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**ARAB QUEER LANGUAGE: What are the characteristics of the language used upon,
and within queer Arab culture, and how does that affect the identity-formation
and subjectivity of queer Arab individuals?**

About the Author:

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ABSTRACT/ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines Arab queer language, focusing on Lebanon as a case study. Lebanon has always been seen as a “Queer hub” for neighboring countries due to multiple socio-economic and historical factors that have made it one of the more “liberal” Arab countries. This research focuses on the different characteristics of Arab queer language, including the etymology and semantics of frequently-used terms in formal and informal settings. The paper is divided into five sections, each dealing with the effects of different aspects of queer language on queer identity in the Arab region/Lebanon.

The paper relied on unstructured, in-depth interviews with a total of 43 local self-identifying queer Arab informants ages 18- 45, 27 of whom are from Lebanon, with the rest being from Oman, Jordan, Qatar, Iraq, Kuwait, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, and Palestine. 13 of the 43 informants are female.

I was born into a straight family, with gay feet. My mother always told me, “You started walking as if you were wearing 12-inch heels”. They had no words to describe me. They had no option but to alienate me. I had no option but to leave (Personal Communication, W.E., January 2018).

In the first section of the paper, queer language is used to anatomize queer development and subjectivity. This section lays the theoretical framework of language studies and structuralism as well as language and the social construction of reality- why we are studying language to understand Arab queer culture, and how language is both a derivative and constituent of the everyday lived realities of the queer subject.

The second section discusses the colloquial and formal terms used in Arabic to describe “queer”, showing how this hetero-normative and violent language has been simultaneously adopted *by* queers to verbally aggress one another. These terms also exemplify the position of the queer within patriarchal Arab culture, and the fear and marginalization reiterated and exemplified in queer language. Queer language directed

toward non-queer people in the Arab world is perceived as an insult to the founding pride and machismo of their Arabness.

The third section breaks down the repercussions of the politically correct word *Mathli* on queer Arab consciousness and existence.

The fourth section of the paper breaks down the common characteristics of online applications, like Grindr and Scruff, to understand the characteristics of queer Arab culture, and the production of the “Arab electronic queer identity”, which is vastly different than the existing queer identity performing and behaving in day to day Arab life.

Finally, the last section looks at the words used to describe queer spaces, and how these spaces mold and represent queer existence.

INTRODUCTION

Arabs have *no* word for queer, neither as a sexual practice, nor as an identifying pronoun, while the global modern world has constructed many. Are queer identities in the Arab world as scarce as snow in the desert?

People tend to find words, and appropriate language, to what they see and hear. As this paper will show, queer culture *is* seen and heard in the Arab world. Therefore, it is fair to say that the lack of queer language is an active and conscious power of oppressing the aforementioned seen and heard queer existence, and limiting its space for development. The construction of a language for queerness in Europe and the United States has also been the creation of *spaces* for its existence. More importantly, this development has been paralleled by the development of the queer subject. As Simone de Beauvoir writes:

Culture makes the subjects [sic] out of concrete human beings. Subject with subjectivity is not born as such but is made so by his immersion into culture. One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.

As Arab culture refuses to recognize queer identities, the social process that allows for queer subjectivities to develop and recognize *themselves* as queer is compromised. Subjectivity is precisely the condition of our being which enables us to recognize ourselves as subjects or persons. It reflects the social processes that constitute us as subject (Sheikh, 2017). When a lack of a language, as the main constituent of the social process, leads to the lack of recognition of queerness as a *person*, queerness becomes recognized as an act, an anomaly, a phase, a portion, and a perversion of a whole. It might be ordinary for Arab culture to recognize it as such, but it is a tragedy that when queer culture looks in the mirror, the reflection it sees is the single-brush-stroke image that society has painted.

The lack of a language and representation for queerness in the Arab world¹ that accepts and respects queer identities insinuates a lack of a space for queerness to freely and fully exist. Active attempts by organizations supporting the LGBTQ community to fill that void, such as The Arab Foundation for Freedom and Equality's campaign #NoLongerAlone,² have been met with cultural and linguistic violence, reinforcing the prevalent heteronormative language and discourse that has been suppressing the queer collective. As Makar Mustapha expressed on the campaign's Facebook pages:

This is against nature; why did god create Eve for Adam? The people of Lot where punished by god when he cracked the earth open and swallowed them; is this not related to the abundant sexually transmitted diseases found in queers? (Makar Mustapha, April 23 2018, Facebook interface).

Social media, as well as mainstream media, such as television and radio, have created the language used to describe queer culture exemplified by the now famous interview with the Lebanese transsexual guest, Suzy, on Al-Jadeed Tv³, where the host began his show with asking her: "Do you confess to your sickness, Suzy?"

Other shows questioned if queerness is a Western trend, like the latest fashion from Europe, pushed a reformative agenda to rehabilitate queers back to heterosexuality, accused queers of marketing the abnormal, and hosted extreme religious figures to berate and attack queer individuals on live television.

Literary and other cultural texts have reflected that oppression, often from the standpoint of the oppressor, whose art and literature have commonly helped justify broad social belief systems and the more specific acts that follow from biased definitions and designation (Hall, 2001).

¹ The Arab world is to describe the countries that the literature review, and the informant sample covered, namely Kuwait, Iraq, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Oman.

² <https://www.facebook.com/afemena.org/videos/1641009662601603/>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/megaphone.news/videos/2071854719698998/>

The language depicted above is used by heteronormative Arab culture, but has also been adopted at times by queer culture. Its adoption can be seen in the insults that gay Lebanese use against each other as Ahmed⁴ notes:

I would rather not date a slutty gay that has been around. Closeted gays are cleaner. They are like virgins. Howdik m2aydzin. (The dirty ones have aids) - (Personal communication, February 2018)

Hence, the language *about* queer culture communicated *by* queers and non-queers alike has also been used to suppress queer identities. Language has allowed for heteronormative culture to de-humanize the queer, as it has pushed the queer himself to reduce his *queerness as subject* to a state of exception, namely *an object*, an outsider to his hetero-normal Arab sovereign state.

Differences in appearance, language, and customs have been used to designate groups of us and them (or "self" and "other"), with the unique characteristics of "them" perceived as a threat to the security and interests of us...xenophobia—the fear of the foreigner and/or outsider (Hall, 2001).

The biggest difference between the subject of the queer and the object of the queer is that the subject is still alive, dynamic and evolving while, as S.K. describes below, the object of queerness is something that is *already* dead:

My mother told me, why compromise your life for something that is not and will never be in you. It is not you. It is a small period. You forget it, you get married, and you have children. You look back to it when you have a normal family, and you see it was nothing (S.K., personal communication, January 2018).

Representation and language are key constituents of identity formation. Suppressing as well as perverting both language and representation has had negative repercussions on queer identity development. The best example of that would be the most well-known

⁴ 43 local self-identifying queer Arabs informants, aged 18- 45, helped shape the qualitative analysis of queer culture in the Arab world.

representation of queer subjects in the Arab world, “Majdi and Wajdi”⁵, whose image is best described as hyper-feminine, their language as “self-mocking” and “self-degrading”, and their stance as “sexually-predatory” and “sexually-obsessed”.

Images and issues of cultural identity can reveal some of the fundamental structures through which society makes meaning as well as how those structures must change if culturally sanctioned oppression is ever to end (Hall, 2001)

Arab queers adopt, at times unconsciously, the language used to represent queer subjectivity, or adopt a western language that is lost in translation, such as the terms gay and lesbian. Arab queer activists frequently discuss this discrepancy in queer language (Ritchie, 2010), as Rauda Morcos, one of the founders of *Aswat* (Voices), a Palestinian organization for lesbians, states:

I have forgotten my language, I don't know how to say 'to make love' in Arabic without it sounding chauvinistic, aggressive, and alien to the experience (Morcos, quoted in Whitaker, 2006).

Commenting on their HIV/AIDS awareness resources, activists in Helem, a Lebanese LGBT organization, contend that although many materials are available in English, they are unavailable in Arabic. “This causes a problem within Helem’s work as Arabic is the main language spoken and understood by the population” (Helem, 2008). As Morcos put it, “This is not simply a matter of translation; it’s about developing a ‘mother tongue’ with positive, un-derogatory and affirmative expressions of women and lesbian sexuality and gender . . . we are creating a language that no one spoke before” (Morcos quoted in Whitaker, 2006).

When Arabs self-identify as “gay” or “lesbian” they appropriate a term that is categorically a Western term; what do Arab queers know of the Stonewall Riots⁶, or of

⁵ Ma Fi Metlo, Majdi and Wajdi
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbpOvIwtRgE>

⁶ 1969, Greenwich Village, New York City, the Stonewall riots were a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations by members of the gay community against police raids that targeted them in nightclubs.

getting spousal benefits from being legally married to their partner? That is to say, how can a word be used, without proper knowledge of its history? Not only does this mean that developing a mother tongue is among the main challenges of Arab queer activists today (Mourad, 2013), but that the available “queer-friendly” terms, such as *Mathli* are not being appropriated by queer culture colloquially; it feels obsolete, like the term “gay”.

I don't use it. I mean, no one does. Have you ever asked a guy on Grindr “inta Mathli”?⁷ No, you haven't. (H.B., personal communication, February 2018).

Language, as a predecessor for existence and not just a symptom of it, is a necessary component for the formation of subjectivities. Language can create a space for the unfamiliar to grow, as it can depict past and familiar spaces where the old is regurgitated as eternal, and the past as the inevitable future.

QUEER LANGUAGE TO UNDERSTAND QUEER DEVELOPMENT AND SUBJECTIVITY

When an Arab queer youth is “processing” their sexuality, the need to define the self-by-the-self is left un-supported, un-rooted, and un-structured. Fragments of queer identity might be absorbed in different forms, such as male-to-male closeness due to commonly gender-segregated social forums (schools, funerals, casual gatherings). But the material itself is actually non-queer in appearance, even anti-queer. It goes down the queer's throat bitterly, causing a series of ailments, and then symptoms, as the queer becomes an adult.

I seriously felt my heart stop the first time my mom caught me playing with a Barbie Doll. I was too young to have a sense of gender and sexuality, but not too young to feel shame and try to hide what I was doing. The fear of being caught in the act of doing something that girls should be doing is a lingering fear I still feel. - (R.H., personal communication, January 2018).

⁷ “inta Mathli?” translates to “Are you gay?” in colloquial Lebanese Arabic.

For many, the queer spirit (under)develops in denial, in negative transformations, in a series of suppressions and repressions; in a state of a “lost queer youth”, symptomizing the “Peter Pan” state of future queerness as an adult, and leading into a state of anxiety and a chronic “lack” of emotional and sexual satiety, after all language is instrumental to the rise and maintenance of social reality (Lakoff and Johnson, 2002).

She was alone in the dark room, but she still didn't kiss me. I was hit with the truth that day. I will never have my first proper kiss in the world I am in. No kiss good night under the street light after a date. No kiss in the park after a picnic. No “I Love you's” in public. It will always be hidden and short-lived. (F.L., personal communication, January 2018).

The adult Arab queer's self-identification as “hetero-normative, but with sporadic queer tendencies” (M.O, personal communication, Lebanon) grounds that lacking in queer development and in queer language. The heteronormative Arab male claims that his tendencies are “naturally dying tendencies” (L.F, personal communication), similar to “playing doctor during puberty” (A.M, personal communication), being they cannot exist in his *naturally, essentially*, masculine – even “macho” – ,heterosexual body.

Do I look *louti* to you? Sometimes I like men, but that is not me; there is nothing wrong with me. Once I am married and have children, I will not have time for these games. (N.S., personal communication, February 2018).

Queerness is an already-dead object in the Arab queer; it has been killed by Arab culture. Hence the “object of queerness” is no longer existent in its holistic shape, as a queer life, person and existence, but is somewhat shrunk to a “manageable” tumor-like shape, uncomfortable, naturally curable, and can spew out random symptoms at times that need rehabilitation, discretion and containment-management.

Thank god I am lucky. I was never like the others. I never felt the need to walk or talk like them, or be feminine. And even if I did, I would never bring the shame to my family (R.F., personal communication, January 2018).

The word “manageable” is key, because “unmanageable” queerness in the Arab world is exactly what society fears. The strongest indication of Arab culture’s tolerance of “manageable queerness” can be seen in multiple reports of the “coming out” experiences of Arab youth.

My mom didn’t care I was gay, as much as she cared about *who* knew that I was gay. Her first reaction was “who did you tell about this?” (R.F., personal communication, February 2018).

The family’s fear that their son or daughter’s queerness cannot be contained or managed stems from the family’s fear for their reputation. Families are dishonored when *queer-behaving* queers do not behave according to their prescribed gender roles; namely, when gays act feminine and when lesbians act masculine.

A young queer boy in New York notices something “unique” about his sexuality and seeks an explanation from the outside world. And the outside world nourishes a holistic queer identity within him. A young boy in Lebanon notices something “unique” about his sexuality. So he looks towards society and sees no traces of it. Looks towards his family and friends and sees no traces of it. Look everywhere, and still no traces of the actual material of queerness (K.M., personal communication, February 2018).

Other urban cultures, such as the one depicted above in New York City, have “subjectified” the queer, as Arab culture had done historically, prior to European colonialization. But young Arab queers are part of *this* bio-political and regional culture, which has left portions of Arab queer history behind, to fit into the capitalistic, hyper-masculine, patriarchal, religious, and politicized archetype of the modern Arab man.

Kuwaiti men love to forget their history! We know of the men who were men enough to dress as women like Ali Al-Rasheed! 50’s Kuwaiti theatre shows our real impression of feminine men; we like them! (A.K., personal communication, January 2018).

More importantly, the portions of history that fell into this selective amnesia are the “queer” ones, hence the need to an-archive queer Arab history and memory and introduce the youth to queer spaces and knowledge from which they can grow is now more vital than ever.

I loved watching men cross-dressing as women in old black and white Egyptian movies. Even Om Kalthoum dressed as a Bedouin boy. No one would dare put this on TV anymore. The Muslim brotherhood and conservatives would go crazy. Even though the Internet opened some doors, there is less space for gays and lesbians to show themselves now (Z.B., personal communication, February 2018).

QUEER ARAB TERMS

Self-identifying queers informants from around the Arab region were asked about their experience with some derogatory queer terms, like *khinti* and *louti*, as well as their experience with more politically correct terms for “queer” such as *mathli*. Informants were also asked to pinpoint how the language made them feel, and if they can detect what is lacking in Arabic colloquial language in terms of their communication needs as queer subjects.

Common queer terms, such as *louti*, are used to create a sharp distinction between the autonomy and agency of “identity” and the phallic, sporadic homosexual act of queerness. A public queer person is known as the *louti* of the family, or of the neighborhood. The designated role of *louti* can only be that which encompasses the act. The subject becomes the act of homosexuality and nothing more.

My mother said to me after I explained to her that this was *not* my choice, “You choose to be *louti*, then you can no longer be my son. You choose a life as just that, alone” (D.A., -personal communication, January 2018).

A heteronormative Arab cannot merge brother and *louti*, or father and *louti*, or even student or worker and *louti*. Mothers cannot even merge their love for their own sons with *louti*. The queer subject becomes “the other” to heteronormative culture, and with that process, Arab culture is able to aggress and violate anyone unfortunate enough to be labeled as *louti*.

They made so much fun of me because my brother is gay. They would tell me, “we saw the *louti* yesterday in church. The *louti*, was walking in the street”. I would know; the *louti* is my brother. Even if he lives now in Belgium, he is still the *louti* of my village. I distanced myself from him. I had to (G.K., personal communication, February 2018).

This term allows language to identify and reduce entire identities, into a single act of sex, synonymous with calling heterosexual women a “Penis-lover”, and a heterosexual man a “Vagina-lover”; identities reduced to acts. Historically, this process often allowed men to control women, limit their agency, their autonomy, and bodily choices, by shaming them and reducing them to an act of sex. This phenomenon also functions to essentialize all the rest of their behavior, such as being proficient academics, career women, or partners, into that homogeneous and physical act of sex.

When I came out to my brother, I was crying, and he was shocked and at a distance. The next morning, I said good morning, he said “don’t put your tooth brush next to mine anymore”. It was weird that someone so familiar to me would suddenly talk to me like a dirty/ untouchable stranger (D.M., personal communication, February 2018).

Language can then be used for in-group/out-group formation, to oppress uniqueness, and to maintain the existent power structure, and the status quo of those in power, mostly privileged males. Once tagged by Arab culture as “gay” or “lesbian”, the term becomes the sole identifier. As evidence to the above, Arabic is replete with words and terms for gay and lesbian, that clarify the queer identity in terms of the existing gendered and sociopolitical hierarchy. “Queer” itself when translated to Arabic becomes “3alil”, which means, “defected, sickly, infectious”.

One of the many Arab terms for queerness that designate queer culture’s position within the social hierarchy, and used more often in the Gulf countries (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) is *ej-jins el talet* which literally translates to “the third sex”. Shortened in slang to *jins* or “sex”- when used derogatorily- the term is

etymologically related to the history of male castration and Eunuchs in Islam, which dates back to the third Islamic caliphate to follow the prophet Mohammad (Kligerman, 2007). Eunuchs were taken as war slaves and lived celibately without families or any other alliance other than their masters. Hence they were trusted with high positions of power.

Arab culture created a space for the third sex centuries ago, but the space was that of the lonely slave and subordinate. Castrated eunuchs were also called *ghulam* or *ghulman*. *Al gholam*⁸ is an Arabic archetype that generally represents a young, obedient, and pretty boy, referenced as one of the subjects of Paradise, also called *Jannah* in the Quran. Hence, *al-ghulam* is sanctioned, and is simultaneously fetishized, and that history of fetishization lies in Islamic poetry.⁹ The semantics of the term “the third sex” triggers the presupposition that it is an “un-nameable” entity, within two other familiar and natural entities; male and female. Calling it “the third sex” leaves it linguistically lacking, and in an eternal state of “default”. That lacking is maintained and deepened every time a queer individual is designated as “the third sex”. To further assure that the queer subject remains an object, modern Arab culture kept him or her without a name and a language.

Other local terms are more “street-based” such as *khaneeth* (UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq), *mkhannat* (Jordan, Lebanon), *khinti* (Lebanon), and *mokhanas* (Syria) translate directly to “effeminate”, but means “Faggot”. This derogatory term in particular refers to Arab culture’s patriarchal and misogynistic approach to the “world of the feminine”, generally associated with weakness, the private space, “the receiving”,

⁸ <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e722>

⁹ Examples of poetry celebrating male love include Sufi poets such as Jalaluddin Rumi about his lover Shams-e-Tabriz and the Ottoman “divan literature” by male poets celebrating their male lovers “Holly Hatred”, Anissa Helie.

subordination, inferiority, and threat. The same term also signifies a form of biological, psycho-social determinism, which is the gender dialect that the queer is cemented into. The gender dialect that puts masculine heteronormative behavior as the ultimate behavioral guideline for the Arab man can best be seen when queer men are accepted as queer, as long as they don't become feminine.

The struggle here I believe is not with sexual roles, but with Arab men's inherent misogyny and toxic masculinity which is still prominent in gay men and which forced them to alienate the effeminate part of their queerness, as the "shameful other" (F.F., personal communication, February 2018).

Inversely, a heterosexual man will never be accepted as heteronormative if he behaves effeminately. During our interviews, most of our informants reported associating the word *louti* with the word "effeminate", not "gay". Hence, when "gay" is stated as *louti*, it is perceived as more derogatory, and more effeminate.

In some circles in the Arab world, being a receiving bottom is equated to being effeminate and is thus hidden. The root is trying to hide being effeminate, not the sexual role of being bottom- (A.B., personal communication, February 2018).

Louti, (Syria, Lebanon, Oman), from *Kawm Lout*, derived from "People of Lot", also known as sodomites, lived in the cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* mentioned in the Quran, and their destruction was associated with their social practices and not listening to God's moral directions. The word *Louti* transferred into colloquial Arab language to depict a "faggot" shows how queers are represented in the Arab world as those that deserve punishment and annihilation: "The prophet's father in law *Abu Baker*, is supposed to have had a *louti* ('sodomite' from the Arabic word *Lot*) burned alive" (Murray & Roscoe, 1997). This violent term also appears as "God's divine will" towards queer culture. The history of "Profit Lot" linked to "Sodom", also associated queer culture to "Sodomy", further describing the queer subjectivity as a stigmatized act or event.

Directing queer terms such as *louti* is perceived as an insult to the founding pride and machismo of their Arabness. Machismo is a set of values and beliefs on what it means to be a “real man”, including honor, dominance, aggression, sexism, sexual prowess and reserved emotion (J Lat Psychol, 2016). Machismo also includes an attitude towards women to remain in traditional roles, further rooting society’s patriarchal culture, making queer language relevant to both genders and queer culture.

Tobji (Lebanon), the literal definition of the word in Arabic comes from *tabaj*, or “Doing something stupid or erratic, such as hitting an empty vessel”. This word is a derogatory street word also depicting homosexuality as an “act of foolishness”.

Shath (adj)/ *Shouthouth* (noun) (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq) this formal and literary term is not often used on the street, and translates directly to irregular, aberrant, and anomalous. For Arabs, any object or subject that has gone *shath* has been perverted from what the creator has created it for.

Gay (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq) is a commonly used word interjected into the Arabic language. *Gay* linguistically stands out amongst its surrounding Arabic words, as the self-evident queer stands out among the surrounding members of Arab heteronormative culture. It shocks the listeners with its radical difference and insinuates within them a series of images and assumptions, one of which would be that the speaker is “westernized”, further “other”-ing the queer as foreigner. Individuals of all socioeconomic classes, who may not be proficient in English, use this term as “the only word they know” (Ahmed, personal communication, January 2018) to represent Arab queers and queer events. As *gay* is inserted abruptly, obviously, and purposefully into an Arabic sentence, queer subjectivity becomes further alienated and marginalized.

This term is distinct from most derogatory Arabic terms, in that it is occasionally used in an attempted politically correct manner to describe an Arab homosexual, making “gay” a judgment with a nudge of acceptance. The foreign nature of the word simultaneously allows it to be accepted by some, because the word “gay” has gained power, representation, and a global reputation, with one interviewee stating it “sounded friendly, like Pepsi”. “Gay” is gaining currency in the Arab world because of its increased representation. Hence, you can be gay and “Macho”, but you cannot be *louti* and Macho.

I identified first with the language of religion, my friends and family, which felt shameful, blasphemous, and negative. Gay felt *ayb*. When I felt strong enough to abandon this local language, I fell into the colonialist wave of queerness and I defined my queerness through the white western male; the one who has most rights out of us and the one who is most visible. That identity was the first identity I could download. When I could no longer identify with the (aforementioned) rainbow flag subject, I started to identify more with a queer person of color; a queer minority (F.F., personal communication, February 2018).

“The Arab Queer Bottom” is the ultimate tag of shame, tagged as such by both queer individuals themselves, and Arab heteronormative culture. While it is unlikely that you hear a queer person call another queer person *louti* or *tobji*, they do insult, taunt and “slut-shame” each other for being “bottoms” by calling each other *tente*, and *marrat* translating into “women”. This language is characteristic of the performativity of queer culture, where self-identifying feminine queers aggress one another using a language that heteronormative women would use amongst each other.

*Laiki Haidi Ma Absha3a*¹⁰ (T.S, personal communication, January 2018.)

In the Arab world, being at the receiving end of the sexual act, and “going public with it” is compromising your social queer status. As “tops” can claim to be straight¹¹ and “bottoms who act as tops” can claim to be straight, bottoms who act or self-proclaim

¹⁰ “Look at her, she is so ugly” - Ahmed recalling an event in Posh Night Club, December 2017.

¹¹ Being “Straight”, as an identity, is different than being heterosexual; the former comes with a prescribed set of behaviors as masculine, authoritative, Macho, and heterosexual.

themselves to be bottoms are seen as inferior socially, psychologically, and physically, to those that can get away with playing out their preferred sexual roles in *private*, while maintaining the “top and straight” social persona in *public*.

In more traditional Arab societies like Syria and Egypt, Arabs are more likely to fear being seen as bottoms. I would say that whether you top or bottom, the top will claim to be straight, as the bottom is considered to be a social commodity, protected by the tops (C.S, personal communication, February 2018).

Even though many Arab queers would engage in the physical act of what is referred to as “bottoming”, the effort and fear invested into denying and avoiding being identified as such shows the shame of being effeminate as an Arab man, even in a queer context. One of the homosexual Arabs I interviewed living in New York stated that it was “ok” to state one’s sexual orientation and preference to bottom, and even (quite often) celebrate it, “*when I am in New York.*” On the other hand, a common statement I heard in my interviews in Lebanon, accompanied with the sentiment of disgust, is “There are too many bottoms in this country”.

A pact of silence is kept so as to give the illusion that Arab societies are stable and are not havens for any forms of deviation, behavioral, sexual or otherwise, and queer culture is the first to implement this pact by denying and repressing both femininity and the sexual act of “bottoming”.

Arab-Muslims have a complex relationship to queer sexuality. A queer man can “practice” homosexuality as long as he is not the one penetrated. As some theorists have stated, “in a display of virility and machismo, the active man can boast of his “homosexual” exploits whilst shame and scorn are heaped on the man who is penetrated as he is considered to be less than a man (Ncube 2014). Hence, men can engage in homosexual acts provided that they marry and give the semblance of a respectable and conservative father and heteronormative husband, because what Arab

society focuses on is the family structure and its allocated gendered family roles; an Arab man who completes his familial obligations and fits into the family-man representation, can do what he pleases with his private sexuality.

In the Arab world, one might represent their queer subjectivity with multiple identities except for “bottom”, as shown by all the online Grindr profiles, which mostly state they are “tops”, and then choose to do otherwise privately. The use of derogatory language by the heteronormative community on Arab queers might be expected, but the use of it violently within queer culture to hurt and damage is a classic case of the Stockholm syndrome, where Arab queer prisoners have grown to revere, recirculate, and even enjoy the oppressive language’s taunts and abuse.

Derogatory and colloquial terms include *Tezliyah* (Saudi), *Khawal* (Jordan, Egypt), which translates into servant or slave, and existed historically as cross-dressing performers for celebratory occasions such as wedding and birth after women had been prohibited from dancing in public. The mostly-male audience saw the female version of their cross-dressing group members as sexually available.

Other terms include *Tente* (Lebanon, Jordan), and *Pede* (Lebanon), synonymous with the Arabic “Gay”, but for more French influenced and Christian cultures.

QUEERNESS AS “SAMENESS”

The politically correct term for Arab homosexuality is *mathli*, often heard in the media, on news stations, and in formal, legal and academic settings. *mathli* was meant to be the word of resurrection for the LGBT community, as it was Arab culture’s first attempt at “politically correcting” their derogatory labels for homosexual. But the word also re-rooted many of the negative associations to queer Arab culture by always appearing in public and media forums that show queerness in the context of violence, fear and abuse.

Attacks on the *Mathli* community are part of Lebanon's attacks on all vulnerable communities. The *Mathli* community in particular was subjected to anal probes after being arrested, to determine their sexual orientation (LBCI News, July 31 2012).¹²

One should be aware of the notion of political correctness to begin with (Zizek, 2010), usually underlying a more insidious form of racism and discrimination, a more simmered, concentrated form of the "hate of the other". Politically correctness, in terms of the Arab queer's struggle, does not necessarily decrease the constant structural and verbal discrimination that he or she faces. Representation, in terms of the Arab queer's struggle, does not necessarily mean a positive or holistic representation. The media still uses *mathli* in negative contexts, and still represents queer Arabs as social anomalies, even though, yes, it *is* finally representing them. Yet, the appearance of transsexuals on local Arab television stations, and the use of *mathli* in headline evening news, does make it *seem* as if real change is happening, when in reality queer inalienable human rights in the Arab world are *still* being violated. This politically correct yet simultaneously derogative term literally translates to sameness or "that of which is attracted to itself".

I didn't know *mathli* was a word for gay, until I heard it in the news when the police raids happened (J.S., -personal communication, February 2018).

Colloquial terms, such as *Louti* and *Tobji* always seem to be less "severe" than *mathli*, a word that only comes to life in non-commercial headlines, where the headline had to match the "severity" of the word, always describing a phenomenon of abuse, tragedy, sexual scandal, mockery, or some other "event" of extreme negative connotation that shows queerness as an extreme deviation from the norm. The below quote was part of a national show showing trans culture in Lebanon; it is important to mention that as

¹² LBCI news, Arresting 36 people after closing down Plaza Cinema, Burj Hammoud
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AketrNvU_qY

Suzy, introduced by the host as the queer subject, was saying the bellow narrative, comical music was playing in the background, accompanied by the image of a disheveled, almost homeless-looking Suzy under an umbrella in the rain.

My name is Suzy, but my alter ego name is Sou-za-na. My parents haven't spoken to me in fifteen years, and I have tried to commit suicide three times already (Al-Jadeed Programs, Nov 9, 2015).¹³

Hence, the word *mathli* strikes fear and surprise in the queer and strikes disgust and dissonance in society. When heard, the queer expects to hear a certain narrative. The quote bellow is from one of the most viewed videos on YouTube that relate to the term *mathli*.

What is my opinion of the *Mathli*? I do not agree with it and consider it against human nature, and it is a religious sin.¹⁴

Mithli is also a strictly official word, also showing its distinct sharpness, when used colloquially, striking the need "to get serious" or "brace yourself", as my informants mentioned.

Mohammad and Ghaith, as *mathli's*, are the most courageous in facing their violent culture, and they are *building the courage* to ask for their rights.¹⁵

It is a semiotic oddity that same-ness strikes fear and disgust in Arab culture. Sameness, as the real heterosexual, is the most normalized of all "normal"; it is the application of the self *on* the self. In that dialect, authentic heterosexual sex seems *more* radical in a sense that it reaches *out* to devour "the other", seeks "difference" for a weird and alien (even queer) "outside one's- body" encounter. In this logic, heterosexuality can be seen as the non-norm and the heterosexual process can be described as maggot-ing or

¹³ Al-Jadeed, Suzy' First Introduction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDJek3tnSkE>

¹⁴ Fadi Younes, the affect of *mathli's* on Arab culture

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHAPcMRQgaU>

¹⁵ Al-Jadeed, First Mathli Public Wedding in Lebanon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdDF3aQIgbI>

consuming “the other”. I use the term maggot, because as “heterosexual maggoting” has been accepted and normalized, “queer maggoting” remains in a state of awaiting its symbolic revolution. From being seen as the larva of the West maggoting at Arab heteronormative values¹⁶, the symbolic revolution of “queer maggoting” will occur when it will be seen as the process of devouring the *already dead* and stale value system of heteronormative Arab society. Heteronormativity *might* have led Arab culture to some healthy family nuclear structures, but also to extremely oppressive ones. Might there be a need to re-evaluate heteronormative values, some of which are chastity and virginity, virility and emphasized masculinity? These social constructs directly relate to gender conformity within the private and public space. For example, young girls are meant to be virgins and remain in the private space, as young boys are meant to express virility in the public space.

Arab women never leave their husbands; where can they go to if they left their home? Their families will not take them back, and divorced women are powerless. So, they stay. He cheats silently, and sometimes not. And she stays with the family and the kids. All the women I know have had their husbands cheat on them, but *Nhamdullah*, they have kept their families together and remained loyal to their husbands (Z.G, personal communication, February 2018).

Terms like *Mastour /Insittir*, which translates in Arabic to “be covered”, or its semantic inverse *mashmous*, which translates in Arabic to “being in Light”, have expansive symbols on a macro-level throughout the Arab region in terms of the sacredness of the private space, and the fear of the public space, where reputation, pride, and social status might be compromised and where shame can be brought to the subject and the entire family. That is why, as seen in the example of above, women remain “covered” and in private, as to cover their family reputation. They freeze in their family homes like deer

¹⁶ Doctor Adnan Ibrahim and *Mathli*- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwhipdgpIUy>

in headlights, as they do not want to “be in light” where people can see their problems. They stay silent and softly negotiate their basic needs. They are *also* queer in the Arab world. They share the same struggle with queer culture as the queer identity is forced to remain in the world of the private, being that in the public, it can be used “against” the queer, for its social demise.

I tell them (his queer friends), the most important thing is to stay *mastour*. if you are *mashmous*, *btihsmos* your family. Do what you want, but stay *mastour* (F.E, personal communication, January 2018).

Arab heteronormativity, the real stale sameness, is the founding ground from which many of the above social constructs materialize in the domestic and public space to limit the agency, representation and autonomy of both women and queer culture. It is time for queer culture to break these strict heteronormative cultural walls by migrating from the private to the public, thereby shattering the same social structures that have enclosed women to the private.

THE LANGUAGE OF QUEER ONLINE APPLICATIONS

I consider myself a calm and rational person, but I was feeling lonely. I just needed to meet someone, anyone. I opened Grindr after work but felt as if could not handle the stressful negotiation process that day. Online profiles refuse to send their picture first in fear that they might be known. I never send my picture first, both because I do not want to be recognized and because I never go to the gym so I am afraid of how profiles might react to my body and face pictures. Grindr users can be mean. Eventually, I sent my picture and was told that I too old, skinny, and hairy. Then he blocked me. I was furious and I looked at my hand trembling. I felt ashamed and angry. I threw my phone on my glass table, shattering the glass. (M.J, personal communication, January 2018).

The inorganic and antagonistic characteristics of the queer Arab object in the modern queer subject was anthropomorphized in Ahmed’s phone; an object that became the embodiment of his sentiment towards queerness. And what he wanted to do towards this object is purge and destroy. This symbolic act often occurs within queer Arabs and its symptoms, if not managed, can be self-harm, and self-annihilation.

The Arab queer's definition of queerness as an object, as well as his or her own self-professed version of queerness, have been derailed from their own nature, to the extent that their nature has become un-definable, inextricable, and layered by internalized words, images and meanings of fear, fetishization, violence, and shame. These are the images and sentiments of living out queer existence on Internet application before materializing into hidden sporadic queer events.

Queerness cannot develop from a "disposable" object to a queer subject, when its space for growth is an online application. Moreover, the queer escapes the oppression of the heteronormative world where the heteronormative subject reigns, to find the judgments, objectification and violence of the queer world echoing louder.

In the real world, for the hetero-normative subject to exist, queerness *needs* to become an "object". In the online world, subjects are made objects as part of the interface and nature of the application where your profile is expected to have your weight, height, sexual preference, and HIV status. The purpose of the application is for quick sexual acts: but it was created on the grounds that queer culture *already* has a platform to communicate and meet in real life. The application, did not consider its mode of use if implemented in countries where *that* basic platform is non-existent.

What happens in the later scenario is that subjects attempt to negotiate their identity and produce their subjectivity within these reductive categories, fitting in their creative, expansive, and all-encompassing queerness, into concise boxes. One should imagine a generation of heteronormative men that have been taught to communicate with women, and identify as men, over an application like tinder¹⁷, without having a real-life platform to play out their full identities. The sweeping effect on individual agency and

¹⁷ Tinder is a location-based social search mobile app that allows users to like or dislike other users, and allows users to chat if both parties swiped to the right.

subjectivity, family structure, and society would be wide-ranging and would change what we perceive as “natural” or “real life” communication, which is multi-sensory and multi-faceted.

Forty-three Arab subjects sat down for short open-ended qualitative interviews regarding online behavior of queer Arabs between the months of January and February 2018. Most of the informants interviewed for this section agreed that the below prototypes of online profiles are not only repetitive but “have been increasing”. The internet has created its own language of queer Arab communication, with a space for development, freedom, and new forms of representation. Below are some of the common profiles..

Visiting. The profile name is exotic, foreign, but the *right* type of foreign, and Arab queer identities are more comfortable “visiting” their queerness, than “taking permanent residence”. The visiting profile name might have been created a few years ago for a trip outside Lebanon, and sustained for its “social perks”, including being more attractive to local users of the application. Local users are less afraid to reach out, as in send their pictures first, to *Visiting* profiles, because non-local visitors are less likely to recognize them as queer and shame them accordingly.

Masc-for-Masc. This profile represent the misogynistic and queer portion of Arab men and their disdain for the feminine, as well as the fear of being seen with feminine queers. This profile’s targeted audience is only the masculine and “straight-acting”. If feminine looking queers targeted such a profile, they will most likely be shamed.

‘Just manly men’, ‘Guys that hit the gym’, ‘Straight-acting only’, ‘No fems’, are the message for gay and bi men browsing through dating apps in Jordan, and it is clear: masculinity is in, femininity is out (Cuthbert, 2017).

No Fat, Fem or Asian. Arab Queer culture, in some way mimicking global queer culture¹⁸, has a fixation with male aesthetics and is quick to reject men outside these physical standards: femininity is seen as shameful and compromising.¹⁹ Asian is represented as the *wrong* kind of foreign and indicates the importance of race within queer culture. The use of *Asian* in profiles that appear in Lebanon is mostly an indication that the user also uses the application in the Gulf, like the United Arab Emirates, where a more international demographic exists.

Into Classy. This profile is looking for a specific socioeconomic class, education, and refuting blue collar gays, preferring men with privilege and money.

Escort. Known as the monetized queer culture, and similar to class, is a global characteristic of queer online culture, where young men and women have sex-for-pay. The *Escort*, who become successful in this work through the app, are one of the very few public representations of a “successful queer”, who can travel and “get away” from their situation. Needless to say, this representation traces back into the Arab queer’s self-definition of success, which includes commodifying their body for cash, safety and stability. The application opens a large market for those who engage in sex for pay, allowing them to make and save money, dress as more privileged, access more privileged places, and hence a larger and more expensive clientele network that is able to support their lifestyles, with “Older men supporting younger men being known as sugar daddies” (A.F, personal communication, January 2018).

Cam Sex. This profile is for the users who are looking for the safest place to be an Arab queer: alone, in the privacy of the home.

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwJmig0nBHM>

¹⁹ According to Ahmed, Feb 2018, being seen with feminine looking men, is associated with being gay, described in Arabic as *Shamsi*, which translates into being brought to the sun/ the light/ exposed.

No Place. Shows the importance of the lack of spaces to meet, and the barriers of physically meeting: the application itself extends its function, as does the wheel to the feet, to becoming *the space* to meet, more than actually meeting. This critique has been often been voiced by profiles that were *actually* visiting from countries where the function of the application is used as such, with one friend from London saying that, “Lebanese Grindr feels like the leeway to marriage, rather than casual sex”. Everything from “which neighborhood did you grow up in” to “How many men have you dated before” to “what is your religion” to “how long was your past relationship for” might be on the query list. These are questions that queer identities would normally ask one another face-to-face. The fact that an application used for sex, is now used to synthesize relationships, which in turn influences queer identities, depicts a gray present and future for Arab queers. The present is their lack of space, which by extension made the online world their *only* space. The online world though comes with its trolls, bullies, ability to hurt behind the screen, unemotional approaches, lack of non-verbal communication skills, and a world of shadows, and a language that can only depict at times, sexual roles and preferences.

Queer identity lost the space within itself to find balance (N.B., personal communication, January 2018).

The future is a queer Arab identity forged by quick, cold online communication. Grindr has shaped a generation of Arab queer identities,²⁰ and its propensity to influence queer development in the future will increase as long as the physical spaces for queers to meet decrease.²¹ Unbound by the lack of language and its corresponding space, Arabs

²⁰ Grindr is used in all the countries mentioned in this research, and in some countries such as The UAE, strict censorship laws limit the access to such applications but users constantly open blocked sites by using a VPN such as Express VPN or Cyberghost.

²¹ Recent crackdowns on queer culture in Lebanon, for pride May 2018 have been reported with queer people apprehended from social gatherings, queer event and queer spaces.

have Manjam-ed, Grindr-ed, Facebook-ed, Scruff-ed and Tango-ed their way into the deepest spaces of electronic queer existence. One might even say, “when there’s a (phallic) will, there’s a way”, but do not underestimate the importance of these applications of shaping queer identities of modern-day Arabs.

THE LANGUAGE OF QUEER SPACES

The imagined space of queer existence is formed from the cultural material around it, including language and representation creating a complex network of discourses that push political, cultural and ideological values. “The processing, forming and shaping of these imagined spaces are collective and occur over a long term. These processes might not be intentional, but they are oriented and determined by moral and ethical vectors, which we can identify and study as a whole or as a combination of their different parts” (Hartier, 2008).

Hence the language used to describe queer spaces and subjects both by queer and non-queer subjects might be highly indicative of queer existence, and the symbols, representations, and constrains that face queer individuals on a daily basis. It lays out the gendered framework within which Arab queerness exists and it outlines the gendered rules and regulations that queers and women abide by. The language used by queer culture to describe queer culture and spaces can be that which has been created by heterosexual culture, such as *marra* (woman), that which has been created by Western culture, such as gay, and scarce convoluted terms that describe the act, and not the subject, such as *khasso*. *Khasso* translates directly to “he is related to it” or “he is involved in it”, with “it” being the anonymous act of queerness. The term *khasso* screams anonymity and fear, and describes the transitional and temporary Arab *space*

of queerness; a space where a person can perform an act of queerness, and is tagged in relation to the act, but not the identity of queer. There is a clear distinction between being involved with queerness, versus being queer, as there is a clear distinction between the private versus the public. *Khasso* depicts a private space for the subjectivity of queerness, while a queer identity exists in public. The distinction between public versus private space in the Arab world becomes clear when seen from the perspective of queer culture.

When I came out after 33 years, the first question my mother asked me was “whom have you told about this? (T.K., personal communication, January 2018).

The issue of containment when it comes to queer people coming out to their families shows the Arab fear of public perception. That public includes family, neighbors, and relatives, and the way they perceive the family creates shame or pride in the Arab subject. The space for the queer subjectivity to grow depicted by the term *khasso* is that of the private. Privatizing subjectivities, as women in Saudi Arabia have experienced, limits the individual’s autonomy, access to resources, agency, and even thought and emotion and that is the symbolic space, created and depicted by language, where the queer subjectivity can grow.

There is no direct translation for the term “gay” into Arabic, as there is no space for the direct application for the term itself in the Arab world, as described previously in its geo-political and westernized cultural implications. Subjectivities rely on language to socially construct their reality. A reality, such as queerness, that has no distinct language cannot be constructed in the mind and eyes of the queer Arab. The queer Arab uses the language available to construct their perception of queerness, and that language in itself, is destructive and violent to queer thought and emotion. The general laws of language have proven their relation to all other areas of human activity and

transformations in spoken language have been linked to cultural transformations and changes in the individual apprehension of social reality (Kurzweil, 2017)

The queer Arab man can say “*ana gay*”²² which sets him of as “other” as being both homosexual and Westernized. The queer Arab man can say “*ana louti*”, using Arab society’s colloquial term for faggot. The queer Arab man can say “*ana mathli*” using a formal, politically correct word, which may not be familiar to him, and which may not convey the emotions, humility, and closeness that comes with colloquial and familiar words. Each of these statements constructs a *different* social reality for the queer, and the attention to the intention of each of these statements is often lost in the struggle of social survival.

The social reality of “*ana gay*” is shaped by the images and language of “gay people” mostly produced by the West *for* the West. It is shaped by RuPaul’s Drag Race, Will and Grace, Elton John and George Michael and that is the symbolic space, created by social media, music, and art where *that* queer subjectivity will grow. The language adopted from this culture will be the *same* language that the queer self will think and emote with, and that may push him into feeling further anomie in Arab culture. The queer subject is unconsciously living out a discourse that may further alienate him.

To Lacan the unconscious is a text to be unraveled, a text which is rooted in language: “It is that part of concrete discourse, that is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse” (Kurzweil, 2017).

So how can the symbolic space of growth described above, be related to the *actual* space where Arab queer subjectivities grow? What is the language used to depict queer *spaces* in the Arab world? *Siyara*²³ (Car), Grindr (Phone application), *Sher3 Fadi* (Empty Street)

²² “Ana” is a Lebanese colloquial term for “I am”.

²³ According to many of our informants, the car, in terms of cruising at night in neighborhoods far from their local neighborhood, or parked on empty or abandoned garages or dark side streets, is where queer

El-Cinema (Deserted movie theatres), *Club lal gays*²⁴, and *El-Beit Bala Ahl*, which translates in Arabic to the home without the family. Arab unmarried adults stay in their family home until they get married; in the case of Queer individuals, where marriage might not a prospect, the fleeting, anxiety-inducing space of “home without the family”, becomes the *only* space for the consummation of queerness. Arab queer spaces are mostly inconsistent “events”, rather than stable “spaces”. They are fleeting and mysterious; they need to be “found” but by the right people. Being found by the wrong people in the context of the home is disastrous for the queer with those who have experienced it reporting it as “the ultimate shameful event”.

It is in this analogy, that one draws the comparison between queer spaces, and *being* an Arab queer, also a “fleeting” identity where homosexuals are just “homosexual for an event”, a state of exception, and not “gay for an identity”. In the qualitative, open-ended interviews with self-professed Arab queers in Lebanon in January 2018, this small testimonial from Ahmed, a 31-year-old Lebanese man with a PhD in architecture, who has worked and resided in Beirut for more than fifteen years, gives a strong perspective on queerness as an event. On the week before the date of the interview, Ahmed had gone to Ramlet el Bayda²⁵, a spot frequented by what he calls “blue-collar queers”; an array of Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi, and Lebanese, but also known as a pick-up spot for the more privileged, local homosexuals:

I parked my car after one AM in the dark corner of the street, opened Grindr, and found a profile nearby. I decided to share my location with the user, even though I usually block profiles that can only type in Arabic. When the user approached, I slightly opened my window, and we conversed for a few minutes. Asking if he could join me in my car, the user then pulled out a knife from his back pocket, and extended towards my neck (W.R, personal communication, February 2018).

acts are consummated, especially if the queer individual doesn’t live alone, or has their parents in the home.

²⁴ There is no Arab word for *Gay Club*, which is the most common, and probably *only* physical forum for gays to meet, communicate and create a collective covenant.

²⁵ Part of the coastal tip of Ras Beirut, Lebanon.

The same fear and anxiety of existing as queer is reflected in the queer spaces where queers *can* exist. This is how “Queerness” becomes an object of identity. Queer as non-subject, as name-less, age-less, face-less, reference-less, image-less, language-less, without a heritage or an ethnicity, is the strongest barrier to change in queer existence in the Arab world, and the avid representation of Arab queerness.

Queer spaces reflect *back* on the queer’s consciousness, as to rejecting, fearing and *containing* the subjectivity of queerness, as they would want to contain the intensity, emotional violence and even trauma of the queer experience. The Arab queer needs to be “subjectified”, not only by the culture around it, but by the queer him or herself.

CONCLUSION

Many of the informants interviewed for the study of queer language had a uniformed sentiment, that queer names have a “name-as-you-go feeling”, because a “real name shouldn’t be there”. Doing research on trying to find queer names brings up the topic of discussion that finding the names, like finding the spaces, like finding the subjects, is a difficult task. Names are generally unnamable in “normal and respectable” contexts. People are uncomfortable naming them, and there has to be a search for the most public secret in the Arab world. Within their memory, in the cultures, and from family, informants “couldn’t just think of names for it”.

Other themes that appeared during the interviews included the representation of queerness as an act, an event, to be contained, abrupt, sporadic, fleeting and exceptional.

Yes, but what is *wrong* with you, he said. And I said, what do you mean. He said, well, you seem to be handsome, smart, likeable, so what happened to you to become *this way*. And I looked towards him to punch his face, but his face was honestly curious. I came back home that day, and asked myself, what *is* wrong with me? This cannot be *me*. I need to change. This can never happen again. (Z.M., personal communication, January 2018).

The queer collective has forgotten to use their mother tongue; the lack of subject-worthy language exacerbates this vacuum into something natural for Arabs, even biologically deterministic for their collective fate. This, amongst other factors fall into the essentialist discourse that Arabs and queerness cannot exist symbiotically, yet in the Muslim world “male-male” sexuality plays an important role. “In these societies there are no ‘homosexuals’—there is no word for homosexuality—the concept is completely unfamiliar. There are no heterosexuals either. The absence of these categories in the Muslim world is a phenomenon that remains constant over time” (Massad 2002).

Spoken language becomes the language of the mind, so how can queer identities utter their visions of a holistic queer identity to themselves, let alone to society? This might be one of the reasons that Arab queers are afraid to associate themselves with holistic homo-normative visions, such as co-owning a home, and raising a family as they are even afraid to dream it. A change in queer language is vital in reiterating the language of the self; a new empowered self-language and self-narrative is the beginning of identity formation for the Arab queer.

Queer Arab language is underdeveloped and lacking in words that signify the subjectivity of the queer identity. There *is* a language for Arab queers, but this language is not representative of the identity, history and subjectivity of the Queer Arab identity. The existent colloquial and formal language is embedded in hetero-normative norms, shame, and anxiety. The lack of queer words in the Arabic language also signifies the lack of space for the queer subjectivity to develop. Language works hand-in-hand with collective and individual identity; if there was a language, there would be an identity, and if there’s an identity then the Language will surely develop. Oppressed groups often shape language to serve their specific needs, making words “signify” their needs in

powerful ways and “the battle for social power and recognition is often reflected in a battle over language, for in asserting a right to name itself and express itself, a group asserts its ownership of itself, demonstrating that whatever forms of oppression—slavery, imprisonment, and expropriation—may have existed in the past, the group is, in fact, neither owned by nor inherently subordinate to any other” (Gates Jr 2014).

What should queer language demand? It should demand a conversation, not a negotiation. The queer identity keeps finding itself negotiating its own existence, while its linguistic demand should only be that of conversing, since only two, equal, self-evident entities *could* converse. For queer culture to keep communicating in hetero-normative terms is for queer culture to keep the negotiation running thereby stalling the possibility of real change.

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