(Un)critically queer organizing: Towards a more complex analysis of LGBTQ organizing in Lebanon

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Abstract

In this article, I explore two contending claims in the literature on LGBTQ organizing in the Global South. Whereas some theorists argue that LGBTQ groups in the Global South uncritically apply "Western" understandings of sexuality in their LGBTQ organizing, others claim that a global LGBTQ identity and community truly exists, which despite taking on different forms, follows one similar "developmental" trajectory. Drawing on the cases of the two Lebanese LGBTQ social movement organizations (SMOs) Helem and Meem, I argue that the present literature homogenizes such organizations and does not account for the complexities, differences and diversities in their activism. By analyzing their respective websites, online publications and published online speeches from 2004 to 2011, I argue that Meem and Helem's different strategic choices and definitions of collective queer identities both simultaneously contest and engage with dominant models of Euro-American LGBTQ organizing. I illustrate that, despite their different organizing strategies, both Helem and Meem attempt to remain rooted in a local context by highlighting their multiple positions and intersectional struggles. In addition, I show that geopolitical context plays a central role in their collective identity deployment since the two groups highlight different aspects of themselves in relation to local and global audiences. Finally, I use this case to point out the limitations of the present literature and the need for research that operates with a more complex sense of LGBTQ groups in the Global South.

Keywords

Collective identities, Lebanon, LGBTQ activism, queer globalization, queer politics, social movements

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Since dominant LGBTQ organizing discourses emanate from western conceptions of sexuality and sexual identities,[1] LGBTQ groups in the Global South have to translate, redefine and appropriate these concepts so that they can be intelligible and useful in their local contexts (Thayer, 2010). However, there exists an apparent tension in the literature on LGBTQ social movement organizations (SMOs) in the Global South especially regarding the ways by which such groups translate, adopt and/or resist these dominant LGBTQ organizing discourses. On the one hand, some theorists argue that LGBTQ organizations in the Global South uncritically apply western concepts of sexuality, especially since they are primarily funded by international and western NGOs (Massad, 2002, 2007). On the other hand, other scholars and LGBTQ activists argue that there truly exists a global LGBTQ identity and community, which takes on different forms depending on the sociopolitical and cultural context, but follows one similar "developmental" trajectory (Adam et al., 1999). Even though the contending literature considers the importance of translation of dominant LGBTQ discourses, it fails to account for the complex ways by which LGBTQ SMOs in the Global South situate and define themselves by simultaneously drawing on both local and global discourses of sexuality. In addition, the present literature does not take into account nor consider the roles and effects of the various and multiple audiences and contexts with which these SMOs have to interact, extending beyond the local context. Such analyses represent and reproduce a homogenized and generalized image of a unified LGBTQ movement that is deemed as either uncritically applying western concepts or translating these concepts for the purpose of becoming part of a global LGBTQ movement.

In this article, I examine the competing claims in the literature on the internationalization of LGBTQ movements and the various ways by which dominant LGBTQ discourses have been adopted, resisted and/or translated by activist groups in Lebanon. More specifically, I consider the tensions between the two competing claims in the literature cited in the previous paragraph and illustrate how they are inconsistent with the behaviors of the only two Lebanese LGBTQ organizations: Helem and Meem. In order to do so, I analyze the ways by which these two groups deploy collective identities differently by examining their conceptions of coming out/the closet, queer visibilities and LGBTQ rights, which are considered to be major points of diversion in their organizing strategies. In addition, I find that these two groups highlight different aspects of their collective identities in different contexts, most notably the local and global contexts. Hence, I draw on both local and global contexts and audiences to understand the complex ways by which they deploy collective identities and highlight the multiple positions that they occupy.

Even though both Helem and Meem call for sexual diversity and LGBTQ community empowerment in Lebanon, they do so differently. Whereas Helem is a rights-based NGO working on LGBT rights in Lebanon, Meem is a grassroots LBTQ women's group, working on women's empowerment and community-building.[2] Despite their divergent methods in LGBTQ organizing at the local level, at an international level, they are more similar in their focus on

geopolitics and the multidimensionality of their positions and struggles. By analyzing these two groups' online identity deployment and the descriptions of their respective organizing methods, I argue that they construct their different strategic choices and deploy queer identities by simultaneously contesting and engaging with dominant models of Euro-American LGBTQ organizing. Therefore, the ways by which they define collective identities and conceive of LGBTQ organizing are not consistent with, nor accounted for, by the two views presented in the literature. First, the two groups do not simply adopt or reject western understandings of sexuality and LGBTQ organizing; rather, they engage with dominant LGBTQ discourses while keeping themselves rooted in a local context. Second, the diversity in their organizing strategies at both the local and global levels points to the fact that they cannot be treated as a homogeneous entity. Third, the fact that they highlight different aspects of their collective identities at the local and global levels illustrates that the behaviors and collective identity deployment of LGBTQ SMOs cannot be fully understood by accounting for a local or a global context alone.

In this article, I first present the two contending viewpoints in the literature, by contrasting Joseph Massad's work *Desiring Arabs* (2007) and his critique of the "Gay International" (2002) with the book *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics* edited by Adam, Duvenyduk and Krouwel (1999). On the one hand, Massad (2002, 2007) is critical of what he calls the "universalizing mission of the Gay International" and the complicity of Arab LGBTQ social movement organizations which, he argues, rely on organizing strategies that are not rooted in their local cultures and contexts. On the other hand, Adam et al. (1999) celebrate the dominant model of western LGBTQ organizing by talking about a global gay movement, which they consider to be inclusive by virtue of the existence of a global LGBTQ alliance. Second, I briefly touch upon the status of homosexualities in Lebanon. Third, I draw on the case of Lebanon and examine the different ways by which Helem and Meem define themselves and conceive of coming out, queer visibility and the rights discourse. Since I analyze their behaviors at both the local and global levels, I divide the following sections into two parts. First, situated in a Lebanese context, I show how the two organizations' differences are manifested by their contrasting definitions of collective queer identities, their uses of human rights discourses and the strategies of visibility that each group employs. Second, at the international level, I illustrate that Helem and Meem share more similar positions by their problematization of the binary of coming out and the closet as well as their refusal to be de-politicized by situating themselves within an intersectional struggle.[3] Finally, I show that the collective identity deployment of these two groups is more complex, multiple and diverse than is suggested by the dominant literature on LGBTQ organizing in the Global South.

My aim is to contribute to the discussion of global LGBTQ politics by drawing on the example of LGBTQ organizing in Beirut and addressing the limitations of the current literature on LGBTQ movements and organizing in the Global South. I do not intend to privilege one form of organizing over the other; however, by recognizing multiple forms of LGBTQ organizing, I want to underscore how each

is a byproduct of intersectional struggles and contexts. Rather than understanding the behaviors of LGBTQ SMOs in the Global South in terms of a direct application or a complete rejection of dominant LGBTQ discourses, I shed light on the need for a more complex and nuanced analysis of collective LGBTQ identities and organizing by drawing on the Lebanese case.

The "Gay International" and the "international gay"

Amidst growing visibility and research on LGBTQ social movements in both the Global North and South and rising discussions of global LGBTQ rights and politics, a number of theorists problematize notions such as global gay identities, global LGBTQ rights and the effects that they have on people's lived experiences in the Global South (Amar, 2013; Hoad, 2007; Long, 2009).[4] Scott Long, former director of the LGBTQ rights program for Human Rights Watch (HRW), wrote a number of articles on the ways in which global LGBTQ rights discourses have the potential to cause a backlash on the well-being of the subjects that they aim to defend. In an article titled "Unbearable witness: How Western activists (mis)recognize sexuality in Iran," Long argues that uncritically applying western understandings of sexual identities and homophobias in non-western contexts creates the unintended risk of a backlash against sexual minorities rather than helping them (Long, 2009). Using the example of the Iranian state's execution of Makwan Mouloudzadeh in 2007 for a rape crime, Long explores how western gay rights activists misinterpreted and reduced the context by framing the case in terms of a lack of gay rights and rampant institutionalized homophobia. In addition, he also illustrates how direct application of "the terms of Western gay politics can erase voices and political agency in describing other cultural situations, through a pursuit of sameness and a strategic misrecognition of otherness that enables domestic political action but posits misleading universals" (Long, 2009: 119). In other words, he argues that by attempting to explain sexual diversity, an application of "universal" conceptions of LGBTQ identities might not be useful in all contexts. Hence, even though global LGBTQ rights discourses and groups can empower and enable political action in the Global South, using them without being attuned to specificities of local contexts risks producing a homogenization that obscures the complexities of lived realities.

   One of the prominent critiques of the "internationalization of gay rights" is expressed by the historian Joseph Massad in his 2002 article "Re-orienting desire: The Gay International and the Arab world" and later in his book *Desiring Arabs* (2007). In his work, Massad argues that the agents of the universalization of gay rights, who he calls the "Gay International" (dominated by white gay western men and organizations such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)), have taken on a missionary role similar to that of second wave feminism (Massad, 2002: 361). He argues that discourses of "liberation" and of "LGBT" subjects in the Arab and Muslim world primarily aim to transform the

lives of "practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay" (2002: 362). Massad (2002, 2007) argues that such discourses, rather than actually "liberating" homosexuals, have the opposite effect of heterosexualizing the world, by focusing on the binary of hetero- and homosexuality. "By inciting discourses about homosexuals where none existed before," he argues, "the Gay International is in fact *heterosexualizing* a world that is being forced to be fixed by a Western binary" (2002: 383). Massad also criticizes LGBTQ movements in the Global South, such as Helem, which he sees as being controlled by western NGOs and hence being complicit with the "Gay International" (Massad, 2009: 1).[5]

On the other hand, other researchers and scholars point to the presence of a global LGBTQ community that is connected by similar fights for equal rights in opposition to a hegemonic heteronormative world order. In the concluding chapter of *The Global Emergence of a Gay and Lesbian Politics*, Adam et al. (1999) argue that even though LGBT movements in various parts of the world take on different forms, they still all undergo similar steps to "liberation" and share a number of similar features. They argue that the global gay and lesbian movement is characterized by a process of "transnational diffusion," where "all around the world gay and lesbian movements influence and learn from each other" (Adam et al., 1999: 345). In addition, they also present a view of sexuality rooted in an essential identity, where they claim that:

> in an era when queer theory seeks to throw away gay and lesbian identity into question, it is interesting to see that gays and lesbians very often feel themselves to "be a people", considering an attack on their brothers and sisters in another country as an assault on themselves. (1999: 370)

Such an analysis which employs a unitary LGBTQ identity and builds on the notion of LGBTQ brother- and sisterhood not only fails to account for the diversities of people's sexual subjectivities, but also does not take into account the unequal power relations between such groups and communities and the unequal flows of discourse, such as those studied by Thayer (2010).

Adam et al.'s (1999) concluding article and analysis fails to account for the complexities, obstacles and struggles that LGBTQ movements in the Global South face. In addition to having to locate themselves in their local contexts, such groups also need to situate themselves in the global LGBTQ community. As discussed by Thayer (2010), Santos (2008) and Smith and Bandy (2005), global alliances and transnational coalitions must be questioned by looking at the unequal flow of discourse, material and people. In addition, Adam et al.'s (1999) "egalitarian discourses" do not take into account the presence of hegemonic and marginalized discourses of sexuality, and thus have the effect of "cloaking inequalities" between discourses and people (Thayer, 2010).

Whereas Massad (2002) focuses on the symbolic violence of universalizing gay and lesbian discourses and the saving missions, Adam et al. (1999) reflect the global gay discourses which Massad critiques, whereby they erase differences and

inequalities that are inherent in LGBTQ movements across the world (Thayer, 2010). Both works, while pertinent in discussing the international LGBTQ movements and alliances, fail to consider the diversities and complexities of organizing in the Global South. For example, although LGBTQ movements in the Global South, such as Helem and Meem, engage with dominant LGBTQ narratives, they do so while attempting to remain rooted in local and regional contexts. In addition, both works by Massad (2002, 2007) and Adam et al. (1999) do not take into account the diversity of LGBTQ organizing in the Global South, nor do they consider the multiple and various audiences with which these groups interact and from which they gain legitimacy.

Coming out and the assumptions of visibility

The binary of the coming out/closet narrative has been contested by a number of scholars with regard to studying non-heterosexualities in both Euro-American contexts and non-Euro-American contexts specifically within Latin American, African American and Asian contexts (see Boellstroff, 2005; Brown, 2002; Decena, 2011; Ferguson, 2004; Guzman, 2006; Jackson, 2011a; Kong, 2011; Manalansan, 2007; Martin 2003, 2009; Ross, 2005; Yue, 2008). In addition, it has been explored and questioned in relation to non-western LGBTQ movements, specifically Latin American and South East Asian diasporic queer movements (Das Gupta, 2006; Jackson, 2011b; Thayer, 1997; Quiroga, 2000). Academic work on queer activism in the Arab Middle East has been meager; however, published works by activists, especially in relation to issues of queer organizing and visibility, have been more prominent.[6] In discussing the organizing strategies of Arab queer activism, Darwich and Maikey (2011) critique the polarizing discourse on LGBTQ activism, which relegates activism to being either pro- or anti-western, or feminist/LGBTQ. They claim that understanding Arab queer activism should entail a complex reading of the multiple geopolitical and intersectional issues at hand (Darwich and Maikey, 2011). They also point to what they call "the hegemony of LGBT activism" which represents issues of "coming out, visibility, and pride" to be a central lens of understanding LGBTQ activism and hence rejects "possibilities to explore alternative ways of addressing sexuality and gender in our societies" (2011: para 28). They present a way of understanding queer activism without necessarily promoting a reliance on binaries between the closet/coming out and visibility/invisibility.

In a similar vein, Manolo Guzman (2005) argues that most research on homosexualities in a non-Euro/American context (in this case, Latin-American contexts) has extensively relied on dominant and hegemonic understandings of "gay homosexualities" in order to make unintelligible and diverse sexualities fit into a dominant and intelligible narrative of "being gay." One of the primary ways by which "gay homosexuality" is used to explain, assess and understand non-heterosexualities is by focusing on affirmative coming-out narratives and the concept of the closet. Using such an approach erases difference and flattens

complexity, rendering silences and the lack of public affirmations of gay identities as examples of "closetedness" and internalized homophobia. Rather than focusing on essentialist understandings of "repressive" cultures, using an intersectional analysis of people's multiple struggles, along lines of gender, class, religion and regional politics (to name a few) in certain contexts might help better situate differences in sexual identification.

Even though affirmative coming-out narratives and the concept of the closet have been useful in documenting and illustrating certain individuals' lives and experiences, they have been critiqued and questioned by poststructuralist theorists for "the privileged (white) gay, lesbian, and queer liberal subjects they inscribe and validate" (Puar, 2007: 2). The coming-out narrative and the concept of the closet have been criticized by queer theoretical approaches in their reliance on and reproduction of the binary of closetedness/outness which do not always capture the lived realities of many people by not being attuned to the intersectionality of race, class and gender (Seidman, 1994). The coming-out narrative and the oppression of the closet have been central in understanding US-based LGBTQ movements, especially in relation to rights claims and recognition (Seidman, 2004). Hence, coming out and claiming marginalized identities, even if strategically essentialist, have historically proven to help in gaining access to rights. However, using these constructs to structure knowledge about diverse non-heterosexualities can cause misrepresentation that aids in establishing and maintaining the hegemonic and dominant status of such narratives. It also serves to flatten complexities of such organizing in a context such as Beirut. In addition, the uses of the coming-out narratives, in non-white, non- middle class, and non-western contexts have often been employed with undertones of developmental narratives of "modernity," which often position queers of color as being able "to step out of the shadows" of their oppressive and oftentimes "immutable" cultures (Ahmed, 2011: 131; Cantu, 2009).

The debates between the closet/coming out and visibility/invisibility paradigms are central to understanding the differences between the two organizing strategies of Meem and Helem. Even though both groups operate in the same context of Beirut, they each make different strategic choices in relation to questions of visibility, community-building and legal claims on "rights." Whereas Helem is a publicly visible, rights-based NGO working on LGBT rights in Lebanon; Meem, in contrast, is a partially underground, grassroots LBTQ group working for women's empowerment and community-building.

Method

For this article, I rely on both Helem's and Meem's official websites and all published information on them (including newsletters and speeches), dating from 2004 (Helem) and 2007 (Meem) to 2011. All articles I consulted were published in English.[7] I analyze the ways in which Helem and Meem present themselves online, since that medium is most widely accessible to different and multiple publics. In addition, I supplement these sources with secondary sources such as

articles written by Helem and Meem activists, blog posts by Lebanese activists and other studies on LGBTQ lives in Lebanon. Even though I focus on online publications, my analysis is informed by my fieldwork on queer lives in Beirut, which I have conducted in 2008 and 2012–2014.[8] I have conducted ethnographic research since 2008 that has included interviews with LGBTQ-identified Lebanese individuals in Lebanon, both activists and non-activists. However, given the scope of this article, I mostly focus on the published online materials of both activist organizations, even though I make brief references to my fieldwork and interviews. Given that I am exploring only the ways in which the groups situate themselves in their published work, I do not assess the ways in which they implement or follow the strategies that they present.

Homosexualities in Lebanon

Although homosexuality is considered technically illegal in Lebanon and can be punished by up to one year in prison, Beirut has been recently represented as a more open city for non-heterosexuals in comparison to other cities in the Arab world. Despite the fact that Beirut has been recently hailed as the "Provincetown of the Middle East," (Healy, 2009), a "safe haven for homosexuals" in the Arab World and a "beacon of hope" for many gay Arabs (Zoepf, 2007), stories of arrests and crackdowns and, most recently, "anal probings" have resurfaced. On 28 July 2012, the Lebanese Internal Security forces raided a porn cinema in the district of Burj Hammoud in Beirut, arresting 36 men accused of engaging in what they termed "indecent and immoral acts" (Al Akhbar, 2012). This raid, as has been discussed on various internet social media outlets, was directly linked to the airing of a Lebanese talk show called *Enta Horr* (*You Are Free*) a few days before the arrests on the Lebanese station MTV, where the host had outed such cinemas and exposed what he referred to as the "deviance" and homosexuality that occurs there. Following the arrests, the men were taken to the infamous Hobeich police station and were subjected to anal examinations and probes to "prove" their engagement in homosexual activities. These "tests of shame," as local activists have called them, were performed by forensic doctors and sparked an outrage within Lebanese LGBTQ circles and a number of mainstream media outlets. However, days after that, it was reported that a decree was issued by the "Lebanese Order of Physicians," Lebanon's main medical association, "making these anal examinations unlawful and warning doctors they would face disciplinary measures if they carried out the act" (Al-Akhbar, 2012: para 14).

Beirut presents an interesting case in the Arab world where, on the one hand, it is being hailed as the "new Provincetown" of the Arab Middle East (Healy, 2009), especially in the perception of its "openness to homosexuality," primarily due to the somewhat open gay and lesbian events, bars, clubs and an LGBT travel agency (Moussawi, 2013). On the other hand, stories of crackdowns, arrests and anal probes are not unheard of, and they especially target individuals or groups of people who already occupy marginalized positions in society, most notably: refugees and migrant workers (Makarem, 2011). Finally, the presence of gay

communities in Beirut has been problematized by a number of academics who have countered the notion of a gay community in Beirut. Sofian Merabet clearly asserts this point when he says:

> one might contend that there is no such thing as a "gay community" in Lebanon at all, providing, of course, one defines a community as a coherent and encompassing group of people sharing similar, even if competing, positions, and aspirations and where the sexual preference becomes a cardinal point of identity construction. (Merabet, 2004: 4)

Organizing around LGBTQ sexualities has been exclusively done by the only two LGBTQ organizations in Lebanon, Helem and Meem. Whereas Helem was founded in 2004, Meem was founded in 2007 as an offshoot of the support group "Helem Girls." In the following sections, I describe the histories and work of both groups in more detail.

History and group formation

Helem,[9] the first "above-ground" LGBT organization in the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA), was founded in Beirut in September 2004 by five individuals who were members of a former group called "Club Free" (Dabaghi et al., 2008: 15). Prior to the emergence of Helem, Club Free existed as an "underground social support group for the LGBT community" in Lebanon, and was restricted to LGBT-identified members. According to the case study written about Helem, when a number of people from Club Free started Helem as an NGO that operates publicly and is not restricted to LGBT-identified individuals, they lost many of their former 300 members (Dabaghi et al., 2008). Before publicly coming out as Helem, its members contacted the International Lesbian and Gay Association and Amnesty International, which provided initial support for the group (Dabaghi et al., 2008; 15). "Club Free" is an important example of the submerged networks that Helem relied on before its formation (Mueller, 1994). Having a network of people organized around a common goal and providing a safe space or a safe haven was crucial for the emergence of Helem as an above-ground LGBT rights organization (Fantasia and Hirsch, 1995). Even though Helem still does not have official recognition from the state,[10] its existence is not denied nor celebrated, and there have been no recorded attempts on the part of the state to question or halt the group's activities. This illustrates one of the ways by which Helem's existence is ambiguously accepted without any official recognition.

Helem defines itself as an organization with a rights-based approach, with the primary goal of the annulment of article 534 of the Lebanese penal code, which outlaws "sexual relation contrary to nature" (often used as a proxy for anal sex). On its website, it defines its goal as "leading a peaceful struggle for the liberation of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgendered (LGBT) and other persons with non-conforming sexuality or gender identity in Lebanon from all sorts of violations of civil, political, economic, social or cultural rights" (Helem, n.d.).

Meem,[11] on the other hand, was founded in 2007 and defines itself as ''a support community for lesbian, bisexual, queer and questioning women and transgendered people in Lebanon'' (M Nadine, n.d.: 1). The origin and formation of the group is documented in a number of talks and online blogs where Meem members address the history of the formation of the group. Prior to the development of Meem, a group of women who were members of Helem developed a support group for women called ''Helem Girls'' (Abbani, 2012). This support group, which was developed in order to open up a space for centralizing women's issues within the organization, derived its strategies from feminist politics (Abbani, 2012). In one of my discussions with one of the former Meem coordinators,[12] she told me that many women felt that Helem was very male-dominated; hence, they sought a space that centered on women's experiences. In addition, she claimed that, even though Helem Girls provided a space for some women, many remained unsatisfied with the affirmative and visible strategies of Helem and some of the hierarchies present in the organizational structure. Hence, a group of women from Helem Girls started Meem in 2007, in order to create an alternative space that was not male-dominated and had different organizing strategies and a different organizational structure. For instance, the new group did not have a governing board but opted for a less hierarchical structure. In addition, Meem stressed the safety of members and hence organized a group that is less visible than Helem. During my interviews with a number of Meem members, they claimed that they needed a space that was not as visible as Helem and that was grounded in feminist issues, which did not foreground fixed identity-based approaches to gender and sexuality. However, not all women left Helem and became Meem members; many remained in Helem and also joined Meem, whereas others broke off entirely from Helem.

In a talk presented by Meem at the ILGA in Sao Paolo in 2009, Meem presented itself as a grassroots organization with the primary goal of creating community and providing empowerment and a safe space for LBTQ women in Lebanon (Lynn, 2010). Unlike Helem, Meem does not function ''above ground'' and that is particularly the case because the group aims to provide its members with ''support and services without the fear of being legally and socially outed'' (Lynn, 2010: para 1). Hence, it relies on anonymity and confidentiality in its organizing. Ultimately, what Meem provides is a safe haven for LBTQ women.

Even though both SMOs are based and work in Beirut in a similar political opportunity structure, they have very different methods of operating. In addition to needing to locate themselves in Lebanese society and in the larger Arab context, they also have to situate themselves within the international community of LGBTQ organizing. Since their work has been recognized and sometimes funded by a number of Euro-American governments and NGOs, their work cannot simply be analyzed at the local level.

By analyzing their self-definitions, stated goals, strategies of visibility and invisibility, and the ways by which they define sexual identity, I will be able to better understand their different organizing strategies, both locally and globally. The following questions become pertinent: How do they define their collective

identities? How do their collective identity deployments reflect their different organizing strategies, especially with regard to coming out/the closet, visibilities and gay rights? How do they engage with and contest dominant LGBTQ organizing? How do they highlight different aspects of their collective identities when they interact with different audiences at the local and global level? Finally, what are the limitations of the present literature in accounting for the two groups' behaviors?

Collective identities and organizing strategies: Queer visibility and the rights discourse

As already mentioned, Helem adopts a rights-based approach to organizing, whereby its major goal is to annul article 534 of the Lebanese penal code. Helem adopts an affirmative strategy of visibility, pride and coming out, albeit in a more cautious way than its counterparts in western contexts, by taking advantage of the ambiguities and discrepancies between the law and its (lack of) enforcement.[13] Even though Helem's main organizing strategy, which is based on the notion of coming out and pride, is similar to the international LGBTQ discourse, it differs in the degree of caution that the group employs.

Helem's work centers on three main issues: health, awareness and advocacy. As outlined on its official website, Helem claims that it raises awareness on HIV/AIDS and conducts outreach work to educate people and counter the misinformation on homosexuality in Lebanese society. It claims that it does so by "providing *objective*, factual information, initiating dialogue and refuting common misconceptions about homosexuality" (Helem, n.d.: para 2 emphasis added). In addition to having local, regional and international allies, Helem has closely worked with police forces in Lebanon (which have in turn provided security for them).

Helem also has a community center in central Beirut (the address is publicized on the website) and provides a hotline service. Membership is open to anyone "who shares their values based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." According to its website, Helem's work extends beyond the LGBT community, whereby it lists several issues that the group endorses, including women's rights, nationality campaigns, environmental issues and migrant workers' rights. Even though Helem works primarily for LGBT rights, it does not frame itself as "a community" of exclusively LGBT people. Hence, the group's collective identity is derived from its commitment to human rights issues and abuses in the country, which extends beyond LGBT issues. One could argue that what binds the group together is its struggle for civil liberties; hence, in this case, Helem's collective identity is built around a cause, "fighting for civil liberties," with an emphasis on LGBT rights (Helem, n.d.).

Even though Helem's main goal is the annulment of article 534, it does not have a clear lobbying and advocacy strategy. The group relies on private and personal meetings with "decision makers" as part of its lobbying efforts, even though representatives have not yet met with religious leaders, who constitute the major opposing forces (Dabaghi et al., 2008: 18). Given its stated goals,

Helem's strategies are centered around education and creating visibility by giving talks, media appearances and trainings, with the goal of ending stigma and discrimination against the LGBT population in Lebanon. In an interview that I conducted with former Helem coordinator George Azzi in 2008, Azzi claimed that Helem attempts to provide alternative space for LGBT individuals besides nightlife. In addition, he also added that the organization attempts to be as inclusive as possible by doing outreach work and extending its services to individuals living outside of Beirut (Moussawi, 2008).

Consistent with the ways in which Helem employs an affirmative strategy of visibility, its main types of public and open activities are usually centered on the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO). IDAHO is a one- to two-day public event in which the group holds talks, a photography exhibitions, art shows and some social events all under the umbrella of fighting homophobia in Lebanon.

Unlike Helem, Meem adopts a strategy of relative (but not complete) invisibility, focusing on internal community-building and women's empowerment. One of the major ways in which Meem differs from Helem is by not centering its mission on the international human rights discourse, whereby it does not mention "legal change" as part of its goals. Meem presents itself as "a community of lesbian, bisexual, queer women and transgender persons (including male-to-female and female-to-male) in addition to women questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity in Lebanon" (Meem, 2008). Hence, the group's collective identity stems from its members' positions as both women and queer. In addition, the group focuses on community empowerment and group support while ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, which many felt were lacking in Helem. On its official website, Meem also asserts that it is an exclusive group by claiming that it is "a closed, private group, not out of fear, but because we work hard on guarding the safety and security of our members. We believe in empowerment through self-organizing." Its major goal as presented on its official website is to create "a safe space in Lebanon where queer women and transgender persons can meet, talk, discuss issues, share experiences, and work on improving their lives and themselves" (Meem, 2008). Meem also has a community center that is anonymous and private and hence its location is not publicized. The anonymity of the center can be thought of as a strategic choice to make members feel safe to frequent without the fear of being publicized. Helem's center, on the other hand, is located on a major street close to downtown Beirut.

Examining Meem's monthly e-newsletters (April 2008–February 2010) reveals that their work combines elements of activism and lobbying, albeit differently than that of Helem's. Its newsletters include selections on the community center, social events, lesbian and transgender support groups, international conference attendance and local workshops. In addition, Meem focuses on the importance of being heard, read and, therefore, practicing self-expression as a key to the empowerment of its members. In addition, in its newsletters, Meem lists a number of cases where the group did advocacy work, for example, lobbying for lesbian rights at the MENA women's rights conference in 2008. Meem has also provided legal, financial

and moral support to a number of lesbian women in Lebanon and handled asylum cases for a number of queer Arab women (Meem Newsletter, 2008).

Meem has not been an active participant in Helem's events and there is no published information on the relationship between Helem and Meem on their websites. Meem's only public event was held in June of 2009 during the launching of their book *Bareed Mista3jil* (Fast Mail). The book, which is a collection of 41 LBTQ Arab women's narratives, depicts a wide range of queer women's experiences in the attempt to capture the intersectionality and complexity of these women's lived realities (Dropkin, 2011; Georgis, 2013).[14]

Collective identity deployment locally: Coming out and translation

As already mentioned, both Helem and Meem define collective identity and organize differently based on their different understandings of coming out and queer visibility and their engagements with the rights discourse. However, how can their differences be explained and accounted for? In a similar vein to Mary Bernstein's (1997) study of collective identity deployment in the USA, which examines the ways by which LGBTQ groups deploy identity differently based on structural constraints and changing contexts and circumstances, I assess how Helem's and Meem's collective identity deployment can be better understood by centralizing their organizing strategies. Collective identity deployment, according to Bernstein, is practiced "to contest stigmatized social identities for the purposes of institutional change" or "to transform mainstream culture, its categories and values, by providing alternative organizational forms" (Bernstein, 1997: 538).

Since one of Helem's priorities is seeking legal recognition from the state in order to target article 534 of the Lebanese penal code, it has to face different sets of experiences; it is therefore not surprising that it relies on a strategy of open, yet cautious visibility.[15] Therefore, its concern with targeting the law makes it opt for relative visibility and adopt what can be best understood as an "identity for education" framework to counter attitudes and misconceptions about homosexuality (Bernstein, 1997). Therefore, Helem's local work and educational strategies can be understood as less confrontational than that of Meem's. Even though the active Helem members are at more risk since they are public and have organized public events against homophobia (including a number of sit-ins), they do so for the purpose of "educating" people about homophobia, homosexuality and sexual health awareness. In addition, following its founding, Helem launched a gay periodical titled *Barra*. Titling the magazine *Barra*, literally translating to "out," and having its initial logo as "I Exist," are clear examples of the ways by which Helem relies on affirmative strategies of "coming out," similar to those of western LGBTQ organizations.

Meem, on the other hand, uses what Bernstein (1997) calls an "identity for critique" approach, whereby members question and reject gender binaries as well as divisions between outness and closetedness, and their major fight becomes

directed against patriarchal systems of oppression. Rather than using a legal frame-work for its organizing, it relies more on a critique of dominant ideologies that subject both women and queer individuals to discrimination and subordination. An examination of Meem's weekly online publication *Bekhsoos* shows that, rather than simply trying to raise awareness, they locate dominant patriarchal ideologies as their major opponent. Gender issues for Meem become central, since the group claims that it seeks to "explore and address multi-layered forms of discrimination that [they] faced as women first, and as lesbians second" (Lynn, 2010: para 6). Therefore, they position themselves as fighting the patriarchal system and the oppression engendered by the gender binary structure. Meem's relative invisibility gives it leeway in adopting more radical approaches while remaining safeguarded by being less easily identifiable than Helem.

Meem's approach resonates with Joshua Gamson's (1995) call to move beyond strict identitarian models. In addition, the group's deconstructionist approach to gender/sexual identities echoes queer theoretical approaches to LGBTQ organizing (Gamson, 1995). Echoing Gamson, "fixed identity categories" can potentially be both the "basis for oppression and the basis for political power" (Gamson, 1995: 390). In this case, Helem's claim of a more "fixed identity category" illustrates its reliance on notions such as coming out and pride in order to be recognized and to work for legal change. In contrast, Meem's deconstructionist approach to sexual identities entails selective visibility; even though it sometimes might be mistaken for "closetedness," it actually works to challenge the binaries of both gender and sexuality and the appropriateness of such constructs in LGBTQ organizing in Beirut. In his discussion of the uses of sexual identity models in American LGBTQ organizing, Gamson (1995) questions the effectiveness of using essentia-lized sexual identities for the purposes of change. On the one hand, lesbians and gay men became effective in the civil rights movements in the USA precisely because they presented a "public collective identity," but on the other hand, they had to rely on and create essentialized and seemingly stable sexual identity categories (Gamson, 1995).

These questions are pertinent in the Lebanese case; however, Helem's and Meem's uses of identity have to be made intelligible at both the local and global levels. Groups organizing in the Global South, as already mentioned, face the dilemmas of working both within an internationally recognized organizational and discursive template for LGBT organizing, while remaining rooted in a local context. In addition, LGBTQ activists in the Global South also risk being seen as simply adopting a western understanding of sexual identities, and by doing that they can possibly reinforce the myth of attributing "homosexuality as excessive Westernization" (Hoad, 2007: 76). Translation, therefore, becomes central.[16]

One of the primary means by which both groups negotiate their positions is by the translation and appropriation of concepts of sexual identities (Thayer, 2010). Thayer emphasizes that, in order for discourses to travel, they need translators to redefine and appropriate them and "help them cross borders and set down roots in new places" (2010: 31). However, it is important to note that individuals who can

"translate" global sexual identity constructs into a local context need to be able to communicate with international and western LGBTQ groups. Therefore, access is restricted to certain individuals with international connections, high levels of education and cultural and economic capital, which would enable them to interact with both global and local actors.

When it comes to translating sexual identity concepts, both groups have lobbied for the usage of new Arabic terms while referring to homosexuality, for example using the neutral term *mithli* (same-sexness) as opposed to *shaadh* (deviant) (Mourad, 2013).[17] Their efforts have been successful as evidenced in the uses of more neutral terminology in reference to homosexuality (*mithliya*) and transgender issues (al-moghayara al jinsiya) in a number of prominent Lebanese newspapers. Both groups also try to rely more on the Arabic language than English or French in their publications and their websites for the dissemination of information. However, most if not all information on their websites has been translated to English and/or French. Finally, Meem's publication of the book *Bareed Mista3jil*, published in both English and Arabic, is a striking example of their attempts to root their struggles within a local context, by discussing queer issues in local settings. The launch of the book, which I attended in June 2009 at a local theater in Beirut, consisted of both Arabic and English readings of various selections from the book. The event was open to the public and highly attended; however, the press was not allowed in the theater in order to protect the identities of those who were present.

As demonstrated in the foregoing discussion, both Helem and Meem rely on, contest and translate conceptions from the dominant LGBTQ organizing. First, they both engage with western conceptions of sexual identities, even though they do so differently. Whereas Helem uses an affirmative strategy of coming out, Meem's reliance on a queer deconstructionist approach also highlights its engagement (albeit differently) with western conceptions of sexuality. Second, while using the different concepts, they both attempt to stay locally rooted and navigate the sectarianism that characterizes Lebanese society, where historically groups have had to rely on fixed essentialized identities to gain recognition. Third, given their diverse strategies, LGBTQ organizing in Beirut cannot be treated as a homogeneous entity.

Against dominant conceptions of sexual identities at the global level: Intersectionality and situated struggles

In order to get at the complexities of the behaviors and the collective identity deployment of both Helem and Meem, a consideration of the multiple audiences and contexts in which they interact is central. That is, since these groups do not interact with audiences only at the local level, examining the ways by which they present themselves in international contexts sheds light on the complex nature of their identity deployment and organizing strategies. As already mentioned, LGBTQ groups in the Arab world are often locally accused of being "Westernized" and of not being rooted in local contexts, in a similar fashion that is discussed by Massad (Moumneh, 2006; Whitaker, 2006). In addition, as

already stated, Helem and Meem both contest and apply discourses of global LGBTQ organizing in their self-definition and organizing strategies, rather than uncritically engaging with the dominant discourse. Even though these global LGBTQ identifications can open "new spaces" for these activists and enable them to call for rights and recognition (using the human rights discourse), they find them constrictive. That is, rather than simply adopting dominant views about organizing, they contest what they regard to be dominant and depoliticized organizing by situating themselves in terms of geopolitical struggles and rejecting the binaries of the closet/coming out along with dominant notions of queer visibility.

In order to illustrate the ways by which they highlight different aspects of their collective identities in relation to global LGBTQ communities and politics, I draw on three speeches that the two groups gave (separately) in three international settings.[18] In these three speeches, Helem and Meem addressed an international audience of LGBTQ activists. Apparent in these three instances are the ways by which both groups contest what they call the "de-politicization" of LGBTQ organizing, while calling for an understanding of sexuality in terms of situated struggles.[19] One of the primary ways by which the two groups highlight their differences from dominant western LGBTQ organizing is by locating and positioning themselves and their struggles within local and regional politics. In particular, they take strong positions and align themselves in relation to anti-war activism, including the war on Iraq and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. This illustrates instances where their collective identities become rooted in local and geopolitical struggles.

In a speech that was live-streamed at the International OutGames in Montreal in 2006, Helem's keynote presentation by Rasha Moumneh stresses the importance of understanding Helem's struggles in Lebanon, especially in "proving their legitimacy without falling prey to accusations of being agents in the hands of Western Imperialism" and in relation to the lived realities of war and regional instability (Moumneh, 2006). Giving this speech during the midst of the 2006 July War, Moumneh openly calls for LGBT groups present at the OutGames to recognize the effects of the War on Terror on the Arab Middle East and to question the "human rights reforms" proposed in such discourses. In addition, she calls international LGBTQ groups to recognize the oppression of both what she terms "domestic authoritarianism" presented by corrupt and oppressive regimes and "international Messianism," which she argues "collude to produce political discourses, rhetoric, policing, wars, leaving those of us who wish to see genuine and sustainable reform with little space in which to navigate" (Moumneh, 2006). Such an assertion illustrates the ways in which Helem critically views both local and international political initiatives that present themselves as wanting to save women and queers from oppressive regimes (Ahmed, 2011).[20] Such accounts centralize the local and regional contexts, while debunking myths that regard western military involvement and aid as a means of "liberating" women and LGBTQ individuals. In that same speech, Moumneh calls for a complete boycott of the World Pride event happening in Jerusalem that year, in order to make a statement against Israeli aggression (Moumneh, 2006). Finally she ends her speech by saying that

"Helem will continue to work for LGBT rights in Lebanon; however, we will not and cannot do so under bombardment" (Moumneh, 2006).

This stance is echoed in a 2009 article by Ghassan Makarem, founding member and former executive director of Helem, in which he documents some of the problematic relationships with western LGBTQ organizations, specifically in relation to politics in the Middle East and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Quoting the Helem keynote address mentioned earlier, Makarem (even though relying on and engaging with notions of global LGBTQ brother- and sisterhood) restates the need for the international LGBTQ community to oppose war, presenting a picture that is different from that presented by Adam et al.'s (1999) image of a global LGBTQ alliance:

> We do not accept democracy at the barrel of a gun. We do not accept to be liberated through war, if the price of liberty is our lives, meted out in collateral terms. The international LBGT community should not shun its brothers and sisters in Lebanon and Palestine. Especially not now when both Lebanon and Gaza are being decimated by Israel. (Makarem, 2009: 6)

Helem, in this example, employs the dominant discourse of global LGBTQ brother- and sisterhood, while remaining critical of the ways by which their struggles have been overlooked and excluded.

Both groups have also been supportive of and align themselves with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) Movement,[21] which calls for the cultural, academic and consumer boycott of Israeli institutions that deny human rights and equality to Palestinians and profit from the everyday violation of Palestinian's human rights (BDS Movement, n.d.). They have also been vocal against the "pink-washing strategies" that the Israeli state is embedded in, which seek to present Israel as the only gay-friendly country in the Middle East (*A Queer Movement for Queer Powered BDS*, 2010).[22] Israeli pink washing, as explained by Jasbir Puar (2007), consists of using queer and LGBTQ rights in order to present Israel as the only gay-friendly country in the Middle East, as opposed to the other "backwards, repressive and intolerant" Arab countries (*A Queer Movement for Queer Powered BDS*, 2010: para 1).

Second, during one of their speeches at the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Agency's (IGLTA) symposium on gay tourism in Beirut, held in Beirut in October 2010,[23] Helem also stresses the intersectionality of their struggles. The speech starts off by asserting that:

> Helem recognizes the political aspect of sexual liberation, and, as an organization rooted in Lebanon and the Middle East, takes into consideration the local politics and the context of the region it belongs to, without necessarily adhering to the systems for LGBTIQ liberation that have been established, encouraged, and at some point enforced by international gay communities and organizations. (Helem speech, 2010: para 3)

In the this statement, Helem affirms its belief in and struggle for sexual liberation; however, the group distances itself from what it calls "systems of LGBTIQ liberation," which it claims to be enforced by international gay communities. By grounding itself in a Lebanese and Arab Middle Eastern context and challenging what it perceives to be the dominant LGBTQ liberation strategy, Helem distances itself from what it conceives of as the international gay community. This distancing illustrates that Helem does not uncritically align itself with the international LGBTQ community, which is inconsistent with both Massad's (2002, 2007) and Adam et al.'s (1999) arguments.

In addition, during that speech, Helem reiterates its claim that it is not a depoliticized group by defining de-politicization as a situation that forces a person to ignore her/his lived reality "for the sake of conforming to an adopted Western stereotype" (Helem speech, 2010). Hence, Helem reinforces the notion that it does not follow dominant LGBTQ organizing blindly, but rather translates and adapts it to the local and regional contexts. When talking about its own context, Helem situates itself in terms of its members' commitment to anti-war activism by recounting the roles that war and conflict play in their life. As an example of their work, they recount their relief work efforts during the war of 2006, where they provided their community center as a shelter for people fleeing the south of Lebanon. In addition, they situate themselves in terms of regional struggles:

> A human rights organization cannot and should not operate in a country without taking into consideration the local politics and contexts it thrives in, can we as an organization that fights oppressive systems support, instead of condemn, the oppression of the Palestinian people. (Helem speech, 2010: para 4)

Even though Helem took part in the IGLTA familiarization trip to Lebanon (unlike Meem, which completely boycotted the event), it was still critical of the promotion of Lebanon as a gay touristic destination, which, it argues, serves the interests of gay tourists and not the local LGBT community. In criticizing the depictions of Lebanon as an open and liberal country, Helem claimed that:

> it is problematic when Lebanon is described as a "very liberal" country, when the reality of the situation is that Beirut is a liberal city, not for the local LGBTIQ community that lives under the daily threat of police violence and imprisonment, blackmail, and homophobia and stigma, but liberal for the foreign tourist. (Helem Speech, 2010: para 6)

Finally, Meem's speech titled "Framing Visibility," presented at the ILGA pre-conference in Sao Paolo in 2010 by Lynn, directly addresses the issue of visibility, whereby it asserts its refusal of visibility as a means of rejecting the binary of closet/outness. In addition, it views the binary of the closet/outness as a western understanding of sexual identity, which the group seeks to challenge. Meem also

continues to claim that it refuses to locate itself within hegemonic sexual identity discourses:

> When we, LGBTs, locate ourselves within the spectrum of progress that the (predominantly) Western coming out discourse promotes, when we wear masks in pride parades, when we turn "National Coming Out Day" – which originated as a yearly event in 1988 in West Hollywood, California – into "International Coming Out Day" and then on our gay blogs come out with nicknames, we are locating ourselves within a foreign framework that links visibility closely to pride. Hence, this type of semi-coming out, or false-coming-out, looks rather awkward [and] isn't empowering and as playful as it may seem sometimes. We still come off as those less empowered, those more victimized, at the lesser end of the LGBT international spectrum of progress. (Lynn, 2010: para 13)

In addition, Meem situates itself at the heart of what it conceives of as an "Arab LGBTQI network" by stating that "we seek to remain sensitive to community values, stressing a local and indigenous identity and insisting on an Arab movement, on Arab solidarity, which has led to the formation of a regional Arab LGBTQI network" (M Nadine, n.d.: 2).

Helem does not publicly challenge LGBTQ categories, though it still resists them in the global context while strategically employing them locally for its intended goals. Meem, however, openly resists and rejects what it sees as a western model of sexual identities, primarily by refusing the binary of the closet and outness. As already documented, Meem refuses to situate itself in a "Western spectrum of progress" which entails coming-out narratives and "embracing" a lesbian identity, or even participating in events that would position its members at "the lower end of the LGBT progress spectrum" (Lynn, 2010: para 11). However, as already stated, both groups distance themselves from what they call "de-politicized" LGBTQ organizing and situate themselves and their goals in terms of intersecting struggles.

Conclusion

In this article, I explored the tensions in the literature on internationalization of LGBTQ movements by examining the case of LGBTQ activism in Beirut. More specifically, I looked at the two contrasting views as presented by Massad (2002, 2007) and Adam et al. (1999). On the one hand, Massad (2002, 2007) is critical of what he calls the dominant "gay international" discourse which, despite being developed in the West, claims to be universal, and is taken to be the answer for resolving the oppressions of LGBTQ groups in the world at large. In addition, he views LGBTQ groups in the Arab world to be complicit with the international gay discourse by arguing that they uncritically accept and apply western categories of sexuality and hence do not root their organizing strategies within their local contexts. On the other hand, Adam et al. (1999) reflect the "international gay"

position, which Massad critiques. They argue for the presence of an inclusive global gay movement that is a byproduct of the existence of a global LGBT alliance.

Using the case of Lebanon, I argued that the current literature is not sufficient in explaining the behaviors of LGBTQ groups in the Global South since it homogenizes such groups and does not take into account the diversity and complexity of their organizing strategies. By examining the collective identity deployment of the Lebanese LGBTQ organizations Helem and Meem, I argue that both groups simultaneously engage with and reject western concepts of LGBTQ organizing methods, albeit differently. Their divergent strategies are most notable in their different understandings of coming out and queer visibilities, and their engagement with the global rights discourse. In addition, I argue that since they highlight different parts of their collective identities based on context, studying their behaviors only in terms of a local or a global context misses the complexity of their collective identity deployment and organizing strategies. Finally, I shed light on the need for research on LGBTQ organizing in the Global South that centralizes the complexity of LGBTQ groups by taking into account the diversity of organizing strategies and the multiple contexts in which they interact. Having research that is more cognizant of the complexities of LGBTQ organizing in the Global South will promote a more accurate portrayal of the diverse understandings of sexuality and organizing around sexual rights. Even though global LGBTQ groups and global discourses of LGBTQ organizing have helped open spaces of resistance for these groups, it is important to be attuned to the tensions and shortcomings that arise in imagining a global LGBTQ framework that does not take into account diverse conceptions of homosexualities, homophobias and people's lived realities.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Dominant LGBTQ organizing has relied on affirmative coming out narratives and the concept of the closet.
2. I use LGBT, LBTQ, LGBTQ, LBTQI as they are respectively used by each organization. Whereas Helem mostly uses the acronym LGBT, Meem uses LBTQ.
3. I interpret their definition of depoliticization, as being involved in and addressing multiple regional struggles including but not limited to LGBTQ rights.
4. It should be noted that a number of recent works of scholarship have explored various organizing strategies in the Arab Middle East; for more information, see: Al-Qasimi and Kunstman (2012), Amar (2013), Maikey and Schotten on Queer Palestinian and BDS movements (2012) and Mikdashi (2013, 2014).
5. For a critique of Massad's argument, see (Amar, 2013; 75).
6. See Darwich and Maikey (2011), Maikey and Shamali (2011) and Maikey (2012).

7. The majority, if not all, of the articles I came across have been published in English and sometimes translated to Arabic and French. There were no sources that were only written in Arabic, hence my reliance on English texts for the purpose of this project.

8. This article is part of a larger project that I am working on queer subjectivities in Beirut. In my larger project, I provide a more detailed discussion of activism, activists and the role of activism in the everyday life of queer-identified Lebanese. Therefore, queer individuals' narratives and their lives in Beirut and their relationships to the fields of activism are the focus of another paper.

9. "Helem" is derived from the Arabic acronym of "Lebanese Protection for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgenders".

10. "According to the legal practices in Lebanon, an organization can assume a legally-existing status if they have not received a negative reply from the Ministry of Interior within two months of submitting the application. Due to not receiving a registration number, Helem is considered a legal organization but does not have official backing" (Dabaghi et al., 2008: 15).

11. The name "Meem" is derived from the Arabic letter "m," which stands for "majmouaat mou'azara lil-mar'a al-mithliya" (a support group for lesbian women) (Meem, 2008).

12. I do not identify the individuals by name in order to protect the anonymity and privacy of the individuals I talk to, unless otherwise noted.

13. Ghassan Makarem, Helem's former coordinator, recognizes the ambiguities and discretionary nature in the implementation of the law, whereby he argues that it is the already so socially marginalized and economically underprivileged groups who fall victim to these arbitrary arrests and detention (Makarem, 2011).

14. Dina Georgis (2013) offers an insightful reading of *Bareed Mista3jil* by examining affective strategies employed in the narratives. In this article, she employs a postcolonial reading of *Bareed Mista3jil*, rejects a pride/shame dichotomy, and centralizes the role of hope in the narratives.

15. I do not intend to argue that this is a cause–effect relationship. For more readings on the complex nature of organizing strategies, uses of identity and legal changes, see work done by critical legal scholars and works such as Maya Mikdashi's "What is Political Sectarianism" (2011).

16. In this sense I don't mean literal translations, rather ways by which concepts get shaped by local contexts. For work done on translation of concepts in LGBTQ Lebanese publications, see Mourad (2013).

17. For more on uses of language and translation of LGBTQ terminology in Lebanon, see Mourad (2013).

18. The first is a speech given by Helem at the OutGames 2006 in Montreal; it was live streamed since they couldn't attend because of the 2006 war on Lebanon. The second is the speech given by Helem in Beirut in September 2010 during the ILGTA symposium on gay tourism in Beirut. The third is Meem's speech given at the preconference of the ILGA at Sao Paolo in 2010.

19. Even though queer organizing, which challenges and contests heteronormativity, is highly political, I use the term "depolitical" in this context to describe LGBT groups that do not take into account factors that intersect with sexuality (such as race, gender, and class).

20. More about the critique of the saving mission discourse, see Sara Ahmed (2011) and Ghassan Makarem (2009).

21. More about the BDS campaign can be found on http://www.bdsmovement.net/ (accessed 2 February 20112)
22. More about pinkwashing can be found on the same website http://pinkwashingisrael. com (see *A Queer Movement for Queer Powered BDS*, 2010).
23. The familiarization trip to Beirut was co-sponsored by the ILGTA and Lebtours (a Lebanese gay travel agency) in order to market Beirut as destination for gay tourism specifically for gay men.

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