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Sexual Sociality between Lebanese and Syrian men: A Study of the Representations of Syrian Men in the Non-heterosexual Lebanese Context

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the multiple representations of Syrian men in the non-heterosexual Lebanese context. Through qualitative research methods, eleven Lebanese men who have sex with men are interviewed about their sexual sociality with Syrian men. In terms of eroticization, this thesis exposes that Western and negotiated forms of orientalism overlap and produce multiple and even contradictory forms of sexual desire concerning Syrian men. Sexual script theory is utilized to explain the diversity of sexual desires. Regarding sexual rejection, this thesis combines sexual field theory and intersecting processes of racialization, orientalism, and sexualization to illustrate the sexual othering of Syrian men. Altogether, this thesis goes beyond encapsulating sexual sociality in a dichotomy of eroticization versus rejection and argues that engagement in casual sexual encounters with Syrian men breaches this dichotomy. Finally, this thesis explores through the lens of positionality how some Lebanese men reflexively position themselves within multiple social hierarchies to inform their attitudes towards Syrian men.

Keywords: non-heterosexuality; Lebanese men; Syrian men; sexual sociality.

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INTRODUCTION

In late November 2016, a two-and-a-half-minute video entitled “Would You Date a Syrian?” was shared on my Facebook News Feed.¹ At first, a female voice whose identity remains unexposed throughout the video interviews eight university women in Beirut asking: “*Est-ce que c’est possible pour toi de sortir avec un mec syrien ? Pourquoi ?*” which translates to “Would it be possible for you to date a Syrian guy? Why?” Also in French, and dubbed in English and Arabic, the women answer negatively. They argue that they would not date a Syrian man because “it’s a little weird, we have nothing in common,” or “it’s not my style, it’s a different culture, I would rather not.” One of them sentences “I don’t think any Lebanese girl would date a Syrian man, except if he doesn’t speak the language [Arabic].” Then the video changes settings to interview six other women at McGill University in Canada. These interviews are in English with English subtitles. Asked the same question, none of the McGill women refuses to go on a hypothetical date with a Syrian man because they maintain that “it doesn’t matter where a person comes from, it’s all specific to the person,” or “I don’t choose people depending on their culture.” At last, the interviewer meets Hala, a Lebanese woman living in Canada. She responds in Arabic and she wonders “why would I have a problem dating a Syrian man? He’s like any Lebanese person or any other person.” At the end, the viewer sees what the video intends to denounce. It closes with a statement in bold white letters over a black background that reads “Say no to racism.”

It was not until a year later, in October 2017, that I was reminded of this video. During the fall semester 2017-18, while an exchange student at the American University of Beirut, I read a 2013 blog entry entitled “The Syrian Hunk, and the Misery of a People.”² The author, a Lebanese man who signs as The Angry Tinker Bell, narrates how he met a Syrian refugee man through a dating app and a few days later the two met up for a casual sexual encounter. He describes the man that he encounters as a “manly playful like a grown up [sic] child.” I found the author’s description of the Syrian man especially striking for the orientaling rhetoric:

He imposed his presence in the cutest oriental manly behaviors. [...] He wondered why i [sic] was smiling several times, with his “Shami” accent [the

¹ BigFrankTube. “WOULD YOU DATE A SYRIAN ? (Lebanon vs. Canada)(SOCIAL EXPERIMENT)” Filmed [November 2016]. YouTube video, 2:33. Posted [November 2016]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cc3s8mZ1ZTo&t=75s>

² The Angry Tinker Bell, “The Syrian Hunk, and the Misery of a People,” The Angry Tinker Bell (blog), Wordpress, September 15, 2013, <https://angrytinkerbell.wordpress.com/2013/09/15/the-syrian-hunk-and-the-misery-of-a-people/>

accent from Syria] that i [sic] imitated several times. [...] I even felt it was exotic, you know, similar for what Europeans look for in Arabs. Some even come here just for the sake of being with an Arabic [sic] oriental man. I feel you Sistas [“sisters,” referring to fellow non-heterosexual men in Europe]. I know why you seek it now.

This blog entry differs greatly from the video about the college women. The video is a form of statement against what the person(s) who recorded it consider racist practices against Syrian men. The blog entry celebrates comradeship with Europeans who would supposedly travel to the Arab region to engage in sexual intercourse with “exotic” men. Both texts portray opposite views over the same subject, Syrian men, yet the two represent forms of blatant othering. The culturally different Syrian man who speaks Arabic in the heterosexual context, is the manly Arab with a funny-to-imitate Syrian accent in the same-sex one. In either case, the Syrian is regarded as the Other.

The Angry Tinker Bell’s narrative offers a glimpse into the sexualization of Syrian men by a Lebanese man, but to what extent does the blog entry reflect the opinion of other Lebanese men? With the aim to explore the meanings that non-heterosexual Lebanese men create about Syrian men, this thesis seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1. How do non-heterosexual Lebanese men eroticize/reject Syrian men?*
- 2. How do non-heterosexual Lebanese men represent Syrian men?*
- 3. How does non-heterosexuality influence the representation of Syrian men?*

1.1 Research purpose

This study investigates the sexual sociality between non-heterosexual Lebanese men and Syrian men. It explores the eroticization of Syrian men through diverse forms of orientalizing representation. It exposes that sexual desire is a subjectively constructed process better understood through the lens of sexual script theory. This thesis also investigates the sexual rejection of Syrian men. It argues that it is necessary to put into conversation sexual field theory with intersecting processes of racialization, orientalism, sexualization, and othering to fully understand the sexual rejection of Syrian men. Altogether, this thesis contends that eroticization versus rejection does not account for the complexity of the social sociality between Lebanese and Syrian men, and it investigates how engagement in casual sexual encounters with Syrian men breaches this dichotomy. Furthermore, this study explores positionality to understand how for some Lebanese men their position within social hierarchies informs their attitudes vis-à-vis Syrian men.

1.2 Disposition

Following the introduction, the context chapter in this thesis is divided into two sections. First, I expose the unwillingness of the Lebanese government and the Lebanese population to host Syrian refugees in Lebanon. I argue that the Syrian military occupation of Lebanon between 1976 and 2005 generated social resentment against Syrians that re-emerges in the current context of refugee influx. Second, I expose that despite that the Lebanese legislation against same-sex sexual conduct has been loosely enforced in the past years, the Lebanese security forces persecute LGBTI-oriented events and harass non-heterosexual Syrian refugees.

Next, the literature review is divided into five sections. First, I engage with the literature that examines the orientaling representations of Middle Eastern men and I point out that while this literature is appropriate to discuss the Western viewpoint on Arab men, it is insufficient to investigate the sexual representation of Arab men by Arab men. Second, I briefly review the literature on forced migration and sexuality and I expose that policy-oriented research that combines migration and sexuality studies focuses largely on sexual violence. Third, I engage with the existing literature on Syrian refugees in Lebanon and sexuality and highlight the heterosexual nature of these examinations. Fourth, I turn to the literature on LGBTI Syrian refugees in Lebanon and expose that the sexual sociality between Syrian and Lebanese men remains overlooked. Fifth, a conclusion is provided.

I build my theoretical framework on four main perspectives. First, I discuss sexual script theory and focus on intrapsychic scripting to explore the subjective construction of sexual desire. Second, I engage with sexual field theory as a theoretical perspective to understand sexual rejection of Syrian men through the notion of erotic capital. Third, I claim that accumulation of erotic capital alone does not suffice to account for the rejection of Syrian men and I discuss intersectionality, othering, racialization, and orientalism as processes that contribute to the alienation of Syrian men. Fourth, I engage with positionality to illustrate how non-heterosexual Lebanese men reflexively position themselves within social hierarchies.

In the methodology chapter, I explain the qualitative research methods that I have employed to glean the data. I describe narrative research and phenomenology as techniques that I used to go about collecting the data through eleven semi-structured interviews with non-heterosexual Lebanese men. Furthermore, I describe how I accessed the field and coped with the challenges of inviting respondents to participate in a study that demands disclosure about their intimate sexual life. In the ethical considerations section, I elaborate on how I guaranteed the anonymity and respect of the respondents

and how I obtained informed consent from all of them. I end the chapter positioning myself reflexively as a researcher in a qualitative study.

Next, in the findings chapter I profile every participant and I identify five main themes. “Fetish, Sex, and Desire” illustrates the ways in which Syrian men are eroticized, and “‘No Syrians:’ Reasons for Rejection” describes how Syrian men are sexually rejected. However, I argue that fetishization versus rejection does not entirely encompass the sexual sociality between Lebanese and Syrian men. Therefore, reasons for rejection cannot be understood without the following section, “The Syrian Hookup.” In the latter section I show that despite that non-heterosexual Lebanese men would not commit to an intimate relationship with a Syrian man for a number of reasons, some engage in casual sexual encounters with Syrian men. The last two sections are “The Syrian as Sexual Commodity” and “The Anti-Discrimination Brotherhood.” The former describes how sexualization of Syrian bodies entails a form of othering. The latter indicates that for some non-heterosexual Lebanese men, their self-identified homosexual sexuality informs an inclusive attitude towards Syrian refugees. Taken together, these five sections elucidate how Syrian men are constructed in the non-heterosexual Lebanese context.

In the analysis chapter, I analyze my findings in relation to my literature review and theoretical framework in five sections. First, in “Constructing Sexual Desire” I expose that sexual desire formations are subjective processes shaped in the intrapsychic script. I argue that negotiated and hegemonic orientalizing discourses overlap and produce multiple approaches to eroticize Syrian men. Second, in “Sexual Rejection with Exceptions” I highlight how sexual field theory and orientalism help us draw the reasons for the sexual rejection of Syrian men. Third, in “Racialization and Orientalism in Casual Sexual Encounters” I expose that racialization and orientalism intersect and other Syrian men in the context of non-committed sexual intercourse. Fourth, in “Othering via Sexualization” I argue that sexualization is a form of othering Syrian refugee men. Fifth, in “Countering Discrimination Against Syrian Refugees” I expose how some Lebanese non-heterosexuals think of themselves as belonging to a sexual minority that should not discriminate against Syrian refugees.

Following the conclusion, I suggest that future investigations should examine how Syrians react to sexual rejection and what mechanisms they mobilize to resist social stratification. Finally, I propose that future research should also explore whether Syrian men eroticize and reject Lebanese men in the same terms.

1.3 Note on Terminology

Throughout this thesis, I have made conscious choices to refer to the sexual identities of the men who participate in this study. I have avoided employing terms such as “gay” or “homosexual” which often not only describe male-male sexual behavior, but they are associated with a sexual identity. I have opted for other terms such as “non-heterosexual” and “MSM” (men who have sex with men), that I use interchangeably. By doing so, I take into consideration that some men may engage in same-sex acts without adhering to a sexual identity that is based on or restricted to these acts.

Altogether, I do employ “gay,” “homosexual,” and “homosexuality” in “The Anti-Discrimination Brotherhood” and “Countering Discrimination Against Syrian Refugees” in the findings and analysis chapters, respectively. The reason to do so is because the Lebanese men described in these sections self-identify as gay.

CONTEXT

2.1 Reception of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, more than 5.5 million Syrian refugees have fled their country.³ In July 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registered 976,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon,⁴ but the Lebanese government estimates that the unofficial number amounts to 1.5 million.⁵ This disagreement on the number of refugees in Lebanon is due to diverse reasons. For example, Lebanon has not signed the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees nor its 1967 Protocol, and the Lebanese government has not allowed the UNHCR to establish official refugee settlements, which has encouraged refugees to self-settle across the country (Thorleifsson 2016, 1072). Self-settlement renders it difficult to determine a definitive number of Syrian refugees in Lebanese territory. Lebanon has not permitted UNHCR to establish official refugee camps for different reasons, one of them being the fear of militarization of these settlements, which would replicate the Palestinian experience (Turner 2015, 390-1). Despite the difficulty to determine the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, their presence could come to an end soon. 50,000 refugees returned to Syria from Lebanon during the summer 2018 in a coordinated operation between Beirut and Damascus, and more refugees are expected to return in the upcoming months (Bassam 2018).

As Syrian refugees poured into Lebanon, the Lebanese population was unenthusiastic about their presence. In 2013, a national poll surveyed 900 Lebanese citizens across the country about their opinion on Syrian refugees (Christophersen et al. 2013). The opinions are resolutely inclined towards the perceived negative effects of Syrian refugees. For example, 98% of the respondents believe that Syrians are taking the jobs from the Lebanese population, and 96% consider that employing Syrian refugees brings the wages to fall. Moreover, 63% consider that Syrians are unfairly given economic assistance. On the social level, 61% declare feeling uncomfortable with Syrians as close neighbors, and 82% express discomfort with a Syrian marrying a family member.

³ “Syria Regional Refugee Response,” Operation Portal Refugee Situations Syria, UNHCR, last modified September 27, 2018, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

⁴ “Syria Regional Refugee Response,” Operation Portal Refugee Situations Lebanon, UNHCR, last modified July 31, 2018, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71#_ga=2.6556730.944179093.1538937057-432099148.1476537148

⁵ Government of Lebanon and UNHCR, “Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020” 3RP, Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2018-2019. Accessed October 4, 2018. <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Lebanon-Crisis-Response-Plan-2017-2020.pdf>

As for the mobility of Syrians, 98% report that the border with Syrian should be more policed and 89% believe that Syrians should not enter Lebanon freely.

Nevertheless, anti-Syrian sentiments existed in Lebanon prior to the refugee crisis. From 1976 to 2005, the Syrian army was a de facto occupying force on Lebanese territory. Following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005, anti-Syrian political groups demanded the withdrawal of Syrian troops in a series of popular uprisings known as the Cedar Revolution. However, not everyone was in favor of ousting the Syrian troops. During these protests, two political blocks emerged in opposition to each other that remain until today. Shia groups gathered around the “March 8” movement to support Syria’s presence in Lebanon, and Sunni groups assembled in the “March 14” movement against Syria (Thorleifsson 2016, 1072-3). Although the Cedar Revolution was successful in ousting the Syrian military, Damascus’ grip on Lebanese politics remained well beyond the uprisings (El-Husseini 2012). Today, Lebanese Shia groups still maintain their political allegiance to the Syrian regime. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the presence of Syrian refugees is looked upon with suspicion by large numbers of Lebanese individuals, who consider that clashes between Lebanese sectarian groups could re-emerge and bring about another civil war (Christophersen et al. 2013).

2.2 Homosexuality in Lebanon

Lebanon, or more precisely Beirut, is often cited as an exceptionally liberal environment for LGBTI individuals, especially in relation to other states within the Middle East. However, Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code, enacted during the French mandate, forbids “sexual relations that contradict the laws of nature” (Myrtrinen et al. 2017, 67). While this article does not specify the word “homosexuality,” it is invoked by judges to criminalize same-sex conduct, and the punishment for it is up to one year of prison.

Since 2007, several judges have refused to convict suspected LGBTI people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity (Ghoshal 2018), and in July 2018, a court of appeal ruled that consensual sex between two adults cannot be considered contrary to nature (Azar 2018). Despite these steps towards the depenalization of same-sex conduct, there are contradictions between the judiciary and the executive powers, as the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) continue to police LGBTI-oriented events and harasses non-heterosexual Syrian men.

In May 2018, the ISF detained a Lebanese LGBTI-rights activist and obliged him to cancel the Beirut Pride week. Later on, in September, the ISF attempted to shut down an LGBTI-focused conference in Beirut organized by a Lebanese foundation (Human Rights Watch 2018). In these two occasions, the events were cancelled, while the

organizers were not imprisoned. Yet, Syrian refugees have reportedly been subjected to abusive practices by the ISF. In 2014, the ISF raided a bathhouse in Beirut where men would have sex with men, and detained employees and customers alike (Wansa 2014). Unlike the Lebanese individuals, Syrians were beaten, insulted, terrorized, and harassed for days. Then, they were transferred to a prison, where they were confined despite a court ruling ordering their release. There, they were forced to pay between US\$100 and US\$500 to guarantee that they would not be molested, but they were beaten and insulted by the inmates. Likewise, a year before the ISF raided a gay-friendly club located in East Beirut and a number of Syrians were detained with some Lebanese. In prison, they received a humiliating treatment from the police officers (Nammour 2013). Consequently, since their arrival in Lebanon, Syrian refugees are faced with social and institutional forms of discrimination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Orientalizing the Arab Body

Edward Said (1978) begins *Orientalism* quoting a French journalist in Beirut at the beginning of the 1975–1990 Lebanese Civil War. The journalist describes a place in decay, an illusion of the previous mesmerizing Orient as illustrated in French romantic literature. Said points out that the journalist’s account rightly speaks to a European public because the Orient is “almost a European invention [...] a place of romance, exotic beings, [...] remarkable experiences” (Ibid., 1). He names “orientalism” the discourse that the Occident has created to represent the Orient regardless of its correspondence with a “real” Orient (Ibid., 5). Said claims that the West has defined itself in opposition to the Orient. As a result, orientalism has allowed for a set of binaries such as West/East, Self/Other, civilized/uncivilized, progressive/backwards, and the like. Consequently, the Occident has constructed itself as a superior entity, a narrative that the West articulates to justify its hegemonic control over the Orient (Ibid.).

It is important to underline that Said includes “exotic beings” and “remarkable experiences” in the Western misrepresentation of the East. Said suggests that sex and sexualization of Middle Eastern people are fundamental elements to the orientalizing discourse. He reveals that sex in the Orient is more often than not depicted as a transgression to Western sexual decency; the Orient is represented as a place where everything “exude[s] dangerous sex” (Said 1978, 167). Said adds that the Orient is described as a region for sexual discovery and promise, where one can rejoice “unobtainable” experiences in Europe (Ibid., 190). However, the perception of sex in the Orient is an ambivalent one. Sexual temptation in the Orient appears to be abundant, but it comes in a threatening form. Inasmuch as sex is libertine and available with exotic beings, it is regarded as immoral, a debauchery. Ultimately, the orientalizing desire projects onto foreign lands sexual fantasies that are shameful or forbidden in the West (Boone 2014, 5).

In his discussion about the eroticization of the Orient, Said focuses on the description of women and places, but just as Boone notes, Said’s argumentation is exclusively heterosexual in nature (Boone 2014, 25). For Boone, Said hints at the presence of sexualities other than heterosexual, but Said refrained from its study on purpose (Boone 2014, 54). Whether true or not, later studies have undertaken the task of examining the representation of homoerotic fantasies, men, and masculinities in the Middle East.

Moussawi (2013) explores the ways travel articles and gay travelogues make non-heterosexual Lebanese men intelligible to a Western public. His study illustrates that the gay tourism industry markets Beirut as a utopia for self-identified gay Western males who seek to satisfy their appetite for sexual discovery and adventure with local men (866-7). Gay travelogues racialize non-heterosexual Arab men in Lebanon to render them intelligible for the Western reader. For example, in terms of physical description, Moussawi points out that there is an excessive focus on facial and bodily hair to emphasize their masculinity, because a well-trimmed beard is viewed as a means to pass as masculine (Ibid., 868). Gay travelogues also sexualize Arab men and present them as closeted and repressed, discreet in public, but sexually available in private (Ibid.).

This binary between public versus private reflects an orientalizing approach to the sexual life of Middle Eastern men, who are presumed to be willing to engage in sex with other men but must do so in a private setting. This perception nurtures the idea that sex with other men in the Middle East is illicit because homosexuality is unlawful, but it is also adventurous because sex must happen in secret. This sexual secrecy among men in the Middle East, reinforces the idea that non-heterosexual Arab men live a double life (Myrntinen et al. 2017, 65). However, the concept of a double life is a misrepresentation of how homosexual identities are locally constituted in relation to forms of authority and normalization (Gagné and Quabaia 2013). Gagné and Quabaia argue that non-normative sexualities in Beirut are not restricted to the private sphere, but they unfold in everyday interactions with other people and through bodily performances. Accordingly, non-heterosexual men do not live a double life, but they decide to accentuate or not certain demeanors depending on the social context. Rather than living their sexuality at the discretion of a privatized space, they “juggle” (Allouche 2017, 70) multiple strategies.

Transnational circuits of queer tourism have eased mobility to the Middle East, which in turn has provided new modes of orientalizing representation that are not limited to the textual forms. McCormick (2011) conducts ethnographic research to study the encounters between gay Western tourists and Syrian men during gay-oriented tours across Lebanon and Syria between 2007 and 2011. He notes that Western travelers usually believe that the region is hostile against their identified sexuality, which persuades them that Arab men are necessarily homophobic and a threat to their physical integrity (Ibid., 82). McCormick observes that a certain sexual excitement emerges when Syrian men are constructed as dangerous. Travelers may fear being brutalized because of their homosexual identity, but at the same time they desire to be abused during intercourse with a brutal Arab man (Ibid.).

McCormick also notices that groups of travelers often develop a collective consciousness based on a shared Western gay identity (2011, 83-4). Tourists view their self-identified homosexuality as liberated and expect their counterparts in the Middle East to struggle for LGBTI rights and achieve similar levels of progress (Ibid., 84). Yet the commitment for LGBTI rights in non-Western lands assumes the presence of self-identified LGBTI people in need of those rights. Massad (2007) questions the “authenticity” of gay identities in the Middle East. He does not negate the existence of same-sex sexual conduct among Arabs, but he views the adoption of Western-constituted homosexual identities as a form of neocolonialism, a westernization of sexual desire in the Middle East (Ibid., 175). Massad’s argumentations call into question whether engagement in same-sex sexual activity needs to translate into a homosexual identity, an argumentation that is shared by many in Lebanon (Seidman 2012, 20). Despite the significance of his argumentation, Massad ends up denying the agency of Arab individuals to choose their personal sexual identity (Hasso 2011, 653).

Thus far, the literature I reviewed in this section discusses the eroticization of Arab men mainly through fetishization of physical attributes, violent attitudes, and secret sexual lives. One may question whether these representations are reproduced in the eroticization of Syrian men by Lebanese men. Especially, when the orientaling discourse is a product of how the West imagines the East, and it is largely premised on binary distinctions between Western and Middle Eastern men.

Furthermore, these studies on the sexualization of non-Western bodies are based on erotization, but few are the studies that look at the rejection of Arab men. The publications that examine sexual rejection of non-Western bodies mainly discuss racial differences and the importance of being racially white, usually associated with a hegemonic form of erotic desirability (Callander, Holt, and Newman 2012; Daroya 2018; Robinson 2015). Altogether, race is a social category more salient in the West for the organization of society, but racial categories in the Middle East are more fluid. Abdelhady (2017) argues that racialization can be a result of processes of othering that are constructed in ways rendering differences immutable and unnegotiable. Without emphasizing racialization in this section, it is necessary to turn briefly to existing studies that combine forced migration and sexuality.

3.2 Refugeehood and Sexuality

A body of the literature on migration and male-male sexuality is characterized for its policy-oriented research. These studies aim to conduct research on the areas where male refugees are in situation of vulnerability in order to highlight the need of policy

implementation to ensure their protection. Thus, these studies expose sexual exploitation of refugee men and boys (McGinnis 2016; Touquet and Gorris 2016), and the physical health impact of sexual violence on men (Chynoweth 2017). Whereas policy-oriented studies are relevant for policy-makers and practitioners, these studies fail to conceptualize refugees as people other than forced migrants (Bakewell 2008). Consequently, refugees should be perceived as purposeful agents, and research that combines migration and sexuality studies should explore areas other than sexual violence against refugees. In this respect, it is relevant for this thesis to turn to the literature that engages with Syrian refugees and sexuality studies in the following section.

3.3 Syrian Refugees and Sexuality

Oftentimes Beirut is described as a cosmopolitan and modern capital, a tolerant and inclusive city within a larger Middle East perceived as conservative and stubborn, bigoted (Moussawi 2013). However, inclusion to the cosmopolitanism and tolerance of Beirut is restricted to specific gendered, racialized, and classed bodies. Gender non-confirming, trans, working-class people, domestic workers, Palestinians, Kurds, and Syrians are on the margins of this inclusion (Moussawi 2018; Seidman 2012, 16).

For years, Palestinians have been regarded as the primary Other in the Lebanese context, but with the surge of Syrian refugees, these have been turned into the new most notable Other, especially since the Lebanese government instrumentalizes Syrian refugees as scapegoats for its economic, social, and security shortcomings (Thorleifsson 2016, 1078-9). Two studies have examined the othering of Syrian refugees through processes of sexualization. Qubaia and Gagné (2014) explore how unfounded allegations divulged in the media about sexual violence, harassment and rape are imputed to Syrian refugees and construct them as the negation of proper Lebanese mores. By focusing the attention from the act of rape itself onto the Syrian nationality, these articles vilify the Syrian community in Lebanon and associate Syrian men with a security threat, a public danger. In this respect, Allouche (2017) indicates that equating the Syrian refugee with a sex offender has given rise to a discourse on the Lebanese masculinity under threat. When a case of rape is reported, it presumes the defeat of Lebanese men, whose duty as defenders of the nation is to protect Lebanese women (Ibid., 65). These representations of Syrian men as sex predators further reproduce ostracism of the Syrian community.

It is interesting to note that Qubaia and Gagné, as well as Allouche discuss forms of othering via the sexualization of Syrian refugees. However, their accounts remain on the vilification of Syrian men, and one may ask whether non-heterosexual Lebanese men employ these same mechanisms when representing Syrian men. Consequently, in order

to discuss how Syrian men are perceived among Lebanese men interested in same-sex encounters, it is important to review the existing literature on LGBTI Syrians in Lebanon.

3.4 LGBTI Syrians in Lebanon

Turning to studies that engage with the presence of Syrian men and same-sex sexuality in Lebanon, a body of the literature explores the sexual practices of Syrian men from a medical standpoint. These investigations delve into sexual behaviors of Syrian refugee men as a sexually active sub-group within the Lebanese population (Aunon et al. 2015; Mutchler et al. 2017; Tohme et al. 2016). The most salient study is the one conducted by Aunon et al., who compare risk sexual behaviors between two groups of male sex workers in Beirut, escorts and employees at bathhouses. Aunon et al. interview a total of 16 sex workers, five Lebanese and eleven Syrians. While these numbers cannot be taken to reflect the population of sex workers in Lebanon, it is significant to note that a majority of their interviewees are Syrian, yet the authors do not elaborate how this may influence the perception of the Syrian men among non-heterosexual Lebanese men.

Other works explore the vulnerabilities that Syrian LGBTI refugees endure in Lebanon (Clare 2015; Myrntinen et al. 2017). Myrntinen et al. examine the challenges that refugees encounter due to their sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). The authors assess the “continuums of violence” LGBTI Syrians lived in pre-war Syria and continue to experience as refugees. Despite the authors’ comprehensive review of the hardships that LGBTI Syrians undergo in Syria and Lebanon, their work falls short of exploring the specific vulnerabilities that LGBTI Syrians encounter due to their social positions at the intersection of non-heterosexuality and refugeehood. Whereas Myrntinen et al. discuss some particular examples that do affect LGBTI Syrian refugees such as difficulties to access tailored services for LGBTI people in informal tented settlements (2017, 68-9). Most of the experiences of violence that the authors expose are not exclusive to Syrian refugees because of their SOGI. The examples of violence that Myrntinen et al. denounce are likely to affect all Syrians due to their status as refugees or all members of the LGBTI community in Lebanon because of their non-heterosexual sexualities.

Thus far, the studies that explore the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon with a focus on non-heterosexual sexualities do not engage with the sexual sociality between Lebanese and Syrian men. Altogether, Allouche (2017) discusses the sexual encounters between Syrian and Lebanese men. She argues that Syrian men systematically perform receiver roles during intercourse with Lebanese men. She evokes Bruce Dunne’s 1998 *Power and Sexuality in the Middle East* to declare that “sexual acts, if we are to follow

Dunne, are less invested with desire and physical attraction, and more concurrent with reiterating one's masculinity" (Allouche 2017, 66).

Allouche's contention is that the Lebanese man who performs the inserter role reaffirms his masculinity through the physical penetration of the Syrian body. This conceptualization of male-male sexual activity is problematic in various ways. First, she presumes that Lebanese men do not engage in sexual relations with Syrian men for the pursuit of pleasure, but only to reclaim their masculinity. This means that non-heterosexual Lebanese men give different meanings to their sexual encounters depending on the partner's nationality, and if this were the case, Allouche does not explain how Lebanese men interpret their sexual encounters with men other than Syrian. Second, she measures power dynamics in relation to who introduces the penis. She places on the Lebanese man the power to assert his masculinity according to his sexual role, which transforms the Syrian man into the passive receiver of the action. She distributes power in a binary of powerful inserter versus powerless receiver, thus negating power sharing during male-male sexual intercourse (Kippax and Smith 2001). Third, she demonstrates a heteronormative understanding of gender by associating inserter and masculinity versus receiver and femininity (Carballo-Diéguez et al. 2004). Fourth, it is debatable whether all Lebanese men would perform the inserter role with a Syrian man.

While Allouche makes a first step towards exploring how Lebanese men create meaning of their sexual encounters with Syrian men, she paints a picture that does not examine how processes of othering, racialization, sexualization and orientalism intersect and produce the image of the Syrian men in the non-heterosexual Lebanese context.

3.5 Conclusion

In the first section of this literature review, I bring together a number of studies that engage with the orientaling representation and sexualization of Arab men. These descriptions go beyond the eroticization of physical attributes and fetishize imagined sexual lives experienced in secret, violence and masculinity. Altogether, I expose that the studies in this section overlook the sexual rejection of Arab men. I argue that there is a want of studies that engage with the othering among Arabs, and in particular, among non-heterosexual Arab men.

In the second section, I suggest that a corpus of studies on forced migration and male-male sexuality are policy-oriented, which produces a range of studies premised on forms of sexual violence against men in the context of refugeehood. I argue that research that combines forced migration and sexuality studies should explore areas other than

sexual violence, such as for example, the sexual sociality between Syrian men and Lebanese men.

In the third section, I engage with the literature on Syrian men in Lebanon. This section explores the othering of Syrian men via forms of sexualization and vilification. However, I argue that these processes are explored from a heterosexual stance, and I indicate that it is necessary to examine the representations of Syrian men in the non-heterosexual context.

In the fourth section, I expose that the existing literature on LGBTI Syrians in Lebanon does not examine the sexual sociality between Syrian and Lebanese men. I argue that although Allouche's article examines sexual intercourse between these two groups of men, the representation of Syrian men in the non-heterosexual Lebanese context needs further exploration. Therefore, the following chapter gathers multiple theoretical perspectives that enable to examine the sexual sociality between Lebanese and Syrian men.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Subjective Desire Construction: Intrapsychic Script

In an attempt to explain sexual meaning formation, sexual script theory analyzes sexual activity as social and learned interactions. Simon and Gagnon (1986) view sexual behavior as scripted performance, a way of acting that is learnt from social constructs about what is sexually desirable and what is not. Their theory includes three conceptual levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic (personal) scripts. Cultural scenarios are instructions on the meanings, uses, and roles of the sexual for the self and others (Ibid., 98). Therefore, individuals learn what activities, behaviors, and fantasies are sexual from cultural scenarios (Wiederman 2015, 8). The embodiment of these general rules is performed at the interpersonal scripts level, where actors in interaction with other individuals adapt the acquired sexual instructions to the specifics of every encounter (Simon and Gagnon 1986, 99). The individual adaptation of cultural scenarios reifies the intrapsychic script. This is the subjective world of desires, fantasies, memories, and mental rehearsals (Wiederman 2015, 9). At the intrapsychic level, individuals create minor adaptations to cultural scenarios, which result in a great diversity of sexual desires and behaviors across actors.

The intrapsychic script supposes a subjective process to eroticize others and construct desire. It entails introjection of social categories involving gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, class, among others; when these categories are eroticized, they produce sexual excitement (Whittier and Simon 2001, 140). The sexual preference for certain eroticized categories over others is encapsulated into what is described as “my type” (Ibid., 144). “My type” is a set of characteristics that facilitates the selection of a sexual partner, especially in modern urban environments that offer a broad range of possibilities. Creations of “my type” are idiosyncratic, and the judgements that individuals draw from the intrapsychic script are likely to change upon accumulation of sexual practices and the contingencies of time and place when encountering other actors (Ibid., 142). Other actors encountered in interpersonal interactions rarely correspond, if ever, to the ideal of “my type,” which leads to the reevaluation or even abandonment of the initial structures of sexual excitement (Ibid., 145). For example, in the video that I describe in the introduction of this thesis, one of the Lebanese college women argues that she would not date a Syrian man because in her opinion, Lebanese and Syrian people “have nothing in common,” meaning that the qualities of Syrian men do not correspond to “her type.” However, individuals rarely correspond to the ideal of “my type,” and this

is evident for the college woman in Canada who responds that selecting a partner is “specific to the person.” Here, the McGill woman highlights that sexual preferences need to be reevaluated when encountering other actors.

Whilst intrapsychic scripting is a particularly suitable approach to describe what eroticized social categories generate sexual excitement, it does not detail what categories are combined to justify the rejection of other sexual actors. To some extent, the preference for certain individuals over others may come from cultural scenarios. Intrapsychic scripts are shaped from cultural scenarios, and therefore regulatory instructions of who and what is or not sexually arousing are also acquired (Whittier and Simon 2001, 161). However, sexual script theory is unable to provide answers on how cultural scenarios are inscribed into the individual’s intrapsychic script (Epstein 1991, 831).

Towards this aim, the theory of sexual fields explains the selection of certain actors over others based on erotic capital and sexual hierarchies. Whereas sexual script theory is a framework to describe how social constructions of sexuality affect particular desires, it does not elucidate how sexual hierarchies are created among actors (Brickell 2006, 96). However, sexual field theory advances a framework to examine how agents in a sexual field are rejected and placed into hierarchical positions. Therefore, it is necessary to combine theoretical aspects within sexual script theory and sexual field theory to make sense of the individual fantasies and experiences of non-heterosexual Lebanese men with Syrian men.

4.2 Sexual Hierarchies

Building upon Bourdieu’s theory of practice, sexual field theory argues that the social organization of eroticism engenders particular systems of social stratification (Green 2008, 2011). According to sexual field theory, sexual life is divided into erotic worlds, which in turn comprise sites of sexual sociality and sexual fields. The former represents the physical and virtual spaces such as bars, bathhouses, dating apps, and the like, where sexual agents socialize (Green 2008, 28). The latter is the social structure that arises from each site. Sexual fields are multiple and distinct from one another: they emerge when a group of sexual agents congregate around similar sexual preferences. The accumulation of analogous erotic desires at a given site give rise to an overarching structure of desire within the field (Green 2011, 247). The structure of desire produces the field’s specific erotic capital, which in turn regulates the field’s hierarchy.

When players, i.e. sexual agents, recognize the field’s erotic capital, they adapt their own erotic capital to the field’s in order to negotiate their position in the sexual hierarchy (Green 2011, 255). Erotic capital is defined as “the quality and quantity of

attributes that each individual possesses” (Green 2008, 29) in relation to physical traits, affective presentation, and eroticized sociocultural style. This means that erotic capital is not only reducible to physical appearance, but it also includes the emotions, and social and cultural features that players display and that other actors eroticize.

Erotic capital becomes a system of collective valuation to gauge the degree of desirability of the players in the field. Sexual actors learn a field’s specific erotic capital via the visual manifestations of the structures of desire (Green 2011, 248). Structures of desire are reflected in the field’s sign equipment, including the décor of a given site, sexual ideals in videos, posters, and magazines, and the presentations of the participants through fashion, posture, speech, and look of the body. In dating apps and interactive “chat rooms,” the structure of desire is communicated to the users through the information displayed on personal profiles (Green 2008, 43). These visual representations communicate specific forms of attractiveness, which result in the establishment of hegemonic currencies of erotic capital. Therefore, when actors seek to develop sexual desirability, they need to adapt to institutionalized forms of erotic capital (Ibid., 31). Actors who successfully manage to do so, are rewarded with the ability to choose their sexual partner (Green 2011, 248).

When agents enter in interaction with other players in the field, they are required to assess their own erotic capital. This assessment is carried out reflexively in comparing the self to the dominant erotic capital, but it can also be evaluated through intersubjective assessments (Green 2011, 255), that is, how others respond to the presentation of the self. The sexual responses from other players stratify actors in hierarchies of desirability (Ibid., 258). Thus, based on the distribution of erotic capital, actors assign a position to themselves and to others in the field’s sexual hierarchy (Green 2008, 32), which determines who can be approached or not during interactions. When an agent approaches another, the former implies that his erotic capital is equivalent to the latter’s. Whenever this is not the case, the actor with a higher degree of erotic capital may perceive such action as a “violation of deference” (Green 2011, 260). Actors that concentrate a greater degree of erotic capital approach the subordinates first, which is also a recognition of one’s position in the field’s hierarchy. In short, a field’s hegemonic erotic capital becomes a system of collective valuation that determines the agent’s sexual desirability and mediates sexual selection during interaction. Subsequently, sexual sociality in the field results in a system of social stratification.

Although preexisting social inequalities based on age, gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, disability and other social categories are reflected in a sexual field’s

hierarchy, “the logic of eroticism” can attribute sexual desirability to certain individuals due to contingencies of time and space, as well as categories that in non-sexual fields afford a low degree of power (Green 2008, 44). For example, whereas working classes might be at a disadvantage in certain non-sexual fields, some working-class styles are susceptible to be eroticized and afford high degrees of sexual desirability within some sexual fields. Sexual hierarchies within sexual field theory highlight that fields are domains for competition and recognition, yet not all agents are willing to compete for sexual selection, there are sexual agents who do not develop a “feel for the game” (Ibid., 32).

The formulation of erotic capital within sexuality studies represents a major contribution to the theorizing of sexual selection. Nevertheless, other forms of capital, such as economic, cultural, and symbolic also intersect and influence sexual selection (Green 2011, 264). With the aim to illustrate on what grounds Syrian men are sexually rejected by non-heterosexual Lebanese men, it is convenient to include other intersecting processes of discrimination such as othering, racialization, and orientalism.

4.3 Intersecting Processes of Discrimination

Intersectionality explores the ways in which race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, age and other social identities intersect and impact individual realities and social relations (Collins 2000, 299). These identities become categories to represent individuals and groups and create social structures of organization. Social structures result in social hierarchies that place individuals and groups into different positions depending on their multiple social categories. Their positions within these hierarchies mediate their social relations with other individuals. Subsequently, uneven power relations and inequalities emerge according to one’s location within social hierarchies.

Intersectional studies have been criticized for the tendency of its authors to enumerate a list of differences based on the embodiment of multiple social categories (Anthias 2012a, 5). Categories do not merely intersect and generate inequalities, but they already exist in the social world and they are maintained and reshaped via interaction (Anthias 2012b, 128). Thus, intersectional studies examine systems of exclusion based on multiple social categories, but they are also sensitive to the settings in which social divisions are being produced. This means that historical contingencies as well as time and space influence the salience of certain social categories over others. Social divisions are produced, maintained and abandoned in specific time and spatial settings, meaning that social divisions become more or less salient depending on historical moments (Anthias

2012a, 13-14). In turn, one may argue that the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon prompted the category “refugeehood” to become a category of social distinction.

For the intersectional framework to expose systems of social stratification, it draws on a range of social categories. With the purpose to expose how Syrian men are constructed, I turn to discuss three social processes of representation, namely othering, racialization, and orientalism.

Othering is a discursive process by which one or more dominant groups create categories of inferiority and assign them to subordinate groups in order to sustain inequality and legitimate the sovereignty of the powerful (Jensen 2011, 65; Schwalbe et al. 2000, 422). Othering is thus a mechanism to distance the self from the Other and to construct both the self and the Other by opposing one to the other (Brons 2015, 74).

Schwalbe et al. (2000) argue that observable manifestations of underlying othering materialize in face-to-face interactions (420). They distinguish between three forms of othering, the most relevant for this thesis being “oppressive othering.” This type of othering regulates practices and patterns of interaction with Others to reinforce alienation. Ultimately, disaffection can lead up to dehumanizing Others and turn them into commodities for the benefit of the powerful (Ibid., 423). Othering also includes the establishment of symbolic, interactional, and spatial boundaries to restrict socialization with those defined as Others (Ibid., 430). When these boundaries are internalized, they can contribute to personal constraints in achieving closeness between dominant and subordinate groups.

Othering is articulated through processes of differentiation, racialization and orientalism being the most appropriate to the study of sexual rejection of Syrian men. Racialization is the process of ascribing racial meanings to previously unracialized social relations (Gans 2017, 342; see also Abdelhady 2017). Unlike race, racialization cannot be defined along biological terms, as it is socially constituted (Hochman 2018, 4-5). With the arrival of migrants, racialization often becomes a collective practice that constructs the new group as underserving and different, even if they are not racially different to the dominant group (Gans 2017, 345). On a personal level, individuals can also racialize other individuals and groups by reproducing dominant racializing discourses (Hochman 2018, 6). The material effects of racialization include forms of stigmatization such as name-calling and blaming, forms of exclusion such as discrimination and segregation, and forms of punishment such as harassment, prosecution, incarceration and lynching (Gans 2017, 346).

Through racialization, sexual meanings around exoticism, sensuality, and the like, can be inscribed on particular bodies, which can result in marking specific bodies as sexual objects (Gans 2017, 347). The objectification of racialized bodies resonates with orientalizing representations of the body (Said 1978, 1). In Said's view, orientalism denounces a knowledge based on essentialized descriptions of the Orient, stereotypes and distorted representations that allows the West to exert power over the East. Orientalism also affects the ways in which the Other is experienced and described during interactions (Haldrup, Koefoed, and Simonsen 2006). Preexisting stereotypes and representations about Middle Eastern peoples and cultures are incorporated into the unconscious and influence sociality with Arab Others in ways that reproduce systems of dominance and authority (Ibid., 176). Orientalism thus infiltrates social relations and can produce discriminatory practices against and prejudiced representations of the Other.

Othering, racialization, and orientalism are theoretical perspectives discussed in relation to intersectionality because these perspectives intersect in the representations of Syrian men. However, the intersectional approach remains largely focused on the representation of Others and does not illustrate how social agents are also affected by their multiple social categories. It is important to turn to positionality to understand where the Lebanese respondents in this thesis position themselves within social hierarchies.

4.4 Positionality

Positionality enables us to investigate how individuals understand and interpret their position within social hierarchies, as well as their agency (Anthias 2002, 501-2). Although social categories identify groups, they affect individuals in variable ways and also their sense of belonging to the group (Anthias 2012a, 9-10). Positionality acknowledges that each person occupies a unique position within social structures, and therefore each person is at the same time in a position of authority and subordination in relation to other individuals (Anthias 2008, 14). As a result, this creates more complex and even contradictory systems of inclusion and exclusion within social hierarchies. Thus, positionality helps us examine how the Lebanese participants subjectively understand their location within social hierarchies and how this position informs their actions towards Syrian men.

4.5 Conclusion

Understanding the complexities of the informants' narratives requires a combination of theoretical perspectives to analyze the findings of this thesis. Sexual script theory allows us to understand particular eroticization of Syrian bodies, and sexual hierarchies within

sexual field theory sheds light on the rejection of Syrian men. However, sexual hierarchies are mainly premised on the embodiment of hegemonic erotic capital, and Syrian men are rejected for a diversity of reasons that include intersecting processes of racialization, orientalism, and sexualization. Taken together, these processes help us understand how Syrian men are represented in the non-heterosexual Lebanese context.

METHODS

5.1 Paradigm: Constructivism

Constructivism is the worldview that shapes this thesis. The constructivist approach asserts that reality does not exist as a preceding tangible entity, whose objective knowledge awaits to be revealed. In fact, constructivism defends that reality is the product of the active role of social actors (Bryman 2012, 33-4). Meanings are created in interaction with other actors, and thus meanings change constantly, they are contingent and arbitrary, socially constructed. This thesis looks at the interactions between Lebanese and Syrian MSM and examines the meanings that non-heterosexual Lebanese men construct as social actors involved in these encounters.

Meanings are multiple and subjective, they emerge from individual experiences and are negotiated through historical and social norms that organize the individual's life. (Creswell 2009, 8). Therefore, this study examines how historical events and social perceptions entangle for the fetishization of Syrian MSM in the current context of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. However, erotic representation of Syrian bodies is only one aspect in the social construction of the Syrian men. This thesis also elaborates on the subjective meanings that non-heterosexual Lebanese men mobilize for the sexual rejection of Syrian men. In order to yield this variety of views about Syrian men, I employ narrative research and phenomenology as qualitative research methods.

5.2 Qualitative methods. Narrative research and Phenomenology

In order to explore the subjective meanings that Lebanese MSM create about Syrian men, this thesis employs narrative research and phenomenology. These two techniques enable me to conduct research on how a single phenomenon is experienced differently and individually (Creswell 2007).

Narrative research focuses on the study of individual stories. It is based on the collection of data on the lived experiences and the meanings thereof for the individuals who narrate these stories (Creswell 2007, 54). Individual narratives are multiple and disputed because each experience is shaped by personal, social and historical circumstances (Ibid., 56). This diversity of experiences among the participants accounts for the disparity and complexity of the respondents' interpretations of the same phenomenon. In addition, narrative research not only delves into the experiences of past events, but it discloses attitudes towards present, future, and hypothetical experiences (Chase 2018, 947).

Phenomenology is employed as an overarching principle to gathering individual narratives. It helps me explore commonalities among the contested views of the participants and organize them for the reader. The purpose of including phenomenology is to glean the essence from the individual experiences and draw the necessary conclusions as to how the Syrian man is perceived in the Lebanese non-heterosexual context.

The meanings that Lebanese MSM create and re-create concerning Syrian individuals are multiple and antagonistic, influenced by diverse factors such as their perceived socio-economic status, sexual fetishes, historical processes, previous relationship with Syrian men, gender performativity, discriminatory attitudes against refugees, just to name a few. Their interpretations are based on past, present, and hypothetical experiences with men from Syria. Despite the dissimilarity in their views, their narrations are organized into different sections in the findings that illustrate the ways in which Syrian men are conceived among non-heterosexual Lebanese men.

5.3 Data and data collection

The data in this study was collected from May to June 2018. I conducted one-on-one interviews with eleven Lebanese MSM. Eight interviews took place in the living room of my apartment in Beirut. I opted to host these interviews in my apartment for two reasons. First, I needed a quiet place where nothing would disrupt the flow of the interview. Second and most importantly, to ensure that the participants would feel relaxed to open up and share their personal views on Syrian men, their sexual experiences, desires and apathies at the discretion of a private space. When my visa expired in May, I left Lebanon and I interviewed two participants over the phone because we were unable to arrange a time for their interviews when I was in Beirut. I advised them to be in a quiet place, where they felt at ease and no one could overhear the interview. Lastly, I met another respondent in the Netherlands. He was living there for his studies, and he suggested I interview him at a public café where he feels comfortable.

I recorded the eleven interviews with the consent of all the participants and the recordings were later transcribed. At the end of each interview, I would jot down every piece of information that I deemed meaningful about the interview. I took notes about the feelings and impressions that I sensed coming from the interviewees, and the main themes discussed during the interviews. At a later stage of my research during my data analysis, these notes helped me highlight the themes that emerged from the interviews.

5.4 Access to the field

I initiated my research about non-heterosexual Lebanese men through my personal networks. At first, I contacted Lebanese and non-Lebanese friends whom I had met in Beirut and invited them to inform their social circles about my research. This technique, known as snowball sampling, is explained in the next section.

Snowball sampling became the only way to meet non-heterosexual Lebanese men who would voluntarily participate in my study. Altogether, I encountered obstacles to interview these men. A study in the field of sexuality triggered some suspicion among prospect participants. Marwan's friend is an example on point. Marwan, a respondent in this study, suggested that I interview one of his friends in Tripoli who, according to him, has a penchant for Syrian men. Marwan informed him about my research topic and the questions that I would ask. His friend refused to participate in my study and preferred not to share his sexual experiences with Syrian men. As Marwan disclosed later, his friend did not understand why someone from Spain would come to Lebanon and conduct research about his sexual life with Syrian men and later on present the final work in Sweden. Other respondents' acquaintances shared similar attitudes. Needless to say, I told Marwan not to insist to his friend if he was not willing to participate in this study voluntarily. I did not want any of my informants to feel uneasy during the interviews or feel forced to participate. In face of this opposition, I only interviewed men who were willing to participate voluntarily (Bryman 2012, 424). I reflect on my position in the social field that I study in this thesis later in this chapter.

Another adversity that I had to face was how I was perceived as a researcher. Prior to conducting my fieldwork, during the fall semester 2017-18 I was accepted as an international student at the American University of Beirut (AUB) within an exchange program with Lund University (LU). Some participants asked whether I would submit my thesis at AUB and expressed concern about their anonymity. I clarified that whereas it was true that I had been a student at AUB, I would present and defend my thesis at LU, and that I would change their names to preserve their confidentiality.

5.5 Sampling the participants

The sampling technique is snowball sampling. The men in this study were not invited to participate as representatives of the non-heterosexual Lebanese community, nor are their ideas considered to constitute the only opinions among non-heterosexual Lebanese men. The men in this study were recruited for their willingness to discuss their sexual experiences with and views on Syrian men.

My first sampling strategy was to only interview Lebanese men who had gone on dates or engaged in sexual encounters with Syrian men to investigate the meanings and values of these encounters for non-heterosexual Lebanese men. However, my third interviewee had never gone on a date nor engaged in sexual intercourse with a Syrian man. Yet, I realized that his view on Syrian men added nuance and complicated the object of my study. Even though I did not anticipate interviewing Lebanese who had no experience with Syrian men (Bryman 2012, 425), their reasons to reject Syrian men became important for this research and their views framed section “‘No Syrians:’ Reasons for Rejection” in the findings chapter.

I began sampling my participants from my personal networks, friends informed their social circles about my research and put them in touch with me. Snowball sampling made possible to reach out to Lebanese MSM that otherwise I would not have had the chance to meet. For example, during a short visit to the Netherlands, a female friend in Beirut informed me that Ameer, a non-heterosexual Lebanese friend of hers, was living in the Netherlands and would be interested in participating. So, I contacted Ameer and he rapidly expressed his interest in the topic and willingness to participate, so we arranged an interview.

During the interview with Firas, the ninth respondent, I began to approach data saturation. He added valuable insights to the themes that previous participants had already disclosed, but his experiences did not open new themes. The relative homogeneity among my participants and the limited scope of the research topic (Bryman 2012, 426) explain data saturation with a modest sample size. Altogether, I am confident that despite the limited number of interviews, the results in this thesis are sufficient to portray a segment of Lebanese MSM with similar social and cultural capitals.

5.6 Data collection. Interviews

I conducted eleven one-on-one semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Nine were face-to-face interviews and two took place over the phone. I decided to carry out semi-structured interviews to assess the respondents’ subjective meanings of Syrianness in the context of male-male sexuality. The interview length ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. Prior to the interviews, I developed an interview guide with open-ended questions around the themes that I deemed necessary to cover in my research. During the interviews, the questions I posited did not strictly follow the interview guide to allow each participant to lead the conversation (Bryman 2012, 473). I actively listened to their explanations and accounts and posed follow-up probes building up on their responses. This flexibility to posit follow-up questions rather than the ones on the interview guide

permitted my respondents to digress and disclose intimate experiences and points of view unobtainable otherwise (Ibid., 470-1). This unrestricted conversation-like flow surprised some of my respondents, who asked whether “their responses were good.” I explained that there were no right or wrong answers, and that I was interested in understanding their personal experiences and insights.

I interviewed Firas and Hisham over the phone shortly after I left Lebanon because we were unable to arrange face-to-face interviews in Beirut. The telephone interviews were not different than the face-to-face ones. I followed the same interview guide and let both participants drive the conversation. Both participants shared the same level of detail and disclosure than the other respondents.

The interviews were conducted in English, which is neither my native language nor my informants’. Yet, it was still an adequate means of communication. In the course of the interviews, my respondents used some linking words in Arabic to help their speech. For example, words such as “inno,” “fa,” and “yaani” were common, and their translation is close to “so,” “then,” and “I mean.” Nevertheless, these words did not impede a fluid communication with my participants.

All the interviews were recorded with the consent of my informants. This technique allowed me to focus on my interviewees’ responses rather than on taking extensive notes. Therefore, in the course of each interview, I was able to jot down notes on relevant points disclosed by my participants for potential follow-up questions without interrupting the flow of the conversation (Bryman 2012, 482). I also took notes on the body language that my respondents would communicate throughout the interview. This was only possible in face-to-face interviews.

5.7 Data analysis

Recording the interviews also made possible the verbatim transcription. I transcribed every interview shortly after I conducted them in order not to be swamped with the amount of data (Bryman 2012, 576). Next, I coded the interviews with NVivo 11.4.3, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. I followed the framework approach, thus during the coding process I identified themes and the sub-themes that composed them (Ibid., 579). For instance, the theme “sexual experiences” included the sub-themes “exoticism of Syrian men,” “fetishizing Syrian refugee men,” “hygiene,” “physical attractiveness of Syrian men,” “sexualizing social class,” and “with Lebanese men.”

I had noted some of the common themes in my notes after the interviews. More themes and sub-themes emerged during the interview transcriptions. As I transcribed the

interviews, I located some common themes that were present in different interviews. Then, I transferred this information to NVivo.

5.8 Delimitations

A number of factors delimit this thesis. First, the research topic posited a problem to potential participants. Prior to interviewing any participant, I shared the themes and questions of the interview in order to address doubts regarding my research. However, I sampled the participants through snowball sampling, so I relied on the explanations that my own networks and the participants gave to their social circles. I could not control whether they were giving accurate information about my questions to potential respondents. Some of these potential respondents were afraid that I would invade the privacy of their sexual lives. Second, snowball sampling also delimited the profile of my respondents. There is little variation among the social and cultural capitals among the interviewees, which might account for their similar perceptions of Syrian men. Third, the visa restrictions limited my stay in Lebanon, which had an effect on the number of face-to-face interviews that I was able to conduct in Beirut. Had I been able to stay longer in Lebanon, it would have helped me explore other social groups with different social and cultural capitals. Fourth, the information I gleaned from the interviews is limited by the questions and follow-up probes that I posed. In other words, the views and experiences that my respondents shared were shaped by the themes that I covered during the interviews.

5.9 Ethical considerations

I was wary of the importance of informed consent in conducting research in the field of sexuality. Prior to beginning any interview, I read out loud an introduction to the participant where I stated the scope of my research and explained the themes and questions that we would discuss. I considered that this introduction was an important step before every interview because of the level of intimacy and disclosure that we were about to uncover. I explained that the questions would require the participant to reflect on personal views and sexual practices and desires as Lebanese man about Syrian men. I offered to all the participants the chance to ask questions at any moment of the interview, to refuse to answer any questions if they preferred not to, and to withdraw participation at any point. I also requested their permission to record the interview. No participant refused to answer any of the questions or to be recorded, nor they withdrew from participating in my research.

Anonymity is another aspect that I deemed fundamental. I changed all their names in this thesis and I do not provide exhaustive information about their professional careers or other details that could reveal their identity. I also deleted all the audio recordings once I transcribed the interviews.

In the introduction prior to the interview, I ensured to my participants that no judgment would be held against them for their ideas or experiences with men. As I have exposed earlier in this chapter, I was concerned about the settings where the interviews took place and even for telephone interviews, I suggested to my informants to be in a quiet place where they would feel at ease. Altogether, in three interviews I sensed that I needed to pause the discussion and reiterate that I respected the respondent's private life and that I valued his participation. Abdullah was the first interviewee and the first one to whom I had to reassure that I would not judge him. The flow of the conversation took us to talk about his past experiences with Syrian men, he went into detail to describing these sexual encounters and finished by saying "I know that what I'm saying sounds weird, I hope you're not too surprised. I don't know if you've heard similar things before." With these words, Abdullah was telling me indirectly that he was afraid that I would disapprove of his private sexual practices. I replied that I appreciated his honesty and disclosure, and I reaffirmed that I would not hold any antipathy against him for anything he wished to share. In two other interviews, similar scenes occurred, and my response was identical.

The narrative research method to gather the data shaped my relationship with my participants (Creswell 2007, 57). Two weeks after I interviewed Sufyan, he and I ran into each other at night and together we took a *service* ride—a form of shared taxi—to our neighborhood. I had interviewed Sufyan about a previous intimate relationship he had experienced with a Syrian man, and after the interview, when I stopped recording, we discussed other topics not related to my research, Sufyan felt the need to share other aspects of his life to explain where his ideas come from. In the back seat of our *service*, he asked me about my personal life. He was not particularly interested in my view on Syrian or Lebanese men, but whether I was in a relationship. For a moment, we exchanged roles and I answered his questions, as though I was a participant in one of Sufyan's research projects. Being a researcher also means that one has to open up and be subjected to interrogations in order to balance out the power dynamics.

5.10 Reflexibility

As a researcher in a qualitative study, I am aware that my personal views on the fields of sexuality and refugeehood, and my own values and biases have influenced the ways I interpreted the participants' views, as well as how I represented these views (Bryman

2012, 393). First, my own experience as a self-identified homosexual European man has shaped my understandings of male-male sexuality. For me, terms like “gay” and “homosexual” connect same-sex sexual behavior with an identity. However, during the interviews, many participants employed such terms to refer mainly to male-male sexual conducts. Sexual identities being complex and mediated by forms of authority and normalization, I opted to describe the participants’ sexual identity as “non-heterosexual.”

Second, my two-year stay in Beirut prior to enrolling in Lund University influenced how I perceived Lebanese attitudes towards Syrian refugees. I have observed countless conversations about Syrian refugees among Lebanese people in private and public spaces, as well as on the Lebanese media. Thus, I was familiar with some dominant discourses on Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Whereas I might have projected some of these ideas on my informants, I have attempted to rely on each participant’s personal view of Syrian men.

Third, my choice regarding the research methods to gather the data has influenced the way in which I have represented this social phenomenon. Narrative research and phenomenology enabled me to yield knowledge from my respondents, and as a researcher, I am aware that I have guided the informants’ responses through my probes and follow-up questions. When presenting the data, I have also made choices as to emphasize or not certain aspects that I deemed relevant to my research. Thus, my subjective self has contributed to shaping the knowledge that I present in this thesis. In other words, I too I have been an active participant in the creation of this knowledge (Bryman 2012, 394).

Fourth, the meanings that my participants revealed about Syrian men are constricted by the participants’ cultural capitals, their personal sexual or dating experiences –or lack thereof– with Syrian men, and the existing social context of refugeehood in Lebanon at the time of my data collection. Moreover, I interviewed the participants only once, and the attitudes and opinions that they shared on the day of the interview might have been different on another day. I am aware that the individual’s personal life at the moment when the interviews took place might have also affected the data (Babbie 2013, 189). Thus, as a researcher in a qualitative study, I admit that the information that I present in this thesis is only one version of the social phenomenon that I have explored.

Fifth, I am aware that my sexual orientation granted me access to the narratives of the informants in this study. Most likely, the participants disclosed their sexual experiences and particular desires with me due to my gay identity. Furthermore, the fact

that I am a Spanish citizen conducting research in Lebanon but enrolled in a Swedish university also stimulated the respondents' interest to participate in this study. To a certain extent, it made them as intrigued about me as I was about them.

FINDINGS

6.1 Profiling the Participants

This study is based on the narratives of eleven Lebanese men aged between 20 and 33 years old. At the time of the interviews, nine participants lived in Beirut despite they come from different cities and towns. Marwan lived in Tripoli, in the north of the country, and Ameer lived in the Netherlands. Eight of the interviews were conducted in the living room of my apartment in Beirut. I opted to host the respondents in my apartment to ensure that they would feel comfortable to share their sexual experiences and particular desires in the discretion of a private space. When my visa expired, I left Lebanon and I interviewed Firas and Hisham over the phone because we were unable to arrange an interview when I was in Beirut. Ameer is my last participant and the interview took place at a café in the Netherlands. Six participants had gone on dates, or experienced intimate and sexual relations with Syrian men.

Abdullah is 33 years old and runs his family business in Beirut. His phone chimes often and he receives calls from employees who ask for instructions. He defines his sexual orientation as non-heterosexual, but he admits that two years ago, he had a few sexual experiences with women to test his sexuality. He admits he prefers men. At the time of the interview, he is single and in a casual relationship with a Syrian man. Abdullah believes that Lebanese men usually ask too many details about his personal life before they agree to have sex. He prefers Syrian men because he sees them as more sexually available. Abdullah is not interested in having a boyfriend, he wants to encounter men who do not need to go through different dates to engage in casual sex.

Maysam was 23 when we met. He used to spend much of his time in West Beirut, where he worked two jobs. When I asked him about his sexuality, he was hesitant. He defines himself as a homosexual, but he is unsure and prefers not to self-identify as exclusively non-heterosexual. Short after the interview, he was granted the visa to a European country. Once there, he applied for LGBTI asylum. Maysam used to engage in sex with Syrian men sex workers at a bathhouse in Beirut. One time the police raided the bathhouse and Maysam was there, so he was sent to jail and released some days after. After this incident, he felt insecure about meeting other men in Lebanon. Now that he lives in Europe, he hopes that he would not be persecuted again for his sexual behavior. We communicate from time to time to share life updates. To this day, he is still waiting to have his asylum decision.

Ahmad is 24 and pursues a second bachelor's degree after his master's. He volunteers for an NGO, where he teaches English. He comes from a village where he did not feel at ease with his sexuality. He thinks that there is a wider diversity of people in Beirut, where he is able to "pass" rather than "stick out." Ahmad has a Lebanese boyfriend he met years ago while studying in the university. Before, he met his partner, he would use dating apps and talk to Syrians and Lebanese alike, but he has never gone on a date with a Syrian man.

Marwan is 26 and he lives in Tripoli. He works as an engineer and combines two jobs and teaching at a university. He acknowledges that his prejudices about Syrian refugees vanished once he started working with refugees for one of his jobs. At the time of the interview, Marwan maintained a long-distance relationship with another man in Europe. Marwan has never dated a Syrian man.

Georges is 26 years old and will graduate from university soon. During his childhood, he had a strong religious upbringing and cherished the idea of becoming a priest, a project he abandoned later on. Georges expresses concern regarding the increasing number of Syrians entering Lebanon. He thinks that the influx of refugees impacts the labor market negatively. He chats with men on dating apps and he finds that Syrians usually do not conform to his standards of attractiveness, education level, social class, and grooming. Nonetheless, he has gone on two dates with Syrian men.

Sufyan is 25 and works as an engineer. He grew up in a very diverse environment in the Arab Gulf, where he befriended Arabs from all over the Arab world. He moved to Beirut to pursue his bachelor's degree and stayed. Sufyan self-identifies as a practicing Muslim. He ruminates reorienting his career and moving abroad, but he is indecisive since his Lebanese boyfriend lives in Beirut. Sufyan's former boyfriend was from Syria. He believes that his views on Syrian refugees are different from other Lebanese men because of his upbringing and his romantic relationship with a Syrian man.

Nihad is 20 and pursues a bachelor's degree at a university. He is determined to study his master's and PhD degrees in the US. He was afraid that his pious parents would not reconcile to his homosexuality. After a serious car accident, Nihad went through what he describes as a state of depression. His parents came to terms with his homosexuality and now they even joke about it. Nihad is the only participant who is out to all of his friends and relatives. He discloses that his previous partners were rather controlling, and now he prefers to date different men that he meets on dating apps. Once, he met a Syrian man at a gay-friendly bar in Beirut, but that same night he went back to Damascus. They still text each other from time to time.

Zohair is 24 years old and about to finish his studies. He is from a town in the north of Lebanon but moved to Beirut two years ago to continue his education. He has only revealed his sexual orientation to his very close friends. When he visits his family, he is cautious about any feminine mannerisms he might display because they already have reproved him for it. Although Zohair has engaged in casual sexual encounters with men, he is still debating whether he would feel more comfortable if sex only happened in the context of a relationship. He reveals that he has never engaged in a sexual act with a Syrian man. He says that unlike many Lebanese, he does not discriminate against Syrians because some of his closest friends are from Syria.

Firas is 24 and the first participant I interviewed over the phone. He is eager to graduate from university soon. He believes that Lebanese people place themselves in a higher social position than Syrians due to their perceived socio-economic status, cultural capital and “race.” Firas thinks that Syrian refugees are openly discriminated against because Lebanese people see them as inferior. He discloses that he has talked to Syrian men on dating apps, but he has never dated one because, unlike him, they were mainly interested in sexual encounters.

Ameer is 24 and he moved to the Netherlands to pursue his master’s degree. He is the only participant I interviewed at a public space. He suggested to meet up at a café that he likes. Living abroad, he feels a connection to his Arabness that transcends his Lebanese identity. In the Netherlands, he has befriended Syrian men, something that he admits he would have never done in Lebanon. Ameer has never engaged in a sexual encounter with a Syrian man. In his bus rides in Beirut, he recalls being struck by the beauty of Syrian male laborers. He believes that Syrian MSM in Lebanon suffer from double discrimination because of their social position between refugeehood and non-heterosexuality.

Hisham is 22 and works at a consultancy firm, he also volunteers for a civil society organization. He is the second respondent I interviewed over the phone and the only respondent that is more fluid about his gender identity. For now, he says, he identifies as male. He has not dared to share his sexuality with his family because in his view, the village where they live is very conservative. In Beirut, he feels freer to be himself. When we talked, Hisham had recently ended a relationship with a Syrian man. Hisham’s friends did not like that he was from Syria. When Hisham decided to terminate the relationship, he describes his reason as falling out of love, and not social pressure. Nevertheless, he still keeps a sweet memory of him.

6.2 Fetish, Sex, and Desire

The respondents who engage in sexual encounters with Syrian men or who eroticize the Syrian body find in their Syrianness something distinctive in comparison to sex with Lebanese men. For example, Abdullah declares a strong preference for Syrian men when engaging in casual sexual relations. In his view, Lebanese men interrogate him before they agree to engage in sexual intercourse:

[Lebanese men] make a lot of complications before you have sex. [They suggest] let's meet here first, or let's have coffee, oh come on, I'm not going to date you, I'm not going to marry you. [...] He wants to know more details about you, but he tries to ask it indirectly, if he asks you where you live, he will know your religion; if he asks where you're from originally, he will definitely know your background.

Abdullah believes this willingness to know about his personal life is reminiscent of sectarian divisions during the 1975-1990 Lebanese Civil War. For him, past political tensions still influence the sexual life among Lebanese. He does not argue that Lebanese men would not engage in casual sex with each other depending on the partner's religious affiliation, but he notices that Syrian men are unconcerned about past differences among Lebanese, so they do not ask him such questions, and Abdullah thinks that this way, he can enjoy sexual intercourse free from the repercussions of sectarianism.

Abdullah also explains that usually Syrian men do not self-identify as homosexuals, so they are not interested in dating or having a boyfriend. He believes that Syrian men only engage in male-male sex to find sexual relief. He illustrates this point evoking the Syrian man he is in a casual relationship with. Abdullah argues that he has told his sexual partner about homosexual identities, but he is unwilling to talk the matter over:

[W]e cannot discuss this topic [self-identifying as a homosexual] at all, we just do the things [engage in sexual intercourse] and that's it. [...] He's not accepting. [...] Basically, he's just silent.

Abdullah equates same-sex sexual behavior to a homosexual identity, but his Syrian partner does not. For Abdullah, there is no correlation between being Syrian and a better sexual encounter. Rather, he finds in Syrian men the freedom to enjoy sex without being read for his sectarian identity.

However, for Maysam there is a difference between Syrian and Lebanese men. He used to visit a bathhouse in Beirut, where he would have sex with Syrian sex workers. Maysam mirrors an orientalizing discourse when describing Syrian men. He says that for

him, Syrians represent the Arab man, whose “skin color, body, larger penis, and chest hair” are very attractive. Although Maysam reproduces an orientalizing approach to sexual desire, he does not think that Syrian men are particularly exotic or engage in sex aggressively. Neither does he fear Syrian men because he assumes that they are homophobic. In fact, he believes that Syrians “are more caring” than Lebanese men during intercourse. This detachment from dominant orientalizing representations of Syrian men reveals that Maysam’s approach is a form of negotiated orientalism.

With the influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon, Maysam nurtures his fetish around notions of class and refugeehood. He imagines the Syrian refugee as belonging to a lower class with reduced economic means to afford clothing and housing, “I do like the way they dress, very cheap and popular. [...] I love the poor places they stay in. I’ve never done it before, but I have a fetish of having sex in those places.” From his account, it is interesting to note that fantasies of poverty and bare dwelling settings intersect in the production of sexual desire, which to a certain degree echo an orientalizing assumption of a less prosperous, and less developed people.

Maysam continues to explain the ways eroticization of the Syrian body also emerges from the intersection between the presumed social class and a lower economic status. For example, he notes that Syrian men are believed to have a bad bodily smell and earn too little to afford grooming products:

[S]ome [people] think that most Syrian guys have a very bad bodily smell. Others think that they are not clean in general. [...] If I’m going out with a Syrian guy and he smells, [...] or if I’m fucking him and he’s not clean, I don’t mind. I think they should work on their personal hygiene, but maybe they cannot afford it [to purchase personal hygiene products].

The assumed lack of personal hygiene in Syrian men also affects their perceived virility. As Sufyan puts it “some people find it a fantasy” to engage in a sexual encounter with “dirty, masculine Syrian men versus more feminine Lebanese men,” thus implying that for some Lebanese individuals, Syrian men are also more masculine. Sufyan discloses that his Lebanese friends describe Syrians as being “rough,” “masculine,” and “good fuckers,” characteristics that he did not necessarily find in his former Syrian boyfriend. He argues that there exists “compatibility” between Syrian and Lebanese men because Syrians tend to perform insertive roles “because their understanding of being gay and bottoming is different.” According to Sufyan, Lebanese might have a more fluid idea of sexual roles, so they enact the receptive role.

Marwan has a stronger opinion on this matter. For him, “Syrian guys are top, no idea why.” He remembers his own process of coming to terms with his sexuality. In the past, he would define his sexual role as “top only because you still don’t accept yourself and you don’t accept that you will be fucked.” But he adds that with time “you say that you’re versatile and then you bottom.” Marwan does not think that Syrian men need to accept a homosexual sexuality. He just observes that Syrians perform inserter roles, which he deems as an advantage because in his view, Lebanese men who would perform the inserter role are rather scarce.

6.3 “No Syrians:” Reasons for Rejection

The respondents who refuse to date Syrian men expose their reasons through concepts involving class, cultural capital and refugeehood. Via these notions, Lebanese men in this study construct a form of othering towards Syrian men.

Lebanese men who refuse to date Syrians look at indicators of social class to distinguish themselves from Syrians. One example is language. Ahmad reveals that the use of Arabic makes a man look “illiterate, not educated, because you don’t know English or French.” Educational curricula in Lebanon are mainly taught in French or English, thus Lebanese people, especially the higher classes, are fluent in one or both of these languages. Men who type in Arabic on dating apps are categorically assumed to be from Syria, and as Zohair tells us, “Lebanese gay men tend to shy away from people who type in Arabic on dating apps.” Nihad, who goes on dates with men he meets on dating apps, says that he does not answer texts in Arabic because he finds it “annoying, for some reason.” Ahmad also used dating apps before he met his boyfriend, and he was often confused as Syrian because he typed in Arabic, “they directly assume that you’re Syrian and not Lebanese if you don’t use the Latin alphabet [...] they considered I was Syrian because I usually use the Arabic letters.”

In a similar way, for Marwan Arabic language is inconsistent with a high education level. Marwan has never dated a Syrian man, and he suggests that there are few chances he will. Syrians speak Arabic, and for him, that reveals a lack of education, “I think the main problem [in Syria] is that they have a very Arabic-based educational system, they study chemistry and math and these things in Arabic. Even in everyday life situations [Syrians] use words that we don’t.”

Lebanese also instrumentalize refugeehood to reject Syrian men. Marwan observes that since many Syrian refugees settled in Tripoli, his hometown, they might

experience a hard time meeting other men on dating apps, he says that “on Grindr,⁶ people write ‘no Syrians,’ it happens a lot.” Marwan notes that his friends discriminate against Syrians for being refugees, and he admits their rhetoric is racist, “it is a very, very racist expression, but we always say that in Tripoli we have the trash of Syria.” His friends refuse using dating apps in Tripoli because they do not want to meet Syrian refugees. Marwan recalls how a friend told him that “you only find refugees in Tripoli. Go to Beirut, you will find good quality guys.”

Georges explains that class regulates the interactions among MSM regardless of their nationality, or as he puts it “I don’t think a Lebanese man from an upper class would engage in a sexual or non-sexual relationship with a Syrian from a lower class, better than he would with a Lebanese man from a lower class.” Later, he says that for him “it’s a lesser chance” to date Syrians because they belong to a lower class.

Although Syrian men on dating apps approach Georges to go on a date, he refuses because he senses that they are from a lower class. For Georges, “their level of education, their personal description on apps, how they text, and what they want” are all indicators of a lower social class. He indicates that on dating apps there is no real “spontaneity,” meaning that conversations are not constrained by real time. He believes that other users on dating apps have the time to reflect on what they want to say, thus disclosing their social class by what they say and how they say it. Nevertheless, Georges’ opinion towards Syrian men shifts when a potential partner embodies intersecting forms of capital that afford a high degree of sexual desirability. He went on two dates with Syrians who “were intelligent, attractive, and well-groomed,” characteristics that he finds important for “someone I would consider dating or even having sex with.” Georges’ decision to go on dates with two different Syrian men indicates that adaptation to dominant forms of erotic capital and others raises one’s position within sexual hierarchies

6.4 The Syrian Hookup

Thus far, the sexualization of the Syrian Other is articulated through a binary of attraction versus rejection. Yet this binary is subverted during one-night stands. Sexual desire in occasional sexual encounters overrides the reasons for rejection of Syrian men, and markers of discrimination such as class and refugeehood become less important than finding sexual release. Hence, some Lebanese men who would not date or commit to a relationship with a Syrian man, would eventually engage in casual sexual intercourse with one.

⁶ Dating app for MSM that uses the mobile device’s geolocation to display users who are nearby.

Like Sufyan, Firas notes that his friends would not date a Syrian man or commit to a serious relationship with one because Syrians are deemed inferior. However, Firas explains that when engaging in casual sex, his friends objectify Syrian men and do not care about the nationality. His friends “think of [Syrians] as a one-night stand kind of thing or something like that. Like a sexual relief more than an actual person.” Derogatory terms such as “thing” or “trash” as Marwan shared before, dehumanize the Syrian community and add up to the process of racialization and othering.

Marwan tells a similar story. In occasional sexual encounters, his friends prefer to engage in sex with Syrians because of their physical attributes. He explains that his friends are not keen on dating Syrian men, yet in casual sexual relations, they welcome Syrians and objectify the Syrian body. Marwan discloses that “when you're searching for a one-night stand you're searching for someone hot, you really don't care about how he behaves, what he wears, and [Syrians] are hotter.” Marwan illustrates that for some Lebanese men, the Syrian body is perceived as more attractive in non-committed sexual encounters. Even engaging in sex with a Syrian man is regarded as easier and cheaper in terms of arranging a setting. Marwan explains that whereas Lebanese may demand a hotel room, Syrians “don't care in which place [they engage in sex], they'd have sex in a car.”

The eroticization of Syrian men in occasional sexual encounters is thus imbued with orientaling rhetoric. On the one hand, Syrian men are reduced to mere sexual objects and presumably belong to a lower class. On the other, Syrians are assumed to engage in sexual intercourse in furtive places, which nurtures the fantasy that these sexual encounters are sexual adventures.

6.5 The Syrian as Sexual Commodity

In the process of othering the Syrian refugee community, some of the respondents disclose that Syrians are presumed to engage in sex work more than Lebanese do. This assumption about Syrian refugees leads some Lebanese men to offer money in exchange for sex to Syrian men who do not necessarily work as sex workers. A new form of othering emerges through the sexualization of Syrian bodies.

Maysam used to visit a bathhouse with sex workers in Beirut and explains that employees at the facility are from Syria. He says that Lebanese men would not engage in sex work because they do jobs that correspond to their perceived social class, “Lebanese men don't work in just anything. They only work in the stuff that matches their lifestyle like in banking, at a company and stuff like that.” The presence of Syrian sex workers is not only restricted to bathhouses, they also announce their services on dating apps. Maysam shares that “if you're using dating apps, you'll see that there are some [Syrian]

escorts and I think I've chatted with 2 or 3 of them and they told me that 'if you want to have sex, you're gonna have to pay.'”

The fact that some Syrian men offer sexual services on dating apps and bathhouses for money leads some Lebanese men to assume that mainly Syrians engage in sex work. Hisham and Firas disclose that Syrians are rapidly identified with prostitution, and Firas reveals that he has observed conversations among his friends where they would talk about Syrians to whom they have paid for sexual services. Firas affirms that “[sex work] is the kind of conversation that would come out when mentioning Syrians.”

Circulation of stories linking Syrians to sex work construct and naturalize the Syrian man as someone who would engage in sex for money. These imageries intersect with notions of poverty and refugeehood associated with Syrians. Subsequently, some Lebanese non-heterosexuals view Syrian men as refugees with limited economic means who would accept money for sex, even if they are not sex workers. In some occasions, a form of informal prostitution unfolds alongside bathhouses and dating apps. Abdullah explains that Lebanese men who participate in this kind of informal prostitution do so because they do not manage to find sexual partners. Abdullah says that Lebanese men “who don't socialize at clubs, and don't find it easy to find people on Grindr, offer money and many Syrians accept that.” This commodification of the Syrian bodies results in form of othering accomplished through sexualization.

6.6 The Anti-Discrimination Brotherhood

For some participants, same-sex sexuality not only defines their sexual identity, it also inspires a sense of belonging to an imagined gay community. They agree that as gay men, they should sympathize with Syrian refugees. The reason to do so is because they have experienced discrimination due to their self-identified homosexuality, and thus, they believe that they should not discriminate against another minority.

Zohair maintains that Lebanese gay men are tolerant towards Syrian men because they expect society to accept their sexuality. In his view, gay men perceive Syrians as another minority with whom they naturally empathize:

I think that [Lebanese] gay guys tend to be more tolerant, because you want tolerance from people [...], so if you're a minority you tend to sympathize with minorities, [...] it becomes part of you not to judge because that's what you advocate.

Similarly, Nihad explains that in his opinion, gay men automatically develop a welcoming attitude towards Syrians due to their experiences as oppressed homosexuals:

[gay men] suffered when they came out, they experienced a lot of hatred, they learnt to ignore people and not judge anyone, they know the feeling of being alone, that's why they would not be against a Syrian.

Ameer shares similar thoughts like Zohair and Nihad, yet he is cautious that self-identifying as a homosexual cannot be equated to absolute tolerance, "gays are open-minded and tolerant towards Syrians in Lebanon. But yet, I do think Lebanese discriminate against Syrians." Likewise, Nihad and Zohair add nuance to their assumptions. For example, Zohair is aware that he cannot conclude that all gay men are tolerant, "for some people it just doesn't work for some reason, I don't know why."

The three are right when they presume that not all Lebanese non-heterosexuals share similar opinions towards Syrians, because for another group of participants, Syrian refugees are presumed to burden the Lebanese economy. Georges thinks that Syrian refugees affect the Lebanese job market negatively, "I feel a little annoyed by [the presence of Syrian refugees] as Lebanese citizen, because I would love to see more Lebanese people given the job opportunities that are given to Syrians." Maysam and Ahmad have a similar approach, they welcome Syrian refugees until Syria becomes safe again, or as Ahmad puts it "it is normal to have refugees because they have war in their country, but once the war is over and everything is safe, they should return."

ANALYSIS

7.1 Constructing Sexual Desire

The orientalizing representation of Syrian men in the Lebanese context differs from Western-constituted discourses on the eroticization of Arab men. For the Western audience, the Orient is imagined as a sexual geography where sex is abundant, and its sexual experiences are unobtainable elsewhere. It assumes that sex is profuse, but it must be obtained in privacy because homosexuality is punished. This understanding of sexual encounters between men premises that engaging in sex with Arab men is an adventurous act because sex must happen in private, and it is also illicit because it is unlawful. Moreover, the oriental man is described as racially different, exotic, with facial and bodily hair as visual manifestations of his masculinity. The assumed prevailing homophobia in the region constructs the Arab man as categorically violent and hostile towards self-identified homosexual men. As a result, gay Western men fetishize the image of the violent Arab man, who is assumed to engage in sex with other men with rage.

These representations about Arab men generate antagonistic features that divide the Western Self from the Eastern Other via a series of binaries such as sexually liberated-repressed, publicly identifiable-closeted, harmless-dangerous, righteous-shameful, defenseless-dominant, acceptance-bigotry, and the like. In turn, for the respondents in this study, the eroticization of Syrian men shares certain aspects of this orientalizing imagery of Arab bodies, but it also includes differences. For example, fantasies of sexual secrecy or unlawfulness are unlikely to be reproduced. Whereas most political Western environments allow manifestations of same-sex sexuality in public, Lebanon does not. Therefore, Lebanese men are less likely to create sexual excitement from the idea that sexual acts must happen in private or because they are considered prohibited.

Altogether, some Lebanese men reproduce orientalizing rhetoric when describing Syrian men. For example, Maysam believes that Syrians represent the image of the Arab man, whose physical attributes are more attractive than those of a Lebanese man. He creates an image of the Syrian man and eroticizes the body. Maysam's orientalizing discourse of Syrian men becomes more salient when he explains that he harbors the fantasy of engaging in sexual intercourse with refugees in their tented settlements. This fetish reproduces an orientalizing understanding of peoples and places at a disadvantage and away from home, imagined as exuding sexual desire. However, Maysam does not define Syrian men as particularly exotic or violent, notions that correspond to Western-constituted orientalizing representations of men. Yet, Sufyan narrates a different story.

His friends define Syrian men as “rough,” “masculine,” and “good fuckers,” characteristics in line with dominant orientalizing discourses on Arab men.

Whereas Maysam demonstrates a negotiated form of orientalizing sexual desire, for other Lebanese men their fetishes are more in line with hegemonic orientalizing representations. Thus, sexual fantasies involving Syrian men are multiple and overlap, sometimes in contradictory ways. This is even more evident with Sufyan, who does not describe his former Syrian boyfriend along orientalizing terms. As Whittier and Simon (2001) suggest in sexual script theory, this diversity of desires highlights that intrapsychic scripts are idiosyncratic formations that produce particular forms of desire.

Abdullah is an example of how intrapsychic scripts are very subjective, despite being drawn on common cultural scenarios. His preference for Syrian men completely ignores the orientalizing eroticization of Syrian bodies. Abdullah declares that his strong inclination for Syrian men is due to the fact that he views Lebanese men as being excessively intruding of his personal life. He believes that Lebanese men ask personal questions because they read him along the sectarian lines that divided the Lebanese population during the 1975-1990 Lebanese Civil War. Abdullah considers that the collective memory of past sectarian divisions affect the ways in which Lebanese men interact with one another. According to sexual script theory, Abdullah interprets that patterns of intrapersonal interactions with other Lebanese men are based on past sectarian divisions. Subsequently, Abdullah incorporates these patterns into his intrapsychic script, and therefore, he declines sexual sociality with Lebanese men and prefers Syrian men.

The stories of Maysam, Sufyan, and Abdullah demonstrate that these men create multiple and personal formations of “my type.” Furthermore, the sexual preferences that these men draw from their “my type” ideal shift according to their sexual experiences. Abdullah’s experience illustrates this point. Accumulation of unpleasant encounters with Lebanese men account for the reevaluation of desire towards Lebanese men and the readjustment of “my type” for Syrian men.

Despite the diverse creations of “my type” in the intrapsychic script, Sufyan exposes that between Lebanese and Syrian MSM there exists sexual “compatibility” because both groups have different understandings of sexual roles. He maintains that Syrians usually perform the inserter role “because their understanding of being gay and bottoming is different,” whereas Lebanese men have a more fluid idea of sexual roles. Marwan, similar to Sufyan, describes that Syrians usually prefer to be the inserter during sexual intercourse, thus casting doubt on Allouche’s (2017) contention that Lebanese men mainly perform inserter roles during intercourse with Syrian men.

Furthermore, Marwan's personal experience with his own sexuality is significant to understanding individual dispositions towards sexual roles between men. He explains that once he came to terms with his sexuality, he was ready to assume sexual positions other than the inserter, as if authorizing himself to self-identify as a homosexual allowed him to accept and perform other sexual roles. To some extent, Marwan's story contravenes Massad's (2007) claim that same-sex sexual behavior may not be related to sexual identities. Massad argues that homosexual identities should not define same-sex sexual practices, and whereas Marwan does not dispute that argumentation, he sustains that by assuming a same-sex sexual identity, he recognized his sexual orientation and embraced same-sex sexual behavior in its entirety. Although the relationship between sexual acts and sexual identities is not the focus in this section, Marwan's story is relevant to portray the ways in which Lebanese men may make sense of their sexuality.

7.2 Sexual Rejection with Exceptions

In the context of sexual sociality between Lebanese and Syrian men, some Lebanese men sexually reject Syrian men based on erotic capital, "race," assumed class, among other social categories. Sexual field theory along other processes of social discrimination shed light on the reasons for the sexual rejection of Syrian men.

Non-heterosexual men in Lebanon interact with other men through dating apps. Dating apps constitute online sites of sexual sociality where sexual agents with similar erotic appetites congregate and interact with each other. Like offline sites of sexual sociality, online sites become sexual fields with a structure of desire. The structure of desire of an online sexual field is communicated to the users through the information displayed on personal profiles. Users assess the erotic capital of other users through written communication and exchange of photos. As in any other sexual field, hierarchies of sexual desirability regulate sexual selection, and those users with a greater accumulation of erotic capital are able to choose their sexual partners.

Written communication in Arabic is considered a low degree of sexual desirability by the Lebanese participants in this study. Like Nihad, some users do not respond to messages in Arabic. Sexual rejection based on the use of Arabic reveals an orientalizing understanding of the people who write in Arabic on dating apps. Ahmad explains that unlike Arabic, French and English are the languages that Lebanese schools use to teach the curricula. Language is therefore used as a marker of recognition of Lebanese and non-Lebanese individuals. Failing to use any of these two non-Semitic languages becomes a marker of class as well, because English and French are associated to the educated classes in Lebanon, whereas Arabic is attributed to people coming from Syria, where it is

assumed that education is of poor quality. Thus, communication in Arabic entails a series of intersecting social identifications for Lebanese users. Put differently, Lebanese users assume that the person who communicates in Arabic belongs to a lower class and has limited education. Therefore, whatever the erotic capital a user may have, orientalizing assumptions on men who write in Arabic already preclude sexual sociality.

Georges' experience with Syrian men on dating apps demonstrates a deeper interiorization of the field's structure of desire. Georges assesses the erotic capital of other users from the personal information on their profiles and through written communication. For him, the lack of "spontaneity" in written communication reveals the sexual desirability of other users. Based on what other users say and how they put it, Georges assigns to the users a position within the hierarchy of desirability, and he refuses to encounter men whom he believes their erotic and cultural capital is lesser. Sometimes men with a lower erotic capital according to Georges, suggest going on dates, but he declines. When a sexual agent approaches another, the former implies that his erotic capital is equivalent to the latter's. If the latter disagrees, there is a "violation of deference," where the agent with a lower degree of erotic capital has not respected his position in the field. Therefore, when a man suggests an encounter and Georges declines, he is responding to the "violation of deference" from a higher position in the hierarchy of desirability.

During written communication with other men on dating apps, Georges reveals that he precludes interaction with Syrian men. In his opinion, Syrians are most likely to belong to a lower class. This predisposition to prevent communication with men from Syria indicates that his assumptions override the rules of interaction within sexual fields. In other words, he declines sexual sociality with Syrian men because they come from Syria, not because they concentrate less erotic capital. This self-imposed boundary towards Syrian men reflects some of the observable effects of Schwalbe et al.'s (2000) "oppressive othering." Certain practices reinforce alienation of those identified as Others, and symbolic and interactional boundaries can be internalized to constrain interaction.

Nevertheless, Georges went on two dates with Syrian men. The fact that Georges decided to go on two dates with Syrian men despite his assumptions reveal "the logic of eroticism" within a sexual field. "The logic of eroticism" attributes sexual desirability to certain individuals that under other circumstances would be rejected. For Georges, these two Syrian men concentrated higher degrees of erotic and cultural capital than other Syrian men. As a result, Georges assigned sexual desirability to these two men and a chance for an offline encounter.

“The logic of eroticism” can reshape a field’s structure of desire, and this contradiction within rules of sexual desirability becomes more evident during non-committed sexual intercourse with Syrian MSM.

7.3 Racialization and Orientalism in Casual Sexual Encounters

Despite the reasons for the sexual rejection of Syrian men, some Lebanese men would eventually engage in casual sexual intercourse with Syrian individuals. This disposition towards non-committed sexual encounters represents a fissure in a binary understanding of sexual sociality between Lebanese and Syrian men based on eroticization versus rejection. Although this variation is attributed to “the logic of eroticism” within sexual field theory, this factor alone does not account for the representation of Syrian men during casual sexual encounters. Processes of racialization and orientalism intersect and other Syrian men in such encounters.

During non-committed sexual intercourse, “the logic of eroticism” attributes erotic capital to Syrian men who under other circumstances, would be rejected. However, this attribution of erotic capital is imbedded in orientalizing rhetoric. During casual sexual encounters, Marwan’s friends focus on the physical attributes of their sexual partners, and in those encounters, Syrian men are believed to be “hotter” than Lebanese men. Similarly, Firas points out that Syrian men are regarded as objects of sexual relief during non-committed sexual intercourse. In these two accounts, Syrian men are reduced to their bodies and essentialized as objects of sexual gratification. These descriptions are imbued in orientalizing rhetoric, because Syrian men are assumed to be inferior, mere instruments of sexual relief for Lebanese individuals. This orientalizing representation is further exacerbated when Marwan explains that Syrians are assumed to be unable to afford a hotel room for a sexual encounter. Thus, the idea that Syrian men engage in sexual intercourse in bare settings like cars nurtures the fantasy that sexual encounters with Syrian men are sexual adventures.

Processes of racialization also intervene during non-committed sexual encounters. As Abdelhady (2017) and Gans (2017) point out, processes of racialization do not necessarily target groups that are racially different. Nevertheless, they are aimed to create distinctions between dominant and subordinate groups through mechanisms such as name-calling and discriminatory practices. Thus, racialization can be articulated through derogatory language to identify a group as different from the dominant group. For example, when Firas’ friends describe Syrian men as a “thing [...] more than an actual person,” they seek to discriminate against Syrian men. Likewise, Marwan explains that Syrians in Tripoli are referred to as “trash.” He acknowledges that the term is certainly

racist, and he reveals that it is a widespread and has entered common usage in his community, which underlines that racialization is a process carried out collectively.

Racialization also includes forms of exclusion such as discrimination and segregation. Marwan shares that on dating apps, people frequently state on their personal profiles “no Syrians,” as to avoid communication with refugees. He recalls that one of his friends advised him to use dating apps in Beirut, where he would find “good quality guys,” another derogatory term to discriminate against Syrians, who by extension are perceived as “poor quality guys.”

Ultimately, intersecting processes of racialization and orientalism in non-committed sexual intercourse result in the othering of Syrian men.

7.4 Othering via Sexualization

As Schwalbe et al. (2000) indicate, othering is a process that aims to distinguish the self from the Other, and to define the self by opposition to the Other. Sexualization of Syrian bodies can also contribute to the othering of Syrian men. Maysam explains that sex workers at the bathhouse that he used to visit and sexual escorts that he encounters on dating apps happen to be from Syria. Circulation of similar stories linking Syrian men to forms of prostitution give raise to the idea that Syrian men engage in sex work more than Lebanese men do. For example, Hisham reveals that his social circles commonly associate Syrian refugees to prostitution, and Firas shares that his friends usually refer to Syrians when discussing sex work in Lebanon. These examples constitute forms of othering, in which refugees from Syria are identified as “they/Syrians” engage in sex work, and “we/Lebanese” do not.

This form of alienation via sexualization becomes more salient when some Lebanese men offer money in exchange for sexual intercourse to Syrian men. Abdullah shares that some Lebanese men who struggle to find a sexual partner offer money for sex to Syrian refugees who are not necessarily sex workers. In such cases, the alienation of Syrian men and the assumption that they would engage in sex work due to a lack of economic resources, turn Syrian men into commodities. As Schwalbe et al. (2000) indicate, othering can lead to the commodification of Other, and in cases like the one described by Abdullah, Lebanese men commodify Syrian bodies through sexualization.

7.5 Countering Discrimination Against Syrian Refugees

Intersecting processes of orientalism, racialization, othering and sexualization account for the representation and social stratification of Syrian men within the non-heterosexual Lebanese context. In turn, positionality helps us understand how some Lebanese

informants in this thesis position themselves within social hierarchies and are reflexive of their actions towards Syrian refugees.

Zohair, Nihad, and Ameer self-identify as homosexual males. They sustain that their homosexuality is a social identity that supposes belonging to an oppressed sexual minority. They explain that their experiences as oppressed homosexuals in Lebanon position themselves in a place within multiple social structures where they refuse to become oppressors of other minorities. By doing so, these three men recognize that they are in a position of advantage in relation to Syrian refugees, whose social locations at the intersection of multiple system of discrimination place them at an inferior position within social hierarchies.

Altogether, other Lebanese men such as Georges, Ahmad, and Maysam view Syrian refugees differently. Whereas they reflexively may locate themselves within structures of social organization, they do not assume the same position than their fellow Lebanese respondents, and do not develop the same attitude towards Syrian refugees. In fact, Ahmad and Maysam conclude that refugees should return to Syria once the war ends.

CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this thesis is to study how non-heterosexual Lebanese men construct Syrian men based on eroticization and sexual rejection. The eleven men that participate in this thesis illustrate that processes of racialization, orientalism, othering and sexualization intertwine and diverge to produce erotic desire or sexual rejection of Syrian men.

In terms of eroticization of Syrian men, this thesis exposes that Lebanese men utilize both hegemonic and negotiated forms of orientalism to eroticize Syrian men. Sometimes, these discourses enter in contradiction with each other and generate multiple variations of eroticization. This multiplicity in the creation of erotic desire is due to the subjective nature of the intrapsychic script. In regard to the sexual rejection of Syrian men, I argue that sexual field theory is a valuable perspective to conceptualize the sexual rejection of Syrian men, but erotic capital alone does not account for the preference of certain individuals over others. Sexual rejection of Syrian bodies is also based on orientaling readings of social categories along with processes of racialization.

An understanding of sexual sociality between Lebanese and Syrian men based on a dichotomy of fetishization versus rejection does not fully represent these sexual interactions. The fact that some Lebanese men would not commit to intimate relationships with Syrian men but would engage in casual sexual encounters with them demonstrates that this dichotomy is breached during non-committed sexual intercourse.

This thesis also sheds light on how sexualization of Syrian bodies becomes a means of othering Syrian refugee men. Through notions of refugeehood and poverty attributed to Syrian refugees, Syrian men are believed to engage in sexual intercourse for money. This sexualization of Syrian bodies aims to other Syrian men on the grounds of “they/Syrians” engage in sex work, but “we/Lebanese” do not.

Consequently, representation of Syrian men in the non-heterosexual Lebanese context is the product of an intersectional description based on racialization, orientalism, othering, and sexualization. Furthermore, this thesis exposes how some non-heterosexual Lebanese men think of themselves as belonging to a sexual minority that should not discriminate against other minorities such as Syrian refugees. For these men, self-identifying as oppressed homosexuals informs their actions towards Syrian refugees. However, not all Lebanese men in this study share an equal attitude towards Syrian refugees, which reflects that positionality within structures of social organization is a subjective process with multiple outcomes.

8.1 Future Directions

This thesis represents a step towards the study of male-male sexual sociality between two groups of Arab men. The focus of this study is the representation of Syrian men in the non-heterosexual Lebanese context. Therefore, it is encouraged to conduct research towards the following ends.

First, research should investigate the reception of sexual rejection by Syrian men. For example, future studies may explore how Syrian men react when they are sexually rejected. Research should expose what are the consequences of multiple forms of sexual rejection for Syrian men.

Second, future investigations should explore the different mechanisms that Syrians mobilize to resist social stratification. Put differently, research should examine how Syrian men resist identifications based on their assumed social, cultural and economic capital.

Third, research should investigate the eroticization and rejection of Lebanese men by Syrian men. Research in this direction should illustrate whether similar processes of identification and othering are reproduced in the non-heterosexual Syrian context.

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