Navigating Queer Possibilities:

An ethnographic study of the everyday lives of queer men in Amman, Jordan

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of how young men with same-sex desires experience and navigate everyday life in the capital of Jordan, Amman. The study draws on ethnographic data collected through participant observation from a six-month field study in Amman. Since instating the 1951 Criminal Code, sexual relations between persons of the same sex have not been criminalized in Jordan. However, people with non-heteronormative sexualities are still highly marginalized in Jordanian society today. I am interested in how queer men in Amman may be affected by a state and dominant public discourse that condemns the existence of non-heteronormative sexualities as reprehensible. My interlocutors either have difficult or non-existent relationships with their parents as a result of making their non-heteronormative sexuality known to them. Drawing on Suad Joseph's theories about family and family relations in Arab-majority societies, I seek to understand how my interlocutors experience an insecure, ambiguous social, cultural, and political environment, when the protection kinship loyalties entail has been forfeited. As I explore how the queer men I met create safe spaces and negotiate meaningful connections among themselves, I argue that the experience of marginalized queer citizens in Amman may also bring forth new possibilities. Little anthropological research has been written with a focus on non-heteronormative sexualities in Jordan. I hope that by presenting the ethnography in this thesis, I may provide the young men I met with a voice that can contribute to an enhanced understanding of how queer young men experience everyday life in Amman.

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The process of writing this thesis has been challenging, informative, emotional, and rewarding. I wish to use this space to express my appreciation and gratitude to all of the helpful people who have left their mark on this thesis, from start to finish.
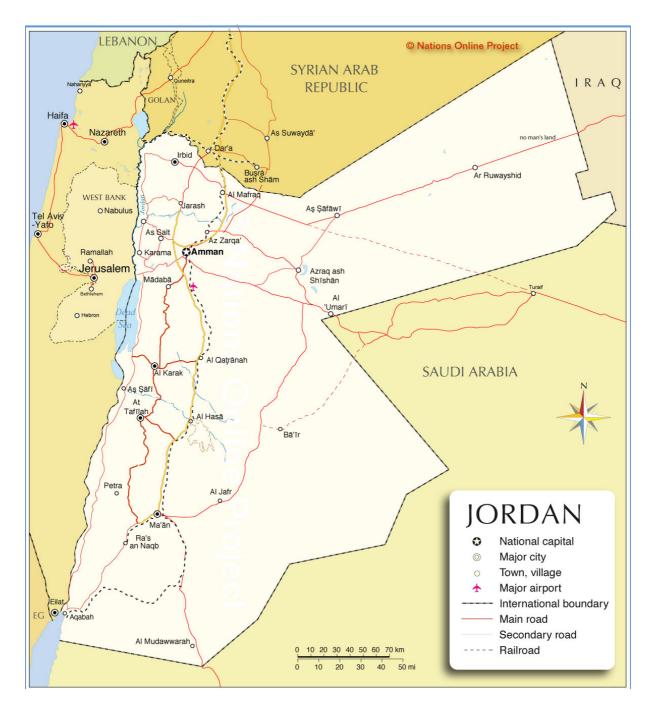
First and foremost, I wish to thank all of my friends in Jordan, many of whom are represented as interlocutors in this thesis. Thank you for letting me be a part of your lives, for opening up to me, and for trusting me. I admire your immense strength and your courage. You all made my time in Jordan one of the most treasured times of my life. Thank you for making this thesis possible. I am eternally grateful for all of our time together, and I look forward to more in the future.

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Map of Jordan (Nations Online Project)

PROLOGUE

It was a Tuesday like any other Tuesday in Amman. I was standing on the balcony I shared with my roommate, Jennie, and the sun felt burning on my face. Ten minutes later, my friend Fouad was coming to pick me up and drive me to my first meeting with a queer Jordanian man, a man who would later become a close friend. I was nervous, and wanting to make a good impression I had put some extra effort into my appearance this early afternoon. I had no previous experience with anthropological fieldwork and was unsure how to prepare. I brought my notebook and an open mind, hoping that would be enough for this first meeting. We were meeting Zaid at the bar where he worked at three o'clock. He had told us this was a good time to talk because there were rarely any customers at this time. Fouad had met Zaid at a party the previous week and told him about my research. I met Fouad about four months earlier while I was studying Arabic and felt comfortable telling him that I was interested in learning more about how non-heteronormative men experience everyday life in Amman. Zaid had been open about his sexuality to his family and friends for a while, and to my great excitement, he had told Fouad that he wanted to meet me.

The bar where Zaid worked was a fifteen-minute drive from my apartment, and Fouad skillfully navigated us through the chaotic Amman traffic. He parked at a gas station close to the bar where we were meeting Zaid, and we got out of the car. At the top of a two-story building was an intimate, dimly lit bar with no customers. Zaid had been right when suggesting that this was a good time to talk without being overheard. I walked over to the bar counter and took a seat at one of the tall stools in front of it. When Zaid walked in, there was no doubt that this was the young man I was here to meet. He was tall, and his thick, dark hair was slightly ruffled. He walked towards me with a broad smile. "Are you Alex?", I barely managed to confirm and tell him I was grateful that he wanted to meet before he gave me a big hug and continued to talk. "Oh my god, I am so excited that you are here! Fouad told me about you, I want to tell you everything. What do you want to know? Ask me anything. I want to take you to all the good bars, you know, I know about all of the best places to be. I feel like we are friends already". I was impressed with how many words he was able to say before having to take a breath. A little overwhelmed by his kindness and eagerness to help with my research, I took a sip of my water. I told him about my project, and after making sure that he understood my purpose for being there and that he still wanted to contribute, I asked if he could tell me a little about himself.

For three hours we sat talking about anything and everything. Zaid told me about his friends, his family, and his childhood. He told me about regular customers at the bar, his boss, what he liked to do when he did not work, and his dating life. By the time three hours had passed, it was like he was a close friend whom I had known for a long time. As guests started to arrive we ended our conversation, and Zaid had to start working. We hugged goodbye, exchanged phone numbers, and I promised that I would text him the next day. When I walked down the stairs and back onto the noisy street outside I no longer felt nervous.

Chapter One: Introduction

"Any general description and contextualization of Jordan as a single country or a single society should be understood by stressing that everyday life experiences are never fully covered by generalizing statements about 'a people', ideology, religion or form of governance" (Odgaard 2021: 191)

I arrived in Amman for the first time in the late evening of January 18, 2021. Because of the restrictions following the covid-19 pandemic, this was my first flight in over a year and I was quite tired when I sat in the backseat of a taxi on my way to my new apartment. A girl I had met the previous year at the university in Norway had moved to Amman the preceding September so I was set to move in with her. This felt comforting as I was now moving to a country, in a region I had no previous experience with. Our apartment was located close to the University of Amman in an area called al-Jubeiha*,* about a 20-minute drive from the city center. Here, we lived together through the following five months, as I attended an Arabic language course in preparation for my fieldwork the succeeding fall. Jordan had implemented quite a few covid restrictions in the spring of 2021, including a curfew that forced everyone to stay inside between 7pm and 6am, and every Friday. Luckily, my roommate Jennie had already lived in Amman for a few months and learned some tricks, which meant we still got to explore much of what Jordan had to offer in these first months. I learned to love Jordan like a home away from home. When I returned that same August, after a short break from the Jordanian summer heat in Norway, the sound of the mosque's *azan*, or morning prayer, felt familiar, safe, and calming. I was ready to start my first anthropological fieldwork.

Methodological Considerations

In the latter part of 2021, I conducted my first anthropological fieldwork in the capital of Jordan, Amman. In my initial project proposal, I set out to explore what relationship queer, Jordanian men had with religion. As I started my fieldwork I quickly realized that religious affiliation or piety was not something most of my interlocutors cared much about. While Islam does affect them through the Jordanian societal structure, as well as legislation and public discourse, most of them did not have, or no longer had, a personal relationship with religion. I therefore had to shift my curiosity and the ethnographic focus and this thesis is a result of a more general interest

in how these queer men navigate and experience their everyday lives. Through countless hangouts, I got some insights in what their interests were, how they dealt with struggles, what troubled and what excited them. I got to listen as they recollected heartbreaking experiences and had the privilege of observing some of their joyous moments among friends. That being said, I wish to emphasize that although this thesis presents some of the hardships my interlocutors endure, I hope that I have successfully conveyed that this is not the whole picture. While some aspects of my interlocutors' lives are affected by profound difficulty, they also experience loving relationships, care, affection, laughter, and joy in other areas of their lives.

My main method of collecting data while in the field was participant observation. Following Karen O'Reilly (2012) who draws on Margarethe Kusenbach (2003), I used the "go-along" method, which entailed following my interlocutors through their everyday activities. For me, this meant hanging out at their work during slow hours, some walks around the city, and many hours spent at different bars around Amman where they met up with friends. This method of "go-alongs" made our interactions feel natural, while I at the same time got to experience my interlocutors in different environments. The "go-along" method's focus on space and place is also highlighted by O'Reilly as she states it "is a good way to get people to do and to talk. Such methods encourage a focus on space and place as opposed to a chronological interpretation of events, it emphasizes context and sensoriality, by placing researchers in the mobile habitats of their informants" (O'Reilly 2012: 99). As O'Reilly describes, through the "go-along" method I was able to observe and interact with my interlocutors in spaces and situations they navigated in their everyday lives. Another method I ended up using was the collection of life stories. While I did not initially set out to collect life stories, these became a large part of my ethnographic material. As Juliet du Boulay and Rory Williams (1984) point out, the collection of life stories can also provide some methodological issues that need assessment. Life stories are a product of our interlocutors' memory, it is affected by how they convey the stories, possible language differences, as well as our interlocutors' relationship with and trust in the anthropologist (du Boulay and Williams 1984: 256). The life stories in my ethnographic material have been told to me on my interlocutors' initiative, and while they are a product of my interlocutors' memories, I regard them as highly valuable. Both because knowing about some of their experiences before they met me has been important to better understand their situations and choices during our time together, and because *what* they remember and choose to share also has analytical value in that it points to what might be important to them since it stands out in their memories.

O'Reilly (2012) notes that as ethnographers we move into people's lives, observe them, ask questions, analyze them, and write about them. The personally invasive nature of anthropological methods raises quite a few ethical questions. O'Reilly argues that while some scholars consider this method of research to be inherently unethical, one should not stop doing research because of ethical dilemmas, but rather work to become more conscious, reflexive, and informed (O'Reilly 2012: 62-63). In my case, as is quite common in anthropology, the interlocutors represented through this thesis exist as a marginalized part of their society making it all the more critical to be attentive and respectful when providing an analytical representation of their lived experiences. Talal Asad points to the anthropologist as a cultural translator and highlights the privilege and responsibility that follows this role (Asad 1986: 148). He calls attention to the importance of engaging in meaningful dialog with interlocutors in addition to contextualizing one's observations in order to retell our interlocutors' experiences as accurately as possible. As anthropologists, we are *re*presenting the perceived realities of our interlocutors, meaning the ethnography we write is a *re*telling of *our* interpretation of a given situation. It is necessary to recognize the temporality of our observations as we are interpreting a reality that started before we arrived and will continue when we are gone (Kurotani 2004: 211). Taking all this into account I have throughout this thesis strived to represent my interlocutors as accurately, just, and honest as possible.

Interlocutors

Most of my interlocutors were young, middle-class men who identified as "gay"[1] in ages ranging from 21-34. Jordan is the home of a substantial number of Palestinian people, as well as housing a considerable amount of immigrants and refugees from among others Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Egypt, however, most of my interlocutors are of Jordanian descent. The first two interlocutors I met were introduced to me by one of the friends I had made while studying the Arabic language in the months preceding this fieldwork. Because of the precarious social position queer people have in Jordan, I think the fact that I was able to spend five months in Jordan before this fieldwork started became beneficial, considering my ability to gain access to the lives of these queer men. I was able to make connections and get to know people before I let them know the nature of my research. One of my friends became particularly important for my access to the field because one of his employees had previously worked at Café Noir, a bar known to be friendly to a queer clientele. He was not queer himself but had gained a small

[1] Categorizing terms for sexuality such as "gay" is discussed on page 8

network of queer friends through his work at Café Noir, some of whom I was later introduced to. While some of my interlocutors came from lower-middle-class families, most of them had parents in the upper-middle-class. I think there are two main reasons why most of my interlocutors are from upper-middle-class families. The first reason why I believe upper-middle-class citizens were more accessible to me was that most of them were relatively fluent in the English language, and my level of Arabic was not sufficient to get a full grasp of all of our conversations if we were to only speak Arabic. Secondly, I found that much of Amman's queer scene consisted of people from upper-middle-class families, and my theory is that many of the queer men who had decided to act on their desires and make their sexuality known to certain people were able to do so because they already had the financial means to support themselves in case their "coming out" caused tensions with their family. Additionally, I believe many who have grown up in less affluent families may have more of an incentive to suppress their desires in order to help their family toward economic stability. Also considering I met many of my interlocutors through a "snowball" method, meaning once I was introduced to one man he introduced me to others and so on, it makes sense that there were many from similar economic backgrounds in the same social circles. I thus, spent the majority of my time in the company of people from Amman's upper-middle-class families.

About a month into my fieldwork, an interlocutor introduced me to the help center *Salaama,* where I volunteered a couple of times a week during the last three months of my stay. *Salaama* is a nongovernmental organization funded by among others the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and King Abdullah II Fund for Development. Their goal is to "make sexual and mental health more accessible to vulnerable communities in Jordan" through psychologists, legal support, and tests for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Their focus is any vulnerable group in the community and thus, the groups that came through varied between women in abusive relationships, transgender women (who at the center were referred to both as trans women and intersex), heteronormative men whose wives had divorced them, and homosexual men who came to get tested for HIV or for psychological counseling. The center was located in one of Amman's business areas, in a four-story building where *Salaama* used two of the floors and there were different businesses on the other two. While I met some interlocutors at this center, among others one of the center's psychologists, there were quite a few ethical considerations to be made concerning the center's visitors.

Ethical Considerations

Considering the precarious nature of my interlocutors' situation the matter of anonymization has become essential. In order to ensure my interlocutors' anonymity, I have taken several precautions, both when conducting my fieldwork in Amman and when writing the ethnography. Public spaces frequented by a wide variety and number of people, such as Rainbow Street and Jabal Amman, have kept their actual names because one cannot be recognized as queer simply by dwelling in these areas as they are common to visit, no matter one's age, gender, religious affiliation or sexual preference. Any other space or establishment mentioned is addressed by pseudonyms. Every person (with the exception of government officials) mentioned in my ethnography is subsequently addressed by their pseudonyms. Drawing on Hopkins (1996) I have also used composite narratives to represent the reality of my interlocutors in the hopes that this will add an additional layer of protection. Because of the sensitive topics that are discussed in this thesis, it has been critically important for me to protect my interlocutors' privacy, and not expose anyone. No unnecessary fiction has been added, and when composite characters are portrayed, the events and sentiments are still represented correctly.

As I wrote my notes in the field, I used a notebook as well as my computer. I rarely found it appropriate to write notes in front of my interlocutors as we often met at bars and with groups of people who had not yet been made aware of my research. I also found that it could create a kind of pressed atmosphere where my interlocutors were made extra aware that they were being observed. While all my interlocutors were of course aware that I was conducting a research project and had given their consent to participate, I found our interactions felt more natural if I left my notetaking for bathroom breaks or when I returned to my apartment in the evenings. Just in case my notebook was to fall into the wrong hands, I wrote all of my notes in Norwegian and used pseudonyms from the beginning. In regard to the collection of data while I worked at *Salaama* I have only included two ethnographic examples that I received specific permission to use. While there were others who also consented to participate in my research their stories have not been included as ethnographic examples. Some are not included, simply because their stories have not been relevant to the topics I have covered. Most however, are not included because they were told to me during private meetings these people had with their psychologist, that I was allowed to observe and I never met them outside of the counseling office. I understand there to be an unequal power balance between employees at the center and its patients, and I do not feel confident that all the patients fully understood the nature of my research. I therefore use most of my ethnographic material from *Salaama* to help get a more general understanding of how some marginalized groups might experience life in Amman.

When I started my fieldwork in the late summer of 2021 I had already spent 5 months in Amman attending an Arabic language course. This gave me time to properly get to know some people before inquiring about issues surrounding sexuality. While these friends of mine are not a part of the ethnography presented in the following, they certainly helped a great deal when I sought to get access to the field, and for that I am grateful.

Notes on Language

The Arabic language course I attended during my first months in Amman gave me the ability to function all right in everyday conversation. I would often practice with excited, curious taxi drivers who got a good laugh out of testing the extent of my Arabic knowledge. However, Arabic is a complex language, with a vast vocabulary and sounds and pronunciations I at times found difficult. I could learn a phrase in class that, while carrying the same meaning, could be expressed in completely different words by someone I talked to at the grocery store. Additionally, most of the Jordanians I met, of course, did not slow their speech down to a pace I could comfortably follow as my teacher did. I am glad I took the Arabic lessons in preparation for my fieldwork as it was helpful when navigating everyday life in Amman. I did, however, speak mostly English with my interlocutors. They all knew English very well, and it was much easier for me to understand them, and even more for them to understand me, when we spoke English. As my level of Arabic was not high enough to engage in conversations on intricate topics, it limited my access to those who did not speak English, as well as some of the nuances found in the extensive Arabic vocabulary. Nevertheless, I was able to understand much of the conversations that went on in Arabic even though I was not as skilled in expressing myself in the language. Many of my interlocutors were happy about this and expressed excitement that they did not have to translate "everything" for me.

When I use Arabic words in this thesis I have used my own modified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) transliteration system for Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. My main focus here has not been diacritic accuracy, but rather readability. Following Sarah Tobin (2016), I have also used English spelling for Arabic words that are commonly recognizable, such as the names of people and cities (Tobin 2016: xiii).

Queer Theory

Teresa de Laurentis has been credited with the introduction of the term "Queer theory" with her (1991) publication *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities.* Combining the word *Queer*, a word collected from the "street slang" of youths, with the sacred *Theory* of the academy was a matter of great controversy, but her goal was to challenge the existing hegemony of "white, male, middle-class analytical models" as well as "the heterosexist frameworks and assumptions usually accepted as theory within academic circles" (de Laurentis 1991 in Halperin 2008: 340). Although de Laurentis might have been the first to formally introduce the term "Queer theory", she is certainly not the first anthropologist to be interested in human sexuality. All the way back to Margaret Mead, or even Malinowski, one can find anthropologists concerned with the issue of sexuality albeit the interest in same-sex relations emerged much later (Graham 2014)[2]. David Halperin (2008) advocates that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet* and Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble* are retrospectively both critical texts in the foundation of queer theory, despite being written some time before the term was introduced. Until now, queer theory has primarily concerned itself with the people that Mark Graham refers to as "[…] lightning rods for social and political unease. […] who inspire fear and fascination" (2014: 7). This includes the homosexual, the transgender person, and the prostitute.

Foucault's (1978) work, *A History of sexuality,* has proved influential, not just to the evolution of queer theory. Just as he marks the shift of the 19th-century method of punishment from the body to the soul[3], he notes a shift from people being defined through their *acts* (the sodomite), to sexuality being an essential part of a person's being (Foucault 1978; Graham 2014: 8). "The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case of history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form […] Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality […] The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species." (Foucault 1978: 43). Thus, sexuality became part of how a complete person should be understood.

Ellen Lewin (2016) asks whether the need for terms such as "queer theory" or "queer anthropology" even exists. She asks, "don't our interlocutors deserve our respect, even if they don't embrace outrageousness or seek to separate themselves from normative social and moral standards in a way we find exciting?" I agree that our interlocutors always deserve our respect, and would also argue that, when analyzed through an anthropological lens, our interlocutors are

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[2] The structural-functionalist disinterest in the individual and its feelings did create a periodical decrease in anthropological research on the matter of sexuality.

[3] Foucault (1991 [1975]) *Discipline and Punish*

always exciting, outrageous or not. However, I also find "queer theory" and "queer anthropology" to be useful as a body of ethnography and analysis in an evolving field of study that offer legitimacy, recognition, and space to research the lives of a still understudied part of our societies.

Discussing the term "queer" as a category outside of Europe and North America in academia automatically carries an English-speaking bias as the term itself, historically stemming from local activism and academia in the United States is a concept of the English language (Odgaard 2021). The same goes for any other categories residing within the LGBTQ+ abbreviation[4]. There are an array of terms used within the field of "queer studies", and there are different preferences among scholars. I now turn to a brief discussion of my choice of terms throughout this thesis. Following a Foucauldian line of thought, I found that any term or category I chose ended up imposing some kind of limits or boundaries upon my interlocutors. However, to differentiate my interlocutors with same-sex desires from heteronormative members of Jordanian society in my analysis, I have chosen some terms I consider to be useful when representing the men I met in Amman.

David Halperin (1995) defined "queer" as "*Whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (Halperin 1995: 62). This definition is close to the dictionary's definition of something strange, unusual, or odd, however both of these definitions are far too wide to be able to use as a good characterizing term for my interlocutors. I therefore move to Michelle Walks' (2014) definition of queer as "an effort to bring people of non-normative genders and sexual practices and identities together" (Walks 2014: 13). As terms for categorizing sexuality (gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, etc.) are generally defined by Western discourse, I find that Walks' definition of the term "queer" allows for more room to discuss any sexual practice or identity outside of the dominant one in any social and cultural context. Throughout this thesis, I will use both "queer" and "non-heteronormative" to describe same-sex desiring sexuality. When my interlocutors have used other categorizing terms, such as "gay", these will be applied. Similarly, when referencing literature that uses other categorizing terms, such as "homosexual", I will also use these.

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[4] LGBTQ+ is an abbreviation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer + (others including questioning, two spirit, intersex, asexual etc.) (Walks 2014: 15)

Anthropology of Arab-Majority Societies

In 2012 Laura Deeb and Jessica Winegar followed Lila Abu-Lughod's (1989) *Annual Review of Anthropology: Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World* with their *Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies.* They start off by noting a shift in paradigm since Abu-Lughod's review two decades earlier from the then Cold war to today's War on terror with Arab- and Muslim-majority societies right in the center of the conflict. Considering the controversially charged task of defining "the Middle East", both Abu-Lughod and Deeb and Winegar have chosen "Arab" as their analytical point of entry. Pointing out how no other regional study has been assigned their own "world", Deeb and Winegar move away from Abu-Lughod's "Arab world" to the more descriptive anthropology of "Arab-majority societies" that I too will follow. I consider the latter to give space for analysis of both people, traditions, and cultural experiences that are identified as Arab, as well as people, traditions, and cultural experiences that are not necessarily recognized as Arab but are situated within Arab-majority societies. The most recognizable, prevalent characteristic of what is "Arab" is the Arabic language. When I refer to something or someone Arab in this thesis it will be in reference to what has already been defined as Arab by my interlocutors or by the applied literature.

While Egypt, Palestine, and Lebanon have been subjects of the majority of anthropological research done in Arab-majority societies, there is an emergent interest in the field in general with themes such as the implications of oil in the Gulf area. As Deeb and Winegar (2012) notes, studies of sexuality in the region are rare, however, I have found an increasing interest in recent years with work mostly located in the Levant, predominantly in Beirut, Lebanon (Merabet 2014; Georgis 2013) but also in Syria (Borneman 2007). Just in the past year, more work has circulated on the topic of nonheteronormative sexualities in Jordan as well, however, research on the subject remains limited (Odgaard 2021). Because of the family's influential position in Jordanian society, Suad Joseph's (2018) work on family relations in the Arab region has been an important source of information throughout this thesis. She argues that "There is not an event – social/political/economic/religious/cultural – unfolding in the Arab region that is not relevant to families and for which more rigorous analyses of families could not produce important and critical insights" (Joseph 2018: 1). Marie Rask Bjerre Odgaard (2021) also writes with a focus on family connectivity and as one of very few who have contributed to anthropological research of queer lives in Jordan, her work has also been a great inspiration to this thesis. Sarah Tobin's (2016) book *Everyday Piety: Islam and Economy in Jordan,* has also been invaluable in helping me contextualize the field, both while preparing for my fieldwork and during the process of analyzing and writing after I returned. Although not

focused on the Arab region, I have found Tom Boellstorff's overview of queer anthropology (2007) helpful to highlight the focuses that exist in queer anthropological literature. His work on same-sex desiring Muslims in Indonesia (2005) helped inform my analysis of queer experiences within a context that is influenced by Islamic moral codes.

Chapter Outline

As I have attempted to show through this introductory chapter, this thesis is an analysis of the lived experiences of the queer young men I met during my fieldwork in Amman, Jordan. The second chapter will contextualize the field site. With a focus on morality, I discuss how my interlocutors navigate the city of Amman and in what spaces within the city they are able to explore queer sexuality more freely. I suggest the bar as a site that offers safe space and discuss what this means for the queer men I met in Amman. Because topics about family and family relations were something my interlocutors frequently discussed, and that affected various areas of their lives, the third chapter turns to a focus on families. The chapter discusses the Arab family, seeking to outline how the Arab family may be a useful analytical entrance. After having illustrated the Arab family's significant role, an analysis of its influence on my interlocutors follows. Considering how most of my interlocutors have precarious relationships with their parents, I discuss both physical and emotional insecurity in light of a "dangerous family". I end the chapter with a consideration of the classic honor and shame paradigm, where I propose that an examination of "pride" as a substitute for "honor" might be more beneficial when analyzing queer realities. Moving on to chapter four, I discuss how meaningful connections are formed and negotiated outside of the family sphere. Exploring how my interlocutors navigate their romantic relations, I challenge Joseph Massad (2007) on his claims that categorizing terms such as "gay" are exclusively Western ethnocentricity imposed on members of Arab-majority societies. Through a consideration of love, I suggest that the arena of queer romance may also be an arena of potential and possibilities. Considering how male same-sex desires have historically been analyzed in relation to effeminate qualities, I look at how my interlocutors perceive masculinity and subsequently, how they see themselves as men. Widening the scope in chapter five, inspired by how Nira Yuval-Davis and Pnina Werbner (1999) analyze female citizenship as "different", I examine my interlocutors' position in Jordanian society as queer citizens. From a consideration of my interlocutors' position as citizens I move on to a consideration of their position as social members of society. What follows is a discussion of Jordanian identity, and what garners a sense of belonging to Jordanian society for my

interlocutors. Finally, as I conclude this last chapter, I explore my interlocutors' thoughts about the future. I discuss questions about their hopes for a future in Jordan, or if moving abroad might be the ultimate goal.

Chapter Two: Navigating Queer Space

"The places of gay and lesbi worlds are sites of belonging and recognition to find people who are the 'same' (sama) as oneself because they too 'desire the same'"
(Boellstroff 2005: 126)

Shortly after I arrived in Amman, the place called Rainbow Street sparked my interest. In my previous experience from public discourse about queer issues in my home country in the global north, the rainbow represented a symbol of queer love, or at least queer allyship[5]. I wondered whether this was also the case here in Amman. I had expected some difficulty in getting in touch with queer men, who would agree to participate in my research, and now I speculated whether it could really be as straightforward as taking a trip over to Rainbow Street. This somewhat naïve idea circling in my head the first few days after my arrival quickly faded. The street was colorful, with a large variety of shops, restaurants, and cafés, decorated with pink and purple flower vines, but gave no association to the queer *pride*[6] that I related to the rainbow. When I much later asked one of my interlocutors about the reason for the street's name, which was also peculiar in that it was referred to by the English word for "rainbow" in Arabic as well (*sharia' al-rainbow),* he told me "Because the rainbow has seven colors which is the same number of hills in Amman, and people living in each hill are different than the other, so they wanted to have a street where people from all around Amman can be together and mix just like the rainbow". I thought this was a lovely explanation, but as I looked around I noticed his friends giggling. I was then informed of the real reason behind the name, which was that there used to be a cinema in that street called Rainbow, and they named the street after it. A rather mundane explanation in comparison to the one I had hoped for, but also probably the more likely one.

Divided into seven traffic circles or *duwars,* Amman with its seven hills is located close to Jordan's north-western border. These *duwars,* or traffic circles served as markers for its surrounding, meaning that if someone told me to meet at first circle, or *duwar al-'awal,* this could refer to any building, establishment, or street coming off of this traffic circle. In other words, a common way to describe a place's location was to explain where it was located in

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[5] Defined as "the role of a person who advocated and actively works for the inclusion of a marginalized or politicized group in all areas of society, not as a member of that group but in solidarity", frequently used in queer discourse (Dictionary)
[6] A symbol of queer love, activism, and awareness

relation to one of these seven traffic circles. The city is usually divided into East and West, with the East generally accommodating more of the lower middle-class part of the population, while the West is home to what is described by Tobin as a wealthier, more internationally connected part of the population (Tobin 2016: 37). Some of my interlocutors worked closer to the city's border where I would sometimes meet them, however, we undoubtedly spent the most time in the areas called Jabal[7] Amman and Jabal al-Weibdeh. While I conducted my fieldwork I rented an apartment just meters from *duwar al-thani,* i.e., Second circle, very centrally located in Jabal Amman and within walking distance to most of the places where my interlocutors liked to spend their free time. Close by lies Jabal al-Weibdeh, described by a Jordanian tourism website as a bohemian, hipster area, a fitting description in my opinion[8]. On the occasions when my interlocutors wished to meet during the daytime, swapping their usual nighttime choice of beer for a cup of coffee or tea, one of the cafés in Jabal al-Weibdeh was often the choice, including Café Noir in Jabal Amman which was also a popular choice. With its parks, chic coffee shops, and art galleries, Jabal al-Weibdeh was popular with both ex-pats and locals. It was also an area where you could hear people speak English more frequently than in most other places. Located next to Downtown Amman, or *Wasat al-Balad*, the area represented the midpoint between East and West Amman.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce some of the social and political landscape within which the queer men I befriended in Amman live their everyday lives and have, adapt, and make choices. Through an exploration of how my interlocutors approach and make use of the city's different social arenas, I seek to provide insight into the environment queer young men may navigate in Amman. With a focus on morality, I investigate why my interlocutors have the need for safe spaces, and who has the power to constitute such a need. More specifically, the chapter investigates the significance of safe spaces, and in particular the bar as one such place, which is analyzed as a closed material structure for queer becoming.

Public Discourse and its Agency

In 2008 Jarret Zigon published the book *Moralities: An Anthropological Perspective,* seeking to make sense of what morality is for the anthropologist, how we approach the morality of our interlocutors, and how it can be used as an effective analytical tool in our research. It is easy to look to moral philosophy when seeking to define morality, but as Zigon points out, moral

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[7] Jabal translates from Arabic to "hill"
[8] Jabal Al-Weibdeh Neighborhood (Tourist Jordan)

philosophers generally approach morality as an abstract concept rather than through actual lived realities which often makes it difficult to utilize when analyzing said lived realities (Zigon 2008: 1). Furthermore, following Cook (1999) he suggests many anthropologists have a tendency to unintentionally project their own ideas of morality onto the practices of the people they study creating similarities where there ought to be differences and vice versa (Cook 1999: 93 in Zigon 2008: 14). In his introductory chapter he introduces Ruth Benedict's definition that states that morality is a term describing "socially approved habits" (Benedict 1956: 195 in Zigon 2008: 4). While this definition is frequently used by researchers of morality, Zigon critiques that it is too broad, and not differentiating morality from many other concepts anthropologist use in their research such as religious practice or ritual (Zigon 2008: 1). In his closing chapter he therefore suggests defining morality as three different, interrelated spheres: institutional, embodied dispositions, and public discourse (Zigon 2008: 162). Institutional morality is explained as a larger moral system presented by an institution such as a religion or a government that everyone who falls under said institution is expected to follow. As upwards of 90% of Jordanians are Muslims, the religion of Islam would be a good example to look to in this case[9]. Morality as embodied dispositions is another one of Zigon's suggested definitions and he compares it to Marcel Mauss' (1973) concept of habitus (Zigon 2008: 164). This sphere of embodied dispositions is different from the other two in that it is not a conscious reflection of right versus wrong according to a set of already established "truths", but rather unconscious actions of everyday life where you do not even necessarily notice that a decision is being made. All of the three definitions suggested by Zigon should be understood as interrelated spheres that collectively form a more complete comprehension of morality. However, in the following analysis, I will be focusing on his last sphere of morality, that is morality through public discourse. I find morality through public discourse to be the most pertinent when discussing my interlocutors' situation, because public discourse most noticably affected the position that these men could have in society.

Morality through public discourse is described as similar to institutional morality but built more upon the interaction and dialog of people in their everyday lives (Zigon 2008: 163). Put differently, public discourse morality is the dominant group's perceptions of morality that are not specified by the institutional. An example of this is children's upbringing, where matters of what is perceived as right or wrong behavior is installed in the children from an early age,

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[9]I could not find an accurate number of the Muslim inhabitants of Jordan as VisitJordan.com (Visit Jordan) states there are 92% Muslims in the country, and the US government's state.gov (United States Department of State) states there are about 97.2% Muslim inhabitants in Jordan to name a few.

often through their family and household. These matters of morality can be conveyed through body language, a daughter's observation of her mother's actions, or children listening in on their parents' conversation as they pick up how different topics are discussed by adults. One could say that the morality of public discourse is embodied and distributed through both actions and word of mouth. If one were to stray away from these moral norms, socially created through educational, religious, and public discourse, the consequence would be to suffer the effects of *kalam al-nas* (the word of the people). *Kalam al-nas* was used, often as a warning, in reference to how a story about someone could spread throughout the community. *Kalam al-nas* may create an image of an individual within said community which again would reflect back to the family as a unit. Rayan, a young queer man who had grown up in one of Jordan's smaller municipalities, told me as we were discussing *kalam al-nas* that he considered it to be one of the most important reasons for why he could not make his sexuality known to his parents. "They [Rayan's parents] would worry so much. *Kalam al-nas,* you know. If people found out [about his non-heteronormative sexuality] they would say many things: That my mother is not fit to be a mother; maybe they would bully my sister, *khalas[10]*. I can never tell them". Rayan considered *kalam al-nas* to have the power to severely affect his family's reputation. In a similar vein to how Foucault (1975) described the panopticon as a functional disciplinary system because the constant *potential* of being watched made the prisoners behave, the thought of the potential effect of *kalam al-nas* stopped Rayan from making his sexuality known to the community where he had grown up. As Asifa Siraj (2006) found, many of the Muslim gay men she studied in the United States were less concerned with their own religious sins than their fear that their parents would worry about *kalam al-nas*, or what people would say (Georgis 2013: 243). Wikan also mention *kalam al-nas* and describes it not as "How people will evaluate and judge" but rather as "How might they condemn and distort?" (Wikan 1984: 636). Among the men I met, I found that they were primarily concerned with their parents' reaction, how their parents would worry about *kalam al-nas,* a find that is echoed in Siraj's research. The tensions my interlocutors experience in their familial relationships will be explored further in the next chapter which discusses the role of the family in Jordanian society, and how this role affected the queer men I met in Amman.

The concept of public discourse morality is useful to try to understand why the queer men who became my interlocutors are part of a marginalized group in Jordanian society. As opposed to many other countries in the region, homosexuality is not prohibited by law in Jordan.

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[10] Arabic word for «thats it» or "enough"

Yet, there are individual opinions that shape a public discourse that condemns the existence of non-heteronormative sexualities as reprehensible. This condemnation is often understood by my interlocutors as "not being accepted". In order to gain insights into forces that shape these men's experience of "not being accepted", I suggest drawing on Gramsci's theory of the "subaltern". I will argue that in Jordanian society, queer men have a status as a subordinate social group, and explore how they navigate the cityscape, both using theories of the subaltern. Through an exploration of how the cityscape is navigated by queer, young men, I seek to shed light on what spaces may be perceived as more accepting of non-heteronormative sexualities, and how my queer interlocutors maneuver the places where they do experience a sense of "not being accepted".

Subaltern Belonging

Gramsci states that "subaltern classes are subject to the initiatives of the dominant class, even when they rebel; they are in a state of anxious defense." (Gramsci Notebook 3 in Green 2000: 2). In the context of Amman, I argue that the dominant class, or rather the groups who possess the agency to steer the dominant narrative, are highly influenced by the state religion, Islam. State officials, as well as public discourse morality, look to the Quran as a moral compass when navigating right and wrong. Indeed, it is specified in the Jordanian Constitution of 1952 that the King and his successors must be the child of two Muslim parents and that he himself must abide by the religion of Islam (Tobin 2016: 35). I found this to be particularly apparent during the holy month of Ramadan[11].

When I woke up to the now familiar sound of the morning prayer, *azaan,* on the first Sunday of April, it felt like any other morning. The weather had started to become warmer so I went out to enjoy my coffee on the balcony watching the sun rise over the earth-colored city. As I got ready to walk to school for my Arabic lessons, my roommate stopped me and reminded me to leave my water bottle at home. At first I was puzzled, it was going to be about thirty degrees outside by the time my lessons ended, so why should I not have water? Then I remembered, Ramadan had started the previous day and public consumption of any kind was forbidden in the time between *suhoor* and *iftar* (hours between sunrise and sundown) during Ramadan. This is Jordanian law that everyone has to abide by, no matter one's personal religion or degree of compliance with the fourth pillar of Islam, *sawam* (fasting). Our teacher had told

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[11] As I write about Ramadan, keep in mind that these events were also in a context of active covid restrictions, therefore many of the social events usually connected to Ramadan were restricted by the 7 pm curfew.

us she did not mind that we drank water during class even though she was fasting, however, we were unsure of whether the classroom should be considered a public or private space. Playing it safe, we decided to leave our water bottles at home. As the month went on there was a noticeable change in the city in accordance with the holy month. For one, the streets were much quieter and many establishments that used to be open had closed during the days. Restaurants are also forced to stay closed during daytime hours, and alcohol sales are forbidden during the month, unless in possession of a special permit usually granted to four- or five-star hotels or other establishments that cater to a large foreign clientele (Tobin 2016: 51-52).

Fouad showed great frustration with the way Ramadan, in his words, was "forced" upon him. Fouad was a Christian and therefore did not participate in the fast. I had gotten to know him because he was the owner of a bar that my roommate and I would often visit on weekends. Now that it was Ramadan, Fouad had had to close his bar. He explained to me with dissatisfaction in his voice how all bars with less than three stars must, by law, stay closed during Ramadan. In his opinion, it was only because he was not a Muslim that they, being government officials, refused to give his bar three stars, when it was clearly up to standards. He told me it was possible to pay them off, however, he did not want to pay for what he knew he should be entitled to.

I later asked a small group of queer interlocutors about their thoughts on Ramadan. I had noticed how many preferred to hang out at bars, as opposed to cafés and coffee shops. Rayan, whom I had gotten to know the best out of the five men sitting around our table, started to answer. "I think it is a little annoying, most of the bars are closed and the ones that are open are expensive. But I understand like, I remember my father used to say we are closer to *Allah* during Ramadan." The other men let out a small laugh at Rayan's comment about his father. Rayan had not grown up in Amman, and his parents thought he had gone to the capital for work, when in fact he had come to further explore his queer sexuality, something he explained to be close to impossible in the small town he hailed from. "We can still have house parties! Just remember to buy alcohol before [Ramadan] because they close the liquor stores too". The other men nodded affirmingly and started to laugh again. Gatherings such as this, among trusted friends and equals, were often filled with laughter and a cheerful atmosphere. However, in some instances, I got the sense that laughter was used to assert distance from and indicate that the topic being discussed was perceived to be absurd or foolish. When Rayan talked about the state-implemented restrictions that were enforced during Ramadan, his friends' response of nods and laughter seemed to imply a recognition of his statements and also ridiculing disapproval of the facts that were stated, i.e., that Ramadan was presumed to bring people closer to *Allah* and that

state-implementations forced the liquor stores to close. I could also sense a sort of mischievous joy among the five men at the thought of resisting the state's encouragement of honoring the Islamic holy month, and arranging parties.

The implementation of special rules that apply to Jordan's entire population, no matter their religious affiliation, during the month of Ramadan showcases the dominant authority the religion of Islam holds. While there are other examples of how both the Jordanian state and public discourse are influenced by Islam which I will touch on in the following chapters, I have chosen these examples with a purpose. The restrictions implemented during Ramadan are not targeted at limiting the mobility of Jordan's queer inhabitants, but rather are a display of the state's Islamic piety. However, they do directly affect people who do not conform to the state and dominant public discourse's adherence to Islamic traditions more than those who do. In other words, a practicing Muslim who participates in the fast during Ramadan and otherwise abstains from matters considered to be *haram*, such as alcohol consumption, in his everyday life would likely not even notice the temporary restrictions of Amman's pubs and clubs. Such a person might appreciate the state's extra efforts for him to better be able to uphold his fast. For Fouad, the bar was his livelihood, and for many of my queer interlocutors, the bar represented a space of freedom from religiously influenced social laws. Both of the previous vignettes showing – Fouad's frustration and Rayan's annoyance – exemplify Gramsci's maxim that "Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, […]" (Notebook 25, §2, 1971: 55 in Green 2000: 20). Goffman (1963) similarly describe "persons with a stigma" who has to endure the actions of normative members of society, who he refer to as "normals", because the stigmatized are perceived as a danger to the dominant order of society. If one were to disclose non-heteronormative sexuality to the wrong crowd in Amman, one risks loss of one's job, being evicted from one's apartment, being excluded by relatives, religious communities, or others who disapprove of non-heteronormative sexualities, physical abuse, and even persecution from law enforcement. The latter is less common, but I did hear stories of people being reprimanded, and even imprisoned on trumped-up charges, by the police if they found out about someone's non-heteronormative sexuality. I cannot confirm whether these stories are true or not as I have not found a record of such events, nevertheless, such stories do reinforce the public narrative of queer sexuality as something dangerous and undesirable. It becomes critical for queer men to access places where they may be able to realize and explore this otherwise marginalized self and are able to avoid those who believe their non-heteronormative sexualities should be condemned. The bar is such a place and I suggest that

considering the significance of the bar can assist us in gaining a better understanding of how my interlocutors were able to negotiate and explore non-heteronormative sexualities.

Conceptualizing the "Gay Bar"

In the area around what is known as the First circle of Amman one can find Café Noir, a popular and well-known establishment. Functioning as a café during the daytime and a bar at night, I was told the place has been a safe space for refuge, rest, and gathering for queer people ever since it was established about twenty years ago. The café markets itself as welcoming to people from "all walks of life". The place was popular with expats and tourists, as well as local Jordanians, and was known both to be accepting towards, and employing queer people. When entering the building one gets the feeling of walking into an art gallery, however, if one continues to walk up a staircase one usually encounters a livelier atmosphere. The tables are placed far enough apart to mingle with a sense of privacy, and simultaneously close enough to fit many people and make the place look crowded. My interlocutors have told me about how visiting the establishment at nighttime a few years back could offer a populous, lively club concept. Then, one could find men dancing closely with other men sharing stolen kisses in the night, and women doing the same.

One late October night a few years ago, the place was packed with intoxicated people having a good time as usual, one of the club-goers got their phone out and started filming the events taking place around him. I was told the filming had gotten minimal attention as taking pictures and videos of your friends to keep personal memories was normal procedure. There seemed to exist a mutual understanding that all the people there found themselves in a similar vulnerable situation, which in turn created a laid-back atmosphere where people could "let their guard down". However, this was not the case this evening. The man who filmed immediately shared the video with an assortment of news outlets as well as on social media. His action led to many of the people present that night being "outed"[12] in places and to people they were neither prepared to tell nor comfortable with telling. Consequently, some people lost their jobs, their apartments, and family connections. Because the video was shared so quickly, law enforcement was notified, arrived at the establishment, and arrested some of those present on whatever grounds the police could find. For a period after the incident, Café Noir was forced to close on the orders of the police. In the time that followed, the queer clientele proceeded with

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[12] «Outing» someone, or being «outed" is used when one's sexuality is made known without one's permission and/or knowing.

caution while warily reclaiming Café Noir as the place it used to be, after having experienced first-hand the fragility of the place they had associated with safety. None of my interlocutors were "outed" at this event, and neither I nor they, knew how many people were affected by the incident. In addition to this incident at Café Noir, queer Jordanians have also been involuntarily outed through their profiles on online dating apps (Kassicieh 2015: 51). I was also told that Café Noir has periodically been forced to close down at other times for varying reasons. It was the opinion of some of my interlocutors that every time Café Noir had to close down, it was an effort from the police to restrict the movement for Amman's queer inhabitants. Stories and events such as this one illustrate parts of my interlocutors' realities, situations they have to navigate in their everyday lives, and how they have to show vigilance in their choices of when and where to disclose their non-heteronormative sexuality.

Quoting Hooker's (1961) work concerning homosexual communities in Los Angeles, Rubin (2011) points out the importance of the "gay bar". "Because most homosexuals make every effort to conceal their homosexuality at work, and from heterosexuals, the community activities are largely leisure time or recreational activities. The most important of these community gathering places is the 'gay bar'" (Hooker 1961 in Rubin 2011: 324). Rubin describes these bars as essential to the maintenance of homosexual social life, a description that resonates with my observations in Amman. While this preceding passage about Café Noir serves as an additional illustration of my previous discussion of why my interlocutors require particular safe spaces in the first place, it also provides a point of entry into a consideration of the bar's significance as a place securing safety, where they are able to express desires, make connections and explore their sexuality more freely than they otherwise would. Some of my queer friends expressed that bars could provide a sense of physical safety, where they felt that e.g., threatening family members[13] would not find them. Additionally, these bars may offer a place where identity and sexuality can be explored and negotiated more freely, including an arena to meet others with similar experiences and desires. Nancy Achilles (1967) argues for the importance of bars (such as Café Noir) as "a setting in which social interaction may occur; without such a place to congregate, the group [homosexuals] would cease to be a group" (Achilles 1967 in Rubin 2011: 324). Although Café Noir was one of the bars known to be more acceptant of a queer audience there was an array of other bars my interlocutors enjoyed visiting and where they could make new queer acquaintances. In fact, I suggest many of the bars and clubs in Amman could serve as a place of protection from the disapproving moral judgement

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[13] Family is further explored in chapter three.

of the dominant public discourse, or at least freedom for a queer clientele as well as others not wishing to conform to the religiously informed morality of the state and the dominant public discourse.

After having attended several of Amman's bars and clubs, as well as having conversations with some people who do not attend such alcohol-influenced nighttime activities, there are a couple of points I would like to make regarding the maintenance of bars and clubs as spaces where physical safety and psychological or emotional liberation may be sought out. The first point I wish to emphasize is that these were not "gay bars" in the sense that they marketed themselves specifically towards a queer audience, as a place for sexual autonomy where you could "safely be yourself" as described by Branton and Compton (2021: 81). While Café Noir was more known for catering to queer people, even this was not a place to assume that the people one met were necessarily queer. Most bars marketed themselves with DJ appearances, events such as karaoke nights, and a good deal on alcohol, all of which could interest people of any sexuality. And while I did not ask every person I met at a given bar or club about their sexuality, the average attendees at the bars and clubs I visited with my interlocutor friends were a mix of sexualities, although predominantly heterosexual judged by the interactions I observed. However, they all did have one thing in common, the consumption of alcohol, which brings me to my next point.

Throughout my stay in Amman, I got the impression that while the scope of what is considered *haram* in Islam is non-negotiable, the publicity of one's actions could affect the consequential reaction. What differentiated bad from worse was rather to what degree one's actions affected your reputation, and to what degree could one's actions be detected by *kalam al-nas.* To exemplify, if your otherwise dutiful son went out and got drunk on a Friday it would be relatively easy to conceal from the public view and could also be relatively easily excused as immature resistance, peer pressure, or just by plain denial. In comparison, it was not quite as easy to explain why your thirty-six-year-old son was still not married, while he was also living with his "very good friend". From her work with Muslims in a Bosnian village in the 1990s, Tone Bringa similarly notes how many of the villagers' religious observance was dependent on what social environment they were acting in (Bringa 1995: 60). Some who would never drink alcohol in the village, could do so outside the village, which bears resemblance to my findings in Amman, where one's actions may be more controlled by who can see them than the actions moral value in and of itself (Bringa 1995: 60). When visiting a bar or club, the moral boundaries drawn set through public discourse were no longer imposed, as entering into these spaces was already crossing such boundaries. Here I could see people of all genders in close dance, young

men sharing passionate kisses with women in a corner, and one of the queer men I had arrived with flirting with another man at one of the tables close to us. All of these are actions that, if displayed elsewhere, would likely be the subject of great commotion due to their perceived immorality. Sexually charged physical displays of affection between people of the same sex were not displayed in an obvious manner in these bars and clubs either, as one could never be sure if the wrong people were watching, but it could and did happen. The reason why this was possible, I suggest, is because most of the people present at such events were engaged in behavior that would, at the least, be perceived as morally questionable by the larger society. This may have created a common understanding or acceptance for behavior that was otherwise condemned or uncommon to see. Most of the attendees at clubs and bars did not want words about their behavior here to be made known in other places, such as their family homes or workplace. Consequently, most people shared an understanding not to meddle with others' behavior and not to share information about how others may have behaved, to disapproving crowds.

Many queer friends pointed out that part of what makes bars feel safe is that they did not have to worry about possibly meeting what was often referred to as "the worst people". These "worst people" were described to me in different ways, but what was generally prominent in these descriptions was that they were of people who were perceived to pose the biggest threat to queer men in Amman. "The worst people" were often described as older, and could use violence, fabricate punishable offenses to law enforcement, and generally go out of their way to complicate the lives of queer people, as an expression of their disapproval of non-heteronormative sexualities. Even though there could be people in bars and clubs who perceived queer sexualities to be immoral, my interlocutors commonly expressed that they could avoid meeting "the worst people" here. There could be many reasons for this experience, for one that the clientele at clubs and bars were typically younger people in their twenties and thirties. Some of the queer men I met had the opinion that "the worst people" were often pious Muslims, and therefore did not seek out establishments that served alcohol. While bars were still navigated with some vigilance, my interlocutors experienced bars as a place that shielded them from what was perceived as their largest threats, and thus a place where a sense of safety and rest could be attained.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that the city of Amman is richly inhabited by a diverse population. From the chic bars in Jabal al-Weibdeh to the King Hussein Mosque - the urban city caters to many. Nevertheless, even though they are not illegal, my interlocutors with non-heteronormative sexualities endure a stigma produced by the morality of a dominant public discourse drawing on religious doctrines. The danger imposed by such a stigma varies from crude comments to life-threatening physical harm. These queer men have to navigate a society where Islamic ideas of morally correct conduct weigh heavily, and consequently, a society where state sanctioned public opinion deems their same-sex desires unwanted. However, places where such ideas of morality weigh less also exist within the cityscape, and the bar becomes a safe space where non-heteronormative desires can unfold in a less restrictive environment. Continuing the thought of safe space, I now move on to a discussion of the family. For many, family and the home are recognized as the epitome of safe space. However, the next chapter considers what happens when the family represents the very thing one needs to stay safe *from*.

Chapter Three: Securing the Self Within the Family

One afternoon I was sitting down with Zaid discussing his family situation with his friend Muneer. This was often a topic between the two of them, likely because of their similar experiences. Zaid was in the middle of explaining how difficult his relationship with his family had become after he decided to live his life as a gay man - facing anything from degrading words and physical violence, to pleads of moving back home - when Muneer interrupted him: "They only want to control you, I think." Muneer continued on about how he thought pride was the reason behind Zaid's family's behavior. In his opinion, they [Zaid's parents] feared what other people would think if they knew about their gay son. Zaid slightly frowned at Muneer's statements, and Muneer goes on to describe how if people found out about Zaid and his family, his family would likely lose their high position in, and ability to influence the community. Zaid's family was part of a well-known Jordanian tribe that was respected in society. This respected reputation is what Muneer suggests might be lost if it became known that they had a queer son. "The same goes for all of us [gay men], that's why we must stay a secret from most people. It will be dangerous for us, and for our families too, if everyone knew that we were gay."

The exchange above sheds light on one of the more difficult parts of many of my interlocutor's life, namely family relations. In considering the role of the family in Jordanian society, paired with my interlocutor's complicated relationships with theirs, this chapter seeks to explore the impact queerness has on relationships within a family. Discussing the significance of traditional family values in Jordan, I further seek to understand what it means for my interlocutors to be queer in a society deeply rooted in such values. Drawing on Odgaard's (2021) argument that queer Jordanian selfhood is perpetually shaped in relation to a threat of violence, either concrete or existential, I aim to understand how my interlocutors deal with this threat of violence in relation to their families, and also how this threat of violence shape their sense of safety, trust, and choice of social space. Before I begin this chapter, I wish to stress that although most of my interlocutors have difficult and sometimes even dangerous relationships with their immediate families, this is not necessarily the case for all. I am basing this assertion on my observations of and conversations with only a limited number of people I was lucky enough to spend time with during my stay in Amman. This information about my interlocutors' family relationships was collected through listening to stories about how they experienced their relationships with their families. My ethnography does not include

conversations with other family members or experiences where my interlocutors interacted with their family members, neither does it necessarily reflect a picture of society in Jordan as a whole. However, I include these stories that have been told to me as they offer useful illustrations of how a queer man in Amman today may navigate the family sphere.

The Arab Family

Kinship studies have been and continue to be a critical part of the anthropology of Arab-majority societies. In their *Annual Review of Anthropology: Anthropologies of Arab-Majority Societies*, Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar (2012) point out kinship as a prevalent theme in gender studies in the region, with analyses of patriarchal family formations, the relationship of kinship to the state, and family planning to name a few (Deeb and Winegar 2012: 542-543). Additionally, they assert that research on family law has been an emerging theme in the anthropology of law and human rights in the region (Deeb and Winegar 2012: 551). William Young and Seteney Shami (1997) argue for the importance of identifying family characteristics in the Arab region in their article *Anthropological Approaches to the Arab Family: An Introduction.* They also argue that equal attention should be paid to challenging the assumption of "the Arab Family" as an "enduring, timeless and unchanging entity" (Young and Shami 1997: 1). Young and Shami (1997) explain that there have been two main approaches to defining "the Arab Family" within the scholarly literature. First, The Normative approach assumes that members of a given society have a shared understanding of basic values and attitudes, differentiating them from another given society (Young and Shami 1997: 5). The problem with this approach is that assuming shared understanding is highly generalizing, and you risk losing any nuance or variation within said society. Frequently used sources to build a normative explanation of the term [the Arab Family] are folk sayings or poems, and because they exist in manyfold you can often find contradictory ones so that they either make no sense or can selectively be used in support of almost any interpretation of the Arab family if taken out of real social context (Young and Shami 1997: 6).

The second approach, the Legal approach, also set out with a goal of universally defining the Arab family and scholars base their arguments on texts such as legal codes or religious [predominantly Islamic] writings. Producing descriptions such as "patrilineal, patriarchal, and patrilocal extended family", the legal approach has been useful in providing precise definitions of these descriptive terms (Layish 1982: xix, 2, 18, 99, 291-92, 373-74). However, Young and Shami point out that basing research on court documents limits the

researcher to focus on issues that reach the court system and this ultimately leads to a disregard for intra-familial matters that occur outside of the courts (Young and Shami 1997: 6). My biggest issue with the Legal approach is that it does little in terms of explaining what makes an Arab family different from any non-Arab family, as descriptions such as "patrilineal" or "patriarchal" are in no way exclusively descriptive of Arab family structures.

Young and Shami suggest that "simply by choosing to characterize families as 'Arab' (rather than Middle Eastern, or Islamic […]), we imply that culture and language are the main determinants of decent group or household structure (rather than geographical/ecological factors, or religion, or political-economic factors)" (Young and Shami 1997: 7). Put differently, the term "Arab" is an essential part of understanding why the use of the term "Arab family" is methodologically valuable as opposed to just "family". Young and Shami suggest that being Arab implies a common culture and language. While critically examining the methodological value of "the Arab family" as an analytical approach, they suggest to investigate whether there is a distinctive Arab family by comparing Arab and non-Arab families who are situated in the same class and region, e.g., Circassian speakers in Jordan (Young and Shami 1997: 7). In their concluding arguments they assert that the main issue they find with using "the Arab family" as an analytical approach is that generalizations about the term have often been sought out in the wrong places (Young and Shami 1997: 11). While generalizations can be useful, they suggest that some of the extensive variations among families in the Arab region may be lost in such generalizations. I agree with Young and Shami and recognize that one of the more valuable aspects of an anthropological approach is that we are able to communicate some of the complex interpersonal nuances and variations in larger societies. What I then suggest may be more useful is to approach the field as "families in Arab-majority societies". This way one may accentuate that there are a variety of families, while also pointing out that locational and linguistic characteristics are part of the analysis. As mentioned, the term "the Arab family" says something about language, patriarchal structures, and often geographical location. I identify that these elements are rather general, however, I find that "the Arab family", or "families in Arab-majority societies" may be useful to say something about the family's societal position as a unit, and not just intrafamily relations. By considering language, patriarchal hierarchies, location, and societal importance of the family as a unit all together, I may gain a greater understanding of how my queer Arab interlocutors navigate these structures.

In her book, "*Arab family studies: critical reviews*", Suad Joseph, a leading anthropologist in the field of family relations in the Arab region, argues that the culturalist assumption that the concept of the family belongs to the less powerful, femininized private

sphere continues to prevail (Joseph 2018). She suggests that family is the most powerful idiom found in the Arab region, being used to mobilize, moralize, and motivate in settings publicly and privately alike (Joseph 2018: 2). Joseph then, highlights my argument that family holds a powerful position in Arab-majority societies, an argument I will elaborate further in the context of Jordan as this chapter continues. The discussion of how or even if one can or should define "the Arab family" is an ongoing one. What I find that stands out in the arguments of both Joseph (2018) and Young and Shami (1997) is that kinship and familial relations are important parts of Arab-majority societies. The characterizations, translations, and interpretations of what makes a family, and also what powers it holds in society as a unit should be analytically considered, both to get a better understanding of the larger societies where such family units are formed and performed, as well as the individuals navigating the social spaces of these societies.

Suad Joseph suggests that to understand selfhood in an Arab Muslim context, one must begin with the notion that selfhood is relational and unfolds in relation and reaction to familial relationships, which again, are formed within patriarchal structures (Odgaard 2021; Joseph 2005: 155). Following Joseph's suggestion then, I would argue that understanding family relations in Arab-majority societies can prove important to better understand the individual. I, therefore, find it useful to identify some of the ways family, the family's position in society as a unit, and intrapersonal relations between kin is manifested in Jordanian society. This is to contextualize some of the social space within which my interlocutors navigate and negotiate their relationships with their own families.

As mentioned, Joseph (2018) argues that the family as an idiom is a most powerful moralizer and motivator in the Arab region. One can find such examples looking to Jordan's previous ruler, King Hussein who would often refer to the country as "the big Jordanian family" and in turn refer to himself as the "national father figure" (Shami 2018: 156; Shryock and Howell 2001). Additionally, this tradition is seen repeated by his now reigning son, King Abdullah II, who at a much younger age at the time of his instatement chose the more age-appropriate term "older brother" (Shami 2018: 156; Shryock and Howell 2001). As Shami (2018) notes in her review article of previous research on familial relationships in Jordan, the many detailed descriptions of kinship terminology show that many variations of the term "family" exist[14]. The above-mentioned work on kinship terminology is important in that it highlights that the term "family" is not necessarily definite and can fluctuate even within the

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[14] Shami (2018) suggests (Antoun, 1972; Lancaster, 1981) for examples

Jordanian sphere. When Yazan, one of my interlocutors, answered the phone yelling "'*ammi*!" I could instantly tell it was one out of his three closest friends who had called. Directly translated as "my uncle (father's brother)", Yazan used the term as a distinct sign of respect and loyalty. Another noteworthy phenomenon I observed during my stay is the changing of one's name according to a family situation. After having children, the parents will leave their own birthnames behind and start going by "parental role" combined with the name of their firstborn son. An example of this is Abu-Muhammad, the landlord at the apartment building where my friend rented accommodation, who once told us he used to be called Ahmed, but after his son, Muhammad, was born his name is now Abu-Mohammad, or "Father of Mohammad". The same goes for the mothers, who in this case would now be named 'um-Muhammad, or "Mother of Mohammad[15]". The first example is an illustration of the fluctuation of kinship terms, from your father's brother to a person you care about and respect. The second exemplifies the significance of familial roles, as your status as a parent holds such high importance that the honorific "Abu" or "Um" is added to one's first name.

Highlighting just how important family values are in Jordanian culture, Odgaard suggests that one becomes a "good Jordanian" through caring for one's family (Odgaard 2021: 192). This point is further illustrated by Khalid, a confident man in his early thirties, who had spent the last few years working at an art gallery in the city center. His theory was that the potential for hurting one's family gave many gay men an incentive to stay closeted (at least to the public), putting their family's happiness and well-being ahead of their own. He was also of the opinion that the potential for putting one's family in danger, combined with the notion that one's actions could reflect and affect the reputation of the whole family, both as a unit and as individual members, was a big part in the lack of mobilization on behalf of queer rights in Jordan. Additionally, looking back to Muneer's comment in the introduction, he also commented on the idea that members of a family have a shared responsibility in maintaining a good reputation when he asserted his theories of how the community might consider Zaid's family if his non-heteronormative sexuality became known. What I have now attempted is to provide some context and illustrations of why I find it useful to analyze family relationships in order to enhance the comprehension of my interlocutors' experiences. I elaborate on this argument, drawing on Odgaard (2021) who suggest that one becomes a "good Jordanian" through caring for one's family. Family was also a topic that my interlocutors would frequently

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[15] This is of course widely reported in anthropological literature, see e.g., previous footnote (14)

discuss, exemplified here by Zaid, Muneer, and Khalid. I will now further explore how my interlocutors navigate and experience the complex family sphere as queer men.

"I have one choice: Me or my family"

Muneer was now vigorously explaining to me the risk of losing one's community's respect as the parent of a gay man. They will think you failed during the child's upbringing, both in the eyes of your *jiraan*[16] and in the eyes of *Allah.* At this point, Zaid breaks into the conversation. "This is not true Muneer!", he exclaims in an assured manner. "My family wants me to come back home, and they know who I am. I was with my sister yesterday, and my mother called her. I talked to my mother, and she said she wanted me to come back home. I even talked a little to my father, and he said he was willing to give me one last chance".

He looked proud recollecting the events of yesterday's phone call, but as the conversation progressed, I noticed the hand gestures between the two friends expressing annoyance. Zaid felt it rude that Muneer suggested he had brought shame upon his family, while Muneer on the other hand kept insisting that this was the hard truth of the matter, and he should just accept it. The two men in front of me kept bickering back and forth until Muneer finally said; "It is because you still hope for them to accept you and take you back. I have come to terms with the fact that I have one choice: me or my family, *khalas*". It became quiet for a while, and you could almost feel the melancholy behind Zaid's subtle smile as he sighs, "I think it will be okay."

This conversation between Zaid and Muneer was a continuation of the discussion that introduced this chapter. Zaid was repeatedly fighting an internal battle between his longing for a united family, and his wish to let himself feel his emotions and desires freely. He once told me that all he wants is for his mother to love him. Zaid is not a naïve man, he knows that to reconnect with his family he would have to give up important parts of the life he has now made for himself, including quitting his job at the bar he loves working at and stop dating men, or at least it would have to be done in secret behind his parents back. For him the question is not *if* the two parts – his relationship with his family and the life he had built for himself where he could act on his same-sex desires - could be combined, but which part he would be able to leave behind.

I was presented with a variety of possible reasons why non-heteronormative sexuality was not generally considered acceptable in Jordanian society by my interlocutors. Many

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[16] Arabic word for «neighbors», used both literally and figuratively when speaking of someone close to you

theorized that the animosity towards queer sexualities was grounded in religious beliefs of what should be considered morally correct behavior. Others thought it may have to do with the inability to have children that inevitably follow same-sex coupling in Jordan. While these theories are likely to be parts of the reason for the hostility my interlocutors experience because of their sexualities, I would argue that bringing the private into the public, and the following fear of judgment may be one of the main causes for the disapproval of queer sexualities in Jordanian society. As Massad (2007) puts it: "It is the publicness of socio-sexual identities rather than the sexual acts themselves that elicits repression" (Massad 2007: 197). Sofia, a woman I met while working at *Salaama[17],* illustrates this point well. The relatively quiet woman, always dressed in a green headscarf, had reached out to the help center to discuss a dilemma she found herself in in relation to her gay son, with one of the center's counselors.

The modest counseling room was lit up by candles and incense and calming instrumental piano music was playing from the speaker in one corner, making the atmosphere almost spa-like. Sofia sat in a big comfortable chair across from the head psychologist at *Salaama* as she began explaining. Her son had come out to her a little over a year before this meeting. In the beginning, she tried to be understanding and accept his sexuality. "*Hua ibni, hua hayati",* he is my son, he is my life, she said as the psychologist handed her a paper towel to wipe her tears. She straightened up in her chair and kept talking. She explained how after having conversations with her closest friends as well as another psychologist, things had become complicated. They had all advised her to, in her words, "give consequences to such behavior, because if she did not, she knew what people would say". They had told her that if word got out she had a gay son living at home like any *normal* son, the community would see her as a bad mother, a bad citizen, and a bad Muslim. Now she could not decide which was worse. Throwing her son out of her home, neglecting him, and going against her own instincts of love for him, or risking judgment and exclusion from her community.

Navigating Insecurity

To some extent, Sofia and Zaid's predicaments are quite similar, despite being situated on opposite sides of the issue. They are both being pulled towards their own desires on the one hand, and familial expectations defined by their communities and larger society on the other. Borrowing a phrase from Henrik Vigh (2011), I suggest that my interlocutors' fear might stem from a negative potentiality, defined as "the future negative effect that an invisible agent or

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[17] Help-center - see chapter 1, page 4.

force is seen as being capable of producing" (Vigh 2011: 96). For Zaid it might mean the potential of losing his family or friends, of being outed by the wrong person and the threats of danger that might follow or of not being able to live his life true to himself. For Sofia, it could mean being excluded or even harassed by her community, or losing contact with her son. While my interlocutors are not necessarily in direct danger at all times, they are aware of the potentiality of such dangers being present in their lives as a "presence of an absence" (Agamben 1999: 179; Vigh 2011: 93). In other words, following Vigh's logic on the effects of potentiality, I suggest that when they are not in an active harmful, dangerous situation the absence of harm may be felt as a presence of the potentiality of such.

Meeting Abid at a rooftop bar one warm September afternoon we started talking about his work. For a few years, he has been employed at an activist organization aiming at educating children and young adults at schools about women's rights. Identifying as gay himself, I was curious to know if education on LGBTQ+ rights was ever a possibility. "We hope to one day, but the people of Jordan are not ready," he answered with a sigh. He continued to explain that although he and his colleagues had hopes of one day being able to educate students on LGBTQ+ issues, it would not be possible at this time as the potential backlash they could receive from school staff and parents was too big of a risk to take. "Some of the kids come from very powerful families you know. You never know what they would do, there are no laws for the rich[18]". I have been told by a number of my interlocutors that some of Jordan's more wealthy, powerful families (often from well-known tribes) are regularly ignored by law enforcement if involved in criminal activity as a result of their economic capital, connections with the government (social capital) and general high standings in society[19] (Bourdieu 1986). The underlying potential rejection from society, as well as the threat of physical violence, stops Abid's organization from moving forward with their desire to advocate issues they feel are important. For several of my interlocutors, the threat of violence is existent throughout their everyday lives. Odgaard (2021) referred to at the beginning of this chapter, claimed that queer Jordanian selfhood is consistently being shaped by the threat of violence. While I have

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[18] Referring to the concept of "wasta". Directly translated to connections, but is frequently used about any kind of power (social or material) that can give you an advantage

[19] Providing it does not negatively affect tourism. One story I heard was about two neighboring families of different tribes. Situated in one of Jordan's three biggest municipalities they had a feud that had been going on for years. The rivalry had involved murders from and of members of both the feuding families. The events were widely known, but law enforcement had never been involved as the families both had high standing political positions. Thus, the situation was deemed as "family matter, to be handled as the families saw fit". The feud was still rumored to be ongoing, but after having been told this story I was assuredly informed that had they involved tourists or expats, law enforcement would immediately be involved and the participating parties would be prosecuted.

predominantly discussed the threats my interlocutors face in relation to the family's reputation, I find it important to also point out the existing threat of physical violence. To say that Zaid, Sofia, and Abid only try to conform to society's norms because of concern for their "good name" would be an understatement, rather the real threat of actual physical violence is present and recognized.

Zaid recalled numerous instances where his family had both threatened violence and acted on their threat. After leaving his family home he had, on multiple occasions, been picked up at random locations by his *'amaam*[20] (uncles), who had put him in a car and thrown him into the basement of his parents' home. Here he had been isolated, beaten up, and verbally abused. He told me about times when his mother and father had hit him and choked him with a belt. They had called him words like "bitch" or "faggot"[21]. He also recalled more than one episode where his mother had threatened him with a knife and told him that she was going to cut his face so that he would be ugly and no one would want or desire him. The most recent incident happened just a couple of months before I had met him. Because of this, he told me, he was always afraid that his family would find out where he was.

Just as Vigh describes his interlocutors in Northern Ireland and Guinea-Bissau as exhibiting social hyper-vigilance, defined as "a constant awareness and preparedness toward the negative potentiality of social figures and forces", I find similar behavior in my interlocutors as I have just exemplified with Zaid (Vigh 2011: 99). While spending time with my interlocutor friends at various places around Amman I could often see their investigative looks around the establishment, or their quiet warnings of "they do not know, we should talk about something else". Just as numerous young men had been involuntarily outed at Café Noir a couple of years ago (see chapter 2), and just as Zaid had been found and kidnapped by his uncles, the same could happen again, and the potential for it to happen is a constant in my interlocutors' lives.

Living in unstable, unpredictable environments as my interlocutors do, can create difficulty in obtaining one's ontological security. Ontological security, as introduced by Anthony Giddens in 1991, is an individual's experience of their own reality as stable, continuous, and – to a certain degree - predictable, as well as feeling confident that you can trust the people and world around you (Giddens 1991). I draw on Huysman (1998) and Kinnvall (2004) who propose that when ontological (in)security is applied as an analytical term it is

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[20] Here referring to his actual father's brothers rather than the previously mentioned use of the term as "a person one respects and care for"

[21] These are the words he used when he told be these stories and I do not know if they actually used these English words, or what they might have said in Arabic instead.

necessary to include descriptions of the reason why the situation is insecure. In other words, what constitutes the threat, who is the individual who experiences this insecure, threatening situation or environment, and how does this insecurity affect this individual's relation to their surroundings and to themselves (Huysman 1998: 231; Kinnvall 2004: 744-745). I find this approach helpful because including definitions and analysis as suggested by Huysman and Kinnvall is necessary in order to fully grasp the implications of feeling unsafe or insecure for my interlocutors. What constitutes my interlocutors' insecure environment is among other things a dominant public discourse that condemns the existence of non-heteronormative sexualities as reprehensible. For some, like Zaid, their families are also part of what creates the insecurity. The individuals who experience insecurity here are of course my queer interlocutors. The task of determining how insecurity affects my interlocutors' relation to their surroundings and to themselves is one I wish to examine further, and I start with a consideration of the home as part of their surroundings. When I say "the home" here I am referring to what could be compared with the Arabic *bait*, which directly translates to "house", but can also be used to talk about the household or the people who belong to a given house. In other words, the use of "the home" here is in reference to the places where my interlocutors grew up and the family members who raised them and continue to reside in these places, and not referring to the apartments where they now live separately from their parents.

Ann Dupuis and David C. Thorns (2002) argue that "the home", both as a physical space and as a consistent, stable place where identities are constructed, can provide a locale where a sense of ontological security may be attained (Dupuis and Thorns 2002: 25). The home is said to contribute to the creation of ontological security as it joins together an actual material setting with the emotional set of meaning connected to the home and its safety, often related to familial relations. Family and the home are usually the spheres where people spend most of their time in their first living years, and in turn the sphere you first associate with safety. It is also the place where one consciously or unconsciously learns what to associate with feelings such as safety and danger, as well as how to react to said feelings. If the home can provide a stable and consistent social and physical environment, ontological security may be obtained here (Dupuis & Thorns 2002: 28). Most of my interlocutors have not found stability in "the home", and for some, the home is one of the more unstable places in their lives and a source of insecurity. When the home has not provided a secure and predictable environment, my interlocutors have had to seek other arenas that may establish a reliable sense of security. Outside of the home, there are other arenas a person can seek that may provide a sense of stability and safety. One such place may be bars, as discussed in chapter two. I spent a lot of time with queer friends at

bars, and many explained that they preferred to meet in bars because it was the place where they could relax the most, outside of their apartments. I suggest that bars are places where queer residents of Amman may attempt to attain a sense of ontological security when it cannot be attained in "the home". The explanation for why Dupuis and Thorns (drawing on Saunders 1984, 1986) suggest "the home" as a place to seek a sense of ontological security is that it is "where people feel in control of their environment, free from surveillance, free to be themselves and at ease, in the deepest psychological sense, in a world that might at times be experienced as threatening and uncontrollable" (Dupuis and Thorns 2002: 25). Drawing on my discussion in the previous chapter of the bar as a potential safe space for my interlocutors, among other, I do not understand my interlocutors to experience bars as a place that offers a sense of control and freedom in "the deepest psychological sense"[22]. However, as many of my interlocutors describe the bars we frequented as places where they could "relax" or "be themselves", I argue that bars may still serve some of the same purpose for my interlocutors as "the home" does in Dupuis and Thorns' analysis of ontological security.

Khalid would sometimes invite me to his apartment that he shared with his boyfriend, Amir. Here we could meet just the three of us, or Khalid would invite additional friends for dinner or a party. When we were at these private gatherings at one of my friends' apartments, the topics of conversation did not differ considerably from ones we would discuss at a bar, and therefore it seemed as though a bar could provide an environment where my interlocutors were able to verbally express themselves similarly to how they could in the private spheres of their apartments. However, I did find that some men, Khalid for instance, would sometimes physically express himself differently at a private gathering than he would at one of the bars where we often met. When we met at one of our friends' apartments, Khalid would often wear tighter clothes and more visible, ornate jewelry then what he otherwise wore. When we met at his and Amir's flat, he would put on make-up, eyeliner or lipstick, on special occasions. The next chapter take on a discussion of gender, yet I include these recollections of Khalid and his varying visual expression to illustrate how some private gatherings may also provide an environment where my interlocutors could feel free and in control, resembling a place where Dupuis and Thorns suggest that ontological security may be attained. Kinnvall (2004) points to exile communities, such as Sikhs in Canada or Pakistanis in Britain, and how they often find common places, like places of worship, to assemble (Kinnvall 2004: 747). She does this to illustrate that secure, reliable environments may also be sought out in the company of people

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[22] E.g., episodes such as the incident at Café Noir discussed in chapter two may happen again.

who experience insecurity as a result of similar reasons as one's own insecurity (Kinnvall 2004: 747). If I apply Kinnvall's theories to my observations and conversations with Khalid in different social arenas, I suggest that my queer interlocutors can establish secure environments for themselves when they gather in closed spaces and with others who sympathize with or relate to their own sense of insecurity. This point might read as obvious, but I argue that private dinners, meetings, and parties where all attendees were known to be friendly, acceptant of non-heteronormative sexualities, is likely the environment where my queer interlocutors can experience the most freedom of expression and predictability while in the company of other people.

Zaid is a sociable man with many friends and did not lack opportunities to meet with likeminded people, either at bars or in their home. While conducting my fieldwork I, therefore, sometimes found myself struggling to make sense of Zaid's efforts to maintain contact with his family and his plans to move back into the family home, while simultaneously carefully making sure they did not know his location and expressing fear that they would find him. He had bought a separate phone that he only used to communicate with his family to make sure they did not track his primary phone. He would always look around to make sure none of his family members (or someone who knew them) were in the vicinity when moving around the city. However, he had rented an apartment in a neighborhood next to the neighborhood where his parents lived and lit up when he could tell me they had talked together on the phone. For some time, it was difficult for me to understand the meaning behind this contradictory behavior.

In an attempt to make sense of Zaid's inconsistent relation to his family I turn to Giddens (1976) who argues that ontological security is a deep psychological need that is founded on the trust relationships established in early childhood (Giddens 1976: 117; Dupuis and Thorns 2002: 27). The home is commonly the arena where a sense of safety and security is first experienced, and consequently an arena that may continue to be associated with security, even when it is no longer secure. What I then suggest, is that Zaid's seemingly contradictory approach to his relationship with his parents might all be an attempt to seek out stable, secure environments. Following Giddens, one may suggest that even though his parents are the cause of some of his insecurity, Zaid still associates his parents' home and presence with a previous sense of safety. He could make statements such as "I know it is not safe for me to go back [to his parents], but maybe now [that] they have felt what it is like when I am not there they will understand that they miss me and be happy if I come back". Statements such as this suggests that Zaid was conscious of the fact that his parents constituted a threat to him. However, hope, paired with memories of what he described as a loving, caring relationship with his parents before he made

his non-heteronormative sexuality known, may be part of the cause for his seemingly conflicting behavior.

Having positioned the home as the initial and ultimate source of safety and security, I suggest it is natural for a person to seek back to the home when his life is in a state of uncertainty, even when the home is a big contributor to said uncertainty. In light of this idea of the home, combined with Linda Green's reasoning that "[…] the mundane experience of chronic fear wears down one's sensibility to it", Zaid's gravitation towards his family seems more sensible than it initially did (Green 1994: 230). The uncertain and insecure state of his life situation made him prone to seek a safe and reliable environment, and while his rational reaction was to stay away and hide from the threats his family posed to him, his emotional side longed for the secure, dependable place his family had provided in his earlier years of growing up.

Pride and Shame

The insecure environment that the queer men I met in Amman have to maneuver in their everyday lives are made up of a variety of components. In the previous discussion, I addressed some of the places where a sense of security may be sought out when it cannot be found in the home. I now seek to examine the concept of shame, as I find that, similarly to how Giddens (1976) argues that the need for ontological security is founded in childhood relationships, shame is also often rooted in the family sphere. This is where one often learns what should be considered shameful, and because members of the same family may be affected by each other's shameful acts shame is also highly connected to the family.

Growing up as a young queer man, Khalid recalled feeling anxious, uncertain, and curious when he first started to notice desires and emotions that contradicted what he had learned to be *right*. To have seen one's own and other people's parents together, maybe the King and Queen, heteronormative couples on TV, all these examples of where you at a young age learn what a relationship is supposed to be: between man and woman. Both Khalid and Zaid have cited recollections of confusion and insecurity when they first experienced attraction towards others of the same sex, and then turning to the internet to look for answers. When searching for answers they would mostly find information put out by Western media talking about the importance of *pride*. Here, they would be told not to feel shame because of their thoughts, to be proud of who they were, and not to live frightened or in secrecy. Additionally, there would be "coming-out stories", people who shared their experiences with making their sexuality known and being met with a preponderance of positive responses. Although Khalid now expressed security and

confidence in who he is and wanted to be, he remembered a time after he had first made his sexuality known to his parents, when he felt deeply afflicted by shame.

In the anthropology of the Middle East and the Mediterranean, shame has often been discussed paired with honor (see Wikan 1984). In her article, *Shame and Honour: A contestable Pair*, Unni Wikan (1984) gives an introductory overview of how honor and shame has been understood in anthropology. She explains how honor had been viewed as an alluring concept, concerned with men and how they might defend this honor that is theirs. I say that it is theirs because as Wikan points out, women were considered in anthropological literature to have no honor, and female correlation with honor was therefore virtually unexplored (Wikan 1984: 635). Wikan continues to explain how shame had been given little attention in anthropological literature, except for being the disgraceful opposite, used to direct attention to its binary, honor. This leads her to question why anthropologists so often insist that honor and shame are binary terms, and why most of the literature chose honor as the focus of their discussion, rather than shame (Wikan 1984: 635). Wikan critiques this scholarly focus on honor and argues that "at least for some people of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, it is *shame* rather than honour which is the predominant concern" (Wikan 1989: 636). After proclaiming that honor and shame does not necessarily read as obvious binary opposites, she moves to point out how it is important to note researchers' choice of focus between the two concepts because they relate differently to behavior. Honor is described as a character trait or a quality of a person, whereas shame only refers to a person's action. Additionally, she critiques the then existing literature for being too preoccupied with normative moral discourse (among men) and argues that honor and shame must be seen in the context of everyday, local life, rather than just in selected discourse (Wikan 1984: 636). Drawing on ethnography from Cairo and Oman she points to how 'shame' as a concept is more universally understood by her interlocutors as a term commonly spoken in everyday conversation, and therefore served more useful as an analytical entry than the previously favored 'honor'. Referencing Geertz (1976) she discusses shame as something that is "experience-near" and used by people "spontaneously, unselfconsciously", whereas honor is discussed as "experience-distant" and often a construct of the analyst (Wikan 1984: 637). Reflecting on her observations and conversations with her interlocutors, she suggests words such as "good, kind, or beautiful", in place of 'honor', to be more accurate representations of 'shame's opposite.

The honor-shame complex is an integral part of male-female relationships. The man is looked at through a lens of honor, that can both be gained and must be protected. He has the agency to protect said honor where the woman does not. The woman, and her sexual nature,

bring the potential for shame. She can bring shame upon herself as well as her husband (who is not able to control her) by dressing provocatively, going about the town alone, or by being adulterous (Wikan 1984: 645). In addition to bringing shame upon her husband, the woman's shameful behavior can also contribute to the destruction of her father's honor as he has not raised her right and is not able to control her. In other words, the male's honor largely rests on the female's behavior, and the male must protect his honor through ensuring that the women he is "responsible for" (wife or daughter) does not conduct shameful acts.

On a similar note, Marit Melhuus (2001) states, based on a review of existing anthropological literature and ethnography from Norway and Spain, that as a wife's shameful actions reflect back onto her husband, a son's shameful actions may reflect back onto his father who cannot control his children (Melhuus 2001: 148). This means that the contagious nature of shame is not only marital and happening between a man and a woman, but also applies to other kinship ties and to the relation between two men. I argue then that my interlocutors, such as Zaid's, non-heteronormative sexual desires may be perceived by his father to pose the same threat to his honor as that of the hypothetical sexual misconduct of his wife.

In the introduction of this chapter, I presented a conversation between Muneer and Zaid where Muneer expressed the thought that "pride" was the reason Zaid's parents rejected him for being queer. When I consider Muneer's comment, in addition to the fact that *pride*[23] in Western public discourse carries a strong association with a project concerned with queer activism, celebration, and awareness, I suggest a variation to the classic honor-shame dichotomy. I argue that in the context of queer Jordanian men it is productive to discuss the concept of pride as an alternative to honor, and I will discuss two meanings of "pride" in turn, in an attempt to highlight why I find this productive.

The first aspect, that I refer to as pride, is close to the dictionary's definition of the word, relating to dignity, superiority, and self-esteem, which resemble how honor have previously been understood by Wikan (1984) and Pitt-Rivers (1965). Wikan explains that her interlocutors in Cairo and Oman did not explicitly discuss the term honor, but she did interpret their reflections about "self-regard" and "social esteem" to echo the way honor had been discussed as an analytical term in scholarly literature (Wikan 1984: 638). Pitt-Rivers' (1965) definition of honor, which Wikan refer to as seminal, claims that honor is a person's "estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but it is also his acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride" (Pitt-Rivers 1965: 21 in Wikan 1984: 638). Honor has

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[23] Italicts to indicate difference

often been analyzed as something inherent, to be protected from the damage of shame or shameful acts, and one can find some of the same characteristics in pride as illustrated by Muneer's comment. Muneer was of the opinion that it was Zaid's parents', both mothers' and fathers', pride, not honor, that led them to wish to distance themselves from Zaid and his shameful sexual desires. One of the reasons I focus on pride rather than honor, similar though they might be, is that while my interlocutors would sometimes discuss pride, as illustrated by Muneer, honor was never a topic for conversation in my experience.

The second meaning of *pride* originated with the riots at the Stonewall Inn in New York City, in June of 1969[24], often referred to as *LGBT pride* or queer *pride. Pride* represents a recognition of queer culture, a celebration of queer love and diversity as well as the many fights that have been fought, both publicly and on an individual level, in order to gain acceptance and rights. Every year in the month of June it is commemorated in different countries across the world through *pride* parades. As Georgis (2013) points out, queer *pride* is by definition the absence of shame. This raises the question of how shame and pride produce themselves in relation to each other, as shame and honor have been thought to do. "To be queer and proud is to dare to live one's life shamelessly" and in *pride's* shadow is "the proverbial closet of shame", Georgis states when describing queer *pride* as an epistemology in the Western context (2013: 240). While interlocutors such as Khalid and Zaid do not themselves live within this Western context, they are as mentioned exposed to Western queer discourse through e.g., internet searches and social media. The *pride* narrative, the utopian idea of a life void of shame, has undoubtedly paved the way for considerable progress in terms of visibility, value, security, and rights within queer communities globally. However, as Georgis (2013) argues, this *pride* narrative leaves no room for feelings of shame to be experienced without additional judgment.

Before Khalid made his sexuality known to his parents, he had read some internet articles about Western queer *pride*, where the content was largely aimed at encouraging its queer readers to be proud and open about their non-heteronormative sexualities. When he later came out to his parents they asserted that they found his desires shameful. His parents' reaction made Khalid feel ashamed, and when he returned to the internet articles where he had initially felt a sense of recognition, he now experienced an additional feeling of shame as he felt he had failed to be proud of being queer – as the articles told him to be. While Khalid's parents urged him to suppress his same-sex desires and told him that he should feel ashamed, *pride* provided

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[24] 1969: The Stonewall Uprising (Library of Congress)

a narrative that encouraged the opposite, openness and self-love. Nevertheless, both his parents and his exploration of *pride* played a part in the creation of the very same experience for Khalid – a sense of shame from not meeting expectations from the norms set by others. I, therefore, argue that shame may be reproduced by the queer *pride* discourse, suggesting that shame is shameful because (paraphrasing Georgis) to be queer is to be proud (2013: 240).

Georgis (2013) draws on Sedgwick (2003) and Probyn (2005) and argue that instead of viewing shame as something that must be avoided, shame should rather be considered as something productive that can be a tool for self-reflection (Georgis 2013: 234). She argues that through an examination of what makes a person feel shame one may also uncover something about what is important to that person (Georgis 2013: 234). In other words, if a person is ashamed of something, that thing is also of importance to that person. If we follow this logic, the fact that Khalid felt shame caused by a sense of not meeting expectations suggests that meeting expectations was something that concerned him. When I met Khalid in Amman, years after he had made his sexuality known to his family and friends, he no longer experienced these layered feelings of shame referred to earlier. He told me that once he started reaching out to other queer Jordanians, who did not condemn him for his desires, and could simultaneously relate to his feelings of shame, he experienced an emerging sense of change in how he perceived himself. As he told me this, his smiley eyes filled with tears, he took my hand, and I understood that this was a significant point in his life, infused with meaningful self-exploration and reflection. The clearest difference I deduce between Khalid's experience with Western *pride* through internet articles and his introduction to other queer Jordanians is how the two arenas approached the notion of shame. Khalid did not find that there was room for his feelings of shame within the Western *pride* discourse, even though it was encouraging of his non-heteronormative desires. However, when he became friends with other people who experienced queer desires within a Jordanian context, he recounted an environment that, while embracing his sexuality, encouraged him to consider, explore, and grow from his experiences with shame.

I suggest that by analyzing shame through its relation with pride, rather than honor, one may be able to grasp a wider sense of how the queer men I befriended in Amman experience, are affected by, and understand the concept of shame. A consideration of pride understood as an estimation of self-worth, dignity, and social recognition can aid in an analysis of how shame is experienced as contagious and relational, affecting more than just the person who had conducted the shameful act. For instance, how it was thought that Zaid's parents wished to distance themselves from him and his desires which they deemed shameful, in order to protect their pride. When we add a discussion of *pride,* which is commonly used in Western

public discourse as a collective term to describe awareness, activism, and celebration of queer sexualities, one may be able to explore the concept of shame in a manner that is more specifically focused on the experiences of queer individuals. I found that although *pride* aim at inspiring and motivating queer individuals not to be ashamed of their non-heteronormative sexuality, it instead added to Khalid's feelings of shame. He was left with the feeling that he was not able to meet his parents' expectations, and neither could he meet the expectations of *pride*. When Khalid later acquainted other queer Jordanians, he found them to create a social space where experiences of shame was accepted. Consequently, he expressed that he was able to begin a process of self-reflection and acceptance. Khalid's story may serve as an illustration of how shame can facilitate transformation, as Sedgwick (2003) argues.

Conclusion

I include a discussion of family relations because I found "the family's" role in society affected my interlocutors' lives in many ways, not just within the family sphere. As a member of a family, one is considered a representative of that entire family as a unit, collectively responsible for its reputation. Additionally, respect and care for one's family is considered to have high importance, and it is even argued that one becomes a "good Jordanian" through caring for one's family (Odgaard 2021: 192). Although difficult to define, "the Arab family" proves valuable when discussing intra-family relationships in the region as the term gives some context to the cultural and linguistic backdrop for the discussion. Longstanding patriarchal traditions and family idioms are continually being communicated by both Jordanian state officials and the state's inhabitants. Representing and shaping social boundaries, expectations of behavior, and potential danger, my interlocutor's families play an influential part in their navigation of their everyday lives and sense of safety. As illustrated through Zaid and Sofia, tension remains between the idea of the family and queer sexuality which forms a struggle between the internal and external. For many, there is an ongoing battle of choosing whether to listen to their own desires or pursue a *correct* position in society. I argue that much of this anxiety is due to what Henrik Vigh (2011) describes as negative potentiality. As my interlocutors attempt to navigate a family sphere deeply concerned with others' perceptions of how they appear as members of Jordanian society, the potential for putting a foot wrong is always present. Though *kalam-al-nas*[25] is a concern, the dangerous potential for actual physical harm is also present, and for some this threat is presented by their own family. In an effort to make sense of why people like Zaid

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[25] Word of the people

continue to seek back to this abusive and violent environment I introduce the concept of ontological security. Explained as the need to experience one's own reality as stable, continuous, and trustworthy, the home is often described by scholars almost as a symbol of ontological security (Kinnvall 2004; Dupuis and Thorns 2002). I have suggested that even when the family for my interlocutors is contributing to why reality is experienced as insecure, it may simultaneously be where security was learnt, and thus it carries a sense of predictability. I move to a discussion of honor and shame because both concepts, and their relation to one another, are part of the production of the insecure environment that my queer interlocutors navigate in their everyday lives. I suggest a consideration of shame in relation to "pride" as an alternative to the more commonly associated "honor" because for one, the dictionary definition of pride carry similar substance as Wikan's (1984) or Pitt-Rivers' (1956) definitions of honor. Additionally, "*pride*" can also be referred to as a symbol of queer activism, affection, tolerance, and celebration. When I reflected on my interlocutors' experiences with shame in relation to these two different meanings of pride I found that, in addition to a discussion of shame that resemble how it has previously been discussed in relation to honor (Wikan 1984), I was able to include a consideration of shame in relation to the type of *pride* that is more explicitly focused on the experiences of queer individuals. Although I note that *pride*, as presented in queer discourse has actually contributed to additional feelings of shame for some of my interlocutors, Khalid's story, in addition to Georgis' (2013) arguments suggests that the feelings of shame may be a productive focus for personal development. However, as Khalid's story illustrates, that is if one is able to find an environment where one feels comfortable to express and work through feelings of shame without suppressing them.

Chapter Four: Making Meaningful Connections

Sometimes I just want to hook up. You know, we meet and hook up and they tell me 'Oh you are so sexy' and I have to tell them no, khalas. This was just for this one time. And it's nice you know, it's fun. But then really, I want a boyfriend. You know, he can love me so much, and make me food, and I can give him the cool clothes and you know massage and just kiss him all the time. Like him! Ah look at him, he is so handsome, he will be my boyfriend.

This quote is taken from a conversation I had with Zaid while he gave me a tour of his online dating apps. The previous chapter involved a discussion of ontological security, and I mentioned the search for safe dependable spaces outside of the family sphere. In this chapter I will take a closer look at my interlocutors' romantic relationships, and how strong meaningful connections can be produced on the basis of common ground. Joining the debate surrounding whether homosexual love really does exist in Arab-majority societies, I attempt to challenge Joseph Massad (2007) as he boldly claims that same-sex desires are exclusively restricted to the sexual realm in Arab-majority societies. What follows then is a discussion of how my interlocutors perceive and experience their own romantic relationships and I point to some of the possibilities that may arise out of the socially insecure arena of queer romance. I then move to a consideration of gender as I examine how my interlocutors relate to the narrative that connects male homosexuality to femininity, as well as how they understand themselves as men.

The Homosexual Jordanian

The question of the reality of a homosexual Arab has created heated debate over the years, and it continues to be debated today. Considering how most of my interlocutors self-identified as "gay", I would undoubtedly say that homosexual Arabs do exist, however, the idea that Arab individuals can be recognized and be defined by the categorizing terms abbreviated as LGBTQ+ is highly contested. While earlier research suggested sexual identity was biologically given, manifesting itself in a similar fashion no matter the historical or societal context, later research has stated the opposite arguing that sexual identity should always be understood as a product of history and social construction (Foucault 1976; Tolino 2014). This debate, however, is not so much one concerned with how people have come to experience the sexual desires that they do, as it is concerned with semantics. The existence of same-sex desires in Arab-majority

societies is a fact I assume most scholars would agree upon, the debate rather relates to the question of whether describing and defining them through terms such as "homosexual" should be deemed ethnocentric or not.

Joseph Massad, a Jordanian[26] academic frequently discussed in the literature on queer anthropology of Arab-majority societies, claims in his book *Desiring Arabs* (2007) that categories for sexual orientation such as 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual', are inherently Western imports reflecting imperialistic identity politics (Massad 2007; Odgaard 2021). He proposes instead to refer to same-sex desires in the Middle East not as a sexual orientation or homosexuality, but rather explicitly as the acts of intercourse between people of the same sex (Massad 2007). Introducing "the Gay International", Massad describes an orientalist, Western missionary movement aimed at either unraveling "the mystery of Islam to a Western audience […]" or "[…] informing white male gay sex tourists about the region to help 'liberate' Arab and Muslim 'gays and lesbians' from the oppression under which they allegedly live by transforming them from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as 'homosexual' or 'gay'" (Massad 2007: 162). While strongly critiquing what he refers to as "western male white-dominated organizations" such as the International Lesbian and Gay Association – ILGA – and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission – IGLHRC – the controversial author claim they [those who represent "the gay international"] "produce homosexuals, as well as gays and lesbians, where they do not already exist, and represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology" (Massad 2007: 163). Indeed, Massad boldly claims that same-sex encounters between Arabs are purely sexual in nature, and that Arab men never seek romantic connections with other men (Massad 2007).

Inspired by Abu-Lughod who proclaims that "The fight for women's rights is not the same fight everywhere", I do agree with Massad in that Western ideas of liberation might not echo in other societies, and as anthropologists, we should not assume Western concepts to be transferrable anywhere (Abu-Lughod 2002: 787). Yet, in suggesting that all same-sex desiring Arabs who refer to themselves as gay or homosexual do so in an act of self-hatred and assimilation to Western constructs, I would not agree. I would argue then, that Massad invalidates the sexual identity of my interlocutors, defining them as merely self-hating sexual beings. Furthermore, Jordan is a post-colonial society and part of a globalized world, where queer discourse from all over the world merge and continuously work together to reproduce

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[26] Massad is of Palestinian decent.

and redefine what it means to be queer. Thus, a same-sex desiring man in Amman can self-identify as 'homosexual' or 'gay' without losing his Jordanian Arab identity and without being defined as the passive recipient of the Western import that Massad describes. Swann and Bosson (2008) critique Massad for being radically essentialist, arguing that his descriptions paint all of the Middle East as passive and incapable of change, all the while describing sexuality as something stable and unchangeable (Swann & Bosson 2008). Backing up their critique, Tolino highlights how it is problematic to view "the West" as an active actor importing its ideas and ways of thoughts onto a simply passive and receiving "East", and the two should be seen as partners in the creation of an ongoing discourse (Tolino 2014). In a similar vein, Paul Gilroy argues "all sexualities have been affected by colonialism and therefore are negotiated or lived between East and West" and suggests a more nuanced depiction of how sexuality is produced and experienced today (Gilroy 1993 in Georgis 2013: 237). Globalization continues to blur the socially, politically, and culturally constructed divide between *East* and *West*, and meaning and experience is negotiated across the East and West. I would argue that although derived from a Western narrative, categorizing terms abbreviated as LGBTQ+, may be purposeful in non-Western societies if empirically analyzed in a local context. I will now attempt to illustrate how the young Arab men I acquainted in Amman found room for self-recognition and self-definition in terms such as "gay" and were able to create meaningful connections through a common understanding of what this entailed for them.

Love, Love, Love

A couple I spent quite a bit of time with during my stay in Amman was Khalid and Amir. Khalid was in his early thirties, and Amir in his mid-twenties and they lived together in a spacious third-floor apartment close to Amman's city center. Khalid had grown up in Amman, though on the East side which he described as a part of the city stuck in "old ideas of what the world is like". He explained to me what he meant by this was that people who lived here were generally more religious and less open to anything that did not conform to traditional Islamic ideas of proper behavior. In contrast, he described West Amman (mostly the city center and the closest three *duwar*s) as a place where it was more acceptable to dress and act in ways that were not so common for traditional Jordanians, a trait he accredited to the many tourists who would frequent the area. Khalid had had no contact with his parents and sisters since he "came out"[27] to them.

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[27] «out» or «out of the closet" is a common way of saying that someone has made their non-heteronormative sexuality known. When speaking in Arabic they would also say e.g., *"ana* out" translated to "I am out".

He told me he had expected his parents to react the way they did and give him an ultimatum of marrying a woman or leaving the family. However, the harsh reaction his sisters had, took him a while longer to process. For Khalid, there had not been a question of whether he was to leave his family or not, and in his own words "I do not regret anything". Living together with his boyfriend, Amir, and working at an art gallery, he was satisfied with the life he had built for himself.

Amir, a tall muscular man, had fled to Jordan from Yemen as a 16-year-old. His family had stayed behind in Yemen, and he had lived on his own in Amman ever since. No one in his family knew about his sexuality and he had only come out to his closest friends in Amman who were mostly also part of the LGBTQ+ community. For him, it had never even been an option to come out to anyone back in Yemen. Because Yemen still practices the death penalty as the maximum punishment for homosexuality, it would put both him and his family in great danger if his sexual orientation was to become known. When I asked him if he ever considered telling his parents seeing as he now lived in Jordan and therefore would not risk being killed in Yemen, he assured me that if it was to be known that his parents had a gay son they could also be punished for his "crimes" as they were still living there. Since he had come to Jordan, he was unable to finish school but had acquired a job as a construction worker, a job he described as tiering but at least it was work. Amir was set to marry his maternal cousin back in Yemen in a year or two, an issue that had been hard on the couple ever since they heard about the arrangement a few months before the covid-19 pandemic hit in early 2020.

One Friday afternoon, I met up with Khalid and Amir in their apartment a short distance outside Amman's city center. Their living room was filled with brightly colored Persian carpets, crystals of every kind, and lots of small trinkets they had collected over the years. Amir showed me a white crystal-looking stone that he could tell me was a salt stone they had picked up from their trip to the Dead Sea the previous year. We sat down on the sofa and Khalid served some Jordanian white wine to the three of us. The two of them had been a couple for about two years. As we were waiting for the other guests, they told me the story of how they had met at the bar we often frequented, a few years previously. This was one of the many bars in Amman where you can find a queer clientele during the hours of the night. They had come to the bar to celebrate the birthday of a mutual friend and immediately hit it off. The couple kept sending each other loving looks as they were sitting on the beige couch holding hands and telling me this story. "I thought he was so handsome, look at him", Khalid explains as he holds his blushing boyfriend's face to prove his words. Since they both lived by themselves at the time they had gone home together and as Amir explained it, he never left. Amir described "one of the

advantages of being gay" was that they were able to live together without raising too many questions, and pointed out that "a straight[28]" couple could never [live together unmarried]". Indeed, it was not uncommon for unmarried men who had moved out from their parents' house to pursue work or education in the capital to live together with other male friends in order to afford to pay for rent. Additionally, reflecting on the precarious nature of female premarital virginity, a heterosexual couple would likely not be able to spend much time alone together before marriage in fear of contaminating the woman's purity, and they could certainly not live together without the significant engagement of *kalam-al-nas.* As pointed out by Nasser El-Dine, "premarital relationships are still commonly deemed dangerous, and disruptive of the local values and social order [in Jordan]" (Nasser El-Dine 2018: 424). Following this logic, the opportunity to explore romantic connection and intimacy outside of marriage, I suggest may be more accessible to queer people wishing to engage in such relations.

Khalid and Amir's relationship show how same-sex desires move beyond the sexual realm, into a realm of long-term meaningful connection and love. Inspired by Norbakk (2018) and how she explores love to investigate Egyptian men's motivations for engaging in marriage, I would like to explore love to investigate my interlocutors' motivations for risking personal loss and what they might gain in return. I wish to look at my interlocutors' subjective experience of love, not to be compared or measured by my own or other people's experience with love, or the portrayal of love by popular culture in the global north (Norbakk 2018: 50-51). As Norbakk explains, love is "at the intersection of an internal, neurological phenomenon and a shared, communicated understanding", and following Norbakk I will focus on the latter when examining how my interlocutors relate to love (2018: 51). In the rare occasion love has been discussed in the Arab region (see Mortensen 2021; Fortier et al. 2018; Kreil 2016; Norbakk 2018) I have found that it is often in relation to a feeling of responsibility toward expectations from one's family, or rather often described in a context of giving up love to honor said feeling. In her article discussing the material dimension of love and marriage in Jordan, Nasser El-Dine has found economy to have a high priority when considering a potential spouse, exemplified by women who described a man's most desirable attribute to be "not stingy" (Nasser El-Dine 2018: 424). While love in the context of responsibility in no way undermines or invalidates the genuineness or legitimacy of their loving feeling and experience, it does create certain frameworks and boundaries for it to be experienced through, such as considering an economic dimension when choosing a partner (Norbakk 2018: 59). However, what I find with my

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[28] Heterosexual

interlocutors, such as Khalid and Amir, is that the idea of a passionate, romantic love is the goal, above the feeling of responsibility. I, therefore, theorize also based on my analyses in the previous chapter that when my interlocutors relinquished the societal responsibilities that come with kinship, and thus also the protection such loyalty entails, such detachment also made room for a love unburdened by these societal responsibilities. Further, as the idea of expanding as a family (having children) is completely put behind them (although it is a wish for some of my interlocutors) as this is not possible in today's Jordan, it opens up additional space for them to focus on their own perception of what love is outside of a normative family. Commenting on the relationship between her infertile Egyptian interlocutor Hamza, and his wife Janna, Inhorn argues that although counterintuitive, their loving marriage had been facilitated by being childless (Inhorn 2012: 1). As a childless dual-income couple, Inhorn explains how they were able to save up money to realize other dreams and had more time to enjoy each other's company. This supports my argument that by resigning from, or in Hamza's case not being able to sustain, some societal familial responsibilities and expectations, one may gain opportune space to explore more of the emotional, romantic dimensions of love.

Zaid was not in a stable, long-term relationship like that of Khalid and Amir, but this did not mean he did not have emotional and intimate relations with men. I once met one of his ex-boyfriends, Thomas, who is a tall, slim-built British man with a calm presence who had lived in Amman for about three years because he was working there. The two men still frequently met each other at social gatherings with shared friends and they seemed to get along well despite the breakup. Zaid and I had met up at our usual bar, specifically chosen because of the "very hot" bartender[29], about an hour early to get some time to ourselves before the rest of his friends arrived. Zaid told me how he and Thomas had dated until about three months ago, but after figuring out they wanted different things they had ended their six-month-long relationship. "I was too needy" Zaid laughed and held onto my arm. "You know I just want love. Love, love, love. You know like the movie, Romeo and Juliet! I want them to die for me", he continued to laugh as he put the back of his hand on his forehead and pretended to faint for dramatic effect. "All the time I text him, it was too much", he let go of my arm and looked around the room to see Thomas and three of his other friends walk in and waved them over to our table with a big smile. After having introduced himself to me, Thomas gave Zaid a big hug and took a seat next to him. Now a table of six, the atmosphere was light and lively, and everyone seemed to be

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[29] We went to this bar multiple times a week until this "very hot bartender" was (rumored) fired and the day Zaid heard about this he actually called me specifically to inform me that "we are never going there again" as the bartender was "the only good thing about the place".

enjoying themselves as both laughter and competing voices filled the room. As I turned my attention to the two ex-lovers sitting next to me, I found them in a deep discussion about which one of the men sitting two tables over was more attractive. While discussing their preferences for the appearance of a partner, the two men seemed unphased by their relatively recent breakup, hanging out and conversing as any other couple of close friends would do.

Initially, their interaction perplexed me, a reaction I ascribe to my impudent assumption that meeting someone from a previous relationship so soon after its end must result in anxious, awkward communication. What transpired between Thomas and Zaid instead was a display of understanding and affection that had not ceased just because the romantic relationship had. Consequently, I wish to argue that while Zaid expressed a longing for a romantic connection, his previous relationship with Thomas resulted in another variety of meaningful connection. During the time they had been boyfriends they had gotten to know each other on an intimate personal level, and what is more, had together experienced the other's strains and struggles navigating queer sexuality. I therefore suggest that through romantic relations Zaid could also build a connection with someone who comprehended his lived experience with negotiating queer identity as a man. Because Thomas was simultaneously negotiating similar experiences for himself, he may have a more profound understanding of his partner's reality than what a heteronormative couple could have of each other's realities. I propose that possibility of such reciprocity-impacted understanding is a valuable addition, possibly also quite particular, to queer relationships.

Negotiating Gender and Identity

The second time I met Zaid, he introduced me to his dating profiles on Tinder and Grindr[30]. While excitedly swiping through different men's dating profiles and pointing out what features he liked or disliked about them, he explained to me how both apps were frequently used to connect with people for one-time sexual interactions, although clearly Grindr profiles were more explicitly sexually charged. The layout of the dating app was arranged in a manner that let you see about fifteen different profiles simultaneously, and I quickly recognized a reoccurring theme of pictures showing half-naked bodies, often with the heads cropped out of them. Because it was possible to initiate a conversation without first having to confirm mutual interest (as one does on Tinder) Zaid could show me an inbox scattered with unopened

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[30] Both are dating application for your phone. Tinder is available for all sexualities while Grindr focuses on a queer clientele.

messages which he assured me would mostly consist of pictures of male genitals in various bad lighting. "It is these *Arab men*", Zaid uttered as he rolled his eyes. Continuing, perhaps as a reaction to my puzzled expression, he expressed great frustration with these *Arab men's* need to assert dominance, and how they were only ever interested in having sex, never anything further. I was reflecting on his assertion, but before I could probe further, Zaid was already well underway with a reenactment of a date he had once experienced.

Intrigued by this second encounter with Zaid, I attempt to decipher the connections between the sexually charged nature of these dating apps, Zaid's dissatisfaction with *Arab men*, and his understanding of himself considering how he on multiple occasions had expressed a sense of belonging to Arab culture. Was Zaid himself not one of these *Arab men?* Short-term sexual encounters as described above are definitely part of the lives of some of the men I encountered. I would argue that because there is less societal pressure on men in terms of sexual purity and pre-marital virginity, whereas a woman's premarital or adulterous sexual behavior is considered the epitome of shame (see chapter 3), sexual encounters between men may be negotiated on terms more familiar to both parties. This as opposed to heterosexual relations where the partners have grown up managing different societal pressures and expectations. That is to say, it is not their sexuality that facilitates more frequent short-term sexual encounters, but rather their gendered position in society as all participating parties of these encounters are male and have grown up learning to relate to sexuality as men. Additionally, my experience with talking to heterosexual Jordanians further emphasizes my assumptions. I have had conversations with frustrated women who complain that "the men, they just do whatever they want". One woman told me "It is because of you. You women come to Jordan from Europe and you let them sleep with you. Even when they are married." This is in no way to suggest that every Jordanian man is an oversexed adulterer who will sleep with whomever he can, but rather to point out that there exists a relatively general understanding that sex for men is more of a "need" as opposed to that of the woman's reproductive and marital "duty". This issue in and of itself could be the subject of a long discussion, I include it, however, to substantiate my argument that a higher occurrence of non-marital sexual activity might be more accessible to queer men. Partly because homosexual intimate relations will always be outside of marriage as they are not allowed to marry in Jordan and thus, there is no incentive to "wait" - as there is nothing to wait for. Furthermore, I would argue that because society puts more emphasis on the restriction of female sexuality, men might not have been conditioned to repress or condemn their own sexual desires to the degree that women have, here talking about sexual desires in

general. In other words, irrespective of their non-heteronormative sexuality, men have grown up learning sexuality from a male perspective.

Marica Inhorn describes an essentialized sketch of the hegemonically masculine Middle Eastern man, drawing heavily on Connell's (2005) theories of hegemonic masculinity which have since been compared to a list of toxic traits by Connell themselves[31] (Inhorn 2012). She describes the caricature of a hegemonically masculine Middle Eastern man as a respected and feared family patriarch, pious to the point of being fanatical, a virile father of many children, husband of many wives, accumulating great wealth in his "homosocially competitive" strive to be better than other men (Inhorn 2012: 49-50; Connell 2005). This might have been some of the traits Zaid hinted at as he expressed his frustration towards *Arab men.* While some of these characterizations might be found in certain men at certain times, as Inhorn continues to point out, "masculinities in the Middle East, as elsewhere, are plural, diverse, locally situated, historically contingent, socially constructed and performed in ways that require careful empirical inspection" (Inhorn 2012: 51). What I attempt to assert here is that while these traits are not accurate general descriptions of Middle Eastern men, these stereotypes are not conjured out of thin air and thus, I suggest they might help us say something about what is expected of masculinity as well as the power dynamics that arise because of it. It is of course important to acknowledge my interlocutors' non-heteronormative sexuality, a sexuality that has long been considered in relation to effeminate characteristics (Connell 2005). Connell states that patriarchal culture has interpreted homosexuality plainly as lacking masculinity (2005: 143). So how then, should we understand my queer, Arab interlocutors' experience with gender in light of the masculine ideals described above? First of all, although homosexuality has long been characterized by feminine attributes, this is a generalized stereotype. The thought was that opposites attract, and thus whatever desires masculinity must be feminine and vice versa. As Inhorn explains, masculinity is diverse, plural, and performed in a variety of ways in different contexts, and the idea that male homosexual desires equal femininity should thus be read as just that – a generalized stereotype (Inhorn 2012: 51). However, this stereotype still seemed to be considered to be true within some discourses in Jordan. When I once asked my Arabic teacher about her thoughts on same-sex desiring, she told me she did not understand why they did not change their gender to female if they desired men. While none of my interlocutors explicitly expressed a sense of belonging to the feminine gender there were times when Zaid for instance,

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[31] Inhorn uses «he/him» pronouns when referencing Connell. Connell is a transgender woman, but because I am unsure what pronouns Connell prefer I use the gender neutral "they/them" here.

explained how he sometimes had to, in his words "act like a man", which he illustrated by making an angry face and gesturing as if to show muscles. This particularly came up when talking about time spent with his father or other older men in his community. In relation to this Zaid also told me that when he was pretending to be heterosexual around his father he would sometimes point out sexually desired features of girls passing, such as their "sexy curves". These comments tell us two things, about how Zaid understood masculinity as well as how he considered himself in relation to it. First, traits such as being angry or strict, physical strength, and desire for the female body were all traits he connected to the notion of "acting like a man". Zaid's statements are also quite reminiscent of the ones presented by Inhorn as essentialist caricatures of Middle Eastern hegemonic masculinity (Inhorn 2012: 149). Secondly, Zaid explains this behavior as an act, a performance put on for those who do not approve of his non-heteronormativity. What follows then is an implicit idea that he himself does not inhabit these "manly" characteristics.

Abid, too, had expressed similar reasonings when reflecting on the way he dressed and his preferred places to frequent. One day he was wearing trendy, loose-fitting, black pants, paired with a black tank top. I complimented his jewelry consisting of a chunky silver-chain necklace, some matching silver rings, and a single dangling earring. He smiled and thanked me as he asserted his enthusiasm for meeting in a place where he felt comfortable wearing it. When I naively asked him why, he started to laugh as he explained that "of course" he could not wear "this" everywhere, grabbing both his necklace and earring, holding them out for me to have a closer look. "These things [jewelry], they are for girls, but I like it. I cannot go to a business meeting like this. People will not want to do business with a man that acts like [a] woman. But here [referencing the area where we were meeting] it is okay, people will stare a little you know, but not too much". Abid refers to his wearing of jewelry as the act of a woman, and like Zaid, he explains dressing differently when in the company of those who do not approve of such an appearance. While both these men ascribe feminine attributes to their actions, or masculine attributes to traits they lack, I do not interpret this to mean that they considered themselves less manly. Abid and Zaid did not talk about themselves in terms of feminine attributes, the feminine characteristics they described were assigned by others. I, therefore, argue that these attributes may say more about heteronormative ideas, and Zaid's and Abid's expectations of normative opinion, perception, and reaction to their queer sexualities.

Hussam had rather clear views of his sexuality and identity as separate matters. The candid man in his mid-twenties worked at a bar where I would often meet him during slow hours so that we could talk. To him, sexuality was more action or praxis than identity-defining.

As he explained, he was attracted to men, so he slept with men, simple as that. Hussam had never been in a relationship but regularly engaged in short-term intimate relations with men he had met through apps or on nights out. "I like men, but it does not mean I want to wear a dress or anything like that". Hussam felt the need to point out that he does not want to wear women's clothes, after having asserted that he is attracted to men. By doing so, he sought to differentiate his non-heteronormative desires from effeminate self-expression. This suggests that the idea of a connection between same-sex desiring men and the feminine was something familiar to Hussam, so familiar in fact, that Hussam felt it necessary to deny the assumption before it was even made.

What I attempt to highlight here is a continuous negotiation of gender and sexuality, through expression, expectation, and exploration of the self. It seems as though the idea that male non-heteronormative sexuality is connected to femininity, or a lack of masculinity, was the perception acknowledged by the dominant public discourse in Amman. It also seemed as though this acknowledgment was recognized by my interlocutors. It appears that there is a contestation between what they deem to be feminine qualities, sometimes their allure towards it, and their perceptions of themselves as male with all the societal implications that implies. None of my interlocutors, however, expressed any interest, need, or desire towards a transgender identity, i.e., they did not feel like a woman and wanted to become one. As Hussam described, he was a man who was attracted to men, nothing more. The queer men I met in Amman navigate a dominant public discourse that draws connections between male non-heteronormative desires and femininity. I would, therefore, argue that this connection may be something that they themselves explore, question, and have to negotiate.

Conclusion

Having asserted the existence of meaningful, emotional queer relations beyond just physical connections in Jordan, I argued that such love may bring forth opportunities less available to the heteronormative population. Drawing on Inhorn (2012) who suggests that a childless marriage might result in more space for romantic love and the realization of different dreams devoid of the economic strains following children, I argue that my interlocutors' situations are comparable. Having relinquished familial connections and the concurrent protections that follow kinship ties, my interlocutors find space to explore romantic connections that are not affected by familial expectations. In this chapter, I have discussed my interlocutors' perception of their own identity in relation to understandings of gender and sexuality, masculinity and

femininity. In the next chapter, I discuss their relationship to the Jordanian state as citizens. This discussion leads to a consideration of what provides my interlocutors with a sense of belonging to Jordanian society, and what they imagine for the future.

Chapter Five: Citizenship and Imagining the Future

The British sociologist and theorist of citizenship, T. H. Marshall defines citizenship as a "status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess this status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed" (Marshall 1983 [1950]: 253). Rogers Brubaker adds the importance of territory to his definition of the term and emphasizes that citizenship is a legal and territorial matter, legally decisive of what territories you, as a citizen, are allowed to roam freely (Brubaker 1992: 21). He describes how citizenship includes, and gives opportunities to its members, while simultaneously excluding and closing opportunities to its noncitizens. Expanding on Marshall's definition, Yuval-Davis and Werbner suggest a wider definition and propose to look beyond just the formal relationship between the state and the individual, and rather look at citizenship "as a more total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging" (Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999: 2). They consider whether the citizen is an abstract subject with access to equal rights, or if it might be more useful to seek to understand specific citizens in relation to their position within and between politics (Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999: 4). The more interesting question to explore is thus not if they are citizens but rather what kind of citizens they are.

In this chapter, I will investigate how the men I met in Amman navigate the socio-cultural, legal, and political landscape of Jordan as queer citizens. Having discussed how a non-heteronormative sexuality may affect family relationships, and further how these family relationships affect my interlocutors' sense of security and safety in chapter three, I here turn to analyze the relationship between my interlocutors' kinship ties and their position in Jordanian society as citizens. Drawing on Yuval-Davis and Werbner's (1999) suggestion to consider citizenship as a more total relationship, I explain some of the connections existing between familial responsibilities – such as taking care of one's parents, getting married, carrying on the family name (having children) – and being Jordanian in the sense of cultural identity and belonging as part of a larger idea of Jordanian citizenship. Considering how most of my interlocutors have resigned from their familial responsibilities as a result of their "coming out", my goal is to get a better grasp of my interlocutors' own sense of Jordanian identity and belonging. In conclusion, I turn to an analysis of how my interlocutors imagine the future, both in and out of Jordan.

The Power of Silence

One day I was writing rapports with Molly at *Salaama*, the help-center I volunteered at a couple of times a week[32]. Molly was one of the psychologists at the center, so I asked her how they let the people of Jordan know about the services they provided, as many of those who benefited from the center where among the more marginalized groups in society who did not necessarily want other parts of the community to know about their situation. Additionally, remembering how Abid and the organization he worked with could not educate people on LGBTQ+ issues because "the people of Jordan are not ready"[33], I wondered how the center could reach out to the targeted groups. "We cannot explicitly say it is for the LGBTQ of course", Molly told me as she took my hand like she often did when she wanted to explain something she thought was obvious.

While homosexuality in Jordan was decriminalized in 1951 after the resignation of the British Mandate Criminal Code Ordinance, there are still no structures in place to protect people from discrimination based on their sexuality. The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, chapter 2, article 6(i) reads:

> *Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of race, language, or religion[34].*

In other words, the law protecting Jordanians from discrimination does not mention sexuality. Speaking directly on the matter in 2017, Jordans then interior minister said that "Jordan has not and will never endorse any charter or protocol acknowledging homosexuals – known as the LGBT community – or granting them any rights as it is considered a deviation from Islamic law and Jordanian constitution" (Human Rights Watch 2017). This clearly sends a message of intolerance as well as painting a picture of queer rights, or rather lack thereof, as something indisputably static and unchangeable. This message is harmful to my interlocutors in that it sets the premise for the public discourse of homosexuality as something undesirable and unworthy of rights and protection. Indeed, this case, where homosexuality is depicted as undesirable by a political leader and official is the only one I could find where homosexuality was being discussed in the Jordanian news, with the exception of one public-opinion piece from 2019[35] with similar, although slightly less explicitly hostile, opinions.

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[32] For a more thorough explanation of *Salaama*, see chapter 1, page 4
[33] See chapter 3, page 32
[34] The Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, (the UN Refugee Agency)
[35] The LGBT storm (The Jordan Times)

Silence can be just as powerful as loud words when utilized at the right time. When state officials or official media avoids speaking of homosexuality they simultaneously avoid taking a stance on the matter. Religious scholar Abdelwahab Bouhdiba states in his book on sexuality in Islam that Islam and queerness is ungrammatical, meaning one excludes the other and do not make sense in relation to each other (Bouhdiba in Boellstorff 2005: 576). Boellstorff (2005) explains Bouhdiba's statements by comparing the ungrammatical example "earth happy twelve the" to how Bouhdiba understand homosexuality and Islam – incapable of being judged, measured, or considered in accordance with one another (Boellstorff 2005: 576). I include Bouhdiba's statements because the Jordanian Monarchy gain much of its legitimacy from their Islamic, Hashemite[36] descendance, and both government and public discourse morality is influenced by Islamic morality (see Chapter 2). Because of this influence by Islamic morality, I wondered whether Bouhdiba's theories that sex between men is incommensurable with Islam was the reason why queer sexualities are so rarely discussed by Jordanian state officials or official media. While this may be part of the cause, I suggest there may be other reasons than "Islamic ungrammaticality" for the silence surrounding non-heteronormative sexuality in Jordanian public discourse.

Looking to China, Lisa Rofel, Judith Halberstam, and Lisa Lowe (2007) provide an example of an instance where state officials were forced to publicly take a stance in LGBTQ+ matters, matters on which state officials had previously remained silent. In 1991, two women whose friendship had developed into a sexual relationship, decided to move in together. One of the women's fathers found out about the relationship and sued his daughter's partner for "hooliganism"[37]. As there was no law against either same-sex co-living or sexual relations, public security bureaus were not sure what to do since they also wanted to honor patriarchal sentiment. Thus, the case was forwarded from the local public security bureau, eventually all the way up to the national public security bureau (Rofel, Halberstam and Lowe 2007: 137). Ultimately the highest national level public security bureau decided they could not judge the case as "What defines homosexuality, and where the blame for the *problem* of homosexuality lies is not clearly defined at present in our country's laws" (Fang 1995: 309 in Rofel, Halberstam and Lowe 2007: 153, *own emphasis*). Although comparable cases have not gone to the courts in Jordan, one finds similar tensions exist, legislation that does not specify non-heteronormative

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[36] The Jordanian Royal family being of Hashemite descendance means they are direct descendants of the Islamic Prophet Mohammad through his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali. (His Royal Highness Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II).

[37] Hooliganism is explained as a "catch-all socialist criminal category that has to do with, paraphrasing Mary Douglas (1992[1966]) movement out of place (Rofel, Halberstam & Lowe, 2007: 137).

sexuality as illegal, and an institutional and public discourse morality that condemns said queer sexuality (Zigon 2008).

Having laws that do not criminalize, yet provide no protection against discrimination or harassment, creates an ambiguous space where the queer citizen is not outlawed but simultaneously is morally and socially shunned. I suggest the Jordanian state has an interest in preserving this ambiguity because its domestic policy on social issues affects the Jordanian state's international relations in both the global North and the global South. For instance, Jordan has as of April 2022 received 17.3 billion dollars in foreign aid from the United States since 1946, a close ally of Jordan's bordering Israel. Jordan is also the home of immigrants from among others Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Palestine, as well as has a strategic placement in the Middle East both geographically and politically. As a result, the Jordanian government strives to please Western sponsors as well as Eastern neighbors and their sociopolitical sensibilities. By not criminalizing homosexuality, Jordan can keep its position in the West as one of the more progressive Middle Eastern states, while at the same time by not acknowledging or condoning it, Jordan caters to religious members of Middle Eastern states who consider homosexuality to be a sin or *haram.* However, as earlier illustrated, on the rare occasion that homosexuality *is* addressed in Jordanian media it is with negative connotations, rather explicitly saying homosexuality is unwanted and undesirable. This somewhat mixed-signal public discourse contributes to producing the ambiguous political landscape my interlocutors navigate, and within which they create their own understanding and ways of being a Jordanian citizen.

A "different" Citizen

A person in possession of their own Jordanian passport is by definition a Jordanian citizen. Accompanying the status of citizenship is equality in terms of rights and duties (see Marshall 1983), as well as access to the country's legal territory (see Brubaker 1992). Thus, I propose two possible entrances to analyzing my queer interlocutors' citizenship. Firstly, one could argue that because no citizen is protected from discrimination on the basis of one's sexuality, this indicates equality under the law, and the citizenship of queer men should be considered in the same way as any other citizen's citizenship. However, Yuval-Davis and Werbner argue that certain aspects, among others sexuality, can interfere with the construction of a citizenship, causing it to be "different", which in turn plays a part in determining that person's access, and ability to exercise independent agency (Yuval-Davis and Werber 1999: 5). Brubaker argues that the exclusion or closure against noncitizens is often carried out by what he calls "front-line

gatekeepers" (Brubaker 1992: 30). Using the labor market as an example, he illustrates how these front-line gatekeepers need not be agents of the state, but could be, for instance, employers with an economic interest in hiring noncitizens (Brubaker 1992: 31). In Amman, I suggest *kalam al-nas,* or the word of the people, could be considered to hold a similar role to that of front-line gatekeepers, though not by governing noncitizens. Instead, I suggest that *kalam al-nas* function as front-line gatekeepers who may set the parameters for what a citizen should be. In other words, *kalam al-nas* may be part of determining what aspects should interfere with the construction of a person's citizenship, and in turn, who's citizenship should be considered "different". In his *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault (1975) describes the rather gruesome torture of a man for attempted regicide in 1777. Following an eighty-year time-lapse, he describes the punishment of prisoners reminiscent of ones we find today, in for instance the United States, with isolation and strict surveillance. Thus he argues a shift had happened, from "punishing the body" to "punishing the soul". Consequently, moving away from punishing the body, often ending in deaths, discipline became about psychologically shaping its subjects into conforming to the norm set by the people in power. Through discipline then, be it in prisons, schools, or politics, states could attempt to create citizens who conform to their ideal norm (Foucault 1975). In light of this, one could further argue that the conforming citizens are the ones in charge of *kalam al-nas*, deciding its dominant narrative, and thus also judging nonconforming citizens as "different", and thus not fully citizens (Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999: 12).

Odgaard argues that one becomes a *good* Jordanian through caring for one's family (2021: 192, *own emphasis*). One is to find a suitable husband or wife, produce offspring that, if you are a man, are to carry on the family name which in the context of Jordan often implies long tribal traditions, or connects one back to ancestral roots in Palestine (Shami 2018: 156). The parents are to be cared for in old age, both socially and financially, and perhaps most importantly, and encapsulating all the above-mentioned responsibilities, one is to respect *kalam al-nas. Kalam al-nas* holds great influence in Jordanian society, and as a carrier of the family name, and thus, a representative of the lineage, one is expected to act in ways that either strengthens or upholds the public position of the family as a unit. Religious piety, be it Islam or Christianity, and respect for the Monarchy which in and of itself implies recognizing their Hashemite descendance, essentially also transfers back to *kalam al-nas.* The breach of Islamic moral codes would also reflect badly on the family; however, a person could be excused if as a Christian they acted in accordance with Christian moral codes[38]. The mentioned actions could

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[38] Alcohol consumption would be an example of this

be described as attributes of a good Jordanian, and I would argue then, also a good Jordanian citizen. Khalid, being in a loving relationship with his boyfriend Amir, will most likely not marry a woman and have children who can carry on the family name. Abid is unlikely to regain contact with his parents and to take care of them as they grow old. All of my queer interlocutors romantically and sexually desire other men, and their sexuality is considered *haram* in Islam. It is these considerations that I argue sort their citizenship into Yuval-Davis and Werbner's category, of "different".

The significance of the family unit, and the importance of not subjecting it to shame is also noticeable in the Jordanian Penal Code (no.16, 1960). Article 340 regarding crimes of honor states:

> *He who catches his wife, or one of his female un-lawfuls committing adultery with another, and he kills, wounds or injures one or both of them, is excused and benefits from an exemption from the law.*
>
> *He who catches his wife, or one of his female ascendants or descendants or sisters with another in an un-lawful bed, and he kills or wounds or injures one or both of them, benefits from a reduction of penalty (Abu-Odeh 2010: 913-914).*

While this law obviously highlights some highly gendered issues within the patriarchal structures, and only refers to women's' illicit sexual behavior in relation to men, and the legitimate right of male members of the family to punish them and even kill them, I wish here to give attention to the family unit. As a country's legislation defines legal citizenship, decides what is acceptable behavior and sanctions citizens who do not adhere, this law underlines the importance of the family's reputation. As a man, one is allowed to go as far as to kill to protect the family honor, showcasing how Jordanian citizenship also has direct legal ties to one's responsibility towards the family. Although Article 340 provides some insight into just how important a family's reputation is in Jordan, it poses no real threat to queer men because of its gendered phrasing. However, Abu-Odeh noted another Article of the Jordanian Criminal Code that, surprisingly to her, was more applied in cases of honor killings - the more general Article 98:

> *He who commits a crime in a fit of fury caused by an unrightful and dangerous act on the part of the victim, benefits from a reduction of penalty (Abu-Odeh 2010: 924).*

This Article poses a more acute threat to my queer interlocutors. Partly because in contrast to Article 340, the phrasing in Article 98 in regard to the victim is not gendered. Additionally, the nature of their "different" citizenship provides no protection for queer men in the Jordanian constitution, chapter 2, article 6(i), which only protects people from being discriminated against

on grounds of race, language, or religion[39]. This law then, opens up a space where homosexuality could be considered, if not an "unlawful act", so an "unrightful act" and thus legitimately punished by a "fury" citizen. While these laws were not something I discussed with my interlocutors, they do serve to underline the precarious environment within which my interlocutors live. Given the centrality of family relations, family obligations, and their fulfillment, to how they are seen by the larger family, neighbors, and society at large as a reputable Jordanian citizen, how do my interlocutors navigate this ambiguous socio-cultural, legal, and political landscape? How do they navigate a public discourse where their existence as non-heteronormative males are either silenced or denied and even considered shameful? One strategy we have already discussed is to relinquish responsibilities connected to the family sphere by cutting all ties. In the next section, I consider how my interlocutors perceive and produce a sense of Jordanian identity and belonging in Jordanian society, despite the rejection they often encounter as a reaction to their non-heteronormative sexuality.

Negotiating Jordanian Belonging

On a weekend trip to Aqaba, Khalid and I were walking along the beach as I looked up at the towering flagpole, waving the Jordanian colors of white, green, black, and red, which caught my eye. An astonishing 130 meters above the ground, making it the 7ᵗʰ tallest flagpole in the world[40], something proud inhabitants of the municipality would regularly point out. "What does being Jordanian mean to you?", I asked as I directed my view back to Khalid, his thick black hair waiving almost like the black of the flag in the wind. Being the well-reflected man he was, Khalid chuckled and told me he had actually given the issue quite a bit of thought. "You know, my blood is from here, I have always lived here, but sometimes I feel that Jordan does not accept me. It does not want me. But then sometimes when I am working in the art gallery, or I see the flowers in Ajloun in spring, or I sit at Café Noir you know, just with my friends and I look out over Amman, then I think yes, Jordan is my home".

Khalid often spoke in such a poetic manner I thought to myself, as we continued our walk along the public beach in the center of Aqaba. He continued explaining his connection to Jordan through familiarity. He knew his next-door neighbor's favorite shisha-flavor by the smell, the road from his childhood home to the school he attended growing up, the loud honking cars on a busy Thursday evening right before *iftar* during Ramadan, and the dewy silence of a

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[39] See page 58
[40] Aqaba Flagpole (Wikipedia)

Friday winter morning. His favorite food would always be *mansaf* and he loved a night of dancing to Bedouin sounds with his friends, he told me while placing his elbows to his sides, his palms up and out to each side and shaking his chest, demonstrating the traditional dance move. "These are all the things of Jordan, you know. My boyfriend, he is from Yemen. Amman is his home now, but he is from Yemen. He will not know the streets and the smells and the people like I do. I know Muhammad who sell falafel down the street from my mother's house and lives alone with his wife, and that he takes care of many stray cats in their apartment. And I know that when he gives me a free cookie with my sandwich it is because one of his sick cats are better and he is happy. He has done this since I was a young boy. This is the good things, it is not all good, but still, I think this is why I am Jordanian".

We had taken our shoes off and were now standing next to each other in silence with our feet in the salty water of the Red Sea. Khalid raised his foot and splashed some water in front of him before he started to speak again. "You know sometimes I get sad because Jordan is my home and I just have to accept the good and the bad, but it is difficult when Jordan does not want to accept me with the good and the bad". He explained how he had met people who did not think queer people existed in Jordan, which was still preferrable to the people who considered them an abomination. In his opinion the possibility of more openness towards the queer community was present, but he thought it may have to be encouraged by a religious leader or the King, and it would have to be done in "a Jordanian way". By this he meant showing heteronormative citizens that they too were Jordanian. "They think because we cannot make children it is just all about the sex, everything, *khalas* (enough). The people, they don't know about it. They have to know it is not like leather and rainbow like in New York"[41]. Khalid smiled at me and did a little twirl in the sand and I could tell that we were about to head back to the hotel.

Analyzing Khalid's reflections, a few points should be made. First, his sense of belonging and identity is not only shaped by his non-heteronormative sexuality. Applying theories of transversal politics, Yuval-Davis and Werbner argue that social positioning and personal values must be considered in all their complex intersections when analyzing the production of identity (Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999: 10). Khalid's identity is made up of a bundle of identifications; he is a Jordanian Arab, an employee, a boyfriend, a neighbor, a friend, and he is gay, none of which are necessarily mutually exclusive. As we have seen, and as argued

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[41] I understood this to likely be a reference to New York Pride where men dressed in leather, rainbows and public displays of same-sex affection as a common sight

by Odgaard (2021), the notion of a "good Jordanian" is decidedly intertwined with family relations. However, having cut ties with his family, Khalid has found other aspects of his life that connects him to a sense of being Jordanian. Sensory experiences such as the smell of shisha, the taste of *mansaf*, the sounds of Bedouin music, or relationships with people outside of the family sphere were all parts of shaping Khalid's sense of belonging to Jordanian society. Khalid's "different" citizenship as a queer man did not lessen his sense of belonging to Jordan. Similarly, his sense of belonging to the otherwise patriarchal, family-oriented Jordan does not make him any less queer. Considering Khalid's reflections together with the previously discussed connections between family relations and perceptions of a "good Jordanian", I suggest a sense of Jordanian identity, or belonging to Jordanian society, can be produced differently, and have different meanings to different citizens. For Khalid it was connected to a sense of familiarity with his surroundings in Jordan, while some of Odgaard's (2021) interlocutors were more concerned with family care. Nevertheless, my queer interlocutors do navigate a political landscape that projects ambiguous messages regarding their position in society. This leads me to explore what the queer men I met thought about and hoped for the future.

Hope and Imagining the Future

One late October afternoon I was sitting with Rayan and his friends at one of Jabal Amman's rooftop bars. I had met Rayan for the first time just a few weeks previous, but since then we had spent a lot of time together and I felt like we were really starting to get to know one another. Rayan had a rather large group of friends, some of whom identified as gay, like himself. He had moved to Amman a few years ago from one of Jordans smaller municipalities. His parents did not know about his sexuality, just that he had moved to Amman for studies and better job opportunities. However, he was getting older which for him meant it was soon time to find a wife. Thus, a discussion he often had with his friends was whether to leave Jordan and start a new life elsewhere or not. In some ways he saw leaving as his only option, as he was convinced his parents would react with rage were they ever to find out about his sexuality. On this particular evening while we were drinking Karak ale and sharing an apple-flavored *shisha*, the conversation turned towards Rayan's future. "Maybe I will move to Amsterdam", Rayan said while waving his hands above his head as if to show an imaginary sign. The other men laughed, and they all started telling stories of what his life would be like in the capitol of the Netherlands. The men imagined Rayan walking through the streets in extravagant designer clothes, swinging by one boyfriend and on to the next one on the upcoming street until finally making his way

back to the house that he had built for himself after his architecture career had taken off. The excited mood around the table was growing and the men spoke louder and louder as they sought to outperform each other by making up the most grandiose future for Rayan in Amsterdam. By the end of the conversation, Rayan had become a world-famous millionaire, living in the biggest mansion in all of Europe.

Conversations such as this one was common among my interlocutors. Dreams of moving and imagining a new life for themselves, sometimes as close as in neighboring Lebanon and its capital, Beirut, other times as far away as the United States. David Graeber argues that rather than seeing the imagination as "the production of free-floating fantasy worlds", we should consider it as part of the process by which our realities are made and maintained (Graeber 2009: 523). Informed by Graeber, I would argue that spaces for dreaming and imagining life somewhere else as illustrated through Rayan, may also be spaces that fuels hope that a good future in Jordan is possible. Ghassan Hage (2016) notes, based on his work on hope, that there have been more emphasis on the distribution of hope, and rather less focus on how hope is initially produced (Hage 2016: 465). He argues that uncertainty is at the very core of hope (Hage 2016: 465). This makes sense in relation to my queer interlocutors and considering the ambiguous political landscape they navigate. They can never be certain of how their non-heteronormative sexuality will be received, and some, like Zaid, live in constant fear of their parents' retribution after having made their non-heteronormative sexuality known. If hope is produced in uncertain environments, there is certainly space for its production among my interlocutors. Nauja Kleist and Stef Jansen (2016) points out how hope is a spatiotemporal issue, meaning one should be concerned with both the "where" and the "when" hope is imagined. Rayan imagines an unspecified time in the future, although presumably in the relatively near future considering he is in his twenties and his hopes involves aspects connected to youth such as building a career. The "where" of Rayan's imaginary is more uncertain. If we are to take him literally, the "where" would be Amsterdam. However, considering Graeber's argument that our imagination should be seen as part of the process by which we maintain our reality, Rayan might in fact be hoping for a similar future, but in Jordan.

Zaid would also often imagine moving abroad. He told me he had discussed the matter with his Canadian manager Sandra, and she thought he could probably be eligible for political asylum because of how the situation was with his family. Whenever we would talk about this, he would often first become excited about all the possibilities. However, after taking some time to dream about 'what could be', he returned to the thought of never returning to Jordan. As much as Zaid dreamed about, or even needed to out of consideration for his safety to move

away from Jordan, he found the thought of leaving his family, as well as his country behind, difficult. "Jordan is always my home you know". When discussing the option of leaving Jordan, Zaid would often express similar sentiments to those of Khalid described above, expressing his sense of connection to his Jordanian Arab identity. Zaid was afraid that he would forfeit the Jordanian Arab part of his identity if he left Jordan, never to return. Among my interlocutors, Zaid experienced the most pressure from his family as he had not completely disconnected from them. He periodically endured their violent abuse, and sometimes even received death threats. His strongest incentive for leaving Jordan was his physical safety, ranking higher than sexual and identity-related autonomy. However, even with the threats and treatments from his family hanging over him, he found the thought of leaving Jordan very difficult. As he explained, "You know I have my whole life here, all my friends, they are here. And I am Arab you know, I love Jordan". Zaid's thoughts of the future underline the argument I set out to make here, with the help of Graeber (2009). Through imagining a better future elsewhere, my interlocutors created a space where hope for a better future in Jordan too, could be produced and exchanged among themselves.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I showed how the Jordanian state contributes to the production of an ambiguous and uncertain political environment for its queer citizens. While the public discourse remains relatively silent in regard to issues surrounding non-heteronormative sexualities, on the rare occasion such issues are addressed, it is with a considerable negative overtone. Inspired by Yuval-Davis and Werbner and their theory that some citizenships are "different", restricting certain citizens' access and agency, I considered the position of my queer interlocutors' citizenship (Yuval-Davis & Werbner 1999: 4). Bearing in mind the significant role of the family when it comes to both Jordanian citizenship and belonging, I argued that my interlocutors' citizenship should also be considered "different". Especially since they lack legal protection from discrimination, while additionally having relinquished kinship ties that may otherwise, albeit usually under heteronormative conditions, have served as another layer of protection. Moving on to a discussion of belonging and Jordanian identity, I analyzed how my interlocutors relate to a sense of Jordanian belonging outside the family sphere. Here, a prominent find was that my interlocutors' sense of belonging was largely connected to sensory memories, such as smells, sounds, or flavors, that they connected to Jordanianhood. Additionally, social connections with non-kin who were considered to belong in Jordan also

became important for their own sense of belonging. Concluding this chapter with a consideration of hope, I found that my interlocutors' imaginings of the future somewhere else, may in fact serve as fuel for the hope of a better future in Jordan.

Epilogue

As this thesis reaches its end, I wish to summarize some of my arguments and suggest some topics that I find interesting for further exploration. In the introductory chapter of this thesis, I pointed out some deficiencies in anthropological research of Arab-majority societies, and especially in regard to topics concerning sexuality. As one of the very few anthropologists who research queer sexualities in Jordan, Marie Odgaard (2021) shed some light on queer sexualities within the family sphere. Because it was important to my interlocutors, the family role has also been important throughout this thesis. I have discussed how family affects my interlocutors' choices, possibilities, mobility, relationships, and even citizenship. Further, I have argued that while some aspects of my interlocutors' lives are complicated by difficult or non-existent familial connections, this lack of connection may also have made space for other possibilities and fueled hope for the future. While I am incredibly grateful for all the insightful knowledge and experiences my interlocutors have given me, this research has also raised some questions for further exploration which I would like to discuss in these ending notes.

Although I have discussed some aspects of queer Jordanian men's familial lives, I never got to observe my interlocutors interact with their families. The main reason for this was that most of my interlocutors had completely disconnected from their families, and thus their kin was no longer part of their lives. Zaid once asked me to come with him to meet his parents, however, I felt I had to decline his offer. He had on multiple occasions told me that he had friends who were scared of his parents and that he had even lost friends because of it. Therefore, out of consideration for my own safety, as well as fear that my other interlocutors would be outed by association to me if Zaid's parents knew about my research, I chose not to meet with them. Nevertheless, it would have been interesting to get a better insight into how these men interact with their parents, in addition to getting to hear some of the parents' voices. I suggest that in order to grasp a more complete image of queer lived experiences in Jordan, it would be helpful to also conduct research from the perspective of the heteronormative family members of queer individuals .

The queer men I am lucky enough to call my interlocutors were all men in their early twenties to mid-thirties who lived in Amman. While I believe there is more research necessary on queer Jordanian experiences in the same demographic, I suggest it would be useful to consider a wider group of queer voices. It would be interesting to attempt to get access to queer

men in a larger age range, particularly men above the age of forty as this is the age group I have found the least research about. I would be curious to compare and explore differences and similarities in the experiences of queer Jordanians across generations. Through an exploration of how non-heteronormative sexualities are experienced by queer Jordanian men of a wider range of ages, I may also shed some light on how the age range of my interlocutors has affected the analyses in this thesis. Additionally, as men in their twenties and thirties, my interlocutors were still at an age where being unmarried could be justified[42]. I was told that there were many men who were married to a woman but would still have sex with men. While I believe this is an overstatement, Khalid suggested that about 70% of Jordanians are gay based on his observations and experiences at bars and dating apps. I wonder then, if one could possibly gain more insight into Khalid's theory if one could get access to an older group of queer Jordanians. I also wonder if thoughts about marriage, children, and family connectivity may change or vary across generations and age groups.

I believe it would be beneficial to gain access to non-heteronormative Jordanians who do not reside in Amman, as my interlocutors do, but rather lives in one of Jordan's smaller municipalities. I do, however, recognize some complications in regard to access to this last-mentioned group. A number of my interlocutors disclosed to me that they had moved to Amman from one of these smaller municipalities with the reasoning that it would be near impossible to exercise a non-heteronormative sexuality outside Amman in Jordan. I interpret the "impossible" here to be a reference to the possible backlash from larger society and law enforcement that my interlocutors perceive as unbearable. Nevertheless, I consider it, from an anthropological perspective, to be useful to get an understanding of queer realities from a larger variety of Jordan's geographical territory. Additionally, I believe this may offer some insight into the implications Jordan's tribal traditions have on queer realities, as I got the impression that tribes and tribal traditions had a more distinct presence in the smaller municipalities than in Amman. Jordan was originally made up of tribes residing in the territory of Transjordan, many of which still exist today (Shami 2018). Kassicieh (2015) stated in her master's thesis that one of her interlocutors described queer belonging in Jordan to reflect the many tribes found in the larger society, rather than the collected community often described by Western queer discourse, and I wonder whether this would become more apparent with the inclusion of queer Jordanians outside of Amman.

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[42] Although some of my older interlocutors were starting to get questions about why they were not married by colleagues or acquaintances who did not know about their sexuality

I would also have liked to further explore the notion of community. While community has not been a focus in my thesis, some of the theories I have applied have suggested it might be helpful to explore it further. Some examples would be how Kinnvall (2004) suggests that gathering with people who experience similar insecurity can help garner a sense of security, or how Achilles (1967) argues that without a space to convene, such as the bar, homosexuals as a group would cease to exist. These examples point to the relevance of further research on queer Jordanians as a community, and I suggest that because people with non-heteronormative sexualities are so often discussed in terms of "a community" in Western public discourse, I would be curious to further research whether this is also the case in Jordan.

I would argue that the exploration of more varieties and nuances of gender in Jordanian queer experiences is also necessary. One aspect of this would be to understand more about how queer Jordanian men perceive, perform, explore, and negotiate gender. While I did explore the issue of gender some in this thesis I would have liked to continue this discussion with my interlocutors. Another aspect would of course be all of the topics discussed in this thesis, but with a focus on female non-heteronormative sexualities. While the existing anthropological literature with a focus on queer Jordanian men is slim, there is even less focus on female queer experiences – experiences that are just as important to understand as those of men. This would also be valuable in that one would be able to compare and possibly uncover if or how queer experiences in Jordan are gendered.

What may have shone through in these concluding considerations is that the existing anthropological literature on Jordanian queer experiences is a rather limited collection, and I would consider any new research to be a valuable addition. I have listed here some of the topics that have intrigued my interest throughout this research, however, this is far from a complete list of topics I find would benefit from additional exploration. I recognize the temporality of anthropological field research, and the lives of my queer interlocutors continue to be experienced, explored, developed, and lived after my research end. The complexity of these lived experiences and the social, cultural, political, and legal environments that affects them is of course impossible to fully grasp through a six-month fieldwork and a master's thesis. However, I hope that this thesis, although a relatively small contribution, will provide some further understanding of how young queer Jordanian men may experience, navigate, perform, and negotiate their lived realities.

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