

Unruly Acts: Queer Masculinities in Akram Zaatari's
Lens-Based Artworks

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*I dedicate this dissertation to my mother Sika Eliev
for her constant support and unconditional love.*

Abstract

Keywords: Contemporary art, Art history, Postwar Lebanon, Gender, Masculinities, Sexuality, Akram Zaatari, Arab Image Foundation, Queer.

Over the past decade, scholarly works have examined the plurality and diversity of men in relation to social practices of Arab cultures, while also examining discourses of violence, militarization and hegemonic masculinity in times of war and conflict. However, there has been little discussion and critical literature concerning non-heterosexual (or queer) representations of masculinities in the Arab world. Within such context, this dissertation addresses the emerging and shifting visual representations of ‘queer’ masculinities as they are artistically performed in the contemporary lens-based artworks of internationally recognized Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari. Much of the research on queerness in the Arab region risks falling into a colonialist and liberatory framework that seeks to discover an ‘authentic’ queer identity. Contrary to such approaches, I argue for the fluidity of a local queer Arab model of disidentification underpinning Zaatari’s artworks, which questions our perceived realities of both queerness and hegemonic masculinity in Post-Civil War Lebanon. Taking an interdisciplinary approach that integrates cross-cultural comparative and queer visual analysis, I locate Zaatari’s artworks within a larger sociocultural context, as well as within and in tension with existing feminist and contemporary art discourses on the body, identity, and performativity. By examining visual and textual representations of local queer masculinities, this dissertation engages in dynamic discussions on the process of masculinization and elaborates on its future cultural and artistic trends both in the Arab world and in Western countries.

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Abbreviations

AIF	Arab Image Foundation
APEAL	Association for the Promotion and Exhibition of the Arts in Lebanon
AUB	American University of Beirut
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
HELEM	Lebanese Protection for Homosexuals (meaning ‘dream’ in Arabic)
IDAHoT	International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia
ISF	Internal Security Forces
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual (LGBTQ)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
M.M.M.M.	Arab version of LGBTQIA [Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual]
MOMEMA	Museum of Middle East Modern Art
MUAC	<i>Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Ciudad de México</i> [University Museum of Contemporary Art, Mexico City]
MUSAC	<i>Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León</i> [Museum of Contemporary Art of Castilla y León]
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency

Introduction

This dissertation investigates the emerging and shifting representations of ‘queer’ masculinities as they are artistically performed in contemporary lens-based artworks, particularly video and photography as seen in the works of internationally-acclaimed Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari. Zaatari is a Beirut-based artist that has developed, over the course of his career, an interdisciplinary and expansive artistic practice that combines the roles of a photographer, filmmaker, archivist, curator, and critical theorist.¹ Zaatari is best known for situating his art practices within a dynamic of exploratory critique using the discourses of photographic and video practice, the documentary, and the archive. Born in Saida (1966), in southern Lebanon, Zaatari grew up amongst the prolonged tensions of Lebanon’s Civil War (1975-1990). During this time, he documented with photography, audiocassettes, and personal diaries the invasions of tanks and the bombardment of nearby surroundings from his apartment. While Zaatari, as a child, aspired to be a filmmaker, he instead chose to study architecture at the American University of Beirut (AUB) in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, his passion for cinema motivated him to run a cinema club at the AUB where he would, on a regular basis, present a wide range of cinematic art and lay a spotlight on foreign directors. Over the years, his references in art primarily came from European filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, Robert Bresson, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, as well as Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami and Egyptian filmmaker Mohammad Khan

¹ In Post-Civil War Lebanon, such interdisciplinary practice occurred because there was very little institutional support for the production and circulation of Lebanese contemporary art. In this context, artists in Lebanon have often found themselves “focused on the development of structures without being an arts administrator or a curator, interested in histories without being a historian, collecting information without being a journalist” (Feldman and Zaatari, 2007: 64).

(Westmoreland, 2011). For instance, one might see Kiarostami's influence in Zaatari's work in the way they both construct complex multilayered narratives that unfold within their films, while also blurring the boundaries between what is perceived as fictional and non-fictional material (Respini and Janevski, 2013). One may also notice both Godard and Zaatari's fluency in constructing and deconstructing narratives around visual documents, while also filming scenes and juxtaposing them with television footage as a way to question the validity of the documents themselves (Zaatari, 2010).

For this study, rather than attempting a survey of a wide range of contemporary artworks from various Lebanese artists, I chose to focus on a selection of photo- and video- based artworks, which will be briefly described below, by Akram Zaatari. His significant contribution to the ongoing history of contemporary art in Lebanon and internationally, and more importantly his critical position in terms of gender and sexuality merits my focused attention because of his approach in dealing with such taboo subjects. Zaatari's artworks in particular draw my interest for a number of reasons. The artist, all at once, breaks many pre-conceived notions of Arab masculinity that both local and global viewers may have. His works show a cross-section of local queer tactics that operate in-between, rise beyond and even toy with stereotypes, essentialist imagery, and binary identifications. He could be said to be contesting the very notion of queer identification. He is also unabashedly political in his artworks, conveying subtle yet powerful messages and narratives around male sexuality and same-sex intimacy, as well as the violent oppressive effects of patriarchy and heteronormativity. Furthermore, much of the scholarship examining Zaatari's works focuses on themes of war, memory and displacement, offering only cursory looks at gender and sexuality. Perhaps this is because many art historians lack the linguistic tools offered by queer theory, or perhaps

in yet another heteronormative utterance, they simply turn away from topics of same-sex sexuality. Regardless, my interdisciplinary approach – incorporating both critical contemporary art theory and queer studies – allows me to break new ground by qualifying Zaatari’s artistic explorations as queer innovations in contemporary art in Lebanon and globally.

The late 1990s marked the beginning of Zaatari’s participation in a global art world. He rapidly gained international recognition for his visual representations and investigations of themes such as civil war, conflict, memory, and the writing of history in Lebanon. Some of his works that explore these themes include: *All is Well on the Border* (1997) – a video reflecting through personal narratives on the experiences of prisoners in detention during the Israeli occupation in Saida, Lebanon; *In this House* (2005) – a video focusing on an old letter written by a Lebanese resistance fighter that was placed in an empty gun case and later buried behind a house in Southern Lebanon; and finally, *Nature Morte* (2008) – a video portrait of two men preparing a homemade bomb in total silence for a military strike that night.

In a post 9/11 era, war has become institutionalized as a dominant framework (creating a market for “Post-Civil War” art in Lebanon²) through which Western art institutions (including art curators and critics) perceive Lebanon’s social and cultural productions in a certain monolithic way that is concerned only with the representations of war, memory, and the impossibility of writing its history (Elias, 2011). A few short

² The term Post-Civil War is a “uncritical consensus’ [...] imposed on the populace, becoming the ‘national policy of silences memory,’ that side-stepped any post-combat investigations and trial and made it possible for old military leaders to transition seamlessly into high-ranking political positions” (Nevalainen, 2010: 3). For this study, I use the term Post-Civil War chronologically as opposed to describing the content of the artworks.

key essays (Cotter, 2003; Feldman, 2007, 2009; Rabottini, 2011; Westmoreland, 2013a, 2013b; Elias, 2013; Masters, 2014) and art reviews (Astore, 2006; Montmann, 2007; Bodinson, 2008; Wilson-Goldie, 2010; Rieck, 2012; Brenez, 2012; Latimer, 2013; Rabottini, 2013) have focused on Zaatari's artwork in terms of the war, memory and the writing of histories in Lebanon through archival practices. However, despite Zaatari's successful career of international solo exhibitions³ and major international gallery representations, he has received relatively little critical scholarly attention about his compelling body of artworks, such as *Majnounak* (1997), *Red Chewing Gum* (2000), *Her + Him VAN LEO* (2001), *How I Love you* (2001), and *Tomorrow Everything Will Be Alright* (2010) that investigate visual representations of sexual practices and intimacies, particularly among men in Lebanon, which are still considered today in Lebanon as illegal. An exception is the exhibition catalogue *Akram Zaatari: The Uneasy*

³ Recently, some of Zaatari's solo exhibitions have included: *The Script*, New Art Exchange, Nottingham, England (2018); *Letter to a Refusing Pilot*, Moderna Museet, Malmö, Sweden (2018); *Against Photography. An Annotated History of the Arab Image Foundation*, MACBA, Barcelona, Spain (2017); travelling to: K21, Dusseldorf, Germany; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea (2017); *Double Take: Akram Zaatari and the Arab Image Foundation*, National Portrait Gallery, London, England (2017); *Unfolding*, Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg, Germany; *Letter to a Refusing Pilot*, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, England (2016); *Tomorrow Everything Will Be Alright*, Galpão VB, Videobrasil Cultural Association, Sao Paulo, Brazil (2016); *This Day at Ten*, Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich, Switzerland (2016); *Akram Zaatari: The End of Time*, The Common Guild, Glasgow, Scotland (2016); *Akram Zaatari: The Archaeology of Rumour*, The British School at Rome, Rome, Italy (2016); *Akram Zaatari*, SALT, Istanbul, Turkey (2015); *Unfolding*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden (2015); *Akram Zaatari: All Is Well*, curated by Vicky Moufawad-Paul, Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa, Canada (2015); *Akram Zaatari: The End of Time*, The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada (2014); *Akram Zaatari: This Day at Ten*, WIELS – Centrum voor Hedendaagse kunst, Brussels, Belgium (2014); *On Photography People and Modern Times*, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, England (2013); *ALL IS WELL*, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston University, Ontario, Canada (2013); *Letter to a Refusing Pilot*, Lebanon Pavilion, 55th International Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2013); *Akram Zaatari: Project 100*, MoMA, New York (2013); *This Day at Ten*, Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Beirut, Lebanon (2013); *Akram Zaatari*, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, England (2012); *The End*, Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg, Germany (2012); *Tomorrow Everything Will Be Alright*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2012); *The Uneasy Subject*, MUAC, Mexico City, Mexico (2012); *Akram Zaatari*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois (2012-2013); *This Day at Ten / Aujourd'hui à 10*, Magasin Centre National d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble, Grenoble, France (2012-2013); *Composition for Two Wings*, Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, Norway (2011); *The Uneasy Subject*, Museo del Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Spain (2011); *This Day*, Moderna Galerija Ljubljana, Slovenia (2011), among others.

Subject (2011), a project solely focusing on Zaatari, co-produced by the *Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León* (MUSAC) and *Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, Ciudad de México* (MUAC). The catalogue is the first comprehensive publication that addresses the subject of desire and the depiction of the male body in photography and popular culture in the Lebanese Arab culture. Particular attention is given to the capture of desire among men and to the study of homosexual practices through Zaatari's examination of hidden objects, documents and stories from personal archives. In fact, Zaatari is unquestionably one of the few artists from this cultural context that deals with the taboo of homosexuality. However, the aforementioned exhibition frames Zaatari's artworks solely in terms of homosociality and homoeroticism, foregoing the radically political and subversive nature of Zaatari's complex works and methodologies. As cited by art historian Juan Vincente Aliaga, "Zaatari focuses on questions of sentiment and amorous relationship (difficult in a country such as Lebanon, where one cannot be openly gay since social expectations demand that each man marries a woman)" (2011: 75). Furthermore, in response to a photograph (*Ali's Back*), Aliaga writes that the work seems to "aspire toward a liberty that cannot be realized, since the face of the tattooed person is hidden" (2011: 75). In this way, the exhibition frames the subjects of Zaatari's works in terms of Western concepts of gay liberation. My study, on the other hand, qualifies Zaatari's approach as one that compellingly empowers his subjects using local and independent tactics.

It is for that reason that I have chosen to specifically focus on a thematic and chronological analysis of Zaatari's lens-based artworks produced from 1997 to 2011. It is noteworthy that the selected artworks have been produced in Beirut, Lebanon – considered as one of the largest and most active ongoing independent media and art

scenes in the Arab world.⁴ While the Civil War is continuously omnipresent within the works of Zaatari, I have chosen, for the purpose of the study, to limit my scope to artworks that deal with queerness and masculinity outside of the larger Civil War narrative.

The first work discussed in the dissertation consists of a set of same-sex kissing scenes, which were photographed by commercial Lebanese photographer Hashem El Madani in his *Studio Shehrazade* from the 1950s to 1970s and later appropriated and exhibited Akram Zaatari by the early 2000s. The second work discussed is that of *Majnounak* [Crazy of You] (1997), a twenty-six-minute video work that explores male sexuality and manhood through interviews with three men who are describing their sexual ‘conquests’ and sexual experiences with women in Lebanon. *Majnounak* also examines their views on the differences in sexual and gender roles in post-war Lebanon. The last chapter examines two videos: *Al-ilka al-hamra* [Red Chewing Gum] (2001) and *Shou Bhebbak* [How I Love You] (2001). Set in the booming neighborhood of Hamra, *Al-ilka al-hamra* is shot as a video-letter that recounts the story between two men, presumably lovers, who were separated due to the start of the fifteen-year-old Lebanese Civil War. The video explores issues of desire, sexuality, and consumption between the two lovers and a young vendor boy. Lastly, *Shou Bhebbak* explores sexuality among self-identified gay men in Lebanon. A couple and three individuals talk about their sex lives, their passions, and love in Lebanon, a country where homosexuality is still

⁴ As Laura Marks states, at this given time, “Beirut is the only Arab city that has the critical mass of artists, activists, organizations, equipment, capital, and audience for a full-fledged local video [and photographic] scene” (2003: 2-3). Also, Beirut is “certainly atypical given its combination of relative wealth, high level of Westernization, large Christian population, and relative liberalism even in these increasingly fundamentalist times” (2003: 4).

punished by up to one year of imprisonment. In the video, Zaatari employs a bright light to mask the identities of each participant rendering their identification almost impossible.

The artwork selected for study here is based, first and foremost, on the works' critical reference of gender, sexuality, and masculinity. Zaatari himself never actually refers to his works as 'queer' or 'gay'; this is entirely understandable given the context in which he works and lives. As will be examined in the chapters, a public 'outing' would jeopardize his physical safety. More importantly, however, such concrete identification is inaccurate and insufficient for describing the nature of his work. Rather, 'queer,' whose definition I will pursue in greater depth in Chapter One, is something that can be 'read' into the artworks for those who know how to look, while allowing others to simply wonder.

The particular artworks that I have selected for this study use combinations of photography and video to depict degrees of interaction, exploration, and representation of male (homo)sexual practices and encounters, homosocial relationships, and the configurations of 'queer' masculinities. My selection is based on the unfolding series of thematic entries – performativity, identity, and masculinity – connected with the presence and sometimes non-presence of the male body and its representations, as well as men's problematic conceptions of women and femininity. Furthermore, my selection is based on the artist's examination of different formal qualities and aesthetic languages that express sociocultural and identity matters, while integrating a self-reflective narrative and documentation of personal and collective memory. Finally, the artworks are significant for their contribution to the ongoing history of contemporary photography and video in Lebanon, the Arab world, and beyond.

In order to broadly and fully situate both my dissertation and Akram Zaatari's artwork within both local and global discourses, I turn to a brief discussion of relevant global socio-political aspects, followed by a comprehensive overview of interdisciplinary scholarship and curated exhibitions pertaining to artists of the Arab world, and its neighboring regions covering Iran, Afghanistan, Israel, and Turkey.

In his influential book, *Orientalism* (1979), cultural and literary theorist Edward W. Said elucidates how representations of the Oriental 'other' are transmitted into Orientalist discourses that were created and are used to signify and represent the perceived differences between the 'Eastern' and the 'Western' world. Said reveals that Western encounters with the 'Orient' are problematic in invoking visual racial hierarchies – whiteness being the most evident – and establishing a knowledge of 'Others' solely as related to the civilized Europeans (1979: 119). As Said contends: "Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness [...]” (1979: 204). Still to the present day, the Western world continues to entrench stereotypes of the Arab world and Arab peoples as categories of 'Oriental' and 'Other'. I understand the term 'Arab' as defined by Arab linguist and scholar Margaret K. Nydell: "Arab refers not to ethnicity, but to *all Arabic-speaking people* regardless of origin or appearance" (2012: xi, original emphasis). In other words, I am acknowledging that there is a myriad of local, regional, political and ethnic diversities among Arab-speaking peoples. Thus, in this study 'Arab' will refer to people who speak Arabic, and 'Arab World' to the geographic area containing countries where Arabic is an official language. Having a specific definition of 'Arab' is especially important, as the events of 9/11 and the emergence of the global 'War on Terror' have escalated contemporary Orientalist

and Western discourses that essentialize and reduce Arab cultures, societies and peoples to a monolithic series of misleading stereotypes such as: dangerous, threatening, pre-modern, and uncivilized (Shaheen, 2001; Razack, 2008; Aguayo, 2008). Furthermore, as noted by geopolitical theorists Karen Culcasi and Mahmut Cokmen (2011), there has been a profound trend to associate Arab bodies as sites and symbols of difference and “otherness” that become embedded in discourses of fear, danger, and terror. By ‘othering’ Arab men as ‘dangerous,’ this has homogenized and distorted representations of diverse groups of people, in addition to justifying social discrimination and Western hegemony.

A number of actors within the global contemporary art world have attempted to combat these monolithic and reductive representations by striving to feature ‘Middle Eastern’ artists and artworks. These include North American and European art institutions, which have organized and exhibited a number of group exhibitions, the corpus of which ranged across photography, video, film, sculpture, and painting. For instance, *DisORIENTATION: Contemporary Arab Art from the Middle East* (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2003) exhibited artists from Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Syrian and Iraq, and from their diasporas. This exhibit centered on themes of memory, exile, migration, community, and geopolitics with the overall aim of deconstructing notions of the ‘Orient.’ Another exhibition, *Veil*, (New Art Gallery Walsall, United Kingdom, 2004) gathered artists from Iran, Palestine, and Egypt to explore the cultural significance of the veil in all of its complexities and ambiguities, while challenging the fixed interpretations of Western audiences. *Out of Beirut* (Modern Art Oxford, 2006) is another exhibition, showing works from Lebanese artists exploring issues of amnesia, current politics, and the construction of Post-Civil War memories and

history. Finally, *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East* (Saatchi Gallery, London, 2009) examined the simultaneity of tradition and modernity, femininity and the veil, conflict in city spaces and refugee camps, and religious politicization, through works of artists from Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Iran, Lebanon. These large and comprehensive group exhibitions aimed to introduce the Western public to contemporary art from the Middle East and North Africa, while providing a contextualization by means of lectures, debates, and film screenings (Muller, 2009; Matar and Harb, 2013).

Further questions related specifically to Arab visual representations have also been of interest for international curator and art historian Catherine David, who has directed a long-term project *Contemporary Arab Representations*, co-produced with Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam and the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona. *Contemporary Arab Representations* were published into two parts: *Tamáss Contemporary Arab Representations – Beirut/Lebanon* (2002) and *Tamáss Contemporary Arab Representations – Cairo* (2003). Both are art publications that include seminars, performances and presentations. David, who is based in Paris, seems aware of her privilege and positionality, and frames these projects in terms of creating space for and giving a platform to local contemporary visual and literary artists, architects, and scholars (David, 2002, 2003). As mentioned by David (2002: 10), the aim was to “encourage the production, circulation and exchange of artworks and publications between different cultural centers of the Arab world and the rest of the world.”⁵

⁵ *Tamáss 1* accompanied the exhibition *Contemporary Arab Representations, Beirut/Lebanon*. The exhibition venues included: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (May 3 – July 14, 2002), Witte de With, Rotterdam (September 15 – November 24, 2002), and Bildmuseet, Umeå (February 9 – April 21, 2003). *Tamáss 2* took place at Witte de With, Rotterdam (May 18 – July 27, 2003), Fundació Antoni Tàpies,

As David's publications are predominantly geared towards artworks that deal with cultural and political realities in general, they lightly touch on issues of gender. Thus, as my dissertation focuses specifically on the intersection of gender and contemporary art from Lebanon, it is also pertinent to discuss exhibitions that focus on specific issues of identity, in particular to sociocultural constructions and representations of gender in the Arab world, North Africa, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.

Issues of gender are explored in the multi-site exhibition *The Fertile Crescent: Gender, Art and Society* (2012), curated by Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin.⁶ This exhibition examines the artworks of twenty-four female artists from Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Pakistan and Nigeria. The exhibition, held in New Brunswick, New Jersey, attempted to challenge and deconstruct Western stereotypes of 'Middle Eastern' women as victims by offering poignant narratives of women in their daily lives and situations that remain unknown to the Western public. Another important exhibition is *Mapping Subjectivities: Experimentation in Arab Cinema from the 1960s to Now* (2012), curated by Jytee Jensen of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The three-part film exhibition presented works of Arab women filmmakers who critically confront issues of gender and sexuality, for example in Assia Djebar's *La Noubia* (Algeria, 1977), Simone Fattal's *Autoportrait* (Lebanon and France, 1971/2012), Raja Amari's *Buried Secrets* (Tunisia, 2009), and Jilani Saadi's *Tender Is the Wolf* (Tunisia, 2006). These questions were also tackled by male filmmakers, in

Barcelona (September 18 – November 25, 2003), Bildmuseet, Umeå (February 8 – April 4, 2004) and Centre José Guerrero de la Diputación de Granada, Salas del Palacio de las Condes de Gabia (April 22 – June 27, 2004).

⁶ *The Fertile Crescent* exhibition was hosted by Mason Gross Galleries, Rutgers University; Princeton University Art Museum and Bernstein Gallery, Woodrow Wilson School, and Princeton University 2012-2013.

films such as Saïd Marzouk's *My Wife and the Dog* (Egypt, 1971) and Tawfik Abu Wael's *Last Days in Jerusalem* (Palestine/France, 2011).

Concerns with the aesthetic representation of the male body in Arab art from the eighteenth century to today is explored as part of the exhibition *Le corps découvert* at l'Institut du monde arabe à Paris, (2012), curated by Philippe Cardinal and Hoda Makram-Ebeid. The exhibition brings together two hundred thought-provoking artworks by more than seventy artists that play with and question taboos and Orientalist clichés (e.g. religious fanaticism) associated to the Arab world. As noted by artist Hani Zurob (Palestine/Paris), Tunisia's and Egypt's Arab Spring are not just political – we are also seeing revolutions against the taboos that exist in Arab societies such as, for example: gender, sexuality, and censorship. For Zurob, the exhibition serves as the final nail in the coffin of ignorance for both Arab and French visitors.⁷ Long absent in Arab art, the male nude emerges in the exhibition through various artworks examining key issues such as masculine Arab identity in “*Picture of Arab Man*” (2010) by Iraqi-Canadian photographer Tamara Abdul Hadi, male homosexuality and homosociality in Lebanese-American artist George Awde's “*Quiet Crossings*” series (2010), and gender performativity through French-Moroccan Mehdi-Georges Lahlou's self-portraiture series “*Mouvement décomposé*” (2011). The concept of gender is additionally examined in the art exhibitions: *Ciphers: Tension with Tradition in Contemporary Iranian Photography* (Saw Gallery, Ottawa, 2012) and *Gender and Exposure in Contemporary*

⁷ As cited by artist Hani Zurob “[...] À l’heure des révolutions arabes qui ne sont pas seulement politiques, on assiste aussi à des révolutions contre les tabous qui existent dans les sociétés arabes, cette exposition est un dernier « clou » dans le cercueil de l’ignorance.” Source: *Film de l’exposition le corps découvert II*, Institut du monde arabe, 2013 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHMmUPKUUkg> (retrieved on March 31, 2014).

Iranian Photography (Gallery 44, Toronto, 2012), curated by art historian and specialist in Iranian contemporary art, Andrea Fitzpatrick. Both exhibitions focus on metaphoric and allegorical strategies used by the artists to capture certain aspects of secular life among the Iranian people. A particular examination is conducted upon normative and fraternal masculinity through Najaf Shorki's black-and-white photographic series "Bachelors" (2010-present), in which young single Iranian men are depicted lying on 'Oriental' carpets laid out around their apartments that are empty of Western furniture. The 'Oriental' carpet is an important element for many Iranians as it is where everyday life happens for instance in sitting together in conversation. As well, Fitzpatrick examines and exhibits Sadegh Tirafkan's "Zoorkhaneh" photographic series (2003-2004), which depicts muscular Iranian men performing, in a studio setting, the traditional Persian art of wrestling, strengthening and conditioning – a sporting institution for male homosociality – where men nurture their bodies and spirits.

In the context of my research, these exhibitions offer insights on the ways the artists and curators have examined the gendered, 'Middle-Eastern' and North-African body (as represented actually and symbolically) and identity (as constructed through performative acts). Facilitated by societal changes, Arab contemporary artists offer new queries on the body and the manner in which the body is lived and regulated by societies that are seemingly perpetually caught between tradition and modernity, religious conservatism and secularism, conformity and openness, and finally, strategies of decolonization and external political interference. Such explorations have provided a starting point for me to focus, more specifically, on Arab contemporary artworks concerned with the representation of what I am identifying as queer male bodies as they are expressed, negotiated, and challenged in contemporary lens-based artworks.

Here, the term lens-based is defined as any artwork derived from using a lens. By this definition, I refer to photography and video, and hybrid formats that combine both mediums in the same work. It is important at this stage to describe the distinctions between both analogue and digital images and technologies. An analogue image, such as a chemical photography or videotape, is based upon a composition of continuous variations of tones and colours (i.e. highs and lows, darks and light, and so forth). An analogue medium, as explained by photography theorist Liz Wells, is formed by unsegmented codes while its digital counterpart is based upon a segmented one in which information is divided and encoded into discrete mathematical elements (Wells, 2003: 337). These elements (also termed as bits) are given a particular value and tone that are represented in pixels. This allows the digital image to be easily manipulated and copied without much degeneration of the image (Lister, 2003; Wells, 2003; Sturken and Cartwright, 2009). The production of images from digital technologies (digital photography, digital camera) and processes (compression, printing, scanning), also known as 'digital imaging,' has developed into a major industry in the past two decades. For many photographers, digital technologies are an essential part of their post-production practices (Lister, 2003), while for others, digital technologies have all but replaced analogue technologies: optical lenses are replaced by digital and virtual cameras, films by disc, 'wet' physical darkrooms and optical enlargers by computers and software. (Lister, 2003: 298).

However, the difference between analogue and digital image technologies is seen within a larger context of technological and cultural changes and continuities. As proposed by Lister (2003), we must look at how images are *used*, by whom, and for what purpose (2003: 303 author's emphasis). In the context of war and conflict, new

digital image technologies (i.e. remote digital video cameras, iPads, iPhones and cell phone cameras) have, in recent years, been used in modern warfare – taking over and extending the historical role of photography. For instance, the atrocious events at Abu Ghraib took place given the way the photographs were, on the one hand, framed and, on the other hand, because the camera was present and that the abuses were done “for the pictures” (Butler, 2007: 958). In other words, the photographs are fundamentally intertwined with the acts they portray. As observed by cultural theorist and critic Susan Sontag in “Regarding the Torture of Others,” “the horror of what is shown in the photographs cannot be separated from the horror that the photographs were taken” (2004: 26). In the case of Abu Ghraib, the photographs, which were taken from cell phone cameras served as visual evidence as they recorded the acts of torture, humiliation, and death of Iraqi civilians by the American guards. In her biopolitical analysis of the Abu Ghraib affair, queer theorist Jasbir Puar alleges the camera as part of an assemblage of what she calls “shaming technologies” that “function as a vital part of the humiliating, dehumanizing torture itself” (2005: 31). Other shaming technologies include: sexual acts, forced nudity, hoods, leashes and so forth that helped to set the stage for the preposterous scenes in Abu Ghraib (Puar, 2005). Not only did the events at Abu Ghraib spark international debate over the elusive definition of torture, but they also lead to questions regarding the shifting definition of photography. The United States Detainee Photographic Records Protection Act of 2009 (H.R. 3015, 2009), which forbade the release of more photographs from Abu Ghraib and other detention centres, is one manifestation of this shift. As stated in its definition section, “the term ‘photograph’ encompasses all photographic images, whether originals or copies, including still photographs, negatives, digital images, films, videotapes, and motion pictures” (2009:

75). The use of photography as a means to exacerbate torture is, arguably, an extreme function of a militarized, hegemonic, heterosexist order (Puar, 2009). The connection here is that photographs taken by those higher in the hierarchical order can serve to dehumanize and victimize the bodies of brown-skinned men and women. In the photographs from Abu Ghraib, their identities are unknown given that their faces are covered by black hoods, blocking them from gazing back at the camera, thus becoming subjects to the Western white-patriarchal gaze. Such an example is noteworthy in the context of this dissertation; as will be examined in later chapters, a multitude of lens-based works produced by Arab artists compellingly refute, reframe, and displace the Western unidimensional gaze upon the Arab body.

Study Objectives

In the past decade, numerous studies have centrally focused on women from the Arab world, North Africa, Turkey, and Iran in the fields of art history, gender studies, and media studies. For instance, art historians Fran Lloyd (2002), Laura Marks (2003), and T.J. Demos (2009) have examined contemporary art practices of Arab women, which challenge Western stereotyping of women's participation in Arab society. Additionally, the works of artist and writer Aphrodite Désirée Navab (2007), cultural scholars Judith Richards and Cynthia M. Williams (2012), and art historian Andrea Fitzpatrick (2017) address contemporary Iranian women's art with attention to women's lived experiences in Iran, and in exile and diaspora. Scholars in the fields of gender and media studies have also conducted research on Western discourses relating to issues around the veil and burqa (Shirazi, 2001; Al-Mahadin, 2007). While anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) examines the Western public and political discourse about women from the Arab world around cultural relativism, other scholarly contributions deal with

Arab women's literature (Cooke, 2002), specifically the visibility of Arab lesbians in Medieval Arabic literary writings (Habib, 2007; Amer, 2009). Scholars have also addressed visual representations of Muslim and Arab women in Arab music videos and television (Al-Mahadin, 2004, 2007; Alsulatny, 2012) and in daily press media from the U.S. (Falah and Nagel, 2005) and Canada (Dahlan, 2011). While race and diaspora theorists Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber (2011) center their research on personal lived experiences of Arab women in relation to their political activism and organization following the Arab spring, gender and women's studies scholar Zakia Salime (2011) focuses on feminism and Islam by examining human rights and Sharia Law in Morocco. Population health sociologists Zeina Abou-Rizk and Geneviève Rail (2013) have examined the ways Lebanese-Canadian women construct health and body practices within the dominant obesity discourse. While such important studies expose and contextualize complex sociocultural practices related to women from regions of the Arab world, North Africa, Iran, Turkey, and the diaspora communities, there remains a significant gap in knowledge related to men and masculinity from and within the Arab world. In the past years, a few critical scholars have examined, on the one hand, the plurality and diversity of men in relation to social practices of the Arab cultures (Khalaf and Gagnon, 2006; Shamma, 2008; Woltering, 2011). On the other hand, scholarly works have examined discourses of violence, militarization and heterosexuality in times of war and conflict (Amar, 2011; Hossein, 2006; Aghacy, 2009). Nevertheless, there has been little discussion and critical literature concerning non-heterosexual (or queer) representations of masculinities⁸ in the Arab world. The

⁸ The use of plural masculinities will offer a portrait of the plural dynamics and forms of masculinity, emphasizing the multiple pathways through which men are remaking their identities (Aboim, 2010).

exceptions to this are: the contributions from Arab political theorist Joseph Massad (2007) who examines the construct of homosexuality in the Arab and Western worlds; social anthropologist Jared McCormick (2011), who studies the images of Arab men used in Western gay tourist publicities; historian Wilson Jacob (2011), whose inquiry on physical culture in Egypt focuses on the performance of masculinity (i.e. men of high education and social standing) in colonial modernity; and curators Philippe Cardinal and Hoda Makram's (2012) exhibition *Le corps découvert* that partially explores male sensuality and homoeroticism in contemporary Arab artworks. In her book, *Hanan al-Cinema* (2015), art historian Laura U. Marks examines – through the aesthetic of enfolding and unfolding – disavowed male erotics and longing within the works of internationally recognized Arab artists that are created under self-censorship.⁹ More recently, in her article, “Veiled Iranian Identities in the Photographic Art of Sadegh Tirakfan,” Andrea Fitzpatrick (2015b) sheds light on ambiguous depictions of Iranian post-war masculinity (such as: vulnerability, mourning, poeticism, fraternity, and self-effacement (2015b: 184)) in the works of Iranian photographer Sadegh Tirakfan (1965-2013), which are located outside of the Western stereotypes (i.e. jihadist, terrorists, extremists). The poeticism and self-effacement, as depicted in Tirakan's work, are informative to study as they demonstrate the way artists living and creating under censorship (like Zaatari) are able to express multiple local identities through socio-cultural specificities. As will be explored later, the use of opaque figures, fragments of images and unclear narratives, in Zaatari's work, is intentionally done so to perhaps create a tension between the visible and invisible, between what is said and unsaid.

⁹ Here, she explores queer bodies in a neutral way. Her readings of Zaatari's works do not touch upon the aspect of queer intersubjectivity and queer politics.

My objectives for this study are twofold. First, I offer an in-depth, critical, and cross-cultural analysis and interpretation of Zaatari's artworks within a larger sociocultural context as well as within and in tension with existing feminist, queer, and contemporary art discourses on the body, identity, and performativity to uncover possibilities of queer visual representations in the present reality of Post-Civil War Lebanon. I hope to achieve this while simultaneously taking into account the complex specificities of Lebanon, a country that has immense ethnic, religious, sectarian, linguistic, and cultural diversity. As cited by Sune Haugbolle, scholar in political culture in the Middle East, "no other Arab country is as culturally and religiously diverse, and in no other Arab country has the diversity of society expressed itself as freely as in Lebanon" (2010: 29). While this dissertation makes feminist and queer issues clear to readers from all backgrounds, it only briefly touches upon Lebanon's Civil War, the issues of sectarianism and its histories, and on the consecutive colonization of Lebanon, from the Ottomans to the French, and later the Syrian (*Baathist*) occupation and interference within the country. These issues emerge as context for queer and feminist organization and thought in Lebanon, yet they are better documented elsewhere.¹⁰ Religion and ethno-sectarian belongings, however important factors in Lebanese politics and social relations, have not been key issues in feminist and queer activist writings. Instead, secularism, largely a reaction to sectarianism and sectarian wards is dominant

¹⁰ See: Kathryn Babayan, and Afsaneh Najmabadi, eds. *Islamicate Sexualities. Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008; Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press, 2007; Jean Said Makdisi, *Teta, Mother and Me: Three Generations of Arab Women*. London: Saqi, 2005; and Ussama Makdisi's *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lebanon*. Berkeley: University of Californian Press, 2000.

within civil society and activist groups in Lebanon. As a result, religious identities are not prioritized in this dissertation.

Second, the study offers to disrupt stereotypes of Arab men as patriarchs, religious fanatics, and terrorists – men who exemplify the embodiment of violence, anger, and homophobia. This is accomplished through Zaatari's lens-based artworks, which combine a broad range of found documents from audio-recordings to family photographs, all of which speak to the sociocultural and political conditions of Post-Civil War Lebanon. The emergence and rapid spread of digital techniques has made photography largely accessible to Arab photographers and artists such as Zaatari. The use of photography and video – mediums that are fundamental to Zaatari – are favoured as affordable and portable tools of representations (Elias, 2011). Furthermore, video art and photography are more transportable – more easily distributed – than painting. Thus, photography and video enabled Zaatari to address and document taboo topics – such as gendered violence and queer and constructed masculinities – omitted from Lebanese newspapers and television programming, which are dominated largely by sectarianism (Elias, 2011). The camera is a fitting tool through which Zaatari seeks to explore alternative representations, ask questions, and stimulate reflections around issues of (queer) identities because it allows Zaatari to record time and to capture personal moments which can compose histories. In addition, the use of video and photography allow him to unearth certain lost and untold stories of men and women who performed certain queer identities forbidden in the past. As noted by Nada Shabout and Salwa Mikadadi (2009), the choice of digital media has proven to be suitable for the political and social nature of Arab art. The use of video art by Arab artists repositions the image

between the real and imagined, while questioning and subverting common conceptions and mining historical narratives (Shabout and Mikadadi, 2009: 9).

Key Terms

Masculinities

The term ‘masculinity’ is not a fixed or unitary category. There exists no true nature or essence of masculinity but rather, like all identities, masculinities are invented categories (Weeks, 1991: 298). From a critical sociological perspective and informed by the scholarly work of critical masculinities theorist Raewyn Connell, masculinity is best understood – in the plural – as embodied socio-cultural practices, and comprehended in terms of their intersectional crossings and specific historical, social, and cultural contexts. In this sense, masculinities are “not fixed character types but configurations of practices generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships” (Connell, 1995: 81). Thus, masculinities are not monolithic, universal or ahistorical. Rather, there exists multiple and competing versions of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities that need to be understood in terms of their historical and contextual specificities (Connell, 1995, 2009).

In her volume *Reading the Male Body* (1997), feminist thinker Susan Bordo suggests a reading strategy for studying the male body through vulnerability. For Bordo, a key critical trope in grasping and challenging masculinities is to consider the intersection of men and power in the lived realities of male bodies as “place[s] of shame, self-hatred and concealment” (1994: 226). Masculinities and male experiences, as noted by Bordo, should be understood and defined in terms of weakness and vulnerability rather than only strength and power. She writes: “Far fresher insights can be gained by reading the male body through the window of its vulnerabilities rather than the dense

armor of its power” (1994: 266). The use of Bordo’s conception of masculinities fosters an awareness that allows us to articulate the male body and masculinity beyond its self-obviousness and power. This allows us to explore and exploit moments of vulnerability amongst men, such as emotional vulnerability, which will be useful in this study to show the change in men’s expression of emotions and sensitivities, and shifts in old stereotypes of masculinity as strong and unemotional.

My dissertation proposes to make masculinities in general, and queer masculinities in particular, explicit and visible as a subject of study. I will not conduct a historical overview of masculinities, nor discuss the construct of masculinity in a socio-historical context. Rather, the central focus of my study is to discuss how Lebanese and queer Lebanese masculinities can be conceived as a variety of social-cultural practices and represented in Zaatari’s lens-based works. For instance, in the following chapters, Zaatari addresses hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity (seen through aggression and male dominance) to enlarge the discussion on rape culture in Lebanon – a subject that remains taboo. Interestingly, Zaatari employs and activates (what I term) queer micro-experiences as a way to resist State censorship and deconstruct dominant concepts of hegemonic (toxic) masculinity, as a way to reveal homoerotic aspects and sexual encounters among the portrayed men. Zaatari is, through his artworks, undoubtedly questioning and complicating conceptions of masculinities as cultural and theoretical phenomena. Zaatari depicts Lebanese masculinities in a multitude of differing and interesting ways, as will be fully explored in the chapters. Thus, it is crucial to understand that the ways of being masculine unavoidably change as related to women, effeminacy, class, race, ethnicity, and other forms of subjectivity (Reeser, 2013).

Queer

The term queer, formerly adopted to mark the appearance of something ‘peculiar,’ ‘bizarre,’ ‘odd,’ ‘strange,’ and so on, was radically reclaimed and re-appropriated in the early 1990s, from its pejorative use to a positive self-defining one by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA) community. This was to indicate a critical, activist stance of resistance – socially, politically, and visually – against dominant essentialist definitions of gender and sexuality. In fact, feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler asserts that queer “derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult” (1993: 226). While queer can function as a socio-political unifying umbrella for members of the LGBTQ community, it can also refer to more a complex meaning. As remarked by queer theorist Lee Elderman, “queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one” (2004: 17). In this sense, while “queer can represent a noun (‘x’ is queer), it can also represent an adjective (queer ‘x’), [a] verb (to queer ‘x,’ queering ‘x’) or [an] adverb (‘x-ing’ queerly)” (Harper, et al., 1990: 30) producing reflection against the authoritative standard (Dowson, 2000).

For this study, I generally use Elderman’s qualifications of queer as outlined above; in particular, I use ‘queering’ as a category and strategy for analytical purposes. The term queer will also be used within feminist conception of gender as performative – as something one *does*, not something one *is*. Here, gender is understood not as a definite biological identity, but rather, in Butler’s (1990, 2004 [1991]) politicized use of the term, as something acted out within a limited range of possibilities. On this subject, I argue that Zaatari’s artworks employ a queer strategy to challenge the defined categories of hegemonic masculinity – disrupting normative claims of sex, identity, gender,

sexuality, and desire. In the following chapters, I discuss in detail how Zaatari's production develops nonhierarchical and denormalizing ways of thinking and organizing gender and sexuality. In order to discuss Zaatari's artworks through a local understanding of queer, I turn to the scholarship of sociocultural anthropologist Sofian Merabet in *Queer Beirut* (2014), in which he provides a local definition and concept of queerness in Lebanon. As explored in Chapter one, queer, for Merabet, is linguistically understood in terms of its rebellious character and ever-shifting quality, in which it "solicits fluctuating imaginative horizons" (2014: 8). Additionally, the writing of Samar Habib (2007), an Arab queer-identified scholar and activist, provides me with a starting point to question historical and present narratives that characterize Arab queers as estranged and displaced in their embodiments and queer identities. Her scholarly writing reflects a need to develop empowering textual and visual language to analyze and explore Arab self-definitions of queer sexuality and desire.

In the last two chapters, I draw on film and queer theorist Denis Provencher's (2011, 2017) examination of the performative speech acts of self-identified Maghrebi-French queer men. Through the performative and photographic artworks of 2Fik, Provencher examines the concept of "coming out *à l'oriental*," defined by the artist as a coming out based on "an assemblage of linguistic and visual images (Leap, 2003) – to explain his sexuality to his parents in terms they understand and that does not rely on references to rainbow flags or to the closet and to perform those identities (Provencher, 2011:831). Such concept can be understood through cultural queer theorist José Estaban Muñoz's (1999) notion of "disidentification," a strategy described as a way for one to situate oneself within and outside the discourses of identity. Muñoz, a scholar highly influenced by Butler, extended queer theory to consider the social construction and

performance of ethnic and racial identities. As noted by Muñoz, disidentification is a way for queer minority subjects to enact identity as they work with and resist dominant patriarchal heteronormative culture from within. I also draw on American queer theorist Nicholas De Villiers's concept of queer opacity. In his book *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes, and Warhol* (2012), De Villiers considers linguistic and visual strategies that simultaneously aim to reveal, while also concealing or negating one's homosexuality. De Villiers proposes a new opaque queerness that can be lived outside of the restricted Western metaphor of "the closet" and resist the confessional discourse associated with gay visibility. Muñoz (1999), Provencher (2011, 2017) and De Villiers (2012) help to contextualize particular performances of Arab queer subjects that can open local and new alternative possibilities for enacting queer belongings and becomings.

Here, it is important to understand the term 'queer' as an endlessly moving concept and identity that has the possibility of transforming itself in various imaginative ways. Thus, for this study, queer will be termed as a range of acts, identities, desires, tendencies, affectivities, and sentiments that divert from the practices of heteronormativity in continuously changing ways. It is crucial to mention that I do not use 'queer' to impose a Western-conceived identity upon the Lebanese men examined within Zaatari's works. Rather, I refer to queer masculinities as a way of being outside of the traditional constructions and images of the local Lebanese hegemonic heterosexual masculine. My usage of 'queer' and its issue of Western colonization of gender and identity terms and categories, as well as other terminologies, is more fully discussed in later sections.

Key Questions

Zaatari's artworks visually explore and juxtapose unconventional models of intimacy, desire, and loss in relation to masculinities. The question then becomes, how exactly does the depiction of men and masculinity in Zaatari's artworks veer away from heteronormative masculine subjectivity? Sociologist Ghassan Moussawi suggests that "there is currently no local positive conception of a gay identity. At the same time, a lack of commonly used neutral Arabic terms that refer to both heterosexual and non-heterosexual identities make it harder for Lebanese men to talk about their sexuality" (2011: 164-165). For my research, however, the questions that emerged ask, to what degree do Zaatari's artworks visually articulate and obscure a 'queer' Lebanese identity. That is to say, how do Zaatari's emerging and complex visual representations of queer masculinities challenge the heteronormative model of Lebanese masculinity? Throughout my research, I contest the argument developed by historian Joseph Massad who claims that "Western male white-dominated" gay organizations, as he terms the "gay international," have participated in a "missionary" effort to enforce binary categories of heterosexual/homosexual into Arab and Muslim worlds where no such subjectivities exist (2007: 161-163). Here, the question becomes how does Zaatari adopt, engage and reimagine the contemporary Western conception of "queerness" in his artworks? As will be examined in the following chapters, reconsidering Anglo-centric conceptualizations will prove to be important in developing more nuanced and accurate local models of 'queerness'.

Hypothesis

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that despite the entrenched stereotypical images of Arab men as aggressive, emotionally undemonstrative, and monolithically

heterosexual machos (Shaheen, 2001; Sisler, 2008; Bar-Tal and Teichman, 2005; Saleem and Anderson, 2013), Zaatari's artworks show that there are masculinities that challenge, negotiate, contest, and destabilize inherent definitions and images of hegemonic masculinities in Post-Civil War Lebanon. For this study, I have selected to examine the following works by Zaatari: *The Madani Project* (1999-), *Majnounak* (1997), *Al-ilka al hamra* (2001), and *Shou Bhebbak* (2001). These artworks – simultaneously bold and subtle – perpetually question our present social, cultural, and political positions and identities in a globalized world in a way that entails finding and giving rise to new forms of (dis)identification, the construction of new meanings, flexible identities, and porous communities. While the artworks are related to each other in terms of gender performativity as a central theme, they are also alike in the way the works were all created within Post-Civil War Lebanon but exhibited and circulated globally.

Throughout this study, Zaatari's corpus of work, as well as his artistic practice, are specifically read as 'queer.' Zaatari seemingly queers the representation of the male body not only visually through photography and video, but also conceptually using language, privileging the voice and textual images. Some example of how he does this visually include: the juxtaposition of sexually suggestive clips inserted in the videos, formal distortions both in the photographic enlargement of the appropriated Madani's photographs, and the deliberate use of poor quality of the videos. It is also significant that he explores and uses local metaphorical language specific to Lebanon in his artworks to discuss and contest sexualities. Zaatari's artworks allow a space to question what we do and do not see. In all, I justify that his artworks question and queer the perceived realities of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, both locally and globally, by

representing images and ways of embodying alternative masculinities, and destabilizing existing perceptions of ‘traditional’ masculinity.

Relevance

As noted by curators Rose Issa and Michket Krifa (2011), Arab photography in the last decade has been intertwined in a game of dismantling Orientalist representations and rebuilding forms of self-representations, while questioning the new symbolic forms of belonging and identifying in the twenty-first century. Younger generations of artists are exploring and negotiating variations of representations that are largely anchored in social, cultural and political settings that they witness, denounce, and disrupt (Issa and Krifa, 2011). However, what has not yet been explored in any depth is how artists from the Arab world negotiate queer subjectivities and, in particular, queer masculinities in visual art. Thus, my research will contribute to the current art-historical and theoretical discourses by exploring and analyzing how Zaatari’s internationally shown artworks are inscribed in a global discourse that destabilizes gendered representations. Within this context, this research contributes to scholarship in the disciplines of critical masculinity studies, gender studies, and practices and theories of contemporary art – especially performative practices of photography and video art at the international level. As well, given Lebanon’s current political instability and uprisings of sectarian violence and militia warfare, this research is urgent in order to combat troubling and persistent unidimensional representations of Lebanese masculinities in ways that facilitate conflict and perpetuate stereotypes. Through a critical, post-colonial, pro-feminist and queer analysis, the goal of this study is to identify and redefine the representations and expressions of queer masculinities in visual culture and open a progressive dialogue to

discuss the process of masculinization, and to elaborate on its future artistic trends in the Arab world and in Western countries.

Theoretical Framework

I will draw on art cultural theorists (Barthes, 1961, 1968, 1977, 1981), photographic theorists (Sekula, 1984; Solomon-Godeau, 1991) and contemporary art theorists who focus on lens-based works (Phelan, 1993; Jones, 1998, 2012; Ross, 2006, 2008, 2012). Furthermore, intersectionality (hooks, 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 2004) will be employed in this dissertation to examine and read the intersections of marginalized queer experiences and representations in Zaatari's lens-based artworks. Additionally, my contemporary art history approach is informed by a variety of cross-cultural (North American, European and Arab) poststructuralist scholarship in feminist, gender, and queer theories (Butler, 1993, 1997, 2004; Grosz, 1990, 1994; Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b; Habib, 2007; Merabet, 2014; Provencher, 2011, 2017). Post-structuralism is appropriate for this study because of its various interests and grounds for instance: discourse power, representation, and instability, which have direct application in gender studies and contemporary art history. I also employ post-colonial theories (Said, 1979; Mohanty, 1984; Bhabha, 1994) and race theory (hooks, 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 2004). Such approach aims at “decentering and pluralizing the (white, western heterosexual, middle-class) categories of gender by examining how other intersecting categories such as race, ethnicity, nation, class, generation, sexuality, and disability shape or constitute gender” (Hemmings, 2011: 48). This tool is useful in examining how dichotomous binaries and power relations (i.e. black/white, male/female, Eastern/Western, heterosexual/homosexual) are depicted in visual texts, in addition to analyzing the

representations of identity, performativity, and masculinities reflected in the artworks of Zaatari.

In analyzing Zaatari's artworks, I rely on feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler's concept of performativity elaborated upon in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993). In both books, Butler challenges the ontological and psychological integrity of gender (femininity and masculinity). In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler specifically examines the socially constructed character of gender through discourse, in which she argues that discourse creates and structures 'subject positions' for one to inhabit. Thus, her theory considers gender as performed and performative, as is determined by repetitive culturally prescribed actions and gestures, rather than being stable and fixed in an 'essence' of the self. Although Butler claims that gender is performative, she shows that gender norms can be destabilized through forms of performance. For instance, in her chapter "Gender is Burning" from *Bodies That Matter* (1993), which examines Jennie Livingston's film *Paris is Burning* (1990), Butler analyzes the ways in which male drag performances function as a parody and imitation of gender.

Throughout my research, Butler's notion of performativity will remain important to question the formation of queer Arab male bodies, identities, and their spoken language and codes as depicted in Zaatari's artworks. In the artworks, the gendered performance of men and their bodies is used to highlight and, in some instances, hide their same-sex desires, in order to guarantee to pass as 'normal' in society.

While following Butler's theoretical model of performativity, I also draw on feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz's theories of embodiment (1994), which examines

the “condition and context” of how bodies are continuously inscribed in various ways by history, culture and power (Grosz, 1994: 86). For example, in *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), the author reevaluates and rethinks corporeality in relation to feminist politics. Grosz deconstructs the philosophical Cartesian concept of the ‘body’ that is defined by a simplistic division of mind from body. Although the body is shaped by cultural discourse, she argues that sensations, feelings and embodied experiences should be taken into consideration as part of the forces that influence gender identities.¹¹ Grosz’s theory of embodiment is useful to my research, for it demonstrates how the body moves beyond essentialist categories, therefore allowing it to be considered as a sociocultural site where norms, practices, and symbols are inscribed by the body and for the body.

In order to study Zaatari’s artworks, I further turn to the artistic theories and literature of the image in relation to identity. French literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* (1981) stems from a personal and emotional reflection on photography, and deals with examining the emotional mourning invested by viewers, what he calls *punctum* or mini traumas of photography as a medium and practice inspired by phenomenological approaches that take into consideration time and a sense of embodiment. His work expands the focus on the ‘scientific’ approach which seeks to objectively classify photography to take into account the individual viewer’s relationship to the photograph, the process of interpretation, and the degree of unpredictability in the viewer’s response. For Barthes, the act of looking at the object or person represented within the photograph is far more important than its production. Barthes is interested in

¹¹ See Grosz’s Chapter 6: “The Body as Inscriptive Surface” of her volume entitled *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994) where she elucidates Michel Foucault’s treatment of the body.

the personal investments, desires, and feeling we have with photographic images that remain after the death of people we once knew. Barthes's work is valuable and pertinent as it offers provoking framework for looking and thinking about photography as images and objects.

I also turn to a feminist approach to photography, in which I draw on photographic theorist and art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau's book *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (1991). Her book revisits, revises and remaps the history of photography through feminist, post-structuralist, and post-colonial perspectives. Her essays inform us on the ways gender has been historically represented through stereotypical ways in photography and how, at the same time, photographic practices can disrupt these representations. For example, in her essay "Sexual Differences: Both Sides of the Camera" (1991), Solomon-Godeau examines, in part, the works of German aristocrat and photographer Wilhelm von Gloeden who photographed in Taormina, in the early 1880s, young nude Sicilian boys of North African origin striking various Hellenic poses. Von Gloeden's wealth purchased not only the male models, but also exploited their bodies. It is reported that Von Gloeden capitalized on the Orientalist theme of the beautiful young men in his portrait series *Ahmed 1890-1900*, which was reproduced as tourist postcards (Boone, 2014). The baron also reputedly organized orgies in his villa and procured the sexual services of these boys for his frequent visiting guests. The young boys would pose in the nude in front of the camera, becoming fodder for a paying and desiring "master" (Solomon-Godeau, 1991). Solomon-Godeau's study provides an example of intersectional analysis and an example of colonial photography as exploitative, in addition to linking Zaatari's notion

of disruptive masculinities to performative images and photography, which I will discuss in chapter one.

Feminist art theorist Amelia Jones's theory on identification will also be pertinent to my research. In her publication *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*, she examines how and why we visually 'identify' an expressive subjectivity with artworks (2012: 5). Her book sets out to challenge the idea that we live in an age of 'post-identity' and refutes that identity politics are dated and unimportant. She argues that class, race, economic wealth, gender and sexual difference continue to have an important effect on the material condition of individuals' lives and that identity politics still informs the majority of Western cultural discourses. Jones problematizes the singular spectatorship that relies on binary models of identity politics and offers a mode of thinking about identification in terms of a "queer feminist durationality," which is defined as a strategy that "reactivates them [the artworks] by returning them to process and embodiment – linking the interpreting body of the present with the bodies referenced or performed in the past as the work of art" (2012: 174). Jones's book is particularly helpful in that it historicizes both progressive and phallogocentric spectatorial theory (2013: 69); it acknowledges the "newly globalized, networked, diasporic world" (2013: xxi) and offers new theories and a way out of what Jones describes as the 'deadlock' of the self/other binary in the identification of the viewer and subject in the visual arts. This helps one understand how Zaatari moves with but also beyond identity politics to think towards local models of sexualities understood as nuanced and complex.

Methodological Framework

I come to this research as a privileged, white, Canadian, queer cisgender male scholar, with access to substantial resources (academic, economic, and political) when researching topics of gender and sexuality within contemporary artworks from Lebanon. Thus, is it important to situate and problematize my position. Working in a global context, I am mindful of hierarchies of power and authority in my research practice, including those power differentials that can create divisions between colonizers and colonized, as well as between male and female artists, gay and heterosexual. My research does not attempt to speak for the ‘other(s)’ nor for ‘other’ cultures through the artworks but, rather, I want to learn from but also raise awareness and reflection on some of the nuanced and complex issues embedded in Zaatari’s artworks in order to address the shifting expressions and depictions of queer Arab sexualities. To avoid ‘universalizing’ disciplinary concepts, I try when possible to employ a comparative lens to strengthen the knowledge of the cross-cultural context of conceptual meaning through Western and Arab world societies (Mohanty, 1984; Kandiyoti, 1999). Further, using critical approaches derived from feminist scholarship and its emphasis on intersectionality, I examine the interconnections and configurations of sexuality, gender, race, nation and class between queer men that circulate between both the Western and Arab world (Khalaf and Gagnon, 2006; Amar, 2011).

Traditionally, the field of art history is understood as the study of objects and their stylistic development interwoven with analytical and interpretive methods of critical theory. These include: visual analysis, iconography, more recently semiotics, and poststructuralist approaches, sociological perspectives, feminist and queer approaches, readings and critiques of art history, postcolonial theory, and psychoanalysis, just to

name a few (see: Harris, 2001; Hatt and Klouk, 2006; D'Alleva, 2012). For this interdisciplinary study, I apply a unique blending of critical visual and interpretive methods such as in-depth close readings, visual semiotics (Barthes, 1977, 1981), and critical discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1980; Fairclough, 1989, 1992), which are read through a specific set of feminist, gender, and queer poststructuralist theories on issues of identity, performativity and masculinity. The methods and approaches used in the interpretation and research of visual cultures within the discipline of contemporary art history, art theory, and art criticism are by no means clear-cut but tend to overlap and appear in combination. There is also an emphasis on the theoretical models applied to the reading of the artworks. Our particular methodological approach is situated within the field of contemporary art history. Within such an interdisciplinary study, the use of multiple methodologies is useful as it allows one to better point out and analyze subtle moments of queerness and eroticism in each of the works – created under censorship – which appear in subtle spoken and unspoken codes, and as fragments.

First, this research required international fieldwork to access the archives and artworks in order to do some site-specific visual analysis. Most of the artworks that I analyzed are inaccessible through online databases and are inadequately documented. Therefore, my research required an attentive viewing of the artworks themselves, and to conduct international excursions to access the archives and permanent collections of the following art galleries and art centers: Regen Projects, Los Angeles (USA), Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston (Canada), Heure Exquise Centre international pour les arts video, Lille (France), l'Institut du monde arabe à Paris, Paris (France), Ashkal Alwan Library, Beirut (Lebanon), Arab Image Foundation Library, Beirut (Lebanon), Beirut Art Center, Beirut (Lebanon), and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut (Lebanon).

Between November 2015 and February 2016, I spent a total of six weeks of extensive research. During this time, I was granted access to archived material, documentation and artworks from the art galleries and art centers in order to describe, contemplate, and analyze the artworks. Such field research contributes to the discussion of artworks that have either not been exhibited or are not well known to the public, or inaccessible to viewers due to financial and logistical challenges, travel restrictions and large geographical distances.

Second, semiotics (or semiology), according to Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), is the science of the life of signs within society. It is a method of inquiry into meaning, born from the field of linguistics and frequently applied to the analysis of visual imagery. Semiology is influential as an approach to interpreting visual images because it provides a framework for apprehending the multidimensional connections between images, society, culture, and viewers, in addition to understanding how the meaning is created and how it is communicated by the artwork, the artist, the viewer, and culture. In art history, semiology is used to try and grasp clearly the different functions of pictorial elements and forms of representations. An important academic reference that has made a great contribution in the field of image analysis is the work of Roland Barthes (1973, 1977, 1980). Barthes is known for his semiotic approach to Western culture, in general, as it is evident through particular manifestations such as literature, film, advertisements, and photography. He aims to understand the ways texts and images relate to structures of narrative, myth, and ideology, all of which are culturally specific and constructed, as he argues. Barthesian visual semiotics analyzes the sign (a written or spoken word, or a symbol) within two main semiotic concepts: the signified and the signifier, in order to read and perceive the image's function in relation to broader systems of meanings. As a

method of analysis, Barthesian visual semiotics is essential in viewing different levels of meaning or order of signification in lens-based artworks. The first layer is the layer of denotation (who or what is depicted) and the second layer is the layer of connotation (what ideas, values, emotions, and attitudes are expressed in what is depicted).

According to Barthes, the photograph “is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms which are so many factors of connotation” (1977: 19). For Barthes, each photograph has been selected and processed to generate specific connotations. Thus, the reading of the photograph through its code of connotation,

“is [...] always historical; it depends on the reader’s ‘knowledge’ just as though it were a matter of a real language, intelligible only if one has learned the signs [...] to find this code of connotation would thus be to isolate, inventariate, and structure all the ‘historical’ elements of the photograph, all the parts of the photographic surface which derive their very discontinuity from a certain knowledge on the reader’s part, or, if one, prefers, from the reader’s cultural situation” (1977: 28).

In other words, the nature of the code of connotation is not natural or artificial but historical and cultural (1977: 27). The signification is elaborated by a set society and history, and is therefore dependent on the reader’s knowledge.

The visual semiotic analysis consists of the following steps, which will assist me in describing, examining, and expressing interpretations of each artwork. The first step will be describing what we see at the primary level (the visual facts) in the selected lens-based artworks. This includes minute details and differences in the formal qualities and modalities (i.e. the duration, dimension, medium, installation specifics) of the visual

images. Other narrative and performative aspects – for instance, the positions of the male bodies, their gestures, and their facial expressions – will be taken into account. The formal and compositional description of each visual element will be noted in a neutral matter to avoid early attributions of meanings (Müller, 2011). The second step will be presenting a meaning of the images and considering its change in meaning over the course of time. After thorough review of the art-critical literature surrounding each of the artworks and exhibitions, in addition to scrutinizing the symbolic and structural and aesthetic features of an image, we are able to provide a plausible interpretation and reason for the analyzed representations. The third step will be interpreting the images signification and articulating the signification through their cultural specificities. Given that both content analysis and visual semiotics are bound to a personal experience and interpretation, other multiple readings and understanding of the artworks may be considered. As noted by cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2013), all meanings produced between a signifier – which is a material image – and its signified – which is the conceptual idea – are historically and culturally specific. Therefore, our background including our gender, class, ethnic origin, sexuality and religion all affect our interpretation of signs and symbols. The meaning is never fixed but is subject to continuous change, thus opening “representations to the constant ‘play’ or slippage of meaning, to the constant production of new meanings, new interpretations” (Hall, 2013: 20). Visual semiotic analysis also relies on textual analysis and contextual and discursive research to consider the images in terms of their historical, political, social and economic contexts. In other words, content analysis is a form of critical inquiry that examines the attributed meaning or clusters of meanings of a specific image by unraveling the context in which the depicted images (or motifs) are produced and circulated (Müller, 2011).

Although visual semiotic analysis is particularly useful for investigating the representational and symbolic meanings that are given in the analyzed artworks, I turn to discourse analysis as a way to reveal how a set of ideas and language (textual and visual) constructs identifiable subjects. Philosopher Michel Foucault (1972, 1977, 1980) and social linguist Norman Fairclough (1989, 1992) have played an important role in the development of discourse analysis. Discourse – or “language as a form of social practice” (Fairclough, 1989: 29) – reveals itself within an assemblage of related words, phrases, and gestures carried into written, spoken and nonverbal exchanges in regard to ways of experiencing and participating in society (Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1980; Fairclough, 1992). According to Foucault, “discursive formations are, strictly speaking, groups of statements” (1972: 115) that are produced and distributed through particular institutions (e.g. media, politics, education, law, medicine, and military) where they become categories of knowledge and power. Foucault (1980) further argues that discourses, which can be defined as an institutionalized way of speaking, are regulated by a set of rules, provoke the distribution and circulation of various statements, therefore structuring the way we perceive reality. This has inevitable consequences on the construction of social identities and the ways of thinking, being, and doing. Following Foucault’s notion of discourse, Norman Fairclough (1992) also examines the discursive practices that contribute to the formation of the social world, including social identities and social relations.

Dealing with contemporary art historical discourse, critical Arab studies, and cultural theories, discourse is understood as more than language, and refers instead to all forms of signifying practices that construct, produce, represent and give meaning through particular configurations of knowledge – in this case, art-historical approaches,

as well as cultural, feminist, queer, and critical sexuality approaches. In this study, discourse analysis will be helpful in describing, analyzing and contextualizing how specific emerging visual languages are constructed and used to describe the forms of (dis)identifying as a queer subject in Post-Civil War Lebanon. As a methodology, discourse analysis is valuable in addressing the circumstances (social, cultural, historical, and political) in which knowledges and meanings are produced and circulated, as well as questioning whose interests they may serve. In addition, it allows one to consider how queer images and subjects are constructed and invested in the representativeness and the significance of specific images. As stated by Fairclough, discourse analysis is useful “in increasing awareness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others because consciousness is the first step towards emancipation” (1989: 1). My decision to employ discourse analysis comes from my feminist and queer commitment to uncover and unpack the social constructs and power dynamics of inequity. Throughout the chapters, I will be using the discourses of performativity and contemporary art history, while at times employing a comparative analysis in an art-historical contextual frame as a distinct way of interpreting and analyzing Zaatari’s artworks in relation to the earlier works of other American and Arab artists.

Summary of Chapters

This dissertation is divided into four chapters and a brief conclusion. The goal of the first chapter, “Post-Civil War Beirut: Art Scene & Gender Norms,” is to map out the recent theorization of gender norms and gender performativity in Post-Civil War Lebanon. I find it rather pertinent to offer an overview of the main issues that surround Arab male sexuality in Lebanon before providing any visual analysis. Further, this

chapter examines the various Arabic terminologies used to describe and identify homosexuality and queerness in Lebanon and the Arab world.

In Chapter Two, “Gender Performativity in Hashem El Madani’s *Studio Shehrazade*,” I analyze a set of same-sex kissing scenes photographed between the 1950s and 1970s by commercial Lebanese photographer Hashem El Madani, and later appropriated and exhibited by Akram Zaatari. Specifically, I analyze the construction of gender as revealed by the photographs, as well as the performative acts and poses embodied by the subjects. Furthermore, I examine the artistic infrastructure within which Zaatari operated, namely the archival practices of the Arab Image Foundation. I argue that Zaatari’s tactics of appropriation and recontextualization serve to problematize and queer the seemingly authoritative nature of the archive.

In Chapter Three “Hidden Voices, Unruly Bodies: Speaking within Metaphors in *Majnounak* (1997),” I focus on Zaatari’s video artwork *Majnounak (Crazy of You)*, situating it within contemporary practices of video art by queer and feminist artists both in Lebanon and abroad. I examine the construction of hegemonic masculinity as raised by the video, as well as Zaatari’s pointed critique of rape culture in Lebanon. I further discuss the queer practices employed by Zaatari, which are tactics for resisting censorship and deconstructing dominant conceptions of masculinity.

In the fourth and final Chapter “(Dis)Identifying Queerness in *Al-ilka al-hamra* (2000) & *Shou Bhebbak* (2001),” my focus moves towards the use of metaphoric visual language in the depiction of same-sex desires and intimacies in Akram Zaatari’s *Al-ilka al-hamra* (2000). Furthermore, in *Shou Bhebbak* (2001), I examine the way gay-identified Lebanese men deliberately obfuscate and complicate their sexuality all the while speaking about it. Here, I employ Provencher’s concept of “coming out à

l’Oriental” (2011, 2017), DeVillier’s concept of opacity (2012), and Munoz’s theory of disidentification (1999) to examine how Zaatari’s depicted men negotiate queerness in a social and cultural homoantagonistic context. This enables us to understand how the gay self-identified men simultaneously participate in and resist dominant societal norms, as well as queer discourses.

The conclusion will summarize and recap the study about the emerging and shifting representations of queer masculinities, as they are artistically performed in the contemporary artworks of Akram Zaatari. Further, I will situate Zaatari’s contribution within the global art-historical context, while also summarizing the evidence that will allow me to substantiate my claim that this study is an unprecedented contribution to the examination of recent visual art representations of male (homo)sexuality and queer masculinities in the twenty-first century Arab world. Finally, the conclusion will feature a section on research limitations, discussion on the research implications of this project, and suggestions for future research. Zaatari’s artworks are significant as they disrupt many presupposed notions of Arab masculinity that both local and global audiences may have, in an existing predominantly binary heteronormative model of representing gender. In Lebanon’s current political instability and uprisings of sectarian violence and militia warfare, this study is critical in order to combat troubling and persistent unidimensional representations of Lebanese masculinities in ways that facilitate conflict and perpetuate stereotypes. Furthermore, Zaatari’s works display a parallel of local queer strategies that manoeuvre in-between, rise beyond and even play with stereotypes, essentialist imagery, and binary identifications. He could be said to be contesting the very notion of queer identification. By doing so, Zaatari reimagined and opens up a multiple and layered local model of queerness, which enables agency within the larger

LGBT community. This study is helpful to contemporary art history and global gender theory as it redefines and revisits representations and expressions of queer masculinities in visual culture and open a broadminded dialogue to discuss the process of masculinization, and to elaborate on its future artistic trends in the Arab world and in Western countries.

Chapter One

Post-Civil War Beirut: Art Scene & Gender Norms

On May 13, 2017, Beirut hosted the first Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual (LGBTQIA) Pride week in the Arab world, which drew crowds from all over the region. More than four thousand people participated in various events that included conferences, workshops, and parties taking place across the city under the banner of Beirut Pride. The event coincided with the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHoT), which is a gathering in Beirut of LGBTQ activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as HELEM, who for over a decade have campaigned against widespread homophobia and transphobia in Lebanon and the region. Following a threat from a Salafist group named The League of Muslim Scholars, a few of the events were canceled for safety. Regardless, numerous individuals, local businesses, and bars displayed gay pride flags in solidarity. Such an act of unity amongst the local populace was a significant statement against systemic oppression and discrimination, and promised a platform from which sexual minorities in the Arab world could express their experiences. Additionally, we are starting to see some queer representation in Lebanese pop culture: the famous Lebanese band Mashrou'Leila's lead singer is Hamed Sinno, an openly gay man who does not shy away from political statements in his lyrics. Because of Sinno's openly gay identity and political commentaries, Mashrou'Leila is regularly barred from performing at music festivals in the Arab world; examples include the Zouk Festival in Zouk Mikael, Lebanon, and at the Roman amphitheater in Amman, Jordan. On the contrary, we also see support for the LGBTQ community in Lebanese popular culture; a prominent example comes from Maya Diab, a Lebanese icon and singer. She was heavily criticized

by her conservative fans and Al-Jaras Magazine's Editor-in-Chief Nidal al-Ahmadiyyeh for performing on September 5th, 2016, at the Posh Rooftop, a known gay hotspot in Beirut. She responded on her Instagram by stating that "[...] all sick-minded people, in all domains, living in denial, judging other people and refusing to accept who they are, [...] need to open their minds [...] and accept others to live in peace" (Diab, 2016). Altogether, these events are an illustrative cross-section of a long continuum of resistance against and beyond taboos, and may help us to understand the cultural contexts of Post-Civil War Lebanon.

The first section of this chapter is intended to present the social, cultural and historical contextualization of Beirut's Post-Civil War contemporary art scene. We examine how the rising generation of Post-Civil War contemporary Lebanese artists from the 1990s, in addition to cultural supporting networks and organizations, have subverted social and cultural norms, which has led to visual explorations of taboo themes, such as gender and sexuality. In this section, we also examine and problematize our perception of Arab cultures, societies, and peoples, which, as a whole, are often reduced and homogenized in global contemporary art discourses.

The second section of this chapter is intended to provide a review of past and current Western literature relevant to the theoretical conception of masculinities. At the same time, we define and situate, through existing scholarly literature, present hegemonic gender norms in Lebanon. This section follows with a discussion on the complex ways in which gender, especially masculinity, and various forms of male homosexuality operate in Lebanon. For instance, we carefully examine the various models of 'Arab masculinity,' and how they relate to the significant transformations and complexities in Lebanon within the culture of globalization. Additionally, we examine

the distinction of same-sex sexual practices and roles among Lebanese men and how such practices both reinforce and challenge hegemonic masculinity. This chapter concludes with a comprehensive analysis of the current literal translations and terminologies used in Arabic to describe and identify homosexuality and queerness in Lebanon and the Arab world. This is particularly important for this study as it allows us to understand how language is used to describe non-heterosexuals, in addition to recognizing how LGBTQ identified individuals from the Arab world have reclaimed pejorative local terminology. This is further necessary as it gives way to the conception of new complex local queer Arab vocabulary. In the final section, we demonstrate a range of complexities and contradictions in the Arab world, as they relate to contemporary art and male sexuality. It is critical to do this before attempting visual analysis on Akram Zaatari's artworks, so that one can gain a fuller understanding of them and how they function in both local and global contexts. Furthermore, a sufficient awareness of historical and cultural specificities of the works is necessary in order to avoid a potentially colonizing approach in our readings.

1.1 Beirut's Contemporary Art Scene: Then & Now

Since the early 2000s, the Arab world has become the core of a frenzied 'art boom,' with record-breaking auctions by Christies, flamboyant annual art fairs, ambitious developments for art museums designed by renowned international architects,¹² and a significant increase in artist residencies. The overall growth of the Arab art market has created exposure and new opportunities for Arab artists abroad and

¹² To name a few: The Museum of Islamic Art in Doha (by I.M. Pei), the Museum of Middle East Modern Art (MOMEMA) in Dubai (by Ben van Berkel and UNStudio), the Louvre Abu Dhabi (by Jean Nouvel), and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (by Frank Gehry).

for international artists to work in the Arab region (Shabout and Mikadadi, 2009). The art world, once defined by the activity of traditional art hubs such as New York, Paris, Basel, Zurich, Cologne, London, and Los Angeles, is now shaped by many emerging art scenes in a variety of cities and regions across the world (DiQuinzio, 2012). Beirut, Lebanon, nestled on the eastern Mediterranean coast, is one of these new artistic communities that boast complex permutations of history, politics, religion, and geography. Thus, Beirut has become a vibrant art center in the Arab world that has seen the emergence of an independent local art scene attracting international attention. In fact, though Beirut is known for destructive cycles of war, identity politics, reconstruction and tenuous cosmopolitanism, it has historically been the site of long-lasting intellectual renaissance movements, and was even recognized as a cultural capital of the Arab world until the Civil War broke out in 1975 (DiQuinzio, 2012). At that moment, cultural life in Lebanon would become disrupted for the next fifteen years. The Civil War formally ended on October 22, 1989, with the “Taif Agreement,” which endorsed national reconciliation and started a ten-year phase of urban renewal in Beirut.¹³

Following the “Taif Agreement,” the early 1990s saw the emergence of a generation of Post-Civil War¹⁴ artists such as Walid Raad, the duo Khalil Joreige and Joana Hadjithomas, Lamia Joreige, Rabih Mroué, Marwan Rechmaoui, Walid Sadek, Jalal Toufic, Paola Yacoub, and Akram Zaatari, who broke away from conventional codes and questioned the limits of cultural and social traditions (Sfeir-Semler, 2008). In

¹³ A decade and half after the charted agreement of 1989, Lebanon’s political situation is long from being stable. Several prominent political and media figures are assassinated; the Israeli war in July 2006 ignites; and internal tensions increase between political factions (Srouji, 2008), and the democratic election of Hezbollah to power. Despite the agreement, the Lebanese State has consistently failed to provide narratives and take a historical responsibility regarding the Civil War.

¹⁴ I use the term Post-Civil War chronologically as opposed to describing the content of the artworks.

doing so, these artists, among others, opened new perspectives that gave way to exploring taboo themes, including gender. For example, Lebanese artist and filmmaker Nadine Touma's street performance and video installation "Ode to Rhinos" (2002) critiques the widespread practice of reconstructive rhinoplasty among young Lebanese women who seek Western-looking noses. Touma, accompanied by three female performers, drives around Beirut in a borrowed vegetable pickup truck named *Sousou la Coquette*, selling one-thousand-and-one handmade marzipan noses in four stereotypical 'ethnic' shapes. Speaking through a megaphone, in humorous rhymes, Touma "incit[es] people to fight the monolithic Lebanese nose – with its political and social implications – and much more" (Touma, 2002: 136). Through this project, Touma seeks to scrutinize and critique the cultural and social order surrounding class and ethnicity. Rhinoplasty is something of a luxury in Lebanon, and would generally be affordable only for wealthy, upper-middle-class individuals. It is common to see, in the streets of Beirut, both men and women wearing the bandage on their noses as a class marker – even if they haven't actually had the surgery (Doherty, 2008). Furthermore, Western 'European' physical attributes are problematically perceived to be more desirable than 'ethnic' looking ones; Touma seems to suggest that the market for 'Western' noses is, to a degree, racist – because it depends on and perpetuates an implicit social hierarchy based on ethnicity.

As another example of artworks that question social conventions, Lebanese-American artist George Awde examines, through his photographic series "Quiet Crossings" (2008-2010) and "Shifting Grounds" (2011-2012), issues of displacement, fragility, and the vulnerability of masculinity in Lebanon. Over a period of several years, Awde photographed and documented the transition of a group of young men and boys – many of them migrant labourers, emigrants from Syria and Syrian Kurdistan fleeing the

war – now living in the margins of Beirut. His intimate portraits are interlaced with disregarded spaces and landscapes, including off the side of a highway, under a bridge and by an underpass. These photographs raise questions about masculinity and citizenship; and since many of these young men and boys are uprooted from their homes and family due to war and conflict, they have lost their national and cultural contexts within which to form their identities. The photographs particularly chronicle the transformations and struggles of these men by the physical marks on their bodies – their tattoos, cuts, and scars. These photographs depict the struggles of men who are caught in-between their unstable native land and the difficulties of adapting to their adoptive country where many are left without any rights. To adapt, these men grow together in order to form new belongings and communities. Awde is acknowledging the presence of boys and men at a non-normative intersection: as they are economically disadvantaged ‘foreigners,’ they may be perceived by traditional middle and upper-class Lebanese society as undesirable men, unfit to become patriarchal providers. Their tattoos and their scars may also be considered class markers, signaling for some links to gangs, drugs, violence (Seidman, 2009; Botz-Bornstein, 2015). Awde challenges such perceptions by depicting these men in intimate, emotive and vulnerable ways; to him, the physical marks on their bodies are not evidence of willful criminality, but rather a record of their struggles. Furthermore, these physical marks qualify the men as rugged and hypermasculine, which leads to a contradiction: the men are socially undesirable yet physically attractive. Their image as ‘outlaws’ may even be exciting for those looking from a traditional and privileged place.

Awde seems to be drawing attention to these contradictions in some of the photographs. For example, in *Untitled # 7 (Quiet Crossings Series)*, the subject is in a

cramped space, lying down on a seemingly cheap sofa which is covered by a paisley patterned sheet, all signifying, perhaps, his lack of wealth. However, the way the photograph is cropped right on the pelvic bone leads the viewer's eye downwards towards his groin, inviting one to eroticize the subject. This is accentuated in several ways: the subject's nude body, his well-groomed facial hair, how his left hand rests on his stomach and is seemingly moving downwards towards his genitals, the flexing muscles of his arms, the furrowed eyebrows showing tension in his face, and finally, his open posture. The eroticized Arab male body, existing at a position of economic and social disadvantage, yet emotive and affectionate, is one example of the exploration of taboo subjects by Awde.

Breaking away from social and cultural conventions and traditions also means that Post-Civil War artists identify as secular and anti-sectarian, vigorously defending their individuality as artists while trying to avoid any external influences on their art practices (Sfeir-Semler, 2008). Due to its sectarian diversity, Lebanon is forged as a nation-state that follows a peculiar political system, known as “confessionalism” or “confessional democracy” – a model of government that is meant to distribute political and institutional power equally possible among different religious communities. Confessionalism, a term encompassing the formation of religious ideologies and institutions, assures representation of different religious groups in decision-making, while also attempting to manage religious divisions and minimize the sectarian conflict which was one of the causes of the Civil War from 1975 to 1990 (Harris, 2012; Kisthardt, 2013). The Taif Agreement attempted to reestablish confessionalism in Lebanon by providing a Maronite Christian President, a Sunni Muslim Prime Minister, and a Shia Muslim speaker of Parliament, while four other communities – Orthodox

Christians, Druze, Greek Catholics, and Armenians – are guaranteed cabinet seats alongside the main three religions (Rabil, 2011; Nelson, 2013). These religious communities are politically represented because they constitute a majority within Lebanon. However, Lebanon also officially recognizes eighteen other confessional groups,¹⁵ regardless of how they do not constitute majorities (Nelson, 2013).

Confessionalism, in theory, creates not only a communal solidarity amongst its citizens and politicians, but also develops an individual desire to conform to a particular confessional identity. Thus, an individual's "confessional affiliation" becomes part of their social identity, regardless of their personal beliefs, leading many to define themselves along confessional affiliation rather than individual political beliefs (Collings, 1994). In other words, individuals look to a sect as a communal reference point, which leads to "a focus of collective pride and patronage networks, and a protective umbrella in times of insecurity" (Harris, 2012: 282). For political scientist Robert Rabil (2011) the confessional system, as such, maintains the importance of religion as the primary carrier of social beliefs, values and practices as determining factors of the way of life, as well as religion's "vital function [...] as the primary social organization through which political security has been maintained" (2011: 1). One of the negative aspects of confessionalism is that civil affairs – i.e. inheritance, marriage, divorce, among other things – are left to clerical authorities, leading to a discriminatory society where civilians, women and minorities are not equal before the law (Rabil, 2011).

¹⁵ These include: Alawite, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholic, Copts, Druze, Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Isma'ili, Jewish, Latin Catholic, Maronite, Protestant, Sunni, Shi'a, Syriac Catholic and Syriac Orthodox.

Confessionalism provides an important socio-political context in which the aforementioned Post-Civil War artists operate. Various scholarly writings further explore these issues, and others such as the Civil War, sectarianism and the historical backgrounds of these issues such as the sequential colonization of Lebanon, from the Ottomans to the French, and later the Syrian occupation in Lebanon (*Baathist*).¹⁶ Significantly, however, contemporary artists specifically attempt to operate outside of the confines of confessionalism, and eliminate the influence of religion in their artworks, as they explore unprecedented themes such as gender expressions and queer sexualities. Therefore, this dissertation will not further expand on historical and socio-political contexts, and instead will focus solely on the contemporary formation of gender, sexuality and queer issues in Lebanon, as explored by Akram Zaatari's lens-based artworks.

The 1990s was also a critical decade in which new and recovered cultural spaces and “sociabilities” (Rogers, 2012) gave way to innovative art platforms for experimental practices deeply embedded in Post-Civil War Beirut. From the mid-1990s, non-profit grassroots art organizations and associations played a crucial role in the vitality of the contemporary art scene in Beirut, and in sustaining and promoting a local artistic identity. These organizations include: Ashkal Alwan (The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts in Beirut), the Arab Image Foundation (AIF), Home Works Academy (Lebanon's first contemporary art school), and the Association for the Promotion and Exhibition of the Arts in Lebanon (APEAL). Zaatari was a key pioneer in the initial

¹⁶ See Ussama Makdisi's *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth Century Ottoman Lebanon*. Berkeley: University of Californian Press, 2000. Jean Said Makdisi's, *Teta, Mother and Me: Three Generations of Arab Women*. London: Saqi, 2005. Fawwaz Traboulsi's, *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press, 2007.

development of these artistic platforms, curating exhibitions and contributing to research projects, as well as being a co-founder of the AIF. Likewise, a younger generation of artists and cultural workers have themselves followed and founded independent collectives, galleries and art spaces (an example being the recently opened Beirut Art Center) featuring programming that alternates between maintaining an awareness of international art developments and critically engaging Beirut's local audiences. Furthermore, non-profit spaces like Ashkal Alwan and the Association for the Promotion and Exhibition of the Arts in Lebanon (APEAL) have recently 'internationalized,' due to a number of reasons: opportunities in the global art market such as increased collaborations with European and other partners, increased private sponsorship, and support from NGOs and international donors (Muller, 2009). Today, regardless of unstable and weak state institutions, and little governmental support for the arts, Beirut's artistic and cultural organizations maintain a rigorous critical engagement in its sporadic contemporary artistic and cultural productions scene, which promotes an interdisciplinary approach to the arts focusing on research, production, and context engagement.¹⁷

The rising commodification and Western curatorial approaches to the contemporary art from the 'Middle East' has problematically grouped artists from this geographical area together under the singular term 'Middle Eastern' umbrella. This is in spite of the fact that these multifaceted markets exhibit a great differentiation amongst the aesthetics and artistic landscapes within these regions. This ethnocentric viewpoint often leads to spoken and written communications about the region that end up reducing

¹⁷ See also: The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, Ashkal Alwan's mission and vision statement (<http://ashkalalwan.org>).

and homogenizing Arab ('Middle Eastern') cultures, societies, and peoples rather than representing their true diversity. For art historian Rose Issa, this is partly because of the geographical images used by the United States military to depict the 'Middle East' as an entirely deserted site, "a place with no history and no population [...] a blank canvas" (2011: 14). The notion of geography is, in fact, one of the most contested areas of artistic debates in the 'Middle Eastern' art world today (Muller, 2009). The area in question is often designated and grouped as 'The Middle East,' 'Near Orient,' 'MENA' (Middle East and North Africa), the 'Arab world' or the 'Eastern Mediterranean.' The 'Middle East' is a Western construction, presenting the area as picturesque, exotic, erotic, despotic, mysterious, empty, veiled, threatening and so on. The term 'Middle-Eastern' was coined in 1902 by United States naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan as a way of describing the area between India and the 'Near Orient.' As the term passed into common usage in the early twentieth century, its reach was extended to cover the mass of land under the decreasing Ottoman Empire.

Contemporary usage encompasses the Maghreb (North-African Arab West), Mashriq (Arab East, including Egypt), Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, a similar landmass to the oldest designation of the 'Orient': the lands of Islam of the Arabs, Turks, and Persians (Moore, 2009: 27). The fear of the Muslim 'Other' first developed among European Christians in the early seventh century as the expanding Islamic empire posed a political and military threat to European power and hegemony (Cesari, 2013; Green, 2015). Thus, the Middle East emerged in Western consciousness as an ambivalent border zone, "*of the West, yet outside it, familiar, yet alien*" (Melman, 2002: 105, original emphasis). As well, due to the rising numbers of migrants and refugees, the influence of the global media and the dominant construction of 'terror,' the 'Middle

East' is something "perceived as also *in* – if sometimes radically different *from* – the West" (Moore, 2009: 27, original emphasis). This perception is reflected in the ways artists from the Arab region are presented and discussed in the global art world. Arab artists are 'Othered' by being quickly "packaged into predetermined categories based on centuries-long [Orientalist] constructions" (Mikadadi, 2009: 11) from Western political and art institutions. For instance, in contrast to their Western peers, Arab artists are expected from both local and international parties to somehow adopt and perform certain roles such as visual ambassadors, archaeologists, anthropologists, and chroniclers of a past, future forecasters, witnesses, archivists, activists, critics, cartographers, storytellers, mediators and facilitators to expose their culture through specified marketing to the global art world (Shabout and Mikadadi, 2009). To borrow from cultural theorist Homi Bhabha (1994), the position taken on by the artists is one of a "borderline artist" – generally displaced and living in-between two cultures. Egyptian scholar Dina Ramadan (2004) argues that Arab artists are deprived of their individuality and are expected to act as representatives for 'the collective' (the Arab, the Muslim, the Egyptian, the North African, the 'Other'). In addition, artists are pressured to depict adequate 'modernity' and 'authenticity,' while maintaining a balance so as to avoid accusations of "imitating the 'West,' or folklore" (Shabout and Mikadadi, 2009: 13). It is ironic that, while the Western-dominated art world seemingly searches for "authentic" 'Middle-Eastern' art, that very search is still informed by stereotypical perceptions going as far back as nineteenth-century Orientalism (Said, 1979).

Thus, to recap, Beirut's contemporary art scene is flourishing, despite past and current internal strife as well as difficulties in the way it is perceived by the global art world, as influenced by Western media. It is within these complexities that this

dissertation will examine and analyze contemporary art practices in Lebanon, focusing on Akram Zaatari's works, which seem to satisfy some and defy other expectations from the global art market and scene. He is not an 'ambassador' in the sense of one who conveys 'authentic' Arab culture in a form that is consumable by a Western audience. His works are devoid of imagery which might be read as 'traditional,' such as geometric motifs, tapestries, and calligraphy; he also avoids Orientalizing props such as head scarves, hookahs, etc. There are notable exceptions to this, particularly in the *Madani Project* (figs. 28 and 29) which uses appropriated images; however, as will be examined in Chapter 2, Zaatari seems to know that these are 'acts' rather than 'true' representations. However, Zaatari's role can arguably be said to encompass that of a storyteller, critic, witness, archivist and archeologist, chronicling the shifting experiences of those under marginalized identities in Lebanon. As Zaatari and his contemporaries began to question and critique societal norms and institutions, they were inevitably met with resistance – which brings us to the issue of censorship.

1.2 Issues of Censorship: The Case of *Let It Be* (2008)

In the absence of the Lebanese government's support for arts and culture, Beirut's art infrastructure mainly relies on private international (European and other Western) funders and irregular funding from art institutions, which are often strategically oriented to serve foreign interests and impose meaning (Mikadadi, 2009; Fattouh, 2013; Marks, 2015). In turn, artists are pressured by foreign Western funders to present (or exploit) clichéd and marketable stereotypical aspects of Arab experiences as 'authentic;' some examples include Islamic fundamentalism, war and terrorism, Arab-Israeli relations, women's rights, democracy, the veil, and more recently Arab women 'voic[ing] their experience' (Marks, 2015: 74). These topics are important and relevant

in the realm of contemporary art because of their exploratory aspect of Arab life. However, they tend to “efface entire realms of Arab experience” (Marks, 2015: 74), in addition to depicting a homogenized view of the Arab world on the international art scene. These subject matters, as remarked by Marks, become a “‘criteria’ for university admissions, festival and exhibition applications, and, of course, funding” (2015: 25). As further noted, upon receiving funding, artists and filmmakers must work within its constraints. Thus, they are subject to external censorship and/or self-censorship (Marks, 2015: 73).

In Beirut’s art context, censorship is undoubtedly present, coming from both the state and peers, which sometimes leads to self-censorship as well¹⁸. This is especially true of works that discuss and depict sex and sexuality, which remain highly taboo even within the ‘open-minded’ art community. Zaatari’s assigned video and film programme *Let It Be* is an example that shows the difficulties and struggles on every level to produce and present images in the face of censorship in Lebanon. *Let It Be* was part of the 2008 Home Works IV: A Forum on Cultural Practices (Beirut, Lebanon) – a platform curated by Christine Tohme for artists, writers, and thinkers working both in and outside the Arab world to participate during a weeklong program of screenings, performances, and discussions (Ashkal Alwan, 2008).

As the program curator of *Let It Be*, Zaatari chose and presented films and videos produced outside the mainstream cinema industry, made by video artists and filmmakers

¹⁸ In Marks’s book *Hanan Al-Cinema: Affections for the Moving Image* (2015), she quotes Joseph Pearson (2010) who explores the strategies used by artists in the Arab world to discuss self-censorship, which include: “a vocabulary of juxtaposition, deletion of material whose absence is felt, the relegation of vital material to the margins, the effacement of meaning and the strategic use of ambiguity” (quoted in Marks, 2015: 327).

who took as thematic material the various aspects of sexuality and sexual practices, particularly male homosexuality, in explicit ways. The festival was presented in a three-part program; the first and second parts presented short films and videos from artists of Western countries.¹⁹ The third part of the program paid homage to the internationally acclaimed Los Angeles-based artist, writer, and filmmaker William E. Jones (2006) by dedicating an evening to his videos that appropriate found vintage gay pornography from the 1970s and 1980s. Jones edits the video clips together to create a discursive space that considers multilayered understandings of desire, sexuality, and sexual imagery. For instance, in one of his videos “The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography” (1998) Jones explores the post-Soviet gay pornographic industry. He arranges the found gay erotic footage into a montage of head-and-shoulder clips, in such a way as to raise issues of masculine vulnerability and the changing relationships between sex, money and power. In “V.O.,” or *version originale* (2006), Jones integrates soundtracks from foreign language films with video clips from gay pornography produced before the 1980s. Editing out the hardcore pornographic scenes, this work focuses instead on the body language and the surroundings as sites of fantasy, and shows

¹⁹ The programme consisted of the following parts: Part 1/A: Plastic Modelling: *Call Roger* by Rodney Werden (1975), *Tiger Licking Girl's Butt* by Nathalie Djurberg (2004), *Forces Inanimate Connection: Climax Modelling* by Sterling Ruby (2002), *Kangaroo* by Pierre-Yves Clouin (1998), *C'est mignon tout ça* by Pierrick Sorin (1993), *Les Ciseaux* by Mounir Fatmi (2003), *Couch* by Hans Perter Ammann (1994). Part 1/B: Meeting and Partings: *Gender Trouble* (2005) and *Pine Pong* (2003) by Tom de Pekin, *Smoke Rings* by Ian Jarvis (2002), *Gay?* By Jean Gabriel Periot (2000), *The Blue Hour* by John Lindell (1993), *Confirmed Bachelor* (1994) and *Theses Meetings, These Partings...*, by Tom Kalin (1991), *Nusch*, a performance by Tg Stan and Rosas. Part 2: *Masturbating in Fatherland* by Naufus Figuera (2007), *Handy Man*, by Nelson Henricks (1999), *7121 Images du sexe d'un autre* by Laetitia Bourget (2001), *Lovers* by Jean Gabriel Periot (2004), *Rain/une reverie aquatique* by Jean Gabriel Periot (2004), *Watch Out for the North Dakota*, by John Lindell (1993), Pierre-Yves Clouin's *Cul en l'air* (1997), *Point P* (2000), and *My Hands Are Shaking* (2001). Part 3: the works of William E. Jones, *Mansfield 1962* (2006), *Film Montages* (2006), *More British Sounds* (2006), *The Fall of Communism as Seen in Gay Pornography* (1998), *V.O.* (2006), (taken from the official Programme of Home Works IV: A Forum on Cultural Practices ((Beirut, Lebanon), April 12 – April 20, 2008 at the Ashkal Alwan).

how cultural references to footage are firmly embedded in a specific time and place. Further, in “Mansfield 1962” (2006) Jones appropriates found footage from the Mansfield, Ohio Police Department, who in the summer of 1962 produced “Camera Surveillance,” an instructional video showing how to set up a sting operation to film and arrest gay men for public sex in restrooms.

The venue for *Let it Be* was shared between two private spaces in the Hamra and Karatina neighborhoods, which were accessible to spectators by shuttle bus (Zaatari, 2014). The works considered less explicit were shown in the Masrah Al Madina Theater in Hamra, while those considered “potentially problematic,” because of their full-on gay pornographic depictions, were projected in Lebanese architect Bernard Khoury’s atelier located in the industrial suburb of Karantina, which was transformed into a two hundred-seat theater for the evening (Zaatari, 2014: 30).

The idea to organize such a risqué programme started out as a plan for a gay and lesbian film festival, which was proposed to Zaatari by a group of gay activists in Beirut (Zaatari, 2014). In terms of the videos’ content, much of them are gay male-oriented. These include: Naufus Figueroa’s *Masturbation in the Fatherland* (2007), which depicts a scene of the artist masturbating with a carrot and interwoven with footage of his father singing a Guatemalan folksong. Other themes explored were of voyeurism and exhibitionism in Pierre Yves Clouin’s *My Hands Are Shaking* (2001), which compiles gay pornographic scenes into a video collage; and Jean-Gabriel Périot’s *Lovers* (2004) a black and white combination of gay pornography that is juxtaposed with nostalgic music, creates a sense of loneliness. Also shown were Tom Kalin’s *Confirmed Bachelor* (1994) that depicted gay anal penetration contrasted with a voice-over of Christian conservatives who described the moral and health risks associated with such sexual

practices. *Let It Be* also presented a limited number of lesbian representations, such as explicit showings of female genitalia in Tom de Pekin's *Pine Pong* (2003) and *Gender Trouble* (2005), and mutual penetration using objects in Sterling Ruby's *Forces Inanimate Connections: Climax Modelling* (2002). The relatively scarce representation of women, lesbians, and transgendered individuals are problematic because the videos show a fraction of the queer community, and are almost exclusively created by men. In an interview, Zaatari explains and defends his conscious choice of displaying only gay sex, stating that most of the documentary work on transgender individuals and lesbians were "very didactic and presented very direct ways of looking at the politics of sexual identities" (2014: 42). For *Let It Be*, Zaatari sought to bring in video works that explored sex and sexuality in a more conceptual way.

The program created an occasion to clandestinely project art videos and films, which would perhaps have never been seen outside this context. It was also the opportunity to make visible the invisible in a conservative society that shies away from all questions and portrayals of sexual matter and acts. The event sparked unwelcomed reactions from the public, the art community (including artists) and the Ashkal Alwan (the hosting organization of the Home Works). In his interview with art historian Juan Vincente Aliaga (2012), Zaatari quotes some of the comments overhead during the event, which took place in Beirut April 16 and 18, 2008. These included some spectators – claiming gay-friendliness – commenting on there being: "[...] too much sex in the programme" and felt embarrassed watching the videos in public, while some were shocked and discomfited at how "[...] gay sex could be presented under simply sex" (Aliaga and Zaatari, 2012: 199). For others, "the films did not represent their sexual interest" and "[...] didn't understand the need for such a thing to surface in Lebanon

now, [...] the sexual revolution belongs to the 1960s, what's the point doing it again?" (Aliaga and Zaatari, 2012: 199). Although the negative responses (which are framed and informed by heteronormative, homoantagonist mindsets) Zaatari does mention an instance, during a screening, where one of his gay friends "brought his father with a bottle of whiskey and plastic cups to serve!" (Aliaga and Zaatari, 2012: 200).

During the entirely discreet planning and execution of the event, both Zaatari and the Ashkal Alwan (The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts) were aware of their illegal actions, as Lebanese law prohibits "the production and [public] circulation of sexually explicit material" (Zaatari, 2014: 28). Needless to say, the censorship office was never consulted for screening licenses because many of the videos and films presented on-screen explicit sexual acts and nudity.²⁰ In order to not risk possible conflicts with the local authorities, the Ashkal Alwan ultimately decided to announce the programme without listing any of the film titles or their screening locations. Furthermore, the organizers of Ashkal Alwan, which had commissioned a short video by Lebanese artist Ali Cherri, asked the artist to remove their names from the credit lines because the video showed a scene of Cherri performing oral sex to his partner (Aliaga and Zaatari, 2012: 199).

For Zaatari, showing raw sexual scenes was a way to counter the representation of sex in mainstream Arab cinema, which is "only alluded [...] poetically" and "restricted to suggestive imagery, ellipses, and symbols" (2014: 29). As further contended by Zaatari, "the purpose of [the] programme was not to offend, nor confront,

²⁰ The fine for not passing the censorship office could lead to an imprisonment given that some of the visual materials would be "judged as pornographic" (Aliaga and Zaatari, 2012: 199). To avoid the censors, Zaatari relied on friends traveling in and out of Lebanon, including artists sending screening copied back and forth to their distributors during the selection process (Zaatari, 2014: 29-30).

nor provoke anyone” (2014: 29) (although one may argue that provocation was omnipresent) but rather, on the one hand, show the institutional, legal, cultural, and social constraints of presenting and circulating such artworks in Lebanon. In this way, Zaatari’s programming and execution of *Let It Be* can be said to be a queering of the conventions which tend to result from the aforementioned constraints. His work particularly challenges the conceptual norms within which supposedly open-minded art communities and institutions operate in Lebanon. On the other hand, Zaatari wanted to understand how sex in general is conceptualized in Lebanon, and how one can work within a set of strict social conservative values.

1.3 Theoretical Conceptions of Arab Masculinities

Before attempting a visual analysis of the artworks, it is important to offer an overview of the theoretical conceptions of masculinity, how they relate with and problematize male homosexuality, as well as pertaining past and current terminologies as they shape queerness in Lebanon, and generally the Arab world. In this study, the critical approach to masculinity is guided by the social constructionist theory of gender, arguing against universal and essential views of identities. According to this view, we consider masculinity, like femininity, as a social construction that is built and reaffirmed through a range of practices, characteristics, and configurations of discourses (such as behaviours, utterances, and wordings) that can be taken up by anyone, regardless of their biological sex, in specific times and spaces. Social constructionism stresses culturally and historically specific variations and complexities in relation to identity. As expanded upon by American gender theorist Judith Butler, gender is a particular process of a “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory

frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1990: 43).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, research on men and masculinity emerged as an academic field – masculinity studies – supported by publications of textbooks (e.g. Brod, 1987) and several journals across the social sciences and humanities. It is important to distinguish the difference between the so-called ‘men’s movement’ and masculinity studies. Many feminist and pro-feminist masculinity scholars have rightly argued that the ‘men’s movement’ is mostly about supporting and maintain masculinity and its existing social status. In contrast, masculinity studies – as a subfield to gender and sexuality studies – is a field of academic scholarship, which critically analyzes masculinity in social life (Connell, 1995; Beasley, 2005). American sociologist Michael Kimmel informs us that masculinity and femininity, often portrayed as polarized opposites, are relational constructs, and one cannot understand the social construction of either masculinity or femininity without reference to the other (1987: 12). Furthermore, Australian sociologist R.W. Connell’s²¹ theory of masculinity – the most influential theory in the field of masculinity studies (Messerschmidt 2000; Gläser, 2004) – has significantly impacted the field of gender studies as well as a range of other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. In her book, *Masculinities* (1995), Connell advocates for the pluralism of masculinity and femininity, sexuality, and gender identities, while providing a critical feminist analysis of masculinities in a specific historical and socio-cultural context. Connell’s (1995) conception of masculinity argues that gender is an institutional structure that is recreated through social practices. For

²¹ Raewyn Connell (formerly Robert Connell) is a transgender person who identifies as a woman.

Connell masculinity is seen as “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices on bodily experience, personality, and culture” (1995: 71). From this definition, we can sum Connell’s point as three elements of masculinity: firstly, it is a social position that individuals, despite their gender, can move into over time and across space. Secondly, instead of possessing (or having) masculinity, individuals produce masculinity by engaging in an identifiable set of practices and characteristics understood to be ‘masculine’ which are then problematized and challenged.²² This is corroborated by Butler, who asserts, as mentioned earlier, that gender is expressed through “doing,” rather than “being” (1990: 25). Therefore, any actions conducted by an individual are carried out through a lens of gender: “manly” or “womanly” (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999; Kimmel and Messner, 2007), which are evaluated by others, and deemed appropriate or inappropriate gender performances. This leads into Connell’s third and final point: when gendered practices are enacted collectively by groups, especially men, communities, societies, institutions and cultural forms including mass media, they have prevalent sociocultural effects. These effects include maintaining models of masculinity as hierarchal and competing for hegemony.

One of the important contributions offered by Connell is the concept of hegemonic masculinity (1995, 2000, 2001, 2005), which, in Western cultures, refers to the most valued and most rewarded form of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is understood as the pattern of “gender practices” – i.e. actions, not just a set of role

²² For instance, Judith Jack Halberstam (1998) made the case for embodied female masculinity, therefore opening a space for performativity. This shows that the concept of masculinity is multiple, rather than a singular.

expectations or an identity – (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832) that allow social male domination and oppression of women and femininities as well as subordinated and marginalized masculinities.²³ It is noteworthy to recognize the various constructed forms of masculinities; by pluralizing the term, we acknowledge that masculinity means different things to different groups of people at different times. However, while a multiplicity of masculinities may be present within a culture, they are not created equally. As sociologist Erving Goffman writes:

In an important sense, there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, unmarried, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record of sports [...]. Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself – during moments at least – as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior. (1963: 128)

Goffman's quote above depicts the singular vision of masculinity, which is steadily upheld by men in power across America, particularly in higher positions within politics, military, and business. The very definition of hegemonic masculinity and manhood that has been defined and rooted in Western culture maintains “a man in power, a man *with* power, and a man of power” (Kimmel, 2004: 184, original emphasis) while constantly being defined in opposition to “others” (i.e. racial, ethnic, sexual minorities, and women). Consequently, according to Connell, hegemonic masculinity is based on

²³ Connell (2000) notes that hegemonic masculinity is not in opposition to marginalized masculinities. In fact, men with colour, working class men, men with disabilities, queer men, and transmen can still embody hegemonic masculinity. However, the ways in which men with marginalized masculinities embody hegemonic masculinity is expressed differently based on one's access to resources, social capital, and social mobility (<http://www.wgac.colostate.edu/men-and-masculinities>. Accessed on August 18, 2015).

heterosexuality, homophobia, and misogyny. In practice, these include: distancing oneself from femininity, restricting one's emotions and vulnerability, always being tough and aggressive, and finally, being highly sexual with women. Such practices go so far as to even include proving one's heterosexuality through acts of homoantagonism.²⁴

This brings us to discuss Connell's statement that gay men embody subordinate masculinities. Connell writes:

Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole. Within that overall framework, there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men. The most important case in contemporary European/American society is the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men [...] oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. (1995: 78)

Accordingly, hegemonic masculinity is relational to 'others,' depending on *nonhegemonic* and *counterhegemonic* masculinities to maintain its dominant position in the social and cultural patriarchal hierarchy. It is no surprise that male homosexuality, in both the Western and Arab world, is not only criminalized but also socially oppressed, censured and even terrorized. These are merely the tools used to uphold the modern form of hegemonic masculinity, since, as scholars Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985) explain, male homosexuality is seen as counterhegemonic: firstly, as mentioned previously, opposition to homosexuality is seen as fundamental to male heterosexuality; secondly, homosexuality is associated with effeminacy (therefore weak and a threat); and thirdly, the homosexual act itself is considered subversive. As will be seen, though

²⁴ I use the term homoantagonism to refer to active hostility, violence and/or oppression towards people who identify or are perceived as queer, bisexual, lesbian, gay, trans, etc.

the concept of hegemonic masculinity has emerged within Western scholarship, it similarly exists in the Arab world.

1.4 Gender Norms in Today's Lebanon

Scholarly attention to gender issues in the Arab world has traditionally focused almost predominantly on femininity (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Meriether and Tucker, 1999; Salhi, 2008; Makdisi, et al., 2014) and while a small number of studies apropos masculinity and the gendered construction of men in the Arab world have surfaced, they remain limited.²⁵ Thus far, masculinity in Arab cultures has generally remained an unrecognized and unacknowledged category, which is still viewed in sharp essentialist terms, perceived as natural, and self-evident. Further, recent Western media stereotypical portrayals of Taliban, al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah religious zealots, suicide bombers, ruthless dictators, and petro-rich Gulf moguls has led to pernicious stereotypes about Arab men as particularly misogynistic, dangerous, loathsome, untrustworthy, inherently violent, and fanatical (if they are Muslims) (Inhorn, 2012). Such contemporary representations of Arab men as medieval theocrats, violent barbarians, oil despots, and patriarchal oppressors are part of a longer history of Orientalism, through which the Western world viewed the Arab world with simultaneous eroticism, repugnance, and outright fear (Said, 1979; Said and Hitchens, 2001).

²⁵ As of now, the only studies I have come across are: Mai Ghousseub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, eds. *Imagined Masculinities: Changing Patterns of Identity of Middle Eastern Men*. London: Saqi, 2000; Mai Ghousseub and Emma Sinclair-Webb, eds. *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*. London: Saqi, 2006; and Lahoucine Ouzgane, *Islamic Masculinities*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Still today, in the Arab world, male and female appear wholly divided, and masculinity fixed, stable, timeless, and universal (Aghacy, 2003). At the same time, however, the field of gender studies is changing from an exclusive focus on women to a new interest in Arab Middle Eastern men; the aim is not to divert attention from women's issues but rather to highlight the relational and/or comparable constructs of masculinity and femininity. Arab men, rather than a singular and monolithic group, are now being viewed as individuals whose masculinity is shaped by the multiplicity, diversity and intersection of men's experiences, attitudes, beliefs, situations, practices, and institutions, intersecting with race, class, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, age, region, physical appearance, able-bodiedness, mental ability, and various other categories with which we describe our lives and experiences (Brod and Kaufman, 1994).

Currently, there is a lack of scholarly research on masculinities in the Lebanese context and as a result this dissertation relies on some generalization from other Arab contexts. Traditional Lebanese society, like in most Arab societies, is strongly masculinist and hierarchical with two sexes: male and female, who live in separate spheres, interacting only during defined occasions.²⁶ For instance, shared activities take place in family settings where other people are present. For women, either their husbands or male relatives accompany them (Murray and Roscoe, 1997; Kugle, 2013). Within the male sphere emerges the highly regarded and often idealized notion of masculinity and manhood. In her article, "Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian 'Intifada': A Cultural Politics of Violence," anthropologist Julie Peteet

²⁶ The Arabic word that the Qur'an unambiguously uses for the biological man (or male) is *dhakar* (which also means the male organ) while the word *ountha* is used to describe the biological women (or female) (Kaltner, 2011; Monqid, 2012).

(1994) discusses several characteristics of an idealized “Arab masculinity” or (*rujulah*) within the first Intifada (1987-1993). This idealized Arab masculinity (*rujulah*) is defined by the image of the *rjjal* (macho male); a man who is physically muscular with sharp facial features, facial hair,²⁷ well-groomed and who projects self-confidence, publicly boasts his sexual prowess and escapades with women, has a sense of being decisive, opinionated, aggressive, assertive, tough, brave, dominant, reliable, virile, in control, respectful, and honourable (Peteet, 1994; Kanaaneh, 2005; Hart, 2008; Gren 2009; Moussawi, 2007). These are highly contingent on fighting unwinnable conflict with Israel and its obscene military practice of oppression. Among these many characteristics, we may suggest that Arab masculinity during conflict periods is acquired and verified by expressions of fearlessness, assertiveness, and risk-taking, which are considered to be particularly important for traditional Lebanese men as they demonstrate prideful manhood while also maintaining patriarchal and heterosexist principles, and asserting nationalism. Furthermore, as shown by Gutmann (1996) and Fuller (2003), levels in which a man can prove his masculinity around him are through not just his manliness, but also through marriage and subsequently fatherhood. Marriage confirms a respectable image of masculinity; it is the moment when the young male becomes independent and leaves his home to become the authoritarian figure in another household.²⁸ As a provider, the man does not actively participate in the order of the

²⁷ The beard has an important signification among Arab societies as it is retained as part of the men’s honour and dignity as it may be a symbol of his masculinity (or manliness). As stated by Dayla Cohen-Mor “the beards represent their gender identity: they are strong, superior males, not weak, inferior females. The beards denote their pious nature, for traditionally only an atheist or a non-believer let his face be clean-shaven” (2001: 128).

²⁸ As noted by Naila Nauphal, due to the migration of men in search of work, the numbers of female-headed households in rural areas during Civil War increased making women the main provider of the family (2001: 60).

household but oversees its correct functioning, ensuring that anyone under ‘his’ roof is well looked after (Gutmann, 1996; Fuller, 2003). This comprehensive yet strict gender role expression is taught at a very young age and deviations from that “normative” expression is considered to be wrong and stigmatized (Szymanski and Carr, 2008).

This vision of masculinity is rigidly demarcated from other gender roles, a process which plays an integral part of identity formation. Today in Lebanon, most women’s identities continue to center around the importance of virginity and on their achievements as wives and mothers (Aghacy, 2004). Patriarchal men are still in control of the sexuality and sexual behaviours of their female family members. This is manifested through the father’s decision of marriage choices for his daughters, and the ever-frequent honour killings in Lebanese society, where male family members kill female members who have disgraced the family ‘honour’ through their sexual behaviour (Hoyek et al., 2005; Hamieh and Usta, 2011). The genders are defined by power: man’s power and control, and woman’s subordination. Traditional Arab masculinity, similar to Western hegemonic masculinity, asserts itself through the renunciation and control of femininity (Segal, 1990). It goes even further so as to identify differing levels of power among masculinities themselves (Connell, 2005) in order to maintain its position at the very top of the hierarchy. For example, Connell (2005) describes the subordination of gay men by heterosexual men as a function of differing levels of power among the masculinities, with subordinate masculinities often conflated with femininity. In fact, as Kimmel (1997) argues, since masculinity is defined in terms of a man in power, or a man who possesses power, then it is not astonishing that those men who partake sexually with other men confer upon themselves a status of (hyper)masculinity – considering they exert some form of power and domination over their sexual partner (Dunne, 1998).

Thus, beneficiaries of hegemonic masculinity have power not just over women but also over ‘lower grades’ of men.

Despite this, the structure of patriarchy has undergone some significant changes in response to the transformations and complexities of the present-day, and the culture of globalization. As described by Samira Aghacy (2004), Lebanese men are becoming increasingly concerned with the ‘feminization of culture,’ where men who belong to the urban middle class are increasingly focused on their body image, concerns formerly reserved for women. Aghacy further notes that men are “captivated by new ideals of male fashion, style and beauty; these men polish their nails, wear earrings, diet, exercise, and undergo plastic surgery to improve their appearance” (2004: 3) – this also true for older men who employ chemical creams, shampoos and hair transplants to deal with their hair loss. Additionally, television programs such as the successful *Star Academy*, aired on The Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, shows young unmarried men and women living together, which contradicts customs and traditions. Furthermore, these young men and women participate in the show on an equal basis without discrimination between them. Furthermore, middle class educated fathers are becoming increasingly participative in their families, sharing responsibilities with their working wives, while learning about being nurturing, caring, and emotionally expressive (Aghacy, 2004; Monterescu, 2006; Bosch, 2008;). In his article, “Stranger Masculinities: Gender and Politics in a Palestinian-Israeli ‘Third Space,’” Daniel Monterescu (2006) discusses Arab masculinity and its relation to both Islamic masculinity and liberal-secular masculinity in the Arab world. In his study, which centers on the hybrid experience of Palestinian-Arab men in Jaffa, Monterescu develops the model of a “situational masculinity” to point to the discourses of masculinities that maneuver between the

essentialist discourse of Islamic conservatism and liberal-secular masculinity (2006: 133-137). Monterescu's thesis is that "between Islamic pious masculinity (characterized by its conservatism) and the 'modern' liberal-secular masculinity that is also developing in the Arab world (characterized by tendencies toward modernity and Westernism), men practice a masculinity, which defines itself as first and foremost Arab, as opposed to the two previous models" (2006: 142). Thus, Arab masculinity is a "situational masculinity," which is situated ambiguously between those other two masculinities (traditional and liberal), and so they inhabit a space of transition.

Today, these complex gender dynamics emerging in Lebanese society have led scholars and artists to radically question, redefine and ultimately subvert the values of traditional masculinity. Yet, we must be mindful that the reach of such changes in masculinity is restricted to the middle class urban sector of Lebanese society, who see the meaning of masculinity and femininity becoming progressively blurred, varied, and problematic. For others, such changes are seen as potential betrayals and threats to one's culture, values and language; as a result, supporters of traditional masculinity are resisting these changes by reinforcing traditional roles and images, and attempting to ensure that Post-Civil War Lebanon remains under hegemonic male control (Aghacy, 2004).

1.5 Masculinities and Sexual Practices

Lebanon is, to a degree, described by the model of compulsory heterosexuality – that is the idea that heterosexuality is both assumed and enforced by patriarchal society through rigid dichotomous gender norms and roles, such as male-female, dominant-submissive, and active-passive (Rich, 1981). These strict norms, however, are not enough to guarantee that one's masculinity is both respected and accepted by his peers.

In order to ensure that one's masculinity and heterosexuality is unquestionable, one must not only engage in 'manly' acts, but also masculine sexual practices. These practices do not necessarily fit into the Western categories of sexuality – i.e. gay, straight, bisexual, etc. As cited by Whitaker “Arab society is traditionally more concerned with sexual acts and roles rather than with sexual identities and/or orientations” (2006: 206). Therefore, the Western binary of heterosexual/homosexual is inaccurate in Arab society, and is better described by that of active/passive, a distinction based only on the roles taken during sexual intercourse (Dunne, 1990; Schmitt and Sofer, 1992). The sexual role played during anal sex between men is key to masculinity.²⁹ Suggested by Lumsden (1991), Murray (1995, 2000), Gutmann (1996) and Prieur (1998) as long as the man assumes the active 'top' role during sexual intercourse and uses his position of male domination to coerce his partner, his masculinity and his heterosexuality may remain intact. Accordingly, the submissive role during sex is always seen as feminine, and assumed to be taken by women, boys, prostitutes, and adult gays, thus designating them of lower status than that of the aggressor or penetrator. Thus, the active dominant role performed by these men is considered to be more masculine and more socially acceptable. As illustrated by scholars Huseyin Tapinc (1992) and Martin Nesvig (2001), who discuss the distinction of sexual roles and identities between men who have sex with other men: the masculinity and social respectability of the active dominant 'top' are intact, whereas the passive penetrated partner is scorned and denounced.³⁰ As a result,

²⁹ Oral sex is generally less desirable in Arab society than anal sex, mainly because of the belief that genitals are 'dirty'. The anus, however, is considered to be clean because custom dictates that it should be washed after defecation (Bouhidba, 2007).

³⁰ Interestingly, as added by Islamic scholar Sabine Schmidtke, homosexuality between young men seems to have been historically widely practiced; “as long as the penetrated was not yet virile his masculinity will not be compromised by his taking the passive role” (1999: 260).

men who engage sexually with other men will inevitably be defined by the role they take during the sexual act (Connell, 1995).

To further complicate conceptions of sexuality in Lebanon, we are increasingly seeing “men adopting the new terminology and self-conceptions of a gay identity under the influence of Western examples, while continuing to observe traditional distinctions of older/younger, active/passive, and even masculine/non-masculine in their personal relationships” (Murray and Roscoe, 1997: 313). A contemporary example is a study by cultural scholar Ghassan Moussawi (2007), revealing that the vast majority of Lebanese men participating in same-sex activities identify mainly as ‘non-heterosexual’ men rather than gay. The term is widely used among men who are not necessarily ‘out’ or exclusively gay-identified. However, what is problematic is that the majority of these men assume that homosexuality is the negation of masculinity, so, they feel the need to embrace and engage in what is considered normative masculine behaviour. Thus, constructions of men’s masculinities are both rigidly hegemonic and yet staunchly challenged. Referring to this kind of contradiction, gender theorist Lynne Segal states: “[...] however assertively or defensively seeking a space inside the dominant culture, homosexual subcultures have a tantalizing relationship with the masculine ideal – part challenge, part endorsement” (1990: 144). While Lebanese men who engage in same-sex practices do not necessarily identify as heterosexual, they also do not identify as homosexual. Therefore, it becomes difficult to define these men using Western terminology, which is limited in its ability to describe the complex sexualities of Lebanese men.

1.6 Conceptualizing Homosexuality in Lebanon and the Arab World

Regardless of the constant cultural taboos and silence vis-à-vis the topics of sexuality and homosexuality in the Arab world and regions, there has been a recent rise in studying sexualities and male homosexual identities in the Arab world, written in English, Arabic, and French.³¹ Beirut is a city of paradoxes, especially when it comes to the reality of everyday life, in which homosexuality is irrefutably present, perhaps even widespread. For instance, Beirut has a popular TV drag queen named Bassem Feghali, and Modi, a flamboyant openly gay internationally acclaimed male belly dancer; both would be considered criminals by the government, yet they are celebrated by the masses. Beirut also hosts an active and flourishing gay scene,³² which enjoys a certain freedom, in contrast to other cities in the Arab world and those found in the Maghreb (MacDonald, 1992). However, in a nation traditionally defined in heterosexual terms, homosexuality is deemed as a perverse behaviour and symptom of mental illness, which has led to abuse, harassment, victimization, and social exclusion, as well as family

³¹ An Arabic example of book-length studies includes Ibrahim Mahmood's *The Forbidden Pleasure: Homosexuality: Sex in Arab History*, 2000. English examples included Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer, eds. *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies*, 1992; J.W. Wright Jr. and Everett K. Rowson, eds. *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*; Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, eds. *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature*, 1997; Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World 1500-1800*, 2005; Brian Whitaker's *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East*, 2006; and Samir Khalaf and John Gagnon, eds. *Sexuality in the Arab World*, 2006. French examples include Abdelwahab Bouhdaiba's *La sexualité en Islam*, 1985; and René Khawam's contribution to French letters by translating various medieval Arabic texts invested in homoeroticism and pederasty such as his *Les fleurs éclatantes dans les baisers et l'accollement* by Ali al-Baghdadi, 1991; *La Prairie des gazelles: éloge des beaux adolescents* by Mohammad al-Nawadji, 1991; and *Les Délices des cœurs* by Ahmad al-Tifashi, 1998.

³² The gay scene includes cruising sites (Dunkin' Donuts is strangely a very popular spot for young gay men), a few gay-friendly bars and nightclubs, a popular gay beach south of the city and a few Turkish baths (although some might have been torn down recently after raids). Also noteworthy is HELEM pro-active presence in the city. HELEM (the Arabic acronym of "Lebanese Protection for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender people"), is a non-governmental non-profit organization that seeks to work in solidarity in order to achieve a peaceful liberation of Lesbian, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgendered (LGBTQ), and other persons with non-conforming sexuality or gender identity in Lebanon from all sorts of violations of Civil, political, economic, social, and/or cultural rights.

rejection, shaming, and persecution of members of the LGBTQI-identified community. Some of the most recent examples of this include “the governmental closing of a gay Lebanese website and the raid of the gay-frequented Acid nightclub in 2005” (Zeidan, 2013: 197) and the “homosexuality tests,” also called “tests of shame” – which consisted of inserting chickens’ eggs into the anus – perpetrated against 36 men who were arrested during a raid on a gay porn cinema (Mezzofiore, 2012). Homosexuality in Lebanon is still officially criminalized and punishable under Article 534 of the penal code, which states that all ‘unnatural’ intercourse, including anal intercourse and non-copulative acts such as fellatio and masturbation, is to be punished by up to one-year imprisonment. Branded sinful and immoral, a public affirmation of a homosexual identity and desires are rather risky, causing individuals to remain silent instead. In cultural anthropologist Jared McCormick’s qualitative study of the lives of gay Lebanese men, he found that homosexual life is kept tightly private because of “economic considerations and the security the family continues to provide in this regard” (2006: 250). As further stated by writer Brian Whitaker (2006) individuals whose sexuality does not fit the heteronormative model live in fear of being exposed or blackmailed; many resort to unwanted marriage for the sake of their family’s reputation condemned to a life of secrecy. Moreover, there are no legal rights to protect them if they are discriminated against, and health agencies promoting and providing sexual advice and education are nearly non-existent (Whitaker, 2006: 10).

Another expression of such persecution is the denial of the existence of LGBTQ identified persons in Arab countries. On the one hand, there are those who maintain that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people exist everywhere, in all cultures (Murray and Roscoe, 1997; Aldrich, 2006a, 2006b; Patanè, 2006; Habib, 2007). On the

other hand, there are those, such as Jeffrey Weeks (1992) and Joseph Massad (2002), who argue that the concept of ‘homosexuality’ or the ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ identity does not exist in the Arab world. The fundamental premise of Massad’s controversial book *Desiring Arabs* (2007) is that homosexuality (including its constitutive identity categories of ‘gay,’ ‘lesbian,’ and ‘queer’) is a Western conception specific to Western sexual subjects and that it should not be universalized to represent the sexualities of Arabs. Massad further argues that Arabs who engage in same-sex encounters do not identify themselves as homosexual and that they are not, in any way, interested in romantic coupling. Here, one may note that Massad does not dispute the existence of same-sex sexual activities in the Arab world; rather, he is disputing the Western identifications of such people as LGBTQ. In other words, one who engages in same-sex activities is not following their ‘natural’ and ‘inherent’ desires, but rather choosing that lifestyle. For Massad (2007) the concept of homosexuality is understood as a foreign import by international gay and lesbian non-governmental rights organizations – which he collectively labels “Gay International” – that promote ‘progressive’ gay and lesbian rights and freedoms, while also imposing the “coming out” imperative, on non-Western countries. This is seen within the Arab world as a form of cultural and political colonial-style “missionary project” where Western foreigners claim to be saving and/or liberating the suppressed ‘Other’. This is partially drawn from Said’s *Orientalism* (1979), where we are reminded of the West’s imperialist relationship to the Arab world, which is based on a sexual character. The West, positioned as masculine (“strong, upright, rational”) seeks to colonize, possess, and penetrate the feminized (“weak, passive, irrational”) and

oversexed Arab world (Said, 1979: 137-138).³³ In the Arab world, Massad further points out that, “[...] it is the publicness of social-sexual identities rather than the sexual acts themselves that elicits repression” (2002: 197). In making this distinction, Massad argues that Arab cultures permit and tolerate same-sex relations as long as they are practiced privately, behind closed doors and remain unnamed.

Massad’s assertions are problematic. He implies that Western cultural influences are fully to blame for having brought the homosexual identity into the Arab world. It is true that there has been increased contact between Arab and Western cultures since the early 1990s, through satellite television, foreign travel, and the Internet. However, the introduction of live journals, weblogs, chat rooms, and other forms of Internet journaling,³⁴ has seen Arab (as well as Iranian) and Muslim sexual minorities independently claim a voice and space online for themselves (Habib, 2006). These Internet platforms have led to significant global awareness around the subject of homosexuality (for example in Islam), and the treatment of the LGBT-identified population in Arab and Muslim countries. Also, access to Western media platforms has enabled Arab people, who share and express similar same-sex desires and feelings, to identify by name those feelings (Georgis, 2013a, 2013b). Massad may view self-asserting gay Arabs as victims, in Sahar Amer’s words, of “Orientalist fantasies, of colonial impositions, and of universalizing claims of Western gay rights groups” (2010:

³³ See also: Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995; Deniz Kandiyoti *Gendering in the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996; Jarrod Hayes, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002; Elizabeth Thompson “Public and Private in Middle Eastern Women’s History.” *Journal of Women’s History* 15 (2003): 52-69.

³⁴ To name a few examples: www.queerarab.blogspot.com; www.gaymuslim.wordpress.com; www.helem.net; www.homanla.org; and www.imaan.org.uk.

652). However, his logic in reducing self-identifying gay (and queer) Arabs to self-hating and assimilated to Western constructs is denying them any agency.

Due to his arguments, Massad unfortunately halts us from thinking beyond civilization's binaries and divisions. As argued by feminist scholar Dina Georgis, the "process of living and working through the traumatic legacies of European colonial sexual shaming and the challenging conditions of contemporary globalization have given rise to reinvented sexualities" (2013: 237). Thus, the process of naming "Arab sexualities is contested because there is no easy way to make sense of the historical entanglements of pre-colonial traditions, colonization and sexual shaming, and gay epistemologies in the lives of present-day Arabs" (2013: 237). As postcolonial scholar Paul Gilroy reminds us in *The Black Atlantic* (1993) sexual identities and histories, to various degrees, have been affected by colonialism and therefore are negotiated and lived in-between 'East' and 'West'. While highly controversial Massad's argument is certainly a sign that Western conceptions of sexuality are not understood in the same way in the Arab world. However, it is clear that Massad's arguments are an overly simple response to a deeply complicated subject.

Massad's arguments are the academic manifestation of a hegemonic way of thinking which denies both identity and agency to sexual minorities in the Arab world. This is an example of a way of thinking that is examined by Judith Butler in the Western context in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997). In her book, Butler focuses on how language or speech-acts "interpellate" subjects within a set of discursive rules or regulations. She contends that to be established as a subject, "[...] means to become subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms which govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject" (Butler, 1997a: 133). While those subjects

uphold a valid “speakable” identity, other subjects that speak outside of those norms are negated (seen as unintelligible and unrecognizable) risking their status as a subject (Butler, 1997a: 133). As a result, social existence of ambiguous and transgressive identities, such as queer, non-heterosexual identities, is discursively silenced and remains invisible.

Massad participates in this process as the ‘valid’ subject, whose words are within the established and accepted discourse. To him, subjects who speak outside of that discourse – Arab people who choose to name and identify same-sex activity – are unintelligible and unrecognizable. In other words, they have lost, to some degree, their authentic Arab identity. They can best be explained as colonized victims, or alien agents of the Western discourse. The invisibility and the silencing of self-identifying queer Arabs maintains particular perceptions and preconceptions about homosexuality held in a patriarchal heterosexual matrix. Following Butler’s thinking, instead of unknowingly participating in the same discourse as Massad, or any one particular discourse for that matter, we may acknowledge the true fluidity of the subjects and languages at hand, and therefore see a diversity of sexual identities.

1.7 A Note on Language and Terminologies

The problem of invisibility is reflected in the language used around homosexuality in Lebanon. A major problem when writing and speaking about same-sex issues in the Arab world is choosing the terminology that is appropriate, accurate, and acceptable to the people concerned. Below is a brief discussion of some of the current literal translations and terminologies used in Arabic to describe and identify homosexuality in the Arab world. Many English-language publications use the term ‘gay’ and ‘homosexual’ as more or less interchangeable. For some individuals, the term

'homosexual' is charged with negative connotations because of its historical clinical use to refer to one's sexual behaviour as opposed to amorous feelings. In general, most homosexual men and women, from the Western world, prefer 'gay' and 'lesbian' to describe their attraction to the same-sex. However, in the context of Arab societies, where sexuality and homosexuality are unspeakable, the use of the term 'gay' is more complex. As noted by Whitaker, the term carries, in the Arab world, associations with a certain cultural lifestyle found especially among gay people in the 'West,' which could suggest a sexual identity that people may not personally adopt" (2006: 13). Despite the lack of Arabic terms equivalent to 'gay,' the Arabic language does have an ample number of words identifying people who are inclined towards explicit types of homosexual activity. For instance, the use of the terms *khawal/mukhanath* refer to effeminate men.³⁵ In some cases, *mukhanath* refers to a hermaphrodite (*khuntha*) – an outdated term that can be replaced by intersex – or to an individual who has been castrated (Rowson, 1991a, 1991b; Habib, 2007). In the context of Lebanon, the labelling of feminine acting men as *tante* or *folle* (the French word for auntie, which refers to being a queen, fairy or flamboyant homosexual) by Lebanese 'gay' effeminate men demonstrate this last point. There is also the word *luti* borrowed from the name of the prophet Lot, of Sodom, which roughly translates into 'sodomite' – describing a male engaging in the act of homosexual sodomy. Other terms include: *ma'ibun* (a passive sodomite), *mu'ayir* (a passive male prostitute) and *dabb* (an active sodomite who rapes victims in their sleep) (Lagrange, 2000: 171), *walad biskilitta* (Egyptian Arabic:

³⁵ As noted by Habib: "when referring to a *mukhanath* in the context of sodomy, the effeminate homosexual male is the intended conveyance – such as a male is always presented as one who enjoys being sodomised, and who seeks sodomy liberally and has a tendency to dwell amongst women even though regularly speaking this would be seen as a grave transgression" (2007: 18).

literally, a bicycle boy, an image of sexual behaviour), *hassass* (Moroccan Arabic: literally, a person who feels deeply, an effeminate man), *tabaj* (Lebanese Arabic: someone who bends over to be sodomized), *biyiniq* (Lebanese Arabic: literally, someone who makes use of his ass) (Amer, 2012: 384).

Terminologies such as ‘gay’ and ‘homosexual’ (and/or variants in other languages) reflect and reveal the social and historical context in which they were created.³⁶ Today, a more specific term *junusiyya* (literal translation of homosexuality) has been employed by some ‘gay’ Arab men to define their sexual identity. Unfortunately, this term still remains misunderstood by the general public and popular media, thus giving way to the use of heavily-loaded derogatory terms such as *shaadh* meaning ‘queer’, ‘pervert’, ‘deviant’. Another expression *al-shuthoth al-jinsee*, which translates literally into a ‘sexual abnormality’ or ‘sexual deviance’ was imported from homophobic 1950s Western sexology, but the expression continues in Arabic-speaking countries as one of the most popular use for ‘homosexuality’ (Habib, 2007). Because of charged negative connotations, most sexual minorities avoid any public assertion of their identities (Al-Ghafari, 2003). But perhaps the most widely accepted way to describe ‘homosexuality’ and ‘homosexuals’ is by the use of the recently introduced Arabic terminology: *al-mithliya or mithlyi* and *al-jinsiya* (or “*junsiyya mithliyya*”), which literally mean “the same sexuality,” “sexual sameness,” or “the same gender” (Whitaker, 2006; Habib, 2007; Amer, 2012, Kugle, 2013).³⁷ As referenced by Samar Habib (2007)

³⁶ Within the concept of these linguistic arguments, it is noted that both ‘homosexuality’ and ‘gay’ are relatively recent additions to the English language. In the late 1860s Viennese writer Karl-Maria Kertbeny first coined in print the German word *Homosexualität* (‘homosexuality’) (Greenberg, 1988), which publicly debuted in his pamphlet calling for homosexual emancipation (Norton, 1997).

³⁷ As mentioned by Habib “the concept of *al-jins al thalith*, or “The Third Sex” appeared in the 1970s was used as confusion of hermaphroditism, transgenderism, and homosexuality – all three categories of

the ‘sameness’ is important here as it breaks away from the word’s historical oppressive medical discourse. I am mindful of the following Arabic terms that have recently come into use in an alleged positive manner. The term *mithlyi* (a masculine “same”) references a self-identifying gay man, “queer” as “*ahrar al-jins*” (literally, “free of gender”), and LGBTQIA as M.M.M.M (*mithliyya, mithli, mozdawij, moghayyir*) (Amer, 2012). For the purpose of this study, I will recourse to English terminology, such as ‘homosexual,’ ‘queer,’ ‘gay,’ ‘lesbian,’ which are commonly used in Arabic conversations, and generally used by subjects. This is necessary because, as noted by Islamic researcher and feminist Sahar Amer, such Western terminology: “[...] adopted, proclaimed, and heralded as positive and liberating is intended to empower gays and lesbians by offering them a positive self-reflection, a less degrading vocabulary to speak about their orientation and identities, and (because the Arabic words are modelled on English terms) an international community to which they can belong” (2012: 385). Paradoxically, the use of English and/or French vocabulary to speak about homosexuality evokes “the legacies of colonialism and remains a distinct hallmark of Western-educated Arabs, a mark of privilege, urban sophistication, and social class” (Amer, 2012: 386). In other words, when addressing homosexuality by Western terms we must be mindful of “the exclusion of poor and working-class Arab gays and lesbians who may feel doubly alienated by foreign cultural semantics and categories” (Amer, 2012: 386). Altogether, one can see that different contexts require different terminologies, whether English, French, or Arabic, in order to more accurately recognize the diverse sexualities among Arabs.

“deviance” being seen as indications that individuals with these “conditions” are neither man nor women, thus occupying the space of a third sex” (2007: 18).

This dissertation will utilize the term ‘queer’. I draw, in part, on gender and queer theorist David Halperin’s (2003) comprehension of the term. He contends: “‘Queer’ is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative.” Moreover, noting that the term ‘queer’ has no equivalent in the Arab language, we must acknowledge that using it to mark the experiences of certain sexual minorities can inappropriately presume Western political associations. Therefore, what the term ‘queer’ suggests for readers within this context is a strong political inclination to consider the study’s outcomes beyond gay and transgender theory – given that bodies examined in the artworks do not necessarily subscribe to gay or transgender politics (Ruffolo, 2009). In other words, I understand ‘queer’ as a position and method that can be used by anyone to deconstruct and challenge dominant definitions of Arab masculinity.

There are, in fact, multiple differing approaches to the identification and expression of queerness currently being enacted in Arab societies. To begin, the vernacular usage of the terms ‘homosexual,’ ‘gay,’ and ‘queer’ has been widely translated and/or transliterated, which indicates a certain globalization of sexual cultures (Aldrich, 2006a, 2006b). Yet, translating queer terminologies in Arabic is challenging particularly because of the absence of positive and empowering queer Arabic expressions and vocabulary. For example, in *Bareed Mista3jil: True Stories* (2009) – an anonymously published collection of autobiographical essays by self-identifying queer Lebanese women – the editors, in their introduction, discuss the difficulties on writing about sexuality and especially nonconforming sexualities that is the subject of the book.

According to the editors, the Arabic language lacks words to describe and express certain feelings and identities related to queer issues. They state: “It was hard to translate terms like ‘wetness’ or to translate a gender-neutral English text into Arabic without using gendered terms. Sadly, and for the lack of Arabic expressions, queer people in Lebanon are more likely to frame their identity in English or French because that’s where these words exist more freely and where we find Internet pages and papers written about sexuality” (Meem, 2009: 6-7). Therefore, the adoption and use of queer Anglophone and Francophone terms help speakers (of “queer tongues”) from different parts of the world to identify with a larger unified, global community of sexual minorities; creating local sensibilities and giving meaning to same-sex desires, subjectivities, and communities (Leap and Boellstroff, 2004: 4).

What is problematic about *Bareed Mista3jil: True Stories*, and by extension the approach that it takes, is that the book was exclusively written in English and not Arabic. Therefore, it is inaccessible to Arab-speaking queers and does not account for various Arabic dialects in everyday discourse. Similar to the editors in the book, Sahar Amer (2012) further addresses the linguistic constraints in labelling and expressing nonconforming sexual identities and experiences in Arabic. Rather than using queer English or French terms, Amer (2012) suggests that Arab LGBTQ persons should adopt existing Arabic medieval terms about homosexuality and homoeroticism as they situate their sexual identity in a historical past in the Arab world (2012: 383). Furthermore, just like the term “queer” was reappropriated from an insult to a positive use, Amer calls for the reclaiming and reappropriation of current Arabic pejorative words such as “*shaadh*” (literally meaning queer or deviant). This, she argues, could serve to affirm and empower Arab LGBTQ persons, as well as disconfirm the common thought that

homosexuality in Arab societies is a product of a Western influence (2012: 393). Similar to Georgis (2013a, 2013b) and Amer (2012), queer scholar Samar Habib warns of the “dangers inherent in the calls for a replication of the Western gay and lesbian rights movement in the Middle East” and suggests that “what is needed is a new strategy, better suited to different cultural and social conditions [...]” (2007: 103).

To further complicate the matter, it must be added that using foreign terminology to describe nonconforming identities does not necessarily mean imitating a Western comprehension of sexualities, nor does it suggest any self-censorship in Arabic. As indicated by Dina Georgis (2013a, 2013b), queer people in Lebanon and in the Arab world are using a combination of Arab, English, and French, also known as ‘Arabish’³⁸ terms as a conscious method of linguistic self-empowerment. In so doing, the sexualities deployed (such as ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’) in each of the essays are neither ‘traditional’ nor ‘modern,’ neither Western nor non-Western.

The terminologies utilized by queer Arabs construct very fluid and diverse discourses that transgress boundaries and binaries established by the hegemonic heteronormative matrix suggested by Massad, as well as the constraints present in simply adopting English or French terminologies. Arab queer persons, as Georgis reminds us, have multiple layers that are positioned in spaces of transitions; they are “not doomed to [...] abide by and assimilate to hegemonic modern sensibilities or retreat to a fantasy of static tradition” (2013a: 237). Through the pressures, concerns and values of the conflicting Arab-dwelling regions, Arab queer persons are constantly negotiating

³⁸ ‘Arabish’ is an informal transliteration system used to write Arabic in Latin letters to reflect the Lebanese Arabic dialect.

and transforming their lives to address their geopolitical, social, cultural, and affective attachments and ambivalence (Georgis, 2013a).

This chapter has provided both the contextual and conceptual foundations upon which we will be able to examine and analyze the selected artworks of Akram Zaatari in subsequent chapters. The first section is a brief survey of the social, political, and historical contexts as relevant to Beirut's contemporary art scene. Within this art scene, we see that artists are challenging and subverting numerous cultural norms, one of these norms being the concept of hegemonic masculinity. We then look at different expressions of male homosexuality within both the global and local contexts; we see how Arab men are forging their own understandings of and spaces for same-sex activities, within all their complexities and contradictions. We conclude the chapter with an examination of the issues posed by the differing ways that language and terminology are used to identify non-normative sexualities in Lebanon and the Arab world. Such work is necessary in order to avoid a homogenizing, 'colonialist,' and 'Orientalist' approach to the study. In turn, we have attempted to fully acknowledge the agency of the artists and their participants, and to understand them from a local perspective. In the subsequent chapter, we examine Akram Zaatari's ongoing photographic project, called *The Madani Project*. We see how Zaatari is influenced by and responds to Lebanon's contentious socio-political history, and how, like his contemporaries, he is broaching taboo subjects and proposing alternative visions of gender within and outside the social order. We specifically introduce the concept of artistic appropriation as used by Zaatari, which we read as a queer strategy. We also introduce gender performativity and see how, from such a perspective, *The Madani Project* can be read to both reinforce and destabilize gender and sexual norms in Lebanon.

Chapter Two

Gender Performativity in Hashem El Madani's *Studio Shehrazade*

In the early 1930s, it became very fashionable for young Lebanese people to have photos taken in professional commercial photography studios. The photographic studio made it possible for people of a wide section of society to perceive themselves from images. The portrait studio setting further enabled subjects to be perceived as they fantasized, often offering a choice of scenes and costumes representative of different historical periods and gender roles. At the same time, commercial photographers saw the opportunity to 'construct' the portrait through the help of props and backdrops rather than the stiff, unnatural expression and pose of the sitter.

In this chapter, we carefully examine internationally-acclaimed artist Akram Zaatari's project titled *Hashem El Madani: Studio Practices* (1999 – ongoing), which consists of numerous studio portrait photographs taken by Lebanese commercial studio photographer Hashem El Madani between the 1950s and the 1970s in Saida, Lebanon. The project displays an extensive research on vernacular photography that led to the creation of the Arab Image Foundation's (AIF) nucleus collection.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: the first section will set the scene by providing a brief biographical introduction of Akram Zaatari and his participation at the Arab Image Foundation (AIF). We follow by introducing commercial photographer Hashem El Madani, whom Zaatari discovered in the mid-1990s. Within this section, we explore a set of same-sex kissing scenes photographed by Madani. The selected images offer an artistic exploration of gender performativity, depicting young women and men performing, gesturing, posing, acting out fantasies and “embody[ing] gender-bending identities” (Wilson-Goldie, 2010: 189). Madani's approachable persona made his studio

a space of intimacy and liberty where private moments of same-sex enactments, desires and experimentation could be ‘staged’ and ‘played’ (Downey, 2014 a, 2014b). An examination of these images, as represented in the studio setting (for example: costumes, poses, and interactions of the same-sex couples) reveal local ways in which gender is constructed, negotiated, challenged and subverted in the socially conservative society of Lebanon. Such depiction of same-sex kissing and affection within studio portraiture, coming from that time within Lebanon, is a rare display of strategies used to circumvent strict social and moral rules.

The second section of this chapter examines the appropriation of Madani’s studio photographs by Zaatari within *The Madani Project*. We examine how Zaatari has reactivated Madani’s forgotten photographs and negatives, which in turn offers us a critical landscape for an inquiry into the apparent ambivalence of self-representations and performed gender conventions. We also look at how such strategy of appropriation reveals a reality that is different than what is typically expected by both Western and Arab viewers, which challenges our perceptions of a very closed, homophobic, repressed society from the 1950s and 1970s. As we will see, the strategic use of appropriation has allowed Zaatari to enter and spark discussions on the discourse of same-sex encounters and queerness within and outside of Lebanon. His selection of images engages Zaatari in a queer, political, and activist stance in giving his artworks a more sociological foundation for his video-based works, which will be examined in the following chapters.

In tandem with a close-reading of the selected photographs, this chapter will draw on the works of gender theorist Judith Butler (1988, 1990, 1993), queer theorist Jose Esteban Muñoz (1999, 2009), cultural art theorist Roland Barthes (1968, 1977, 1981), and photographic theorists John Tagg (1988) and Allan Sekula (1984) to address

the following questions: what is the significance of the depiction of young men and women posing and acting alternative identities through studio portraiture, both in their original and appropriated contexts? In what ways are gender norms transgressed – or not – by Madani and his subjects, and subsequently Zaatari? Furthermore, within a socially and culturally conservative society, what do the photographs of same-sex bridal and kissing scenes reveal and hide about homoerotic desire? By answering these questions, we attempt to gain insight into local alternative modes of intimacy, as performed and reflected in *The Madani Project*. As such, on the one hand, we aim to expand conceptions of gender expression and sexuality within a transnational perspective. On the other hand, we attempt to enrich understandings of *The Madani Project* within the field of contemporary art history, by reading the artworks through the lenses of gender and queer theories, as applied from a local perspective within a global context.

2.1 The Arab Image Foundation (AIF)

After obtaining his bachelor's degree in Architecture from the American University in Beirut in 1989, Akram Zaatari began working as an architect in Beirut during the Post-Civil War reconstruction phase. A few years later, he moved to the United States to pursue a Master of Arts in Media Studies, which he was awarded in 1995 from The New School in New York City.³⁹ As noted by visual anthropologist and documentary filmmaker Mark Westmoreland, Zaatari returned in the mid-1990s to a “booming satellite and television industry in Post-Civil War Lebanon,” a time that

³⁹ It is during his studies in the United States that Zaatari was exposed to video art and consequently wrote his thesis about hostage films as alternative media. Unsure of his options in Lebanon, Zaatari found inspiration in the work of Mohamed Soueid, who was a prominent film critic in Beirut before becoming a pioneer of Lebanese independent and experimental Avant-guard video and film production. Soueid's was considered as improvisational poetics and comedic criticism that portrayed a Lebanese vernacular inspiring many artists like Zaatari (Westmoreland, 2011: 35).

offered “new labour opportunities engendered by the social reconstruction and economic liberalization of Beirut” (2011: 35). This period brought significant shifting political and economic structures, garnering new social relations between people from different parts of a divided Beirut. This flux enabled many artists, like Zaatari, to shape new and unconventional identities for themselves, particularly within new media institutions. For instance, the television station Future TV,⁴⁰ established in 1993 by business tycoon and politician Rafik Al Hariri, offered Zaatari commercial work (as a producer of the *Aalam al Sabah* morning show) that he could use to subsidize his artistic production, as well as granting access to studios, cameras, and editing equipment. As art historian Chad Elias (2011) remarks, this period was crucial in the artistic development of Zaatari and other young Lebanese artists. The radical reorganization of media after the Civil War allowed these artists to develop an ambivalent relation with television as both a medium and as a set of institutional practices. The increase of new experimental video productions in Lebanon was made possible, notably, by the growth of a new media infrastructure (Elias, 2011).

Shortly after leaving Future TV in 1997, Zaatari – along with Lebanese artists Walid Raad, Fouad El-Koury, and Samer Mohdad – co-founded the Arab Image Foundation (AIF). This is a ground-breaking, non-profit,⁴¹ artist-driven organization

⁴⁰ Future TV provided a mass-mediated discourse that erased the past of the Civil War for the benefit of a prosperous and peaceful future. This tenuous ‘Post-Civil War’ vision of Lebanon came to an abrupt close when Hariri’s 2005 assassination prompted the so-called Cedar Revolution. The ensuing assassinations, invasions and domestic battles would throw into serious question the status and meaning of a “postwar era.” (Westmoreland, 2011: 35).

⁴¹ Since the local government does not provide a budget to support and sustain the Arab Image Foundation’s initiative, which is to preserve and archive the photography’s heritage in Lebanon, the foundation relies on private funds in order to support and sustain their projects. The Banque Libano-Française, the Arab Image Foundation’s primary corporate partner, provides annual funding. The foundation is partly financially supported by international organizations such as: The Ford Foundation, the Anna Lindh Foundation, the Bank of America, Merrill Lynch Art Conservation Program, the European Commission, Al-Qattan Charitable Trust, the Getty Foundation Grant Program, the Arab Cultural Fund,

based in Beirut whose mission is to collect, recover, preserve, catalogue and study photographs and negatives, to a large extent from Lebanon, but also from Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Iran, Mexico, Argentina, and Senegal. The collection acquired from these countries includes over three hundred thousand photographs covering a time period from 1860 to the present day. The urgent mission to preserve and acquire images from these specific regions came after the realization that many of the photographs and negatives from commercial photographic studios has already been lost due to human and natural disasters (Feldman, 2009: 312). For instance, in Beirut, most of the commercial photographic studios located in the downtown core, including their image collections, were destroyed by bombardments during the Lebanese civil war. Until the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) started to collect photographs and negatives, the photographic practices of local commercial studios remained invisible, as they were not included in the public register of achievable knowledge. As the former president and one of the lead curators⁴² of the Arab Image Foundation, Zaatari's efforts to preserve the photographic heritage of Lebanon have led to develop the production of his various interdisciplinary artistic works. These include over forty video-based works, a dozen publications, and numerous installations of photographic material, all pursuing a series of interlocking themes, subjects and practices around issues related to excavation,

the US Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, and the Heinrich Boell Foundation.

⁴² In 2011, Zaatari resigned as president of the board and suspended his membership from the Arab Image Foundation (AIF). His decision was based on a personal reflection on the role of photographic archives. He notes that the Arab Image Foundation, in the early beginnings, was to be understood as a "[...] platform for the study of photographic images in all its forms and a conservation project. What tied [the AIF] to the photographic original is the idea that we couldn't conserve until we take that original and put it in a freezer" (Jim Quilty, "Putting An End To The Archive," *The Daily Star* Oct. 29th, 2012). For Zaatari, today's conservation of photography is much more related to the emotional tie between the photographic image and its owner rather than the photographic object itself. Zaatari proposed to the Arab Image Foundation a project to return the collection to the original owners. However, this was impossible given that the foundation (AIF) is, unfortunately, seen with capital, with a photographic collection and archive that belongs to the region.

political resistance, the circulation and production of images in times of war and conflict, and gender performativity. Furthermore, drawing from his extensive research on studio photographers, like Van Leo in Cairo⁴³ and Hashem el Madani in Saida, Zaatari curated numerous exhibitions centering on the commercial photographic practices in the Arab world, which have been exhibited internationally.⁴⁴ Zaatari's "Studio Practices," the focus of this chapter, was the result of Zaatari's study of the photographic archives of Hashem el Madani, one of Lebanon's most prolific commercial portrait photographers.

2.2 Hashem El Madani and His Studio Practice

Hashem El Madani (1928-2017) was a local commercial photographer from Saida in south Lebanon where he worked for over fifty-five years. Beginning in 1949, Madani worked as an assistant for a Jewish immigrant photographer named Katz in Haifa. Following the events and conflicts of 1948, Madani returned to his hometown in Lebanon where he bought his first 35 mm camera and set up his first studio in his parents' living room. In his earlier works, Madani photographed friends and family members, while also offering his services to vendors and photographing passers-by in

⁴³ In the context of Egypt, Zaatari used the AIF archive to explore the work of Van Leo, a prominent Cairene studio photographer who was professionally active in the 1950s and 1960s. At the beginning of Zaatari's documentary titled *Her+Him: Van Leo* (2001) we are told that Zaatari has found a Van Leo portrait of his grandmother in his mother's closet. The discovery of this semi-nude photo among his family's belongings prompts Zaatari to immediately visit Van Leo in Cairo. As the video progresses the story about the photo of his grandmother starts to change. By destabilizing her identity Zaatari apprehends the desires of women like his grandmother to use these secret meetings at the studio to explore new forms of self-expression, including (self-) pornography. His conversation with Van Leo also allows Zaatari to call into question the relationship between the photographer and his subjects, and to juxtapose the tradition of studio photography with the practice of video art (Westmoreland, 2010: 14).

⁴⁴ These include: *The Vehicle: Picturing Moments of Transition in a Modernizing Society* (1999); *Portrait du Caire: Alban, Armand and Van Leo* (1999); *Van Leo* (2000-2001); *Pratiques photographiques au Liban (1900-1960)* (2001); *Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography* (2002); *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices* (2004-); *Hashem el Madani: Itinerary* (2007-); and *Hashem el Madani: Promenades* (2008-).

the streets, in places of work, promenades and sometimes during out-of-city excursions. Eventually, Madani was asked by official election deputies in Southern Lebanon to take photo identifications for voters (figs. 13 - 14) who did not have proper identity cards (Bassil, et al., 2007: 20). Using his 35 mm camera, Madani shot the individuals posing on a simple wooden chair in front of a light-coloured sheet or grey wall. The images were later printed 6cm x 4cm showing “only the rectangle around the face, keeping spaces above the head and below the neck, with a thin white border” (Bassil, et al., 2007: 20). Madani was also commissioned by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools’ administration (figs. 15 - 16), which requested two copies of each photograph – one for the student’s file and the other one for their refugee identifications (Bassil, et al., 2007: 24). In addition, Madani photographed students from a local all-girls school twice a year. Some examples are as follows: (figs. 17 - 18). Their poses were initially quite straightforward, such as standing upright with little or no expressions, gazing directly towards the lens, with the occasional use of a table or a chair to animate the scene. In the photographs, girls are seen wearing the school’s official uniform, which consists of a black dress with a white flat collar and large bow in their hair, whereas others are dressed in a floral print dress. This was because the girls from wealthy families could afford the uniform at the beginning of the school year, while the other girls had to wait until the middle of the year (Bassil, et al., 2007: 30).

In 1953, as his business grew, Madani moved to a modern space in the prestigious Shehrazade building on *Riad el Solh* Street, which he continued to use until his recent passing on August 8, 2017 (figs. 1 - 7).⁴⁵ The studio Shehrazade was

⁴⁵ To upgrade his equipment, Madani sold 6 x 9 contact prints for 23 piasters each, the equivalent of a worker’s daily salary. In 1953 “a set of six passport photos (including a free postcard size enlargement

deliberately located on the first floor of the building to allow Madani's customers, especially women, discreet access to his studio. In a small conservative city, it was uncommon for women to participate in photoshoots without their husbands' approval. Privacy, therefore, was vital to Madani's business. The studio was protected from public scrutiny, where the subjects of his photographs could feel free to explore their fantasies within the conventional format of portrait photography (Bassil, et al., 2007). Furthermore, Madani's easy-going and sociable persona fostered an atmosphere of intimacy in his studio, allowing private moments and memories of lust, desire and experimentation to be developed among the photographed subjects. With time, Madani became Saida's leading commercial studio portrait photographer, accumulating an archive of some five hundred thousand images.⁴⁶ By his own estimate Madani photographed ninety percent of Saida's population ranging from all social backgrounds and classes, forming a "collective physiognomy" of the city (Bassil, et al., 2007: 6).

As a tool of identification and categorization, portrait photography became a site of social control and normalization. In his seminal essay "The Body and the Archive" (originally published in 1986), American photographer, theorist, and critic Allan Sekula examines the concept of the "shadow archive," in which nineteenth-century physiognomic archives attempt to identify, study, classify, and order certain 'types' of bodies. In turn, this process placed all individuals in a hierarchy of 'respectable' bodies.

cost 3 Lebanese pounds (which in 1953 was equal to \$3 US Dollars). In 1970, the price was raised to 4 pounds. After the Israeli invasion in 1982 the price started to go up after the devaluation of the Lebanese pound. Now the price for a passport portrait is 6000 pounds (equivalent to \$4 US Dollars)" (Zaatari, 2007a: 10).

⁴⁶ Since the 1950s to the 1970s, Madani's studio grew into a complete photographic archive consisting of thousands of portrait images. This is in part due to prints that remained unclaimed by the clients for various reasons. Mostly, clients were unable to retrieve their photographs because of their financial situation.

As noted by Sekula: “we can speak then of a generalized, inclusive *archive*, a *shadow archive* that encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain” (1986: 10, author’s emphasis). The shadow archive functions not as a physical archive, but rather as something that is nebulous and universal, which makes use of “subordinate, territorialized archives” to include both “the visible bodies of heroes [...] and those of the poor, the diseased, the insane, the criminal, the non-white [...] and all other embodiments of the unworthy” (1986: 10). For Sekula, this demonstrates how photography is part of a complicated social discourse that forms “a double system,” functioning “*honorifically* and *repressively*” (1986: 6, author’s emphasis). Both types of portraits work to inscribe their subjects into larger social systems. On the one hand, portrait photography offers a “ceremonial presentation of the bourgeois self” (Sekula, 1986: 6) that honorably upholds notions of identity within a specific class; on the other hand, photographic portraits repressively operate and police those individuals classified outside the dominant (bourgeois) realm. For Sekula, the materiality and quality of the photograph is less significant than how the photograph actually functions to serve and reinforce capitalist power structures.

Similar to Sekula, photography theorist John Tagg argues in his book *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (1988) that photography is a discursive system that finds meaning through specific historical context, rather than simply a coherent medium. Tagg asserts that “every photograph is a result of specific and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic and raise the question of the determining level of the material apparatus and of the social practices within which photography takes place” (1988: 2). In other words, photography is a discursive outcome that refers to an array of

practices that operate across several institutional and social spaces, rather than being in relation to its ‘truthfulness’ or ‘uniqueness’ value. Both Tagg and Sekula’s photographic theories examine the social and political instrumental use of photography in the marking of identity in the nineteenth-century, in which the photography apparatus became a source of ‘scientific’ evidence claiming actual representation. In the late nineteenth-century, studio photography was inextricably related to the need for the bourgeoisie to represent itself. The popularity of photographic studios was primarily characterized by a standardized production of small and inexpensive photographic portraits, such as the *carte-de-visite*, which was destined for circulation (Dahlgren, 2010). The studio made it possible for the wider section of society to perceive themselves from an image. In addition to being a “commodity, a luxury, an adornment, ownership of which itself confers status,” the photographic portrait is “[...] a sign whose purpose is both the *description* of an individual and the *inscription* of social identity” (Taag, 1988: 37, my emphasis) that engages within a complex series of intersections that range across aesthetic, historical, cultural, ideological, technological, sociological, and psychological realms.

Zaatari (2007a) describes Madani’s commercial photographic studio works as both descriptive and inscriptive of social identities within the southern city of Saida in Lebanon. In the five decades of his active practice as a commercial photographer, Madani provided his services in Saida, which ranged from taking photographs for identification cards, passports (figs. 8 - 9), and weddings (figs. 10 - 12). Furthermore, over the course of its history, his studio photographed political groups and affiliations, such as the Arab Baath Socialist Party, Palestinian resistant fighters (called *feda’iyyin*), and other politicians who came to be photographed before sneaking back out. At the

peak of his popularity during the 1960s and 1970s, Madani claims to have photographed over one hundred customers a day in his studio (Bassil, et al., 2007: 14). In addition, Madani claims to have collected the portraits of over ninety percent of Saida's population, which captured the city and country's many political and societal shifts. His success continued until 1982 when Israeli troops invaded Saida and a bomb blew out Madani's studio window, killing one of his friends. Sadly, from then on, his business never fully recovered. In relation to nineteenth-century belief of photographic 'truth', Madani's original photographs, which were mostly for identification purposes, could be seen as visual historical 'evidence' and 'reality' of the region.

Madani considered himself religious but moderate (Bassil, et al., 2007: 12). Likewise, Madani's father, who moved to Lebanon from Medina in Saudi Arabia as a representative of the Islamic *Awqaf* Authorities (Lefevre and Zaatari, 2005: 243), was also less conservative. In fact, when Madani's father was asked if he considered photography as *haram*, a sin, or something forbidden, he responded by saying that "a photograph was just like a reflection of one's face when one looks into a pond" (Bassil, et al., 2007: 12). One may wonder why such a question was asked in the first place. It seems that Madani's father was aware of photography's potential to violate established norms and rules within Islam (i.e. as *haram*). In order to circumvent the issue, his answer suggests a traditional understanding of portrait photography. Traditional portrait photography was believed to capture essential characteristics, involving a sense of the 'inner life' of the person depicted (West, 2004). Supposedly, since one cannot be held responsible for their innate characteristics, portrait photography is permissible, as it merely reflects those characteristics. However, postmodern theories of identity reject the idea of a 'natural' truth of oneself altogether, proposing that identity is rather

constructed. Madani's studio portraits in this chapter alternate back and forth between notions of fixed and ruptured identities.

Madani's body of photographic portraiture is situated within a larger explosion of spontaneous, creative, and playful experimentation in his studio. In his early career Madani's camera was used as a tool to create official visual records such as identification cards, passports, and medical records. After moving in his new studio, Madani started to engage his camera in more creative practices in which he portrayed his clients' desires for self-representation. This is clear in the process where Madani began utilizing various tools, such as various backgrounds, props, and attire to engage his subjects more dynamically in the photographic frame. Shortly after moving into Studio Shehrazade, he commissioned a friend to build him a rounded pedestal, which was used for people to stand on, elevating them while being photographed. To animate the photographs, Madani bought catalogues containing numerous images of people posing in different ways from which he would sometimes select and propose to his clients. For example, Madani sometimes asked women to put both hands on one cheek inclining slightly their head.⁴⁷ In some instances, he would place his clients' hands either on their shoulder or on their chin to help them to keep a straight posture while being photographed. Positioning one's hand either on someone's shoulder or on a stable surface (like a chair), as noted by Madani, would straighten the subject's body posture (Bassil, et al., 2007: 11). In other instances, the photographed subjects would themselves select poses similar to the convention of studio portraiture, and asked to be

⁴⁷ As noted by art historian Anthony Downey, portrait photography in the 1950s everywhere in the world looked almost similar. Kodak and every other brand promoted and taught each other the same poses through brochures and photographers teaching each other. The only slight differences were specificities of attitudes and economics (Downey, 2014b: 8).

photographed while performing exaggerated takes on their everyday selves through invented gestures, poses, and situations. For example, young men would ask to be photographed with the Kodak advertisement (fig. 19), which featured a full-scale cardboard cut-out of an American woman holding a camera and offering Kodak rolls. Other times, young men would dress up as cowboys (fig. 20), and dress-down shirtless to show off their muscular bodies (figs. 21 - 22). In the Arab context, it was a popular practice to imitate scenes where, for example, the subjects are dressed as people of the American West and positioned before radios or automobiles. For cultural theorist Homi Bhabha (1994b), such imitation of Western culture can be seen as a personal and collective strategy from a colonized people to utilize ambivalence in order to disrupt and satirize the authority of fixed stereotypes as imposed by colonial powers. As explained by Bhabha: “It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double [...]” (1994b: 127, 129). In other words, through mimicry, the colonized makes known an awareness of the colonizer’s actions. Thus, the colonized becomes the subject and the colonizer, the object – this subversion opens the possibility of reclaiming the political powers around identity.

In addition to such photographs, Madani shot several *feda'iyyin* who were pro-Palestinian militia fighters (fig. 23) in the 1970s that operated in Lebanon after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. During this time of local political and religious conflicts, it was common to witness Palestinian men in the streets of Saida carrying guns to oppose government leaders such as President Camille Chamoun.⁴⁸ The figure of the *feda'i*

⁴⁸ Camille Chamoun (1900-1987) served as President of Lebanon from 1952 to 1958.

(plural *feda'iyyin*), literally meaning “one who sacrifices himself,” was important in Palestinian society as it was a romanticized figure that represented “sacrifice, resilience and defiance” (Dunning, 2016: 60). As highlighted by scholar Daniel Meier, in 1969, Nayef Hawatmeh, leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), conjured up the popular image of the *feda'i* “[...] as a revolutionary from a poor social background who made a total commitment to the cause, never gaining any bourgeois comfort of the kind that would undermine his spirit” (2014: 328). By the mid-1970s, the *feda'i* began to be commonly associated with a male fighter who bears arms to bring about revolution (Sayigh, 1999; Dunning, 2016). The *feda'i* rapidly became an iconic figure in the popular milieu and lived on as a myth. It is not surprising that these young fighters would occasionally come to Madani’s studio to be photographed with their guns (figs. 24 - 26).

However, not all men photographed were militants. In fact, many of the men were simply friends of the militiamen wanting to look like and be part of the militia ‘heroes,’ by posing in front of the camera dressed in their friends’ uniforms and holding their rifles (Bassil, et al., 2007). This performative act of posing with a gun is apparent in the photograph of *Hassan Jawhar* (1968-1972) (fig. 27). As captioned by Madani, Hassan “[...] was a civilian, but happened to be in the studio when Ringo [another young man photographed by Madani] came to the studio to be photographed with his gun. So, he asked for permission to pose with it” (Bassil, et al., 2007: 67). The photograph shows Hassan clothed in bell-bottoms and a collar shirt standing slightly on an angle on a circular platform holding Ringo’s semi-automatic rifle. Two large curtains crop the image suggesting a theatrical and playful nature of the photograph. Further, in the right-hand corner of the photograph, a toy prop airplane can be seen hinting at the

photographic simulation.

The act of posing with a gun can be considered, at one level, as a display of hegemonic masculinity. The image of the *feda'i* upholds the traditional hegemonic concept of the *rujulah* (Arab masculinity) that rests on social attributes of honor, kinship, and community (Peteet, 1994). These social structures require men to adopt stereotypical 'heroic,' 'honourable,' and 'masculine' behaviours. These photographs depict young men performing the *feda'i* figure, embodying a combination of behaviours of virility, resistance, fraternity, 'brotherhood,' protection and strength, which affirms the hierarchically masculine/ist politics of nationalism (Ball, 2012). Such behaviors justify male privilege and dominance within hierarchical social structures, for instance the family, and religious or political groups (Ball, 2012). Within this context, women hold an auxiliary passive nurturing role of providing fertility, stability and care whereas men contribute actively in the protection of the nation (Aghacy, 2009).

Another example of a performative act as militia fighters is in the photograph *Abu Jalal Dimassy and Two of his Friends Acting Out a Hold-Up* 1950s (fig. 28). The photograph depicts two men in white button-down shirts and police hats pointing small pistols at a third man wearing a traditional Arab headdress fashioned from a scarf, also called a *keffiyeh*.⁴⁹ The 'hold-up' can be read as a performance, suggesting that the development of a specifically Palestinian iconography of armed resistance was in part mediated by the image of the anti-hero popularized by American-Hollywood films, such

⁴⁹ The word *keffiyeh* (also known as the Palestinian scarf) is the Arabic name for a traditional headdress, which originated in the Middle East. Initially, the scarf was used to cover and protect the face from the harsh conditions of Middle Eastern deserts (sun rays, sandstorms, dust, etc.). However, over time it evolved into a Palestinian national symbol in its fight for independence. Today the *keffiyeh* has become popular among celebrities and campus students in North American and Europe who wear it as a fashion accessory but have little interest or knowledge on the situation in the Middle-East, let alone that they represent support for the Palestinian cause.

as “Captured by Bedouins” (1912), “Exodus” (1960), and “Cast a Giant Shadow” (1966). It is important to remember that Madani’s studio was conveniently located in the same building as a cinema, which screened American Hollywood movies of the era. It was usual that people would stop by the studio, which was open late after the movies’ screening.

Madani’s photographs coincide with Zaatari’s interest and attraction to the fighters. Zaatari writes how, as a child: “I loved Palestinian *feda’i*, my childhood mythical fighter figures, who used to give me all sorts of bullets to collect as a kid. I loved how they lived on the streets, how they slept in the fields or in vacant buildings. I loved how they smelled. I envied them for fighting for justice; I sincerely loved them” (2012: 9). This quote reflects Zaatari’s deep emotional attraction towards the militia fighters captured in Madani’s images; perhaps this has helped to spark his interest in the construction of gendered masculinity as read within *The Madani Project*.

2.3 *The Madani Project* (1999 – ongoing)

Today, the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) owns and manages the entirety of Madani’s collection (including the images and negatives that remain in studio Shehrazade) representing more than half of the AIF’s collection.⁵⁰ Through such initiative, Madani’s photographic works from the early 1950s to the late 1970s live on to reflect the very structure of an Arab town that has experienced rapid political and societal shifts. Far different from today’s typical media depiction of warfare, terrorism, resistance, destroyed buildings, political and civil unrest, and marginalized and dehumanized subjects circulating in the media, Madani’s photographic collection

⁵⁰ Since Madani’s passing in August 2017, there has been no public announcement as to what will become of Madani’s studio.

presents a diverse and dynamic people in Lebanon. In fact, as will be explored in the following sections, his photographs uncover and present a historical trace of Lebanese quotidian life; material evidence that was lost and forgotten due to the ravage of the country's Civil War. Additionally, the sections below will also examine the status of Madani's work as portrait photographs in which individuals were portrayed in a series of role-playing games, while also exploring Madani's work, later appropriated in the early 2000s by Zaatari, as contemporary art photographs.

Madani's large collection of photographs and negatives in his commercial studio inspired Akram Zaatari to conduct exhaustive research on Madani's vernacular photography. As Zaatari states (2006), he discovered Madani's studio in the course of his curatorial research project *The Vehicle: Picturing Moments of Transition in a Modernising Society* (1999) at the Arab Image Foundation (AIF). Following this discovery, Zaatari (in co-production with the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) and in dialogue with Madani) initiated *The Madani Project*, which takes the numerous photographs in Studio Shehrazade as study material to apprehend the multifaceted relationship that tied the studio photographer (Madani) to his working space, his equipment and tools, and further explores his ties to his clients, society, and the city of Saida in general (Bassil, et al., 2007). *The Madani Project* takes shape as a series of three separate thematic exhibitions, all of which are accompanied with a published

catalogue,⁵¹ and produced videos that center on the Hashem el Madani portrait studio.⁵² This project particularly had impetus because Zaatari grew up in Saida and therefore had a personal link to the place Madani portrayed in his works. Zaatari's artistic interest in capturing the daily lives of individuals testifies to a modern tradition and complex social relationships, and intersected with the Arab Image Foundation's (AIF) mandate of preserving, cataloguing and studying the photographic collections of the Levant region and the Arab world.

The first edited publication of Madani's work, titled *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices* (2007), concentrates on the idea of the studio. It explores, on the one hand, how Madani's exemplary practice in commercial studio photography is both descriptive, inscriptive and performative of social identities. On the other hand, *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices* (2007) further examines how Madani's studio created a private space where individuals could enact imagined identities using the conventions of portrait photography. The editors Karl Bassil, Lisa Le Feuvre, and Akram Zaatari intentionally juxtaposed Madani's commentaries as captions with certain photographs. These captions are important as they describe, set the tone, and contextualize the images.

⁵¹ *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices*, Photographers' Gallery, London (October-November 2004); Home Works III, Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut (November-December 2005); Salamanca (October-December 2007) – this exhibition examines the photographs taken specifically in Madani's Saida Studio. *Hashem el Madani: Itinerary*, Saida Old City, Lebanon (November 2007) – this exhibition looks at portraiture in the place of work, specifically at portraits of individuals owning a shop or workers in shops. *Hashem el Madani: Promenades*, Caixa Forum, Barcelona (October 2006 – February 2007); Sala del Gobierno de Canarias, Tenerife, (May – July 2007); Salamanca, Spain (October – December 2007) – this exhibition explores photography's ties to the urban space, particularly from the 1940s to 1960s, when lightweight cameras enabled photographers to walk around cities while offering their services.

⁵² Some videos include: “Hashem el Madani: Itinerary’ in the Old city of Saida,” reported by Nesrine Khodr for Lamassat, on Future Television, on May 2012, and “Twenty-Eight Nights and a Poem,” directed by Zaatari, 2015.

2.4 Zaatari and Appropriation

Taken from Madani's studio, Zaatari's appropriated images are of a series of black-and-white silver gelatin photographs that have been reprinted – from 35 mm, 6 x 6 cm, and 6 x 4.5 cm, and 4 x 5 cm negatives to various formats, including 19,1 x 29,0 cm, 29,1 x 28,9 cm, and 28,9 x 19,1 cm. Collectively the selected photographs are titled: *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices*. All the photographs are uncropped, with the subject(s) filling the frame, though some older photographs show the subject(s) placed further away from the camera (i.e., sitting at a table or standing by the wooden chair). The photographs tend to have a grey background and are specifically mounted on white paper and displayed in plain white frames. Though Madani is the photographer, he is not, in any way, involved in the selection and exhibition process. The title of each photograph contains a typical set of elements: the names and description of individuals depicted (sometimes the individuals are anonymous), the location (*Studio Shehrazade in Saida, Lebanon*) and the date of the photograph. The series title references Hashem El Madani while adding the phrase “*Studio Practices*,” highlighting the dual nature of the images as examples of both Madani's photographic practice and of Zaatari's focus in his ongoing research at the Arab Image Foundation (AIF). Two dates appear on each image: the original date at the time the photographs were taken, and the date when the photographs were appropriated into Zaatari's work (Downey, 2014a, 2014b). Therefore, a peculiar status of authorship is seen in the project. Each image has at least three authors: the photographed subject(s), the original photographer (Madani) and the author of the artwork (Zaatari). There is potentially an ethical issue here – the photographed subjects were not able to give consent to having their images made available for public scrutiny in Zaatari's exhibitions – though it is notable that Zaatari later attempted to find

the photographed individuals and return the original photographs to them, only to be blocked by the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) who saw the photographs as the foundation's capital. In the end, Zaatari exhibits the rearranged photographic archive relocated as his own artistic intervention.

Zaatari's appropriation of Madani's studio practices can be situated within the genre of the Western artistic scene of the late 1970s up to the early 1990s. Educated in New York during the early 1990s, Zaatari would likely have been exposed to postmodern American appropriation artists, such as Sherrie Levine, Richard Price, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Kara Walker, Cindy Sherman, and Carrie May Weems, who all work on appropriated texts, documents, and images.⁵³ According to traditional definitions, the term 'appropriation' refers to the acts of owning or as noted by scholar, practitioner and curator of digital culture Martin Zeilinger, possessing "re-used already-authored artistic and cultural material" (2009: ii), which artists can mobilize as an ideal social and political strategy for questioning, critiquing, revisiting, and ultimately changing dominant discourses vis-à-vis originality, ownership, re/production, circulation and production of knowledge (Evans, 2009). Zaatari's photographic work derives from a postmodernist thought that expands on new ways of considering contemporary photography.

Until the early 1960s, modernism primarily understood and analyzed photography in terms of authorship, aesthetics, and its technological evolution (Cotton,

⁵³ Much of the postmodern photographic artworks from the 1980s were interpreted by art historians as relating to the French Marxist theorist and writer Guy Debord's theory in *La Société du Spectacle* (1994), which suggested that capitalism ushered in an era dominated by leisure, consumption and the image; and/or of French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) that argued that the notion of reality has been replaced by copies of copies.

2010). Contemporary photography veers away from the modernist focus on authenticity, originality, and its authorship. Instead, contemporary photography draws attention to signs, whose significations spring from contexts and social and cultural codes. French philosophers and theorists Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, both influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's principles of structural linguistics, affirm that the visual image's signification is determined by its references in relation to other images or signs, rather than due to its author. The term 'appropriation' appeared in contemporary art discourse as a result of Douglas Crimp's significant curated group exhibition entitled *Pictures* (1979) at Artists Space in New York City. The practice of appropriation was subsequently theorized through the artists' work in the *October* journal. *Pictures* grouped the works of American artists Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith, all of whom appropriated and brought together images from both popular culture and high art. Crimp's objective was to relay the presence of "recognizable images" in artworks produced by a young generation of artists (1979: 75). In his article, *Pictures* (1979), Crimp further identified the values underlying this new work, stating: "Those processes of quotations, exception, framing, and staging that constitute the strategies of the work I have been discussing necessitate uncovering strata of representation. Needless to say, we are not in search of origins, but structures of signification: underneath each picture there is always another picture" (1979: 86).

Through the practice of appropriation, these artists started an extensive exploration of underlying meanings and significations embedded within images. In his seminal essay "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism" (1980), American art historian Craig Owens, posits that "Allegorical imagery [are] appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscated them [...] He does not

restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured [...] Rather, he adds another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement” (1980: 69). To reiterate, Owens claims that “artists appropriate allegorical imagery, and then act as interpreter, manipulating the appropriated image” to later re-present the original images in a different context (1980: 54). By doing so, the original images are emptied from their “resonance and significance, their authoritative claim to meaning” (1980: 69). In other words, the appropriated imagery is given another meaning to both the new work and the borrowed artworks. Canadian art historian Christine Ross examines in her first chapter “The Withering of Melancholia” of her book, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression* (2006), how postmodernist art intersects between clinical depression and melancholia, which lies in tension with Craig Owen’s definition of allegorical appropriation. For Ross, allegorical appropriation:

[...] functions as a counternarrative that freezes the narrative by a disjunction that replaces the horizontal, metaphorical unfolding of narratives with a vertical readings of sign substitutions. As the sign is appropriated, it is isolated to set into play a chain of unstable correspondences where signs are constantly being replaced and meaning is constantly being deferred. It is this continuous replacement, deferral, illegibility, and meaninglessness that appropriation art sets out to activate so as to ultimately disclose the ambivalence of contemporary images. (2006: 14)

Here, Ross (2006) suggests that our deciphering and meaning of the allegorical appropriated images are not only ambivalent, but difficult and frustrating. It is within such ambivalence in meaning and interpretation that Zaatari’s seeks to bring fore in his

appropriated photographs.

By borrowing from the history of art, artists were challenging social, cultural, political, and economic ideologies, and representational systems present in art historical works. Some artists in the late 1980s used appropriation as a strategy to designate a critical revision of modernism, and challenge notions of authorship and originality by duplicating or reproducing earlier existing art objects, while other artists later began utilizing art appropriation to critique gender stereotyping, in addition to working with the emerging discourse of identity politics. For instance, feminist artists concerned with the politics of representation used photography and video to represent and challenge assumption about identity, gender, and sexuality (Solomon-Godeau, 1993). Such feminist exploration reverberates in Akram Zaatari's work, especially in his video *Majnounak* (1997), which will be discussed in Chapter Three, where he reveals and tackles issues of violence against women, gender stereotyping, and dominant forms of patriarchy within Lebanese culture.

Building upon earlier explorations of racial and gender identities initiated during the political climate of the 1970s, marginalized groups and artists in the 1980s and 1990s obtained recognition in the growing multicultural art world by asserting their identities within mainstream culture. For example, works by artists such as Yasumasa Morimura (b.1951), Carrie Mae Weems (b.1953), Fred Wilson (b.1954) and Renée Green (b.1959) have explored and reconsidered how gender, sexual difference, racial and ethnic stereotypical depictions were visually constructed and codified in the history of Western art, and how they shaped our perceptions of personal and cultural identities. Furthermore, a variety of contemporary artists have used their practices to criticize the dominance of white, heterosexual, patriarchal and capitalist within art institutions; these

include works by Hans Haacke (b.1936), Michael Asher (b.1943), and Andrea Fraser (b.1965). We must be mindful by stating that some appropriation artists (such as Jeff Koons, Richard Prince, and Andy Warhol) are concerned less politically and critically with the underlying social conditions and consumption of images in culture. However, Zaatari's appropriated works stem from the critical perspective of artists (most being feminist or queer) whose works offer important counterpoints to the dominant heteronormative patriarchal culture. In a global context, Zaatari's appropriation of Madani's photographic images allows for an important cross-cultural exchange with larger audiences, perhaps less concerned and aware of the complexities of Lebanese identities and histories, and veers away from the vastly stereotypical and mythical assumptions suggested by Western media.

In her essay "Changing the Subject" that examined autobiographical representations of race, sex, and gender in African-American art, contemporary black feminist, anti-racist theorist, author and academic social activist bell hooks, critical art appropriation disrupted "the essentialist assumption that a pure imagination shapes artistic work, both by interrogating the way in which aesthetic sensibility is shaped by the particularity of artistic vision and by showing how that vision is constrained by a concrete politics of representation that maintains and perpetuates the status quo" (1994: 5). Most recently, art historian and critical theorist John Welchman explored appropriation and its impact in his book *Art after Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (2001). As noted in his introduction, "artists and institutions situated in different global contexts have inflected, recast, and reused the cultures of borrowing and citation" (2001: 1). Within this framework, Zaatari enhances our understanding of the social, cultural and political life of the Levant region by, as he would put it, unearthing,

recording, and circulating these images to a broader public.

Appropriation reactivates these photographs that uphold a contradictory independence, while conversing instantaneously in two different temporalities. That is to say, the excavated and later appropriated photographs invite us to be conscious of what we see, the way we see and examine the ways by which the photographs generate emotions. By re-contextualizing Madani's original photographs, Zaatari reinterprets the neglected, forgotten and suppressed memories, stories, and experiences of the individuals' photographs, allowing them to take on new, varied meanings, which can be understood as existing as ambiguously and imaginatively queer in today's Lebanon. As argued by Feldman, in Zaatari's work, "what we have been looking at as *history* or as a *document* of a repressed truth is also a performance of resistance or indeed, in other instances, of conservatism" (2009: 317, author's emphasis). Feldman's statement reminds us of the performative aspects in photography, and in this case, we can argue that Zaatari's images suggest that certain sexualities were historically unacceptable, and that gender, gender roles and sexuality are not clearly distinct entities. Zaatari's strategic use of appropriation can be read here as a queer act. Much like feminist and queer lens-based artists, Zaatari uses and highlights performance and performativity to subvert notions of a mainstream heteronormative identity, to place emphasis on identity, gender, and sexual differences. The notion of performativity in photography is also of concern for Zaatari. As will be explored in the following section, Madani's photographic portraits become a site for performativity where individuals explore a range of intimate, flamboyant, and semi-erotic enactments.

2.5 Gender Differences in the Photographic Studio Portraits of *The Madani Project*

Located in the same building as the Cinema Scheherazade,⁵⁴ Madani's studio was a space where people felt free from their usual lives. This was especially the case for women. As Madani recalls, while some women in town would walk into the studio with their head uncovered, others used to cover only on the streets, which was common for Muslims (Bassil, et al., 2007: 11). In the studio, women would usually completely remove their covering; as Madani states: "they [the women] used to come wearing fashionable synthetic dresses with a gown worn on top of it. When they entered the studio, they would take the gown off" (Bassil, et al., 2007: 11). Madani's studio was a semi-private space where unaccompanied women could dress up and often undress before the photographer in order to perform an array of fictional persona and imagine different lives for themselves.⁵⁵ Unsurprisingly, in some situations, the studio space became a contentious zone and its atmosphere of freedom was met with resistance.

2.5.1 Agency in Strife: *Wife of Baqari, 1957, (2007)*

For instance, Madani evokes the story of a woman who, accompanied by her husband, was applying for a passport. Her husband refused to allow his wife to uncover her face to be photographed. Until the mid-1930s, it was not mandatory for women in Lebanon to have their photos on their passports; in fact, only a fingerprint was required

⁵⁴ The Cinema Shehrazade was one of six main movies theaters in Saida, which played American and Egyptian films. As noted in his interview with Zaatari, Madani comments on how many customers would drop by his studio after a movie, because it was open until midnight (Bassil, et al., 2007: 12).

⁵⁵ The photographs were usually strictly for personal use and view. After purchasing the photographs, they could be framed, hung over a mantel, tucked into an album, or simply placed in a drawer. As explained by Madani, the poses for women and men were very different. Young men would be showing their muscles, while posing in action, such as a hold-up. In contrast, the girls, in general, would focus on taking a good-looking picture to show to their fiancé or other close friends (Bassil, et al. 2007). The photograph was considered intimate for many girls and women and "it was considered bad for a girl's reputation to have her picture circulate among men" (Bassil, et al. 2007: 11).

(Bassil, et al., 2007: 11). While Madani explained that the photo would not be accepted by passport officials unless she uncovers her face, the husband once again refused, and they left. After a few weeks, they finally came back, and the husband accepted to show only the strict minimum of his wife's face, keeping her hair, forehead, and chin covered (Bassil, et al., 2007: 12).

Perhaps the most famous story involves a young woman whose photographs Madani titled *Wife of Baqari*. This woman chose and paid to be photographed unaccompanied multiple times in 1957; among those, Zaatari printed two in particular (figs. 29 - 30). Her first name is unfortunately unknown; she is identified solely by her husband's family name, as shown by the title of the two photographs. This already indicates some of the ways in which her life, like many other women in Lebanese society during that time, was subject to patriarchal control. In the first photograph (fig. 29), she is shown as a stereotypical Oriental Bedouin⁵⁶ woman posing before the camera against a plain grey background. She wears a traditional black *abaya* (a cloak) and jeweled headdress while balancing a single-handed amphora on her shoulder, which shows off the jewelry on her wrists. At the time, it was a common practice for the local Arab urban middle-class to pose for studio portraits dressed in traditional Bedouin attire. Practiced by both women and men, this phenomenon appeared early in local photography and seemed to imitate the nineteenth-century European tradition of photographing 'categories' of people in the region, such as Bedouins and peasants (Mansour and Fawaz, 2009). In fact, such portraits became a trend throughout the Arab world, particularly in the studios of Sabounji (Lebanon), Legekian (Egypt), and

⁵⁶ The Bedouins are a desert-dwelling Arabian ethnic group.

Kirkorian and Raad (Palestine). Furthermore, given the growing Western tourist industry's demand for souvenirs, many Arab photographers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century capitalized monetarily on clichéd Orientalist representations (Sheehi, 2004; 2016). These representations would often depict figures in a pose similar to those found in Orientalist paintings (Bowen, 2007); using an urn as a prop is a prominent example, which reminds us of Gustave Boulanger's painting *A Woman With an Urn* (1888).

Wife of Baqari can be read as “self-orientalising” that is, according to Iranian post-colonialist theorist Ali Behdad (2001), the practice of seeing and representing oneself and one's own culture as Europe's ‘Other’ (i.e. mystifying and eroticized). Clearly, her posing is not representative of the Bedouins but rather an imitation or a ‘playful’ act. As argued by Arab American scholar Stephen Sheehi (2004; 2007; 2016), the photographed subjects were highly self-conscious about choosing to enact self-orientalizing scenes. The widely circulating representation of the Bedouins in nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings referred to traditionalism and lower social class. For Baqari's wife, self-orientalizing herself could have been a tactic to assert her social upper-class status and affirm her image as a modern, “civilized” individual. This format also seems to have nationalist and anti-colonial overtones. In contrast to other commercial studio photographers that sought to produce images to satisfy a European clientele (Nachabe, 2012), the studio photographs shoot by Madani aimed to produce and imitate a photographic genre that was fashionable at the time. According to historians Wilson Chacko Jacob (2011) and Yasmine Nachabe (2012), the common use of posing in Western/European attire was viewed in a positive way because it signified the shift into modernity. Following the French mandate, only a few privilege individuals

had access to European attire (Jacob, 2011). Dressing in a modern European way became, according to Nachabe, a “politically charged site of cultural contestation where, for the first time, the very essence of the Lebanese traditional identity as Arab nationalist was at stake” (2012: 12). This caused many traditionalists to resist such attire fearing the loss of their identity, norms and values, and thus, revisiting the Orientalist stereotypes, particularly that of the Bedouins as a way to shift the Western gaze towards more traditional Arab gaze (Jacob, 2011; Nachabe, 2012, Stiffler, 2012).

In her second portrait (fig. 30), she is shown as a ‘modern’ woman dressed in a black skirt and a semi-transparent white blouse that exposes her bra. Her hair is let down and uncovered. According to Sarah Graham-Brown, the “Western-style dress was used by some regimes as an indication of modernity and liberality in regard to women [...]” (1988: 249). Here, Baqari’s wife’s choice of attire can be seen as a pursuit of modernity and progress, and perhaps in resistance to conservative gender roles. Her appearance signals a modern woman seeking liberation, independence and freedom from her controlling husband. Her left arm is resting on a pillar in the studio, almost as if she is uncertain where to place her hand and how to position herself face to the camera. Her awkward postures and timid facial expressions in both portraits clearly show her discomfort suggesting she was not used to being looked at. While she gazes directly at the camera, her facial expressions are empty and unreadable: it might be resistance, and it might also be resignation of her being unable to identify herself without the approval of her husband. The photographs were taken while her husband was away. According to Madani, she would often sneak into his studio. Eventually, her husband confronted Madani in the studio, which resulted in the scratching of the negatives.

As recounted by Madani:

[The] negatives were scratched because of a jealous husband, who never let his wife out by herself. She used to come frequently to be photographed with her sister before meeting him. After they got married, he was upset to know that she came to be photographed in my studio without telling him. He came asking for the negatives. I refused to give them to him, because they were on a 35 mm roll. In the end, we agreed that I would scratch the negatives of his wife with a pin, and I did it in front of him. Years later, after she burnt herself to death to escape her misery, he came back to me asking for enlargements of those photographs, or other photographs she might have taken without his knowledge. (Caption cited in Bassil, et al. 2007: 78)

In the original context of the photographs, Madani treats these events as a tragedy, and leaves it at that. However, Zaatari's research leads to a deeper reading of the images, prompting critical dialogue. The act of scratching the images is not simply a destruction of photographs – it now reveals the violent attempt to deny, obscure, and erase female subjectivity and agency, which are indicative of the contention of social traditions regarding women within a modernizing Lebanon. However, perhaps more importantly, the images reveal a women's courage and audacity to reclaim her identity. By accentuating her feminine attributes in the photograph, Baqari flies in the face of the 'modesty' demanded by tradition, and defies her husband's 'ownership' of her body and image. One can observe that the two violently scratched photographs of *Wife of Baqari* are for the most part always exhibited and grouped with the photographs of the resistant fighters. Such curatorial decision by Zaatari seems to be an explicitly strategic one. Through a queer eye, the scratched images of *Wife of Baqari* can be read as speaking

against the nationalist patriarchal attitude within the country and in the fighter images that express courage and rebellion, and gear the reading towards the ignored, forgotten, and marginalized individuals within Lebanon's historical recollection. In *Wife of Baqari*, the camera, as a medium, provided Baqari's wife with a means to assert her personal identity. However, it also allowed her image to be violated.

2.5.2 Wondering Moments: Same-Sex Kissing Scenes

Photography as an instrument has lent itself to the exploration and experimentation of performed identities. Throughout Madani's large collection of photographs and negatives, the most captivating and perhaps surprising photographs, especially for the Western eye, are those that depict same-sex kissing. For instance, the photograph titled *Tarho and El Masri* (fig. 31) depicts two young, handsome, clean-shaven men in their early twenties. White semi-transparent sheer curtains neatly frame both young men, which hints at some sort of theatricality to the actions they are about to perform. Judging by their appearance, the young men seem to have very different styles. Tarho (on the left) seems to be more conservative. He is depicted wearing a black long-sleeved buttoned-up dress shirt. His hair is styled in a classic clean crew cut, which was very popular with the military and in the sporting world. On his right finger, Tarho is wearing a band suggesting he might be either married or engaged. The other young man, named El Marsi, is portrayed in a more liberal way wearing a casual short-sleeved white shirt with his collar opened and flattened. His gel-greased, sleeked, comb-back hairstyle – influenced by the industry of American film and popular music of the time – suggests a more mainstream attitude. Their physical posture and attraction to each other are, like so many of Madani's images, very ambiguous. The photograph captures a staged moment where El Masri affectionately clasps his friend's neck and he tenderly kisses his

cheek. It is difficult to determine the exact nature of the relationship between the two young men. Like most of the other photographs, the title is vague; little is told about the subjects photographed. Were these two brothers, two friends, or maybe even secretly lovers?

Similarly, the photograph titled: *Bashasha (left) and a friend* (fig. 33) depicts two young girls kissing. Both young women are positioned in the middle of the photograph and framed by white sheer curtains. The girls have their hair lifted and parted to the side and to the back revealing their lips touching and their facial expressions. We notice the young girls' jewelry (i.e. a ring, a bracelet, and earrings) that function as visual markers to highlight the girls' femininity. The girls have their eyes open, however, Bashasha (on the left) seems to hide a smile or laugh, suggesting she is aware of the flirtatious performative act. Her friend (on the right), on the other hand, has a soberer expression, as if to suggest that the moment is less of a play act, but actually an intimate encounter between both. In this context, Bashasha's friend (on the right) tightly grabs her, pulling her in for the embrace. At that moment, Bashasha seems to be responding to her friend's assertive actions in a fun-loving way. Their curious dynamic suggests that both subjects are not entirely in a playful 'disguise.' That is to say, even if the young girls are 'acting' or 'playing' around in order to display homoerotic affection in front of the camera, their capability to 'truly' perform is jeopardized by Bashasha. In fact, we could suggest that Bashasha's stance and gesture call attention to a slight discomfort, which might be the result of a shame, embarrassment and awkwardness for expressing such homoerotic sentiment. These images of same-sex kissing were, as described by Madani, outcomes of a desire to imitate the gestures and actions of actors and actresses filmed by other photographers and filmmakers:

Films inspired people a lot. They came to perform kissing in front of a camera. In a conservative society such as Saida, people were willing to play the kiss between two people of the same sex, but very rarely between a man and a woman. I remember only one couple that came to the studio and kissed in front of the camera, and they were not married. The rest of them were people of the same sex. One of them plays the woman, while the other plays the man. (Bassil, et al., 2007: 12)

This quote from Madani suggests that the playfulness and the mimicry performed by the two-young same-sex couples kissing were considered to be an acceptable social practice in his studio. In the conservative setting of Saida, gender segregation was, to a certain extent, the socially acceptable norm (El-Ariss, 2007); therefore, the studio relies on gender substitution. Madani explains the homoerotic kiss as a result of “models of gender segregation, propriety, and shame specific to his milieu,” (Bassil, et al. 2007: 13) claiming that throughout his entire career only once did he witness a kiss between an unmarried, heterosexual couple. In fact, according to Madani, the simulated tender, caring pose between the young same-sex couples was actually a way to avoid the social taboos of unmarried heterosexual affection (i.e. kissing, hugging, holding hands, etc.), which were strictly prohibited outside of marriage. What we may consider as expressions of same-sex desire and love between the subjects are seen as ‘playful’ acts within their original context.

Another fascinating example of gender performativity and ambiguity in Madani’s work is a photograph of *Najm (left) and Asmar (right)* (fig. 32). On the right is Asmar, who is positioned frontally, wearing a white fabric wrapped around his torso and a bride’s veil, and clutching a bouquet of plastic flowers. To the left, his friend Najam

wears a long-sleeved white-striped Oxford shirt, accessorized with a pork-pie hat and a leather studded wrist bracelet. He stands towards the side with his hand positioned on Asmar's shoulder, slightly touching his hand. In reference to this photograph, Madani suggests that the photograph depicted: "a session of disguise. [...] [It] was completely acting. I gave them the white dress to play with" (Bassil et al., 2007: 102). In addition to his stiff posture, Asmar gazes directly into the camera exhibiting a very uncomfortable facial expression. Najam, on the other hand, seems relaxed, pleasant and confident. His eyes, which stare directly into the camera's lens, are glittering with emotions. His facial expression seems to depict a young, confident man. Najam's confidence can be interpreted in the way that he gets to 'play' the masculine partner. In contrast, Asmar is depicted as feminized and therefore occupying subordinate space in a patriarchal context.

Both groups of photographs of Baqari's wife and those of same-sex couples kissing depict distinctly queer transgressions. According to the patriarchal system in Lebanon, these photographs portray things that should not exist; they have no names, and no identities of their own. Yet, the images of Baqari's wife show a woman in search of visibility and validation. As well, the images of same-sex couples kissing depict displays of affection – in a heteronormative order that is chiefly concerned with reproduction within a family structure, and thus marginalizes explorations of pleasure and affection. In the open and safe atmosphere of Madani's studio, these subjects subversively seek to express through photography, and by extension acknowledge and validate their identities as desiring subjects – a designation typically reserved for men at the top of the hegemonic hierarchy. Furthermore, even if these acts were permissible because they were merely 'play,' there are moments of seriousness. In *Tarho and El*

Masri (fig. 31), the young man on the right seems to be fully performing his role, whereas his friend on the left seems hesitant, and slightly uncomfortable – as if he is questioning the situation: have they transgressed too far? Is his friend attracted to him? Similarly in *Bashasha (left) and a friend* (fig. 33), the friend (right) seems wholly engaged in the act – she is holding Bashasha’s shoulder tightly, and leaning in with her whole body. Bashasha, on the other hand, seems to be giggling; her lips are tightly closed, and she is even moving away, as evidenced by the blur of her hand. She is quickly withdrawing from the prospect of a genuine amorous act. Finally, in *Najm (left) and Asmar (right)* (fig. 32), Najm seems to be confident and present, whereas Asmar is somewhat subdued. This, again, suggests a discomfort – what does playing the subordinate role suggest about him? There is also a question of touch – should Asmar fully grasp his friend’s hand, or not? He seems to have decided on a compromise: his hand is open but brushing Najm’s. In each of these photographs, one party is actively participating in the game of role-play. The other is less present, even pulling away in some manner. If both parties were fully participating in the game, and if there was no evidence of questioning or hesitation in these photographs, we might well dismiss these sessions as merely ‘play,’ as Madani states. Even if the parties were aware of the unconventionality of these moments, in that world, they would not investigate further.

Thus far, we have examined how the photographic images are situated in relation to local gender-norms. However, we must take into account the intersection of photography and performance in Madani’s studio portraiture, which is located within the pose of the subjects. In his famous work on photography *Camera Lucida*, theorist Roland Barthes understood the pose as fundamental to the nature of photography claiming: “what founded the nature of photography is the pose” (1981: 78). For Barthes,

posing in front of a camera is in itself a type of performance that creates discomfort and anxiety. He writes: “In the process of posing [...] I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image” (1981: 10). He further describes the act of posing for the photographic camera as a “micro-version of death” and of “the mortiferous layer of the pose” (1981: 13-15). In a reaction of being shot by the photographer, the subject freezes motionless in a pose where ultimately, according to Barthes, the subject is transformed into an object, thus, the death of the subject is enacted (1981: 17). As observed in the photographs of *Tarho and El Masri* (fig. 31) and *Najm (left) and Asmar (right)* (fig. 32), some of the subjects express a discomfort in their pose. To produce a non-blurry photograph, the subjects had to pose motionless for a few seconds. Both Tarho (fig. 31) and Asmar (fig. 32) (presumably heterosexuals) are seen posing still in a state of discomfort; possibility of shame, embarrassment, and awkwardness in an already suggested erotic scene.

Barthes also describes the yearning for the photographic image to “coincide with my (‘profound’) self,” while being aware that “‘myself’ never coincides with my image”; for the Photograph is the advent of myself as other [...]” (1981, 12). In this sense, the posing subject attempts to mimic certain facial and postural expressions onto his/her body. As confessed by Barthes, such a process creates “a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture” in which one is “[...] neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is become an object” before the camera’s lens (1981: 13 and 14). Undeniably, this emphasizes the artificiality of the photographic portrait, which in turn “complicates the traditional claims of the camera to reproduce an authentic ‘real’ of the subject” (Phelan, 1993: 35). As echoed by feminist performance theorist Peggy Phelan, “portrait photography is fundamentally performative” (1993: 35). Phelan writes:

“Uncertain about what [the] body looks like or how substantial it is, we perform an image of it by imitating what we think we look like. We imagine what people might see when they look at us, and then we try to perform (and conform to) those images” (1993: 35 and 36). This can be seen in the photographs of *Tarho and El Masri*, and *Bashasha (left) and a friend* where the subjects are reflecting the performative nature of desire, attachment, and love by enacting a kiss on the lips and cheek, which was seen in romantic Hollywood films.

In *Najm (left) and Asmar (right)*, one can say that both young men are imitating the performative nature of wedding ceremonies that borrows the visual elements, again, from romantic films. In this specific photograph, the young men dress to perform the gendered related identity of the ‘bride’ and ‘groom.’ Thus, such performative moments are considered, by Phelan, to be instances that “complicate the traditional claim of the camera to capture a reality, to reproduce an authentic ‘real’ of the subject (1993: 13). These photographic portraits become physical records of the clients’ fleeting gender performativity. Madani’s studio provided a theatrical and transient space for individuals to perform various desired identities. Yet, his position was clearly geared to enforce some normative gendered roles, which had to be played by either one of the same-sex individuals because of the gender-segregation within Lebanon. One can imagine that Madani was aware of the shifting gendered boundaries played between the two subjects being photographed. The end goal, however, was to deliver a ‘good picture’ that would satisfy his clients. Thus, while Madani’s clients were not necessarily questioning or contesting the larger societal and cultural structures in Lebanon that shape gender, one can argue that both Madani and his clients were unwittingly performing the self and gender through their posture, gestures, and facial expressions.

It is only decades later that Zaatari finally investigated these unusual moments of ‘play’ captured by Madani’s camera. Zaatari does so by literally enlarging the photographs for closer scrutiny. In the original context, where the photographs were for personal use and thus disconnected from the world at large, one might only wonder about what these moments mean. According to Barthes, a photograph conveys a “*denoted* message” (the literal, obvious meaning) and a “*connoted* message” (the socio-cultural meaning associated with the image) (1977: 17, author’s emphasis). This said, at first glance, what can be observed in Madani’s same-sex kissing images are youths who are enacting a kissing scene, which could only be possible by gender-substitution. At the time, these photographs were not under scrutiny by viewers and society. In fact, such substitution was deemed ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’ because of the taboo surrounding unmarried heterosexual couples holding hands or kissing in public places or in front of anyone else. Conversely, the “‘treatment’ of the image” (Barthes, 1977: 17), which can be considered as Zaatari’s appropriation of Madani’s images, allows for the photographs to develop a new signification – one that is read within a new historical, social, political, and economic context in which the images appear as Zaatari’s. Today, the images can be read within the larger discourse of art history and especially gender studies. Zaatari’s strategy in exhibiting his appropriated images is to open them to multiple interpretations by the various viewers internationally. In her book *Why Art Photography?* art historian Lucy Soutter writes about issues of ambiguity, staging and authenticity in photography, in which she posits that photographs become performative in the way they “activate us the viewer, i.e. to move, to irritate, to awaken, to activate empathy or imagination” (2013: 84).

Zaatari appears less concerned in knowing the “true” signification of the subjects’ relationship or their sexual orientation. In fact, he is much more focused on the ambiguities of the images, the poses, the interactions. His interest appears to lie in the possibilities that such images have to critique contemporary issues of gender and sexuality in Post-Civil War Lebanon. Thus, it appears to be Zaatari’s aim to intentionally show the performativity of gender in the images. The idea of performativity that we are drawing from here derives from American philosopher Judith Butler’s ground-breaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), in which she introduces performance theory to the study of gender identification. It is interesting to reflect on Butler’s concept of performativity in juxtaposition to the photographs. Butler argues that gender is a performative enactment, not an essential identity that exists in a pre-social or pre-discursive state (1990, 2003). In other words, gender is constructed through stylized repetitive acts, including bodily movements, gestures, and verbalizations.

For Butler, gender (including sexuality) is socially constructed and considered as a performative consequence of repetitive discursive practices: “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (1990: 34). Butler further elucidates, in *Bodies that Matter* (1993), that while gender is performative, it is not simply a “willful” and “arbitrary” performance. In other words, people are not always free to choose which gender they will perform. However, Madani’s photographed subjects appear to be choosing which gender to perform. Yet, we must remind ourselves that the photographed subjects’ ‘play’ of opposite gender roles was only considered acceptable

because it was considered gender-substitution, and that it was done within the privacy of the studio space.

Butler also specifically differentiates between ‘performativity’ and ‘performance.’ Performativity is the way in which we present ourselves in our daily lives through established social and cultural codes, whereas performance is the deliberate choosing and repeating of selected codes to represent an identity. Feminist scholar Sara Salih takes these distinctions one step further: “[...] whereas performance presupposes a pre-existing subject, performativity contests the very notion of the subject” (2002: 63). This is highly useful for understanding Zaatari’s approach – in recontextualizing Madani’s photographic works, Zaatari reemphasizes how identity is socially and culturally framed through performative acts in each image. Even Madani’s approach in taking the original photographs was concerned less with reflecting ‘true’ identities and more with process and play. Performativity arises, as noted by art historian Staci Gem Scheiwiller, by reason of: “a process of citationality, in which persons are transformed and molded into perceived constructions of identity (i.e., through propaganda, model behaviour, societal pressures or a religious norm), or through materialization, in which persons engage in material discursive practices (i.e., walking through the city) and apparatuses (i.e., contact with institutions)” (2013: 1). Though Scheiwiller is focused on the Iranian context, her work is nonetheless useful for understanding the performance of gender in other non-Western contexts. The achievement of these acts relies on performative acts and their ways of being perceived and repeated within a social and political system of recognized norms and codes.

Perhaps the best-known works that highlight the interaction of the pose, disguise, and performativity in postmodern portraiture is that of American contemporary

photographer Cindy Sherman. For instance, Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* series (1977-1980) offers an endless shifting of personae, denying the desire of the viewer to 'fix' the subject in a stable identity (Leet, 2011). In *Untitled Film Stills*, a series of sixty-nine black-and-white photographs, Sherman utilized full makeup, costumes, and stage scenery to recreate numerous varying iconic "snapshots" of feminine stereotypes seen in films. By appropriating such situations, which are widely recognizable, Sherman directs the gaze back at the viewers – she is informing them of the learned codes with which they identify femininity – the kind that has left her characters generally vulnerable. Thus, she is prompting that discomfort necessary to begin questioning and deconstructing those codes. In her photographic work, Sherman through her many disguises highlights the artificial construction of femininity that is socially prescribed by American society. By doing so, Sherman proposes a nuanced understanding of gender performativity, which resists and refuses strict narrow definitions of gender and sexuality.

While Zaatari's work can be situated within the lineage of internationally-acclaimed artists of the 1980s to today, such as Cindy Sherman, who has explored issues of gender performativity and sexuality in photography, Zaatari's work is unique and important in its own right. For example, Zaatari's initial research of Madani's collection and later his appropriation of Madani's photographs are positioned within a nuanced local approach to sexuality, potentially challenging the very notion and use of the Western-centric frame of the term 'queer' or sexuality. Zaatari's work also sketches out the complexity of queer experience in Post-Civil War Lebanon. By framing and displaying the photographs indirectly as 'queer' Zaatari is able to circumnavigate the political maze that would restrict such topics to be addressed in a larger context. Thus,

Zaatari's work allows viewers, both nationally and internationally, to discover fragmented pieces of Lebanon's diverse, yet forgotten, past. In contrast to Sherman, and other artists, Zaatari seems to be breaking out of the tradition of feminist and queer visual art creation to open up local spaces of representations in Lebanon, which are still in the process of becoming.

Here, Zaatari's appropriated images are not simply images of 'men playing women', and 'women playing men'; there is nuance and different possible layers in which the images can be understood. Similar to Sherman, Zaatari focuses on the intentional context of gender performativity which also has connections to Hollywood cinema and its legacy of mass entertainment. Further, given that each of the moments within the photographs are positioned outside of and destabilizing both hegemonic masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality, we may suggest that the photographs be read as 'queer.' A reading of Zaatari's images as queer is located within the temporality of queer acts and performance. As suggests by queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz:

Queerness is often transmitted covertly. This has everything to do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack. Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere – while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility. (1996: 6)

It is precisely these ambiguities, transient moments, and performances that frame Zaatari's photographs in a critical examination of gender. In *Najm (left) and Asmar (right)* (fig. 32), Najm's masculinity is reinforced, while Asmar's is threatened. In *Tarho*

and *El Masri* (fig. 31), *El Masri*, with his slicked back hair and modern look, is grasping Tarho by the neck, affectionately but forcefully pulling him in for the kiss, even disregarding Tarho's engagement/wedding band. He is displacing Tarho's masculinity, heterosexuality and traditionalism all at once. Finally, in *Bashasha (left) and a friend* (fig. 33), the required presence of a man for pleasure is thwarted. Suddenly, it is possible to have pleasure elsewhere, outside of the heteronormative framework. It is notable that, in both *Tarho and El Masri* (fig. 21) and *Bashasha (left) and a friend* (fig. 33), the framing of the photographs with drapery suggests a theatricality. This can be read as an attempt to reinforce the societal and cultural norms under threat, by dismissing it all as an act – as will be explained, serves only to confirm the queerness of the moments. To elucidate further, we may examine the nature of what Madani calls and describes as 'disguise'.

As will be examined, the term 'disguise,' in this sense, can be related to the 'performance.' In general, the concept of 'performance' originates from the British linguistic philosopher John L. Austin, who examines speech act theory in his posthumously published *How to Do Things with Words* (1970), in which language has both a referential and performative function.⁵⁷ In adopting the term "performative utterance," Austin unravels the performative aspect in the field of linguistics. In other words, 'performance' refers to the deliberate production and use of utterances (language) in a precise situation by a speaker. For instance, there are clusters of sentences (i.e., "I promise," "I apologize," "I dare you," "I sentence you") about which

⁵⁷ For American linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky (1965), 'performance' was describe in opposition to 'competence', which he describes as a speaker's ideal innate linguistic capacity to formulate unlimited utterances with limited linguistic elements.

“it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing [something]...or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it” (Austin, 1970: 6 author’s emphasis). In this perspective, the use of performative utterances cannot be evaluated in terms of truthfulness since their successful outcome depends on a number of conditions, conventions, and contexts. Thus, we may begin to conceive of ‘speech-acts’; it is by the utterance of the words that the act is performed. Accordingly, a referential statement can be true or false, whereas a speech-act is dependent on the agreement and participation of appropriate persons, rules, and settings. For example, the naming of a child is a speech-act that depends at least on the agreement of the family/guardians and societal norms – if the child is assigned male at birth, but given a woman’s name, or if the parents disagree on the naming, the speech-act may fail. Butler draws on these concepts to distinctly assert the comprehension of a performative gender identity.

To understand ‘disguise’ in this context, we must first examine its use by the Arab Image Foundation (AIF), which hosts a massive collection of Madani’s photographs and negatives. The AIF uses a classification system based on tag keywords that describe the content of the images and allow an accessibility when reading the photograph. The use of descriptive keywords and verbs used to describe the identifiable action rests on personal visible observation and description. The use and choice of tag keywords and verbs is a question of personal perceptions and interpretations that ultimately create generalized categories. In the process of adding and re-interpreting keywords, the photographs become a contested site where local Arab notions of gender and social and cultural values are negotiated through the use of the descriptive keyword. According to art historian Dore Bowen (2007), the Arab Image Foundation’s (AIF)

classification system is based on *Le Patrimoine Photographique* from Paris, which functions by placing and adding culturally related terms to the list of keywords to tag their photographs.

In his article “Playing House in The Studio of Hashem el Madani” (2007), contemporary Arabic literary scholar, Tarek El-Ariss critically examines what it means for the photographs to be classified under the keyword ‘disguise’ at the Arab Image Foundation (AIF). As mentioned by El-Ariss, the Arabic translation of disguise is:

tanakkur, which literally means a disowning or a disavowal of one’s representation for the sake of another. It is adequate to say *atanakkar*, or “I disown,” to mean that one is *in* disguise. The process of disowning occurs simultaneously with a process of claiming a reflection that will replace and cover over the one being shunned, denied, and temporarily suspended. Not to be in disguise, to appear as one is and as one is reflected to oneself, involves therefore an embracing of one’s true reflection. In both cases, the subject imagines representation as something he or she can control, either by accepting or by denying it. (2007: 11 author’s emphasis)

In the case of the same-sex kissing scenes photographed by Madani, it is important to note that, while the subjects perhaps imagine that they are in control of their representations, in fact, they are subject to the codes and conventions that govern performative actions within the photographic medium, which also change through time. Thus, they are far from in control of their context-dependent representations, which can be read differently now than they had, perhaps, intended. In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993), Butler problematizes the notion of drag and cross-dressing as a means of disguise. In citing the performance of Julie Andrews in *Victor*,

Victoria (1982), Dustin Hoffman in *Tootsie* (1982), and Jack Lemmon in *Some Like It Hot* (1959), Butler described the films as “high het [heterosexual] entertainment” produced by and for heterosexuals “in which homophobia and homosexual panic are negotiated” (1993: 126). For Butler, such type of entertainment only reinforces the gender distinctions, as opposed to destabilizing gender norms and redefining masculinity, femininity, and queerness. Butler suggests that the art of drag performance, in contrast to cross-dressing, is in itself a subversive means to denaturalize and interrogate heteronormative concept of gender. Within Madani’s photographic images, we may argue that the subjects are performing a type of disguise that allows for local heteronormative conception of gender to be subverted. Here, disguising as a process is key to reading the moments as queer – at one level, since they are disguising themselves in terms of non-hegemonic masculinities and homoeroticism. Since the disguise is queer, it is understood that the more truthful reflections of the subjects are heteronormative. This can also be seen in the attempt to frame the situations theatrically; as well, the gender-segregation that originally prompted multiple same-sex friends to use the studio to explore representations of affection and intimacy is arguably a pillar of heteronormativity. However, the disguise works both ways. The heteronormative poses and acts are, to a degree, also a disguise. The omnipresent assurances from Madani and his subjects that these are just games, or merely theatrics, can now be read to serve as a mask, protecting the subjects’ queerer desires and fantasies from scrutiny. Thus, glimmers of seriousness and wondering within the subjects are allowed to exist. We must be mindful that such interpretation can be seen as colonizing the figures within the photographs as queer. To be clear, the idea here is not to suggest that Zaatari’s works simply bring to fore queer subjects that are reclaimed or outed within Madani’s archive.

Rather, Zaatari rethinks Madani's photographic collection in relation to his own deep sentimental attachment to the images, particularly those of the resistant Palestinian fighters, which as a child Zaatari loved to observe.

2.6 Archival Practice

Over the past two decades, Zaatari has worked extensively on collecting, preserving, researching and displaying Madani's photographs and studio. Since the late 1960s, the photographic archive has emerged as a major subject in contemporary curatorial discipline and artistic practices. As observed by art historian Charles Merewether, the archive traditionally "[...] constitutes a repository or ordered system" (2006: 10) of historical documents, important records (verbal, visual, and written), and artifacts that are collected, stored, classified, and most importantly, conserved for future retrieval. The archive holds primarily unpublished, unique works. Furthermore, the archives have been seen as conveyors of histories, places for researchers and historians to excavate and reveal the stories of the past. In his book, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995), French philosopher Jacques Derrida calls attention to the late history of archives: coming from the Greek origins, the word 'archive' refers to the home where official records were kept by the *archon*, the superior magistrate (1995: 2). As Derrida suggests, the archive appears as an authoritarian site, which is shaped by social, political, and technological forces. The archive, in this sense, is thought to be a fixed and stable entity that accumulates, stores and recovers historical elements of knowledge considered to be holding a significant amount of power. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, French philosopher Michel Foucault argues that the archive is to be understood not as an institution or a material site filled with a collection of documents and object, but rather, as a space of enunciation. Foucault states that the archive consists of: "the law of what

can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events [...] it is *the system of its enunciability*” (1972: 129, author’s emphasis). Repositioned as a set of discursive rules, for Foucault, the archive becomes committed to the production and authorization of discourse – dictating what can and cannot be said.

Since his early works, Zaatari has been at the center of the critical reconstructive trend that examines the archival practice – challenging and contesting its traditional discursive, material, and conceptual aspects (Feldman, 2009). If the archive is perceived as a fixed object, established in institutional power, then “The Madani Project” is best considered as a counter-archive in that it constantly highlights its constructive aspect (or “constructedness”), in addition to its gaps, and thus, the ways in which it is organized as the counterpart of power. The Madani Project (hosted within the Arab Image Foundation) can be labelled an archive, per se, because it holds a large collection of slides, negatives, and photographic records from the commercial photographer Hashem El-Madani. Most photographs in Madani’s studio were left behind by clients for many reasons. Some individuals were displaced by the war making the transportation of their photographs difficult, while others simply forgetting to pick them up or were unable to afford the costly price of their photographs. However, as the co-founder of the Arab Image Foundation (AIF), Zaatari never conceived the foundation and the Madani Project, as ‘proper’ archives because their collection was shaped and organized throughout the years by various projects from Zaatari and his contemporaries. For Zaatari, his projects and involvement in the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) has often compared with those of an archaeologist who seeks to excavate objects in order to reflect on the way photography, as an apparatus, is part of our sociocultural construction rather than fixed arrangements of images (Feldman, 2009). As described by Zaatari: “I

decided I should tackle [Madani's] entire collection [...] the project became centered, precisely almost as an archaeological site, centered on that studio. [...] I'm interested in what exists in his vitrine, how he organizes his work, how he organizes his studio, how he decorates it. I'm interested in the peak time of his economy and the fall of his economy" (Zaatari et al., 2009). By using the archaeological metaphor, Zaatari shifts the terminology from the 'archive' to the more personal notion of a 'collection,' alluding to more conceptual formulations away from a bureaucratic disciplinary approach to history (Zaatari and Feldman, 2007: 51). Similarly, rather than use 'documents,' which is heavily associated with questions of originality, authenticity, and authorship, Zaatari refers to the metaphoric term 'fossils'. By definition, fossils are objects (or artifacts) hidden inside other matter, in which their original integrity is preserved until they are unearthed, rediscovered, and given a new sense (Zaatari and Feldman, 2007; Feldman, 2009). As fossils, the artifacts (Madani's photographs) are "reassign[ed] a new function revealing [...] narratives and desires" from the past, present and perhaps the future, thereby speaking simultaneously in two different tenses (Zaatari and Feldman, 2007: 64).

While the traditional definition of the archive is understood as a place of knowledge and power that produces truth as historical *a priori* (Foucault) and essentially securing the meaning of the past (Derrida), the Madani collection (and Zaatari) question the archival impulse of holding on and preserving knowledge, which limits what can be said about the past. This can be understood in Zaatari's 2011 project proposal, which consisted of returning the photographs from the Madani's collection to their original owners. This was suggested by Zaatari in order to allow the photographic objects (or fossils) to be experienced beyond the collection, and to be reactivated within their

original context. In some way, the image becomes less important than the actual story behind it. However, the project was never initiated given that the foundation is seen to gain capital, with a photographic collection and archive that now belongs to the region.

The collection conceptualized by Zaatari is one that is not constrained to the question of the past, but rather to the “question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow” (Derrida, 1995: 37). The Madani Project was meant to be a collection of photographic objects whose meanings are not pre-determined but experienced in a way that trigger new meanings and shapes new conditions for the present and future through one’s inquisitiveness. As cited by Stuart Hall, “archives are not inert historical collections. They always stand in an active, dialogical, relation to the questions which the present puts on the past” (2001: 92). As a whole, the Madani Project and the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) are to be considered by Zaatari as research materials as opposed to an “archive of photographic practices” (Zaatari in Respini and Janevski, 2013).

Manipulated by Zaatari’s intervention, Madani’s collection is reorganized to give the photographs different meaning, removing them from their original context and displacing them “into another time, another tradition, another economy” (Zaatari in Respini and Janevski, 2013). This leads us to Zaatari’s tactic of appropriation, which sheds light on a rich, invisible Lebanese history (Feldman, 2009). Recontextualized in the present-day, the Madani project is much more than an archive of forgotten images. It is a space that provides critical reflections, re-readings, and re-interpretations of the many found photographs, negatives, films, and video recordings.

2.7 Towards a Queer Reading of the Archive

In Beirut, numerous photographic archives located in the downtown core were destroyed by natural disasters and the consequences of the Civil War, and “the only remnants of their production were of their prints collected from Beirut families” (Feldman, 2009: 312, n. 9). For Zaatari, his main interest rested in the actions of decontextualizing original images by taking them out of their social and political economy. In this sense, we may think of Zaatari’s immense investment and research in the collection as one that is ‘queer’ because it creatively reexamines the photographic collection through a different perspective in order to disrupt dominant essentialist claims of sex, gender, sexuality, and desire – socially, politically, and visually.

In his appropriation, Zaatari merely represent what seems to be already highly queer in Madani’s work. However, Zaatari’s perspective differs from Madani’s. While Madani uses his camera to capture the ‘playful’ moments between the subjects, as a commercial service for his customers, Zaatari’s appropriation readdresses and redefines the photographs context allowing the modern-day viewer to engage in a critical inquiry and interpretation. Furthermore, Zaatari’s appropriation revives a local insight on sexuality scripts, which were overlooked and unspecified. By doing such, it destabilizes, alters, and interferes with the original connotations of the photographs giving way to contradictions, diversity, and unconventional (queer) responses.

However, Zaatari’s appropriation may trigger questions regarding the ethical dimension of his ‘queering’ of Madani’s photographs, which could be understood as a form of colonialization. In fact, the use of queerness outside of its white urban academic Anglo-American context risks falling into a colonialist and liberatory framework because for the most part, it seeks to discover an ‘authentic’ queer subject or identity

within visual images, texts, and histories. Such an idea of queerness imposes a queer narrative based on identity categorization, which ultimately erases sexuality's fluidity (Ruvalcaba, 2016). As argued by queer theorist Jasbir Puar, the idea of an identity narrative not only informs "much global LGBTIQ organizing" but it also "privileges the role of identity as the evolved form of modernity" (2005: 136-37), which is heavily related to colonialism. Arab scholars Paul Amar and Omnia El-Shakry claim that queerness should be understood and utilized in the Arab world as a method of critical thinking that seeks to explore "the gender troubles, sectarian subversions, social movements, and affective economies of the Middle East – as well as the forms of geopolitical, colonial, liberal, and cultural domination that occupy the region – as generative of theory itself" (2013, 334). Still, the question remains: how does one read 'queerness' in same-sex Arab sexualities without being labelled colonialist? The answer seems to be to discuss queerness and queer sexualities outside of the Western-centrism and towards the in-betweenness of cultures (situated in-between 'East' and 'West'). For queer postcolonial scholar Sara Mourad, queering should be employed in its contradictions and paradoxes "without resorting to binary understandings of English/Arabic, foreign/local, experience/language, authentic/translated" (2013: 2543). We must remind ourselves that Zaatari's 'queer' readings of Madani's commercial photographs are located within global, transnational and intercultural perspectives that recognize the importance of difference and mutability and allow for converging multiplicities.

With the rise of queer studies in the globalized world, this study, much like Zaatari's work is concerned with the risk of perpetrating colonialization. The inquiry of queer at the global level must therefore "[...] radically interrogate and transform the

lenses through which [Western queer studies] reads and appropriates desire, queer identity, and sexual differences, and to self-reflexively examine its own imperialist and homogenizing impulses made possible through globalization” (Spurlin, 2001: 200). In other words, we must decentralize the Western concept of queerness by taking into account local ways of being queer. To do so, we must examine models of queerness in non-Western world (including transnational models of queerness), which could therefore give way to the decolonization of queer studies. The idea is to have “[...] a global queer narrative without centers and peripheries” that would enable the break away from rigid understanding gender and sexuality towards analytical concepts of “non-fixity, in-betweenness, and third spaces” (Crang et al., 2003: 443).

Consequently, Zaatari readdresses the discourse of gender and identity in today’s larger context, subverting the established identity boundaries and signifies a continuous critique of contemporary, mainstream politics (Rowley and Wolthers, 2009). In her influential book *An Archive of Feelings*, cultural theorist Ann Cvetkovich reminds us that archives (or collections), that deal with queer sexualities must not only “preserve and produce knowledge” but also “immaterial” feelings and “ephemeral” experiences such as “intimacy, sexuality, love, activism” (2003: 241), including art and cultural artifacts that can function as important archival queer practices. Zaatari’s project teases out alternative histories and the ways in which photography is used to highlight those histories. As shown by the analyses of Zaatari’s chosen photographs within today’s discourses of queer theory and contemporary art history, Zaatari traces alternative queer histories for display. Such histories are missing, perhaps having been lost, forgotten and/or deliberately excluded from the traditional archival compilation. Whatever the reason, by exhibiting these photographic records of queer moments, as can now be

understood outside of their original context, Zaatari is challenging the dominant hegemonic discursive, material, and conceptual boundaries of traditional archives. He presents a collection whose contents consist of fleeting, queer moments, such as gender nonconformity and same-sex eroticism, that are difficult and problematic to classify. Furthermore, rather than claim to represent a factual, historical record, Zaatari is deliberately drawing attention to issues of context and shifting meanings in this archive. Thus, he continuously generates new narratives based on private memories, experiences and viewers' interpretations. Along similar lines, in "Ephemera as Evidence" (1996), queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz argues that the ephemeral is central to an understanding of queer history. Muñoz (1996) reminds us that the apparent lack of queer presence in official archives and history is related to the performative and ephemeral quality of queer acts. Focusing on the "invisible evidence" of queerness, Muñoz (1996) shows the necessity of rethinking the evidential when writing queer history. One can also draw on Judith Halberstam's conception of a queer archive, which is [...] "not simply a repository; it is a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of queer activity" (2005: 169-170). She further points out the necessity of cultural and artistic practitioners to "wade through the material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of queer history in the making" (2005: 170). Zaatari takes on such a role. By appropriating and juxtaposing vernacular anonymous images, he incites us to remember a different past, ultimately eliciting a reevaluation of identities and the relations to their sociocultural specificities.

In considering photography as performative we can, in a similar way, consider the queer archive as a performative apparatus. The performative is understood here via theorists Austin and Butler as the reiterative enactment, across time, of meaning

(including that of the “self” or subject) through embodied gestures, language, and/or other modes of signification. It opens the supposedly static work of art construction by art history to the temporal, and to the fluctuations of invested and embodied engagements by viewers, who have become participants of the works. As well, as noted by Downey (2014a, 2014b), the collaboration between Zaatari and Madani is also an ongoing performance. It’s an intervention into the photographer’s studio, work and life space over the years to re-activate his economy and displace his practice. Madani’s collection of photographic images are a significant resource in reclaiming forgotten histories of the Lebanese people. The collective effect from each of the individual stories that are brought to light by Zaatari gives way to a local, autonomous representation upon which the Lebanese people can not only locate themselves, but also challenge and disrupt the oppressive and denigrating visual and historical narratives imposed by Western cultures, and ultimately imagine new ones. Today, Zaatari’s work is novel because of the cross-cultural exchange on sexuality he brings forward with the appropriated imagery. His appropriated photographic images open-up an inquiry on local nebulous articulations of sexuality in Lebanon, which is discussed vis-à-vis the context of contemporary neoimperialist discourses of queer sexuality.

Chapter Three

Hidden Voices, Unruly Bodies: Speaking within Metaphors in *Majnounak* (1997)

“Superman is an *Arab*.” This bold statement stems from the title of Joumana Haddad’s recent publication (2012), which blends gender studies, poems, and biography. Haddad is a Lebanese award-winning poet, literary translator, and women’s rights activist who is best-known for her critique of the sexism that continues to dominate in Lebanon. In 2008, she launched the Arab world’s first erotic cultural quarterly magazine *Jasad* [*Body*], which covers provocative topics such as polygamy, virginity, and forced marriages, while also including personal testimonies and erotic stories.⁵⁸ Following her first book titled *I Killed Scheherazade: Confessions of an Angry Arab Woman* (2010) – a personal exploration of what it means to be an Arab woman today – Haddad published *Superman Is an Arab: On God, Marriage, Macho Men, and Other Disastrous Inventions* (2012) in which she examines the authoritative patriarchal system found in most Arab societies, including her birthplace of Lebanon. Using creative poetry throughout her work, she challenges the prevalent notion of hegemonic Arab masculinity, reflecting on how men envision themselves as supermen with “the same pretentious ‘I can save the day’ attitude (2012: 14). These men may seem themselves as powerful “saviors of humanity,” yet their “muscles are just a façade for [their] insecurities,” which result in their confusion of “manhood with machismo, faith with fanaticism, ethics with stale tradition, love with possession and strength with despotism” (2012: 21 and 15). Haddad’s main target isn’t Arab men but rather what she calls “the macho species, the narrow-minded species, the Neanderthal species, the ‘you only exist in my shadow’

⁵⁸ See: <http://www.jasadmag.com/en/index.asp> (accessed January 26, 2017).

species [...]” (2012: 20). As further noted by Haddad, this macho species (or, in other words, the ‘superman’) is conceived as a by-product of corrupt patriarchal systems that guarantee men various social, political, religious, economic powers that result in the oppression of women. Throughout her writing, Haddad seeks to redefine masculinity in a way that would allow men to express “[...] all their clumsiness, timidity, flaws, slips, and weak spots” (2010: 12). Her provocative viewpoints and resistance to Lebanese patriarchal society has led to numerous threats of murder, rape, stoning, and acid attacks.⁵⁹ Such violent intimidation only strengthens Haddad’s critical position as a woman, a writer, a mother, and a feminist to continue the constant battle against the machismo mentality in Lebanon. As we are reminded by Haddad, patriarchy lives strong in the social and cultural fabric of Lebanon and its deconstruction is urgent.⁶⁰

In the following sections, such urgency to resist imposed values of patriarchy are shown in Zaatari’s video *Majnounak* (Crazy of You) (1997), in addition to the ways straight-identified men are depicting and negotiating their identity in patriarchy. Within this chapter, we examine Akram Zaatari’s *Majnounak* (Crazy of You) (1997), a video artwork in which three men recount their sexual conquests of women. This work is significant – both among Zaatari’s works and within the wider artistic community in Lebanon – because of its subject matter, namely hegemonic masculinity in Lebanon as it relates to sexual violence. As well, the way that Zaatari constructs the video to discuss

⁵⁹ See: East, Ben. “Joumana Haddad's Book ‘Superman Is an Arab’ Lampoons Gender Politics.” *The National*, <http://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/books/joumana-haddads-book-superman-is-an-arab-lampoons-gender-politics>, September 12, 2012 (accessed January 26, 2017); and Segal, Victoria. “Superman Is an Arab By Haddad – Review.” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/sep/11/superman-is-an-arab-review>, September 11, 2012 (accessed January 26, 2017).

⁶⁰ For instance, while women are sexually harassed and assaulted every day they are blamed by the police force, the media outlet and public opinion for having “brought it on herself,” thus becoming the accused versus the victim (Haddad, 2012: 77-78).

such topics is meaningful. For instance, instead of relying solely on traditional documentary practices, he incorporates appropriation and video art practices. He also utilizes homoerotic undertones to question the validity of the men's stories.

We begin by describing *Majnounak* in detail. Then, we situate the video within contemporary practices of video art by queer and feminist artists both in Lebanon and abroad, as well as briefly covering the recent social and political history of Lebanon as it relates to the rise of video art. Following such contextualization, we proceed to analyze the construction of hegemonic masculinity as raised in the video, as well as Zaatari's pointed critique of rape culture and the pornographic imagination in Lebanon. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the queer practices employed by Zaatari, which are tactics for resisting censorship and documenting dominant conceptions of masculinity.

Gender politics remain a rare topic in Lebanese film and video art, but there are a few notable exceptions. In mainstream culture, for instance, actress and director Nadine Labaki's film *Sukkar Banat [Caramel]* (2007) explores and questions gender roles, norms, and patriarchal values in Post-Civil War Lebanese society. Through the story of five women from different generations, Labaki addresses several social issues and taboos that deal with sex before marriage, the hymen reinstatement surgery, repressed sexuality, female desires, and ageing. This feature film is the first of its kind to be produced in Lebanon and in Lebanese Arabic dialect, and is a best-selling Lebanese film. Her most recent film *W halla' a la wayn [Where Do We Go Now?]* (2012) addresses the sensitive topic of sectarianism in Lebanon. The film portrays Muslim and Christian women living in peaceful coexistence in their village. They unite to prevent and stop the sectarian tension and violence propagated by men. Both award-winning

films have been presented in international festivals, and are significant for their local representations, as well as their relatability and language accessibility for Lebanese viewers. These films offer sincere feminist depictions of women in a variety of empowered positions, both in traditional and modern contexts, as well as their conflicts with patriarchal authority. In *Caramel* (2007), the women are unabashedly using their voices and bodies to discuss and explore their desires. In *Where Do We Go Now* (2012), the women occupy the political spaces normally reserved for men – and they succeed in negotiating the peace despite the men’s actions.

While Labaki’s fictitious works fall into a genre of mainstream movies, artists within the Lebanese video art scene are also focusing on issues of gender and sexuality. Reina Mitri’s *A propos de la poire* [*About the Pear*] (2001), a short five-minute video, explores sexuality and its taboos. Through a history of erotic art of various cultures, her work examines how sexuality was considered a “source of life” free from contemporary prejudices. In *De la seduction* [*On Seduction*] (1997), a thirty-three-minute poetic personal-documentary, filmmakers Nesrine Khodr and Ghassan Salhab provide a space in which women from different generations voice their mixed experiences with desire, seduction, and love. In *Shameless Transmission of Desired Transformation per Day* (2000), filmmaker Mahmoud Hojeij documents morality police in Beirut in their attempts to stakeout young women in public places and at checkpoints throughout the city, forcing them to reveal and confess their most intimate sexual acts.⁶¹ These works are important in that they offer – through both fiction and non-fiction – glimpses into an

⁶¹ Mitri’s *About the Pear* (2001), Khodr and Salhab’s *On Seduction* (1997), and Hojeij’s *Shameless Transmission of Desired Transformation per Day* (2000) are examples drawn from Laura U. Marks’s *Hanan Al-Cinema: Affections for the Moving Image*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2015.

ongoing feminist dialogue around topics of sex, sexuality, intimacy, desire, as well as the violent conquest of women that accordingly represses the conversations around these topics. Each work contributes to a destabilization of gender norms and hegemonic power structures. Situated in this shifting continuum of the topics of gender, sex and sexuality in Lebanon, we find Akram Zaatari's *Majnounak* (Crazy of You) (1997).⁶² As will be explained, Zaatari is engaging the same power structures of patriarchal oppression and violence. However, *Majnounak* is different from the aforementioned films and video-artworks in two ways. Firstly, it is neither fiction nor documentary – rather, Zaatari creates a unique kind of narrative by appropriating found documents and altering their meanings. Secondly, it focuses specifically on the performance of hegemonic masculinity, with a decidedly queer twist.

3.1 *Majnounak* [*Crazy of You*] (1997)

Set in the industrial suburbs of Beirut, *Majnounak* is a twenty-six-minute video, narrated in Arabic and subtitled in English,⁶³ and taking place in the decade that follows Lebanon's Civil War (1975-1990). The video opens to the jolting blue image of the Mediterranean Sea. Filmed at the 'Corniche' – a famous seaside promenade located in Beirut's Central District, popular especially among men looking to pick-up younger men for casual fun or prostitution – the video-camera captures bodies of pedestrians that sweep in slow motion onto the screen. Then, synchronized with the ticking sound of a

⁶² The title of Zaatari's video *Majnounak* is translated in English to 'Crazy of You,' which is grammatically odd and incorrect. It appears not only in the title but also in the English subtitles of a scene where a woman sang "my heart is crazy of you". The French version of *Majnounak* is translated as *Fou de toi* ('Crazy about you' or 'Crazy for you'). However, the literal translation of 'Fou de toi' in English is 'Crazy of you'. Therefore, it is possible that the title (*Majnounak*) was translated from Arabic to French, and afterwards from French to English.

⁶³ The video is also available with French subtitles.

metronome, a woman's voice off-screen recites in Arabic with English subtitles what seems to be a love letter:

- 1 In order to retain a memory of every love
 - 2 To have a place for every memory
 - 3 And in order for each place to have a story
 - 4 For each story to have a beginning and an end
 - 5 But then all is over, what remains of love are the words and the places
 - 6 Beirut
 - 7 The pines, Raouche, together
 - 8 I love you
- (00:16 – 00:49 mins).

Seconds later, her voice begins to sing “my heart is crazy of you” which echoes the video’s title. While at first the title *Majnounak (Crazy of You)* may suggest a romantic relationship between two individuals, we quickly learn the deeper and darker signification of the relationship that has turned into a stalking and violent obsession. Following this introductory scene, the video proceeds to a collection of interviews with three young working-class seemingly heterosexual men. The interviews in *Majnounak* are structurally organized by content, which Zaatari divides into four subsections and labels in the video as such: 1) “language,” (1:33 mins) 2) “sites and beginnings,” (4:05 mins) 3) “sex,” (10:52 mins) and 4) “endings” (17:18 mins). Accordingly, in each section, the interviewees seem to have been asked the same questions and are given the exact same duration as the others (Hojeij and Zaatari, 2002). Zaatari does not actually ask the questions on camera, but the answers from each respondent cover similar issues. We can only suspect that the questions asked could be: how and when did you try to sleep with a girl? Can you share with us the steps you took? Throughout the interviews,

the young men boastfully recount in detail their erotic stories, from which emerges a pattern: they start with seduction, continue with foreplay and end with sexual assault. After the interviews are done, we see and hear a larger group of men (not the interviewees) chanting misogynistic songs, simultaneously as news captions inform us of the deaths of various women, either by suicide, ‘honor’ killings, or murder by their lovers. At one point, the men are seen driving in an old car while jokingly dancing to the chants. The video ends with the group of men lined up and facing a brick wall, as they continue to chant with their backs turned to the viewers. Notably, weaved intermittently throughout the work are short moments, which include: a separate interview that Zaatari conducts with a body-builder who is being injected with steroids in his buttocks (24:54 mins), an appropriated Herbal Essences shampoo commercial of a woman screaming in ecstasy (03:19 – 0:36 mins), segments from a video game showing a male hero in a race against time to rescue the princess (22:49 mins), and multiple newscasts reported by a female anchor that cover two local stories in 1997 – one about a woman who survived an attempted murder and the other about one who perished in an honor killing (24:05 – 24:50).

This artwork is significant in that it visually engages a constellation of issues pertaining to the construction of hegemonic masculinities, and the resulting violence towards women. The men’s narratives are similar to the many stereotypical images of masculinity seen on television and in videogames, which they try to adopt and convey to other men. For instance, through various poses – in front of a car, on the basketball court (fig. 35), and near the seaside – the men seem to be presenting to the camera their own version of a ‘courageous’ and ‘seductive’ man, which can only be irresistible to women. Their clean-cut and macho-laden appearances serve as pretense to perverse accounts of

their sexual experiences and relationships, and their ‘conquests’ of women. Additionally, the video not only portrays a cutting portrait of traditional masculinity with which the interlocutors identify, but also highlights how men’s narrow understanding of sex and romance are used to justify their acts of sexual violence and exploitation against women. The video also tackles issues of body sculpting, sexual language, and misogynous chants, all of which become elements of expression for their fantasies.

Additionally, *Majnounak* is particularly interesting because of the short constructed and staged moments inserted by Zaatari. As will be examined in detail, the contents of these moments can be read as collectively presenting a queer subtext. Furthermore, their juxtaposition with the rest of video’s representation of hypermasculine fantasies destabilizes the context, and subsequently the viewers’ perceptions and understandings. My hypothesis is that Zaatari’s method for creating this artwork is arguably a queering of traditional documentary practices, similar to the queering of Madani’s photographic archive as explained in the previous chapter. Furthermore, it is interesting to note Zaatari’s use of subtitles. At first glance, they seem to exist solely to make the video accessible to a global audience. Upon closer scrutiny, we see that subtitles are a component of the artwork, functioning beyond simple accessibility: Through repetition, they serve to reinforce the emerging and changing meanings of what is said, seen and heard.

3.2 The Emergence of Video Art in Lebanon

Before beginning an in-depth analysis of *Majnounak*, it is crucial to understand the historical, political, social and artistic contexts of video art in Post-Civil War Lebanon. In the late 1990s, Lebanon saw the development of an artistic infrastructure

such as Ashkal Alwan and Ayloul,⁶⁴ in addition to the introduction of communications and audio-visual departments in Lebanese universities, which paved the way for a prominent generation of video artists like Mahmoud Hojeij, Mohamad Soueid, Jayce Salloum, and Akram Zaatari (Hojeij and Zaatari, 2002). As discussed by Mahmoud Hojeij and Akram Zaatari, two main factors influenced video production in Lebanon: “first, the absence of any past tradition of filmmaking in the country allowed artists a certain freedom in working with form, exploring video not as a substitute for film but as a specific medium; and second, the dominance of conventional television prompted the exploration of new ways of telling beyond using video to showcase evidence” (2002: 80). The coverage of the Lebanese Civil War, as dominated by mainstream television, was particularly contentious for the aforementioned artists, who – through video – sought alternative narratives and histories.

Following the Taif Agreement of 1989, which sought to provide the foundations to end the Post-Civil War, Lebanese artists and intellectuals who were living in diaspora or studying in the U.S. and abroad, such as Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Katia Jarjoura, Jalal Toufic, Walid Raad, and Akram Zaatari, returned to Lebanon to make films, teach, mentor, and found organizations (Marks, 2015). In 1992, Lebanese-Canadian Jayce Salloum and Lebanese-American Walid Raad offered a video workshop in Beirut (with only a portable editing suite and a Hi-8 camera) to artists and writers to develop independent video projects (Marks, 2003: 50), which generated “a hybrid of critical documentary, experimental video, and personal video” with a focus on “local and regional interests” (Marks, 2003: 11-12). In 2001, Akram Zaatari and Mahmoud

⁶⁴ Before the first edition of the Ayloul festival of international art and video in 1997, video in Lebanon was considered only a substitute for film or television.

Hojeij curated “Transit Visa,” a festival of experimental video with a pan-Arab focus, which showcased nine young Arab artists, all working with video. Hosted in Beirut, the week-long festival offered video post-production classes, screenings and mini-presentations on the medium (Marks, 2003). In the end, the artists of “Transit Visa” produced one-minute videos contributing to the flourishing video scene in Lebanon, which is well documented by the organizers in a published catalogue (Hojeij and Zaatari, 2011; Marks, 2003).

The accessibility of video, in the 1990s provided opportunities for artists of the Arab world and its diaspora, such as Walid Raad, Eliane Reheb, Jocelyne Saab, Mohamed Soueid, Rania Stephan, Jalal Toufic, Akram Zaatari, to express personal issues on topics of war and displacement “in explicit experimental ways” (Marks, 2015). For art historian Laura U. Marks (2015), Lebanese artists in the mid-1990s developed artworks known as “experimental documentary” as a creative means to address the issue of Civil War and its devastating aftermath. In this context, ‘experimental’ has two meanings according to Marks, the first being to carry out experiments or to try things out; and second, experimental based on experience (2015: 2). As further noted by the author, the double meaning of “experiment and experience is more familiar to the Arabic word *tajriba*, like the French *expérience*, than it is to the English *experiment*: one can speak in Arabic of *sînema tajribî* with that double sense of experiment and experience” (Marks, 2015: 2-3). These aspects of experiment and experience are important to the works of Zaatari, as well as his contemporaries. Video art, as will be explained, provided an excellent opportunity for them to experiment beyond the conventions of established artistic media.

3.3 Why Video Art?

Through its early beginnings, video as a medium was particularly attractive for many women artists because of its convenience and immediacy, lack of history⁶⁵ and less commodifiable nature (Meigh-Andrew, 2014a; 2014b). Thus, it gave them a voice to speak, critique, and deconstruct dominant hegemonic ideologies and the patriarchal status quo (Meigh-Andrews, 2014a; 2014b). In 1965, Sony launched the first portable recording camera named ‘portapak,’ which simplified the documentation and experimentation of artists’ works, therefore precipitating an instantaneous result. The immediacy and easy manipulation of video also made it possible for women to engage in introspective work without the intrusive presence of a generally male crew and technicians (Elwes, 2006). This allowed women artists to “easily take unprecedented control over both the substance and terms of their visibility,” providing an empowering nature (Elwes, 2006: 41). Such visibility resulted in a recognition that could not be easily attained within the more traditional and predominantly male-dominated fields of painting and sculpture (Brandon, 2005; Meigh-Andrew, 2014a; 2014b). These traditional fields, known for being an all-male club, often devalued or disregarded women artists (Brandon, 2005). At that time, video was an unconventional and unexplored medium. It offered women and feminist artists the opportunity to work on “equal footing with their male counterparts” (Burgess Fuller and Salvioni, 2002: 311),

⁶⁵ See: Hanhardt, J.G. and M.C. Villaseñor, “Video/Media Culture of the Late Twentieth Century”. *Art Journal*, 54(4), 1995: 20-25. As discussed by the authors, there seems to be a nonlinear history to video, a history that does not unfold within a sequential logic of developments defined by technology, nor does it lend itself to a reductivist and essentialist reading of video as a medium uniquely created by one sole community of artists” (1995: 20). To enter the art world, video first identified itself with the modernist discourse (Magnan, 1997) that was defined by its specific formal characteristics: instantaneity of information, electronic reproduction, and the multiple of the original (Antin, 1975).

while simultaneously disrupting the Modernist structures in art often defined as masculine (Brandon, 2005).

A prominent example of the use of video art by women is Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988), in which she records her close and emotional relationship with her mother. The video revolves around letters written by Hatoum's mother in Beirut to her daughter living in London. The letters appear as Arabic text moving over the screen, which the artist reads aloud in English. The scripts are superimposed on a backdrop of fixed images of Hatoum's mother's naked body in the shower. The taped conversations in Arabic openly explore the mother's feelings, sexuality and her husband's disagreement of Hatoum's intimate observation of her mother's naked body. The durational representation of the naked female body was made possible here by video – it is notable that Hatoum's father disagreed with such representation, as it indicates how problematic it would be for a male camera crew or male management to oversee such a project. In the Lebanese context, a woman's body represents virginity, purity, and moral redemption – but only within the confines of marriage. A woman's naked body outside such a context would be considered dirty, sinful, and punishable. In other words, for anyone other than the husband to see such exposing images of his wife's body, at once violates the patriarchal construction of women's roles, as well as the validity of men's claims to their bodies.

The personal video camera allowed Hatoum to bypass male authorities, thus reclaiming space for a mother and daughter to bond on their own terms. The video further speaks about the artist's experiences of the Arab Diaspora, in which she tries to overcome the effects of exile, displacement, isolation and separation due to the Lebanese Civil War. By inextricably weaving intimate personal images and recordings, Hatoum

adheres to the feminist mantra of the political is personal – in other words, against a backdrop of exile and displacement, Hatoum and her mother are claiming their rights to remain connected. It is an act of resistance against both war and patriarchy (Waterhouse, 2014).

3.4 Video Art as a Tool of Representation and Subversion in Zaatari's Works

The use of video – a medium fundamental to Zaatari – is favoured as an affordable and portable tool of representation (Elias, 2011) and more easily distributed than other traditional mediums such as painting and sculpture. As such, video art is one area where Arab artists re-positioned the image between the real and imagined, questioning and subverting common conceptions and mining historical narratives (Shabout and Mikadadi, 2009: 11). Video art in the Arab World, in contrast to film, was not institutionalized in the internal structures historically controlled by men (Marks, 2003; Pytlinski, 2006). The confrontational and intimate nature of the medium attracted minority artists around the globe to become politically engaged, “impatient to speak, visualize and become visible” (Meigh-Andrews, 2014: 283). In this sense, video in the Lebanese context provides for the practices of social and cultural critique, through personal expression, experiences, experimentation, activism, anecdotes, and subversive storytelling (Marks, 2003).

Such artistic practices are especially pertinent given that it is difficult to construct a straightforward narrative of Lebanon's history, due to the complicated nature of its Civil War, and its direct involvement with and investment from foreign powers (Haugbolle, 2010; Berti, 2012). Throughout the war, archives, historical documents, and artworks have been destroyed, leaving a major void in accounts of the formation of the country. Since its foundation in 1943 (the date marks the end of the French Mandate)

Lebanon's modern history has not been taught in its schools because of the inability of government officials to reach a formal consensus on the national curriculum, due to disagreements about the events of the Civil War, in addition to continuing sectarian divisions. This is also due, in part, because of the destruction of official and historical documents, archives, museums, and artworks during the Civil War (Narusevicius, 2014). However, there are some state-approved history textbooks, which offer differing and selective versions of Lebanon's past based on religious affiliation (Haugbolle, 2010; Narusevicius, 2014). For instance, "Christian schools tend to focus more heavily on the Phoenician past," while "the Muslim schools teach more about Lebanon under the Arabs".⁶⁶ In response to the lack of 'official' documents, Lebanese artists have employed "experimental visual practices [...] to poignantly critique the politics of representation and read the codes of documentary evidence in ways that readdress this representational crisis" (Westmoreland, 2013b: 721). Such crisis is perhaps a reflection of the unresolved status of the Civil War. In fact, the Taif Agreement superficially addresses, but does not resolve or officially reconcile the main problems behind Lebanon's continuing ordeal: that of Lebanon's competing sects and its foreign military occupation (Saseen, 1990: 67).

Within such a reality, Lebanese artists work to make sense of the country's violent past, insecure present, and uncertain future. Some of these works include: Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige's *Wonder Beirut* (1997-2006), a photographic project that showcases tourist postcards from Beirut's pre-Civil War era. The series focuses on a fictional photographer, Abdallah Farrah, who was commissioned by Lebanon's tourism

⁶⁶ Retrieved from: BBC News, "History Lessons Stymied in Lebanon," http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7988399.stm. (accessed January 14, 2017).

board to showcase attractions in Beirut. Shortly after the Civil War erupted in 1975, the photographer burnt the negatives to mirror the damage caused by the war. The resulting photographs are printed from Farrah's damaged negatives showing the residue of an unresolved war, distorting the sights of Beirut. Additionally, examining the effects of war is Lamia Joreige's *Object of War* (2006), a video series of several personal testimonials that discuss recollections of the Lebanese Civil War. Shown unedited, each of the four videos present someone who chooses a personal object as a starting point to their story. While the testimonials help to create a collective memory of the past, the series reveals the difficulty of conveying a single history of the Civil War. Another example is *Civil War, the film* (2012), a video artwork by Fouad Elkoury which attempts to chronicle individuals' experiences of the war in a Post-Civil War era. In the video, we see a man and a woman as they watch images of the war's devastation and destruction on a television monitor. Both individuals vividly recount the heavy bombardments, shootings, and the constant running to find shelters. These lens-based artworks address, individually and collectively, the fragmentation of Lebanon's history and the way people remember it personally and institutionally. They also provide a context to confront the many varying accounts and discourses surrounding the Post-Civil War, thus problematizing experience, memory, authenticity and authorship. Similar to the aforementioned works, Zaatari's *Majnounak* also emerges from a Post-Civil War context, questioning authenticity and memory (in this case, men's accounts of their sexual encounters), and utilizing appropriative strategies. However, its subject matter is somewhat unique in that it examines, almost exclusively, men's roles in gendered and sexual violence.

One of the most prominent examples of artworks by Zaatari's contemporaries that contribute to the rereading of Lebanon's historical documents is Walid Raad's *The Atlas Group Project*. This is also perhaps one of the only other works by a major Post-Civil War Lebanese artist that examines similar subject matters as *Majnounak*, including masculinities, sexualities, and violence. As such, this work provides a valuable example to help situate *Majnounak* within the contemporary discourse of video art in Lebanon. Raad is a critically-acclaimed Lebanese contemporary artist, having won international recognition for his landmark archival research that contests notions of history and representations of the Lebanese Civil War.⁶⁷ In 1999, he founded *The Atlas Group (1989-2004)* an archive group project that aims to "preserve, study, and produce audio, literary and other artefacts that shed light on Lebanon's contemporary history."⁶⁸ The project is composed of multimedia works and performances in addition to fictional characters, institutions, and invented photographic, audiovisual, and written documents. The aim of the archive built by *The Atlas Group* is to incite broader questions regarding visual documented representations of Lebanon's Civil War history. Raad does so by confecting and weaving both historical and fictional 'documents' of the Civil War, which comment on the conventions and authority of archival material, and problematizes the validity and reliability of historical visual documents relating to Lebanon's devastation (Cotter, 2009, 2013; Soutters, 2013; Stallabrass, 2013; Narusevicius, 2014). For instance, in *The Bachar Tapes (English version)* (2001), Raad

⁶⁷ Raad was born in Chbanieh, Lebanon, in 1967, and raised in East Beirut. Notably, at a young age, Raad collected materials and recorded his observations and experiences during the wars. In the early 1980s, he immigrated to the United States where he studied photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology, New York. He eventually earned a Ph.D. in Visual and Cultural Studies from the University of Rochester exploring his interest in the history, politics, and art of the Middle East, through conceptual photography, performance, video, and multimedia.

⁶⁸ See: www.theatlasgroup.org (accessed 14 December 2016).

constructs fictional video-recorded testimonies of Souheil Bachar, an imaginary character who was kidnapped and held hostage in solitary confinement by Islamic militants in Lebanon between 1983 and 1993. In 1985, however, Bachar is said to have been detained for a period of three months in a shared cell with five non-fictional American male hostages: Terry Anderson, Thomas Sutherland, Benjamin Weir, Martin Jenco, and David Jacobsen. In 2000, *The Atlas Group* produced a series of fifty-three videotapes in which the fictional character Bachar discusses his incarcerated days. Out of the fifty-three tapes only # 17 and #31 were available outside of Lebanon. In the tapes, Bachar directly and indirectly addresses political scandals such as the Iran-Contra Affair in the United States, while also revealing the homoerotic aspects and sexual encounters during his captivity with the five American hostages (Westmoreland, 2008). Through his testimony in the video, Bachar reveals how the American hostages feared his Arab male body yet they were compelled to sexually touch him. Bachar describes a homoerotic incident where he was sexually assaulted during one night and later beaten by one of the men:

I remember one night in particular. One very hot summer night. When the room was filled with the stench of our sweat. As usual, we were all on the floor sleeping or trying to sleep. I felt someone's ass rubbing against my crotch. Someone was rubbing himself on me. I became hard. And I don't know why, but I pressed myself against his ass. It felt good. Seconds later, he punched me in the groin, as if my hard-on provoked him. I stayed quiet. (Bachar as qtd. in Helstrup, 2003: 45)

After being freed, the American captives' personal stories were documented in Western media reports and later published in books. The aforementioned American hostages are

real; though Bachar is a fictional character, his story is used to uncover the homoeroticism of the hostages' narratives, which usually remains hidden by the media (Helstrup, 2003; Westmoreland, 2008). Thus, through Bachar's fictional narrative, Raad challenges the Western-dominated media representations of the thousands of Lebanese kidnapped during the Civil War by occupying armies (Westmoreland, 2008). By envisioning and inserting alternative stories within the dominant narrative, Raad's work sheds light on histories often ignored from official archives about Lebanon's Civil War.⁶⁹ It is notable that these histories are sometimes omitted in the global context as well. For instance, in the final chapter of the art history textbook *Themes in Contemporary Art* (2004), the art critic Niru Ratnam discusses Walid Raad, *The Atlas Group Project* and *The Bachar Tapes* (2001) within the context of art and globalization, as presented at Documenta 11, in Kassel (2002). At Documenta 11, not only were the tapes (#17 and #31) in which Bashar speaks about the male to male sexual assault presented, the dialogue was actually included in the wall-text of the exhibition space (Helstrup, 2003). However, Ratnam completely omits the colonizer-colonized sexual assault in his chapter. Another example of such omission is found in the exhibition catalogue of *Walid Raad* (MOMA, New York, 2015-2016) by art curators Eva Respini and Barbara Lee and art writer Finbarr Barry Flood (2015). Respini and Lee discuss *The Bachar Tapes* at length; however, in a very brief statement, she mentions only that Bachar describes some "homoerotic activities" (2015: 38). Such language is problematic because it omits the sexual assault reported by Bachar, and instead casts it as merely

⁶⁹ It is worth mentioning that while Raad is not considered a queer artist, we can argue that his *Bachar Tapes* (2001) could certainly be read as queer because of how they challenge and subvert the heteronormative history and narratives of the American hostages.

“homoerotic activities” (2015: 38). The brevity of Respini and Lee’s writing on this topic, as well as their omission of the assault, perhaps reflect an aversive attitude towards such taboo subjects, and paradoxically reinforces the importance of Raad’s critical and exploratory works. Here, one could suggest that Raad’s art has queer overtones.

The use of video art by Arab artists repositions the image between the real and imagined in order to question and subvert the historical narratives put forth by those in power (Shabout and Mikadadi, 2009). For Zaatari, video enabled him to reveal topics omitted and censored from Lebanese newspapers and television programming, which are dominated largely by sectarian structures (Elias, 2011). Choosing to work with video instead of film or television in Beirut became a conscious political choice, as was the level of subject matter he explored, like the dominance of male sexual discourse and homosexuality (Hojeij and Zaatari, 2002). As noted by art historians Nada Shabout and Salwa Mikadadi (2009), the choice of video has proven to be suitable for the political and social nature of Arab art. In his hands, the camera becomes a tool of subversion as he seeks to shed light on the invisible, explore alternative representations, ask questions, stimulate reflections, and provide a context on issues of identities, more particularly queer identities. In addition, the use of video and photography allows him to record time, compiling personal moments that compose histories through unconventional explorations. Thus, *Majnounak*, as well as Zaatari’s other artworks, serve to motivate social change through the vital process of unearthing alternative histories in Lebanon.

3.5 Rape Culture and the Pornographic Imagination in *Majnounak*

As examined by Haddad (2012), masculinity in Lebanese culture is generally categorized under acts of heroism because men see themselves as valiant saviors and

protectors, roles that are emulated from the militiamen.⁷⁰ In *Majnounak*, the idea of the heroic (“superman”) lies in their tireless determination in acquiring their sexual gratification. The discourse of rescuing women resonates with the American anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod’s scholarly works (2002; 2012) that examine how Arab women within our popular imagination are seen as oppressed victims “having no rights, agency or ability to escape violence,” thus needing to be saved (2012: 19). Such ideas stem from the notion that women are traditionally symbolic of a culture, which if used politically, for instance in nationalist projects, justify men’s war, violence, and forms of domination (Abu-Lughod, 2002: 344). Such depiction is evident in *Majnounak* since the only visual depiction of the woman takes form as a vulnerable videogame character who appears to be kidnapped and needing to be saved by the heroic male protagonist. In accordance with Abu-Lughod, the woman becomes an object that solely functions to validate men’s course of action. One of the only instances of a female voice in Zaatari’s video is heard in the occasional interjection of an anonymous woman’s voice-over. She narrates the same lines in a robotic and monotone way, which are repeated throughout the whole video. In one instance, this voice-over is juxtaposed with scenes from the video game, which depicts a male hero on a quest to save the princess and restore the kingdom. While the woman speaks (and her lines appear in English subtitles), the male hero’s lines are seen in captions from the videogame:

- 26 I’m suffering
- 27 I think of you
- 28 Everything reminds me of you

⁷⁰ Also see: Sune Haugbolle’s *War and Memory in Lebanon*. Cambridge University Press, 2010, and “The (Little) Militia Man: Memory and Militarized Masculinity in Lebanon”. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, Winter 2012, pp. 115-139.

- 29 I want you to save me
30 I want you courageous
(Captions from the videogame on screen: The nation will soon be mine!)
- 31 I want you stronger
(Captions from the videogame on screen: Ahhh! The taste of revenge is sweet!)
- 32 I want you quicker
(Captions from the videogame on screen: Your father will pay the price for destroying the Imperial rule!)
- 33 I want you more beautiful
(Captions from the videogame on screen: What happened!)
(03:37 – 04:04 mins).

Like in the videogame, where the female character is held hostage, the anonymous woman's voice offers little sign of agency. Yet, her voice-over calls for the man's attention. Her voice may function as a manifestation inside the man's head – insisting he take anabolic steroids to strengthen his physique, or urging him to 'save her' therefore becoming the heroic figure. While asking him to be courageous (line 30) he responds by the phrase "The nation will soon be mine," alluding to the metaphor of the nation-as-woman and woman-as-nation. Women have long served as symbolic markers of the nation. Their bodies are seen to serve the nation –giving birth to the ideal male citizen (Ranchod-Nilsson and Tétreault, 2000). In this perspective, the woman's body as a national marker becomes carefully demarcated, protected, and policed (Pettman, 1996). Woman-as-nation can be disqualified from protection if she engages in any form of "unruly, ungrateful behavior, or by dishonoring themselves/their men/nation" or "simply by being an actively desiring sexual subject" (Scott, 1999). This passage is important as it sets the tone for the way that the interviewed young men approach the female body

and sexuality as conquest. This is alluded to in the sentence “Your father will pay the price for destroying the Imperial rule!” (04:56 mins) suggesting that the woman’s virginity or honor would be taken from her family through a sexual assault or rape.

Today, Lebanon remains a patriarchal society that manifests and institutionalizes male dominance over women and other vulnerable populations. That said, violence against women, more particularly rape and sexual violence, is a central issue for feminist movements in Lebanon. The problem with rape in Lebanon is amplified due to a lack of reporting of incidents by police and hospitals (Khoury, 2015), inaccurate definitions of sexual violence and harassment, and the dismissal of its effects (Ahmad, 2016).

According to Article 522 of the Lebanese Criminal Code, in the event a man rapes (including kidnapping) a woman, he can be acquitted if he marries his victim (Zuhur, 2005, 2008; Fateme, 2011). Rape is a means of controlling women’s bodies by an act of sexual violence, through causing or threatening immense physical and psychological harm and trauma (McDougall, 1998; Moawad, 2012). In other words, rape and sexual violence are not just about vaginal or anal penetration, they are about asserting domination through violence. Within that perspective, the young men’s action to ‘conquer’ or ‘acquire’ pleasure from a woman can be determined as form of patriarchal power. Such attitude towards sex can be heard in the young men’s interviews with Zaatari where they share their tactics of manipulation to enhance the like-hood of ‘getting it’ or ‘getting some’ even in the face of resistance from the young women. For instance, Sami, the young man in the red t-shirt, describes his sexual persuasion with a young girl, which led to a sexual assault:

128 I took her hand and put in on my ... dick
129 I said: “now it’s going to get hard and we’ll go to the bedroom.”
130 She said: “get away from me.”
131 We argued until I jumped over her, you see?
132 She took it off, finally by force.
133 She took of her bra, but wouldn’t take off her pants
(11:58 – 12:24 mins).

220 She said: “Sami that’s enough, let me put my clothes on I want to go”
221 I said: “you’re not leaving.” I lifted her up into the bedroom.
222 I laid her down on the bed took off my clothes and hers.
223 She was half-naked, but I made her take off her pants, by force.
224 She was nervous and shouted at me.
225 I said: “lie down naturally. There is [sic] nothing to fear.”
226 I lied on top of her, and told her: “hold my dick”
227 “rub it wherever you feel comfortable.”
228 She took my dick. I asked her to close her thighs.
229 She did, and we fucked.
230 I slept with her for nearly 45 min.
231 When she sat up she started crying. I said why are you crying?
232 She said: “nothing, but I didn’t think you were like that.”
233 I said: “don’t worry.”
234 She put her clothes on.
235 I offered her a ride back home, but she wouldn’t come with me.
236 She went alone.
(19:16 – 20:21 mins).

Throughout their stories, the young men project their actions in front of the camera as normative attempts to be ‘courageous’ and ‘seductive.’ As referenced in the previous chapter, social and cultural norms state that men are expected to engage in violent behavior, in this case sexual violence, to maintain their status of hegemonic normative

masculinity, which is largely represented as a stoic image (i.e. the *rajjula* or traditional Lebanese masculinity). Young boys and men are socialized to see themselves as powerful over women and to see women as sexual objects, leading to sexual violence against women. As argued by cultural theorist Sut Jhally (2007), mainstream culture and media have often constructed women around the “pornographic imagination,” in which women’s bodies are presented and valued as sex symbols that submit to the service of male fantasies and sexual pleasures. This display of misogyny is linked to male entitlement and power that ultimately justifies acts of violence, harassment, intimidation, forceful non-consensual sexual acts, and stalking of young women (Jhally, 2007; Moawad, 2012). The use of misogynistic language, objectification of women’s bodies, and the glamorization of sexual violence supports and perpetuates “rape culture.” Coined by feminists, the term ‘rape culture’ refers to a culture in which sexual violence is trivialized and normalized generally by male-dominant environments (such as sports, war, and the military), which condones violence against women (Projansky, 2001: 9). Also, the male gaze on women as “‘objects-to-be-looked-at’ contribute to a culture that accepts rape, and in which rape is one experience along a continuum of sexual violence that women confront daily” (Projansky, 2001: 9). *Majnounak* reveals the way language of rape culture works. For instance:

166 [...] “so you’re not hesitant anymore?”
(12:54 mins).

Such speech fetishizes “women’s sexual indecision” (Pascoe and Hollander, 2016), and is one of the tools used to justify rape and sexual assault. Furthermore, the victims are often blamed because rape culture has informed us that regardless of women’s protests,

they are seen as ‘enjoying’ being violently pursued, and seen as ‘provoking’ rape by wearing ‘provocative’ clothing, sending out mixed signals such as: staying out late at night, drinking alcohol, being flirtatious, or simply being sexually active (Buchwald, Fletcher and Ross, 2005; Valenti, 2007; Meyer, 2010; Bonnes, 2013). In other words, rape, sexual assault and violence against women are horrifyingly perceived as pleasurable and even desirable by some men (Pascoe and Hollander, 2016) leading society to trivialize, normalize, and accept male sexual violence, which perpetuates myths and misconceptions (Garbarino, 1999; Ravitch and Viterreti, 2003; Jhally, 2007).

One of those misconceptions of rape culture considers the average ‘good’ guy as not being a rapist because he doesn’t ‘fit’ the image of a rapist, who is a ‘bad guy’ who preys on and attacks women from dark alleys or bushes (Pascoe and Hollander, 2015).⁷¹ When examining *Majnounak*, it is clear that Zaatari draws attention to this as well. The interviewed men are young, beautiful, clean-shaven, and clean-cut; their appearances come across as innocent boys just joking and playing. Yet when they speak and describe their experiences, they reveal a macabre world where the sexual harassment and rape of women are normal, expected even. Here, one could suggest that Zaatari operates simultaneously as both an observer and a prosecutor revealing the assaulters. The power dynamic between Zaatari and the men requires close scrutiny, as does the precise role he takes in *Majnounak*.

⁷¹ It is important to mention the tremendous contribution of feminist organizations and activists in Lebanon who continuously confront patriarchy to stop sexual violence against women, in addition to changing the cultural aspect of society’s mind. Organizations such as the Kafa: Enough Violence and Exploitation, an NGO based in Lebanon, Oxfam, and the United Nations are slowly shifting national classification of domestic abuse from a private and religious matter to a public one. They are fighting for the redefinition of the law system (which is still governed by confessionism) to make sexual assaulters and rapists accountable of their violence actions against women (Khoury, 2015).

In an interview, Zaatari describes himself as a documentary artist.⁷² We understand this statement to mean that *Majnounak* is not a documentary film – rather, it uses both sourced and created documents over a period of time to create an artwork. Nevertheless, it is useful to examine some documentary practices in order to better understand *Majnounak*. Within global documentary discourses, there is almost always an imbalance in the relation of power between both parties where the filmmaker tends to have an exploitive relationship with the participants (Nash, 2011). Filmmakers are conscious of the inequality of power in relation to participants, leading many to employ a “protective attitude” (Aufderheide et al., 2009: 7) that showcases the filmmaker’s concern, which leads to developing and maintaining a trustworthy relationship towards their participants. Usually, the “positionality” of a documentary filmmaker requires that he/she direct their attention beyond their subjective selves to create a sympathetic dialogue between both parties (Madison, 2012: 10). In *Majnounak*, Zaatari observes the interviewee and records what is happening and being said without directly intervening. In fact, throughout the entire video he is nowhere to be heard or seen, except for a quick reflection of his image in one of the participants’ sunglasses. The idea he is drawing from is to “let the subject forget they are being filmed and revert to acting ‘naturally’” (Bonner, 2013: 67). Yet, during the video, we sense a subtle tension in the relationship of the participants being filmed and the filmmaker. While the three men may use *Majnounak* (1997) as a platform to speak ‘proudly’ about their conquests of the other gender and describe their sexual encounters in detail, Zaatari succeeds in casting a generally negative light on them. For instance, while filming, Zaatari consciously

⁷² See: <http://www.kunstkritikk.com/artikler/ti-sporsmal-akram-zaatari> (accessed February 4, 2017)

avoided an anthropological approach to the interviewees, omitting any identifying information about the interviewees such as: name, age, occupation, religious affiliation, etc. In traditional documentary practices, such an act might be for the sake of protecting the identities of the subjects. For Zaatari, however, the point was to exclude any general information that would “reveal their humanity” (Hojeij and Zaatari, 2002). It seems he is less interested in their stories as persons, and more interested in how they collectively portray the voice and acts of a violent patriarchal order. Furthermore, in a few occasions Zaatari films the men as displayed on a television monitor in post-production, which gives a grainy effect reminiscent of police interview tapes exposing their crimes. Finally, the juxtaposition of the inserted moments throughout the video interrupt, destabilize and reframe the narratives as told by the men. This will be fully examined in the next section of this chapter. Hence, the nature of the video becomes a critique of the definition of hegemonic masculinity, as it is conceived and propagated by heteronormative men – in general – in contemporary Lebanon.

In constructing his critique, Zaatari may be said to be abusing his power as the one behind the camera, rather than establishing a sympathetic relationship with his subjects. It is one way in which he departs from documentary practices. Furthermore, he is an insider – Lebanese-born, male, and assumed in the heteronormative context of Lebanon to be heterosexual – privileges which likely allowed him to gain the men’s trust. They probably consented to revealing their personal experiences on video, but they were most likely unaware of how they would be portrayed. This is, to a degree, exploitative. Zaatari justifies it as “a legitimate practice when you are challenging dominant power” (Hojeij and Zaatari, 2002). For Zaatari, the urgent need to address violence against women and challenge dominant power seems to be a greater priority.

Here, one may situate Zaatari's actions as a video artist by considering the positionality of Jennie Livingston in her documentary film entitled *Paris is Burning* (1990), and its subsequent critique by bell hooks in her book *Black Looks* (1992).

In her film *Paris is Burning*, Livingston chronicles the ballroom scene of Harlem's late-1980s African-American and Latino gay male subculture. Throughout the film, Livingston brings attention to the condition of oppression, economic marginalization and police violence faced by her subjects in their daily lives, as perpetrated by an order of hegemonic, patriarchal whiteness. For instance, throughout Livingston's interviews with the ball's participants, we encounter Dorian Corey, an older femme queen and icon of the ball community, who brings a critique of race and class about how some ball performers aspired to a 'white' notion of femininity, rather than a black one. Additionally, we meet Willi Ninja, a successful vogue dancer who opens-up about how in many cases, the ball participants live in poverty, having been rejected by their family, and working as sex-workers to survive. As further noted by Ninja, the balls are a way of defying oppression and exclusion. Such a discussion is required for understanding the truly radical and subversive nature of gay African-American and Latino drag balls – they were born of a necessity to critique and undermine structural racism, and to defiantly make a place in the world for queer, black people. Near the film's end, we are presented with “the death of Venus Xtravaganza, a Latina / preoperative transsexual, cross-dresser, prostitute, and member of the ‘House of Xtravaganza’” (Butler, [1993] 2014: 125). At twenty-three years old, Venus Xtravaganza was brutally murdered in an instance of transphobic violence. This event emphasizes once again the violence faced by trans people of color and the hegemonic

constraints that surround the embodied experience of the participants in the ball scene (Butler, 1993; Coles 2007).

The film did receive criticism in regard to the ballrooms' racial politics. For bell hooks, the ballrooms presented an obsession with "an idealized fetishized femininity that is white" and that the participants, along with other "colonized, victimized, exploited" Black people, "worship at the throne of whiteness, even when such worship demands that we live in perpetual self-hate, steal, lie, go hungry, and even die in its pursuit" (1993: 148 and 149). hooks also questions Livingston's subjective position as a white lesbian director exploring the lives of gay Black men and trans people. hooks states: "Since her presence as a white woman/lesbian filmmaker is "absent" from *Paris is Burning*, it is easy for viewers to imagine that they are watching an ethnographic film documenting the life of black gay 'natives'" as opposed to, "not recognize that they are watching a work shaped and formed by a perspective and standpoint specific to Livingston" (1992: 151).

As further criticized by hooks, Livingston is actually profiting from putting Black queer subcultures on display. For hooks, Livingston portrays the gay black drag balls in a way that somewhat diminishes the tragedies faced by her subjects – in other words, she has made her film more palatable to a white audience. hooks elaborates: Livingston's film is presented as though it is a politically neutral documentary providing a candid, even celebratory, look at black drag balls [...] making it a spectacle (1992: 150). While I acknowledge hook's critical examination of *Paris is Burning*, she grants, perhaps, too little agency to the drag ball participants. At the core of Livingston's film, we are shown a conceptual, nuanced understanding and analysis of power structures intertwined with race, sex, and class. However, I also agree with hooks that, while the

platform is given to Livingston's subjects, ultimately Livingston herself, as the filmmaker, has more power to speak through what she chooses to show. As such, a critical examination of her whiteness in relation to *Paris is Burning* would have allowed for white viewers to see beyond the spectacle and to be more critical of their own privileges (hooks, 1992).

In this context, one might contend that Zaatari's physical absence in *Majnounak* is a way for him to avoid discussion of his privileges and positionality. This is especially pertinent considering the exploitative relation he has to his subjects. However, where Livingston is absent and comes across as a neutral observer, even asking interview questions on film, Zaatari in a subtle but deliberate way makes his political inclinations clear. Our clue to this is the one instance, close to the beginning of *Majnounak*, where we actually see an image of Zaatari with his camera crew, reflected in one of the young men's sunglasses. Zaatari's arms are crossed and his expression seems to be stern and discerning. We never see Livingston's camera, but Zaatari shows us his – he is disclosing his position as a critical observer. It is true that such a small glimpse of Zaatari and his camera crew may go unnoticed by many viewers. However, given that Zaatari was contending with a context of censorship and political oppression, and that he is discussing the highly taboo subject of sexual assault, his almost unnoticeable disclosure can nevertheless be read as a bold act. It is important to mention that it is hard to exploit and make a spectacle of power, especially patriarchal power, as it is already visible everywhere and oppressors cannot be seen as victims, at least in a post-colonial or feminist world.

Many Lebanese women are reluctant to challenge their aggressor's violent acts in court because of the state's failure to guarantee protection under the law. Also, rape

culture tends to describe women's behaviors as shameful in juridical trials – this is propagated in part by the *awra* – a term often literally translated as “private parts” that is deemed to be shameful, vulnerable, and weak (Stephan, 2006: 166). As cited by Anna Ball: the term: “operate[s] as a powerful motif for conceptions of female sexuality in traditionally patriarchal arenas of the Arab world, in which female sexuality is deemed a private rather than public matter” (2010: 73). At the center of Zaatari's video there is, of course, the absence of women's voices. One could suggest that such absence conveys how rapes victims are silenced due to being scared, terrorized, shocked, and shamed. This unfortunately leads to many un- or late- documented and often forgotten cases. In her book, *Men Explain Things to Me*, American writer Rebecca Solnit (2008) shows how men “mansplain,” a practice in popular American culture in which women are assumed to be incapable of understanding certain concepts the way men do, and for which they are accordingly mocked. Thus, good-natured men must patiently take pains to simplify said subjects so that women can understand them. Solnit asserts that ‘mansplaining’ is really an exercise in power, originating in the interruption and takeover of women's voices – thus silencing women from being heard. For instance, Solnit refers to cases of where “a woman can't testify that she was raped without a male witness to counter the male rapist. Which there rarely is” (Solnit, 2008: 5). As she further points out, sexual violence – whether it be rape, assault, harassment, and so on – becomes a way to silence women, and “to deny their credibility, to assert [men's] right to control over [women's] right to exist” (Solnit, 2008: 5).

In the video, the men's narratives serve to mystify the violent occurrence, treating rape as a female fiction or fabrication because men base the situation on ‘romantic love,’ and therefore as the consummation of male sexual desire. For instance,

in a section of the video one of the young men proclaims his love to a girl for his sexual conquest:

120 I said: “listen, I have loved you for a long time”
(11:31 mins).

125 She wanted to leave. I tried to convince her to stay.
126 I added: “you know what happened between lovers”
(11:43 – 11:51 mins).

136 I told her I loved her. She said: “you all say the same things.”
137 I said: “no. Try me and you’ll see.”
138 Love isn’t “love for fuck,” but sex leads to love
(12:36 – 13:47 mins).

This dialogue is masked by a romantic façade. From the young man’s perspective, he feels entitled to demonstrate his competence by being “masculine” and display his dominance superiority over women. Here, he tries to persuade the girl to engage in sexual intercourse even if she lacks interest. In this exchange, the young man’s speech takes over the female subject position rendering her absent. As suggested by French feminist-philosopher Luce Irigaray, men designate themselves as subjects using the discourse of action whereas women are prone to efface themselves. In her study, *Speculum of the Other Woman* Irigaray states that “any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the masculine” (1985a: 133). In other words, woman has been constructed as the ‘Other’ of man in discourses. Critical of Freud’s interpretation of women’s psychosexual development, Irigaray (1985b) intends to subvert Freud’s theory of sexuality, which is based on the “one-sex model” that claims that women exist only as variations of men. Such theory also implies that all things, including our experience and

language is primarily centered around men. In that sense, the male is at the forefront while the female is absent.

Irigaray refers to the speculum⁷³ – a concave mirror – as a metaphor to discuss women’s representation. As pointed out by Irigaray, the curved mirror (speculum) reflects the patriarchal discourse thus, reducing women’s bodies as objects for the male gaze. The mirror can only see women’s bodies as absent – a “hole.” She writes: “Through this specular surface [...] is found not the void of nothingness, but the dazzle of multifaceted speleology. A scintillation and incandescent concavity (Irigaray, 1985: 143). Through the metaphor of the speculum, Irigaray shows men’s inability to see or hear women’s sexual specificities.⁷⁴

In *Majnounak* (2011), the woman’s monotone voice-over is unidentified, letting us wonder if she exists or is a figment of the young men’s erotic fabrication. Consistent with Irigaray’s theory, her voice only seems to be useful as an object of sexual fascination for the men, thus strengthening and justifying the traditional attributes associated with hegemonic masculinity. In this regard, the video depicts a certain image – one of pride and heroism – that these men seek to project and identify with, therefore living up to the traditional hegemonic masculinity. Throughout the men’s stories, women are absent from their lives, except to be sexually conquered (like in the videogames). In fact, one may begin to think that they are uninterested in women. When

⁷³ Here, Irigaray draws from the speculum tool, which is used by gynecologists for examination of the inside of women’s genitalia.

⁷⁴ Irigaray’s post-Freudian, post-Lacanian feminist philosophy is based on the female’s body and genitals. Irigaray contends that female sexuality is not to be considered in Lacanian terms as a ‘hole’ (or lack), which ultimately confines and reduces women within a male system. In response, Irigaray describes a women’s sex as an image of contiguity of “two lips which embrace continually [...] they are pleasuring themselves-continually” (quoted in Marks and De Courtivron, 1981: 100). This allows a woman’s desire to be represented for-itself as opposed to represented in male terms.

detailing their relationship and sexual encounters, their stories quickly lose coherence. Progressively, they seem to lose interest in their female partners. Nowhere in the video do they speak about the sexual pleasure during intercourse, and most men have difficulties expressing even the sexual terminology to describe their relations. This offers the first clue to how Zaatari critiques and queers these men's stories. Their exclusively male-narrated fantasies create a reality in which only male sexuality matters, leaving a total absence of female desire, agency and perspective.

Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema"⁷⁵ (1989), provides an excellent model for understanding the presence and absence of women in *Majnounak*. Mulvey contends that women displayed on screen are continuously objectified in accordance to "the controlling male gaze."⁷⁶ Women are constrained "to be looked at as an image" as "[...] erotic objects [of desire] for the characters within the screen story, and [...] for the spectator within the auditorium [...]" (Mulvey, 1989: 19). Here, 'woman' is seen as solely providing experiences of visual pleasures and fantasies for men. As expressed by critic John Berger: "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determine[s] not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus, she turns herself into an object – a most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (Mulvey, 1975: 47). As further stated by Mulvey, narrative cinema encourages spectators to identify with the active male gaze of the male character (regardless of their sex) therefore reducing the

⁷⁵ Her essay was written in 1973 and published in 1975 in *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3.

⁷⁶ Mulvey is the one who coined the term "male gaze" that subsequently became the focal point for feminist film theorists.

female character as a passive “spectacle” (1989: 19).⁷⁷ Overall, Mulvey claims that the female body in classical film is either excessively present as an object to be gazed upon or as a site of absence.

Zaatari seems keenly aware of the potential of presence through absence as a feminist and queer tactic. Apart from the opening poem narrated by an anonymous female voice and the female news reporter, Zaatari seems to consciously exclude women’s voices throughout *Majnounak*; as we are given the men’s incomplete descriptions of the women in these stories, we are prompted to fill in the missing details. Through the process of creating our own mental images of the women, we develop sympathy for them. In the most extreme example, the absence of the women’s voice can also be understood as a violent act of murder. *Majnounak* demonstrates this progression through the news report of the ‘honor’ killing of Rana. The fact that this woman is named, and her body is only alluded to following her death is an example of the presence through absence. Here, there is one critical exception to the exclusion of female voices in *Majnounak*. The journalist is female, with a clear and authoritative voice; she provides the only non-sexualized and non-objectified verbal acknowledgement of a female body throughout the video. The fact that Zaatari chose to include this particular news story could be read as a powerful juxtaposition of men’s fantasies with women’s

⁷⁷ While the female figure on the screen provides a desire for male spectators, she also can be troubling to men because she evoked the fear of castration: “[...] her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure [...] thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and hence the enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified” (Mulvey, 1989: 21). According to Mulvey, the male escapes his “castration anxiety” through mechanisms of voyeurism (objectification of the image) and fetishism (identification with the image). Voyeuristic looking entails the demystification of the female icon (she is punished or saved by men): “pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt – asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness” (Mulvey, 1989: 21-22). In contrast, fetishistic scopophilia turns the female figure into “the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous. This builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The erotic instinct is focused on the look alone” (Mulvey, 1989: 21-22).

reality, and his attempt to redirect agency and empowerment to the female voice. Is one lone female reporter's voice enough to upend the entire construction of masculinity presented by all the men throughout the entire video?

In regard to the female voice, in her book *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (1988) Kaja Silverman, an influential American film theorist, builds on Laura Mulvey's model of the 'gaze' by extending a feminist critique in the field of the voice-over, in addition to questioning the role of the 'authorial voice' in classical narrative cinema. She appropriates the expression "acoustic mirror" – coined by French psychoanalyst Guy Rosolato⁷⁸ – to unravel "a range of 'subjective' issues, from castration, projection, disavowal, and fantasy to narcissism, melancholia, and the negative Oedipus complex" (Silverman, 1988: ix). Influenced by a psychoanalytic approach, Silverman builds on the relation between the voice and the body, stating that classical narrative films "hold the female voice and the body insistently to the interior of the diegesis, while relegating the male subject to a position of apparent discursive exteriority by identifying him with mastering speech, vision, or hearing" (1988: ix). In this perspective, she argues that a woman's incapability to lead the narrative is a result of her voice (and speech) being linked with interiority, in contrast to her male counterpart's "voice-over," which is often separate from the body. Thus, she argues that the "disembodied" female voice is a way to externalize and free feminine speech.

⁷⁸ See: Rosolato, Guy. "La voix: entre corps et langage." *Revue française de psychanalyse*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1974, pp. 75-94. Rosolato shows the voice's ability to be both internalized and externalized: "The voice [has the property] of being at the same time emitted and heard, sent and received, and by the subject himself, as if, in comparison with the look, an 'acoustic' mirror was always in effect. Thus, the images of entry and departure relative to the body are narrowly articulated. They can come to be confounded, inverted, to prevail one over the other" (quoted and translated in Silverman, 1988: 85).

Zaatari makes conscious use of the functions and powers of the voice in *Majnounak*. Relying on Silverman's theory, we see that every instance of the male voice is embodied and internalized. Thus, though the men are constructing various narratives, they are, at best, characters on display regulated to their bodies. This is one instance which can be read as a queer act – the 'gaze,' as understood by Mulvey, is appropriated and redirected from patriarchal power back onto itself. Furthermore, most instances of the women's voices occur only as described by the men (as seen in lines 51-54). With the exception of the news story, the few instances where we actually hear a female voice, "I want you stronger, I want you quicker, I want you more beautiful," (lines 30-33) are still arguably part of the male narrative. This is what the men fantasize about women's desires: to be saved, conquered, and protected. This point is demonstrated by the monotone grain of the female voice,⁷⁹ literally set to a metronome – this robotic voice does not belong to a person. It does not represent actual women in any capacity. Informed by Silverman's theory, one may think that the female voice-over is disembodied and perhaps commanding agency. However, the female voice here clearly does not belong to a narrator – it is merely part of the stories constructed by the men and related through their own perspectives. Thus, it is more accurate to say that this female voice-over is embodied by the men, and thus has no authorial agency of its own. In fact, the master narrator may be read to be Zaatari himself, who takes disembodiment one step further: not only is his body almost completely absent from the video, he also has no audible voice in *Majnounak*. Yet, as discussed earlier, Zaatari visually identifies

⁷⁹ In relation to the embodied voice I refer here to Barthes's "The Grain of the Voice" that instigates its aesthetic qualities: "the 'grain' is the body in the singing voice, in the writing hand, in the performing limb" (1991: 267-77).

himself, which allows the viewer to question his position. Furthermore, he is ‘speaking’ – through the appropriated clips which he inserts at carefully chosen moments, and through what he chooses to reveal and conceal about the men.

3.6 Queer Moments in *Majnounak*

In addition to the themes of sexual assault, rape culture, and the silencing of women in *Majnounak*, Zaatari allows himself to critically explore and challenge the young men’s hegemonic masculinity. The interviews not only show how the men assert a hegemonic heterosexual masculinity through coded-language and masculine images that are depicted in mainstream media, but also how they conceal other parts of it. Their narrated stories are so similar that we wonder if they are simply trying to get closest to a common fantasy ideal. In this perspective, one can imagine that maybe these men’s first sexual encounters were with men, and they hide it through this language of heterosexual ‘conquest’ in order to uphold their hegemonic masculine status – with all its privilege. Zaatari is drawing attention to the frailty of this narrative, further creating short appropriated video segments that could be characterized as queer moments or micro-experiences of queerness depicting a male-to-male sexual overtone. It is these small details that most comprise his moments of critique. The male identity portrayed in the video-documentary is nothing but mere reproduction of a hegemonic and heteronormative identity discourse, which is based on the repetition of a set of behaviors that constitutes a kind of institutionalized sexual normativity. To evoke Butler (1993, 1997) such an identity is subjected to regulated repetition, as the young men perform a dominant discourse in order to be accepted within their heteronormative peer groups. This leads young boys and men to engage in a practice of policing both their and others’ masculinities.

In one scene from *Majnounak*, a thin young man stands beside an automated boxing arcade machine (fig. 34) while masticating a piece of gum with his hair slicked back into a ponytail. He inserts a quarter and punches the bag with all his might, triggering a loud obnoxious alarm, which almost ridicules his punch and the act of ‘showing off’ his masculinity. Such machines are usually seen in local fairs or arcades in which men compete for the strongest punch that confirm their superiority vis-à-vis their peers. In his dark sunglasses, is a close-up reflection of what seems to be Zaatari and his crew behind their large cameras. This image is a reminder that the young man’s masculinity is constantly under observation and policed by other men. Here, we are shown how young men seek a dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity, involving themselves in peer groups to police sex and gender boundaries. This is done by validating heteronormative expressions and behaviors, which are unfortunately, perpetuated, supported, and encouraged by society (Martino, 2000). Because of this, men and young boys avoid any expressions associated with emotions or feelings that are commonly linked to femininity (Martino, 2000). The boxer repositions himself in front of the camera, leaning against the machine and gazing directly into the camera. The scene abruptly cuts to a shadowy, flat-chested figure, against an old-fashioned motif wallpaper, who oddly enough, resembles the thin young man with the ponytail from the previous scenes. The individual zips-up their black pencil skirt, clearly showing their large hairy hands and red painted nails. Off-screen, a young man whistles in attempts to get our attention. Another young fellow, wearing a blue checkered shirt and leisurely posing against a wall, gazes directly into the camera and curiously asks, in what seems to be in a polite manner:

- 23 Ma'am! May we slide it in without messing it?
24 Ma'am! We hope what is in between is blond.
25 If it was blond can we see it? If no, can we make sure?
(02:56 – 03:06 mins).

This short yet important scene displays the most ambiguous and queer moment of the video. It certainly stands out not only because of its theatrical, staged, and scripted nature but also the unusual metaphoric language which is inconsistent with the rest of other men's clear statements. At the beginning of the sentence, the young man refers to the individual (whom we have already identified as ambiguous – perhaps even transgendered) as 'ma'am.' By using such term, he reiterates the language of gender as a sign of performativity and language construction. As we are reminded by Butler in her introduction to *Excitable Speech* (1997a), an individual is discursively constructed through the operation of name-calling (or interpellations). Here, the interpellation relies on gender conventions, which are perceived and enforced differences between men and women. In this scene, the young man upholds his masculinity by depicting the person as a woman, regardless of how they identify. This is the only part in the video where a reference is made directly to a woman by asking her sexually ambiguous questions.

The sentence "May we slide it in without messing it?" references the curiosity and possibility of a group sex. Due to the degree of ambiguous language used, it is unclear exactly what he is asking for. The act of sliding it in is perhaps related to the sexual penetration of the vagina or anus by a finger, a penis, or even an object. His mention of "without messing it?" hints at maintaining the women's virginity, which is socially considered as a measure of worth for getting married. It has been documented that some heterosexual women chose to engage in anal sex as a means of maintaining

virginity and avoiding pregnancy in spite of religious and cultural beliefs (Uecker, Angotii and Regnerus, 2008). Zaatari intricately inserts another layer of reading by juxtaposing the scene with a found footage of a Clairol Herbal Essences shampoo television ad of the 1990s. These commercials were quite popular as they depicted a playful, yet taboo scene. While the commercial is narrated by a deep male voice who describes the product, a woman disrobes to enter the shower. Her nude body is seen through the frosted shower glass door where she enjoys her hair product so much she uncontrollably screams in joy to finally reach an orgasm. The young man follows by asking: “Ma’am! We hope what is in between is blond.” Here we may suggest that the young man speaks of the female genitalia as ‘blond’ to indicate virginity. The blondness is a key part of the young man’s sexual fantasy. Historically embodied in Aphrodite for the Greeks and Venus for the Romans, blond hair has been considered synonymous with illicit sex and sexuality, sexual attraction and sexual appeal to sexual desire and power (Cooper, 1971; Pitman, 2003; Donnan and Magowan, 2010; Milliken, 2012). For Joanna Pitman, writer for the London Times, the iconic figure of Aphrodite of Knidos became a symbol of erotic energy for prostitutes of the time who mimicked her by “singeing and then plucking their pubic hair and rubbing their skin with pumice stone until it glowed and shone, and [...] stung” (2003: 11). As further developed by Pitman, from the mid-fourteenth century, representations of Eve with flowy, strawberry blond locks had developed as the sinful appeal of Aphrodite, “both eternally desirable and forever forbidden” (2003: 43). However, over time, long, flowing blond hair has also stood for both promiscuity and virginity (Cooper, 1971: 76, 77 qtd. in Donnan and Magowan, 2010). Still today, the image of the ‘blond’ is considered one of the most desirable forms of femininity. This type of patriarchal depictions of women as being promiscuous –

easily accessible, consumable, and conquerable – is very pervasive in the young man’s narratives (as seen for instance in lines 139-141; 164-166; and 170-189). Women’s sexuality is yet again under scrutiny when he finally asks her: “if it was blond can we see it? If no, can we make sure.” While this sentence is open to interpretation, one may suggest that it does involve some sort of curiosity about the women’s virginity. The second part of his question, “If no, can we make sure” could be understood as a form of “subjective observation testing” that may involve inserting a finger into the vagina to determine the presence of an intact hymen. If the hymen is found to be ‘broken,’ then the woman ‘fails’ suggesting that she has been “habituated to sexual intercourse” (Nandy, 2001: 130). Of course, the hymen is widely misunderstood, and such testing is problematic as the vaginal laxity and the absence of a hymen can be caused by multiple factors. The concept of virginity, as explained by Moroccan feminist Fatema Mernissi, “locates the prestige of a man between the legs of a woman”; his dominant status is acquired and maintained by controlling women’s body and sexuality (1982: 182).

Another queer moment is played out throughout the video by a young bodybuilder who appears sporadically working out, posing shirtless, and speaking in front of the camera. In contrast to the other young men interviewed about their sexual conquests, the bodybuilder solely describes his relationship to his body, for instance: his daily diet, workouts, and use of supplements. The image of the bodybuilder’s upper-body is tightly cropped, emphasizing his physique. As documented by media and film scholars Adam Locks and Niall Richardson (2012), the image of bodybuilders is closely aligned with traditional heteronormative and hegemonic ideals of physical strength and aesthetic. For sociologists Brian Bailey and James Gillett, the desirable aesthetic of a powerful, muscular, and fit male body has “social and gender capital” with younger men

and their peer group (2012: 105). The depiction of the bodybuilder and his muscularity are purposefully used to visually indicate the ‘acceptable’ and normative hegemonic category of masculinity. Within classical art history, the muscular male body is represented within a co-existing tradition of both heroic and aesthetic figure, as is seen with statues of Greek gods and heroes. The bodybuilder’s muscularity can be read as a symbol of male power, which according to Richard Dyer is socially and culturally understood as ‘natural’ (biologically given), achieved (the activity of muscles-building), and phallic, all of which legitimize male domination (1992a: 114-115). In the video, the bodybuilder goes as far as using anabolic-steroids and other artificial supplements in order gain more hard muscles mass. For feminist author Margaret Walters, the hardness of muscles (their angular shapes, hard lines) symbolically references not only the erect phallus, but also represent the “abstract paternal power” (qtd. in Dyer, 1992: 115).

In one scene, the bodybuilder is seen through the reflection of a mirror in a living room. In the upper-right corner of the wall one can notice a large framed black-and-white photograph of what seems to be a heroic and patriarchal father figure overseeing or ‘policing’ the bodybuilder. The camera zooms into the mirror exposing the bodybuilder’s buttocks at which moment he slowly pulls down his jeans to receive a shot of anabolic-androgenic steroids by syringe from his male friend. The bodybuilder only reveals his naked buttocks to the camera while hiding his penis. As noted by cultural historian Kenneth Dutton, the male buttocks, contrary to the other sexual organs, are perceived as “non-intimidating” and “a symbol of passivity” because of its association to “childhood: a baby’s bottom can be patted, pinched or even admired for its dimples” (Dutton, 2012: 162). The scene of the syringe slowly and painfully jabbing into the bodybuilder’s buttocks could be emphasizing the construction of a hegemonic

masculinity that can be understood as toxic, while also suggesting a metaphor of anal sex.

From Zaatari's perspective the bodybuilder's physique in question is being gazed at and perhaps underpins a mild eroticism. Indeed, the representation of the bodybuilder's physique has always been the object of homoerotic desire and pleasure (Mercer, 2003; Dutton, 2012). The fact that the bodybuilder is shirtless, exposing his shaved smooth skin surface, is indicative of a "body-as-object." His body becomes an "object of the gaze," which is considered to be not only a symbol of seductiveness, but also of submissiveness (Dutton, 2012: 158). In the light of such suggestion, one may argue that the bodybuilder's hairless body is one that is not to be feared but in fact observed and touched.

Another queer suggestion made by Zaatari is in a scene with four men are filmed from the outside as they drive in an old car. They are dancing in the car in a mocking way, almost prancing, and singing:

273 "She went to the spring to get zucchini, the wind blew and her pussy showed."

274 This car seems to be really horny. How do you know?

275 Don't you feel those orgasmic moves?

(23:08 – 23:20 mins).

The car jerks as they move lurch backward and forward inside it. We also hear the squeaking of the car's seats as they move their buttocks in place, perhaps being anally stimulated by the vibrations of the car. This can be read as an expression of their sexual desires – having no available female partners leaves them with no choice but to engage

those motions in each other's company. Zaatari's intention is probably not to name these men as gay or bisexual – he seems to merely allow the viewer to begin wondering.

The last scene in the video is perhaps the most obvious one in which the men are seen to be placed on trial. Four unidentified men stand side-by-side in a vulnerable way. They are facing a wall of an abandoned building with their backs towards us and appear to be handcuffed. A misogynist and sexist song chanted by men overlap on the image of the men's bodies that are captured by the video camera.

291 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
292 *I got it out and pulled it and stuck in the wall*
293 *As much as I did it the wall of my house broke down*
(23:56 – 24:05 mins).

These metaphoric lyrics can be read in as indicative of a desire for group sex – even if it is only women being penetrated, the presence of multiple men in a sexual situation does prompt some homoerotic questioning. Do the men look at each other? Do they think about each other's pleasure? Could the holes in the wall also be referencing glory holes? Another verse of the chant further illustrates this point:

300 *If it is big and hard take it in your ass*
301 *If it is little and soft you enjoy looking*
(26:10 – 26:16 mins).

Once again, in the heteronormative context one would assume that a woman is being penetrated anally. However, given Zaatari's framing of the situation, one may read this scene as homoerotic. Their chant includes "take it in your ass" – and their backs are presented to us. Thus, as viewers, we wonder if Zaatari is suggesting for us to imagine these men being penetrated – perhaps, indicating a power reversal where the men

experience the receiving end of what they normally perpetrate against women. Here, we may see the significance of Zaatari's use of subtitles. The lyrics of the misogynistic chant appear in English subtitles, and are repeatedly shown with every instance of the chant. It was possible for Zaatari to omit some subtitles, or substitute (repeated) for them. He might also have identified the verses and chorus of the song, and have written (chorus) instead of fully spelling the same phrases over and over again. Thus, this can be read as a tactic to visually emphasize the repetitive aspect of the men's constant harassment and sexual violence towards women. Perhaps Zaatari is asking how many more times women have to become victims before actions are taken. Moreover, the inclusion of full subtitles here can be seen to contribute to the power reversal: with the men facing the wall and seemingly handcuffed, the viewer seems repeatedly urged –not only verbally, but also visually – to punish the men.

Majnounak aims to make visible certain perspectives that have been silent and invisible in the fabric of Lebanon. While the video depicts and problematizes heterosexism, the myriad of micro-queer moments aims to disrupt the hetero-patriarchal normative order. The micro-experiences of queerness also draw attention to the hidden sexualities within men. As outlined throughout the chapter, the focus on such subject matter through video art makes *Majnounak* somewhat unique in Lebanon. At the same time, it reflects a variety of artistic practices that have emerged within Beirut's art scene in a Post-Civil War context. These include the exploration of taboo subjects such as sexuality, critiques of 'official' documents and dominant narratives, the blurring of fictional and non-fictional material, and appropriation. In the following chapter, we will see how Zaatari, three years after creating *Majnounak*, continues to employ video artistic practices to critique hegemonic discourses around male sexuality. However, in the two

videos that will be analyzed, Zaatari's focus turns away from gendered violence in a heterosexual context, and fully towards expressions of same-sex sexualities and desires. We will also introduce the use of both visual and lingual metaphors in Zaatari's newer works, and see how such language enables his subjects to negotiate their queerness in a homoantagonistic context.

Chapter Four

Opaque Expressions: Un/Disclosing Queer Identities in *Al-ilka al-hamra* (2000) & *Shou Bhebbak* (2001)

On July 28, 2012, thirty-six men were arrested by Lebanese police at Cinema Plaza (a known cruising spot for gay men) in the *Bourj Hammoud* neighborhood of Beirut under suspicion of homosexual activity (Awadalla, 2012). The accused men sustained forced anal examinations (also known as the anal probing test or ‘gay test’) by law enforcement officials and medical personnel to ‘prove’ the men engaged in homosexual acts.⁸⁰ Based on long-discredited nineteenth-century medical knowledge, such examinations often involve medical examiners inserting their fingers, and often egg-shape metal objects into the anus of the detainees claiming it can determine homosexual conduct by the shape of the anus and sphincter (Ghoshal, 2016). According to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, forced anal exams are a violation of bodily rights; they are invasive, intrusive, degrading and humiliating to the point that they are considered a form of torture (Ghoshal, 2016; HELEM, 2017). While the controversial anal examinations were officially outlawed by the Lebanese Syndicate of Physicians in 2012, they are still used by some law enforcement officers.⁸¹

The raid at Cinema Plaza comes after the controversial primetime television show “*Enta Horr*,” (“You are Free”) aired hidden video footage of inside an all-male adult cinema theatre in Tripoli, Lebanon. The episode was broadcast on May 8, 2012, on Lebanon’s Murr channel (known as MTV). Using a hidden camera, the show’s reporter and host (Joe Maalouf) captured men engaging in homosexual acts while publicly

⁸⁰ The incident is reminiscent of a similar case that occurred in Cairo in 2011, when police officials raided and arrested a dozen men in a dance club. The men were jailed and underwent anal examinations.

⁸¹ In 2013, the Lebanese Syndicate of Psychiatry officially removed homosexuality from the list of mental health disorder (Reid, 2017).

exposing their identity to the public (Mandour, 2013). During the broadcast, Maalouf expressed his disgust towards such ‘debauchery,’ and called upon the authorities, “to raid the cinemas, shut them down and arrest the ‘perverts’” (qtd. in Mandour, 2013: 7). Maalouf’s relentless homophobic campaign and hatred instigated the raids by law enforcement officers. According to Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code “sexual intercourse contrary to nature” is punishable by up to one year in prison. HELEM – a Lebanon-based LGBTQ organization – condemned the unethical exposure by “*Enta Horr*” stating it had violated both human rights and right of privacy of the accused men. A year later, in 2013, MTV’s owner Gabriel Murr cancelled the show due to growing disparities between Joe Maalouf and himself (Mandour, 2013).

More recently, on January 26, 2017, Lebanese Judge Rabih Maalouf set a new precedent by ruling a court order that would protect freedoms and human rights for LGBTQ individuals. Judge Mallouf specifically invoked Article 183 of the Penal Code that stipulates “the [same-sex] act committed is not considered to be a crime if exercised as a right without exceeding its limits” (Walden, 2017). In other words, Maalouf enforced that consensual same-sex relations are part of one’s personal freedom and choice, rather than “against nature,” and therefore can neither be punishable nor prosecuted under Article 534. While this new ruling demonstrates a step forward for LGBTQ rights in Lebanon, there remains discrimination against queer individuals. Still today, police in Lebanon do not adhere to the new ruling, and can arrest any individual suspected of being gay or transgendered (Aliaga, 2012). In fact, Syrian trans refugees living within Beirut have become targets for police arrest and brutality on a regular basis.

Unconcealed depictions of homosexuality in visual arts and media is forbidden from making its way to mainstream audiences in Lebanon and the Arab world. To subvert the strict regulations and laws around censorship, artists and filmmakers lean towards the use of “melodramatic devices,” “coding,” and “subtext” to depict homosexuality in an allegorical manner (Hassan, 2010: 19). Arguably the most famous example within contemporary mainstream Arab cinema is in Nadine Labaki’s film *Caramel* (2007), which we briefly mentioned in chapter three. In one particular scene, Rima who is working in the beauty salon slowly shampoos and massages Siham’s (a walk-in client) long dark hair. Halfway through their small talk and compliments they lock eyes in silence. The scene becomes intense of emotion and curiosity when suddenly a power outage breaks out – a reminder of the prohibition of such suspected gay acts in Lebanon.

In the previous chapter, we described how Zaatari’s *Majnounak* (Crazy of You) (1997) – a video that chronicles sexual conquests of women by men – engages in a critique of hegemonic masculinity in Lebanon as it relates to sexual violence. *Majnounak* aims to make visible certain perspectives that are silent and invisible in the fabric of Lebanon. My claim was that while the video depicts and problematizes heterosexism, the myriad of micro-queer moments (constructed by Zaatari through appropriation) aims to disrupt the hetero-patriarchal normative order. The micro-experiences of queerness also draw attention to the hidden sexualities and homoeroticism within men.

Within this chapter, we turn away from gendered violence in a heterosexual context, and fully extend towards expressions of same-sex (or queer) sexualities and desires in Post-war Lebanon as depicted in a selection of two video works by Akram

Zaatari. In this context, we use the term ‘queerness’, as defined by queer theorist Héctor Dominguez Ruvalcaba, as “an expression [and/or a representation] of rupture against compulsory heterosexuality and its method of excluding all types of difference” (2016: 84). The videos that will be examined can be read as queer in the sense that they elaborate and offer alternative embodiment outside of the hetero- and homonormative landscape.

This chapter is divided into two parts that each consider a different video by Zaatari. In the first half of the chapter, we examine *Al-ilka al-hamra* (Red Chewing Gum) (2000) – a video-letter that tells the story of separation between a queer couple. The film’s narrator, speaking in Arabic with English subtitles, recounts an encounter between him and his male lover in some alleyway fifteen years earlier near Hamra Street. There, alone together, the male couple observe a young street vendor chewing his gum. As will be examined in this chapter, a sensual story unfolds throughout the video-letter among the three young men. In the second half of the chapter we focus on *Shou Bhebbak* (2001) – a video that explores queer sexuality and relationships among five young gay men in Lebanon. Through various oral testimonies the young men examine how they express and live their queerness within Lebanon. To mask their identities, Zaatari employs an aesthetic strategy that consists of shining a bright light on the young men’s faces and bodies rendering them quasi-unidentifiable.

Both videos have been selected for analysis because, on the one hand, they reflect on the various ways self-identified gay Lebanese men express their same-sex desires and intimacies within the homoantagonistic context of Lebanon. On the other hand, they also offer an explicit representational critique of homosexuality. What will be productive to examine are the strategies employed by Zaatari and the protagonists to

depict and discuss the various ways in which gay-identified Lebanese men negotiate their sexuality and subjectivity in today's Post-war Lebanese context. In a country where homosexuality is still punishable with imprisonment, how do the protagonists navigate, obfuscate, and complicate their queer sexuality, all the while speaking about it outside of the prism of stereotypes? Furthermore, within the homoantagonist setting of Lebanon, how do the videos represent both the visibility and invisibility of sexuality? And finally, they question what is said and what is kept unspoken in terms of queer desires?

To answer these questions, we draw from and elaborate on American queer theorist Nicholas De Villiers's concept of queer opacity. In his book *Opacity and the Closet: Queer Tactics in Foucault, Barthes, and Warhol* (2012), De Villiers considers linguistic and visual strategies that simultaneously aim to reveal while also concealing or negating one's homosexuality. We apply De Villiers's concept to the reading of Zaatari's *Shou Bhebbak* in which we consider how the occlusion of the men's faces and bodies in the video are a productive and alternative mode of the self rather than a negative, self-hating, homophobic aspect of homosexuality. Furthermore, we turn to Denis Provencher's (2011) concept of "coming out à l'orientale" to question how the young men in Zaatari's video negotiate their visibility. These two conceptual approaches developed by Provencher (2011) and De Villiers (2012) are useful to understand the various strategies and tactics employed by the protagonists in reconsidering the 'coming out narrative' specifically in Lebanese culture. As previously mentioned in chapter one, queer Arabs shape and frame their sexual identity using hybrid local and foreign languages (such as Arabish), which allow them to collectively identify as a community, while also transgressing the binaries established by the hegemonic heteronormative matrix.

4.1 *Al-ilka al-hamra (Red Chewing Gum) (2000)*

Akram Zaatari's *Al-ilka al-hamra* (Red Chewing Gum) (2000) is a ten-minute-long colour video, which is narrated as a lover letter, with sound that tells the story of the separation of two young male lovers during the early rumblings of the Lebanese Civil-war. The video's narrator, speaking in Arabic with English subtitles, recounts how he and his male lover ended up alone together in some dark alley-way fifteen years earlier in Hamra, a formerly booming commercial centre in Beirut. There, the couple follow and closely observed a young street vendor chewing pieces of gum non-stop. Throughout the video, as we will see, the couple starts to develop a particular interest in this vendor. The video-letter is filmed as a re-enactment of the events described by the narrator. Dressed in plain white t-shirts and blue jeans, three actors play the following parts: the narrator, the narrator's lover, and a young street vendor. The video is mostly comprised of scenes filmed in a studio setting, while intertwined with what seems to be actual raw video footage taken by the narrator's lover.

In the opening scene a young disheveled man is seen sitting on the pavement in a dark alleyway. While chewing on a piece of gum, he looks directly at the camera, expressionless and silent. The scene abruptly cuts to the lively street of Hamra, which seems to be busy as usual with pedestrians and vehicles circulating, thus suggesting that the Civil-war has yet to occur. Suddenly, the scream of a siren is heard at a distance piercing the air to possibly signal an attack. As explained by the narrator, both he and his lover, against the sound of gunshots, seek refuge in a dark alleyway where they encountered a young street vendor, who is casually sitting on the side of the sidewalk as if everything around him had stopped in time. The narrator and his lover observe the

young man engaging in a curious ritual. He is seen compulsively masticating pieces of Chiclets™ – a popular candy-coated chewing gum brand that is known for its yellow packaging box. Chewing one piece of white gum after another, he sucks and swallows all the sugary juiced leaving them flavourless and shapeless. He spits them out in a little box repeatedly uttering: “there’s no sugar left” (00:55, 02:47, and 3:46 min). Among the pile of white chewed gum, a chewed single red one catches the eye of the narrator’s lover. The vendor silently glances at both men discreetly acknowledging their presence. As soon as he looks away, the narrator’s lover picks up the red gum with his middle finger, and challenges his partner to chew the gum.

Eventually, both men take part in a peculiar and seemingly highly sexually portrayed activity: the lover slowly opening his mouth and sucking the gum with his middle finger leaving a red stain on his tongue. This scene is repeatedly referenced by the narrator who verbally reiterates it in the video, each time revealing new information. The scene is accompanied by the well-known song by Egyptian multi-award-winning signer Amr Diab “*Tamally Maak*” (2000), which translates into “Always with you.” The song’s original rendition is about an inseparable love and bond of a heterosexual couple. In *Al-ilka al-hamra*, the narrator’s lover is seen and heard singing acapella the song’s chorus:

019 I feel I’m always with you
020 Even when you are away, your love survives inside of me
021 Makes me feel always with you
022 Always in my mind and heart
023 Missing you, even when next to you
(01:08 – 1:25 min).

The chorus is sung four times in different parts of the video. It first appears at the beginning of the video when the narrator and his lover first encounter the vendor boy. Next, it appears after the three men are in the alley way, hiding from the stray bullets. And finally, it appears twice at the end of the video when the narrator seems to have become separated from his lover.

Towards the end of the video, the narrator is still unsure as to why his lover had so much pleasure chewing the red chewing gum. Yet, he admits to finding pleasure watching his partner engage in such an erotic act in front of the vendor. The video ends in an unpromising manner where we learn that the narrator and his lover are separated perhaps because of the city's segregated sectarian lines. Without giving the viewer too much detail, the narrator brings up his move out of Hamra to relocate to Ashrafieh, a predominantly Christian neighborhood in East Beirut, while his lover presumably stayed in Hamra, a Muslim district in West Beirut (9:00 min). The narrator indicates that their separation resulted in them never recoupling and ultimately losing contact.

We are told by the narrator that his lover had videotaped parts of the evening including their encounter with the young vendor. In a studio (possibly his lover's space) a video of a deserted street is projected on the wall, where the narrator reminisces about the eventful night through the video footage likely left behind by his lover. The images on the old fifteen-year-old VHS tapes have faded with time, leaving the narrator to rely on his sensorial and olfactory memories. Thus, the obscure events remain in the narrator's consciousness and manifest through the chorus of "*Tamally Maak*," the sounds of gunshots, the smell of car fumes, and the feeling of hands touching (9:18 – 9:32 min). Before cutting to the end credits, the narrator concludes by addressing out

loud in the video for the last time his lost ex-lover who is not present in the shot: “He [the young vendor] sends you his regards, I hope you remember him?” (10:07 min).

This moment in the video can be read in relation to Laura Marks’s concept of haptic visuality.⁸² According to Laura Marks, haptic visuality is defined as formal and textual qualities in the video that include: grainy, blurry and out of focus images, decaying imagery, and sensuous imagery, which evoke individual and cultural memories of the senses, such as touching, smelling, sniffing, and tasting (2000: 2). As further noted by Marks, haptic visuality can be tactile: “as touching a film with one’s eyes [...] where the eyes themselves function like organs of touch” (2000: 162). Marks claims that haptic visuality derives from filmmakers’ intercultural perceptions that are informed by their experience and background:

[...] intercultural experience is violent at the level of the body, for the recent immigrant must choose whether to keep his or her bodily habits, at the cost of being considered primitive or exotic, or to shed them, at the cost of shedding the memory these habits encode. This hard (and not necessarily conscious) decision underlies the ambivalence towards sensory traditions characteristic of much intercultural cinema. (2000: 209)

The narrator in *Al-ilka al-hamra* can only partially remember events that happened that particular day. Certain memories, which faded with time, are triggered by his sense of smell of the car fumes. It is not surprising that he has such a strong association the smell

⁸² Marks distinguishes haptic visuality from optical imagery. Haptic images are often distorted and/or grainy, thus making it harder for the viewer to see and identify spaces and/or figures. For Marks, we must understand the surface of the screen as another skin. In contrast, optical imagery allows for the identification of figures in a video, and the depiction of spaces in which viewers are able to position themselves within.

of car fumes. For Marks, “memories of smell endure much longer, even after a single exposure to an odor than visual or auditory memories” (2000: 205).

Al-ilka al-hamra was part of Zaatari’s contribution to the *Hamra Street Project* (2000) in Beirut, an art initiative curated by Christine Tohmé, founder and director of the Ashkal Alwan (The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts). The project reflected on both the historical and present image of Hamra, Beirut’s busiest and renowned cosmopolitan causeway. The interdisciplinary artworks were exhibited and screened at the Hamra, Strand, and Colisée cinemas, as well as on Sadat Street located in Beirut.

In Arabic, the word *Hamra* means ‘red.’ While some attribute the name of the street to the auburn color of the soil from the farms of the Ras Beirut neighborhood, others have suggested it was named because of the red window shutters of the Red House – one of the last standing traditional villas in Beirut (Merabet, 2014; El Chamaa, 2016). Prior to the Lebanese Civil War, Hamra Street was the cultural epicentre of Beirut. During the Civil War, the Hamra District became a well-known hangout for gay-identified men who could meet clandestinely in the narrowing-streets or in the street-level cafés near the Horseshoe Building (Merabet, 2014: 84). Still today, Hamra District hosts many small café shops, clubs, and pubs, such as Café Sheikh Mankoush, T-Mabouta, Bardo, Walimat Warde, Starbucks, and Dunkin’ Donuts, which are LGBTQ friendly.

In the opening scene, one can only see a reddened and distorted image of what seems to be the surroundings of Hamra. As the camera pans to the left, the first image moves with the frame, to reveal an undistorted, untinted and clearly defined street. The video frame is divided by the convex edge of the first image – we realize that the first

image was a reflection in a shiny red sphere-like object. The camera zooms out and shows cars and pedestrians. In effect, Zaatari destabilizes our perception by convincing us that the reflection in the red object is the whole image, before revealing that that image is merely a reflection within the larger, 'real' world. This red sphere is recurrent throughout the video and is used each time the narrator is reminiscing about his past. This deliberate coincidence inscribes the object as a representation of 'another time'. In this context, 'another time' is not necessarily the past, but rather something in between past and present. The narrator is recreating fifteen-year-old memories in the present, perhaps now physically walking around in these spaces where his queer experiences took place, which have been previously closed off because of his sectarian affiliation. This is one example where Zaatari blurs our understanding of time.

Additionally, the visual distortion which rounds and reddens the image as reflected in the sphere hints at the narrator's conception of the physical space he once knew. In the course of and following fifteen years of Civil War, the Hamra neighbourhood has been destroyed, rebuilt, and gentrified. This actual distortion may be what is represented by the visual distortion of the reflection in the red sphere. This can be read as a queer tactic, contributing to the creation of a queer temporality (Halberstam, 2005). The narrator is trying to describe *his* Hamra, that *he* knew. He wants to share how different it was, through the dichotomy between the red sphere and the clearly demarcated image of a modern Hamra. He seems to be still searching for that space that brought him pleasure.

Red Chewing Gum can be described, to a degree, as queer, in terms of its staging of sexuality, and non-heteronormativity, in addition to the techniques employed in the video; it is an attempt to recreate multiple dimensions of a queer experience,

destabilizing concepts of linear time, natural space, and normative values. Zaatari employs a range of coded language and coded visual tactics. These include: the omnipresent use of the color red, two distinct moments where the video freezes, moments of hesitation between the characters, and finally, optical distortions, all of which will be examined next.

The color red here appears to be representative of two distinct periods in time (and to some extent is utilized to show the protagonists living in two parallel worlds). This seems purposefully done so as to differentiate the story strands in the video that are non-linear. For instance, the narrator's recurring flashbacks are composed non-chronologically and therefore creating multiple unresolved narratives. Throughout the video, what I am calling the 'dark-shadowy scenes' are interspersed with red scenes, which are created by filming the reflection of the red metallic sphere object. The dark-shadowy scenes seem more to represent the present post-war period, whereas the red colored scene is suggestive of the reminiscing of the past. The red sphere is a representation of that opposing temporal memory. As viewers, we are immersed within the men's alternative universe. Thus, the colour metaphorically and literally tints the narrator's view and experience of the city. The narrator's vision (as seen in the distorted effect of the red sphere) seems to create an atmosphere of melancholy, which can be said to be caused by his separation of his lover. Did his lover die as a result of the Civil War? How did they lose touch? Was the lover living a double life? Did he get married? What was their relationship? Was it a queer amorous one, a fling or simply a friendship?

Zaatari is clearly inviting us to engage this story from the narrator's perspective. To that end, he employs a particular method that leads to a degree of theatricality: the narrator's verbal recounting of the past events is staged and filmed in a studio setting.

This includes his dialogue with his lover, which is filmed against a background of video-projections of Hamra Street. Furthermore, the dialogue is reconstituted and played by two actors. Each of these elements combine to form a construction of time and memory in a theatrical way – it is as if, rather than film a nostalgic love story, *Zaatari* is filming the process of its reconstruction. Such an approach simultaneously displaces our typical position as an audience, and draws us into a much more intimate space – one within the narrator’s mind, which is grieving, and struggling to remember – leading to the breakdown of linear time, thus repeating fragments of the narrative, each time adding more detail. In this space, there are also fewer social filters – leading to uncomfortable moments where the actors gaze directly into the camera, and where the narrator speaks about unusual shared moments and acts between men. Such a space can be described within a queer temporality – where social norms fade, and where we are invited to adopt the narrator’s gaze in addition to and in dialogue with our own. *Zaatari* facilitates such invitation by providing so much interesting aesthetic material; we are curious to learn more. Here, queer temporality can be understood, according to queer film theorists Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt (2016), as visual and textual specificities (such as an anachronism, asynchrony, slowness, and, motionlessness) which will be examined in the following sections.

4.1.1 (Queer) Acts: Fellatio & Exchange of Money

In the video, *Al-ilka al-hamra*, *Zaatari* emphasizes two separate moments that can be read as queer acts. The first is when the lover picks up a red chewing gum amid the other white gums from the box and slowly inserting it his mouth with his finger perhaps suggesting an oral sexual act. As soon as the gum touches the back of his tongue, the video freezes for a slight moment. Furthermore, when the narrator’s lover

sticks his tongue out after placing the gum on it, the video blurs a bit, and its sequence goes into slow-motion. The second moment is when the narrator asks his lover if he has money on hand, to which the lover responds: “yes” (7:06 min). We see the narrator handing dollar bills to his lover for him to possibly give to the vendor boy, as the lover had earlier inquired “About the cost of the whole box” (5:04 min). In both still moments, the instrumental introduction to Amr Diab’s love song accompanies the images, which begin to move again a split-second after the song has begun. The use of slow-motion and video stills are effects that play into queer temporality to interrupt our traditional narrative (Schoonover & Gault, 2016). These moments literally disturb the flow of time as experienced by the audience. Furthermore, they refer to the dilation of time in moments of heightened sensuality and emotionality – which is indicated by the juxtaposition of the love song, which itself is only a fragment. The slowing and freezing of the video also transform the banal acts of licking one’s finger and exchanging money into sensually erotic acts among the three men – the elongation of the moment creates a space where we may wonder: did the men’s hands touch too long? How does lingering on a taste sensualize the act? In sum, Zaatari’s use of such visual styles and tactics only underlines the eroticism and desires that would normally be go unnoticed.

4.1.2 Hesitations

The slow and frozen moments in the video can additionally be read as acts of hesitation, a concept which plays a multi-layered role in the construction of a queer time. We see hesitation everywhere in the narrative, beginning with the narrator’s tone. The first instance is between the actors playing the narrator and his lover, discussing whether to “sing for him [the vendor]” or not (1:28 – 1:31 min). The next moment, which seems to escalate the situation, is when the lover is dared to chew the masticated gum first, and

refuses, daring the narrator to chew first instead, and asking, “is there no more sugar left?” (2:46 min). The final moment of hesitation comes near the end, where the men are thinking about purchasing the vendor’s box – they not only hesitate with whether to buy it, or not, they also hesitate to decide who should pay for it (5:04 min).

At another level, Zaatari causes hesitation in the viewer’s gaze by use of the frozen moments as already discussed. The destabilization and fragmentation of time, as well as the theatricality, cause us to question our understanding of the love story. Furthermore, Zaatari causes hesitation by depicting abject images of the masticated gum pieces. The images both repel and fascinate us; we wish to look away, but also to see more.

In the video, the hesitations work to produce a type of broken, slower flow to the narrative. In Sara Ahmed’s terms, such a film has a “queer orientation” (2006) because of its non-normative and askew linearity. As argued by film theorists Thomas Waugh and Jason Garrison, queer storylines are usually inclined to open-endedness, loss, and displacement narratives, as opposed to the generic closure (2010: 89). *Al-ilka al hamra*’s queer orientation is one that diverts from the linear and normative storyline. In fact, one may suggest Zaatari experiments with a circular narrative – one that is continuously referenced and restated by the narrator in his flashbacks. This causes a disorientation for the viewer who simultaneously navigates in-between times (before and after the Civil-war) and spaces (the outside alleyway and the studio).

4.1.3 “The Shadow Boy” Figure

A central character in the video is the vendor, who is referred to as “the shadow boy” by the narrator (8:15 min). The vendor’s role in the video’s narrative is not quite defined or understood. He also is never fully seen – we only ever catch fragments of his

face and body. He first appears at the beginning of the video as a shadowy figure, standing and loitering at the corner of a street. We do not know him, we only know of him, and that he is acting strangely: he repeatedly, almost compulsively, chews pieces of gum – setting them aside and declaring “there’s no sugar left” (2:46 min).

As portrayed by Zaatari, he seems to be constantly shifting and resisting our gaze, and our attempts to identify him. He is opaque. Furthermore, by consuming his stock of gum, he is destroying his means of profit, which seems illogical. However, given the situation in which he finds himself, such a queer act – defying capitalism and acting against his self-interest seems to make more sense (Halberstam, 2011). In a time of war, perhaps he wants to taste, for himself, every last granule of sugar within the gums – reveling in and enjoying something before, potentially, his last hour. Thus, Zaatari has constructed a space where a queer (and to an extent Marxist) act is not only possible, but sensible.

To compare and contrast, Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami’s *Taste of Cherry*⁸³ (1997) also examines a similar experience of a simple pleasure. The film recounts the story of Mr. Baddi, a wealthy middle-aged Iranian man, who drives through Tehran’s suburbs searching to hire a man who will agree to bury his body after he commits suicide. Throughout the film, we never fully understand why Baddi wishes to end his life. In fact, Kiarostami offers little information about the protagonist’s personal history and background. All of the potential individuals approached by Baddi decline to partake in his request. However, Baddi finally encounters a Turkish taxidermist named Mr. Baghi, who reluctantly agrees to help him out. During their car ride Baghi reveals he

⁸³ The film *Taste of Cherry* (1997) was the winner of the 1997 Palme d’Or at the Canne Film Festival.

too had once contemplated suicide by hanging himself from a cherry tree. Moments after his failed suicide attempt, where the tree branch cracked, he felt the soft skin of cherries rubbing against his hands before eating one. It is the taste of the “deliciously sweet cherries,” as explained by Baghi, that prevented him of committing suicide. The savory fruit reminded him of the simple pleasures of life and nature; something he could not leave behind. Near the end of the film, Baghi attempts to dissuade Baddi by asking him, “You want to give up the taste of the cherries?” This sentence is key to the core narrative of the film. Kiarostami seems to suggest that while there is less optimism within an oppressive regime, life is worth living because of its simple pleasures.

A common thread in *Red Chewing Gum* and *Taste of Cherry* (1997) is the depiction of the protagonists as average people. While the protagonists are seen and heard struggling with their troubling experiences and unresolved issues, their personal histories and backgrounds are purposefully masked by both Zaatari and Kiarostami. This is perhaps done to allow a more complex and imaginative reading of the main characters by the spectators. Visually, the works are similar in the sense that they are for the most part filmed in interior spaces (in a car with open windows overlooking the landscape and in a cloned alleyway recreated in a studio setting). The surroundings of both spaces are blurred.

Interestingly, both films use some type of obscured language in which they may be read as homosexual pickup lines (Connor, 2017). For instance, when Badii approaches the young single men for help he asks them: “if you have money problems, I can help” and in Zaatari’s video-letter when the narrator’s lover asked for money for the young vendor. In any case, what this may suggest is that the protagonists, at the very beginning, are seen as marginal individuals negotiating while driving in obscure areas

far beyond the strict city limits of the city and society. Furthermore, the films deliberately aim to obscure names, faces, and motives from the spectator. In many instances, we can hear voices off-screen; the camera never reveals the actor playing the role. Compared to Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*, Zaatari's *Red Chewing Gum* is not a feature film and carries itself as less poetic and enigmatic. For example, Kiraostami uses a very poetic object (a cherry) to reference life's simple pleasures and the appreciation of nature, whereas Zaatari employs a cheap manufactured object (a chewing gum) that is commonly related to popular culture and consumerism, which has an erotic subtext.

4.1.4 The Red Chewing Gum

Central to the video is the red chewing gum, which has sexual connotative undertones. At first glance the sweet and flavorful flexible material may seem innocent, however, we quickly understand how it alludes to the sexual undertone between the protagonists.

Within the video, the gum can be seen as a sensual object explored by the characters – they touch it, place it in their mouths, suck on it, chew – or work – it, they taste it, spit it and they share it. In this sense, the gum may represent the penis, its red colour signifying an erection, which in some men, reddens the tip. While the chewed gum can be associated as an abject object, it remains fascinating and pleasurable for all three characters. In this sense, we may understand their fascination as a queer tactic of appropriation by Zaatari – he has seized the disgust that is used by hetero-patriarchy to injure men that do not uphold the traditional hegemonic masculinity, and revels in it. This is a classic queer tactic – one remembers the appropriation of derogatory terms by sexual and racial minorities to define and empower themselves. Thus, Zaatari has appropriated a common, non-significant object into a metaphor of queer reading.

When discussing gum as both an object and a metaphor in contemporary art history, one may turn to the well-known artwork *S.O.S Starification Object Series* (1974-75) by American feminist artist Hannah Wilke. The work constitutes a series of black-and-white photographs of Wilke posing seminude against a neutral backdrop, while occasionally accessorizing with sunglasses, turbans, and ties. She plays, through satire, with the traditional representations of ‘femininity’ by imitating the stance of female models from high-fashion magazines and advertisements. In each photograph, small pieces of pink chewing gum, which she has molded and folded to resemble female genitals (vulvas), are sporadically applied to her seminude body. These visually disruptive shapes may recall the numbered tattoos given to Holocaust victims (which would explain the ‘star’ in the title of the work *Starification*), while also referencing non-Western rituals of scarification on bodies as a rite of passage (Frueh and Kochheiser, 1989; Wacks, 1999; Wilke et al., 2006). Wilke’s work brought attention to the damaging ways women and femininity were depicted in popular culture as being objectified by men and subordinate to men (Frueh and Kochheiser, 1989). For Wilke, the gum holds a political message. She writes: “I chose gum because it’s the perfect metaphor for the American woman [...]. Chew her up, get what you want out of her, throw her out and pop in a new piece [...].” (qtd. in Berman, 1980: 77). This said, Wilke seeks to challenge the male gaze by transforming the vagina-like forms on a desirable female body into repugnant growth-like formations. The gum seems to simultaneously read as erotic, sexy, and unsettling, whereas in Zaatari’s work, the gum becomes a central desired and attractive object that could become phallic.

4.1.5 The Colour ‘Red’

In the video, the colour red is important to the visual storytelling as it allows the artist to convey certain moods and stir certain reactions and emotions in nonverbal ways, all of which engage the audience’s attention. Not only is the color referenced in the title, but it is also amplified and recurrent throughout the video in terms of effects and lighting. As previously explained, it is significant that the very first image we see is the red-tinted reflection of Hamra Street. All depending on the context, the colour red can either be associated with a negative or positive meaning. In both Arabic and English, the primary meaning of ‘red’ is negatively associated to blood,⁸⁴ anger, revolution, and danger (Houghton, 2007; Hasan, 2011; Al-Adaleih et al., 2012). ‘Red’ may also be associated with a painful disease such as in the expression “red death” (Al-Adaleih et al., 2012: 10). Additionally, in the Arab context, red may be associated with death such as in a person who is to get executed usually wears red to refer to their punishment (Hasan, 2011: 210). In a Western (hetero-patriarchal) religious tradition, sin is symbolized by the color red. For example, in the Revelation (12: 3), “red is the color of Satan, the great dragon; it suggests his power and murderous nature” (William Steffler, 2002: 132).

Alternatively, the colour ‘red’ can also be positively used to imply feelings of love, passion, and eroticism (Houghton 2007). For example, the Arab expression “*spending a red night*” or a “*red evening*” may indicate an explicit night of pornography (Al-Adaleih et al., 2012: 11), while in English, red “extends its meaning to a positive direction, such as with Santa Claus, who has a red costume, to mark the beginning of

⁸⁴ Red symbolizes the blood of martyrs in the Shi’a Muslim commemoration of Imam Hussein (Sharifi Isaloo, 2017). In Christianity, red also evokes the color of blood of martyrs, in addition to the sacrificial blood of Christ (William Steffler, 2002).

New Year or new life” (Hasan, 2011: 210). In English, red is also synonymous with sex and prostitution, for instance, when speaking about the red-light districts that are found in major cities.

In the video, we may consider red as used symbolically to represent love, sexuality, eroticism, and immorality. Firstly, red is historically considered as the color of the heart, thus closely associated with romantic love. Here, the color of the gum not only represents both the affection and pleasure between two individuals, but also the abject and disgust some may relate to their shared body fluid. Secondly, red is often referred to as the color of sexual passion, eroticism and sin. In the video, this suggestion is further supported by some of the language employed by the men; for instance, the narrator relates how his lover desired the vendor “to be gluttonous” (8:27 min). Furthermore, the compulsive behaviour of the vendor in repeatedly chewing the gum, which fascinates the lover, seems to suggest a *junnun*: the simultaneous state of madness and passion. This is further suggested when the lover’s hand slides “into his box” (3:52 min), indicating perhaps that the lover throws caution to the wind and reaches into the vendor’s trousers to grab his penis.

The passion and sexuality between the two men lead to the third representation of the color: immorality and danger. While the men do not openly identify as gay, in the Lebanese context their acts define them as such. Thus, they are taking many risks, which jeopardizes both their physical safety and social standing. Red also indicated a sense of danger that is present throughout the video. For instance, if caught, the young men face harassment, outing, violence, imprisonment, rape, and in some circumstances, execution. Also, red in the video can be indicative of dangers associated with war, a lockdown, a sense of urgency – which paradoxically facilitates the men’s willingness to disregard the

rules and pursue their pleasure. In terms of immorality, the young vendor's identity and presence strongly suggest that he represents a male sex-worker, which is feminizing.

This idea is emphasized by the monetary transaction that takes place between the men.

The first frozen moment is followed by the depiction of a red stain on the lover's tongue, after he consumes the gum. The lover sticks out his tongue, showing a red stain left by the red chewing gum. The image is out of focus. Here, the stain references the sexual act of perhaps performing fellatio; it can also be read as the consumption of the young man. The fact that this image is out of focus suggests that the act of male to male sex is, again, censored, and thus may only exist in the shadows of the cityscape.

Furthermore, the image can be one of submission. In comparison to gay (and sometimes heterosexual) pornography, the 'submissive' individual is sometimes depicted kneeling down, and opening their mouth to show their partner's semen before swallowing it.

4.1.6 Disgust

In a conservative country like Lebanon, where homosexuality is still considered a criminal offence, some individual may find homosexual affection visually repulsive, thus creating an emotional reaction of disgust. For cultural theorist William Ian Miller, "Conventions have come to accord sex and sexuality an almost sacred seriousness – sex because of its occasional link to love, and sexuality because of its supposed role in the definition of personhood and identity" (1997: ix). Not only is the act of two men being intimate considered 'disgusting' by some, the idea of them sharing a chewed-up piece of gum and exchanging fluids becomes more repulsive (or disgust-evoking). As studied by Miller (1997), revolting scenes are processed instantly as dangerous and repulsive for some individuals. For instance, the nature of chewing (in this case the gum) may trigger reactions of repulsion because, it breaks down and transforms the food into viscous

substance that is digested and later evacuated from the anus as feces. In other words, the chewed item, which is spit out, is forever transformed (Miller, 1997).

In *Red Chewing Gum*, the narrator's lover slowly sticks his finger into a box of chewed gums with perhaps other unknown materials. Further, as the gum is shared by the three men, their spit is exchanged from mouth to mouth. Here one can suggest that the narrator performs a type of oral sex to the young vendor. It could also be read as a representation of a threesome between the men, where the gum is evocative of a penis being inserted in the mouth, which can also allude to the sexual orifice of the anus. For Miller, "the mouth and the anus bear an undeniable connection [...] literally connected, each being one end of a tube that runs through the body" (1997: 95). Of course, the unknown is commonly linked to the dangerous. Here, the fact that two unknown men are sharing and exchanging fluids can be highly linked to contamination, leading to sexually transmitted infections. Such imagery may also be related to the negative and devastating representations of HIV-AIDS (Varas-Días & Toro-Alphonso, 2003).

We could interpret these moments in the video as being abject. Philosopher Julia Kristeva, defines 'abject' in several ways. The primary characteristic being that abject is "neither subject nor object" (1982: 1) but instead as process that threatens and disrupts strict boundaries and structures. Kristeva explains: "[...] what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva, 1982: 2). In her attempt to understand one's repulsion and fascination when thinking about bodily fluids, Kristeva notes, "It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1984: 4). In this sense, the moments where the men are sharing bodily

fluids are not only disrupting and threatening the patriarchal structures, they also transgress our sense of cleanliness.

As saliva is the shared fluid between the three men in *Red Chewing Gum*, it can be suggestive of semen. This can be understood when the characters use the term sugar – the idea of sucking out all the sugar from the gum, which becomes oozy, juicy, and slimy – can signify the semen (or cum) consumed via oral sex. Thus, as the saliva may be seen as the substitute for semen, Zaatari’s aim maybe to provoke attraction and repulsion in the audience. This is significant within the context of a hetero-patriarchal order which strictly regulates ‘acceptable’ non-disgusting sex because semen is understood to pollute in a number of ways. The conception of the anus is one that is essentially contaminated; it is the “essence of lowness, of untouchability, and it must be hemmed in with prohibitions” (Miller, 1997: 100). As further elaborated by Miller, “It is also considered to have the capacity to feminize and humiliate that which it touches. This is pertinent as it illuminates the particular male disgust for ‘feminized’ men. As claimed before, Zaatari seems to appropriate and revel in disgust as defined by the heterosexist patriarchy. By doing so, he both creates a queer space in which homoerotic acts may exist, and challenges his audience to redefine the fixed conceptions that automatically censure and marginalize expressions of male to male desire, intimacy and sexuality.

The final image that I examine within *Red Chewing Gum* involves that of the flashlight. In the dark alley way, one of the protagonists uses a flashlight to illuminate their path. The flashlight, however, not only shines light on the tight dark road but also shines light onto the body of the vendor. Here we can suggest that the flashlight serves two significations. The first is the objectification, fragmentation and sexualisation of the

subject in this case, the vendor. The flashlight only illuminates parts of his body, repeatedly focussing on the mouth – perhaps bringing attention to the sexual pleasure of the mouth? The use of strong light to emphasize parts of the body is reminiscent of that used in baroque art. For instance, Caravaggio’s paintings dramatically and symbolically highlight with a single bright light the wounds and fleshiness of Christ’s body. Secondly, the flashlight can be perceived as a tool of the authorities – who represent the heteronormative order – as it searches for and investigates transgressions of hegemonic masculinity, much like in the times where police would raid gay cruising spots such as saunas or movies theaters. Throughout the late 1960s until the early 1990s, in Canada and the United States, it was a common practice for police to locate and regularly raid gay establishments, such as bars, clubs, and bathhouses. One of the most significant raids took place on June 28th, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn, which escalated into a violent fight between gay men and the police officers. As a technique of intimidation, police would oftentimes shine their flashlights into the face and eyes of the patrons with the pretext of checking for intoxication (Janoff, 2005; Kinsman and Gentile, 2010). Such technique of shining bright lights onto a suspect’s face has been designed by police authorities to regulate and obtain confessions (Godsey, 2009). It is reported that in some instances the flashlight itself became a weapon used to beat up men and in some more extreme circumstances sexually assault them (Janoff, 2005). According to the Human Rights Watch report, *Dignity Debased: Forced Anal Examinations in Homosexuality Prosecutions* (Ghoshal, 2016), medical professionals and police investigators in Turkmenistan have used flashlights, among other tools during ‘anal tests’ to examine inside the detainee’s anus for fissures. During the recent raids in Lebanon, policemen were armed with guns and flashlights to identify the men. While no physical abuse was

reported during these ‘crackdowns,’ the police were verbally abusive towards the arrested men (Chahine, 2008). What happened behind closed doors during the interrogation between the police investigators, medical professionals, and accused men are not always well-documented. Many of these men are hesitant to discuss their experience publicly in fear of being harassed, threatened and outed by police, or simply feeling ashamed (Chahine, 2008).

Recently, the Search for Common Ground (SFCG) – a local non-governmental organization in Lebanon – and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) have implemented new police campaigns and modes of surveillance that aim to appease the general public in regard to larger security threat facing the country such as “[...] refugee influx, unemployment, homelessness, sex work, poverty as well as a selective attitudes on proper gender and sexual behaviors [...]” (Saleh and Qubaia, 2015). The SFCG and ISF’s growing policing and surveillance of ‘proper’ gender and sexual behaviors has led authorities to define themselves, acts and individuals considered threatening or ‘deviant’ (Saleh and Qubaia, 2015). Any individual deemed ‘doubtful’ or ‘suspected of homosexuality’, for example, can be arrested and detained by authorities under the pretext of representing a security threat (Chahine, 2008; Saleh and Qubaia, 2015). As argued by Foucault (1977), such surveillance of public and private spaces are put into place to expose ‘deviant’ sexual practices that have fallen outside of the normative regime. Thus, non-normative individuals and behaviours are constantly undergoing scrutiny and state intervention to be controlled with disciplinary strategies (Foucault, 1977). As Jasbir Puar points out, “the daily monitoring activity is linked not only to fears of being exposed but also to desires to surveil others and fears generated by exposure to others” (2017: 163n. 14). In other words, while modern “regimes of surveillance” shape

exemplary subjects, they also enforce subjects to discipline themselves while keeping tabs on others (Puar, 2007). While brightening the bodies of the protagonists in *Red Chewing Gum*, the video camera continuously seeks, but fails, to automatically focus, thus creating a blurred, grainy, and shadowy image of the protagonists.

The video-letter ends in a peculiar way. On the wall of a studio setting, we see a low-quality projection of Hamra Street playing, while the narrator speaks for the last time: “[...] do you remember him? He sends you his regards I hope you remember him” (10:04 – 10:06 min). This puzzling moment in the video creates an open-ended narrative that triggers even more questions about the young men’s queer relationship and experience. Do they still see each other? If so, is it in a casual way on the street or otherwise? One can think that perhaps the exchange of money in the earlier scenes could suggest that the young vendor was a sex worker. Does the narrator still have contact with the vendor? Are they lovers? The strength in the video lies in the ability to create ephemeral, fractured and uncertain moments, which can be termed as queer micro-experiences. The video unfollows the logical and conventional production of what seems to be a circular narrative. Throughout the video, the characters are depicted in a positive light. While a Western viewer may suggest that the men fall into the stereotype of the gay men meeting up clandestinely in dark alleys, we must be reminded that they are still in search of forging their own space of encounter. While the acts may in this particular video be in the alley, their sexuality still seems to defy the representation of darkness. However, in the following section, we examine how a couple and young gay-identified protagonists negotiate their purposefully obscured queer sexuality within the homoantagonist setting of Lebanon.

4.2 *Shou Bhebbak (How I Love You) (2001)*

Shou Bhebbak (How I Love You) (2001) is a twenty-nine-minute video that explores queer sexuality among a group of young self-identified gay Lebanese men who speak about their sexual identity in the face of criminality and social taboo of homosexuality in Lebanon. *Shou bhebbak* (2001) is considered a pioneering video, as it is one of only two films in Lebanon that directly address and depicts homosexuality without any judgements (Aliaga, 2012). The other film is *Cinema Fouad* (1993) by Mohammad Soueid – a Lebanese filmmaker whose films and writings were well known to Zaatari (Elias, 2013). *Cinema Fouad* (1993) is a forty-one-minute documentary-portrait that follows the compelling journey of Khaled El Kurdi, a Syrian transwoman living in Beirut. The film depicts the struggles of El Kurdi who works as a cabaret dancer in hopes of raising money for her sex reassignment surgery. During the entire film, El Kurdi insists that the filmmaker address her as a woman.⁸⁵

In contrast to Zaatari's *Majnounak* (1997), which offered a platform for three men to speak 'proudly' about their sexual adventures with women, *Shou Bhebbak* (2001) features five characters (a couple and three individuals) who openly discuss their sexual lives, the challenges of their committed relationship, and their relationship to their bodies. Against a black backdrop, the opening scene of the video cites Article 534 of the criminal code in Lebanon, which states that any sexual intercourse 'against nature' will be penalized with imprisonment for up to one year: a reminder of the daily scrutiny gay men experiences in Lebanon. The scene sharply cuts to a computer monitor on which

⁸⁵ While the examples here focus mainly on positive representation of male homosexuality, it is important to note that Nadine Labaki's internationally-acclaimed film *Caramel* (2007), as previously mentioned, depicts a lesbian character who engages in perhaps the first lesbian scene.

multiple windows are open in the ‘#gaylebanon’ online chat-room. Zaatari and his assistant (they are never seen, only heard) engage in small conversation with the online participants in hopes of finding gay men – criminals under Lebanese law – willing to consent in being interviewed on camera about their sexual life, commitments, relationships to their bodies, passions and love in Beirut.

Zaatari’s voice is heard off-screen as he asks a variety of questions to the participants. His bodily absence seems to allow for the participants to share their “thoughts, impressions, feelings and memories” directly with the viewer in a “pseudomonologue” (Nichols, 1991: 54). Mindful of Lebanon’s penal code that punished homosexual behaviors,⁸⁶ none of the men in the video are shown in any explicit ways, rather they recount their sexual experiences through detailed verbal descriptions (Zaatari, 2014). Their personal stories are recorded on video with continuous ambient piano music playing in the background that sets a nostalgic tone. Interestingly, Zaatari decides not to alter or distort the participants’ voices via voice-enhancer programs, which would further maintain their anonymity. The conventional practice for de-identifying an individual involves blacking-out faces, which limits possible recognition. Other types of concealments include the use of black bars over eyes, projections of shadows, blurring, and pixilation. Within the video, Zaatari uses a bright white light that he shines on the men’s bodies and faces rendering them as pale silhouettes. This is done in an attempt to protect the interviewees’ identities and

⁸⁶ In an interview Zaatari explains that, in practice, the law regarding Article 534 in Lebanon, which punished any sexual act of homosexuality (i.e. sodomy) remains vague. For instance, he further explains, men who are caught engaging in homosexual activities are sometimes arrested and jailed for one month to a year. However, the decision comes back to who’s handling the case. Policemen in Lebanon (who are entitled by the law to negotiate power at the scene) are better known for harassing and blackmailing subjects for gay behaviour (Aliaga & Zaatari, 2012).

preventing any sort of potential harassment or blackmailing from the authorities. The blurring and overexposure function as a reminder of Lebanon's contemporary social context in which one's homosexuality, let alone sexual rights, are not permitted.

For the most part, the projected bright light conceals certain facial and body traits from the viewer. In other random moments, the shining light transforms into a translucent glare that allows the viewer to identify certain facial details from the participants, which ultimately allows us to recognize them within the storyline. Here, Zaatari and his participants willfully play with the idea of being hidden and seen. Zaatari hides their faces, while simultaneously overexposing them – rather than simply darken or erase them. In fact, we may propose that such visual approach may be closely read with Nicholas De Villiers's concept of 'opacity'. For De Villiers, the use of opacity as a queer strategy gives way to a shy, matte, neutral figure that engages in creative self-enactments by which one can resist the rhetoric of 'coming out' as (2012: 6). In other words, queer opacity would ultimately empower the individual still in the closet (by choice or necessity) rather than seeing a 'closeted' anonymous individual who lacks agency, freedom, and who is repressed.⁸⁷ In this perspective, the occlusion of the men's faces and bodies in Zaatari's video can be considered as a productive mode of the self rather than a negative, self-hating, homophobic aspect of homosexuality.

⁸⁷ An example of queer opacity is explored in the introduction of José Quiroga's book *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (2000). Quiroga describes the Buenos Aires Gay Pride March of 1993, in which individuals who wanted to join without being recognized or labeled as 'queer' were handed-out masks by the event's organizers. The strategic use of the mask not only allowed LGBTQ individuals to have a presence in the public sphere, it also welcomed allies to join the fight against homophobia. While the mask could be a reminder that homosexuality is either lived out of the closet or in the shadows, Quiroga proposed a more productive understanding of its use. In fact, "the mask spoke of broader circuits that did not necessarily end with an "outing," or an identity as conclusion" (Quiroga, 2000: 1). The main objective was not to 'come out', but rather, to collectively show solidarity that open-up larger discussions around LGBTQ demands around human rights.

It is important to acknowledge the social class privilege of Zaatari's participants. These include participants having financial means to live and travel abroad during summers. In one scene, a participant explains how he was fortunate to have the opportunity to be submerged in a more "free," "open," and "liberating" space where he could "fully" explore his sexuality outside of the norms of his "repressed" upbringing. For another young man, his privilege is situated within his secure accepting family environment where he is able to live 'openly' as a gay man. Other class markers that entail a privileged lifestyle include access to private education in Lebanon and abroad, financial security, and the ability to access resources within the gay community.

The concept of queer obscurity is not only limited to the visual. In fact, as we will see next, the concept may also be extended to the speech acts. Unconcealed depictions of homosexuality in visual media is forbidden by the State from making its way to mainstream audiences in Lebanon. To circumvent strict regulations and laws around censorship, artists and filmmakers lean towards the use of "melodramatic devices," "coding," and "subtext" to depict homosexuality (Hassan, 2010: 19). In fact, as will be examined, Zaatari's artistic strategy aligns with such representational strategies. It is worth noting that *Shou bhebbak* was screened only once in Lebanon by invitation only. This is the result of a few factors. First, as explained by Zaatari, within the Lebanese context once a film and video has been shown once, no one believes it is worth screening again. Second, no art establishments in Lebanon are willing to show it. And third, none of Zaatari's video works have shooting permits or release permits (Aliaga & Zaatari, 2012: 203) placing him in a risky position.

Throughout *Shou Bhebbak*, Zaatari manages to capture the coded language used between gay men in Lebanon to express their feelings and desires within a deeply

homophobic society. In the first part, the young men are asked about their favourite part of their body. One of them answers by exposing his back and replying:

[Guy 1]

003 Because it has a large surface, smooth and hairless

004 It has a nice shape especially since I am skinny

005 It shows the body's silhouette

(01:37 – 01:54 min).

The nameless and blurred individual continues by recalling a story about a tattoo freshly inked on his back, which left a dry bloody impression on his bed sheets.

006 The first night I applied some medicine

007 And avoid sleeping on my back not to damage it

008 When I work up the next day

009 Probably I turned on my back at night

010 I found the wings printed precisely on the sheet under me

011 It was a strange idea

012 To wake up and find wings printed under you

013 I love the idea

014 So I cut the part of the sheet with the wings printed in dry blood

015 And sent it to him inside a letter

(01:54 – 2:39 min).

At first, the young man narrates what seems to be a romantic tale. One may suggest that the cut-out imprint of wings is used as a love letter, which is sealed with his own blood⁸⁸. While the recipient is never mentioned, it suggests that the relationship is clandestine. This specific scene seems to have struck Zaatari because the image of the

⁸⁸ In East Asian and Southeast Asian societies, a red envelope is gifted to newly-weds at their wedding, or to family members during holiday as a symbol of good luck. Additionally, paper money is usually placed in the red envelope as a way to ward off evil spirits (Erh-Ya Pai, 2017: 207). In almanacks (or yearly calendars), saints' days and holidays are printed in red ink ('red-letter day'), other days in black" (Brewer, 2010: 1046).

young man's wing tattoo has been photographed and printed in large format under the title "Ali's Back, 2011" [fig. 55], which is usually exhibited side-by-side with the video. In Christian tradition, images of wings are generally associated with angels and the spiritual realm (Olderr, 1986). They can also be symbols of protection and guidance. In this case, we may conclude that the young man's tattoo may be symbolic of someone special in his life. However, this scene also suggests a sexual tension. The description of his back as a nicely shaped, large surface, smooth and hairless is open-ended so as to, perhaps, suggest his whole back, including the buttocks. It may even be referencing only the buttocks. Furthermore, the shape of the wings as dual and symmetrical, with a gap in-between them might also reference the buttocks. The uncertainty seemingly plays into the sexual tension. As well, the trace of blood found under him on his sheets in the morning might reference his first sexual experience with anal penetration. Historically, the mark of blood on the sheets is evidence for the bride's virginity, also known as the "virginity test" (Harris & Caskey-Sigety, 2014). In the morning following the newlyweds first night, the stained bloody sheets were often publicly displayed as to indicate the "sealing of the marriage act" (Weinstein, 2003: 398). Interestingly enough, such public display was later opposed by the Catholic Church as it feared that the newlyweds would become obsessed with sex (Mitchell, 2007: 129). Speaking in this way allows the young man to express and reveal his same-sex desires and experiences that perhaps could not be told in normal circumstances through ordinary language.

Another example of queer coded language is when one of the young men explains how he transformed the lyrics from a song by Fairuz.⁸⁹ Her famous song *Ana*

⁸⁹ Fairuz (1935-) is a Lebanese singer and cultural icon widely adored and respected in the Arab World. Over the years, rumours about her sexuality surfaced because of her 'androgynous look' and her strong

Habbaytak [I Love You] is transformed by the young men into *Ana had bayatak* [I am near your house or I Am Near You] to address his lover:

[Couple 1 – Guy 1]

- 104 He used to call me as soon as he arrives to pick me up
105 And sing to me: “I’m near you, near you”
106 Which was a variation on a Fairuz song that said:
107 “I loved you until I forgot sleep”
108 But instead he used to add a letter that changed the meaning to “near
you”
(10:06 – 10:20 min).

In a few scenes, we are given the impression that the young men are also improvising with their romantic relationship. The young couple discusses how the only relationship model available to them was the traditional heterosexual standard. They go so far as replicate heteronormativity where they exchange rings as an act to profess their love.

[Couple 1 – Guy 1]

- 113 We gave each other rights
114 I was supposed to behave in a certain way with him
115 And we were supposed to behave in a certain way with me
(10:47 – 11:00 min).

[Couple 1 – Guy 2]

- 116 We took the example of a straight couple and applied it on ourselves
(11:03 min).

character (Merabet, 2014). This has in part led Fairuz’s figure to be become a gay icon in the Arab world by her admiring gay fans.

However, such traditional model of a couple is never defined by the young men. Thus, we are left to imagine that perhaps they are speaking of a committed and monogamous relationship that seeks to build and share a home and life together, with or without children. While they attempted to apply part of this normative model, the young couple failed to maintain their commitment.

[Couple 1 – Guy 2]

117 I find that it doesn't work like that
118 Neither of us has an experience in such a relationship
119 We have only the typical image to take as an example
120 And apply on our relationship
121 It couldn't work
(11:08 – 11:26 min).

[Couple 1 – Guy 2]

293 This relationship influenced me a lot
294 First of all, it started when I was relatively young
295 And it was my first relationship besides it went on for a long time
296 I believe it is still going on although it evolved into something else
297 It shaped the way I think especially in my relationship with people
(23:42 – 24:06 min).

[Couple 1 – Guy 1]

298 The commitment made us suffocate
299 We reached absolute routine
300 Every day before going to bed, we'd call each other
301 Every night, we'd decide
302 How we were going to see each other's the next day
303 Anything even if it hasn't happened...
304 Any possible attraction to anyone else would create problems
305 Such things weren't supposed to happen

306 But after the end of the relationship those things were deleted
307 I put them to an end
(24:13 –24:58 min).

The couple reaches an absolute routine caused by the normative linearity of their relationship. We may argue that the couple seeks to articulate an alternative mode of living – one that rethinks the progressive conception of hetero- and homonormativity. Throughout their stories, we see and hear the difficulty the couple has to communicate their vision of a queer future. They are trying to imagine their own future (as a couple) that lies outside of the normative logic, such as redefining their relationship, while setting their own limits and commitments. Yet, while they are resisting such normativity, they are also adopting discourses of their cultural tradition. This is what queer theorist Jose Esteban Muñoz would describe as disidentifying. The term ‘disidentification’ is defined as a “survival strategy” for queer subjects to identify with a mainstream group (i.e. whiteness or straightness), while still claiming individual traits such as blackness or queerness (Muñoz 1999: 28). In other words, one can choose to identify through identity labels while simultaneously rejecting to be fully defined by those labels. Accordingly, Muñoz suggests that one can form and enact identity within and in opposition to the dominant social hegemonies of heteronormativity, misogyny, and white supremacy. Such act of resistance not only allows queer individuals to “resist and confound socially prescriptive patterns of identification,” it also allows queers to reform the “dominant script” (Muñoz, 1999: 28) in attempts at redefining power structures of society.⁹⁰ One of

⁹⁰ It is pertinent to note the similarities of disidentification and hybridity. For Muñoz, “to perform queerness is to constantly disidentify, to constantly find oneself thriving on sites where meaning does not properly ‘line up’. This is equally true of hybridity, another modality where meaning or identifications do not properly line up” (Muñoz, 1999: 78). For instance, “the postcolonial hybrid is a subject whose identity practices are structured around an ambivalent relationship to the signs of empire and the signs of the ‘native,’ a subject who occupies a space between the West and the rest” (Muñoz, 1999: 78).

the undertakings that seems to be happening in *Shou Bhebbak* is the development of a porous community set in a queer temporality that is ‘not here’ and ‘not now’ (Muñoz, 2009). In other words, a queer community that has no peripheral centers and borders, which allows to be always transient. Throughout the video, the young men discuss how they are constantly being placed in new situations, where they must negotiate their sexual identity. We see this in how they use language to discuss their homosexuality (i.e. the linguistic play on Fairuz’s song). Paradoxically, while the coded language reveals their same-sex desires, it also conceals them.

Within *Shou Bhebbak*, the young men’s stories can be qualified as coming out narratives given the nature of personal accounts, as well as them seeking recognition of their existence even if they are visually anonymous and faceless. Zaatari’s occlusion of the men’s faces could be considered as a form of quasi-closeting. This brings us to examine the notion of ‘coming out’ and how it operates within the current Lebanese context.

In the North American context, the narrative of ‘coming out of the closet’ is often understood as a rite of passage from an oppressed identity to a liberatory and emancipated gay identity (Van Gennep, 1960; Herdt and Boxer, 1993; Signorile, 1996; Webb-Mitchell, 2007; Meeks, 2006). According to American gay liberationist politics, which dates back to the 1970s, to ‘come out’ required non-heterosexual individuals to achieve a “gay consciousness” (Meeks, 2006: 59). Such consciousness, according to liberationists, was crucial as it allowed gays and lesbians to recognize society’s homophobia, thereby collectively taking action and standing in solidarity against forms of discrimination and stigmatization (Seidman, 2004).

From the mid-1980s, gay culture in Western societies was stereotypically associated with promiscuous sexual activities, drug use, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, deviancy, and the unnatural (Seidman, 2004; Grindstaff, 2006; Petro, 2015). References of ‘illness’ and ‘abnormality’ to non-heterosexual identities increased and reinforced the binary divide of the “good heterosexual” and the “polluted queer” (Seidman, 2002). Such discourse led to the emergence of gay and queer grass-root activist organizations (such as ACT UP, Queer Nation, and Lesbian Avengers) that mobilized and unified the gay and lesbian community to transform cultural politics, disseminate information about safe-sex practices, as well as fight against oppression and discrimination (Bernstein, 1997; Rimmerman, 2002). Appropriately, gay, lesbian, and queer activists and scholars put forward the metaphor of ‘coming out of the closet,’ which was (and still is for many) considered as a quintessential gesture to become gay within the Western world (Wood and Lucas, 1993; Jagose, 1996; Meeks, 2006; Ward and Winstanley, 2005). For these activists, coming out also involved documenting and relaying stories of gay life, particularly ones that involved the relationship between sexual practice and HIV/AIDS.⁹¹ As a result, shared coming out stories connected and empowered the LGBT community by grounding them in their history that allowed an affirmation of an ‘authentic’ sexuality as a response to discrimination, while also ensuring civil rights (Seidman, 2004; Schweighofer, 2016). Thus, by living the

⁹¹ At the same time, the dominant capitalist economy in relation to urbanization became popular and crucial to the modern gay identity in developing gay communities around the United States, which included West Hollywood, San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and Atlanta (Jayne, 2006). These spaces were to be safe, free and open. However, as shown by John D’Emilio (1982) only white, middle and upper-class men in a stable economic position could afford and enjoy living in these spaces.

‘authentic self’ outside of the closet meant being in a state of self-acceptance and liberation.

Yet, it is important to note the difficulties and consequences of coming out for some LGBT individuals. For instance, one may encounter serious psychological distress, bullying, fear of harassment, blackmailing, discrimination, religious and community exclusion, and family rejection that may lead to homelessness (Herdt and Boxer, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1998, 2001, 2005). Therefore, some individuals do not take up the subject position of ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ and choose not to reveal their sexuality⁹². In such cases, they often develop strategies to manage their sexual identity. For instance, individuals who choose to discreetly live their sexuality by ‘passing’ as heterosexual might reference their partners and friends in neutral ways, while others choose to live their sexuality by ‘covering’ (not disclosing information), which can lead to creating fictitious heterosexual lifestyle (Ward and Winstanley, 2005: 450).

The closet narrative is set up in a way that is limited: either you are ‘in’ or you are ‘out’. Such an implicit binary opposition creates a rhetoric that associates those living within as being unhappy and repressed in darkness and isolation (Purnell, 2016), whereas those living freely ‘out’ become part of “the realm of the visible, the speakable, the culturally intelligible” (Fuss, 1991: 4). However, the process of coming out is dismissed by Butler when she writes that “no transparent or full revelation is afforded” on one being lesbian or gay (1991: 309) because these categories remain improperly named. In other words, even if one does ‘come out’, their “identities (and by extension

⁹² See: Steven Seidman’s “A Post-Identity Culture of Sexual Resistance.” *Introducing the New Sexuality Studies*. Eds. Seidman, Steven, Nancy Fischer and Chet Meeks. London and New York: Routledge, 2007. 496-99.

the subject) are always at risk of becoming unintelligible and further ‘closeted’ within discourse, normalizing practices, and heterosexual frameworks of power (i.e. language, institutions, and heteronormative regimes of recognition)” (Gallagher, 2012: 86). As will be examined, within the context of Lebanon, the closet takes on a different meaning and importance.

In a recent article titled “Globalizing the Closet: Is ‘Coming Out’ A Western Concept?” (2018), journalist Musa Shadeddi sheds light on the various perspectives of coming out in the Arab world, by conducting interviews with Arab LGBT activists. Noticeably, there seems to be four divergent views on the concept of ‘coming out’ in the larger Arab context. First, some members of the Arab LGBT community believe that the concept is a Western product that should not be forced onto the family. As one noted, “[...] if I like them [family members], then I should not force them to accept something they do not want” (Shadeddi, 2018, para. 2). Such a view is perhaps not surprising given that traditional family structure and solidarity are considered to be fundamental to most Lebanese. We could say that the family remains at the core of one’s identity. In contrast to such a view, other Arab LGBT members stating that “coming out per se is not a Western concept”; however, whether it becomes involuntary for the individual to come out or not, in this situation it turns into a Western representation; this is associated with the concept of confession, which is very popular in the West” (Shadeddi, 2018, para. 4). Lastly, some of whom identified as LGBT either have difficulties comprehend the meaning of the term or had simply never heard of it before (Shadeddi, 2018, para. 5). This is particularly of interest as it indicates the possibility of Arab queer sexualities existing outside of the dominant Western concept of ‘coming out’, in addition to being

positioned beyond the restrictive binary systems of East/West, inside/outside, and invisible/visible.

In *Shou Bhebbak*, the couple and young men appear to be playing simultaneously with their ‘closeted’ position as subjects seemingly pushing against visibility. In fact, the young men are perhaps less interested in revealing their sexual identity, which according to the Western concept of ‘coming out’ is geared towards an act of revelation associated, for the most part, with the idea of confession and truth (De Villiers, 2012). In this study, our attention rests with the non-revelatory approach, rather than the idea of confession and truth as central to one’s self-discovery. In current times, queer scholars have examined forms of refusal, darkness, passivity (Halberstam), escape (Muñoz), and non-revelation and opacity (De Villiers) as strategies of twenty-first century queer subjectivity. With the growth of neoliberal constructs of individualism, De Villiers (2012), in particular, argues for anonymity and facelessness, the recognition of privacy as a right, and the comprehension of one’s privacy as freedom. Returning to *Shou Bhebbak*, the protagonists seem to be pointing towards the illegible and non-recognizable. We can suggest that their queerness is opaque – an opaqueness that, according to art critic Alicia Eler, rethinks visibility and recognition outside “standardization through speculative and utopian experimentation and fantasy” (2013, para. 5). We can read Zaatari’s video as questioning inadvertently the viability of the closet and visibility in Lebanon, the Arab world, and possibly the Western world. What seems to be developing here is a more nuanced, complicated, and creative formulation of queerness.

In rejecting the essentialist and binary concept of the subjects as either ‘in’ or ‘out’, queer theorist Denis Provencher proposed a “coming out à *l’orientale*” or

“‘Middle-Eastern-style’ liberation of gender and sexuality [...]” (2017: 81) through the photographic series of 2Fik – a Maghrebi-French performance artist-photographer living in Quebec⁹³. 2Fik’s photographic series examine the notions of sexuality through masquerading as various characters. In his interview with Provencher, 2Fik refers to the term “*coming out à l’orientale*” as the use of coded language and imagery, which are specific to one’s social and cultural environment, in order to “[speak] about a delicate or taboo issue like homosexuality for a traditional Muslim family” (2011: 817). For instance, one may “*come out à l’orientale*” by saying “I do not plan to get married” (2011: 821) a sentence that may suggest one’s rupture with the dominant traditional culture. Furthermore, it allows 2Fik to “[distance] himself linguistically and culturally from his parents [...] by taking a step back and speaking in English and preparing himself to face potential rejection when he speaks to them about foreign concepts (i.e. cross-dressing, gender bending, and critiquing hypocrisy in Islam through performance art)” (Provencher, 2011: 821-822). Within the Western context, Provencher points out that “speaking homosexual subjects” depend on “first-person ‘I’ statements [‘I’m gay,’ ‘I come out’] that help to construct a visible identity in relation to a larger social world” (2017: 31). For 2Fik, instead of using first-person pronouns, he relies on “local language” or a series of visual references that his Moroccan parents and friends will recognize and understand (Provencher, 2017: 57). In comparison, the young men in Zaatari’s video use coded language or “flexible language” defined as a “broad accumulation of linguistic and other symbolic resources” (Leap (2003) as qtd. in Provencher, 2017: 27). Here the “flexible language” can also be seen as “veiled

⁹³ See: <http://2fikornot2fik.com/portfolio/> (Accessed Dec. 9, 2017).

language” (Akbari, 2004), which make the transmission of meaning possible. In other terms, coded language allows for “the transmission of meaning that cannot be expressed through ordinary language” (Blumenberg, 2010). This is also seen in the play of words in the original lyrics of Fairuz’s song *Ana Habbaytak* [I Love You] that becomes a queer way of speaking in coded language.

In *Shou Bhebbak*, the young men seem to be expressing and identifying their sexuality in a more local way, for instance through coded language. Yet, they maintain a very strict understanding of gender (hegemonic masculinity), except perhaps for one individual who identifies as financially privileged. This individual bends the gender rules. He does so by wearing fashionable crop-tops, sleeveless tank tops, and colourful female items that were given as gifts from previous partners and purchased by themselves in his various international travels. The hegemonic construct of masculinity is maintained by the other young men by enforcing the idea of a ‘perfect’ man. For the most part, they describe this man as physically abled with either a tall slim build and hairless body. Additionally, they impose the strict sexual dichotomies of the ‘top’ (alpha male) vs. the ‘bottom’ (submissive male), which only sustains hegemony. The discussion on race and ethnicity is non-existent.

Unfortunately, while ideas of hegemonic masculinity are maintained by the young men’s rhetoric, the young men are, however, moving towards an ambiguous orientation and intervention in the representation of an opaque queerness. Such representation is situated in a space that is non-victimizing. Nonetheless, critiques by neoliberal activists over the occlusion, facelessness, invisibility, and lack of speech ‘to come out’ could be read as homophobic. This is caused because the larger (Western) idea of being publicly out remains one that is political and thus, creates a sense of

membership. In short, as we have examined, queer opacity can only “propose a view, in which the definition of the subject fluctuates” (Ruvalcaba, 2016: 114) that disrupts and rejects all essentialist orientations of an ‘authentic’ gay identity.

Within Lebanon’s contemporary social context, where homosexual acts and sexual rights in general, are highly restricted, one can suggest that the blindness of the light in the participants’ faces is a reminder that there are constantly under scrutiny. None of the men in the video are shown in any explicit ways; they do not even speak directly about their sexual experiences, but rather indicate them through coded language. Throughout the video, Zaatari allows for the participants to speak and to be heard. By doing so, the participants reclaim agency. They also reclaim their image by self-depicting in a positive manner, outside negative stereotypes (i.e. as victims) and reductionist rhetoric (as subhuman). Both of Zaatari’s videos, *Al-ilka al-hamra* (2000) and *Shou Bhebbak* (2001), address the multiplicity of layers, discourses, and cultural models within Lebanon, where queer identities are not fixed or neatly associated with a particular ideological model or traditional practices, but rather in a state of tension and unease. What seems to come out in this analysis is the way Arab queer-identified individual are reimaging queer spaces, where language and expressions can be developed in their own local way, outside of the harsh binaristic confines of the closet. One must remember that silence and the absence of speech is not synonymous with ‘internalized’ homophobia or shame. In fact, as depicted within both videos, space is available for queer encounters, pleasures, and expressions. Zaatari, thus, seems to identify and redefine the representations of queerness in Arab visual culture, which challenges and destabilizes not only dominant heteronormativity in Lebanon, but also institutionalized conceptions of queerness at large.

Conclusion

On May 14th, 2018, the Zoukak Theatre Company had scheduled to feature an Arabic text reading of “Les Ogres” – a queer French play by Yann Verburgh – that directly addresses homophobia, violence, crimes, aggressions, and other various forms of discrimination against LGBTQ individuals in today’s tense social and political world. The play takes on a transnational perspective exploring issues from France to Russia to Uganda to Iran, passing by Bulgaria, South Africa, Cameroun, Greece, Brazil, Romania, South Korea, and Holland. The event was part of the planned activities for Beirut Pride 2018, which coincided with the International Day Against Homophobia. Unfortunately, hours before the show’s opening it was shut down by the censorship bureau at the General Security with the pretext that it needed to be approved prior to the scheduled date.

In a statement published on Facebook and later on Beirut Pride 2018’s website, the organizers explain that there are: “No clear idea whether the original plan was to raid the space or demand to look at the script. [...] It is worth mentioning that the censorship pass is the approval [...] of any show, from which are exempted text readings” (Damien, 2018). As one can imagine, a great number of LGBTQ organizers and allies protested against such censorship and outright discrimination. In fact, many of the organizers were detained by authorities under suspicion of “inciting debauchery and immorality and disrupting the general law,” while others were questioned, physically abused and verbally threatened by the police (Damien, 2018). After endless conversations and negotiations between the lawyers (representing the organizers of Beirut Pride), the police officers, and the General Security, a decision was taken by the General Prosecutor

of Beirut to cancel all events scheduled for Beirut Pride 2018. As the Lebanese State authorities continue to take hostile action towards members of the LGBTQ community in Lebanon, Akram Zaatari's work seems relevant as it reveals themes of queer expressions, representations, and struggles in this political uprising.

The aim of this study was to draw attention to the emergence and shifting representations of queer masculinities as they are artistically performed, negotiated, and challenged in the contemporary lens-based artworks of internationally-acclaimed Beirut-based artists Akram Zaatari. I utilize a contemporary art history approach that is informed by a variety of cross-cultural poststructuralist scholarship in feminist, gender, and queer theories. Such theoretical approach is appropriate for this study as it allows to examine discourse power, representation, and instability, all of which have direct application in global gender studies and contemporary art history. Further, I draw on art cultural theory, photographic theory, and contemporary art theory specific to video works. Lastly, I employ a feminist intersectional and postcolonial approach to the analysis and interpretation of the works to comprehend the intersections of marginalized queer experiences and representations as they are depicted in Zaatari's artworks. The artworks were selected for analysis because of their similar critical thematic entries of gender performativity, sexuality, and masculinity, in addition to the way the works were all created within Post-Civil War Lebanon but exhibited and circulated globally.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach that fused both cross-cultural comparative and queer visual analysis, I located Zaatari's artworks within a larger sociocultural context, as well as within and in tension with existing feminist and contemporary art discourses on the body, identity, and performativity. Such approach has led me to break

new ground by qualifying Zaatari's artistic explorations as queer innovations in contemporary art in Lebanon and globally.

It is important for me to restate my privileged position as a white, Canadian, queer cisgender male scholar, with access to academic, economic, and political resources when researching topics of queerness within contemporary artworks from Lebanon. Throughout my research practice, I was mindful of hierarchies of power and authority, including those power differentials that can create divisions between colonizers and colonized, as well as between male and female artists, gay and heterosexual. To avoid any 'universalizing' disciplinary concepts, I employed, when possible, a comparative lens to strengthen the knowledge of the cross-cultural context of conceptual meaning through Western and Arab world societies. Such a conscience research practice allowed me to raise awareness and reflection on some of the nuanced and complex issues surrounding queer sexualities in Zaatari's artworks, rather than attempt to speak for the 'other(s)' or for 'other' cultures through the artwork.

This dissertation started by considering how Zaatari's production developed nonhierarchical and denormalizing ways of thinking and organizing gender and sexuality. Furthermore, this dissertation reflected on the process of reimagining the contemporary Western conception of "queerness" in Zaatari's artworks to articulate, both visually and conceptually, a local queer identity in Lebanon. Much of the research on queerness in the Arab region risks falling into a colonialist and liberatory framework that seeks to discover an 'authentic' queer identity. Contrary to such approaches, I argued for the fluidity of a local queer Arab model of disidentification underpinning Zaatari's artworks, which questions our perceived realities of both queerness and hegemonic masculinity in Post-Civil War Lebanon.

Throughout this study, I offered an overview of the recent theorization of gender norms and gender performativity in Post-Civil War Lebanon. I discovered that queer Arabs shape and frame their sexual identity using hybrid local terminologies and foreign languages, also known as ‘Arabish’ to collectively identify as a community, while also transgressing the binaries established by the hegemonic heteronormative matrix.

Through the same-sex kissing scene photographed by commercial Lebanese photographer Hashem El Madani in his *Studio Shehrazade* from the 1950s to the 1970s and later appropriated and exhibited by Akram Zaatari in the early 2000s, I found that Zaatari’s appropriation revealed a reality that is different than what is typically expected by both Western and Arab viewers. This view challenges our perceptions of a very closed, homophobic, repressed society from the past. I argued that while postmodern theories of identity reject the idea of a ‘natural’ truth of oneself altogether – proposing that identity is rather constructed – I claimed that Madani’s studio portraits alternate back and forth between notions of fixed and ruptured identities. This flux led to the development of alternative modes of intimacy and identity by the photographed subjects. In terms of Zaatari’s appropriated images, they are read today in a context that opens-up an inquiry on local nebulous articulations of sexuality in Lebanon, which is discussed vis-à-vis the context of contemporary neoimperialist discourses of queer sexuality.

In the discussion of *Majnounak* [Crazy of You] (1997), I examined how the young men’s views on sexual ‘conquests’ and sexual experiences with women in Lebanon could be understood as reinforcing their hegemonic traditional masculinity. In addition, I explore their views on the differences in sexual and gender roles in Post-Civil War Lebanon. For Zaatari, his greatest priority is to address violence against women and challenge dominant power structures, which silences women’s voices. For instance, he

inserts a specific moment in the video clips of a female journalist with a clear and authoritative voice. This journalist is depicted in a non-sexualized and non-objectified manner. To subvert the hegemonic masculinity propagated by the young men, Zaatari consciously creates what I call micro-experiences of queerness, which give homoerotic undertones questioning the validity of the men's stories. Furthermore, drawing attention to the hidden sexuality and homoeroticism among the young men. For instance, these micro-experiences of queerness can be found in the video where a bodybuilder exposes his buttocks and his friend injects a shot of steroids, where it may be considered a metaphor of anal sex.

Finally, the last part of the dissertation analyzes two videos: *Al-ilka al-hamra* and *Shou Bhebbak*. These videos explore the sexuality among self-identified gay men in Lebanon, where homosexuality is still punishable by up to one year of imprisonment. In the first video, Zaatari puts to use a strategy such as formal distortions and the deliberate use of poor quality of the videos that I read as contributing to the creation of a queer temporality, which I posit resist normativity. The aim of the first section of the chapter was to explore queer temporalities, foremost, through the local visual and textual elements. This strategic move was fundamental to decipher the local semiotics within Zaatari's works of art that would open us a discussion on the aesthetics and politics of queer theory in Lebanon. However, for future studies, I would foresee the use of José Esteban Muñoz's "queer horizon" and Heather Love's "backward feeling" as a way to discuss and animate modes of feeling in time and queer historicity. Muñoz's reading is optimistic in asking how one should push towards possibilities of the future, while Love's perspective is more geared towards negativity. In relation to the "aspects of historical gay identity" (2009: 23), Love suggests that queers are faced with the

question: “[I]s it better to move on towards a brighter future or to hang back and cling to the past?” (2009: 27). Love’s seeks to develop a “politics of the past” (2009: 21) that is that take account of the negative affects (i.e. shame, stigma, and suffering) in order to offer an alternative and transformative queer politics of the present.

What is noticeable in *Shou Bhebbak* is Zaatari’s use of a bright light to mask the identities of each participant rendering their identification almost impossible. Here, I argued that Zaatari not only challenges the very notion of queer identification, but he questions inadvertently the viability of ‘coming out of the closet’ and queer visibility in Lebanon, the Arab world, and possibly the Western world. This finding is broadly in line with those of researchers such as José Esteban Muñoz (1999), Denis Provencher (2011; 2017) and Nicholas DeVillier (2012).

Throughout both videos, I have shown that the participants reclaim their images by self-depicting in a positive manner, outside the negative stereotypes such as victims. What comes out in the analysis is the way Arab queer-identified individuals are reimagining queer spaces, where language and expression can be developed in their own local way, outside the harsh binaristic confines of the closet. In fact, as depicted within both videos, space is available for queer encounters, pleasures, and expressions. Zaatari, thus, seems to identify and redefine the representations of queerness in Arab visual culture, which challenges and destabilized not only dominant heteronormativity in Lebanon, but also institutionalized conceptions of queerness at large – in a more nuanced, complicated, and creative formulation of queerness.

The presence of intertextuality emerged, in this study, as a critical and useful framework for decoding and interpreting the meanings embedded within Zaatari’s

artwork (or in this case ‘text’).⁹⁴ In his essay, *From Work to Text*, cultural theorist Roland Barthes differentiates two terms ‘work’ and ‘text’: “The work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language” (1977: 157). As explained by art historian Andrea Fitzpatrick, the term ‘work’ is understood, by Barthes, as an isolated object, “closed, complete, centered, and authored by a seemingly original, singular, source [...]” (2010: 100). In contrast, the ‘text’ offers a plurality of open-ended meanings in part because of how it weaves and overlaps with numerous existing texts. Thus, the text is continually in flux and open to various interpretations. As noted by Fitzpatrick, “[...] a text can be considered any theoretical or artistic entity (visual, musical, theatrical, or literary), and this openness as to what counts as a text foster interdisciplinarity” (2010: 100).

The notion of intertextuality, specific to the field of contemporary art history, is understood as a method of interpretation that is used to construct meaning from the text and deepen our experience of it (Fitzpatrick, 2010). The text’s interpretation is not closed but in fact open to infinite meanings that take shape through the interrelationship or interconnectivity among other texts. Moreover, intertextuality allows to reveal and connect the specific cultural and political histories engaged within the text (Fitzpatrick, 2010). Throughout my analysis, I read Zaatari’s artworks locally, art historically, and through various media (i.e. the newsflashes, lyrics, and subtitles, which appear strategically throughout the videos). In chapters three and four, I analyzed numerous symbolic imageries (such as the bloody tattoo, the buttocks, etc.), and coded lingo (such as the use of the word ‘blond,’ and the lyrics ‘stick it in the world’), in addition to the

⁹⁴ I acknowledge and thank Dr. L. Burns for highlighting and suggesting a scholarly pathway of research on the notion of intertextuality during my defence. I also thank Dr. A. Fitzpatrick for helping me in better grasping the use of intertextuality within the field contemporary art history, which will be useful in my future research.

choice of specific title, the subtitles that accompany the video, and the choice of the music.

Intertextuality enabled me to examine the relation of the hybrid linguistic local registers, motifs, and metaphors within the complex and obscure work of Zaatari to generate layers of meanings, multiple associations and different open interpretations. Here, intertextuality allowed me to connect the referential elements provided by Zaatari, to further animate the representations and expressions of queerness in the videos, in addition to offer an anti-patriarchal and anti-essentialist perspective in Lebanon.

Zaatari's artworks disrupt many presupposed notions of Arab masculinity that both local and global audiences may have. Given Lebanon's current political instability and uprisings of sectarian violence and militia warfare, this study is urgent in order to combat troubling and persistent unidimensional representations of Lebanese masculinities in ways that facilitate conflict and perpetuate stereotypes. Further, his works display a parallel of local queer strategies that maneuvers in-between, rise beyond and even play with stereotypes, essentialist imagery, and binary identifications. He could be said to be contesting the very notion of queer identification. In fact, one could say that Zaatari's works represent a 'queer *à la Libanaise*'⁹⁵ – a local queerness that is defined as living (by choice) in the shadows and opaqueness of everyday life, while simultaneously surfacing in impulsive moments. For instance, in Zaatari's videos, queer-identified individuals use ambiguous local lingo, songs, and street names, which are sometimes difficult to translate (to a larger audience) because of their local specificities. Zaatari's emphasis on the local vocabulary, imagery, and conception of queerness can be

⁹⁵ Thanks to Dr. Grandena for sharing this expression during the defence.

read as refusing and resisting the limited Western conception of gay visible identity.⁹⁶ By doing so, Zaatari reimagined and opens up a multiple and layered local model of queerness, which enables agency within the larger LGBT community.

His significant contribution to the ongoing history of contemporary photography and video in Lebanon and internationally, and more importantly his critical position in terms of gender and sexuality merits my focused attention because of his approach in dealing with such taboo subjects. As previously mentioned in the Introduction, Zaatari is unabashedly political in his artworks, conveying subtle yet powerful messages and narratives around male sexuality and same-sex intimacy, as well as the violent oppressive effects of patriarchy and heteronormativity. It is also significant that he explores and uses local metaphorical language specific to Lebanon in his artworks to discuss and contest sexualities. Zaatari's artworks here allow a space to question what we do and do not see. In all, I justify that his artworks question and queer the perceived realities of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, both locally and globally, by representing images and ways of embodying alternative masculinities, and destabilizing existing perceptions of 'traditional' masculinity.

In this study, my intent was to contribute to the current art-historical and theoretical discourses by exploring and analyzing how Zaatari's internationally shown artworks are inscribed in a global discourse. In fact, Zaatari's work avoids at all costs tropes of female veiling, harem, terrorism, sectarianism, fetishism and stereotypes, such as the work of Iranian or other Arab arts that use motifs. Rather, his work is situated in

⁹⁶ To situate Zaatari's work in the 'global contemporary' (Joselit, 2012) seems difficult given that much of his art objects are directed towards a distinct understanding of the local queer semiotics. At the same time, Zaatari seems to be wanting to create an international dialogue on queerness to put forward a new conception of queerness. I thank to Dr. Zdebik for point out the 'global contemporary' during my defence.

the more global art. Additionally, this study provided an important contribution to Middle Eastern Studies, which has seen a slow to consider the study of Arab queer masculinity both within the Arab world and its diaspora. Lastly, this study is helpful to contemporary art history and global gender theory as it redefines and revisits representations and expressions of queer masculinities in visual culture and open a broad-minded dialogue to discuss the process of masculinization, and to elaborate on its future artistic trends in the Arab world and in Western countries.

The findings in my study are limited to the expressions and representations of queer male sexuality, with the sole exploration of female sexuality (*Bashasha and a friend*) in *The Madani Project*. I should make clear that I have deliberately not fully explored certain themes such as the implication of race and ethnicity in the conception of a queer Arab masculinity. Moreover, I was less concerned with the emerge of queer and feminist organizations and thought in Lebanon, as they are better documented elsewhere. The question of religion and ethno-sectarian belongings was not examined in my study given that it has not been key issues in feminist and queer activist writings. Instead, secularism, largely a reaction to sectarianism and sectarian wards is dominant within civil society and activist groups in Lebanon. As a result, religious identities were not prioritized in this dissertation.

The frameworks I have provided in this study of lens-based artworks by Akram Zaatari provide a starting point from which to examine my next project, the visual documentation works by contemporary Lebanese-American photographer George Awde. His recent solo exhibition “Scale Without Measure” at the Light Work Gallery in Syracuse, New York, addresses themes of contemporary Arab masculinity and sexuality among labor migrants between Syria and Lebanon. However, in my future research, I

intend to consider the representation of ill and disable male bodies in Awde's photographic series "Quiet Crossings" (2008-2010) and "Shifting Grounds" (2011-2012), in which I would critically examine issues of displacement, fragility, and vulnerability of masculinity, while decolonizing concepts of disability, illness, and queerness through aesthetics, postcolonial studies, and crip theory. Such study is crucial given the lack of scholarly discussion of disability in the Arab world.

Another avenue for further examination involves considering the study of visual metaphors used in two highly mediatized international exhibitions shown in the United States in the recent past months to highlight issues of queerness and sexuality within global Arab diaspora communities. The first exhibition to be examined is titled "American Landscape: An Exploration of Art and Humanity," curated by Elizabeth Barrett Sullivan from the Arab American National Museums in Dearborn, Michigan (November 17, 2017 – April 9, 2018). Through the photographic works of American-Syrian artist of Nabil Mousa, this exhibition focuses on the lived experiences of refugees marginalized because of their non-conforming gender and sexual identity. The second exhibition to be examined is "The Third Muslim: Queer and Trans* Muslim Narratives of Resistance and Resilience," co-curated by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Yas Ahmed at the SOMArts Cultural Center, San Francisco (January 25 – February 22). The multimedia works presented in the exhibition examine and problematize the notion of visibility of LGBTQ Muslims living in the United States. In both controversial exhibitions, I see developing an inquiry that involves revisiting the politics of LGBTQ rights in the United States, while also reconsidering notions of queerness, community, and visibility similar to those explored in my study on Akram Zaatari.

Many significant obstacles still remain within the Middle East and North African region affecting LGBTQ individuals, such as: including criminalization of same-sex conduct and gender non-conformity, and arbitrary arrests, family rejection, social stigma, and censorship of LGBTQ voices. However, it is through the works of Akram Zaatari that awareness is raised regarding gender and sexual identity. The artworks that have been examined in this study – simultaneously bold and subtle – perpetually question our present social, cultural, and political positions and identities in a globalized world in a way that entails finding and giving rise to new forms of (dis)identification, the construction of new meanings, flexible identities, and porous communities.

As cited by queer theorists Arnaldo Cruz-Malava and Martin F. Manalansan, “Queerness is now global. Whether in advertising, film, performance art, the Internet, or the political discourses of human rights in emerging democracies, images of queer sexualities and cultures now circulate around the globe” (2002: 1).

This study has shed light on many aspects regarding queerness and queer masculinities in Lebanon. I have shown that Zaatari’s use of queer strategies in his artworks has compellingly empowered queer and non-gender-conforming individuals by using a cross-section of local and independent tactics that operate in-between, rise beyond and even toy with stereotypes, essentialist imagery, and binary identifications. While change is difficult to attain in a context where traditionalism, resistance, and hostility reign, we must remain hopeful that we will arrive to forge a space of acceptance (whatever form it may take) and perpetually stand in solidarity with those in marginalized positions.

Figure Appendix



Figure 1 Akram Zaatari. “Hashem El Madani. Studio Shehrazade [1].” *Instagram*, 9 January 2016. Photograph. 14 April 2016.



Figure 2 Akram Zaatari. “Hashem El Madani. Studio Shehrazade [2].” *Instagram*, 9 January 2016. Photograph. 14 April 2016.



Figure 3 Akram Zaatari. “Hashem El Madani. Studio Shehrazade [3].” *Instagram*, 9 January 2016. Photograph. 14 April 2016.



Figure 4 Akram Zaatari. “Hashem El Madani. Studio Shehrazade [4].” *Instagram*, 9 January 2016. Photograph. 14 April 2016.



Figure 5 Akram Zaatari. “Hashem El Madani. Studio Shehrazade [5].” *Instagram*, 9 January 2016. Photograph. 14 April 2016.



Figure 6 Akram Zaatari. “Hashem El Madani. Studio Shehrazade [6].” *Instagram*, 9 January 2016. Photograph. 14 April 2016.



Figure 7 Akram Zaatari. “Hashem El Madani. Studio Shehrazade [7].” *Instagram*, 9 January 2016. Photograph. 14 April 2016.

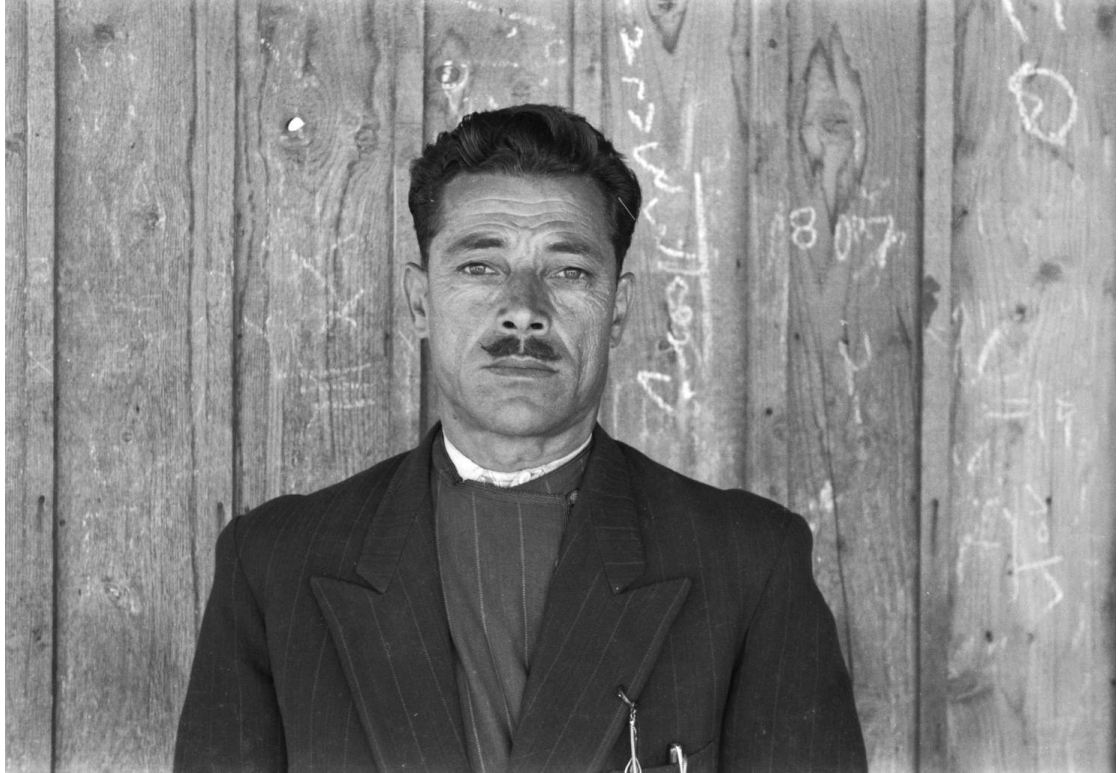


Figure 8 Akram Zaatari, *Anonymous, South Lebanon. 1952. Hashem el Madani.* From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 19,1 x 29,0 cm, 2007.

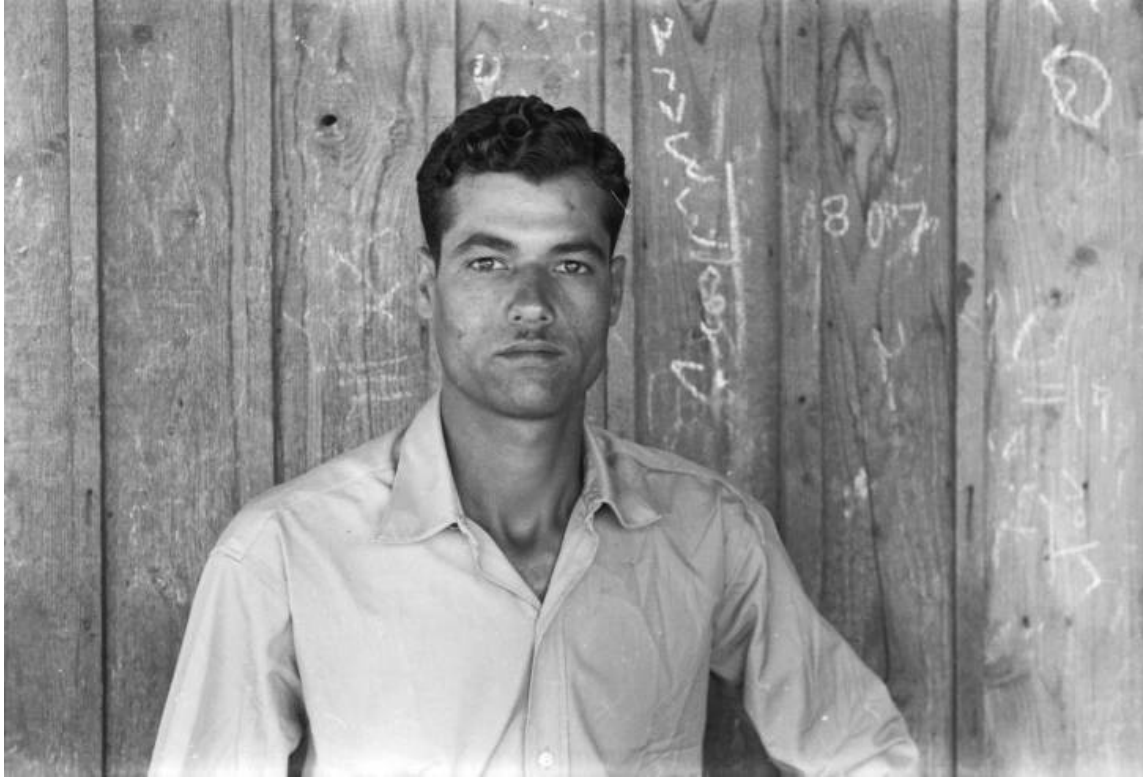


Figure 9 Akram Zaatari, *Anonymous, South Lebanon. 1952. Hashem el Madani.* From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 19,1 x 29,0 cm, 2007.



Figure 10 Akram Zaatari, *Abu Zahr and his wife*. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon. 1973-74. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 39,2 x 26,5 cm, 2007.



Figure 11 Akram Zaatari, *Palestinian couple from Ain El Helweh. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon. 1973-74. Hashem el Madani.* From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 39,1 x 26,5 cm, 2007.



Figure 12 Akram Zaatari, *Couple from Iqlim El Kharrub*. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon. 1973-74. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 39,1 x 26,5 cm, 2007.

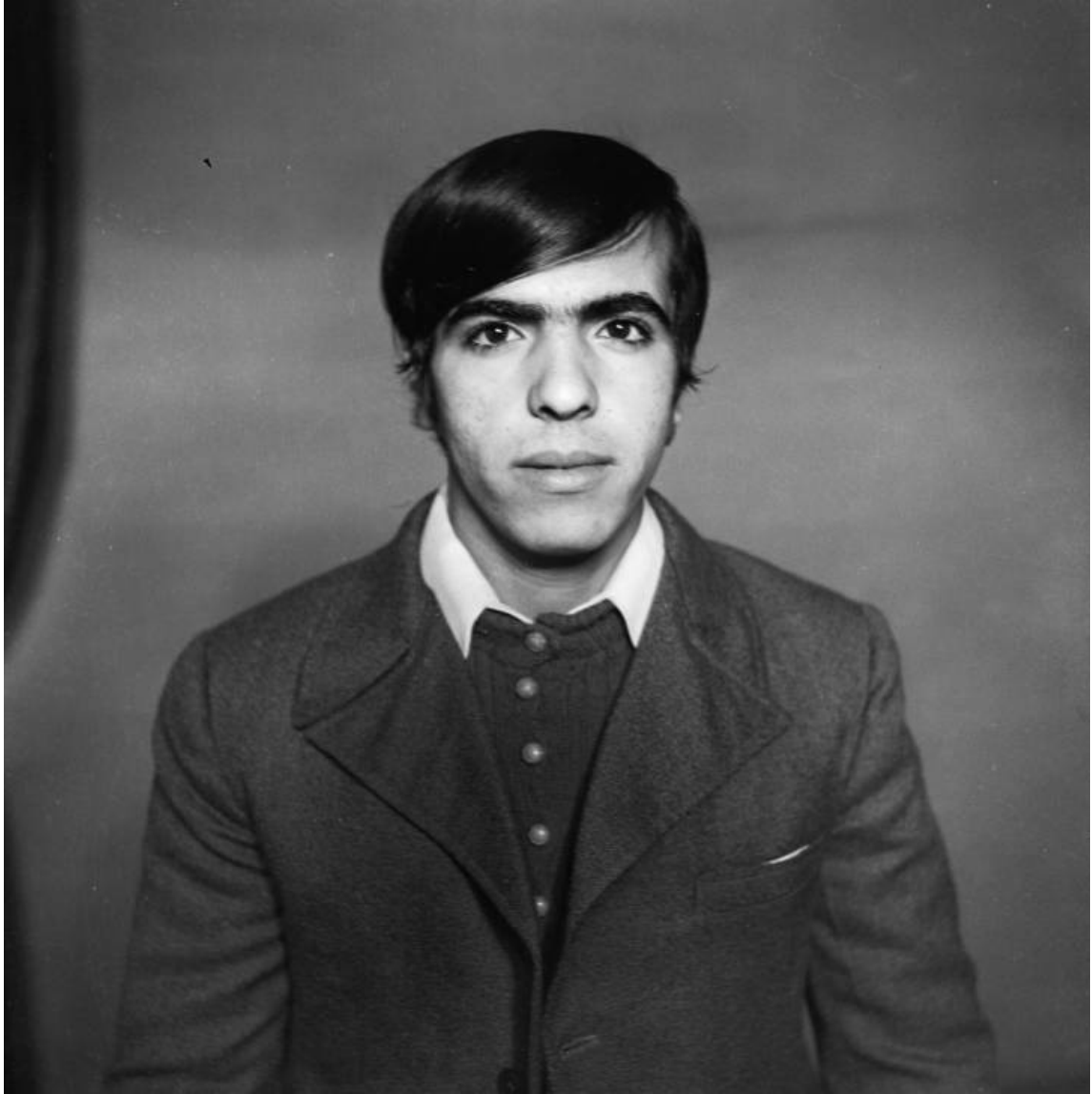


Figure 13 Akram Zaatari. *Anonymous. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, late 1960s. Standard profile portrait, mandatory for candidates to military service. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 29,0 x 29,2 cm, 2007.*

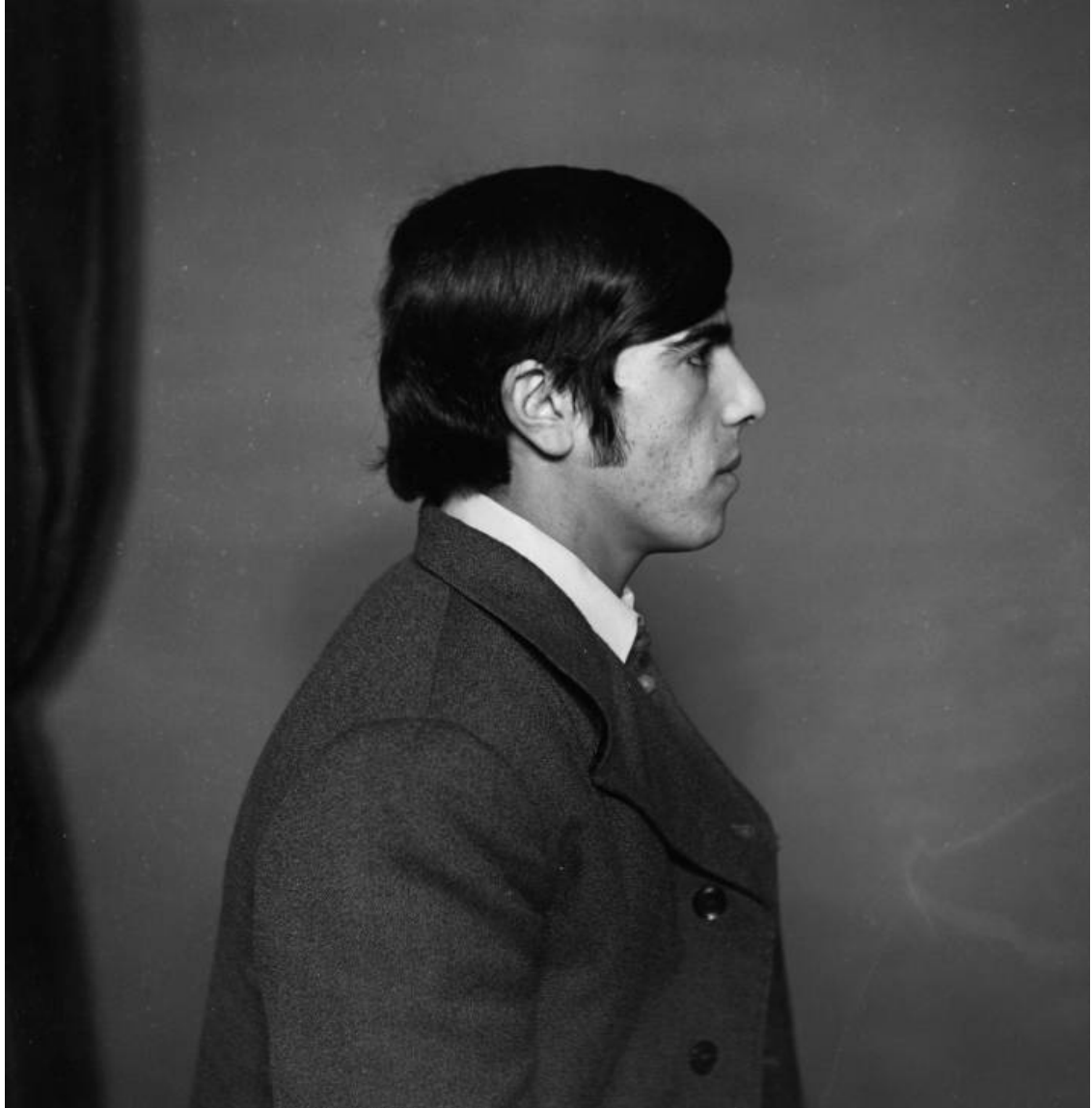


Figure 14 Akram Zaatari. *Anonymous. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, late 1960s. Standard profile portrait, mandatory for candidates to military service. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 29,0 x 29,2 cm, 2007.*



Figure 15 Akram Zaatari, *Anonymous. UNRWA School, South Lebanon. 1960s. Hashem el Madani*. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 19,1x 29,0 cm, 2007.



Figure 16 Akram Zaatari, *Anonymous. UNRWA School, South Lebanon. 1960s. Hashem el Madani*. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 19,1x 29,0 cm, 2007.



Figure 17 Akram Zaatari, *Student of Aisha Om el Mo'minin School for Girls. School courtyard, Saida Lebanon. 1949-49. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 15,0 x 22,7 cm, 2007.*



Figure 18 Akram Zaatari, *Student of Aisha Om el Mo'minin School for Girls. School courtyard, Saida Lebanon. 1949-49. Hashem el Madani.* From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 15,0 x 22,7 cm, 2007.



Figure 19 Akram Zaatari. *Anonymous. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1970s. Hashem el Madani.* From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 19,1 x 29,0 cm, 2007.



Figure 20 Akram Zaatari. *Anonymous. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1960. Hashem el Madani.* From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 29,0 x 19,0 cm, 2007.



Figure 21 Akram Zaatari. *Reesh. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, late 1960s. Hashem el Madani.* From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 29,1 x 28,9 cm, 2007.

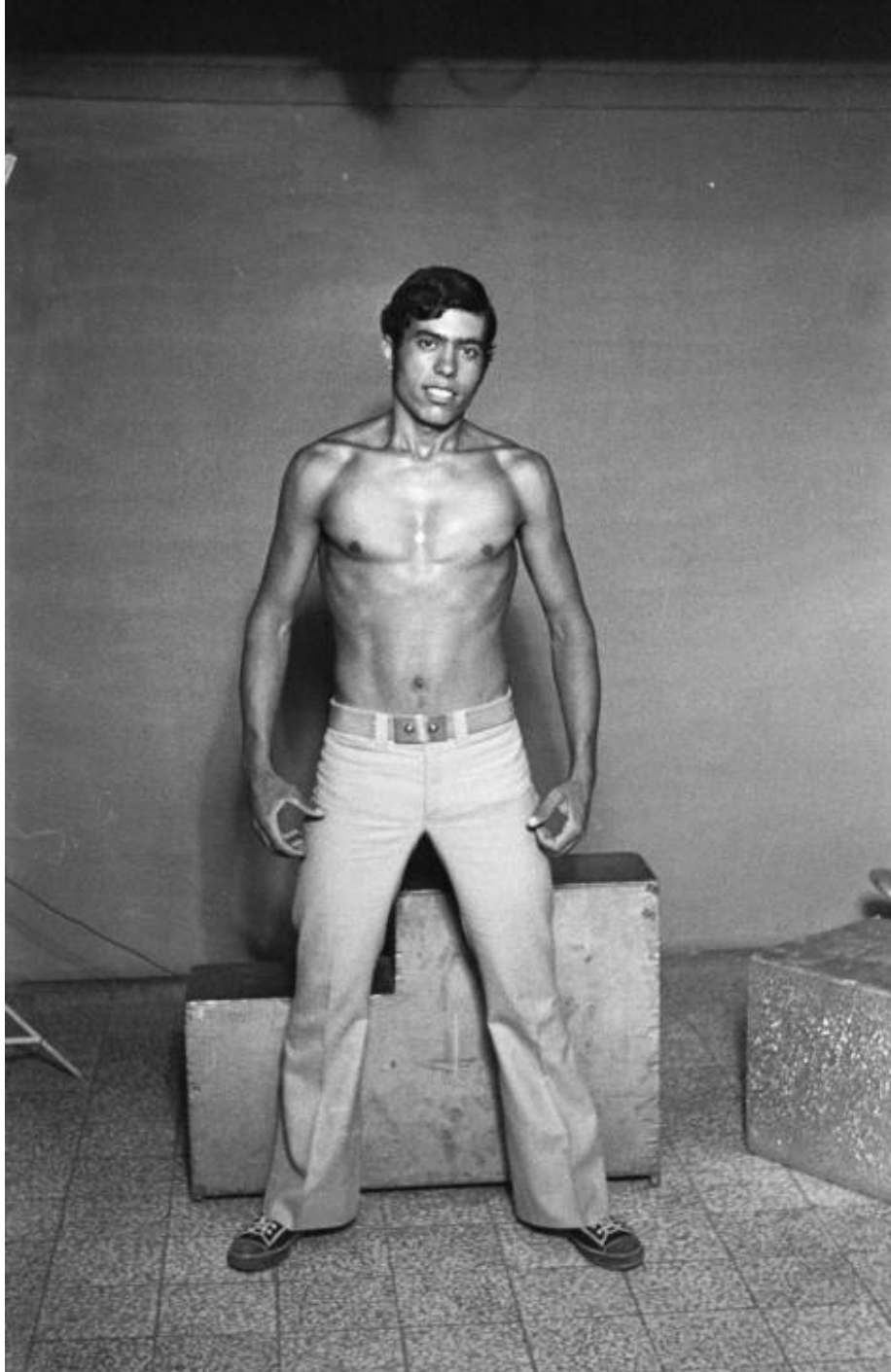


Figure 22 Akram Zaatari. *Anonymous. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1972. Hashem el Madani.* From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 28,9 x 19,1 cm, 2007.

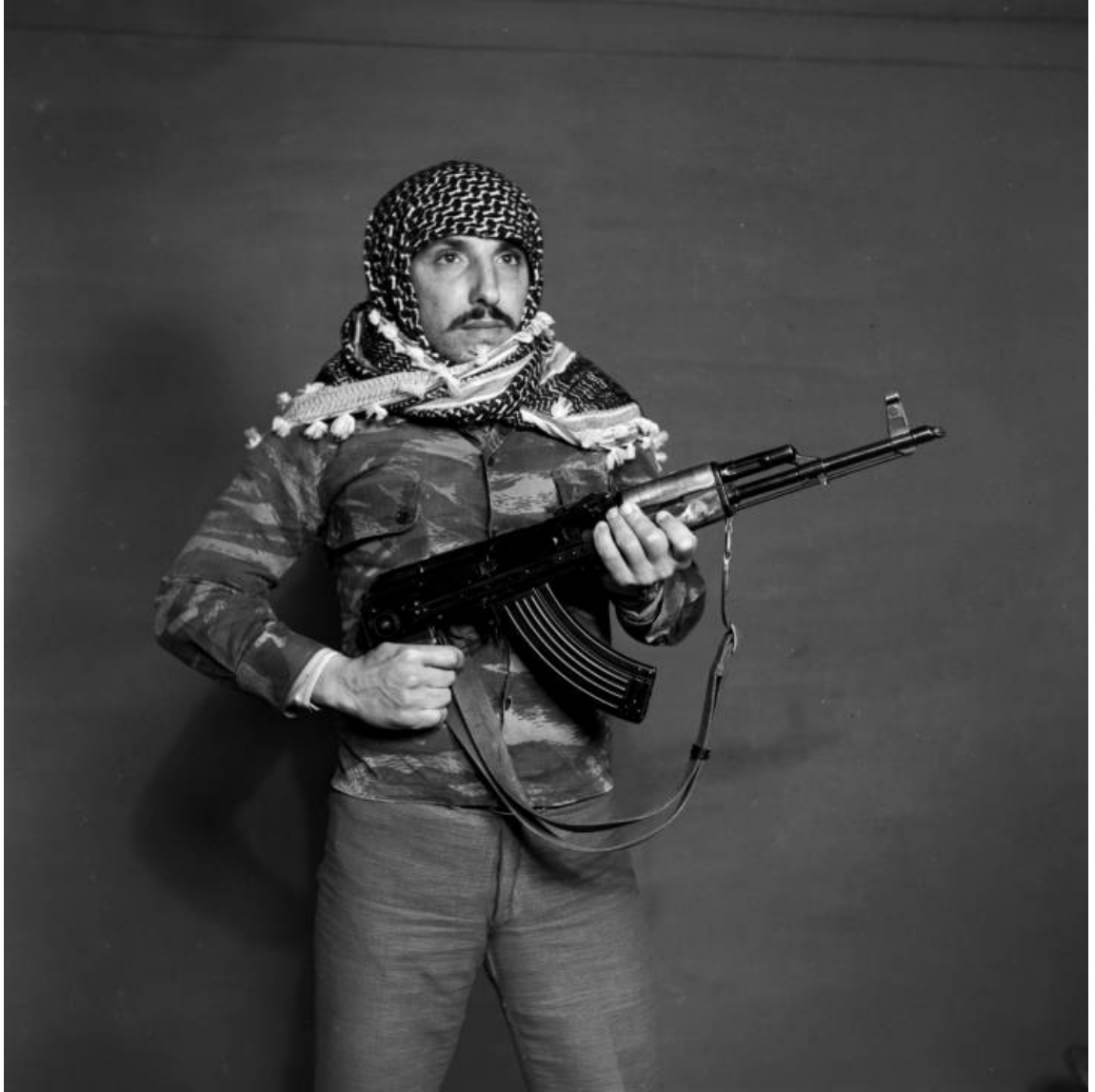


Figure 23 Akram Zaatari. *Zarif, a Palestinian resistant. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1968-72.* From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 28,9 x 29,2 cm, 2007.



Figure 24 Akram Zaatari, *Palestinian resistant*. *Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1968-72.* Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 28,9 x 19,1 cm, 2007.

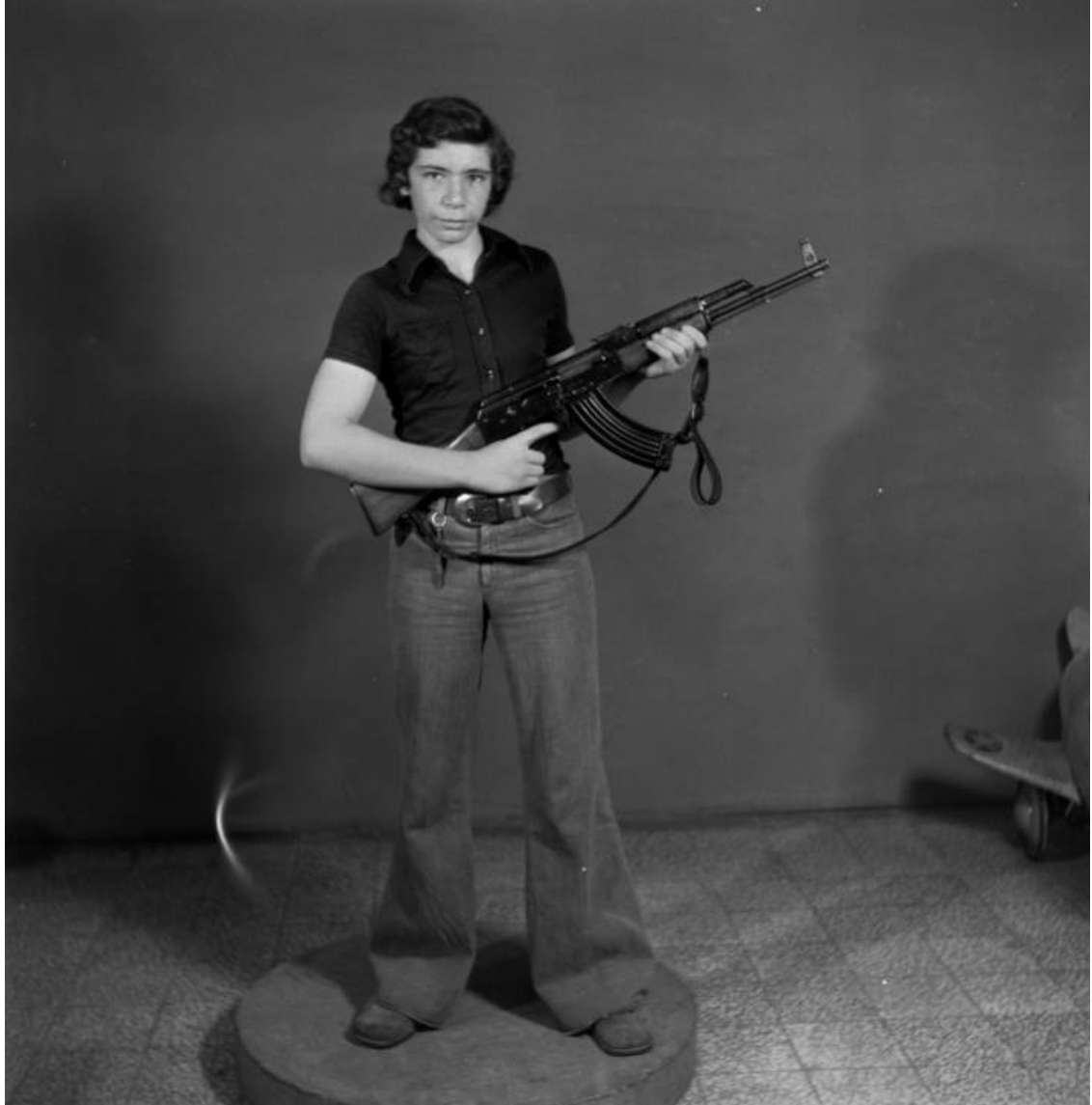


Figure 25 Akram Zaatari, Ringo, a *Palestinian resistant*. *Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1968-72. Hashem el Madani*. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 28,9 x 19,1 cm, 2007.



Figure 26 Akram Zaatari, Ringo, a *Palestinian resistant*. *Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1968-72. Hashem el Madani*. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 28,9 x 19,1 cm, 2007.



Figure 27 Akram Zaatari, *Hassan Jawhar*. *Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1968-72*. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 29,0 x 29,2 cm, 2007.



Figure 28 Akram Zaatari, *Abu Jalal Dimassy (centre) and Two of his Friends Acting Out a Hold-Up*. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1957. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 19,0 x 28,9 cm, 2007.



Figure 29 Akram Zaatari, *Baqari's wife*. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1957. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 29,0 x 19,0 cm, 2007.



Figure 30 Akram Zaatari, *Baqari's wife*. *Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1957*. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 29,0x 19,0 cm, 2007.

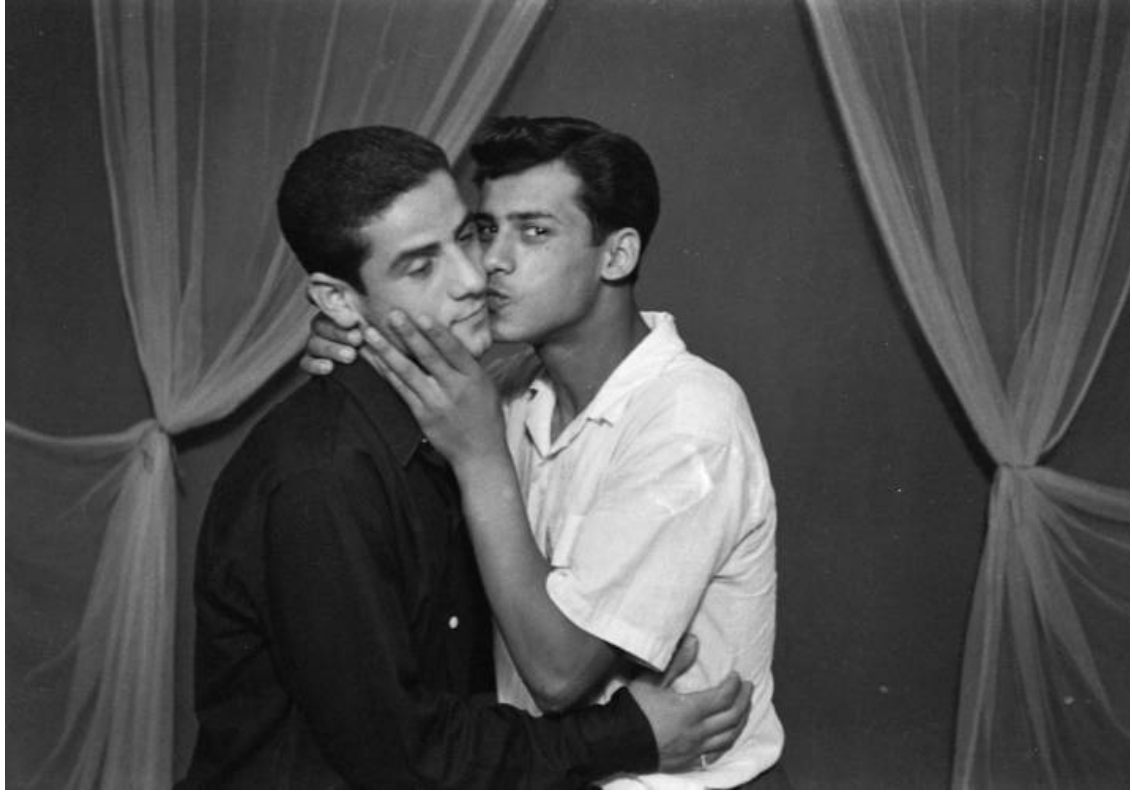


Figure 31 Akram Zaatari, *Tarho and El Masri*. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1958. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 19,0 x 28,9 cm, 2007.



Figure 32 Akram Zaatari, *Najm (left) and Asmar (right)*. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1950s. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 19,0 x 29,0 cm, 2007.



Figure 33 Akram Zaatari. *Bashasha (left) and a friend. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, early 1950s. Hashem el Madani. From Objects of Study/The archive of studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Photograph, gelatin silver, print on paper, 19,1 x 28,9 cm, 2007.*



Figure 34 Akram Zaatari. Still from *Crazy of You (Majnounak)*. 00:26:00, Lebanon, Arabic with English subtitles, Color, Mono, 1997.



Figure 35 Akram Zaatari. Still from *Crazy of You (Majnounak)*. 00:26:00, Lebanon, Arabic with English subtitles, Color, Mono, 1997.



Figure 36 Akram Zaatari. Still from *Red Chewing Gum (Al-Ilka al-hamra)*. 00:10:45, Lebanon, Arabic with English subtitles, Color, Mono, 2000.



Figure 37 Akram Zaatari. Still from *How I Love You (Shou Bhabbak)*. 00:29:00, Lebanon, Arabic with English subtitles, Color, Mono, 2001.



Figure 38 Akram Zaatari. Still from *How I Love You (Shou Bhabbak)*. 00:29:00, Lebanon, Arabic with English subtitles, Color, Mono, 2001.

Video Transcripts

The following transcripts are from the videos' transcripts verbatim.

A.1 *Majnounak* [Crazy for you] (1997)

FULL TRANSCRIPT

MAJNOUNAK [CRAZY OF YOU]

Akram Zaatari, 1997, colour, sound

Arabic with English subtitles

Lebanon, 00:26:00

BEGINNING

(00:00:17-00:01:32)

- 1 In order to retain a memory of every love
- 2 To have a place for every memory
- 3 And in order for each place to have a story
- 4 For each story to have a beginning and an end
- 5 But then all is over, what remains of love are the words and the places
- 6 Beirut
- 7 The pines, Raouche, together
- 8 I love you
- 9 *Aman Aman, O the wall of my house*
- 10 *We get it out, we get it out*
- 11 Yes for this one
- 12 *I pulled it, I pulled it*
- 13 Not for that one
- 14 You and I till the end
- 15 I won't leave you whatever happens

LANGUAGE

- 16 Can we talk?
- 17 I love those eyes!
- 18 I have a tattoo on my back
- 19 An eagle holding a snake and 4 words "my first & last love"
- 20 Underneath is a branch of a tree
- 21 A sun
- 22 And there's another one here
- 23 Ma'am! May we slide it in without messing it?
- 24 Ma'am! We hope what is in between is blond.
- 25 if it was blond can we see it? If no, can we make sure?

(women's voice)

- 26 I'm suffering

- 27 I think of you
 28 Everything reminds me of you
 29 I want you to save me
 30 I want you courageous (on screen: The nation will soon be mine!)
 31 I want you stronger (on screen: Ahhh! The taste of revenge is sweet!)
 32 I want you quicker (on screen: You father will pay the price for destroying the Imperial rule!)
 33 I want you more beautiful (on screen: What happened!)

SITES AND BEGINNINGS

(Young man – blue chequered shirt)

- 34 We come to play paddle ball
 35 I came to brought my own paddle
 36 But I gave mine away so I could borrow hers, hence talk to her
 37 I went and asked to borrow her paddle
 38 She gave it to me. I took it and played
 39 Then I went to give it back to her
 40 My cousin had joined them and asked: “are you all brothers and sisters?”
 41 I had taken her young brother aside and asked everything about her
 42 When she comes here, where she goes, where she lives
 43 What she does, who’s her brother, her sister, and everything
 44 I asked about all of them
 45 When my cousin came to her sister
 46 He asked: “are you all sisters?” she answered yes
 47 I said: “with all my respect, no.”
 48 “you two are sisters. She is a friend”
 49 “how do you know? I said I am a seer
 50 “how?” I said the heart reads what the eyes see.

(Young man – red shirt)

- 51 A respectable girl, wears good clothes.
 52 The classy girl dresses up well,
 53 And walks respectfully,
 54 The way she talks, walks, in every way

(Young man – white shirt/in car)

- 55 I looked at this girls, I stopped the car and asked her where she was going.
 56 She said that she was going home around Chatila or Chiah
 57 I said get in. She did.
 58 She asked me where I was heading to.
 59 I said: “I’m going for a drive,” she replied she was not in a hurry
 60 She said she was not ready to go home.
 61 I said: “so you want to go out?” she said: “yes.”
 62 We went towards Rawcheh and Manara
 63 I parked the car at Ramlet el Baida.
 64 There was some fighting and swearing. I though I’d better take her elsewhere.
 65 We went to a nice place in Ouzai.

66 So I parked the car, and went to check it out.
67 I found an appropriate spot here.
68 We came down here, behind these rocks.
69 I took a cover and put it on the ground
70 And we sat down together.
71 We started chatting.
72 I put my hand on hers, and she didn't react.
73 I asked her if she was virgin she said she had three kids
74 In short, I put my hand on hers
75 Since she is a widow, I think it's not forbidden to...
76 And since she didn't react to my hand,
77 I said is it possible for us to make an agreement, or be friends?
78 She said: "your words penetrated my heart."
79 I said: "then is it possible or not?"
80 She said: "do as you like, but keep away from my sensitive parts."

(Young man – Bodybuilder)

[The body builder is taped from the pectorals up. He is re-recorded from a TV monitor giving that grainy and canvas effect.]

81 Talking about body building,
82 One can't say that it is just about bulk
83 It is more about body beauty
84 One should consider body harmony and take care of all the muscles.
85 One must focus on one's technique
86 One should have contact with his muscles to control the transformation of his
body

(Young man – red shirt)

87 She lives in the house above,
89 I've seen her going in and out.
89 Once I invited her to a birthday party.
90 I said: "would you come with me?" she said her parents won't let her go.
91 I said OK, I'll send my sister to day your going with her.
92 She said: "what do you want?" I said, friendship.
93 She said OK
94 There was kind of a bet on this girl, as to who gets her first
95 We got to the end of the street. I took my sister back home.
96 She waited for me at the end of the street.
97 I told her the party was at my friends house in Chiah
98 I told her it was still early to go, it was 8 o'clock.
99 I suggested we got for a ride. She agreed.
100 We went to Ain el Mraysseh, she sat for 15 minutes but was scared.
101 She said it was her first time out,
102 Her first time on a motorcycle...
103 I said: "don't be afraid,"
104 And gave her a helmet to wear so no one would recognize her.
105 I headed towards my friend's place, and knocked his door. He opened.

106 I said Kassem behave as if there was a party, but got canceled. [*sic*]
107 He said: “OK, but who’s the girl?” I said: “she’s my girlfriend.”
108 He asked about her, I said: “I want to sleep with her.”
119 He said: “can I sleep with her after you finish?”
110 I said: “no, she is my girl.”

(women’s voice)

111 I think of you (on screen: Area 1 Start)
112 Everything reminds me of you
113 I want you to save me

SEX

(Young man – red shirt)

114 I turned on the TV and said: “would you like to watch a tape?”
115 She asked what kind of tape? I said: a “documentary” for example
116 Girls with each other, or a boy and a girl
117 She said: no, let us just watch TV.
118 I took her in my arms she said: “Sami take your hands off me”
119 I said: “what is the matter with you?” She said: “take them off me.”
120 I said: “listen, I have loved you for a long time”
121 No one can take you away from me.
122 I wish I could deflower you now, and make you legitimately mine.
123 She said: “what’s this talk?”
124 I said: “Like you heard it.”
125 She wanted to leave. I tried to convince her to stay.
126 I added: “you know what happened between lovers”
127 She said: “that’s impossible.”
128 I took her hand and put in on my ... dick
129 I said: “now it’s going to get hard and we’ll go to the bedroom.”
130 She said: “get away from me.”
131 We argued until I jumped over her, you see?
132 She took it off, finally by force.
133 She took of her bra, but wouldn’t take off her pants
134 She said: “have all what you want from the waist and up, but not below it”
135 I started sucking her, you see? I sucked her mouth, she got upset.
136 I told her I loved her. She said: “you all say the same things.”
137 I said: “no. Try me and you’ll see.”
138 Love isn’t “love for fuck,” but sex leads to love

(Young man – white shirt/in car)

139 Eat
140 By saying: “I ate” to friends
141 I mean: “I fucked”

(Young man – blue chequered shirt)

142 I told her my friend has an apartment
143 Where we could sit down just her and me, without being bothered

144 I told her we will chat, and live a night of love.
145 I told her what will happen.
146 She came with me, I had brought some food
147 We sat down and chatted. Then I came close and kissed her
148 She didn't seemed to be surprised.
149 I kissed her mouth, and laid her on the sofa
150 Then I got down to her breasts and started to kiss them
151 You know, like someone making love to a girl
152 I reached down her navel but she pulled me upwards.
153 The first time, I thought maybe she was overwhelmed by the gesture.
154 I focussed on her breasts, then mouth like someone making love to a girl.
155 ...behind her ears, on her neck, I sucked her breasts.
156 Every time I moved downwards she refused me
157 we spent nearly 2 hours together and arranged to meet 3 days later.
158 We went to the same apartment

(Young man – red shirt) [Shot from TV monitor – grainy]

159 I enjoy being with her when she shows up for the appointment right on time.
160 When she's late and I have other plans in mind
161 I would still go out with her but not very happily

(Young man – white shirt/in car)

162 I told her can I ask you something?
163 She said: "what?"
164 I said: "I want to kiss you."
165 She said: "it is possible, why not?" I kissed her.
166 Then, she wanted to kiss me. I said: "so you're not hesitant anymore?"
167 She said: still, I want to kiss you now.
168 I gave her my cheek, but she kissed my mouth
169 Then she took me in her arms and I started kissing her.
170 I said: "since you're not a virgin, can we sleep together?"
171 She said yes why not.
172 Now, I think she was a bit shy during the foreplay
173 In short we kissed for nearly ½ hour,
174 She took off her pullover, undid her bra
175 She was wearing a skirt not pants, she raised her skirt, took off he panties
176 And we went slowly until I started fucking her
177 After 5 minutes, a bit less, 4 minutes, I cam quickly.
178 I said I wanted a second one. She said what is it?
179 "There's not way," I said. "I want to fuck." She said OK.
180 Probably she though I was really potent.
181 In short, we proceeded. She was very frank with me
182 She said: "make yourself comfortable."
183 She lied down, I lied on top of her
184 And started fucking her for ½ hour
185 I fucked her, fucked her, fucked her, fucked her.
186 Then I said what if you get pregnant? She said no I have a "lead" (diaphragm)

187 I didn't know what it was.
188 She said that if get laid I won't get pregnant.
189 I said: "great. That's what I want."
190 You're a widow and you have a "lead." Both of us are comfortable.

(Young man – yellow shirt)

[Whistles]
191 It's there,
192 It's there,
(computer screen: Don't come!)
193 Have a good meal.
(computer screen: It's a trap!)
194 I hope we're next.
(phone rings)
195 Hello
196 Fine, how are you darling?
197 Yii, I miss you a lot really.

ENDINGS

(Young man – yellow shirt)

198 It was been 2 days since I last heard your voice, you made my day.

(Young man – white shirt/in car)

199 I said to her what is we sit father. She said why?
200 I said look at the waves. She said I like it this way.
201 It keeps one freshened and awake.
202 In short I sat and the waves splashed us.
203 Fucking, fucking until she came.
204 When she was about to come, I moved back from her.
205 She started moaning with excitement. Ah, Ah, ...things like that.
206 At one point I wanted to leave but she kissed me more
207 I felt that I really pleased her.
208 I wanted to leave. I didn't want her anymore.
209 After I came twice, I felt bored
210 So when she came, she started scratching my chest
211 She grabbed my pullover. She tore it from here.
212 I sewed it later.
213 I told her: "what is the matter with you?"
214 She said: "would you marry me?" I said: "no, I'm still young"

(Young man – bodybuilder)

215 The injection is a kind of anabolic
216 It helps store protein in the body
217 Protein increased the volume of the muscles.
218 But one's body gets used to these injections quickly
219 And I don't recommend them.

(Young man – red shirt)

220 She said: “Sami that’s enough, let me put my clothes on I want to go”
221 I said: “you’re not leaving.” I lifted her up in to the bedroom.
222 I laid her down on the bed, took off my clothes and hers.
223 She was half-naked, but I made her take off her pants, by force.
224 She was nervous and shouted at me.
225 I said: “lie down naturally. There’re nothing to fear.”
226 I lied on top of her, and told her: “hold my dick”
227 “rub it wherever you fell comfortable.”
228 She took my dick. I asked her to close her thighs.
229 She did, and we fucked.
230 I slept with her for nearly 45 min.
231 When she sat up she started crying. I said why are you crying?
232 She said: “nothing, but I didn’t think you were like that.”
233 I said: “don’t worry.”
234 She put her clothes on.
235 I offered her a ride back home, but she wouldn’t come with me.
236 She went alone.
237 I saw her at different instances afterwards
238 She wouldn’t talk to me.
239 I sent my sister to tell her that I wanted to see her, but she refused.
240 I met her once where she works
241 I took her on a ride.
242 I wanted to take her to the same place, but she refused.
243 Since then, I’ve stayed away from this girl
244 I see her. She will marry soon and I don’t speak with her anymore.

(Young man – white shirt/in car)

245 The “pain in the ass”
246 For example, when I go out with a girl, and she starts asking for so many things,
247 I warn her.
248 I tell her to wait to be offered. “Wait until I do it by myself”
249 For example, I got her one beer, she asked for another one.
250 I told her, “listen you start to piss me off,
251 You’re asking too much! Wait until I offer you”

(Young man – blue chequered shirt)

252 She went with me to the apartment we sat together.
253 And I had sex with her the way I wanted.
254 In the sense...her breasts...other places.
255 When I got to the lower part, I was able to get it, all of it.
256 She even started to get it, hold it. [Image of a tree trunk]
257 She reacted to what I was doing, and never objected.
258 I spent the night with her, it was the only night I spent with her.
259 After that she started coming to see me.
260 I didn’t have to look for her anymore.

261 I got what I wanted. Now she comes to me.
262 When she comes it is OK but I don't look for her anymore.
263 When I met her first, it was the contrary
264 I used to go see her whenever I got the chance to do so
265 Even every 10-15 mins but not anymore

(computer screen: It's all over.)

266 (Women's voice) I'm suffering...
(Computer screen: The girl's at the top of that tower!)
(news) [He asked her for marriage, but her father refused.]
(Computer screen: she must be dead by now.)
(news) [Ali visited the young girl where she works this morning]
267 (women's voice) I think of you
(news) [he shot her, then shot himself using his military gun]
268 (women's voice) Everything reminds me of you
269 (women's voice) I want you to save me
270 (women's voice) I want you courageous, I want you stronger, quicker, beautiful
(news) [Rana is in the hospital now and Ali died of his injuries]
(Computer screen: Look out!)

(Young men in car chanting and talking)

271 "Be he blessed who tore it without a saw, planted trees around it.
272 And send your friend Tamer the mighty.
273 "She went to the spring to get zucchini, the wind blew and her pussy showed"
274 This car seems to be really horny. How do you know?
275 Don't you feel those orgasmic moves?

(Young man – blue chequered shirt)

276 The film that I like to act is about a mission to save a girl
277 Who was kidnapped by the Mafia.

(Man chanting)

278 *I got it out and pulled it and stuck it in the wall*
279 *but as much as I pulled it the wall of my house broke down*
280 *we get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*

(news) [A crime at Burj Abi Haydar and the victim Imad Al Khalil.]

(news) [The investigation started]

(news) [Unofficial information claims there may be emotional reasons behind the death]

(news) [At midnight, residents of the "Canary Tower" building at Burj Abi Haydar]

(news) [heard the sound of a collision which was cleared later]

(news) [to be that of the all of Imad Al Khalil (23 years) from an upper floor]

(Young man – red shirt)

281 I love you, I would die for you.

(news) [The young man doesn't live in the building, but was just visiting.]
(news) [According to the victim's family and to some residents of the building]
(news) [he has an affair with a girl living there]
(news) [and was threatened by her parents if the relation continued]

282 (women's voice) I want you courageous
(Computer screen: Let me go!)
(Computer screen: Hold it!)
283 (women's voice) I want you to be stronger
284 (women's voice) I want you quicker
285 (women's voice) I want you more beautiful

(dancing men and chanting)
286 "...silver chains..."

(Young man – red shirt)
287 You and I till the end
288 I won't leave you whatever happens

289 (women's voice) stronger, faster, beautiful

(men chanting)

290 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
291 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
292 *I got it out and pulled it and stuck in the wall*
293 *As much as I did it the wall of my house broke down*
294 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
295 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
296 *She wore her pink dress wanting to tease me*
297 *Some wind blew and the walls broke down*
298 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
299 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
300 *If it is big and hard take it in your ass*
301 *If it is little and soft you enjoy looking*
302 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
303 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
304 *I saw her on Manara, they made her marry – what a loss!*
305 *She said: "I wish!" The wall broke down*
306 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
307 *We get it out and pull it and stick in the wall*
308 *I got it out and pulled it and stuck in the wall*
309 *As much as I did it, the wall broke down*

A.2 *Al-ilka al-hamra* [Red Chewing Gum] (2000)

FULL TRANSCRIPT

Al-ilka al-hamra [Red Chewing Gum]

Akram Zaatari, 2000, single-channel video

Arabic with English Subtitles

Lebanon, 00:10:45

[Narrator]

001 I still keep the tapes you shot in Hamra fifteen years ago
002 I hope you remember Hamra as it was fifteen years ago
003 And the boy with the red chewing gum
004 We were walking in an alley
005 And that boy was carrying a box of chewing gum
006 He was chewing one piece of gum after another
007 Throwing each away and saying “there’s no sugar left”
008 Then he was placing the masticated gum
009 In a little box, one after one

[Young man #1 singing]

010 I feel I’m always with you
011 Even when you are way your love survives inside of me
012 Makes me feel always with you
013 Always in my mind and heart
014 Missing you, even when next to you

[Young man #2]

015 “Shall we sing for him?”

[Young man #1]

016 “We’ll sing for him”

[Young man #2]

017 “What do we tell him?”

[Young man #1]

018 “We’ll sing for him”

[Young man #1 singing]

019 I feel I’m always with you
020 Even when you are away your love survives inside of me
021 Makes me feel always with you
022 Always in my mind and heart
023 Missing you, even when next to you

[Narrator]

024 That was fifteen years ago
025 When we were walking on a side street
026 Hiding from the stray bullets around us
027 We took a little road with yellow buildings
028 When the boy hurried ahead of us
029 Suddenly he sat down
030 Opened his box
031 And started chewing the pieces of gum one after the other
032 Throwing each away and saying
033 “there’s no sugar left”
034 then, he took the masticated gum straight out of his mouth
035 and placed them in a box he has next to him
036 I don’t remember his look
037 But I still remember the masticated gum
038 One next to another inside the box
039 There was, among them, a unique red gum
040 That you picked as soon as the boy looked behind
041 That happened fifteen years ago do you remember?
042 I haven’t seen you since that day
043 Since we were walking in that dark alley following the gum boy
044 He used to open the little gum packets
045 Chewing the gum pieces and saying
046 “there’s no sugar left”
047 He stealthily glanced at us
048 Before your hand slid into his box
049 And picked the only red chewing gum
050 You held it in your hand challenging me to chew it

[Young man #1]

051 “You”

[Young man #2]

052 “You”

[Young man #1]

053 “You”

[Young man #2]

054 “No, you do it first”

055 “is there no more sugar left?”

[Young man #1]

056 “No more”

[Narrator]

057 I still remember the mark it left on your tongue

058 Before your teeth gluttonously ground it, that red chewing gum
059 We were together, around sunset, in that deserted alley
060 The boy hurried ahead of us
061 I didn't understand why you asked him
062 About the cost of the whole box
063 But I sensed you desire to see him chew
064 The gum he is supposed to sell
065 And which you thought he desired
066 You found pleasure watching him chew the gum
067 One after one, pair after pair handful after handful
068 Consuming the sugar
069 Throwing away the masticated gum in the box, sugarless, shapeless
070 I didn't get why you picked the red chewing gum, the only one
071 But I felt your desire to partake the pleasure of the boy
072 Chewing the gum after him
073 In the beginning, the boy himself was surprised
074 With what you asked him to do
075 But soon, he opened the box
076 And started chewing the little gum pieces
077 Throwing them out of his mouth saying: "there's no sugar left"
078 I didn't quite get why you wanted me
079 To chew that red gum after you
080 As if making me share that pleasure with you
081 The gum was tasteless, sugarless
082 But it was fulfilling for the pleasure I saw in your eyes

[Young man #2]

083 "do you have money on you?"

[Young man #1]

084 "Yes, and you?"

[Young man #2]

085 "with you"

[Young man #1 singing]

086 I feel I'm always with you
087 Even when you are away your love survives inside of me
088 Makes me feel always with you
089 Always in my mind and heart
090 Missing you, even when next to you

[Narrator]

091 You got what you wanted fifteen years ago
092 In a street that got the shade early in the evening
093 For the proximity of its buildings one to another
094 You said you liked sunset

095 Because you liked that clear continuous line
096 That separated lit surfaces from other in shade
097 When details blend into opacities of either light or darkness
098 You said you preferred to film shadows of a presence
099 Aiming at hiding it instead of showing it
100 You aimed at the boy's face examining his features
101 But you were sure your camera would capture only darkness
102 You also said that you could snatch
103 Splits of a second from time
104 By changing the speed of your camera's shutter
105 You loved that glow
106 As if it located your shots in another time, outside time
107 Whether or not that happened fifteen years ago
108 Has no more significance
109 We looked for someone to play the shadow boy
110 The gum seller whom you wished to choose yourself
111 You wanted him to be timeless ageless: you said
112 You desired him to be gluttonous like a kid
113 With the eyes of a young boy and the body of a man
114 You wanted someone who tricked age and seized
115 From its fragments of time
116 Exactly like those fragments seized by your video camera
117 But you suddenly stopped you searched and smiled to me

[Young man #1]

118 "You"

[Young man #2]

119 "You"

[Young man #1]

120 "You"

[Narrator]

121 Your videotapes faded with time and became colorless
122 And I moved out of Hamra to relocate to Ashrafieh
123 I barely remember the neighborhood and its resident
124 And when I go back to your tapes looking for the details
125 I see emptiness, a featureless face
126 I hear your song mixed with sounds of gunshots
127 I smell car fumes and feel the sun of February
128 Penetrating my skin
129 When I watch your tapes, I see that glow of your eyes
130 And I feel your hand touching mine, your hand touching mine
131 Maybe that didn't happen fifteen years ago
132 What's important is that I haven't seen you since then
133 Since we walked in an alley

134 Following that boy selling chewing gum
135 He sends you his regards I hope you remember him

[Young man #1 singing]

136 I feel I'm always with you
137 Even when you are away, your love survives inside of me
138 Makes me feel always with you
139 Always in my mind and heart
140 Missing you, even when next to you
141 Even when next to you

A.3 *Shou Bhebbak* [How I Love You] (2001)

FULL TRANSCRIPT

***Shou Bhebbak* [How I Love You]**

Akram Zaatari, 2001, colour, sound

Arabic with English subtitles

Lebanon, 00:29:00

(Introduction)

Article 534 of the criminal code in Lebanon states that any sexual intercourse against nature will be penalized with imprisonment for up to one year

(Guy 1)

1 The part I like the most in my body, is my back

(Interviewer)

2 Why?

(Guy 1)

3 Because it has a large surface, smooth and hairless

4 It has a nice shape especially since I am skinny

5 It shows the body's silhouette

6 The first night I applied some medicine

7 And avoid sleeping on my back not to damage it

8 When I work up the next day

9 Probably I turned on my back at night

10 I found the wings printed precisely on the sheet under me

11 It was a strange idea

12 To wake up and find wings printed under you

13 I love the idea

14 So I cut the part of the sheet with the wings printed in dry blood

15 And sent it to him inside a letter

(Guy 2)

16 The part I like the most in me is my face

17 I like my eyes, but not their shape

18 I like how I stare at people

19 I like my mouth

20 Usually I don't like thin lips I like how I stare

21 There are wyes that fall on the edge like this

22 I don't like those eyes

(Guy 3)

23 My eyes

24 I find my eyes very beautiful useful in many ways

25 My lips are strange

26 They say sexy
27 And my hands because they are long, useful too

(Guy 4)

28 The sun

(Guy?)

29 I can't tell you which is the part I like the most in my body
30 I would be lying at myself
31 I never look in them mirror unless
32 I was arranging my hair or dressing up
33 However, people told me that the most attractive parts in me
34 Are my hands

(Guy?)

35 I love my eyes the most
36 Since I don't talk much
37 Maybe I communicate with my eyes

(Interviewer)

38 Tell him to come now if he could

(Couple 1 – Guy 1)

39 Actually I met him the first time at my cousin's birthday party
40 But I'd known about him before
41 We talked on the phone, and decided to meet
42 I remember we went to the military beach
43 We sat neat the sea and talked

(Couple 1 – Guy 2)

44 Bit by bit our telephone conversation were changing
45 I recall the first time he called me "my love" on the phone
46 At that time we had seen each other very little
47 But we had talked a lot on the phone

(Couple 1 – Guy 1)

48 It was becoming more and more intimate
49 The relationship had to go somewhere else
50 And that was when went to Meshref
51 Where the first physical contact happened

(Couple 1 – Guy 2)

52 The second step happened
53 When we slept together
54 In the sense that we were naked
55 He was staying over at my place

(Couple 1 – Guy 1)

56 That was when the first undressing happened
57 I consider we slept really together
58 I was doing things to prove
59 That we can cross the barrier of...shyness
60 I took off my jeans, and for the first time
61 Dealt with his sex organ as a target in the practice

(Guy – NYC)

62 I found this shirt at home
63 It belonged to one of my sisters
64 The hat was offered to me by people I stayed with in N.Y.

(Guy – Fashion)

65 I like to wear together I like the idea

(Both Guys)

66 This one cost me 5000LP
67 Because the longer sleeves show below

(Guy – Fashion)

68 He offered me this one
69 Because I was looking for a shirt that goes well with my blue pants
70 A friend offered me this T-shirt as a gift
71 I bought these suspenders when I was in France
72 I usually hesitate before I buy any clothes
73 Especially if they risked looking strange on me

[HOW I LOVE YOU] written on the mirror

74 ...but I bought these suspenders immediately after I tried them

(Guy – 1)

75 The part I find beautiful in a male's body is below armpits
76 There are nice curves where the skin is usually hairless
77 The form is beautiful also especially if one is skinny

(Guy -2?)

78 The chest and the stomach
79 I like narrow shoulders aligned with the torso and stomach
80 Without excess forms on the sides
81 I like the stomach to be flat
82 I usually get attracted to people, who look like me
83 And I like very much people with a nice smile

(Guy &?)

84 I have a weakness to the neck
85 I like ears. I like to caress someone's ears
86 I like hands
87 And the hair that grows on them
88 I like good-looking faces

(Guy?)

89 The most beautiful part in a man's body is the back
90 And the feet, I mean the feet
91 The feet

(Guy ?)

92 I like him to be sweet, and funny
93 I like to be attracted to one's face while talking to him
94 Of course I like him to be sexy
95 It depends on what you fell then
96 Sometimes you need a blond one to hug
97 Other times you need a brown one who is very masculine

(Guy?)

98 I like very much the eyes
99 And I like the butt

(Interviewer)

100 "Ausecours" loves the dick, big like his
101 -Did he say he has a big dick?
102 -Yes

(Couple 1 – Guy 2)

103 Then, we decided to act like any couple in love

(Couple 1 – Guy 1)

104 He used to call me as soon as he arrives to pick me up
105 And sing to me: "I'm near you, near you"
106 Which was a variation on a Fairuz song that said:
107 "I loved you until I forgot sleep"
108 But instead he used to add a letter that changed the meaning to "near you"

(Couple 1 – Guy 2)

109 He wasn't sixteen yet, and I was about nineteen
110 I thought maybe we didn't have anything to say to each other
111 In fact we used to talk all the time
112 We used to thing together

(Couple 1 – Guy 1)

113 We gave each other rights

114 I was supposed to behave in a certain way with him
115 And we was supposed to behave in a certain way with me

(Couple 1 – Guy 2)

116 We took the example of a straight couple and applied it on ourselves
117 I find that it doesn't work like that
118 Neither of us has an experience in such a relationship
119 We have only the typical image to take as an example
120 And apply on our relationship
121 It couldn't work

(Guy – NYC)

122 I bought it when I was in N.Y. for the summer
123 In a boutique that sells punk clothes it was a women's store
124 It shows a Manga character with calligraphy

(Guy – NYC II)

125 This sweater belongs to a friend
126 She has just received it back from a friend before it ended with me
127 I like the fabric because it reminds me of our clothes as kids
128 Which felt like a towel

(Guy – NYC)

129 I took this one from a friend not long time ago
130 She like that sweater, and wasn't supposed to give to me
131 But she lent it to me until she decided to wear it again

(Couple 2 – Guy 1)

132 I don't usually practice hard sex
133 But, I did it several times only with one person
134 I was in N.Y. when I met this guy
135 He asked for it and I didn't have problems trying it

(Guy?)

136 Whether someone penetrated me, no
137 Whether I penetrated someone, no
138 Whether I would like to try it, yes
139 I don't think that only women do...

(Guy?)

140 Penetration is not a major issue
141 Sometimes I feel like I want it
142 It depends on the person you're with
143 Sometimes you feel like you want to have sex with that person
144 And particularly have penetration with him
145 So it depends on the person and on what you want at that moment
146 But it is certainly not so essential

(Guy?)

147 I didn't think penetration was important until I was 27, no 26
148 Given that I am thirty now after 26, I found it important
149 But this is the case with a limited number of people
150 I can't offer everything in bed
151 To anyone I meet on the street

(Guy – braces)

152 It excites me
153 I imagine it more as a penetrator but I would like to try the other one
154 Since I know many people who prefer to be penetrated
155 And who talk about it as wow!

(Guy?)

156 The size of the sex organ doesn't matter for me
157 Since I am more interested in my feelings
158 More than the organ itself, the body or the muscles

(Guy?)

159 I don't like the big dick since I can't manipulate it
160 And give it the pleasure that I want to give
161 Also I don't like it very small
162 Since I don't enjoy it myself

(Guy red)

163 Sometimes it is very hard so it becomes difficult to play with
164 Sometimes it is very...
165 Sticky
166 I don't know, there are many types

(Couple 2- Guy2)

167 When we went home I understood we were going to have sex
168 We went home and were listening to music
169 At some point we stated having sex
170 We were in bed when he asked if I had a condom

(Interviewer)

171 This one for example is very quick

(Couple 1 – guy 2)

172 The lyrics of a piece of music
173 A song by Ziad Rahbani, says: "How I love you, so much"
174 I recorded this part of the song
175 Looped on a cassette to tell him how much I loved him

(Couple 1 – guy 1)

176 I gave him a drawing that showed a mountain, a house, and a sky

177 With stars because he used to tell me about his village in the South
178 He wanted to take me there, but it never happened
179 So I did this drawing for him
180 Which illustrated how I imagined his village to be
181 I wrote to him “patience” meaning: be patient, we’ll go together one day

(Couple 1 – guy 2)

182 I loved that ring and I loved the idea
183 Since then, I wear it
184 The ring isn’t a perfect circle
185 It doesn’t look like a ring but looks more like a rounded piece of metal

(Guy – NYC)

186 A friend gave it to me two years ago
187 I think she got it from a second hand store in the Cola area

(Guy – NYC II?)

188 I was given this shirt when I needed it for a play where I was acting
189 I liked the cut, which looked a bit retro

(Guy – NYC)

190 He gave me this T-Shirt
191 I didn’t originally have the star
192 He made the star

(Guy – NYC II?)

193 I got these pants from a wholesale store
194 I like them because they were striped, and the cut fitted me
195 I got this T-shirt when I was in France
196 I like it because it has a wide neck that showed the tip of my tattoo

[WRITTEN ON THE HANDS: HOW I LOVE YOU]

(Couple 2 0 guy?)

197 The first time I did it, I wanted to see how...I felt
198 I did it another time before leaving to N.Y. for the summer
199 There, things were different

(Guy – red)

200 I inspire those one-night stands
201 It happens when one doesn’t want to, or when this hasn’t occurred to him
202 Or isn’t prepared, nor expecting that it happens
203 But one feels that he can have a flirt with me and forget it later
204 I don’t consider them one-night stands
205 Because I still see there people and they are dear to me

(Guy ?)

206 I was about to leave
207 When he wanted to give me his name and phone number
208 I told him it didn't interest me, I only wanted to...

(Guy – red)

209 I go down, and I find someone waiting at the door
210 He was a policeman, in uniform, very sweet, blond and smiling
211 was around 35 years old
212 He said: You made us worry
213 Because you stopped the car all of a sudden and left
214 I was smiling in the morning
215 And told him that I forget a CD at home
216 He asked me where he could have sometime to eat in the proximity
217 I showed him a bakery around the corner
218 He said you made me feel hungry what are you eating?
219 I said: ham and pickles
220 He said: you made me feel like eating
221 I said: come upstairs, I could make you a sandwich
222 I took him upstairs to make a sandwich
223 While I was making it,
224 He raised my shirt
225 I asked: what is the matter with you?
226 He said he wanted to see if I had a golden or a silver button
227 I looked at him for his pretext was too obvious
228 We went into the bedroom, and finished in 45 minutes
229 I was speeding to catch up with work
230 After I closed the door
231 I regretted the fact that I didn't take his name and number
232 He was sweet and cute
233 He knew well what he was doing
234 What do you mean?
235 Sure it wasn't his first time having sex with a man
236 We sat in my sister's bedroom listening to music
237 He lied down on the bed
238 I lied down on the bed
239 He said, after a moment of silence
240 That he needed someone to hug him
241 I said, yes, yes, yes, I was happy since I liked him
242 I hugged him
243 And we kissed
244 We started
245 I undressed him little by little
246 And did everything myself

(Guy?)

247 I followed the guy I liked to the steam room and sat down with him

248 I told him that his friend had approached me
249 And that I told the friend that I like him not his friend
250 He said yes, and that his friend has told him
251 He said what do you want to do?
252 I said I wanted to satisfy my desire
253 He asked where? I said I would like to do it there in public
254 He asked if that wasn't disturbing for me, I said no
255 Since whoever comes to the Hammam was normally after those encounters
256 That's what happened, we were in the middle, not in the main room
257 But in a side room with people coming in and out
258 We were having...
259 We were having sex
260 In front of everyone
261 We were there naked
262 Yes we took off the towels
263 They call them sheets in the Hammam and we were naked
264 With people coming in and out
265 And I wasn't shy, neither he

(Couple 2)

266 And you are in a intimate relationship with someone
267 You don't even know the name
268 It has an attractive element
269 Going into someone's house
270 At intimate moments
271 And never seeing him again
272 You feel it is a moment stolen from your life as well as his
273 You invade his privacy and let him invade yours
274 I don't do it here in Lebanon since it is difficult to meet someone
275 And sleep with him, without seeing him later
276 Or without finding out he knows someone you know
277 So the story never ends in the first night

(Interviewer)

278 - Who needs sex tonight?
279 -Ausecours
280 -Where did he answer?
281 -There

(Couple 1)

282 I told him that I was not at ease with all of this, that...
283 I had a problem with commitments
284 And that I didn't want out relationship to be what it was
285 The relationship didn't end when I said what I said
286 I said it once, twice and three times
287 We tried to stop the relationship
288 We tried to maintain it in a different way

289 He went out with another person
290 And a while after, I went out with another person
291 But it didn't end, and still hasn't
292 It evolved in a way that allowed us to be the way we want to be

(Couple 1 – Guy 2)

293 This relationship influenced me a lot
294 First of all, it started when I was relatively young
295 And it was my first relationship besides it went on for a long time
296 I believe it is still going on although it evolved into something else
297 It shaped the way I think especially in my relationship with people

(Couple 1 – Guy 1)

298 The commitment made us suffocate
299 We reached absolute routine
300 Everyday before going to bed, we'd call each other
301 Every night, we'd decide
302 How we were going to see each other's the next day
303 Anything even if it hasn't happened...
304 Any possible attraction to anyone else would create problems
305 Such things weren't supposed to happen
306 But after the end of the relationship those things were deleted
307 I put them to an end

(Interviewer)

308 Who put an end to the relationship?

(Couple 1 – guy 1)

309 I did

(Couple 1 – Guy 2)

310 I can't give as much as I used to give
311 I still feel I haven't recovered from this relationship yet
312 I see it in every relationship I go through now
313 It is with me in my everyday life
314 It shaped everything for me for it is still alive
315 I can't say I am done with it, seal it and go elsewhere

(Couple 1 – guy 1 singing)

316 *I love you till I forgot sleep*
317 *But fear you forget me*
318 *You imprison me outside sleep*
319 *And let me awake*
320 *I am near you, near you*
321 *I am near you, near you*
322 Is that ok?

(Interviewer)

323 yes

(Song looped and repeated X 12 times)

324 *How I love you*

325 *If only you knew how I love you*

326 *So much*

(Voice of a woman – famous Lebanese singer?)

327 As you see, we are repeating because she loves him immensely

328 And if she wants to fully express herself

329 You wouldn't have enough time tonight

330 So we have to stop it there

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