

matter to be distasteful but unimportant. In discussions with Johann Franz van der Lepe, who represented Hamburg and other northern European constituencies in Madrid, Grimaldi declared: "I deeply deplore their lechery and his scandalous behavior with that loose woman, but she has committed no crime other than to be a debauchee, in a word, a whore" (123). It seems that in the diplomatic world of eighteenth-century Europe, sex did not merit the kind of official attention that it would soon get in the bourgeois era.

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Desiring Arabs. By JOSEPH A. MASSAD. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. Pp. 472. \$35.00 (cloth); \$22.50 (paper).

Joseph Massad's valuable study, *Desiring Arabs*, examines writings on sex and sexuality by Arab intelligentsia from the end of the nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century. Massad is interested in how these literati have responded to Orientalist accounts of putatively Muslim and Arab sexual mores and practices over time. *Desiring Arabs* also challenges universalizing sexual identity and sexual rights discourses in the Arab world. Massad contends that western accounts since the nineteenth century have invested sexual subjectivities and practices with cultural and civilizational value along an evolutionary schema within larger colonial and imperialist contexts that constitute the West as advanced and modernized and the East as backward and undeveloped.

Chapter 1, "Anxiety in Civilization," argues that Arab nationalist writings and debates from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were concerned with cultural revival and modernization in response to colonialism and imperialism. They often harked back to putatively golden Arab and Muslim pasts but produced revisions, repressions, and narrations of these pasts that served the ideological and cultural purposes of different authors. Such selective readings were especially likely when modernists engaged with evidence of polymorphous sexual values and practices between men and boys in medieval literature. Massad argues that readings of the lives and works of eighth-century poets such as Abu Nuwas, for example, were developed in response to an Orientalist discourse that legitimated European colonial and imperial projects on the basis of civilizational superiority in the realms of sexuality, gender, and family. Many Arab nationalist writers, Massad contends, reversed these generalizations, instead condemning the backwardness of European sexual, gender, and family mores and practices, although other writers were less moralistic and essentializing in their characterizations. Massad shows how these Arab responses changed over time and were "informed by the political conditions within which they were expressed" (98).

Chapter 2, “Remembrances of Desires Past,” focuses on twentieth-century philosophers, literary scholars, and social scientists, showing how these modernizers also recalled a medieval Arab and Islamic golden period in producing sexual histories of Arab civilization and in making a case for changes in the present, again informed by their differing ideologies and locations. These authors wrote in often repressive postcolonial national settings. Many were concerned to define the “authentically” Arab or Islamic with respect to sexuality, pleasure, love, and women’s status. Again, these were selective readings of the past to serve twentieth-century agendas. Some of the modernist authors attributed women’s loss of power to non-Arabs, sometimes Ottomans, sometimes Persians. Sexual and national purity were linked by some of these nationalist writers—whether secular and Islamist—“who sought to expel foreign elements in the process of cleansing the past, thus setting the stage for the expulsion of all contemporary foreign elements in order to cleanse the present” (122).

Chapter 3, “Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World,” is a slightly modified version of an article published by Massad in 2002. In a 2005 article, I mildly criticized this essay for not acknowledging the possibility of indigenous nonnormative or “queer” Arab sexual subjectivities and identities. In the essay, Massad only recognizes such subjectivities and identities in comprador terms, that is, as belonging to “outsider within” figures who ultimately damaged authentic sexualities by facilitating colonial and imperial projects and repression.¹ My contention remains that Massad does not acknowledge the possibility of plural sexual subjectivities that may or may not rely on bounded sexual object choice and that may or may not include visibility and identity components. I nevertheless agree with Massad’s argument that the dominant representations of nonnormative sexual subjectivities and practices in the Arab world by largely white, gay, and male US and western European activists, tourist guide writers, scholars, and journalists rely on “antihistoricism” (167) and universalizing approaches. Massad calls these advocates and purveyors the “Gay International,” arguing that they often reproduce the Orientalist “missionary” impulses in their human rights discourses. Massad argues that bounded sexual object choice and a universalist identity on the basis of gayness is the goal of the Gay International, which is willing to impose it if necessary, a form of “epistemic, ethical, and political violence” (41) in the name of “freedom” or “progress” (42). He contends that the Gay International “produces homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they

¹ Joseph A. Massad, “Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 361–85; Frances S. Hasso, “Problems and Promise in Middle East and North Africa Gender Research,” *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 3 (2005): 653–78. In *Desiring Arabs*, Massad calls my critique a “facile and naive misunderstanding” (187n101), although he does not substantively engage my point.

do not exist, and represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology” (163). Such discourse reproduces the classic civilizational epistemology of colonial and imperial projects that posits the West as best and the rest as backward, seeking to define and thus stabilize for the purposes of assimilation what could be termed the queer in classic Butlerian terms (although Massad does not term it so). Massad argues that anticolonial nationalists and Islamists are correct in perceiving such campaigns “as part of Western encroachment on Arab and Muslim cultures” (175). Indeed, Massad argues that these western campaigns have incited sexual repression, including the criminalization of homosexual sociality, by Arab states and conservative pundits in the region.

Chapter 4, “Sin, Crimes, and Disease: Taxonomies of Desires Present,” reviews the explosion of Arabic literature largely since the 1980s on erotica, love, sex, and “deviance.” This literature relies on religious, psychological, and medical approaches and sometimes once again returns to the Arab medieval period to make its contemporary case regarding private morality and public health. Massad argues that the Gay International and the AIDS epidemic “are the main forces behind the emergence of this new discourse” (192), although he does not present convincing evidence regarding these putatively omnipotent western gays and their organizations, whom he views as even setting the agendas of “UN and other international conferences” (264). Massad similarly and confusingly attributes the rise of sexual criminalization campaigns in Arab countries to the AIDS epidemic, the Gay International, and the emergence of criminology discourse. Like earlier nationalist accounts that posited Persians or Ottomans as the source of “sexual licentiousness” and decadence, the newer Arab and Muslim sexual chauvinisms contend that westerners, the purveyors of imperialistic economic and political policies, are also the sources of modern “deviance” (194). Sex and gender continue to be connected to civilizational battles, but in the contemporary period, “debauchery” is now understood as presenting obstacles to advancement and leading to cultural and social death. For the Gay International, gay rights and acceptance of a gay identity become signs of advancement, whereas for Islamists, the solution and cure for all deviating desires is a return to Islamic morality and practices. Both positions characterize “sexual mores and practices . . . as the privileged sites for the elaboration of civilizational differences” (223). Here Massad asserts another parallel: Islamist approaches to sexuality echo “Western Christian fundamentalism” in its cultural critiques without acknowledging this similarity, just as the Gay International refuses to associate sexually repressive tendencies with the West.

Chapter 5, “Deviant Fictions,” examines a selection of twentieth-century Arabic novels, novellas, and poetry written “before the rise of Islamism and the Gay International” (335) for their deployment of sexual allegories and narrations of social and sexual histories of desire. Massad argues that these texts are “nothing short of literary attempts to produce and repress,

not merely to represent, the modern Arab subject” (271) and that their pedagogical messages proliferate widely in film and other forms that reach beyond the literate classes. He argues that earlier forms of literature only condemned the “publicity of . . . private intimate practices, . . . not the practices themselves” (276). Over time, some of this literature began to constitute sexual nonnormativity as illness rather than simple deviance, which Massad argues is related to the increasing entrenchment of “the medical model of homosexuality” (287). More generally, the twentieth-century Arab literature examined by Massad increasingly renarrates past and present sexualities in heteronormalizing or naturalizing terms. Since the 1970s, the figure of the “passive homosexual” comes to be “the most important element connected to national decline” (314) and is repeatedly used in Arab literature, Massad contends, “as a symbol of political and national defeat, in addition to its literal reference as a defeat of manhood itself” (333).

Chapter 6, “The Truth of Fictional Desires,” contends that in Arab literature produced since the 1980s, “sexual desire and ‘deviant’ practices” become signs not only of civilizational status and social degeneration but also of “liberal individual rights.” This shift, Massad argues, “coincide[s] with the rise of the Gay International and the Islamist movement (AIDS remained absent from fiction entirely), as well as the advent of globalization” (335). Some of this literature views sexuality in “identitarian” terms rather than simply as practices, mimicking “Western ‘civilized’ values” (339). This chapter revisits a continuous and problematic theme in *Desiring Arabs*: “Religious—or state sanctioned extermination” (370)—of sexual nonnormativity is caused by the will to visibility (“coming out”) and incitement to discourse, identity politics, and the “sexual rights agenda” of especially “upper- and middle-class Westernized [Arab] men” and their largely secular counterparts in the intelligentsia who have internalized “facile Western notions of liberation” (375). These dynamics are in turn blamed on the Gay International.

Desiring Arabs would be more persuasive if it were less parsimonious in its engagement with relevant feminist scholarship informed by postcolonial, queer, and critical race, class, and gender theories. Such scholarship, which exists in dialectical relations to activism, does not consider sexuality or gender to be superordinate axes of identity and positionality but rather insists that gendered and sexual subjectivities and positionalities are imbricated with economic, racial, colonial, class, cultural, and other contexts. It includes vital debates regarding the double-edged nature of identity politics based on clearly bounded categories and rights-based claims. It recognizes that epistemological policing inevitably accompanies identity and rights projects, even as these provide certain freedoms. Moreover, this scholarship acknowledges a range of postcolonial dilemmas, the most crucial of which is how to respond to the often destructive combination of economic inequalities, western imperialism, and repressive postcolonial nation-states. All projects and subjectivities are “compromised,” to use Massad’s term (418), by these realities, and none exist

outside of them. Critical feminist scholarship has challenged western cultural projects, especially those based on gender and sexuality, as ultimately serving the political and other interests of western states and funders. In comparison to hegemonic gay and feminist international activism, transnational activism informed by such critical approaches has been more self-reflexive and mindful of relations of power across class, racial-ethnic, cultural, and other divides within and across countries and cognizant of “rights” discourses and projects as multiply and strategically deployed. Activism and scholarship informed by these approaches engages ironically with the politics of visibility and the closet, disputes unitary definitions of freedom and subordination, and challenges western modes of human subjectivity.

Massad is correct in his contention that internationally hegemonic gay organizations are dominated by white and well-off men and rely on funding sources and organizational structures that are ethnocentric and imperialistic in cultural, economic, and political terms. Rights are often fetishized and campaigns to save others become mechanisms through which a range of violent and subordinating projects are legitimated. More complex engagements acknowledge the impossibility of “similarity” on one dimension (whether womanness, for example, or sexual nonnormativity) in overcoming other differences and inequalities as well as the messiness, contradictions, and paradoxes of solidarity across difference. While material inequalities can never be overridden, more useful interventions fracture binaries of East-West, authentic-inauthentic, backward-advanced, and practice-identity. Massad unfortunately does not provide such an intervention but rather constitutes what can be termed a preservationist nativist discourse that seems intent on elision of the wrinkles, dynamism, and pluralism characteristic of Arab histories and presents even as he gestures toward these complexities in his evidence. Nevertheless, *Desiring Arabs* is a significant and compelling contribution to the scholarship on modern Arab literature and thought, especially as these engage with sex and sexuality, and should be widely read. There is much of value in the book and more for others to say.

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From Marriage to the Market: The Transformation of Women's Lives and Work. By SUSAN THISTLE. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. Pp. 311. \$55.00 (cloth); \$21.95 (paper).

Thistle is to be commended for undertaking such a large-scale interdisciplinary study of the changes white and African American women experienced with regard to unpaid domestic and paid labor in the twentieth century. Her work is a synthesis of a great deal of secondary sources combined with a primary analysis of the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series. The