

Out of the Closet: Queer Love in Arabic Literature and Islamic Society

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Abstract: *When same-sex desire is brought to literature it gives it a new shape. This kind of literature is crucial, urgent, and relevant to today's world and it has a lasting impact on the human sexual experience. Nevertheless, this type of literature in itself is rarely the focus of research, thus it remains undefined and under-explained. Since there are no serious studies on homosexuality in Arabic literature, I find it necessary to address this scholarly gap by shedding light on such an argumentative subject especially in today's world. Depending on this consideration, this study focuses on the interplay between homosexuality and Islamic culture. By so doing, it explores the manifestation of twin flame relationships in Arabic literature, in light of its epistemic closure in Arabic cultural societies. Accordingly, the study is equipped with specific references to famous Arabic poets, novelists, and short fiction writers, who are qualified to depict the constructions of queer desire and sexual customs of Arabic Muslims. Therefore, the study provides a vehicle for conveying multiple portrayals of homoeroticism in Arabic literature and Islamic society that values religion above all. Looking at the representations of queer social relations, we hope to find both echoes of the Arabic Muslims' views on queer relationships and indications of the ways in which the conceptual state of bisexuality is evolving in both Arabic literature and its culture. In conclusion, the study offers a monolithic image of homosexuality and Arabic literature in homophobic Islamic society. Thereby it is conceived as a contribution to a wider discussion of sexual queerness in the Middle East.*

Keywords: Arabic Literature, Arabic Muslims, Epistemic closure. queer love, Same-sex desire,

1. Introduction

In a society, strongly tied to the Islamic restrictions, the subject of homosexuality is strictly prohibited and referred to as taboo by Arabic Muslims. Creating a state of general rejection, Arabic societies reprobate vehemently the existence of homosexual practices and flatly rebuff uttering them. To put it differently, Arabic Muslims deny and fail to acknowledge homoerotic acts even though they are widely spotted in the Arab world. Having no status in *fiqh* (jurisprudence), this pederastic love is highly preserved and harshly criticized by Arabic societies, whether they are Sunni or Shiite. Adding insult to injury, this act of sexual perversion is not only socially penalized, but also legally punished. Queer behavior is condemned in the strongest terms by Islamic governmental laws. Homosexual couples are sentenced to imprisonment, flogging, and even the death penalty in Saudi Arabia. Let alone literature which shows less eagerness to discuss the margin of sexual ethics in all its manifestations. However, the striking repudiation of homosexuality in Arabic societies does not occult this phenomenon in Arabic literature. In that, the denial of homosexuality does not stop the flourishing of the visibility of gay writers who make bold moves to come out of the shadow and promote their thoughts in their writings, though they are limited, restricted, and severely inadmissible by Arabic Muslims.

Unlike non-Arabic literature, Arabic literature is an expression of self-doubt. It avoids exposing any views on a man's sexual life over the other or the same sex. In Arabic literature, there are limited works to be read in a sex light, let alone the works that deal with openly gay content. Arab world follows extremely rigid approaches towards topics of difference. Arabic literature is preoccupied with its society and with characters who are depicted as mere archetypes of normal society. Normality executes any sense of individuality, no matter how it is calculated. In his notable

book, *NLP Remedies All Maladies By Self-Therapy*, Mohammadi (2019) asserts, the "Subjective experience is a fancy term. It's a way for saying how an individual organizes their senses about the world...it is a feeling of greater confidence, a sense of peace and a capacity to produce success." (p.2). In elucidation, Mohammadi is interested in the structure of a person's subjective experience and what can be calculated from it. Since subjectivity puts emphasis on the intrinsic value of human beings, it contributes to the pursuit of the human dignity. In this respect, human's sexual individuality must be respected and esteemed in literature.

However, reflections of individuals' sexual preferences are avoided in Arabic society which make the sexual, heterosexual, homosexual desires lack defined definitions in Arabic literature, as Arab societies thoroughly concealed them. This absence of a whole slice of realism, represented by the sentimental and erotic life, makes literature lose its aim to be realistic. Even rare examples to the contrary, Al-Jahiz's *Mufakharat AL-Jawari wa Al-Gilman, Book of Maids and Lads* is a case to this scarcity. However, palpable eroticism is disseminated at any time and everywhere in Arabic literature. Therefore, the view of homosexuality has not gone so far in its discussion. To put it differently, discussions of same-sex relationships is suppressed, unseen, and ignored in Arabic literature. The quasi-existence of erotic desire in Arabic literature accuses Arabic writers to be so blind as to miss it. However, homosexuality is usually denounced or simply neutrally described. While the homosexual character is depicted to be struggling with a severe dilemma of self-identity and articulated in a traumatic relationship, possibly leading to death or suicide. Therefore, only a handful of direct hints survive to indicate peculiar states of Arabic homosexuality.

To what extent is Arabic literature qualified to depict the multi-faceted homosexual constructions and taboos referred

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to them in the Arab World? Answers should be ranged from classical Arabic literature to the religion domains, to give clear indications of the queer norms and their transgression overages. Nevertheless, Arabic literature, or as it is referred to as *Adabin* the Arabic language, never fails to address same-sexeroticism which helps to define the sexual ethics of the Arabic Muslims. The scarce references to homosexuality in Arabic literature could be interpreted as an indication of the Arabic Muslims' relations with their bodies and queer desires. As in Arabic culture-related subject, the use of the Arabic term *shudhudh jinsi* (sexual deviation) aroused to be a controversial debate that degrades homosexuality and refuses to consider it as an identity.

Religiously, the homosexual rejection of Islam is going back to the source that is based on the story of the people of Sodom, narrated in the Quran, who were notorious for their appetite to approach men with desire instead of women, which led them to persecute their prophet, Lot, and sexually harass his visitors, the angels. For this forbidden and sinful act, they received divine punishment that suits them well. In reference to the Quranic personage Lut, the word Luti, an active sodomite who prefers boys over girls, appears to be widely used to refer to gay male sex since the 13th century of Arabic literature. Therefore, queer love had some representations in Islamic societies and literature, though it was not recognized by governments.

Two basic notions about homosexuality, as reflected in *Fiqh*, must be stressed. First, the acknowledgment of male beauty causes *fitna* (temptation) in Arabic societies. However, this serious matter goes in sharp contrast with Quranic verses. The Quran attests to the Prophet Joseph's angelic beauty, who "...is not a human being, he must be a human angel" (Quran, p. 239), to be an indication of young male beauty and its ability to seduce, on merely seeing him. Moreover, the Quranic paradise contains many forbidden elements to which immortals are inclined, but are widely available and lawful in paradise. When in heaven, the wine is allowed as it "causes no intoxication." (Quran, p. 56). Let alone the wine is served by eternally charming young lads who "if looked at, seem like scattered pearls" (Quran, p. 76). Even though, the Quran makes many references to the ability of male beauty to seduce, the sensuality of the male body is considered to be a cardinal sin in *Fiqh*, which results in its seldom appearance in the Islamic religion. The *hadith* of Prophet Mohammed is simply harsh and hashed concerning homosexual intercourses between men: "the doer and the receiver are to be put to death" as reported by *Al Nibaya*. It should be noted that despite their allowance in heaven, homoerotic acts are deathly rejected by Islamic norms.

Second, the recognition of male beauty is considered as a tendency of appreciating males' bodies which leads to desire that is to be resisted. The mere sin lies not only in the bisexual practice, but also in its recognition as a sexual act. However, the Sufi mystics, a primary doctrine of Islam, sees in the male's beauty a witness of God's beauty and his creative power. Thus, acknowledging beauty is a religious exercise of acknowledging the perfection of God. Associated with spiritual concerts, celebrating the beauty of the boy, without physical relations, as a metaphor for God's

beauty was an assured genre of mystical literature. Concerning the passage from the queer desire to fulfillment, Arabic literature seems to be more tolerant than both the harsh treatment of society and the sacred law of Islam. The conspicuous expression of homosexuality in classical Arabic literature reconciled in opposed to the apparent Islamic restricted law is a puzzle that remains unexplained. Islamic legal schools are divided into two doctrines, in terms of their punishment. One that is harsh enough to consider sodomy a capital crime. The other, in analogy with the penalty for the heterosexual act, reduce the sentence to one hundred lashes for the illicit sexual offender. In essence, Islamic juries analogously treat homosexuality to heterosexuality. Therefore, evidence on the act of penetration made by four witnesses of established integrity is required for the conviction to be permitted.

2. Discussion

Historically, the same-sex desire was first recorded in the first Pharaonic era, before 23 century BC. Among the accounts of the Fifth Dynasty in Egypt, several paintings were found on the graves of two high officials Nyankh-Khnum and Khnum-Hotep, who were buried together in one tomb, embracing each other and touching their faces nose to nose, normally represent a kiss. These paintings offer plenty of rooms for speculation. Though they were forbidden to be discussed and delved into, they reflect an example of the homosexual connection between two married men and prove that same-sex relationships were accepted in ancient Egypt. A quick walk down the Arabic literature lane attests to the existence of homosexual practices in Islamic societies, especially in the late eighth century.

Installing the Abbasid dynasty in 750, the Iranian revolutionary troops were forbidden to accompany their wives with them on their campaigns. As a matter of sexual desire, they attempted to find satisfaction in male relationships. Therefore, they brought this newly acquired taste to Baghdad, where it has begun to flourish. In Caliph's court, poets used to celebrate the illicit pleasure of boys in their poems which made the most famous of them. Being famous for his homoerotic writings, the eighth century hedonistic poet and the glories poet of Arabic literature, Abu Nuwas, explicitly praised his gay encounters and described it vividly in many of his poems. In one of his beautiful Arabic references to homosexuality, he asked, "Would I choose seas over land?" (Mai Ghossoub, 2006, p. 174). In attempts to prefer the love of men to love of women, since the sea is a metaphorical reference to the love of women, while the land is the love of men.

Therefore, Abu Nuwas's verses depict his affection towards adolescent boys who are described as virtually identical to women with wide hips, narrow waists, and big charming eyes. However, the pederastic love celebrated implicitly by Abu Nuwas in his affectionate poems is anal intercourses between the poet, who takes the active role, and a mercenary boy as a penetrator in the sexual act, while the poet's masculinity is intact. This interest in the physical attraction of boys, make the boys slaves. However, slave boys lose their allure and attraction once they become adults. This crucial transition, marked by the growth of the beard,

generated a response that defends the beauty of fully bearded boys, resulting in anthologies of “beard poetry” devoted to this debate.

Male tendencies towards other male flourished among Arabic poets until the expression of male sentiment became the supreme art among the Arabs. Thus, explicit homoeroticism was one of the dominant themes in classical Arabic literature in the ninth century. Sentimental poems about the beauty of males, ranging from humorous to passionate, became popular as those about females. Although homosexual behavior is condemned in the strongest terms by Islamic law, pietistic works devoted to homoerotic love appears as a natural literary phenomenon in classical Arabic literature. This striking affirmation of homosexuality developed into an independent genre known as *Udhuri* poetry, the kind of poetry that is associated with passionate homoerotic. Though they were severely opposed by vocal protesters, who rely on the teachings of Islam and reject the idea instinctively, queer desires were expectable from a man sin-prone creature on the condition that they do not exceed sexual desires.

Nevertheless, some famous ninth-century poets as Abu Tamma, Ibn Al-Mu'taz, and Al-Buhturi favored heteroerotic love poems, which were, to some extent, welcome at the caliphs' court, and some caliphs actively encouraged them. This is not the case with all caliphs, the concupiscent Abbasid caliph Muhammad Al-Amin, who praised Abu Nuwas's radicalism, was ill-famed with a fondness for the court eunuchs, especially the black eunuch Kawther. Devoted to his beloved man, the openly gay ruler, Caliph Al-Amin wrote, “Kawthar is my soul, my religion, my illness and my therapeutic” (Mai Ghossoub, 2006, p. 180). His love was increasing until he rejected the idea of marrying a woman because he found his affection and his love had been spent on a person of the same-sex and felt satisfied enough to make him dispense with the wife. Feeling that the wife would distract him from his beloved and found her existence merely for sex, he controlled his sexual desire and directed it to his male beloved.

Known as the husband of the eunuchs, Al-Amin's mother, Zubaidah bint Ja'far, ordered the court's slaves to dress up in boys' clothes, bob their hair, and paint artificial mustaches on their faces, as a way to lure him away from eunuchs which made him had a total male disguised Harem. This transitional state of “girls-boys” (Ghulamiyat) persisted for several generations. Worthy to be mention here, there is no evidence that these Ghulamiyat were identified in any state of lesbians or gays, although, some were said to have bisexual affairs.

Composing chaste homoerotic love lyrics, numerous transmitters of these anecdotes pursued and adopted this genre. Among them, Al-Khubzaruzzi who, although was an unlettered baker in Basra, attracted the admiring attention of the aristocratic poets of the Al-Abbasid court with his delicate lyrics on the beauty and attraction of the young boys. In addition to Ibn Waki Al Tunnisi who recalls both the frolicsomeness of Abu Nuwas and the stylishness of Ibn Al-Mu'tazz. Wise to be said that the erotic poetry of Al-Khubzaruzzi and Ibn Waki Al Tunnisi are preserved in the

works of the genius anthologist Al-Tha'alibi, who safeguards them in two collections. The homoerotic series of literary verses, *A Thousand and One Boys*, and the heteroerotic accumulation of poems, *A Thousand and One Girls*.

As an objective observer of human behaviors, Al-Jahiz touched many aspects of daily life in the Abbasid period, which is known as the richest intellectual and literary age of the Arabs. In his most extended discussion of homosexuality, *Maids and Youths*, Al-Jahiz broaches the topic of homosexuality frequently. Claiming that, “Among women, there are some who prefer women, others who prefer men, others who prefer eunuchs, and yet others who like them all without distinction, and the same holds true with men's preferences for men, women, or eunuchs.” (820, VI). Acknowledging its variety, he confesses his hostility to homosexuality as an unnatural and shameful phenomenon. However, he lists two groups of advocates. The boys' advocates claim the availability of boys and the advantages of not being pregnant nor menstruated. Whereas the advocates of women refer to the shortness of time by which boys are attractive, until their beard grow out, while women remain attractive until their fifties. Argumentatively, Al Jahiz points to the fact that sex with boys is forbidden by Islamic laws, while with women is restricted to marriage. In other words, it is illicit with boys with or without marriage, whereas it is licit with women under the condition of marriage. In essence, the sanctions of Islamic laws are against all kinds of illicit love. In contrast to the sociable attitudes that are reflected in Arabic literature, where both licit and illicit love are equally culpable.

Here, what caught the attention is that same-sex desire has found its way into Arabic literature through the eighth century writers' expressions of homoerotic tendencies and male to male desires. Amid with hedonism and libertinism, homoerotic poetry continues to find favor in the court of the Rashid caliphs. Under the caliph Al-Mutawakil, an encouragement was offered to the *Muthannaths*, passive participants in male intercourses. The court's poets and writers, inspired by this bisexual encouragement, devoted their scandalous writings with titles such as *Lesbians and Passive Male Homosexuals*, *Rare Anecdotes about Eunuchs*, and *The Superiority of the Rectum over the Mouth*, to the notorious court as a sign of loyalty.

In his anthology of poetry, *The Book of the Flower*, Muhammed Ibn Dawud Al-Zahiri dealt with love poetry and proposed a theory of love portrayed in Arabic literature. He tackles both heterosexual and homosexual love affairs and tracks their progress as stereotypical acts. In his view, the dividing line between heterosexuality and homosexuality is depicted as thin, fluid and infiltrated. His idealizing view of love is assured by a statement transmitted by Prophet Mohammad, “The one who loves passionately but remains chaste, hides his love until death, then he dies a martyr.” (Mai Ghossoub, 2006, 185). Thereafter, entering paradise directly without judgment. In that, confessing licit love is allowed by Islamic laws, while hiding it is martyrdom. Several accounts of historicity referred to the fact that on his deathbed, dying from an immaculate passion for a boy named Ibn Jami, Ibn Dawud confessed his love to die peacefully.

Being occupied by Muslims, homoerotic poetry was as popular in Islamic Spain as in the Middle East. Homosexual verses were interestingly vivid in the literature of Al-Andalus, composed by Arabic-Spanish Muslims. In his treatise on love, *The Ring of the Dove*, the jurist Ibn Hazim proposed a love theory in which he depicted, in anthological form, his contemporaries' homosexual and heterosexual affairs. Although he condemned the sinful act of homosexual sodomy in his moralizing book, he offered a valuable picture of the erotic love of the Andalusian courts. Nevertheless, in his book, the human aspects of homosexual affections were written from the perspective of a devout Muslim. Although heavily affected by Plato's Phaedrus, the book provides a glimpse into Ibn Hazim's psychology, unrequited love and a certain sort of chaste were common themes.

This kind of love associated with sensuous and spiritual beauty led a respected scholar, Rumi, to experience sacred and ecstatic mystical feelings with a wandering dervish named Shams Al-Din Muhammad Al-Tabrizi. The two men fell in love until no one knew who the lover was and who the beloved. Although being married to women, Rumi and Al-Tabrizi merged in an intense mystic communion that inspired them to pour out their passionate souls in glorified poetry and mystical whirling dances of the spirits. Though it is queer, their strong love makes their souls fuse with each other. They became inseparable, Rumi, attributed his pure affection to Al-Tabrizi, wrote: "Why should I seek? I am the same as he. His essence speaks through me. I have been looking for myself." (Nevit Ergin, 2006). In elucidation, Rumi went to extraordinary and ill-fated efforts to legitimize Shams' presence in his life, and draws comparisons between his own love for Shams, with that of Layla and Majnun, and Joseph and Zulaikha, those star-crossed lovers in Arabic literature, which represent the highest form of romantic love. Deeply and profoundly, the greatest Sufi poets and mystics spoke of their union with God in overtly erotic and romantic language. In essence, in mystical traditions literature, metaphors of erotic love are often used to express the highest form of relationship between the soul and God.

As a matter of fact, with the Turkish dominance in the twelfth century, classical Arabic literature closes its final period. This closure resulted in a radical shift in the measurement of beauty, the svelte Turkish girls became the ideal love objects. The decreasing accumulations of homosexual literature, in the fifteenth century, were reflected in the literary systematization of the anthologies, resulted in producing regular beauty poetry, including Al-Nafzawi's *The Perfumed Garden*. To put it differently, pederastic writings were cut off and have become unacceptable among Arab society. Rather, it reaches to the extent that those who disclose it or defend it were to be killed.

In medieval literature, few homosexual references can be trailed since Arabic authors' attitude towards homosexuality condemned the unnecessary display of homosexuality in literature. Based on the meaning of the word *Adab*, which means an extreme state of morality, the accounts of *Adab* must not include immoral writings about this minor sexual act. However, homosexual references are best found in the

plays of both Ibn Daniyal and Al-Safadi. In his homoerotic play, *Al-Mutayyam*, the poet Ibn Daniyal mocks the regular romantic expression by proposing a touching affair between a homosexual-obsessed character and his Turkish slave, to whom he declaims sexual tasted poetry as away to express his homoerotic feelings before he passes out from intoxication. Moreover, in his *Al-Mutayyam wa Al-Yutayyim* (1310), Ibn Daniyal explicitly exposes an image of pederast attraction by an erotic man whose life is full of homosexual adventures, until final repentance and death. In the same fashion, in his well-composed romantic *Maqamat*, Al-Safadi narrates, in elegant rhymed prose, a tale of homoerotic love between an Arabic man and a young Turkish soldier which ends in a tantalizing ambiguity.

Composed in the same spirit, numerous debates over the following centuries echoed homoerotic themes have been forwarded. In elucidation, queer expressions remained vivid constants of Arabic literature into the twentieth century. Modern expressions of homoeroticism have been affected by the impacts of modernity. Although respectable Arabic societies are hostile to illicit love and embarrassed by its references in Arabic literature, many Arabic writers have broached the concept of homosexuality in their fiction. However, public morality has changed. Treating it as a psychological deficiency, modern Arabic writers depict the survival of homosexual attitude in recent literature. Contemporary Arabic writers whether supportive, opposing, or neutral towards homosexual themes, cannot fail to be assured of the fact that their writings will be scrutinized by the government and corrupting society. Censorship demands authors to respect public views and religious values.

In the Middle East today, sodomy is a capital offense and people are frequently executed for it. Being a male society, where the male has the power, Arabic male society shows no mercy for those trying to walk another path. Considering it as a symptom of an ill society, homosexual attraction is believed to be a consequence of a strange inclination. In Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, and Mauritania, sodomy is punishable by death. Among other Arab countries, the penalty in Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Tunisia and Syria is imprisonment up to 10 years. In Egypt, an old law against debauchery is often used. The problem with such laws, even if not vigorously enforced, is that they signal official disapproval of homosexuality and, coupled with the fulminations of religious scholars, legitimate discrimination by individuals at an everyday level and may also provide an excuse for action by vigilantes.

In Iraq, years before ISIS began throwing allegedly gay men off the top of buildings, the un-manly men were killed by injecting glue into the anus. These laws have a catastrophic effect on the lives of homosexuals. Leading them to intellectual isolation, homosexual people are deprived of merely expressing their emotional and spiritual feelings. This deprivation breaks and smashes the homosexual psyche into pieces which causes severe psychological destructions in the homoerotic personalities. The social cruelty, with which homosexuals are treated, is alluded to in Yahya Al-Tahir Abdulallah's *Raqasa Al-Mubaha (The Permitted Dance)*, (1981). A stigmatizing rural society, that does not

legitimize a homosexual act, catches a young boy being sodomized by another boy of his own age. Openly confronted with sexual deviation, the boys are savagely killed and expelled from the village as they disgraced and humiliated the whole village. Although the society can simply deal with this deviation with a suitable punishment, it adopts the harshest penalty which reflects its striking rejection.

Although the concept of homosexuality is not new in Arabic literature, it is seldom a central figure. In that, Arabic literature defends these tendencies, but the amalgamation of this emotional tendency with sexual orientation has sparked widespread controversy in society, creating a sense of rejection. Homosexual characters are presented in Arabic literature as secondary characters, as in Alaa Al-Aswany's *Yacoubian Building*, Khaled Khalifa's *There are no knives in the kitchens of this city*, and Hilal Shoman's *Limbo Beirut*. In other literary works, the gay character is attended as the main character but without talking about the homosexual details and sufferings.

If truth be told, the first vivid homosexual novel of modern Arabic literature is the Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz's *Zuqaq Al midaqq* 1947. The novelist placed his homoerotic character, *Al Ma'allem*, as a coffee-shop owner in a crowded district to depict an archetype of all the sorts of the inhabitants of this popular dwelling. The sixtyish boys-lover offers free tea for his male beloveds. To the knowledge of all the district, his wife decides to scandal him by accusing him of his homosexuality before a company of amused customers. Mahfouz concludes the novel, "... this is an old evil, that is called in English homosexuality, this not true love. True love is for the Prophet's Family." (p. 410), said by a local Sufi, Shaykh Al Darwish who draws the moral of the scene. It should not be mistaken that this view on homosexuality places Mahfouz on the same boat with the medieval mystical Sufis who claim the truthfulness of homosexual love if it is reserved for God, regardless of its nature. It should be noticed that the Arabic Sufi uses the English tongue in defining homosexuality which hints at the embarrassment of the Arabic man to pronounce it in the Arabic language, the language that stands mute when it comes to express homoeroticism.

Mahfouz continues to portray homosexuality in his writings. In his notable novel, *Al-Shukariyyah (Sugar Street)* published in 1957, Mahfouz depicts a homosexual experience from a young and handsome homoerotic boy's point of view. Being attracted by men, Radwan employs his female beauty to tempt an elderly Pasha to get what he wants. Being seduced, the boys-lover Pasha attempts to find a governmental job for Radwan, to be always in his sight. Soon after, Radwan becomes a prominent figure in the right-wing monarchist part. In *Sugar Street*, Mahfouz provides a panoramic archetype of the Egyptian youth in the 1950s. Preferring elderly Pasha allures the Arabic homosexual's only choice to practice his queer desire is by returning to the condemned world of the past Egyptian-Ottoman. This moral decline suggests that homosexuality is a remnant of the ancient regime. However, there is a lucid difference between the portrayal of homosexuality as evidence of moral decline and the type of homosexuality that is chosen as a means of

rebelling against the religiously restricted Arabic society. In essence, Mahfouz qualifies homosexuality to a moral illness and describes it as a sign of degeneration.

Worthy to be mentioned, Arabic authors try not to entail vividly homosexual intercourses in their writings. However, in his *Waqai harat Al Zafarani (Incidents in Zafarani Alley)*, Gamal Al Gitani depicts a sodomy relationship between a shy young boy named Samir and a worker named Aws, who works all night in Hamman Al Ahrar. Aws agreed to stay at hammam all night under conditions, "He was offered a position envied by many: he would become clean, eat meat every day, and be accommodated if he agreed to stay all night at the hammam. He would receive a monthly salary like civil servants, and what he would have to perform would be both easy and pleasant. Every night he would meet many respectable effendis, some of them occupying high ranks in society and deciding the destiny of people. Some of them were famous, appeared on television and were interviewed on the radio, which made their coming to the hammam highly secret. If he really pleased them, they might give him a nice baksheesh. Ewes accepted at once." (1975, p. 43). Therefore, we find Samir secretly enjoyed visiting the Hammam every night to be sodomized by Aws who can satisfy many boys in a row. Frequently this homosexual intercourse indicates a distinction between socially tolerable sexual acts and a mere amusement that is turned into losing an identity.

Arabic writers are inclined to denounce the religiously restricted society as a cause of homosexuality. They project homosexual encounters as a symptom of the social deterioration caused by political and economic oppression of the Arab citizens. The deprivation of feminine elements leads to the need for any type of sexual satisfaction which encourages the substitutive homosexual intercourses. In his notable book, *Al-Ayyam, (The Days)* especially in the third chapter, "A Consequence of the Absence of Women", the blind dean of Arabic literature, Taha Hussein views homosexuality as a consequence of the deprivation of femininity in Arabic society. Hussein (1927) claims, "Some followed the path of Jamil and Kuthayyir, and their fate was that of total deprivation, while the others favored Abu Nuwas's example; they were to suffer less deprivation and gain some measure of satisfaction." (p.301). In elucidation, the strict separation of men and women leads to turn the attention and the attraction to be felt for males. Hussein's non-judgmental attitude towards homosexuality depicts a sexual peculiarity and a manifestation of humanistic tolerance.

Among the finest studies of homosexual desire in Arabic literature is the Syrian playwright Saadallah Wanous' documentary play *Tuqus Al-Isharat wa Tahwwulat (Rites of Signs and Transformations)* published in 1997. Based on a story contained in the memoirs of Fakhri al-Baroudi, who is considered one of the most famous figures in the resistance against French colonialism in Syria. Al-Baroudi's historical story says that a dispute arose between the Mufti of al-Sham and the captain of al-Ashraf during the period of the Ottoman ruler Rashid Pasha, but the mufti overcame his personal problems with the captain and intervened to help him after the gendarmerie commander caught him in a homosexual situation with his male mistress. However,

Wanous does not mean in his play public figures, rather he stresses that the characters' desires represent humans' desires that may befall them. The magic touch in the play appears when the various completely opposite ways converge into one goal. It is affirmed that the truth has many paths and that every human being has a sublime essence that can only be reached through experience.

In her meta-referential homoerotic novel *Sayyidi wa-Habibi*, Huda Barakat links homosexuality to the continuum of male homosocial desire. In that, she recovers those confused and contradictory feelings that surround a homoerotic person while he lives his life without equivocation. She suggests that in the crowd of emotions float some confessions that reveal the hidden world that is located at the bottom of the soul, which no one whoever dares to reveal. The novel begins with the protagonist's affectionate talk about his infatuation with another man who, according to him, turned into a beloved. Confessing his love for his male beloved, says he "I loved him with unspeakable love. Not because I cannot describe well or because I am unable to speak and elaborate on it when it comes to me, inside me and my feelings, but because that love remains mysterious." (2004, p. 34). Leaving the margin open to the sexual overtones results in a semi-mystical confession that cannot be concealed, he continues "... when I think of him and remember his beautiful face, I feel overjoyed. I feel so grateful that God put him on my way when I was disappointed." (2004, 61). The man who is meant by this passionate love is the new manager of the company in which the protagonist, Wadih, works, after he escaped from the brutal Lebanon war and after the death of the previous manager. Barakat concludes by disrupting the normative distribution of center and margin and suggests a way out of the epistemic closure imposed on homosexuality.

In the same fashion, Alaa al-Aswani's develops a constructionist example of the same closure in his novel *Imarat Ya'qubyan*. He sheds light on the successive changes that occurred in the thought and behavior of the Egyptian society in the post-openness period through realistic models that live among them the aristocratic man Hatem Rashid, who belongs to an aristocratic family and occupies a prominent position among the elite of the pressmen that made him the head of a French-language newspaper. However, Rashid suffers from a psychological complex from a young age that makes him a person looking for his lost soul when he reaches the stage of manhood. Passing through internal psychological conflicts, a sense of guilt arose in him which encourages the appearance of sexual deviations and homosexual desires towards men, which kept growing until it became an urgent need. Although being an urgent psychological need, Rashid avoids confessing his homosexual desire to eschewal being criticized by a strictly restricted homophobic society. Reflecting a sense of powerlessness and alienation, Rashid's loss of manhood and self is underscored and confirmed. Al-Aswani points to the fact that homosexuality in Arabic literature is explained through a narrative of abnormal development that circumscribes its diffuse potential, because of the restrictions Arabic society imposes on both its culture and literature.

However, a recent Egyptian writer has finally succeeded in getting a way out of this restricted social closure. In his homosexual-lucid novel, *In The Spider's Room*, Mohammad Abdul Nabi, investigates the world of homosexuality and depicts the lives of homosexuals in Egyptian Islamic society. Abdul Nabi has dealt with homosexuality with tact, elegance and sober language that tends to be psychoanalytic rather than engaging in vulgar scenes. What distinguishes *In The Spider's Room*, the fact that its mere function is to tell about the sufferings, dreams, breaks of a gay Muslim character and the way in which he interacts with his surroundings. Al Nabi narrates the series of "Queen Pot" incident that took place in 2001, "...which lasted for a few days from early May, and the peak scene was at the dawn of Friday, May 11, 2001...It was named Queen Pot or the Queen Nariman boat." (2017, p.93). In this incident, the Egyptian authorities arrested fifty-two homosexuals for practicing debauchery and brought them to trial in a case that caused much controversy. "Two or three days after my friend and I were arrested near Tahrir Square, when the police of ethics stormed an indigo boat that was said to welcome homosexuals to watch every Thursday." (2017, p.173). Despite the sensitivity of the topic, Abdul Nabi succeeds to deal with his characters literary and realistically, relies on the deteriorating psychological state of his hero Hani Mahfouz, who is one of those homosexual men who were arrested, accompanied by his male beloved, Abdel Aziz, whose family's powerful lawyer can take him out of the prison, while Hani remains imprisoned by pending investigation.

The novel attempts to highlight various models of homosexual couples and to break the stereotype embedded in people's awareness. To put it differently, Hani tells the stories of everyone he knew, from friends and acquaintances to people who had rapid sexual intercourses with them. He refers to the diversity of homosexual personalities, ideas, attitudes and ways of life. However, what collects the homosexuals all in one incident is the society's rejection of their sexual life. This social rejection is reflected in their actions. In other ways, their reactions take different forms, including retirement, rebellion, and suicide. Hani tries to write all his sufferings, his previous and subsequent life after he was acquitted in court, as he leaves prison unable to speak. Starting with his memories of his grandfather, family, and childhood, through his first experience of true love and his first sexual intercourse, says he, "It is a journey that does not follow a straight line, as much as it takes it in many directions, as if it is a spider web spinning it with one thread, which is his lost voice, a thread that extends from himself to others, from his present to his past, and from childish illusions of love to the nightmare of cruelty and mischief." (2017, p. 320)

However, he attacks the social conventions that oblige him to marry a woman even though he has nothing to do with women, ending in having a child under the pressure of his mother. Hani, the protagonist, finds in writing a way to reveal bitter things he had not even said to himself, a way to spread his anxiety and torments, and to make the world know and realize the sufferings of homosexuals, and perhaps a way for him to get to know himself. Hani writes all this, imposing an optional solitude, in which only a small spider can share. He wrote, "...my only friend appeared, my little

black spider that I met on the day I got out of Prison in this same room a few weeks ago, he started climbing my fingers simply and lovingly and without fear, as if he was stopping my hand and trying to stop me, and whispering to me to calm down and think again. His frail home may not be lost.” (2017, p. 344). In essence, these soliloquies are depicted as means that are utilized to reach a state of self-discovery and to convey human’s loneliness and his stifling feeling of injustice and pain. Speaking to a spider hints at the choosing of the novel’s title. To elucidate, the title is controversial as it perfectly suits the novel as far as the spider is isolated as the protagonist is. While the word *Room* suggests a private romance. In a nutshell, Abdul Nabi’s *In The Spider’s Room* is considered one of the novels that break the barrier of fear of delving into this issue that was prevalent in Arab literature, as it removes the concealment of homosexual desires and refers to the inclinations between male to male sex directly.

On the other hand, female homosexuality remains locked into tradition as being obscene that cannot even be mentioned. As Sahar Amer points to the fact that, “The Arabic writings that have survived focus on men much more than women; they remain for the most part phallogocentric and ultimately reflect a male perspective.” (2009, p. 221). This negation-silence through ages in relation to same-sex female eroticism introduces a small fissure in the Arabic female bisexual canon. In fact, Arabic literature is subjected to strict social censorship. Such condemnation identifies what can be said and what cannot. Besides this social restriction, Arabic women authors enclose themselves with self-censorship, they prefer not to mention sex at all, let alone queer sex.

Definitely, in a society still governed by customs and traditions, there is a suppression on the presentation of diverse ideas, and the radical thoughts are strikingly confined. Inspired by true events, the bold novel *ISIS: A Love Story*, by pseudonymous Abu Salam who attempts to conceal his real name, fearing the public intellectual restrictions that may prevent him from revealing the courageous ideas he carried, narrates real-life details of ISIS’s Civil War into a homosexual romance between two of its warriors. Its author tells what it is hard to imagine, unexpected queer romance takes place on a fearful battlefield. The burning diesel and the smell of gunfire provides a paradoxical background to an erotic romance between two combatants within the ranks of ISIS. Majnun and Ali, best friends, secret lovers and soldiers fight for ISIS in Syria. As the booms boom and death hovers upon them as does their battlefield romance. Passion and tensions swell and turns Majnun and Ali from Salafi Mujahideens to gay lovers. The homosexual scene begins when one of them is injured during the battle, and a queer interaction develops between them in the desert. Depicted from the inside looking around, the story provides unparallel view of ISIS which excoriates the absolutism of the black flag and turns it into shades of grey.

Through their eyes, ISIS is depicted as unrelenting violent and unforgiving of homosexuality, punishing gays with death. Forced to confront their conflicting identities, Majnun and Ali decide to free themselves of their impossible love by

agreeing to meet in heaven. Despite all the taboo surrounding the story, Abu Salam did not hesitate to draw sexual scenes between the two men, wrote he, “Ali’s joy sprang forth as a kiss onto Majnun’s lips. He lingered for a moment, enjoying the life in his companion. Then, rolling his body off, Ali rocked a full magazine into his rifle. Under pressure, he rose- spraying fire at his foe. Adrenaline and amphetamine steadied his muscles”. (2016, p. 87). Therefore, Abu Salam lays the foundations for a new literary genre, the “pornographic jihad”. In summary, the fulfillment of the bodily needs can lead to true affections; the author provides a message of the possibility of true affection. By revealing the passion that fills them, the futility of the violence that drives the.

Linking the image of the “Islamic State” with homosexual love is not intended to ridicule the jihadists but rather to remind the world that ISIS is consisting of human beings and that many of them have joined the extremist group ISIS to achieve their goals and to live happily, which seems impossible in their country. Humanizing the soldiers of ISIL, Abu Salaam says in an email, “As much as some people may hate to admit, ISIS isn’t composed of monsters. They are human just like you, or I. In all likelihood, members of ISIS didn’t grow up wanting to be part of a homicidal Jihadi death cult. They were kids with hopes and dreams, and they went astray.” Isolating homosexual couples as being mentally retarded and up-normal creatures without realizing that they could practice a normal life through the formation of families, led them to avenge their societies to regain their rights and to live like the rest of the people.

Up so far, queer theory has been always associated with sex and desire, but until recently it has turned to say something about love. In the standard narrative of romance, the concept of love has been concealed and kept to be deeply embedded at the heart of normal life, in the conventional social structures of the home that is based on normal marriage. In essence, love is meant to maintain the acceptability of the familiar norms of congenial life imbued with an expression of intrinsic normality. Slipping outside of normal perception and assumption, the uncanny feeling has nothing to do with normal love since it ends in no socially standard marriage. In contrast, homosexual love is easily stigmatized as kinky sex. Recently, many campaigns were organized to help homosexual people recover and pass through this illness safely. Homosexual supporters have found these campaigns to be based on unscientific theories. They believe these campaigns are meant to torture since their recovery act leads to isolation, homelessness, depression, and suicide. Historically, governments go after the most vulnerable segment of society and in this case, the homosexual community which is the most misunderstood and therefore becomes a target for persecution. Boldly and directly, Homosexuality is not a disease; therefore the term therapy is distracted and misleading.

Hopefully, the values attached to homosexuality have been evolved since the confrontation with the Western values. This shift is inevitable and suggests a meeting between two different cultures. New moral trends have taken shapes in the new millennial era. This modern morality allows for a wider spectrum of male desire. Therefore, popular

presentations of homosexuality are depicted with no harm to the new social norms. In that, the sexual deviation is easily verified as a psychological deviation and comes to be normalized. To some extent, the new society offers a space of freedom to practice one's own standards since he cannot conform to normal social standards. As has been emphasized, the current tendency of Modern Arabic literature promotes a cultural understanding that will redefine and reform traditional values of the Arab-Islamic identity, which is traditionally defined with rigid sexual ethics that strikingly condemned homosexuality. However, this redefinition of homosexuality cannot be completed without a better knowledge about the complexity of human sexuality and culture. Doubting and questioning the old social norms are the first signs of building new standards that include the most obscure part of human desires.

3. Conclusion

Whether considered from a medical, psychological, or literary viewpoint, homosexuality is never a matter of derogatory laughter and degradation. Contemporary Arabic authors have engaged the topic by overlooking the biological aspect of homosexual desires far from customs, traditions, and religion and have found that these desires are innate tendencies formed in the human body before birth. In that, homosexuality is a feeling that is intrinsically constructed deep in the human psyche; therefore, it is not a choice that is to be chosen or a thought that it is to be adopted through days. Being biologically constructed, more attention should be given to the biological essence of the sexual differentiation, to the bodily needs rather than to the gender compatibility. Since the biggest and foremost aim of literature is to preach, the sexual deviation must take its own space in literature. In that, literature on bisexuality must be taken into consideration.

Although bisexual Arabic literature has witnessed an acceptance of integration into modern society as opposed to its segregation in the past, it is still bound to binary social structure. In that, it allows a quasi-presentation of homosexual texts while prevents the full presentation of the homosexual act. This novel binary structure sets the basis for an aesthetic development in the literary canon of homosexual writings. However, Arabic Literature helps in displaying stock-type representations of homosexuality in Islamic societies. In elucidation, it does not fail in representing one of the most intimate elements of the human life, a human's relationship with his body which illustrates his needs, since the needs of the body might reveal the needs of the heart. Therefore, same-sex attraction is not a mere sexual phenomenon; rather it is expected to be associated with love, passion, or a desire for submission. Worthy to be mentioned, illicit sexual intercourse, between two persons not united by marriage, is forbidden, whether it is heterosexual or homosexual relations. Therefore, the main concern is not who acts but how to act. As for spiritual and emotional communication, a difference between emotional tendencies and sexual orientation should be fully realized.

Accordingly, homosexual couples can enjoy healthy spiritual and emotional relationships. Since homosexuality and heterosexuality is six of one and half a dozen of the

other, it is wrong to accept illicit relationships between different genders and reject pure feelings and respectful tendencies between the same genders. As a closing statement, homosexuality should not be considered as a queer, uncanny, and unfamiliar behavior while heterosexuality as a familiar and acceptable attitude. Naturally not everything that is unfamiliar is weird and frightening. Therefore, pure and adulterated feelings, whether homosexual or heterosexual, should be distinguished and treated with suitable criticisms and analyses. All things considered, humankind, with different skin colors, religions, nationalities, genders and needs, have the right to live peacefully without fearing the risk and the possible consequences of their behaviors.

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