

What Makes a Man? Sexuality and Representation in Europe-Middle East Encounters

Questions about sexuality, gender, and religion in the East and West have dominated debates in Germany and other European countries since the beginning of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in the summer of 2015. Despite all claims as to the unprecedented nature of the displacement and its root causes, German media attention is becoming increasingly transfixed by an all-too-familiar construction of 'oriental' masculinity.

Back in 2003, the Berlin-based 'West-East Divan' initiated an author exchange between Rashid al-Daif from Beirut and Joachim Helfer from Berlin. Two books resulted from the encounter: *al-Daif's Awdat al-almani ila rushdih* (The German's Return to His Senses, 2005) and Helfer's response *Die Verschwulung der Welt* (The Queering of the World, 2006). Both texts caused a heated debate at the time of their publication: al-Daif's apparent homophobia seemed to have found a match in Helfer's orientalism. Their exchange certainly complicated the assumption that an encounter between two intellectuals, two literary writers from different cultures would ultimately have to be able to dispel all intervening prejudices. A decade later, their remarkably candid debate crossed the Atlantic: in 2015, the English translation of the exchange was published with additional critical essays under the title *What Makes A Man? Sex Talk between Beirut and Berlin*.

The workshop reassembles the original partners of the encounter and a larger group of critics from both sides of the Atlantic to explore the issues at stake. It will test the assumption that al-Daif and Helfer's publications can help us carve out the cultural, literary, and media conditions in which narratives of gender and sexuality across cultural and religious differences and their critiques are developed.

An ICI Event organized by Peter Rehberg (ICI Berlin/DAAD), Tarek El-Ariss (University of Texas at Austin), and John Borneman (Princeton University) in cooperation with Europe in the Middle East – the Middle East in Europe (EUME), a programme at the Forum Transregionale Studien.

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Workshop and Discussion –

Thursday, 18 May 2017, 13:00 -21:00, In English



A SACRED BIRD - DIGITAL COLLAGE BY ABRAHAM H. ZEITOUN

What Makes a Man? Sexuality and Representation in Europe-Middle East Encounters

Programme

13:00-13:15 WELCOME
Christoph Holzhey (ICI Berlin)
Georges Khalil (EUME/Forum Transregionale Studien)

13:15 -13:30 INTRODUCTION
Peter Rehberg

13:30-15:30 **Panel I - East/West Literary Encounters**

Michael Allan
Zeina Halabi
Gary Schmidt
Robert Tobin

Moderator: Tarek El-Ariss

15:30 -16:00 Coffee break

16:00-18:00 **Panel II - Sexuality, Masculinity, and Media Representation**

Mohamed Amjahid
Dieter Haller
Paula-Irene Villa
Samuel Williams

Moderator: John Borneman

18:00 -19:30 Break

19:30-21:00 **Discussion – What Makes a Man? Revisiting The German’s Return to His Senses and The Queering of the World**

Rashid al-Daif
Joachim Helfer

Moderator: Friederike Pannewick

followed by a Q&A

Rashid al-Daif is the co-author of *What Makes A Man: Sex Talk in Beirut and Berlin* and a renowned Lebanese novelist whose works deal with questions of social relations, conflict, and history. He is professor of creative writing at the American University of Beirut.

Michael Allan is associate professor and Petrone Faculty Scholar of comparative literature at the University of Oregon and currently a EUME Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung.

Mohamed Amjahid is a political reporter and editor with the German ZEITmagazin. His first book, *Unter Weißen* (Among White People), a take on racism and privilege in Germany and Europe, is based on anthropological work among white Europeans.

John Borneman is professor of anthropology at Princeton University. In his current project he is examining phobias and philiias that frame the location of the foreign and strange in Germany, as it concerns the refugee flow of Muslims and Arabs.

Tarek El-Ariss is associate professor at University of Texas at Austin and former EUME Fellow. His research focuses on Arabic and comparative literature, theories of modernity, new media and digital cultures, and gender and sexuality in the Middle East.

Zeina G. Halabi is assistant professor of modern Arabic literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a former EUME fellow

Dieter Haller is professor for social anthropology at Ruhr-University Bochum.

He has carried out fieldwork amongst transvestites in Seville, Spain (1980s), and on masculinities in Morocco (2013 and ongoing).

Joachim Helfer is the co-author of *What Makes A Man: Sex Talk in Beirut and Berlin*. He has also authored various novels and essays. He lives in Berlin.

Friederike Pannewick is professor for modern Arabic literature and culture at Philipps-University Marburg and member of EUME. She currently works on the representation of violence in Arabic novels and drama.

Peter Rehberg is affiliated fellow at the ICI Berlin and awardee of a DAAD stipend. His work focuses on queer theory, popular culture, and media studies. Currently, he is working on transnational masculinities, post-pornography, and celebrity cultures.

Gary Schmidt is chair of the Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies at Coastal Carolina University; his scholarship addresses masculinity and queer sexualities in twentieth-century and contemporary literature and film.

Robert Tobin holds the Henry J Leir Chair in comparative literature at Clark University (Worcester, MA) and is currently working on sexual human rights in literature.

Paula-Irene Villa is professor (chair) of sociology and gender studies at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. Her research focuses on biopolitics, social and gender/queer theory, pop culture, and care work.

Samuel Williams is a social anthropologist. He is a post-doctoral research fellow at Musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, where he is working on an ethnographic project examining the scrap gold market between Europe and the Middle East.