

Deconstructing the Gay International: A Content Analysis of Coverage of  
Homosexuality in Arabic Satellite News

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**ABSTRACT**

On May 17, 2004, Massachusetts became the first American state to legalize same-sex marriage. In what was widely seen as a historic milestone in North America, the marriage equality debate was quickly thrust into the head beams of global media networks. Images of protestors, activists and jubilant couples in long lines outside of Boston's city hall were transmitted and consumed worldwide, including Arab and Muslim news outfits. From Marriage Equality to the conscription of Gay men in the military, globally salient events dealing with homosexuality have begun to be broadcast with increasing frequency on Arabic satellite news networks, a move that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. Despite this surge in queer visibility, homosexuality remains unpopular amongst Arab publics, prompting questions about the editorial mechanisms involved in its exposure. Are Western news regimes influencing the editorial gatekeepers in the Arab newsroom? How does an Arab satellite network attempt to reconcile its identity as a global media institution with its desire to represent the voices and aspirations of its audience? Finally, what can this coverage tell us about the similarities and differences in the attitudes towards homosexuality between international-based and local-based Arabic newsrooms?

This study approaches this puzzle by problematizing post-colonial assumptions about contemporary sexual subjectivity as articulated through the “Gay International”, a term coined by Joseph Massad to describe the principles enshrined by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) activists, human rights networks and academics in their efforts to enforce Western constructions of homosexuality upon the Arab world. Today's highly mediated environment prompts questions about the salience of Massad’s argument , particularly when the agents of transmission are increasingly, local indigenous media sources. Using a quantitative content analysis of online articles from four major Arabic language networks, this study seeks to explore how this transmission is framed amongst local, and internationally based Arabic language news broadcasters. Are the news networks the new conduits of the Gay International? Or are they a source of incitement to discourse?

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## **CHAPTER I: Introduction**

This thesis seeks to explore the emerging role of Arabic language satellite news in influencing discourses of homosexuality in the Arabic public sphere. Stories on marriage equality legislation, conscription of gays and lesbians in the military and the plight of gays in Iraq, Egypt and Iran have begun to be featured with increasingly regularity on Arab newscasts and social talk shows, in what seems like a growing trend to redress the confines of socially acceptable discourse in the Arab world. While this study does not seek to explore longitudinal trends in attitudes towards homosexuality within the Arab street, it does seek to ask how and why Arab news networks, both local and international, cover socially sensitive issues. Are Western news regimes influencing the editorial gatekeepers in the Arab newsroom? How does an Arab satellite network attempt to reconcile its identity as a global media institution with its desire to represent the voices and aspirations of its audience? Finally, what can this coverage tell us about the similarities and differences in the attitudes towards homosexuality between international-based and local-based Arabic newsrooms?

To explore these issues, this study made use of content analysis to analyze online news articles dealing with issues related to homosexuality content on four Arabic news networks. In addition to analyzing content on Al-Jazeera Arabic and Al-Arabiya websites, this study included two internationally based networks with news outfits in Arabic, these being the BBC Arabic and CNN's Arabic online portal. While both Al-

Jazeera and Al-Arabiya garner the lion's share of audience preference in the region, I found it necessary to explore how international networks localize homosexual issues for the Arab market. The BBC has maintained a strong and consistent presence in the region, beginning with the establishment of the BBC World Service Arabic language radio in the immediate aftermath of World War II and culminating with the release of BBC's first dedicated television network in Arabic (and the first dedicated BBC television network in a foreign language), a move that would position it in direct competition to Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya. Historically, perceptions of the BBC's presence in the Arab world have oscillated between its identity as a conduit of impartial news, and as a mouthpiece for Western interests (Ayish, 1991; Miladi 2006). The BBC has worked vigorously to maintain editorial consistency in its localization efforts and continues to emphasize its trans-lingual, trans-cultural objectivity in its branding (Cheesman & Nohl, 2004). CNN has only recently begun to branch out into foreign language news and has yet to televise its content in a language other than English. Under pressure to compete in an already crowded media market place, CNN rolled out its Arabic language web portal in 2002. CNN Arabic has sought to differentiate itself from its most direct competitors, the BBC Arabic, and Voice of America through its motto: "International news from an Arabic perspective." (CNN 2009).

On the other hand, Al-Jazeera, and to a lesser extent Al-Arabiya, have much more explicit partisan agendas, having sought to position themselves as vessels of the Arab street (Seib, 2003; El-Newawy & Iskandar, 2004, Kraidy, 2001) and to leverage their

coverage in order to gain the trust of an otherwise skeptical audience base (Miladi 2006). Despite this, both networks have also strived to brand themselves as major actors in the global news arena, and have collaborated extensively with other regional and global networks. As I will discuss in the next section, these influences can give us some direction as to how homosexuality is framed within the Arab news arena. They also serve as a guiding blueprint for the research questions I am asking:

RQ1. How do international and local networks cover homosexuality?

RQ2. Do political-economic influences have any agency in how homosexuality is framed and discoursed?

This thesis will be divided into five chapters. In the next section, I will talk about the motives underlying this project as well as a brief introduction of some of the concepts underlying my approach. Chapter Two will present an overview of some of the seminal literature, past and present, on sexuality in the Arab/Muslim world. Here, I will focus on the study of homosexuality as a context of post-colonial and constructivist discourses, two epistemic approaches that have come to embody the current polarity homosexuality represents in the region. Chapter two will also present a brief discussion on the etymological evolution of homosexual terminology within the Arabic language- a chronology that would come to engender the complex sociocultural relations between East and West. Chapter three will present an overview on media effects and localization theories and the ways these themes help us frame the visibility of Homosexuality in the Arabic media arena. I will then shift gears towards an empirical overview of the current

state of mediated homosexuality on Arabic airwaves. In chapter four I will present a detailed account of my methodology. I will also present a cursory overview of the different methodological approaches used in other empirical studies on sexual subjectivity and gender from an Arab/Muslim context. In addition to my conclusion, chapter six will feature a section on research limitations discussion on the research implications of this project and suggestions for future research.

### **Research Motive**

There are two motifs underlying this project. First, I wanted to better understand how editorial systems functioned within global news organizations. The control of in-house gatekeepers has diminished as news becomes more consolidated and aggregated across global news networks (Cohen, 1995; Gurevitch & Levi, 1997; Kim, 2002), meaning that regional or local news networks have less control over content selection. The Arab television news arena is a compelling case study of this phenomenon because of its historical salience in the region. For many scholars and journalists, Al-Jazeera's launch in 1996 was the progeny of a "gilded age" in Arab news, one that would come to circumvent the information stranglehold of state governments and challenge the West by directly courting the sentiments of the Arab street. Over time, this identity would serve as one dimension of a larger interplay between Al-Jazeera's desire to promote itself as a reputable global news source that is held accountable to its treaties and commitments, and more illicitly, as a diplomatic arm of the Qatari government who were its official

sponsors and financiers. This trifecta of influences, which Kai Hafez refers to as the “three paradigms” model of mass communication (2008), has become a salient lens for exploring the political structures of state-sponsored global networks and the ways in which internal editorial mechanisms negotiate different, and often competing influences.

The second underlying motif for this study revolves around one central inquiry: why look at the coverage of homosexuality in the first place? After all, there are several equally provocative issues that could be ideal for this study. Al-Jazeera's breakthrough coverage of the 1999 Israeli elections drew pointed allegations that the station was too pro-Israeli and in the words of Sheikh Hamad was “being financed by the Mossad”<sup>1</sup>. Both Al Arabiya and Al-Jazeera have been the target of irate conservative Islamic groups in their extensive coverage of Women's issues (Hafez 2009, 322). Both Feminism and Anti-Semitism would have served the purpose of this project well, however, the decision to focus on a socially sensitive topic, homosexuality in particular, stems from the premise that no issue comes close to engendering the provocative and polarizing effects that sexuality has played in cross cultural dialogue between the Arab world and its Western counterparts. Perceptions of a decadent, morally culpable West, a culture that has largely embraced homosexuality- remain popular memes in social commentary throughout the Arab world. Even today, attitudes towards homosexuality remain resoundingly negative amongst most Arabs. A 2007 Attitudes survey by the Pew Global

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<sup>1</sup> Full article along with the Emir's statement can be found here:  
[http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall01/Jazeera\\_chairman.html](http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall01/Jazeera_chairman.html)

Project showed that of the five Arab countries surveyed, only Lebanon had a favorable rating above 10% with 18% of respondents agreeing that homosexuality should be accepted by society. Only 1% of Egyptians respondents answered yes to the question, followed by a 6% agreement in both Kuwait and Jordan. In contrast, the United States scored the lowest of the eight North American and Western European countries polled, with 49% of respondents answering favorably (Pew, 2007). On questions related to women's equality in the workplace and participation of women in politics, the same poll shows significant convergence between Arab respondents and Western and North American respondents, suggesting that with the exception of homosexuality, there seems to be growing agreement on the trajectory of social issues. In summary, if Pew's findings suggest that if there was an issue that best exemplified Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations; homosexuality could very well be the dividing fulcrum (Inglehart & Norris, 2002).

Another driving focus of this thesis concerns the very study of homosexuality in the Arabic media; very little has been written about it. Even when we look at broader discussions on gender, feminism and other sociocultural issues, we find that media effects literature of how these themes intersect with news production has lagged tremendously behind scholarship on political and religious currents in the Arab world. Islamic extremism, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have effectively crowded out these research avenues in favor of appeasing international policy circles, who have long seen networks like Al-Jazeera and Al Arabiya as significant

arbitrators in the trajectory of geopolitical events in the region (Seib 2003, Sharp 2003, Miles 2006, Walt 2002) because of the perceived influence these networks have over the opinions of the Arab street. Moreover, amongst Arab publics, researchers have a strong base of stakeholders to speak to. The relaxing of censorship laws and the explosion of information networks have had dramatic transformative effects on the region, turning the Arab public sphere into one of the most politicized regions (Brumberg, 2002). Both factors mean that Arabists and mass media scholars have a vast trove of information to source from and analyze, and a vibrant debate to contribute to. In contrast, the queer theorist continues to find the Arab world as a hostile, confounding and elusive space for conducting similar forms of inquiry. Until recently, public discussions on homosexuality were virtually non-existent and outside of tepid curiosity and scandal on a handful of newscasts and talk shows, the Arab public sphere continues to be generally hostile to discoursing these topics. From a logistical standpoint, there are linguistic and cultural barriers to overcome, and the fragmented demography means that any macro regional studies will have to tweak their research protocols for every country surveyed, particularly if the researcher plans to conduct audience focused studies (to date, there are no active macro-regional rating agencies). For both Western and regional academics, there are legitimate fears and trepidations around studying homosexuality in a region where social and legal forces are hostile to it, and where the risk of legal persecution is all too real (Abukhalil 2002). This lack of attention paid to the intersection of these two increasingly research salient domains represents a significant research gap, one that could

potentially provide academics with valuable insight into the evolution of sexual and gender identity in a mediated environment.

## **Chapter II: From Practice to Persistence: the Evolution of Sexual Discourse**

### **Introduction**

Much of the theoretical foundations of homosexuality in the Arab world continue to be informed by Foucauldian and post-colonial discourses on sexuality, both of which broadly interpolate a tale of power and colonial subjugation into the evolution of sexuality. Generally, this philosophy relies on two constructs. The first concerns an “Imperialist” Western sexual liberation regime that has sought to “transpose” its own ideas of sexuality upon a culture where none had existed a priori (Massad 2002); and the second, an Arab-Islamic public that has resisted such advances for the sake of conserving its own sexual heritage. In this paradigm, sexual subjectivity becomes a conquest of ideas, one involving the hegemony of Western constructions of sexual identity as a demarcation between persistent hetero-normative and homo-normative subjectivities within the political, legal and cultural life of the Arab-Islamic world- a cultural space where such distinction had never existed. It is within this contemporary frame that Joseph Massad first stakes his claim. In his controversial article “Reorienting Desire”, Massad argues that the “Gay International”, which he defines as a loose federation of missionaries, activists, and scholars committed to the advancement of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) rights, is merely a manifestation of the cultural imperialism that was practiced with the arrival of the French and British. Within the

perceived vacuum of proper sexual conduct, both powers introduced a systematic approach to sexual morality, culminating in the codifying of penal laws that punished acts that were considered “indecent or unnatural.” Furthermore, Massad argues that the “Gay International” in its “aggressive” agenda, is to blame for much of the backlash against homosexuals and those who practice same-sex intercourse within the Arab world. This backlash, which he defines as “incitement to discourse” has not only fueled the persecution of practitioners of same-sex intercourse or relations, whether they choose to identify as gay, lesbian or otherwise, but it has encouraged the backlash against an LGBT rights agenda. In sum, Massad sees the Gay International as the front line in the battle between its fiercest advocates and those hostile to its philosophy, with Arab homosexuals becoming its unintended victims.

In review of the binary posed by “Gay International”, this project asks the following questions: What role do Arab networks play within its arena? And how entrenched are they in this project? The aim of this paper is not to necessarily dismiss Massad's argument wholesale, but to interrogate the binary it attempts to establish from the prism of Arab journalism. How do we thematically integrate the coverage of homosexuality into Massad's articulation of the Gay International? There are three possible answers to this question. First, we can argue that the advent of global information networks has raised serious questions about the very role of sexual rights groups as the main propagators a Western narrative of sexual subjectivity. More so than ever before, Arabs are being exposed to news coverage of globally salient events like the

marriage equality debate in the United States, violence against gay men in Iraq and Somalia, and the ordination of Gay and Lesbian clergy have interpolated the discourse on sexual categories and homosexual rights. These issue areas have gained exposure amongst Arab publics, whether they are receptive to these issues or otherwise. Second, we can argue that local Arab networks have become an extension of the discourse incitement apparatus in the Arab world, and that their coverage fuels anti-homosexual sentiments. A third and equally plausible thesis could suggest that Arab networks are neither nor, their coverage falling into an interstitial space that has no explicit affinity with either side.

These three positions are certainly not exclusive to the thesis of the Gay International and media matters. Indeed, before we can attempt to meaningfully ask and explore the questions above, we must first map out the Gay International's epistemic foundations within the broader discussions of Arab sexuality, and the unfolding sociocultural processes it influences. This is no easy task given the broad ideological spectrum inherent to a relatively nascent discipline like queer scholarship, one that has only recently begun to appropriate multicultural paradigms into its cannon. Within the milieu of Arab and Islamic studies, two theoretical strands seem to emerge. The first, advanced by Massad and his cohort of post-colonial theorists, regards the introduction of sexual categories as a top-down cultural subjugation between two disparate sets of mores. The second view falls more in line with what I regard as constructivist paradigms, which argue that the epistemic foundations of homosexuality are borne out of a heuristic

processes of intercultural exchange between East and West. (Bennett 2005, Evanoff 1998).

### **Operationalizing Massad's "Gay International"**

Before we can fully parse out the premise and agenda of the Gay International within the discourses on Arabic media, we must first operationalize its concepts. Massad defines two core elements of the Gay International. The first concerns the Gay International as a space for missionaries- comprised of institutions, actors and individuals mobilized around promoting a global sexual rights agenda. The second definition revolves around the Gay International as an ideological framework consisting of principles and assumptions that are propagated via academic and popular literature. As such, the Gay International is as much as a theoretical metaphor of Post-Colonial Orientalism as it is a category ascribed to the agents working actively on behalf of its principles. Groups involved in missionary work tend to consist of White and Western human rights groups (though he has also attributed these references to Arab LGBT rights groups operating in the Diaspora). Massad singles out the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission as a particular example of a missionary institution; its mission statement, he argues, serves as the preamble of the Gay International's mission to "protect and advance the human rights of all people and communities subject to discrimination or abuse on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV status." (Massad, 2002 pp. 362). Founded in 1990, the IGLHRC has become one of the oldest and most prominent US based LGBT advocacy groups with extensive global activist

network extending to Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and more recently, the Caribbean. It also has a strong political presence on the Hill, having worked with Congress on asylum legislation (IGLHRC 2011). Additionally the group has a strong record of collaborating with other human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. For Massad, the global scope of IGLHRC's mission and activism makes it a text-book example of the Gay International.

As an ideological framework Massad identifies a number of principles that he claims are inherent to all of those involved within the Gay International. First Massad argues that the Gay International reinforces Orientalist tropes by continuing to regard the Muslim and Arab worlds as “special places” in its discourse and advocacy. He cites a statement made by Lisa Power, co-secretary of the International Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA) that appeared in OUT Magazine as a typical example of this. The quote reads "most Islamic cultures don't take kindly to organized homosexuality, even though male homoeroticism is deep within their cultural roots! . . . most people are too nervous to organize, even in countries with a high level of homosexuality." (Wockner 1992). To Massad, Lisa Powers' comment represents a contemporary manifestation of how the colonial powers perceived Arab sexuality, one that reincarnates essentialist constructions of sexuality in the Arab and Islamic world as a hostile and foreboding . The second characteristic he ascribes is the need for the Gay International to emphasize the universality of its beliefs and that its understanding of sexuality transcends historical and cultural boundaries. On this he writes:

“[T]his discourse assumes prediscursively that homosexuals, gays, and lesbians are universal categories that exist everywhere in the world, and based on this prediscursive axiom, the Gay International sets itself the mission of defending them by demanding that their rights as "homosexuals" be granted where they are denied and be respected where they are violated. In doing so, however, the Gay International produces an effect that is less than liberatory” ( 362).

The last sentence of this quote is a direct lead in into his notion of incitement to discourse, which is the last characteristic he ascribes to the Gay International. As noted earlier, Massad sees the Gay International as a constant source of agitation discourse of incitement, which in empirical terms is the emergence of a homophobia. However, Massad also notes that the anti-homosexual discourse in the Arab-Islamic World is increasingly reminiscent of the rhetorical and lexical undertones of its Western/Judeo-Christian counterparts. In the last 50 years, anti-homosexuality discourse has expanded beyond its moral and religious roots to appropriate many of the homophobic themes inherent to the West. Today, Homosexuality has become synonymous with mental illness, biological disease and with HIV and AIDS. Indeed, one can point to the sharp rise in “corrective” programs and psychiatric treatments in the Arab world promising to “cure” homosexuals as an empirical illustration of this phenomenon. For Massad, these disturbing themes have emerged as a direct consequence of the Gay International's attempts to introduce a Westernized discourse on sexuality, one that would in turn, prompt a Westernization of anti-homosexuality.

## Criticism

Unsurprisingly, Massad's controversial thesis has not been received well amongst LGBT rights movements, queer scholars and even amongst his contemporaries in the Arab Islamic studies field. Some have contested his version of the Gay International as reductionist and limited to an orientalist discourse, one that is transient of the historical processes that have helped shape and reify sexuality in the Arab world. In a rejoinder to Massad aptly titled "Distorting Desire", Brian Whitaker (2011) writes "there are plenty of reasons other than an "orientalist impulse" [as to] why gay rights activists might justifiably pay attention to Muslim countries... but that is not the same as reserving "a special place" for them in discourse." Others have attacked Massad's assertion that the Gay International only subscribes to the notion that sexual orientation as a transhistorical/transcultural phenomenon devoid of the complexity and nuances of contemporary sexual discourse. "no "orientalist scholar" applies a text written some thirteen hundred years ago to today", writes Arno Schmidt in a rejoinder essay to Massad, "Orientalists study the way thirteenth-century Muslims use and interpret the Qur'an, the way fifteenth-century Indians understand it or the differences between Maghrebi, Ottoman, and Moghul lithographs of the Qur'an, or how a nineteenth-century Egyptian uses a twelfth-century commentary on it." (pp. 589)

Even contemporaries of Edward Said have questioned the salience of Massad's argument under the pretext that sexuality, like other "introduced" ideologies such as

national determinism, human rights, and free speech have become a defacto part of Arab idealism. In a direct rejoinder to Massad on his personal blog, Hussein Ibish, a prominent Arab American activist argues that Massad “treats modernity as if it were optional, which is wrong, or to be lamented... as if it were an à la carte menu in which a society may pick and choose the items it wants for its own purposes and simply decide to avoid some other aspects that are inherent in modernity (and not, therefore, simply in Western culture) such as gay and other "problematic" socio-political identities. (Ibish 2010). Put simply, Ibish see's Massad's avoidance of addressing other post-colonial ideologies, such as national determinism as flawed and contradictory. A final criticism and a central component of this thesis, seeks to problematize the relevancy of Massad's argument in today’s increasingly mediated and globalized environment. As stated earlier, Massad's critique seems to rest exclusively on the direct interplay between actors within the Gay International movement, and its rejoinders in the Arab public, without accounting for the role of global media in disseminating Western constructs on sexual subjectivity. To this point, Keohane and Nye (1998: 87) write:

Nonetheless, the spread of information and American popular culture has generally increased global awareness of and openness to American ideas and values. To some extent this reflects deliberate policies, but more often soft power is an inadvertent byproduct.

Could we not argue that the premise of the Gay International as a direct vehicle for transmitting Western sexuality is being overshadowed by global television and the Internet? Both mediums, among others, have given viewers unfettered access to content containing social mores that may very well fall outside of their comfort zone. American syndication of shows such as “Will and Grace” and “Queer as Folk” on Arabic entertainment channels have all but served to orient Arabic viewers to themes that would be considered invasive if not disruptive to Massad. By shifting the boundaries of asymmetrical information networks, indigenous or local satellite news networks have become a platform for articulating the concerns of the Arabic public sphere by extending their counter-hegemonic framework towards the coverage of gender and homosexuality. As I discuss in an upcoming section, Gay visibility is on the rise on a variety of Arabic media platforms, bringing with it a narrative that acknowledges and at times, mimics the Gay International platform.

### **Post-Colonial Discourses on Homosexuality**

We have already dealt extensively with post-colonial attitudes of homosexuality in looking at Massad's articulation of the Gay International. However, the spatial relationship he strings between the Gay International, its native informants, and the Arab homosexuals the movement attempts to speak for (and about) is almost formulaic of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's discussion of subalterity, in which she sought to frame Western intellectual movements and its native agents (Marxism and Western feminism in particular) as attempting to represent or speak for the needs of a population that was

presumed to be unable to speak for itself- the subaltern. In *Can the Subaltern Speak*, Spivak attempts to problematize the privilege of enlightened movements themselves by questioning the very conditions of subalterity that such movements purport to speak for. These movements not only render their subjects as nothing more than a set of essentialist characteristics, but do so in such a way as to render their narratives unnecessary or contradictory. Spivak's own take on Western feminism is particularly poignant here in its theoretical likeness to Massad. Spivak writes "Between Patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third world woman" caught between tradition and modernization." (Spivak, 1984: 102)

For Spivak, the dialectic between patriarchy and imperialism are reincarnated in the conflict between tradition and modernization- a theme that is echoed in Massad's writings. For Massad, there seems to be a general disconnect between the aspirations of the subaltern as conveyed through the interests of the Arab men and women who engage in homosexual intercourse, and Gay International discourse.

Another facet of post-colonial discourse concerns the need to articulate cultural discourse as a function of power. Cultural discourses are not fostered through exposure, but through forced consumption and assimilation of alien mores. The dialectics between Arab and West, practice and persistence, and scientific and doctrine become intractable and irreconcilable concepts that cannot be reconciled. Sexuality becomes a hostile weapon used by the French and British to uproot and transform a preexisting culture of

sexuality that had existed for thousands of years. Indeed, scholars like Khaled El-Rouayeb argues that using the word homosexual retroactively to describe male on male sexual behavior is problematic on two grounds, first, with the assumption that sexual intercourse was seen as a function of power between an active partner and a passive recipient, and second, that male on male penetration was often used under the pretext of domination and conquest, often in instances of war and retributive justice. To the latter point he writes “the act of penetration can hardly be called “sexual”, as it is disassociated, not only from love and intimacy, but also from desire and pleasure. It is explicitly stated that that the penetrator has to overcome his feeling of disgust and impose on himself what is “contrary to preference”” (2005:14). As I will articulate later, distinguishing between practice and persistent constructions of homosexuality becomes a tool in the arsenal of post-colonial approaches towards the Gay International.

### **Intercultural Constructivism**

Constructivist attitudes on the ontology of Arab homosexuality set themselves apart from their post-colonial counterparts by positing that the epistemological origins of homosexuality is not just limited to Western and colonial narratives, but is grounded upon intersubjective themes between both Arab and European sexual heritages. These arguments suggest that expressions of a persistent homosexual identity- a defining principle of Western homosexuality- has been acknowledged in some form or another within Islamic poetry and literature, despite popular consensus by critical theorists that argue that such demarcations between a hetero-normative and homo-normative narrative

are a recent construct in the Islamic and Arab world. For example in Arabic poetry, we see examples where homoerotic expressions are juxtaposed with themes of romantic loss and heartbreak. Take this stanza from the Islamic Poet Abu Nawas titled “Love in Bloom”:

*I die of love for him, perfect in every way,  
Lost in the strains of wafting music.  
My eyes are fixed upon his delightful body  
And I do not wonder at his beauty.  
His waist is a sapling, his face a moon,  
And loveliness rolls off his rosy cheek  
I die of love for you, but keep this secret:  
The tie that binds us is an unbreakable rope.  
How much time did your creation take, O angel?  
So what! All I want is to sing your praises.  
(Translated by Monteil 1979. Pp. 95)*

Historians like John Boswell (1980), have always maintained that various historical interactions between European Christendom and the Islamic world resulted in a shared evolution of sexuality. As such, constructivists are likely to argue that contemporary constructions of homosexuality as we know them today were a result of those historical and cultural experiences (Evanoff 1998; Bennet 2005). Constructivist attitudes do not necessarily have to discount post-colonial assumptions however, some like AbuKhalil are likely to acknowledge that while homosexuality as an identity may have preceded British and French colonial forces, it was only under their rule did this subjectivity become institutionalized. Similarly, modern constructivists like Ibish might accept that Western homosexuality, be it in the form of the Gay International, is here to stay, despite the

Orientalist and post-colonial circumstances that brought them here. However, what separates them from Massad is that both authors are less concerned about epistemic and physical extrication of the Gay International (a measure that Massad calls for), and more open working with the new paradigm.

### **From Practice to Persistence: a Lexical Evolution**

Perhaps one of the key schisms to emerge between Post-colonial and constructivist notions of homosexuality revolves around a practice-persistent dialectic. Distinguishing between the act of sex between two men, and homosexuality as a persistent identity serves as a critical cultural fault line in both Massad's and El-Rouayeb's arguments. Here, the act of sodomy is not a function of a homosexual identity, but an instrument of domination and conquest. It is incompatible with what they argue as recent, Western notions that Arab men and women who engage in sexual acts with people of the same gender are by default, persistent homosexuals.

While some scholars like As'ad Abukhalil maintain that expressions of a persistent homosexual identity have long existed in some form or another within Arab Islamic poetry and literature, Boswell (1980), Schmidt (2002) and Massad (2004) suggest the contrary, arguing that Islamic mores on sex emphasized principles around conduct and practice, and not on sex as a function of identity. Boswell's historical analysis can shed interesting light on this history. He argues that the epistemic roots of homosexuality can be traced to the rise of Anti-Semitism and the implacable, persistent traits it relegated to European Jewry. Under a similar framework, European Christians began to see Homosexuals as an embodiment of a consistent community, defined not through a set of

discrete practices, but through manifest characteristics. According to Boswell, this transition took time to develop. Penal codes on homosexual behavior was scant and canonical establishments tended to be “gender blind” on sexual misconduct, lumping sodomy amongst males with adultery and other forms of sexual transgression. The move towards the construction of a persistent homosexual minority did not begin till much later, and occurred incrementally over the course of two periods, the first under the Christian Crusades and the second, under the Dominican inquisition. In the first, the wholesale association of the Saracens as practitioners of sodomy entrenched this belief of a collective of deviants. Under the inquisitions, homosexuals were considered heretics with the same punitive measures used against them as other heretics. As a minority of heretics, disenfranchised from the Church, homosexuals began to take on many of the conditions previously reserved for other persecuted minorities, namely Jews, Pagans, and the last pockets of Muslims in Andalusia Spain.

While Boswell provides a comprehensive background on the practice vs. identity schism in medieval Europe and Andalusia Spain, much of the literature in sexual studies traces the emergence of persistent sexual identities towards the end of 19th century. Under this lens, we begin to see the emergence of orientalist literature that sought to depict the “orient” as a fixture of sexual decadence (Said 1979). It is through this lens that we also begin to see the lexical and social evolutions of homosexuality converging within the legal and social structures introduced by the French and British- of which the institutional backbone remain in place today throughout the Arab world.

At first glance, the syntactical structure of Arabic's sexual terminology seems to support the idea of sexuality as practice, or a binary between ( *tahr*) appropriate and inappropriate ( *zinnah*) forms of sex. The schism between practice and identity can be readily apparent in the evolution of the Arabic etymology of synonyms of homosexuality. Much like its Romance and Anglo language variants, modern Arabic is host to numerous synonyms on sexual subjectivity, ranging from technical terminology to derogatory and colloquial expressions. The emergence of the term “متلي الجنس” ( *Mithliyu'l Jins* or transliterated as sexual sameness) in official public discourse in the Arab World, serves as an important milestone. For one, the term served to fill a terminological deficit for a scientific and technological term that could be seen as compatible with Western scholarship. Instead of the ambiguous and pejorative expressions that were often used to describe sodomy or other acts of “sexual deviance”, the term was the first to specifically refer to homosexuality and homosexuals. This would serve as a crucial development in the establishment of a homo/heteronormative binary in the Arab world. The widespread use of *mithli* in academic and popular literature has arguably consolidated the integration of the Gay International lexicon in the Arab world, even its ideals remain unpopular and prone to hostility.

## **CHAPTER III: Televising Homosexuality in the Arab World**

### **Mediating Homosexuality and it's Misconceptions**

While literature on homosexual subjectivity in the Arab World has been generally scarce (Abukhalil 1997, Drucker 1996), even less has been written on how these subjectivities have been televised and mediated. This scarcity could be attributed to a number of factors. First there is the issue of research priority, as academic works on the coverage of terrorism, geopolitical conflict, and political Islam tend to crowd out potential studies on outlier social issues like sexual orientation (AbuKhalil 1997). Inaccessibility has also been seen as a problem, particularly for non-native researchers who are unfamiliar with local mores, language and customs. AbuKhalil maintains that those who are best equipped to approach sexual issues in meaningful ways- native Arabic sociologists and anthropologists- may be dissuaded to take up such studies in lieu of the risks to their academic careers and personal safety. (pp. 103). This confluence of inaccessibility and lack of interest has helped fuel broader assumptions about an Arabic media industry that has largely ignored or sidelined homosexuality. Ali Azadeh an activist working with the IGLHRC wrote “Al-Jazeera's Arabic network was “not interested in covering gay rights issues.” and that the network’s proclivity to its audience was at fault for this. Azadeh’s point also raises concerns about “issue emergence” and the reflexivity of academics in adopting these issues for research purposes (Carpenter 2007, Risse et. al. 1999). To date, only a handful of GLBT rights groups have launched sustained campaigns against Arabic television networks calling on them to reform their

coverage, suggesting that a) the priority of activists still lies in confronting state actors, and that b) an underlying reason why the intersection of Arab media and homosexuality has been seldom explored. There are of course some exceptions to this. In addition to the article that appeared on the IGLHRC website, the Lebanese Protection for Homosexuals (Abbreviated as HELEM- meaning dream in Arabic), in an open letter to Al Arabiya in June, 2009, criticized the network's coverage of the NGO on the grounds that it's coverage was misleading viewers about its mission and mandate. "The Arabic media has long misled its viewers about our mission- accusing us of being agents of Western imperialism" he wrote. "We are a Lebanese group from the ground up."

Despite these misconceptions by Azadeh and other activists, the allegations about a media industry largely ignorant of homosexuality cannot be thoroughly substantiated. While the data collected for this study does indeed point to a significant dearth of coverage of homosexuality- only 340 online articles published between 2001 and 2010 from the four networks analyzed in this study contained explicit reference to homosexuality issues; to date, there have been no institutional quantitative studies that accurately measure the frequency of Gay content in the Arabic media. However, even if such a data set was available, simply benchmarking the quantity of homosexual issues in Arab news to their Western networks is inherently problematic. Yes, we cannot dispute that homosexual issues have received far more visibility and exposure in Western news airwaves than their Arab counterparts. and that non-local coverage of homosexual issues continues to be the predominant window of exposure to homosexuality for Arab and Muslim publics as well as the media institutions that localize and syndicate this content

(Boelstorff 2002). However, simply comparing both media environments does not take into consideration the 1) Broader scope of sociocultural programming in Arab television, and 2) the weight this coverage places on covering Homosexuality. As a whole, there has been an increasing rise in sexualized content on Arabic television, and this trend warrants studying. Second, as a social “taboo”, homosexuality represents a valid and salient vantage point for exploring broader “how and why” questions about the shifting boundaries of social, religious and cultural discourses in the region. These questions also prompt inquiry about how the medium itself- in this case satellite news- is engaging or arbitrating this change. Over the last decade, Arabic media scholars have posited that satellite television in the region- an industry largely untethered to government control- has led to a democratization of the Arab public sphere by challenging the information pathways of the regional elite, (Sakr, 2001; El-Newawy & Iskandar, 2004; Seib, 2003; Lynch, 2006); that- at least from a Western vantage, Arabic transnational broadcasters constitute a space for redressing the asymmetrical dominance of Western media norms (Iskandar, 2005).

Even then, we have so far not talked about the role of the Internet and the use of online social media sites like YouTube and Facebook as a gateway of exposure. Online social spaces are on the verge of eclipsing television news as primary sources of information, potentially making the study of television exposure redundant (Gallup Arab attitudes survey 2010).

## Gay Visibility in Arabic Media

Gay visibility has enjoyed a surge of exposure within variety and entertainment programming. In her historical analysis of satellite television, Naomi Sakr (2001:3) observed that “programmes(sic) dealing with subjects like homosexuality and divorce... marked a major advance on what passed for current affairs programming ten years earlier.” Subbed and dubbed episodes of popular LGBT themed television shows like the drama series *Queer as Folk* (both American and U.K versions), and popular situation comedy *Will and Grace* have broken into Arab and Non-Arab Muslim markets on multi channel media conglomerates like the Saudi based Orbit Showtime Network (OSN) and the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). International based networks like the BBC Arabic have localized documentaries and human interest segments exploring homosexuality. In early 2010, the network aired an hour long documentary titled *Ana mithli* (I am Gay), which introduced viewers to a panoply of self-identified GLBT characters from Egypt, Lebanon, Bahrain and the Palestinian territories as they struggled against social taboos and spaces. Beginning with interviews with Egyptian activists, the documentary revolved around the events leading up to and following the 2001 Queen Boat incident in Egypt, in which 52 men were arrested and charged with committing acts that were “contrary to nature” (*fujour*). The documentary broke ground by attempting to regionalize the dilemma of a Palestinian gay man who was straddling between his loyalty to a Palestinian social order that does not condone or accept him as a homosexual, and the struggles he encounters as a Palestinian living in Israel.

In addition to imported programming, locally produced social talk shows exploring polemical social issues like homosexuality and gender issues (Sakr, 2009:168) have surged in popularity in recent years. These shows enjoy a far larger viewer base than their international counterparts. Most of the shows follow a format designed to instigate sensationalism, often pitting gay, lesbian and transgendered protagonists, religious scholars, and an array of psychologists into heated discussions about the presence and implications of homosexuality within an eastern, orthodox society. Inevitably, much of the discussion veered towards reinforcing commonly held tropes about homosexuality in the region, namely that homosexuals represented an existential threat to moral order, that self-identified homosexuals were merely exhibiting a tendency (*muyul*) towards the same sex, that this behavior was borne of sexual or physical trauma in early childhood, and that such “behaviors” were “treatable” via psychotherapy or re-socialization. Positive or sympathetic frames used often revolved around the “courage or bravery” of the queer guests who had agreed to participate, as well as acknowledging the real and present dangers they face as homosexuals living in a homophobic society. For example, on an episode titled “*al jins al thalith* (The third sex) on *bila tahdeed* (Without Limits), a popular social talk show on the Kuwait Television One, host Rima Khalaf commended the transgendered woman who had agreed to show her face on camera, calling her “brave and courageous.”, despite repeatedly prodding the audience to ponder if the transgenderism was *dud lil tabee’a tul-bashariya* (contrary to “human nature”). This theme was reiterated on *ahmar bil Khat el areed* (A Big Red Line), a popular weekly social talk show on the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International channel

(LBCI). As with Khalaf, the show's host Marwan Marktabi repeatedly commends the panel of queer participants for agreeing to come on the show, while asking probing and derisive questions that challenged or questioned their sexual identities as pathological or subject to scrutiny. For example, Marktabi repeatedly challenges "Eman", a Moroccan self-identified Lesbian, on her ability to have a relationship with another man. In what might be seen as a nod to Gay rights activists, both *ahmar and bila tahdeed* included at least one expert panelist who took a more sympathetic view of homosexuality. For example, Dr Lina Hadad on *ahmar* went as far as to blame the marginalization of homosexuals in Arab societies on "prevalent homophobic attitudes", or *Kuruhat il Mithliyeen/Shuath* in Arabic.

From a constructivist perspective, the dialectic between local cultural tropes and positions that could be regarded as sympathetic to the Gay International suggests that a process of learning is taking place. On all of the shows surveyed, the majority of the sympathetic frames come from either experts, activists or by the protagonists themselves. While this may be done for the purpose of being objective, the increasing prevalence of homosexuality on the social talk show circuit and the presence of sympathetic viewpoints on a local, indigenous format problematizes the binary of the Gay International, particularly the theme argued by Massad that the Gay International is an exogenous phenomenon- and challenges Massad's assumption that discourse incitement was the sole voice of agency on homosexuality discourse in the Arab world.

## **Reporting Homosexuality**

Like their talk show counterparts, news producers in the region have been covering homosexuality for years. LGBT Issues salient in the West (like marriage equality and Don't Ask Don't Tell to name a few) have been appropriated and localized, as well as an array of newsworthy events including coverage of local sexual rights movements, violence against homosexuals in post-Saddam's Iraq, and human interest pieces exploring the cultural wedge between Eastern and Western ideas about homosexuality. While social talk show and local news producers may share similar social frames about homosexuality, there are structural and contextual differences in the way the topics are presented. First, unlike the social talk shows where information is controlled regulated and used to reinforce dominant homosexual tropes, the need for objectivity (genuine or otherwise) means that alternative viewpoints get some form of mandatory airtime, even if local mores are being contested. Local news networks who might be sympathetic to local cultural mores on homosexuality have to reconcile with their international counterparts.

The second and more putative observation concerns the different approaches to Gay visibility between social talk shows and news coverage. Social talk shows are commercialized forms of content and have tended to draw upon populist frames to attract and retain viewers. After all, why would Arabic news producers relent to covering news items that at first glance, allegedly pose little or no salience in Arabic public discourse (Massad, 2002)? This comes down to 1) the homogenization of global news flows (Giddens 1990) and the centralization of editorial, gatekeeper and news selection

mechanisms across different regions, and 2) the increasing salience of transnational inter-industry networks. As the widespread global coverage of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” demonstrates, the globalizing of homosexuality discourse, and the newsworthy events that have shaped it have in turn, demanded new paradigms for evaluating the influence of viewers in determining what ends up on their news feeds (Reese 2008, Cheesman and Nohl 2011). According Cheesman and Nohl (2001), as Arabic satellite news networks lose agency over issue priority, their gatekeeping methods have had to evolve from simple deletion, placement and addition routines, to localizing or “trans-editing” content in order to make it relevant to their regional and ideological cannon. According to the authors, “Trans-editing” is the process of “adapting specific aspects of the coverage of the globalized event on the basis of assumptions made about the knowledge, comprehension, and cultural reference points of the target audience” ( 219). The notion of a consolidated global news agenda underscores the increasing depth of networks across different media actors. We can no longer think of news producers as isolated or unitary- but as institutions with intense dialogic interactions with other journalists and news institutions (Hafez, 2009). For example, Al-Jazeera maintains numerous contracts with American broadcasts to sell or lease footage and translation services (Azran, 2008). Al-Jazeera's broadcasts are regularly featured on US networks, and Al-Jazeera journalists occasionally appear on pundit shows. Indeed Azran notes that the barrage of criticism Al-Jazeera received for airing footage of dead American soldiers and for its literal translations of Al Qaeda leaders did little to affect its relationships with American broadcasters.

Hafez (2009) also mentions inter-industry and market pressure as critical factors for homogenizing global news agendas. In summary, localizing homosexual coverage has meant that local Arabic news networks have attempted to situate Western subjectivities about homosexuality by localizing the rhetorical and syntactical inferences of the original story to match local mores and customs. This creates a unique discursive platform, one that constitutes a hybrid space between Arab and Western rhetoric of homosexuality. While translocation does a good job of attempting to explain the ins and outs of gatekeeping systems in global news, it does not touch upon the “whys” of editorial choice selection. What drives journalists to cover and localize across the aisle? We should not forget that within the layers of institutional bureaucracy and the increasing automation of news production, journalists continue to play a significant role in influencing news selection (McCombs, 2004, Graber, 2000). Sociological studies on Arab journalism have sought to portray Arab journalists as a broadly elite group of professionals that represent and promulgate secular, democratic values (Amin 2000, Pintak 2009), as empowered “cultural intermediaries” with the strong potential to influence public opinion (Mellor, 2008), and increasingly, as members of a broader global collective of journalists who strongly identify with a universal set of journalistic ethics (Rao & Lee, 2005). While Rao & Lee focused mostly on political issues in their ethnographic survey of Arab journalists, they found strong consensus amongst Arab journalists in their desire for reporting objectively, presenting issue balance, and ensuring tolerance of religious and cultural diversity in their coverage (113- 116). These factors

may lend themselves towards a more diffused (and less confrontational) attitude of the Gay International. Rao & Lee's findings not only suggest that Arab journalists strongly identify with the principles and ethics of their craft, but that they see themselves as part of a greater collective of journalists. They state in their conclusion "What we found surprisingly refreshing was an unspoken solidarity among journalists from vastly different cultural, political, national, and religious back- grounds about their commitment and mission in the global society" (118). This fits nicely with Zelizer's (1994) thesis on journalistic interpretive communities, in which she posits that journalists, regardless of background, institutional affiliation or political proclivity, coalesce around similar worldviews, routines and professional philosophies. Nowhere is this more telling than in Jehane Noujaim's 2004 Documentary "Control Room", where Al-Jazeera and American journalists traverse their political and institutional boundaries to form bonds of empathy around the killing of Tarek Ayoub, and where critical speculation of CENTCOM's narrative of events is shared by Arab and Western journalists alike.

### **Satellite News: Acquiescence or Counter-Flow?**

There has been a shared consensus amongst scholars that satellite news networks (Al-Jazeera Arabic in particular) have become an under-girding force of democratization in the region (Kraidy, 2004) and as a platform for countering the asymmetrical dominance of Western media. Wojcieszak (2007) writes "that [Al-Jazeera] facilitates sociopolitical changes by criticizing and challenging the institutionalized structures and the prevalent social discourse in the Arab world". In circumventing or challenging these

power structures, Al-Jazeera (and Al Arabiya to some extent) has effectively served as a platform for articulating a new Pan-Arab identity (Kraidy, 2007) by circumventing border restrictions and regionalizing coverage of specific events to the broader MENA region. Both Al-Jazeera and Al Arabiya have been attributed to the events of the “Arab spring”, which brought down the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes in Tunisia and Egypt (Miles, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, immense scholarly and popular attention has been given to the democratizing effects of satellite news and the spurious and antagonistic space it occupies via a dominant Western narrative (Azran, 2009). However, very little has been written on how this antagonism is manifest in the discourse of gender and sexual issues (Skalli, 2006). Even within this body of scholarship, unlike the (almost) unanimous chorus of voices that speak to the transformative qualities of coverage on satellite news in mobilizing political action in the Arab world, there are divergent views on whether the coverage of sexual and gender issues has had a similar effect on homosexual and feminist discourses in the region, and whether this content is ancillary to alternative voices in the region. Empirically, news networks have been actively engaging these topics for quite some time. Segments dealing with gender and homosexuality are frequent openers on Al-Jazeera Arabic shows like “*Al shari’a wal Haya*” (Shari’a and life) and “*lil Nisa’a Faqat*” (For Women Only). Furthermore, as the findings of this study demonstrate, gender and homosexuality are not entirely ignored issue areas. El-Nawawy and Iskandar (2002) see no clear distinction between Al-Jazeera’s approach to geopolitical and social coverage by arguing that Al-Jazeera’s “daring approach touches on issues considered by Arab

standards to be forbidden, like sex, polygamy, corruption of governmental regimes, women's rights, and Islamic fundamentalism” (29). Others however contend that satellite news networks have not been as forthrightly progressive in their coverage of social, gender and sexual issues, choosing instead to reinforce and appropriate conservative social tropes on gender roles, human rights, and sexuality (Kraidy 2004, Mattar 2007). Feminist perspectives are similarly divided. While Loubna H. Skalli (2006:43) views Arabic satellite networks as a platform for empowering women as professional journalists (despite a public sphere that continues to admonish and marginalize their public participation), Dina Mattar (2007) writes that the “obstacles facing women in their attempts to capitalize on the media as a powerful tool for transforming discriminatory practices are numerous.” On the exposure of gender issues, Mattar goes on to write that “Arab media's reproduction of prevalent gender discriminatory attitudes has had a negative effect on women both as users of and as subjects in the media” (pp. 53). Still others, like Souril-Tawil bring a critical perspective on gender discrimination by positing that feminist perspectives must not fall prey to essentialist and orientalist frames. She writes:

Here, the mainstream perspective echoes the familiar rhetoric of incompatibility based on essentialist views of culture and ‘civilization’. From this perspective, what is happening on Arab screens is indicative of the collision of cultures, with the call that Arabs, or Muslims, need to reconcile (superior) Western traditions (of media production, democracy, public sphere, rational thought, human rights, women’s rights, etc.) with indigenous values. (pp. 16)

So what does the discussion on mediated feminism tell us? Ostensibly, one could conjecture that by conforming to socially conservative mores in its coverage of homosexuality, the Arab satellite news industry is merely expanding its counter-flow approach to include a redressing of Western sexual, gender and social norms while simultaneously appealing to its target audience. However, such a conclusion loses sight of the very processes involved in thrusting sexual and gender discourses into the public eye. Regardless of the rhetorical frames used by satellite networks to cover homosexuality, they have played a significant role in erecting and sustaining the platforms by which to discourse and challenge these issues.

It should be noted that caution must be taken in drawing any parallels between Homosexuality and Feminism in Arabic news production, and in making general assumptions about the Arab media scene as a whole. Overlapping suppositions about covering gender and homosexuality presents a unique epistemic challenge in a region where there is little interaction between the two. Simply put, feminist networks in the MENA region have at best, distanced themselves from homosexual issues, and at worst, actively campaigned against them. Similarly, lumping theoretical suppositions about news producers with those of non-news producers is potentially problematic. So far, many works have used the term satellite news and satellite television interchangeably, (Both Sakr and Kraidy are well known for this!) without accounting for the structural and ideological nuances between the two industries. Any meaningful assessment about how homosexuality is framed should take these differences into consideration. Future research

on how gender and sexual issues are framed in news production demands a confluence of theoretical approaches that situate discussions of localization, globalization and counter-flow within the antagonism between Western and Eastern constructions of sexual subjectivity.

## **CHAPTER IV: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Traditionally, research on queer issues have tended to approach sexuality through a pragmatist lens, one that argues that social and latent forces are a critical components of study into how sexual subjectivities are constructed (Green, 2007). Drawing from this epistemological framework, pragmatist scholars have generally agreed that post-positivist approaches might not adequately capture these latent or social undertones. As I will show in a later segment, these researchers see sexual categories as socially constructed and contextually fluid, while this in and of itself is not a point of contention between positivist and pragmatist, the methods for studying these phenomena are. Pragmatist scholars see quantitative studies, particularly those that rely on coding for specific, popular categories (like Lesbian or Gay) as inadequate methodologies for capturing the contextually dynamic and fluid undertones of sexual identity. Secondly, pragmatists feel uneasy with methods that are built around confirming, boxing and deducing. For example, traditional textual analysis in communication and media studies have been generally understood to be a deductive process, whereby coding schemes that attempt to verify and support extant theoretical suppositions are drafted before any meaningful data analysis or collection is conducted ( Glaser and Straus, year; Charmaz 2007). Grounded theorists have been particularly vocal on this issue, and have long viewed traditional

“replicability” (or the recycling of coding schemes) as an inherent flaw of postpositivist research (Charmaz 2007).

These concerns are hardly unwarranted. Gail Dimes (year) notes that while quantitative textual analysis can “provide us with insights into how texts are structured and how to analyze their ideological differences”, she argues that such methods cannot sufficiently ascertain how audiences interpret, understand, and use a text. This problem can be abstracted towards the study of fluid social ecosystems such as those contained within sexual identity formation, prompting questions about the validity of stringent, systematic research paradigms such as those found within traditional textual methods.

The challenges highlighted above are only compounded by the dearth of queer scholarship in methodological stringent field like communication studies. Communication scholars have lagged behind their counterparts in other disciplines in interpolating queer and gender paradigms into their research (Yep, 2003). While much of this, Yep explains, has to do with an unchallenged “heteronormative bias” that has persisted within Communication Studies (to which I respond that heteronormative biases are hardly limited to communication studies!), the perceived lack of a viable research tool-set might also be at play. John Cresswell (year) faults this less on the perceived immovability of communication research, and more on the rise of “advocacy-centered

and participatory research models that have taken center stage in the studies of marginalized groups or communities.

So why traverse these disciplinary boundaries? And why approach this study using a quantitative approach? At its core, The discussion above underscores some of the broader challenges posed to the cross-pollination of methodologies across areas of scholarship. Interdisciplinary approaches that include quantitative methods, while gaining momentum in the past two decades, have not caught on in queer and sexual studies. While this study does not explicitly advocate a new way forward, nor does it portend the end of methodological lock-in in queer studies, it does suggest that the study of media actors demands a broader set of analysis that go beyond intimate ethnographies and other forms of participatory and advocacy-centered approaches-particularly within a “site” where access to these small groups is limited and where public perception is little understood in the first place. This does not mean that one method group should be favored over another. On the contrary, there are several ways to blend or infuse traditional research paradigms around the study of queer issues within the quantitative tradition. To illustrate, a quantitative researcher could very well adopt a grounded or theoretically inductive or *invivo* process for developing her hypotheses and coding schema, and use quantitative methods to analyze her data. Alternatively, Glaser and Strauss- the progenitors of Grounded Theory and (at the time *Discovery* was published)

staunch opponents of positivist methods- even suggest that inductive theoretical approaches could be applied at the analytical level of a quantitative study. Here a researcher could adopt a heuristic approach to modeling by cycling through various statistical methods (1967: 187). Both examples illustrate ways of adapting fluid constructions and critical issues like queer studies into quantitative research. Coding schemes do not necessarily have to reflect preexisting grand theoretical suppositions, but could be generated inductively by looking at the data itself. Particularly when looking at large volumes of text dealing with the coverage of GLBT issues, robust quantitative analysis can provide insights beyond the microcosmic prism of ethnographic research. I will discuss how this is the case in a later section.

### **Methodologies Past and Present**

As mentioned previously, ethnographic studies on outlier communities dominates the methodological focus of sexuality from an Arab-Islamic context. The studies appropriated a variety of themes from examining the linguistic evolution of sexual identity to the schism between homosexuality and Islamic identity. Each of the studies surveyed revolved around the social construction of the stakeholders themselves, and less about the environmental forces that influenced them. When media influences are present- be it in the form of news coverage of GLBT issues, imported television programming from the West, as well as exposure to online discussion forums and social

media outlets- (to name a few)- the discussion inevitably shifts towards exploring how participants interact with these media forms. Direct mentions of the media actors, if any, are usually relegated to limited discussions of secondary sources or case studies. For example, Ibrahim Abraham's analysis on how queer Muslims in Australia perceive and interact with broader social forces (the Australian media being one of them) relied almost exclusively on how participants perceive and internalize the coverage. Using ethnographic data collected from 12 self-identified Queer Muslims, Abraham documented the ways in which his subjects populate their sense of place within a broader sociopolitical binary, one between a xenophobic, anti-Islamic West; and a homophobic Islamic orthodoxy (2009: 92). While Abraham's discussion relies heavily on unmasking the Australian media's role in constructing this binary, the discussion is limited to references to secondary and tertiary studies of the media's role in reinforcing Islamophobia in Australia. Mediated influences also play a crucial role in Tom Boelstorff's study of sexual identity construction amongst Indonesia's sexual minority cultures. Drawing from the testimonies of self-identified queer Indonesians who refer to themselves as *gay*, *lesbi* and *tomboys*, Boelstorff (2002) argues that the rise of what he calls a "globalized dubbed sexual identity" or a hybrid Indonesian/Western sexual vernacular, is derived from "fragmented exposure to mainstream mass media". Again, the discussion on media effects is limited to secondary analysis of localized international

programming, and the perceptions and viewing choices of the study participants themselves.

The above discussion is not so much a critique of the methodologies, but a call for the need to adapt to shifting paradigms. Media producers, like the major Arabic satellite news networks in this study, hold significant sway on public opinion in the Arab world, and have tremendous reach in the Arabic public sphere. Al-Jazeera and Al Arabiya both reach a total of 60 million households (Miles 2005)<sup>2</sup>- in a region where satellite broadcasters continue to dominate information flows across religious and income boundaries.

It is here that quantitative textual analysis could be fruitful in understanding how environmental forces, in this case media influences- that shape and frame homosexuality. Moreover, the decision to veer away from exploring the texts of outlier communities is critical towards future empirical investigating of public/heteronormative attitudes. A 2010 Arab Opinions survey by the Brookings Institute found that a commanding 84% of respondents saw television as their primary source of news, with the Internet coming in second at 8%. These figures further demonstrate the research salience of the Arabic satellite news arena, and the gateway this platform affords for studying social issues.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that accurate audience statistics are difficult to come by and Miles does not provide a methodology or reference for the number

## **Variables and Hypotheses**

This study relied on a quantitative content analysis of news articles extracted from the online portals of three Arabic satellite news broadcasters, these being Al Arabiya, Al-Jazeera Arabic BBC Arabic, and one dedicated Arabic language web portal, CNN Arabic.

A total of fourteen hypotheses were developed across two broad areas of study:

1. A general analysis of content and issue areas and themes across the four networks.
2. A study of correlations and measures of association of coded rhetorical undertones and language use.

Two separate content analyses were used in this study, one for each of the broad topics. The first, using the article as a unit of analysis, pooled general parameters about the article, including source, region of coverage, and year of publication. Four regions were identified in this study- these being the Middle East and North Africa/Africa (MENA/A), North America and Europe (NAEU), South East Asia and East Asia (SEAA/EA) and Latin America (LA). Unfortunately, only a total of seven articles coded positively for the latter two regions, so much of the analysis focused on articles that dealt with either the MENA/A and NAEU regions. Some of the articles with more than one location mentioned were coded accordingly. Articles with no specific location to speak of, such as articles that summarized surveys, or dealt with international institutions were

coded as null. Finally, each of the articles were coded for the presence of four issue areas.

1. Mentions of Human Rights for homosexuals, and Human Rights Institutions
2. Mentions of Violence and Hate Crime against Homosexuals
3. Coverage of Legal and Policy related measures concerning homosexuality
4. Mentions of religious figures, institutions and edicts concerning homosexuality.

A total of five hypotheses were tested to examine how coverage of the four issue areas above trended according to the source of the article.

*H1. Local networks are more likely to feature coverage of religious issues than international networks.*

*H2. international networks are more likely to feature mentions of violence and hate crimes against homosexuals than their local counterparts.*

*H3. Coverage of human rights is likely to be inversely related to policy oriented coverage of homosexual issues across all of the networks.*

*H4. Local networks are more likely to feature policy oriented coverage than international networks.*

*H5. international networks are more likely to feature mentions of human rights actors and institutions than local networks.*

Each of the hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H5 relied on a Chi-Squared cross-tabulation, along with the Cramer's Phi statistic to measure the strength of association, while H4 relied on the Pearson's R. statistic to measure the strength of the relationship between the two independent variables. A more detailed explanation of why I chose these hypotheses is contained in my findings section. The second coding scheme was used to code paragraphs with mentions of any of three synonyms of homosexuality (more on this later) for the following seven parameters. With the exception of the first category, parameters two to seven were dummy coded.

**Synonym Type (Categorical):** This category was used to code for the synonym featured in the paragraph. If more than one synonym type was present, both were coded between presence and absence of the phenomena. A more detailed discussion about why I chose to look at these specific words is outlined in a later section.

**Mentions of homosexuality as a negative influence.:** Here, any mentions of homosexuals or homosexuality as directly contributing to a negative consequence were coded positively. This included mentions of homosexuals and/ or homosexuality contributing to a social, moral or religious harm, homosexuals as a international or invasive phenomena, homosexuals as engaging in criminal activity (sexual, non-sexual or religious) and homosexuals as a social nuisance or inconvenience.

**Homosexuals as Victims:** Any mentions of homosexuals as being subjected to punitive measures, facing physical abuse or were victims of hate-related incidents were coded positively. This category also included mentions of homosexuals as encountering socioeconomic and cultural hardships in their everyday lives. For example, a series of articles by the BBC Arabic on the struggles of Gay and Lesbian Arabs in coming out to their families were coded positively.

**Homosexuals as Perpetrators:** This category was used to code any mentions of homosexuals as direct practitioners of violence, crime, scandal or mentions of homosexuals as deemed to be contributing to what is considered immoral or unlawful behavior. It should be worth noting that the interplay between perpetrator and victimhood in framing analysis has been explored

**Homosexuality as Practice:** Any references to homosexual acts or direct mentions of homosexuality as a form of practice were coded positively in this category. There were a few difficulties in coding this section. This is partly due to the arbitrary connotations of infinitive constructions in Arabic (for example, the infinitive variant of شاذ (*Shaath*), الشذوذ (*shuthouth*) or *deviance* can also be considered a *gerrund* (*deviant activity*)- which would imply that the context of the sentence was an action). Explicit mentions of same-sex intercourse were also coded positively.

**Homosexuality as subjective:** This category was used to code any mentions of groups of homosexuals, homosexual individuals, homosexual institutions or homosexual communities.

### **Operational Hypotheses**

All of the hypotheses in this section were developed around the assumption that local satellite networks were in a state of counter-flow to Western sexual discourses and this is reflected in their reference frames and terminology. As such, much of their coverage will tend to be symptomatic of social sentiments towards homosexuality in the Arab world (Massad 2002). The first hypothesis in this series sought to compare the use of pejorative synonyms across the four networks.

H6, local networks were much more likely to use pejorative synonyms of homosexuality than their international counterparts.

For hypotheses H7 and H8, I wanted to explore the how international and local news framed homosexuality as a subjective. In keeping with Massad's theme of incitement to discourse, one could argue that in rejecting Western imposed categories of persistent heterosexual and homosexual identities, local networks were more likely to define homosexuality as a form of practice or behavior. As a secondary analysis, I decided to explore how word choice factored (if any) into this argument.

*H7. Local networks are more likely to contain references to homosexuality as a practice than their international counterparts.*

*H8. There is an observable and significant correlation between synonym used and references to homosexual practice.*

The following three hypotheses sought to explore pattern of mentions of negative influences the networks and whether this frame was influenced by word choice and subjectivity:

*H9 Local networks are more likely to feature mentions of homosexuality as a negative influence than their international counterparts.*

*H10. There is a significant positive relationship between pejorative synonyms and references to homosexuals as a negative influence.*

*H11. There is a significant correlation between references to homosexuality as a negative influence and references to homosexuality as a form of practice.*

The last three hypotheses focused on the relationship between homosexuals as perpetrators and victims. As noted earlier, portrayals of homosexuals as victims lends agency to sympathetic frames to the Gay International. Conversely, perpetrator frames, which see homosexuals as harbingers of societal ill and negative consequence are an indication of incitement to discourse. In testing the interaction between perpetrator and

victim frames, I wanted to investigate if there was a direct reciprocity between the two variables:

*H12. Coverage by International networks was more likely to feature references of homosexuals as victims than their local counterparts:*

*H13. Local networks were more likely to feature references of homosexuals as perpetrators than their international counterparts.*

*H14: Mentions of victims will have a significant inverse relationship with mentions of perpetrators.*

### **Dependent Variables**

Much of the analysis involving cross-tabulations analysis used the article source as the dependent variable, though analysis tended to focus on comparing differences in coverage between international and local networks. Al-Jazeera Arabic and Al Arabiya were both regarded as local networks, whereas both the BBC Arabic and CNN Arabic were noted as international. For the study on rhetorical and language use, network source was still used as the primary dependent variable. In some of the hypothesis, geographical region was also used to identify themes and concepts depending on region. Finally a dependent variable that coded for type of synonym present was also used to identify relationships between word choice and other themes.

## Data and Collection

The corpus consisted of articles extracted from the online web portals of Al-Jazeera Arabic, Al Arabiya, BBC Arabic and CNN Arabic. All of the articles were collected via Google site-specific and time-specific search algorithms (more on this below). This involved the use of the root and three etymological variations of the three most popular synonyms of homosexuality which are shown in table 4.1 as shown below:

شاذ ( <i>shaath</i> )	Pederast ( <i>sing, root</i> )	مثلي ( <i>mithli</i> )	Same ( <i>root</i> )	لوط ( <i>loot</i> )	Lot ( <i>root</i> )
الشذوذ ( <i>alshuthooth</i> )	Pederasty	مثلي الجنس ( <i>mithli and jins</i> )	Homosexual ( <i>sing</i> )	لوطي ( <i>looty</i> )	Queer, Faggot ( <i>sing</i> )
شواذ ( <i>showaath</i> )	Pederasts ( <i>plural</i> )	مثليين جنسيا ( <i>mithliy'ain jinsiyan</i> )	Homosexuals ( <i>plural</i> )	لواط ( <i>luwat</i> )	Queers, Faggots ( <i>Plural</i> )

TABLE 4. 1 TABLE OF SYNONYMS OF HOMOSEXUALITY

As shown above, the synonyms used have different semantic inferences that vary from the pejorative (شاذ (*shaath*) and لوطي (*looti*)); to the neutral or approbative (مثلي الجنس (*mithliyul jins*)) With the exception of the synonym لوطي (*Louti*), the other two synonyms have only been recently adapted to reference homosexuality. The term الشذوذ or شاذ (*shaath or shuthouth*) is used generally to describe “perverse, deviant or abnormal” sexual behavior (*Makdous Dictionary*). In news coverage, the term has been appropriated to describe perceptions of moral and social perversion in addition to describing homosexuality. The term is also commonly used in Arabic scientific literature to describe outliers or findings that deviate from normal assumptions. The introduction of the term مثلي جنس (*mithli-al-jins*), transliterated as “same, sameness, like and similarity of sex” has a more complex and controversial etymology, as its introduction into Arabic technical lexicon was designed to fulfill and facilitate scientific and academic study of homosexuality. Some like Massad have argued that the ontology of the term is inherently political and a reflex to sexual rights regimes that were critical of the lack of technical expressions for homosexuality in Arabic. Massad then goes on to argue that most Arabs have had very little exposure to the term and that its existence came as a response to external pressures. Officially, the term is prefixed to the word *jins* or sex (origin from the Greek term *genus*), but is often shorthanded.

The term لوطي, (*louti*), literally “of Lot” or from the tribe of Lot, is a derivative of the Quranic and Biblical references to the accounts of Sodom and Gomorrah and is specifically used to describe men who practice same-sex intercourse. In Arabic vernacular (particularly amongst the Levantine dialects), the term can also be used pejoratively to describe men who are deemed “effeminate” or non-masculine.

### **Search Algorithms**

The search algorithms used to extract the articles involved a combination of an OR statement for each of the syntactical variations of the terms used, affixed to an AND statement for the term *jins*. This was done to maximize the likelihood of extracting articles that dealt explicitly with homosexual issues. Following this, a site search command was used to limit returned results to the web portal. This was repeated for each of the three synonyms used in this study. A template of the full algorithm is shown below:

<b>شاذ OR الشذوذ OR شواذ AND الجنس site:www.website.com</b>
---

In order to ensure that the sample was representative and comprehensive, methods of collection were strictly consistent across each of the four networks. This included the use of the following:

1. Using the same OR-AND expressions for each algorithms for each of the networks websites
2. Limiting the date range to a ten year period between 1/1/2001 and 03/01/2011
3. Limiting article types to news coverage. Editorial and commentary pieces were truncated. Duplicates and republished works were also truncated. Using this method of article extraction, a total of 131 articles were extracted, with word length of the articles ranging between 250- 867 words, with a median of approximately 450 words.

### **Inter-coder Reliability**

An inter-coder sample of 30 randomly drawn article across the four networks were coded and analysed using Cohen Cappa’s test for reliability, and using 0.75 as a benchmark. Values for the dependent variables region and synonym were at 0.96 and 0.87 respectively. Unfortunately, I was only able to find one coder proficient enough in Arabic to code the variables consistently. The fellow inter-coder and I met on two occasions to review our selections and smooth out any potential discrepancies. As shown in the table below, inter-coder reliability was met at all intervals- though I anticipate these figures might be conflated given the lack of a third coder.

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Cohen’s Kappa (2dp)</b>
Mentions of Homosexuality as a negative influence	<b>0.95</b>

Homosexuals as Victims	<b>0.90</b>
Homosexuality as Practice	<b>0.98</b>
Homosexuality as subjective	<b>0.94</b>

**TABLE 4. 2 RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS**

## **CHAPTER IV: Results**

### **Introduction**

The results of this investigation were divided into three topical areas. The first section discussed the prevalence of reference paragraphs across the four networks. Reference paragraphs were then used to measure the “coverage density” of homosexual coverage. The coverage density is the mean value of number of reference paragraphs per network divided by number of articles. This was used to quantitatively discern between the numbers of articles that were dedicated to a homosexual theme from articles with only secondary or tertiary mentions of homosexuality. In the next section, I reported my findings on the coverage of homosexuality across issue area. Much of the analysis revolved around investigating patterns of coverage across the four networks. The third section presents my findings on rhetorical frames and language use. Here I explored 1) emergent patterns on language use across networks 2) patterns of language use across the four subject frames and 3) Correlations between the different rhetorical frames.

### **General Frequencies**

A total of 131 online news articles were extracted across the four networks. Coding for paragraph references of homosexuality yielded a total of 379 paragraphs with direct mentions to one of the three root synonyms coded for this study. Of the four networks, Al-Jazeera had the largest repository of articles at 57%, while the BBC Arabic

stood at 13%. The relatively small sample makeup might be due to a recent website overhaul of the BBC Arabic website. It is also important to note BBC Arabic's satellite service has only been on the air since late 2009 which might also reflect a dearth of articles.

As for the frequency of paragraphs containing direct references of homosexuality, CNN Arabic had the highest number of references (n=117) followed by Al-Jazeera Arabic (n=97). This is despite the fact CNN Arabic articles only comprised 20.7% of the article base. Both Al-Arabiya and BBC Arabic featured a total of 81 and 84 reference paragraphs respectively. A cross-tabulation between articles broken down by number of reference paragraphs reveals that only 11.9% (n=8) of articles contained 6 more reference paragraphs compared with 28.4% (n=19) of CNN Articles. A breakdown of means showed that Al-Jazeera Arabic had an average of 2.7 references per article, compared with 4.49 for the BBC and 3.51 for CNN. Al-Arabiya did not fair much better with an average of 3.0 per article ( $P < 0.01$ ).

These figures suggest that both the BBC and CNN are more likely to feature dedicated stories on homosexuality than both Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya. Many of the Al-Jazeera articles reviewed would only contain secondary references to homosexual figures. To illustrate, an article on the Wikileaks scandal contained only one reference to Bradley Manning's sexual orientation (AJA10).

Table 5.1 shows the breakdown of articles across the four networks and the mean number of reference articles with direct mentions of homosexuality.

<b>Network</b>	<b>Frequency of reference paragraphs(% across references)</b>	<b>Mean number of references per article (Standard Deviations)</b>
<b>Al-Jazeera Arabic</b>	114 (43.5%)	2.78 (1.74)
<b>Al-Arabiya</b>	60 (22.9%)	3.01 (1.99)
<b>BBC Arabic</b>	66 (13.0%)	4.49 (3.27)
<b>CNN Arabic</b>	54 (20.6%)	3.51 (2.54)

**TABLE 5. 1 TABLE 5. 1 FREQUENCY OF REFERENCES TO HOMOSEXUALITY ACROSS NETWORKS**

( $\chi^2 = 20.70, N = 397, p < 0.01$ ).

### **On Region**

A breakdown of the entire data by region reveals that the majority of the stories covered issues in the Middle East, North Africa and African regions (MENA/A) (49%) and North American and European (NAEU) regions (44%). Out of the entire sample, a

total of 14 articles fell outside of both regions, ten in South East and East Asia, and four in Latin America.

<b>Network</b>	<b>Middle East and North Africa (percentage across network)</b>	<b>North America and Europe</b>
<b>Al-Arabiya</b>	28 (93.3)	1 (3.3)
<b>Al-Jazeera Arabic</b>	16 (28.1)	37 (64.9)
<b>BBC Arabic</b>	11 (64.7)	5 (29.4)
<b>CNN Arabic</b>	10 (37.0)	15 (55.6)

**TABLE 5. 2 BREAKDOWN OF REGIONAL COVERAGE ACCROSS NETWORKS**

Articles containing more than one geographical region were coded to reflect each region mentioned (AJA13), whereas articles dealing with trans-geographical issues (BBCA7) were not coded. A breakdown of network coverage according to region, we find that Al-Jazeera featured significantly more coverage of homosexuality in North America and Europe (64.9% versus only 28.1% of MENA/A), whereas the BBC and CNN featured significantly more coverage of issues dealing with the MENA/A (64% and 55% respectively). Al Arabiya was an anomaly, as almost all of its coverage focused on issues within the MENA/A (93.3%) region. Al-Jazeera's regional priority towards covering events outside of the MENA/A region may reflect a reticence towards confronting domestic LGBT issues. Of the four networks, Al-Jazeera was the most likely to feature conflict frames involving Western and Arab/Muslim viewpoints. In June, 2001, in article

titled “HIV highlights cultural rift between Muslims and the West” quotes an Iranian representative at the 2001 UNAIDS conference as saying “We must not allow Western countries to exploit this conference as a vessel for promoting their own cultural agenda.” The quote comes after a reference to concerns raised by Islamic countries that the conference was being giving too much weight to discussions about “homosexuality, prostitution and extra-marital sexual intercourse.” (AJA6). In similar vein, Al-Jazeera ran an article titled “Westerners more likely to commit Adultery with Multiple Sex Partners.” The story, which summarized a study on global sexual habits conducted by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, made several comparisons of sexual habits between subjects living in developing and developed countries, arguing that “people in Western countries were more likely to have sex with multiple partners than people living in developing countries.” (AJA13).

Conversely, both international networks had a higher proportion of stories on the MENA/A region than those in the NAEU, suggesting an active editorial interest in the region. Indeed, the majority of the stories on both the CNN Arabic and the BBC Arabic were not secondary references, but dedicated pieces exploring homosexual themes within an Arab or Muslim context.

## **Analysis of Issue Areas**

This section explored the coverage of homosexuality around five topic areas. These being 1) religious figures or institutions, 2) mentions of hate crime or assault targeting homosexuals, 3) mentions of human rights actors or institutions around their sexual orientation, and last, 4) mentions of legislative and penal measures involving homosexuality. As noted in our methodology, four independent hypothesis were constructed to test directional relationships between local and international networks over coverage of homosexual issues around these topics. Following coding, each of the five topics were cross-tabulated across the four networks as shows in Table 5.3.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Al Arabiya</b>	<b>Al-Jazeera</b>	<b>BBCA</b>	<b>CNNA</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>Cramer V</b>	<b>CI (p)</b>
Human Rights (%)	(33.3%)	(21.1%)	(29.4%)	(37.0%)	2.88	0.15	<b>P&lt;0.44</b>
Policy issues (%)	(66.7%)	(47.4%)	(29.4%)	(33.3%)	8.8	0.26	<b>P&lt;0.05</b>
Entertainment	(26%)	(15.8%)	(0%)	(33.3%)	8.76	0.26	<b>P&lt;0.05</b>
Religious Coverage	(30%)	(40.4%)	(5.9%)	(11.1%)	12.44	0.31	<b>p&lt;0.01</b>
Violence and Hate Crime	(16.7%)	(10.5%)	(52.9%)	(22.2%)	15.1	0.34	<b>P&lt;0.01</b>

**TABLE 5. 3 CROSS-TABULATION OF ISSUE AREAS ACROSS NETWORKS**

## **On Religious Coverage**

As mentioned in my methodology, articles that coded positively in this category could either feature references involving statements by religious figures on secular issues, or stories involving the intersection between religious life- both institutional or personal and sexual orientation. The hypothesis we tested was:

*H1. Local networks are more likely to feature coverage of religious issues than international networks.*

Both Al-Jazeera and Al Arabiya dedicated a significantly larger portion of their coverage to religious issues than their international counterparts. In addition to featuring dedicated articles on religious matters, both networks were more likely to include statements by religious figures on secular issues. To illustrate, while the BBC Arabic, CNN Arabic and Al Arabiya featured articles on the Egyptian government's ban on allowing Elton John to perform in Egypt, Al Arabiya was the only network to include statements by Coptic leaders over Elton John's alleged remarks about Jesus Christ's sexual orientation. Of the four networks, Al-Jazeera was the only network to directly refer to Catholic priests embroiled in the sex abuse scandal as homosexuals.

Surprisingly, the one mention of religious coverage by the BBC Arabic concerning the controversy over the appointment of Gene Robinson, the first openly gay bishop in the Anglican church- was mentioned three times in Al-Jazeera's coverage.

### **On Violence**

This was a relatively broad category that included recorded actual instances of violence and hate crime committed against homosexuals, as well as any reference to or expressions of fear or threat of violence. Mentions of state sanctioned violence including beatings or torture of homosexuals in captivity, capital punishment were also taken into consideration. Finally mentions of domestic violence by family members were coded positively. The hypothesis we used to test this argument was as follows:

*H2. international networks are more likely to feature mentions of violence and hate crimes against homosexuals than their local counterparts.*

Unsurprisingly, coverage of violence and hate crime was more prominent amongst the international networks than on the local networks. . On BBC Arabic, expressions of violence were mostly articulated as interpersonal affairs involving narratives of homosexual protagonists struggling against hostile social forces. (BBCA1 BBKA7, BBKA8). For example, a story titled “GLBT Egyptians use the Internet as a haven” detailed the experience of a gay Egyptian blogger who was robbed and threatened at

gunpoint by a man he had slept with. In another paragraph, another Gay man expresses fear of violent reprisal by his brothers and father if he ever was “outed”.

Interestingly, neither one of the local networks featured Human interest segments were Of the five mentions of violence on Al Arabiya, three of them pertained to some form of police brutality (ARA1, ARA3 ARA17).

### **On Policy**

The justification for including this category as an object of analysis is twofold. First, the prevalence of coverage of political narratives of homosexuality may indicate a desire to reflect the meaningfulness of a topic (Gultang and Rouge,1965). As such, an emphasis on policy oriented coverage might reflect an editorial policy to diminish the meaningfulness of a topic to its audience. Second, and more specific to this study, defaulting to policy or legislative oriented coverage serves to neutralize or avoid otherwise sympathetic or advocacy oriented approaches- which may be more evident in coverage of issues such as violence or hate crimes , or from confronting human or subject oriented coverage (MacDonald 2000). To test this relationship, I used a Pearson's correlation to measure the directional correlation between political coverage and coverage of violence and hate crimes. H3 states:

*H3. Coverage of human rights is likely to be inversely related to policy oriented coverage of homosexual issues across all of the networks.*

The results show a moderate to strong inverse correlation ( $r(129) = -.273$   $p < 0.01$ ) between the two variables, suggesting that coverage of violence and hate crimes is likely to subside as policy coverage increased. This suggests that there is an increasing gap in the coverage of human rights issues, and the legal and policy implications.

The next hypothesis sought to examine the prevalence of policy coverage across the four networks. Taking editorial distancing into consideration, H4 reads as follows:

*H4. Local networks are more likely to feature policy oriented coverage than international networks.*

From table 5.3, we find that both of the local networks eclipsed their international rivals in the proportion of political or policy oriented coverage. Of the two, Al-Jazeera Arabic contained the largest proportion of coverage of legal issues concerning homosexuality. This included stories about the appointment of Gay and Lesbian politicians, as well as coverage of contentious legislative issues like DADT and marriage equality.

Unsurprisingly, the BBC Arabic seemed least vested in political coverage. Most of the articles surveyed were human-interest pieces revolving around the personal struggles of Arab homosexuals living under social hostile forces. In contrast, neither Al-Jazeera nor Al Arabiya appropriated human interest frames in their coverage- often defaulting to reporting institutional actors and religious figures further reinforcing the reliance on policy centered coverage.

## **On Human Rights**

Surprisingly, references to human rights agencies and actors involved were consistent and prevalent across the four networks reflecting no discernible patterns between references to human rights and network type:

*H5. International networks are more likely to feature mentions of human rights actors and institutions than local networks.*

Given the lack of statistical significance, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. This finding seems to support an increasing intractability of sexual rights discourse in mediated coverage of homosexuality regardless of the rhetorical position of the article. Furthermore a cursory analysis of the articles shows a greater willingness to counterpoints or rebuke statements made by human rights advocates, either by directly quoting official statements critical of the involvement of human rights movements (AJA45, AJA56) or by testimonials on the futility of human rights efforts. To illustrate the latter point, the final paragraph on Al-Jazeera's story on the Queen Boat incident conveniently titled "Escalation of Human Rights Violations in Egypt" sought to highlight that despite the efforts by human rights groups in pressuring the Egyptian Government to release detainees that were caught in the raid, the prosecution of

homosexuals remained unhindered and that the majority of Egyptians saw the mass arrests of homosexuals as a “positive development” (AJA14).

### **An Analysis of Terminology and Rhetoric Use**

The aim of the portion of this study was to analyze rhetorical frames, language choice and directional statements in the coverage of homosexuality across the four networks. To review, each of the reference paragraphs were dummy coded for the network as the dependent variable, and the following parameters as the independent variables: 1) Synonyms used (*Shaath, Mithli or Luwat*), 2) Homosexuality as Subjective 3) Homosexuality as non-subjective (practice or behavior) 4) Homosexuals as victims 5) Homosexuals as perpetrators 6) homosexuality as a negative influence/societal concern and finally 7) Homosexuality as part of a positive development. In this chapter, I will report the results of the hypothesis tests used followed by a brief discussion of findings.

### **Factor Analysis**

Before delving into the data analysis, I used a factor analysis to test for underlying patterns between the independent variables across all of the networks. Three component matrices were rotated using a varimax (orthonological) rotation as shown in Table 5.3. Factor scores under 0.5 were excluded from the analysis.

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Component 1</b>	<b>Component 2</b>	<b>Component 3</b>
<b>As Practice</b>	-0.91		
<b>As Subjective</b>	0.90		
<b>As Perpetrators</b>	-0.53	0.75	
<b>As a Negative Influence</b>		0.73	
<b>As Victims</b>		-0.66	-0.54
<b>As Positive Influence</b>			0.89

**TABLE 5. 4 FACTOR ANALYSIS OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

The first component indicates fairly strong inter-variable relationships between the three categories. As expected, there is a sharp inverse correlation between references to homosexuality as subjective and homosexuality as practice as they are diametrically opposite constructions of homosexuality. In the second component matrix, we see clear inter-variable influences between mentions of homosexuals as perpetrators and homosexuals as a negative influence, suggesting that references to homosexuals as a negative social influence are also likely to contain statements with direct mentions of homosexuality or homosexuals as the fault for this. Component 2 also shows a moderately strong inverse relationship between negative references and references to homosexuals as perpetrators- to mentions of homosexuals as victims. This is expected as

statements concerning homosexual victims are likely to see them as innocent parties. Component 3 yielded interesting results- showing a weak inverse relationship between mentions of homosexuals as victims and references to positive conditions for homosexuals. This might be true given that Improving social, legal and structural conditions for homosexuals are less likely to make them victims.

### **Rhetoric and Language**

The underlying motif for examining word choice went beyond simply testing for the presence and frequency of “pejorative” synonyms of homosexuality amongst local networks, I wanted to document the ways in which the synonyms were contextually relevant. As such, this analysis sought to explore the relational frequency of pejorative and approbative synonyms on homosexuality, and how these synonyms were contextualized within the independent variables coded specifically for this study. The final part of this study will involve a longitudinal analysis of word choice across the reference paragraphs for the local networks.

For all of the hypotheses studied, I used a cross-tabulation to explore how the use of pejorative and approbative synonyms differed across the four networks. As mentioned earlier, H6 centered on the argument that local networks were much more likely to use pejorative synonyms:

*H6: Local networks are more likely to use pejorative synonyms in their coverage of homosexuality than their international counterparts.*

Overall, of the four networks, Al-Jazeera's coverage contained the largest proportion of pejorative synonyms (either *Shaath* or *Luti*) at 83 data points out of a total of 94 (88.3%). Only 11 (11.7%) approbative synonyms (*Mithli*) were recorded across the entirety of Al-Jazeera's coverage. Al Arabiya's coverage contained a total of 25 (30.9%) pejorative references versus 56 (69.9%) approbative mentions. international networks were highly unlikely to use pejorative synonyms in their coverage. None of the BBC Arabic articles surveyed contained any use of pejorative synonyms. CNN Arabic's use of pejorative synonyms tallied at 30 (25.6%)- bringing it more in line with Al Arabiya. As a plot, we find that both the BBC Arabic and Al-Jazeera Arabic as extreme outliers, with CNN Arabic and Al Arabiya falling somewhere in the middle. Model-wise this strong correlation reflected in our measure of association, which stood at  $0.66 (c^2 = 163.33, N = 397, p < 0.01)$ .

### **On homosexual subjectivity and practice.**

Our data showed that mentions of homosexuality as a subjective were prevalent across all networks and was the most frequently coded categories. Of the sample of 379 reference articles, 378 (80.4%) contained one or more references to homosexuality as a subjective. This finding strongly suggests that even amongst local networks “Western”

notions about persistent sexual identities and communities have become endemic to queer discourse in the Arab world. Given the high prevalence rate, I decided to focus my analysis on references to homosexuality as practice. To review, the category included any references to homosexuality as an activity, as behavior, as well as mentions of homosexuality as a “tendency” (*muyul Jinsy*). Two approaches were used. The first was to measure the prevalence of references to practice across the four networks. The second approach used Pearson's Correlation to observe the relationship between word choice and practice. The two hypotheses used were as follows:

*H7. Local networks are more likely to contain references to homosexuality as a practice than their international counterparts.*

*H8. There is an observable and significant correlation between synonym used and references to homosexual practice.*

The distribution across the four networks was similar to our previous analysis on synonym use. Again, Al-Jazeera had more references of practice than all of its three counterparts with 43(44.3%) mentions. In contrast, the BBC only had a total of 13(15.5%) mentions. Al Arabiya came in second at 32(39.5%) mentions followed by CNN Arabic at 27(23.1%). As for the strength of our model, our measure of association came in at  $.251 (c^2 = 23.93, N = 397, p < 0.01)$ .

## **On Synonym use and Subjectivity**

For our correlation, I found an inverse relationship between synonym use and mentions of homosexuality as practice at  $r(377) = -0.31$   $p < .01$ , suggesting that pejorative mentions of homosexuality scaled up with mentions of homosexuality as a practice. The findings here suggest that both local networks, Al-Jazeera in particular, were more likely to highlight homosexuality as a behavior or practice than their international counterparts. This was particularly evident amongst stories involving either policy discussions or in instances where there were mentions of acts of violence committed against homosexuals. For example, on coverage of homophobic violence in Iraq, Al-Jazeera referred to the victims as “men who committed homosexual acts” (AJA1) as opposed to identifying them as homosexuals. (CNN15). On the coverage of mass arrests, both Al-Jazeera and Al Arabiya would default to appropriating language used in anti-sodomy penal codes to describe their protagonists. One line in an article on the crackdown of a “sex party” in Bahrain described the scene as a “den where people went to commit homosexual acts” by men “who had homosexual tendencies.” (ARA1). The correlation between word choice and practice could simply come down to linguistic differences. The term *mithli* -the technical/approbativ term for homosexuality, is seldom used in its infinitive form “*mithliya*”, whereas *shaath* and *shuthuth* are more commonly used to express a state or form of behavior.

### **On homosexuality as a negative influence.**

Three sets of tests were used to explore the coverage of homosexuality as a negative influence. H9 revolved around exploring the patterns and relationships between the networks and references to negative coverage.

*H9 Local networks are more likely to feature mentions of homosexuality as a negative influence than their international counterparts.*

As for H10, a Pearson's correlation analysis between word choice and negative coverage was conducted to explore the directional relationship (if any) between the two variables.

*H10. There is a significant positive relationship between pejorative synonyms and references to homosexuals as a negative influence.*

The final test sought to explore the relationship between negative coverage of homosexuality and mentions of homosexuality as a form of practice.

*H11. There is a positive relationship between mentions of homosexuality as a negative influence and homosexuality as a form of practice.*

This was done to explore the likelihood that references to sexual practice might be influenced by negative stereotypes about homosexuals. A study by Fisher, Hill, Grube, and Grubel (2007) on gay, lesbian and bisexual content on American television networks

found that viewers were likely to view non-heterosexual behavior (which they coded as sexual activity and suggestive behavior) as deviant or unusual.

For H9, it should be noted that all four networks had a similar count of mentions of homosexuality as a negative influence. Both Al-Jazeera and Al Arabiya tallied at 31(32%) and 28(34.6%) negative references, compared to 17 (20.1%) instances for the BBC Arabic and 26 references for CNN Arabic (22.2%).

When it came to testing the relationship between negative influence and pejorative synonyms, I decided to limit my analysis to the local networks. This was due to the lack of use of pejorative synonyms on international networks. Our correlation showed that the use of pejorative synonyms was highest when negative influences were mentioned, whereas the contrast was true for positive influences and neutral/positive synonyms.

( $\chi^2 = 9.904, N = 397, p < 0.001$ ).

This significant relationship was also observed when I looked at the correlation between the negative mentions and mentions of homosexuality as a form of practice. Amongst the local networks, mentions of homosexuality as a form practice were more likely to contain mentions of homosexuality as a negative influence ( $\chi^2 = 8.688, N = 397, p < 0.05$ ), than those which referenced homosexuality as a subjective. Coming back to Fisher's

study, we find a similar pattern of associating homosexual activity with negative

	Synonym	Practice	behavior
<b>Negative Influence</b>	-2.08	.156	r
	DF=375	DF=375	amongst
	p<0.01	p<0.01	the Arab network

s.

**TABLE 5. 5 CORRELATION MATRIX BETWEEN MENTIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY AS A NEGATIVE INFLUENCE, SYNONYM USE, AND PRACTICE.**

As our data shows, mentions of homosexuality as a negative influence correlated positively with pejorative synonyms. A weaker correlation was observed between negative influence and practice. This correlation was not observed amongst the international networks. Simply put, both the BBC Arabic and CNN Arabic did not use references to homosexual practice as extensively as the local networks.

As a whole, mentions of negative influences amongst the local networks did not yield any significant differences between Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya in terms of our

data. This might be partly due to the relatively even distribution of the variable across the networks, suggesting that each of the channels may share similar editorial policies around the reporting of homosexuality as a negative influence. Weak but significant correlations between word choice and references to homosexuality as a form of practice suggest that they play a marginal role as predictive indicators for measuring negative influences. In contrast, mentions of homosexuality as a negative influence did not play a significant role in discerning between homosexuality as a subjective or homosexuality as a practice on either of the international networks. This could come down to contextual differences in how international networks use homosexuality as a practice.

### **On Homosexuality as Victims and Perpetrators**

These variables were used to identify sympathetic and hostile frames in the coverage of homosexuality. Homosexuality was used to positively code any mentions of challenges faced by homosexuals. This was broadly defined to include any mentions of daily struggles faced by homosexuals, mentions of homosexuals as victim of physical or psychological violence, and direct mentions of interviewees about their concerns.

Coding for mentions of homosexuals as perpetrators included mentions of homosexuals as engaging in criminal activity, homosexuals engaging in sexual abuse (including pederasty), and finally statements made by homosexuals that were deemed “offensive or contrary” (for example, Elton John's claim that Jesus Christ was a closet homosexual) (ARA14, CNNA25).

The first two hypotheses, H12 and H13, sought to explore how mentions of homosexuality as victims and mentions of perpetrators trended across the four networks.

*H12. Coverage by International networks was more likely to feature references of homosexuals as victims than their local counterparts:*

*H13. Local networks were more likely to feature references of homosexuals as perpetrators than their international counterparts.*

The third hypothesis in this section, (H14) used the Pearson's R statistic to measure correlation between the two variables. Here, I argued the following:

*H14: Mentions of victims will have a significant inverse relationship with mentions of perpetrators.*

Unsurprisingly, our test for H13 supported the notion that both international networks featured more mentions of homosexuals as victims than their local counterparts. Both the BBC recorded 40 (47.6%) mentions while CNN Arabic contained 55 (47.1%) mentions. Al-Jazeera Arabic featured the least amount of mentions at 25 (25.8%) mentions, with Al-Arabiya coming in third place at 31(38.3%) ( $\chi^2 = 12.72, N = 379, p < 0.05$ ). As noted earlier, the higher prevalence of mentions of homosexuals as victims is also indicative of thematic undertones; both of the international networks ran more stories featuring human rights themes than their local counterparts.

For H14, we found a much stronger pattern across the four networks. Both Al-Jazeera Arabic and Al Arabiya had 18 (18.6%) and 21(25.9%) mentions of homosexuals are perpetrators respectively compared with just one mention from the BBC Arabic and 9 (12.9%) on CNN Arabic. Our measure of association- Cramer's V was similarly strong at 0.27. ( $\chi^2 = 28.02, N = 379, p < 0.00$ ).

For our final hypothesis, we found a statistically significant inverse relationship between the two, measured at  $r(377) = -.298, p < .000$ - which is a robustly moderate correlation. This correlation jumped to  $-.377$  when we limited our sample to the international networks. This could suggest that international articles containing references to homosexuals as victims were far less likely to contain a perpetrator counter frame.

## **CHAPTER 6: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

If we were to take a snapshot of our analysis, we would find that there are general and significant differences in how international and local networks cover homosexuality. However, these variations are not dichotomous along resistance and acceptance of the Gay International as Massad would have theorized. While the international networks were indeed, far less likely to deviate from Western-dominant constructs of homosexuality, the coverage on local networks seems to oscillate between the two positions, drawing upon concepts and themes that were at times sympathetic and at other times oppositional to the Gay International. It is crucial to note that each of the local networks had distinct editorial approaches in the coverage. Al Arabiya focused more on

reporting domestic matters with a focus on legal and policy issues. Much of Al-Jazeera's coverage, however, focused on issues in the West, with emphasis on religious issues. However, we find significant similarities in their coverage. Both used pejorative synonyms, to the use of oppositional and hostile frames in implicating homosexuality as a negative influence. Interestingly, my analysis also found that there seemed to be some disparity in the coverage of homosexuality between Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, particularly around topical emphasis. This was in contrast to the BBC and CNN, which seemed to converge on a lot of the dependent variables. So what do these trends tell us? This chapter will flesh these concepts out in more detail.

Both the BBC Arabic and CNN Arabic did not stray far from the policies of their English counterparts by largely avoiding pejorative synonyms and by limiting the role of oppositional frames via the testimonies of religious and socially conservative voices. Both networks were more likely to focus on issues relevant to the MENA region with a greater emphasis on themes around human rights and violence against homosexuals. Both networks were also more likely to use personalization and human interest stories to frame homosexuals as victims. In addition to the "Ana mithli" documentary which aired on the BBC Arabic, CNN devoted a significant number of articles towards covering the victims of Iraqi death squads targeting suspected men. Both devices attribute directly to the credence and legitimacy of a social cause, in this case, the Gay International (Hugh 1940,

Gitlin 1980). In extrapolating the role of international networks to Massad's dichotomy, we find that the international networks are not only less likely to diverge from the tenets of the Gay International, but on occasion are willing to be its propagators.

In contrast, Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera used pejorative and neutral synonyms to describe homosexuality. The coverage was also more likely to include oppositional frames, particularly when the voices involved religious undertones. Human rights issues and frames involving homosexuals as victims were also less frequent than their international counterparts. When homosexual protagonists were featured, they were more likely to be seen as a negative influence, or as perpetrators of their condition. Al-Arabiya's coverage in particular demonstrated the latter with its coverage of crackdowns on "Gay parties" in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

### **Shifting the Fulcrum**

Before we can attempt to situate the coverage of local networks within the spectrum of the Gay International, we must first understand how networks balance their coverage around competing sympathies. One way of looking at this is to fall back on Hafez's trifecta model of political influence in the Arab media sphere whereby state influence, audience retention, and global news regimes affect the editorial trajectory of the news. However, Hafez's model deals mostly with priming and agenda setting qualities

and not with the everyday nuances of gatekeeping. Another, more plausible explanation is that this tension is symptomatic contextual objectivity, as coined by Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar to describe the “epistemic and discursive” tensions between Al-Jazeera's popular appeal and its claim for objectivity, which can provide context on how the local networks approach their coverage. While the Gay International is still very much a contested concept amongst the majority of Arabs, the concepts of the Gay International are very much alive in Arab discourse. Framing homosexuality as a subjective or identity was far more prevalent on all of the networks over references to homosexuality as practice.

Akin to contextual objectivity, we must not forget the role localization plays in the packaging of the news, particularly around language use and context. Both Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya relied heavily on religious themes and commentary, which is reflective of the propensity of religious issues in Arab public life but not necessarily an indication of negative perception. As mentioned earlier, both networks were likely to append their stories with statements by religious figures, even if the article contained coverage that was sympathetic to homosexuality.

### **Cultural Proximity and Newsworthiness**

Despite the gradual influence of concepts within the Gay International the findings of this study seem to reinforce the lack of salience of homosexuality in the Arab

Public Sphere. The small number of articles collected over a ten year period amongst both local and international networks is emblematic of this. The dearth of coverage can also be symptomatic of a lack of cultural proximity. The mean of references to homosexuality on local networks was smaller than their international counterparts (See table 5.1). Looking at Al Jazeera in particular, we find that a larger number of stories fell outside of the region. This could indicate different coverage priorities, or a deliberate reticence to diminish cultural proximity of the coverage (Straubhar 1991, Boyd 1994, Burch 2002). While both Burch and Straubhar refer to cultural proximity as a way of facilitating media flows for the purpose of increasing audience share across a regional market, Al-Jazeera might be doing the very opposite by covering events that have even less resiliency in public opinion. This could be done as a way to appease Global News Regimes while satisfying their own audience.

While this was not explicitly explored in my data analysis, the dearth of human narratives and personalization on either of the local networks may be a telling sign of distancing. It was Schudson (1982: 98) who said that “the power of the media lies not only (and not even primarily) in its power to declare things to be true, but in its power to provide the forms in which the declarations appear.” If this is the case, then the absence of personalization may also suggest that there is a reticence to frame homosexuality as a relatable concept to its mass audience. However, this view may not take into account the

general news production philosophies towards personalization. Indeed, a study of political communication patterns on Arabic television by Muhammad Ayish (2002) found that human-interest stories were notably absent in much of the political news coverage on Arabic news producers. Ayish chalks this up to a strong “interest in political news” which he argues overrides the need to cover “human interest news describing the lives of ordinary individuals” ( 150). He also argues that personalization is already inherent on thematic programs such as documentaries and pundit shows. <sup>3</sup>

In contrast, three of the BBC Arabic articles contained some form of personalization. One of the first articles analyzed (BBCA1) contained a feature promoting the “*ana mithli*” (I am gay) documentary mentioned previously in Chapter 3. The article opens up with “Manal”, a Moroccan lesbian who quotes her now girlfriend about the way she came out to her. “She approached me that day and asked me: What is the most dangerous thing that could happen to a person?” The next sentence reads “And being a Lesbian is not the only affair that needs to be kept private.” Another BBC article, introduces readers to Rami, a Palestinian Gay man living as an asylum seeker in Israel. The article delves into a deep personal account of Rami's hardships, including his time served in prison, the constant fear of being captured and executed by Palestinian security

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<sup>3</sup> While Ayish's findings seem to corroborate with the lack of personalization themes in our data set, it should be noted that his thesis relied exclusively on political coverage. Furthermore, the networks he analyzed did not include any of the networks used in this study.

forces if he ever returned, and the angst he feels about disenfranchising and dishonoring his family back in Gaza. BBC Arabic's use of personalization may lend further credence to its role as a missionary of Gay International principles, or it could be simply symptomatic of its rigid editorial centrality with its parent network, which has gravitated towards the use of both devices in its news production for quite some time now (Piazza & Haarman, 2011). Indeed, the BBC's use of human interest stories is a reflection of a growing trend by Western networks towards human narratives in the news.

### **Al-Arabiya: A model for convergence?**

Of the two local networks, Al-Arabiya's seemed to be more receptive to pro-Western themes. For example, almost all of Al-Arabiya's coverage of homosexuality fell within the purview of the MENA region, suggesting that it is bringing issues of greater salience to its target audience. Al-Arabiya also used fewer pejorative synonyms in its coverage than Al-Jazeera and featured slightly less references to homosexuals as a negative influence. It should also be noted that Al-Arabiya was one of the first media networks to lend HELEM, a Lebanese LGBT rights group, the opportunity to publish a rejoinder to what the NGO saw as a "smear campaign against HELEM" in one of Al-Arabiya's op-ed pieces. Despite being financed by the Saudi regime- arguably one of the most repressive regimes in the region- Al-Arabiya has consistently viewed itself as a

moderate alternative to Al-Jazeera (Lynch 2005, pp. 38). In a 2005 New York Times article on Al-Arabiya's general manager Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed, Samantha Shapiro wrote that Al-Rashed's goal for Al-Arabiya was “to foster a new kind of dialogue among Arabs, to carve out space for moderate and liberal ideas to enter the conversation, and in the process to do nothing less than save the Arab world from itself” (Shapiro 2005). However, polls show that despite this, Al-Arabiya continues to lag behind Al-Jazeera in audience retention, with just 14% of total respondents compared to Al-Jazeera's 43%. (Arab public Opinion Survey 2011).

### **Research limitations**

There were a number of limitations with this study. The extensive statistical modeling was overshadowed by a small and limited data set, spread across too large of a time span to yield any meaningful longitudinal analysis. A robust longitudinal analysis could have given us a means to model the historical interaction between the Gay International and Arabic news. The data collection itself also proved problematic, as all of the articles were extracted from the websites of the respective networks, which could have skewed the sample. Coding Arabic articles using an English coding structure also proved problematic, particularly around coding between subjective and practice references to homosexuality. This could have been mitigated somewhat if there were more coders available.

While the small sample size could be an indication of lack of issue salience across the industry as a whole, it could also be attributed to the corpus format itself. Since this study only focused on online content, using archival broadcasting material and transcripts could have yielded more data. However, the lack of aggregated archival repositories of broadcast transcripts (of the four networks, only Al Jazeera featured transcripts of its variety shows) meant that this was not possible.

This project could have benefited tremendously from analytically exploring other mediums, such as social talk shows, which have become a rich space for discourse on social issues. Within the study of news, this study could have benefited from deeper study of the presence of human interest frames. This was only apparent within the later stages of the coding process and was thus only appropriated in a limited way at the end of the project.

Fundamentally, my hope is that this project serves as a precursor for further studies on mediated homosexuality in the Arab world, as well a call for integrating broader macro approaches in the methodological approaches in the general study of Arabic news production.

## **Conclusion**

This study showed that political-economic influences had some degree of influence on how homosexuality was framed. Al-Jazeera stayed true to its populist base in its deliberate distancing effects and its use of pejorative synonyms. Of the four networks, Al-Jazeera had the lowest mean of references to homosexuality per article, suggesting that most of its coverage of homosexuality issues were ancillary to other topics. Al-Arabiya seemed to be lukewarm in its reception to the Gay International, with its focus on local coverage and its greater use of neutral synonyms. Al-Arabiya was also less likely to feature mentions of homosexuality as a negative influence, though the difference was marginal compared to Al Jazeera. On the other hand, both the BBC Arabic and CNN Arabic stuck to editorial paradigms that were consistently sympathetic to the Gay International. References to homosexuality as a negative influence were considerably lower on both networks, as was the presence of pejorative synonyms. BBC Arabic seemed to cross the line from propagator to missionary in its use of personalization and human narratives, both of which were absent in the coverage of the local networks.

Beyond its research directive, this study asked several difficult and probing questions. Is Gay visibility akin to tacit advocacy of the Gay International? Or does the less sympathetic coverage on local networks point to a clear sign of incitement to discourse? Can we meaningfully articulate a broad assessment to either question in lieu

of the differences in coverage between the local networks? One common denominator running through all these questions is the need to consider political-economic influences. We cannot dispute that Arab networks have fully interpolated the themes and discourses inherent to Western constructions of homosexuality- even if the coverage was mostly antipathetic to its agenda on the local networks. The concepts of homosexuality as a subjective and persistent identity are no longer limited to Western discourse. The implications of this are too early to tell and will require more research.

### **Research Implications**

Despite its limitations, this study is but one small step in what is hopefully, a broader conversation on homosexuality and the media forms that propagate and disseminate their discourses. Whatever it may represent to the people who come into contact with it, the Gay International will continue to rile, incite and influence Arab public. This is made even more poignant by the rapid adoption rate of social media technologies across the region. It is through social media technologies that the Gay International has garnered the most exposure. On Al-Jazeera's coverage of the events shaping the Arab Spring, John Lloyd of the Financial Times wrote, "The station's part in this year's rebellions in the Arab states has made a huge statement about the nature of engaged reporting. More globally significant than Fox News's championing of the Tea

Party, its reporting has provided a potent example of television's political power.”

(2011).

While Lloyd's commentary follows a cadre of journalists and academics who have attested to Al-Jazeera's potency as a force of change in public opinion, there is for the first time, growing consensus in the belief that social media networks will become a major contender, if not eclipse television news in the battle to court the hearts and minds of the Arab street. The unprecedented access and influence of social media in generating public action underscores the need to explore this technology further. In tandem with the dearth of studies on televising social issues in the Arab world, media effects researchers have been slow to study how Arabs use social media technologies for discourse about sexuality.

### **A “Gay National”?**

For the Gay Internationalist there are several questions too. Where does the movement go from here? Will it rely on its international proxies to propagate its message? Or will it attempt to engage the local networks in a meaningful way? In recent years, HELEM, the Lebanese based LGBT group, has sought to distance itself from its Western counterparts by stressing the locality of its mission and by aligning itself to a leftist Arab-Islamic agenda. In 2010, the group announced that it would be boycotting the

Queer Lisbon Film Festival in Portugal because the sponsoring committee had agreed to accept funding from the Israeli Embassy. A statement on the HELEM website reads:

We must not forget that there is no freedom of gender or sexuality when one is discriminated on grounds of ethnic background, living in closed Bantustans, under military occupation, surrounded by walls of shame, deprived of basic goods, subjected to checkpoints, house demolitions and bombings<sup>4</sup>.

As a self-professed LGBT rights group, one that Massad explicitly confines to the annals of the Gay International, HELEM's decision to boycott the festival is seen as an active attempt to carve an alternative space for itself, as an Arabist movement grounded on the principles of sexual equality. Could this be the progeny of a “Gay National” movement? This mishmash of political and sexual activism is a bold attempt to expand its reach beyond the stakeholders it serves by prioritizing national and Arab solidarity over sexual rights. As noted earlier, this was demonstrated in HELEM's Op-Ed piece on Al-Arabiya's website, in which it redressed allegations that it was a “Western Imperialist project” by stressing its Lebanese roots. As the only legally recognized LGBT NGO in the region, the genesis of a Gay national movement remains a distant prospect.

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<sup>4</sup> Full statement can be found at the following URL: <http://www.helem.net/node/119>

## Appendix

### A1. List of Cited Corpus Articles

Articles Number	Title*	Source	Date Published
BBCA7	Egypt: Homosexuals find haven online.	BBC Arabic	04/17/2010
BBCA1	“I am Gay”: The Complete Movie.	BBC Arabic	05/06/2010
BBCA8	American Soldier Interrogated over Facebook video of him mocking Iraqi Children	BBC Arabic	05/25/2010
CNNA25	Morocco: Elton John Stokes conflict between Islamists and Secularists	CNN Arabic	24/6/2010
ARA1	Bahrain: Police investigate Satanic Sex Parties	Al-Arabiya	04/12/2005
ARA3	Islamic Council of Saudi Arabia: Women should be banned from using Facebook.	Al-Jazeera Arabic	03/26/2008
ARA14	“Sex Online”	Al-Arabiya	02/16/2009

AJA10	Archbishop of Canterbury responds to critics	Al-Jazeera Arabic	11/2/2008
AJA14	Human Rights Violations on the rise in Egypt	Al-Jazeera Arabic	1/14/2003
AJA13	Westerners more likely to have multiple sexual partners outside of marriage	Al-Jazeera Arabic	11/7/2006
AJA45	Sexual Abuse scandal lead to reforms in French Churches	Al-Jazeera Arabic	2/23/2001
AJA1	Aids in South Africa	Al-Jazeera Arabic	5/12/2004

\*Titles were all translated to English from Modern Standard Arabic.

## A2. Table of Correlations

		Synonym Present	Homosexuality as a Negative Influence	Homosexuality as a Positive Influence	Homosexuals as Victims	Homosexuals as Perpetrators	Homosexual Practice	Network
Synonym Present	Pearson Correlation		-.208	.046	.232	-.246	-.313	.497
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.370	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N		375	375	375	375	375	375
Homosexuality as a Negative Influence	Pearson Correlation	-.208		-.165	-.299	.280	.156	-.109
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001	.000	.000	.002	.034
	N	375		379	379	379	379	379
Homosexuality as a Positive Influence	Pearson Correlation	.046	-.165		-.131	-.167	-.192	.074
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.370	.001		.010	.001	.000	.150
	N	375	379		379	379	379	379
Homosexuals as Victims	Pearson Correlation	.232	-.299	-.131		-.298	-.150	.170
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.010		.000	.003	.001
	N	375	379	379		379	379	379
Homosexuals as Perpetrators	Pearson Correlation	-.246	.280	-.167	-.298		.105	-.185
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	.000		.041	.000
	N	375	379	379	379		379	379
Homosexual Practice	Pearson Correlation	-.313	.156	-.192	-.150	.105		-.211

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.000	.003	.041		.000
	N	375	379	379	379	379		379
Network	Pearson Correlation	.497	-.109	.074	.170	-.185	-.211	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.034	.150	.001	.000	.000	
	N	375	379	379	379	379	379	

### A3. Descriptive Statistics

#### Al-Jazeera Arabic

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T (p<0.000)
Homosexuality as a Negative Influence	97	.3196	.46874	.04759	6.715
Homosexuality as a Positive Influence	97	.1546	.36344	.03690	4.191
Homosexuals as Victims	97	.2577	.43966	.04464	5.774
Homosexuals as Perpetrators	97	.1856	.39078	.03968	4.677
Homosexual Practice	97	.4433	.49936	.05070	8.743
Homosexual Subjective	97	.6907	.46460	.04717	14.642
Synonym Present	94	1.12	.323	.033	33.512

## Al-Arabiya

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T (p<0.000)
Homosexuality as a Negative Influence	81	.3457	.47855	.05317	6.501
Homosexuality as a Positive Influence	81	.1111	.31623	.03514	3.162
Homosexuals as Victims	81	.3827	.48908	.05434	7.043
Homosexuals as Perpetrators	81	.2593	.44096	.04900	5.292
Homosexual Practice	81	.3951	.49191	.05466	7.228
Homosexual Subjective	81	.6914	.46481	.05165	13.387
Synonym Present	81	1.69	.465	.052	32.749

## BBC Arabic

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T (p<0.05)
Homosexuality as a Negative Influence	84	.2024	.40419	.04410	4.589
Homosexuality as a Positive Influence	84	.1190	.32579	.03555	3.349
Homosexuals as Victims	84	.4762	.50243	.05482	8.686
Homosexuals as Perpetrators	84	.0119	.10911	.01190	1.000*
Homosexual Practice	84	.1548	.36385	.03970	3.898

Homosexual Subjective	83	.9639	.18778	.02061	46.762
Synonyms Present	NA	NA	NA	NA**	NA

\*not significant at the  $P < 0.05$  interval

\*\* not enough data.

### CNN Arabic

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T ( $p < 0.05$ )
Homosexuality as a Negative Influence	117	.2222	.41753	.03860	5.757
Homosexuality as a Positive Influence	117	.2222	.41753	.03860	5.757
Homosexuals as Victims	117	.4701	.50125	.04634	10.144
Homosexuals as Perpetrators	117	.0769	.26762	.02474	3.109
Homosexual Practice	117	.2308	.42314	.03912	5.899
Homosexual Subjective	117	.8632	.34506	.03190	27.060
Synonym Present	117	1.74	.439	.041	43.007

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