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al-Šadīdī, Mūsà. *al-Mitliyya al-ğinsiyya fī ḡazū al-‘Irāq*. ‘Ammān: self-published, 2020. 95 pp. ISBN 978-9957-67-761-9. € 7,00.

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The fourth book written by Mūsà al-Šadīdī, (b. 1992, Baghdad), *al-Mitliyya al-ğinsiyya fī ḡazū al-‘Irāq* (“Homosexuality in the Invasion of Iraq”), explores the relationship between homosexuality and the invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies. The author of this book, an Iraqi queer activist writer living in Jordan, is the founder and director of Cinamji [*Sīnamġī*], an Arab queer cinematic initiative for queer-feminist criticism) and the Arabic language editor of the LGBTQIA magazine *MyKali*. al-Šadīdī deals with issues related to gender and sexuality in Arab contexts. In recent years, the author has published a book which addresses the sexuality of the Egyptian star Umm Kultūm,<sup>1</sup> as well as a book about the representations of non-normative sexualities in Arab cinema.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, al-Šadīdī has published numerous articles on Arabic platforms and online magazines addressing questions related to the representations of the body and sexualities in pop culture and cinema, as well as “pinkwashing” (i.e., the appropriation of LGBTQIA+ themes and motifs by states and corporations as a form of propaganda), among other topics.

In his latest book, al-Šadīdī addresses the United States’ instrumentalization of homosexuality as one of the pretexts for the war against Iraq, whereby the question of the liberation of Iraqi homosexuals was widespread in public debate. According to the author, this has led to the production of an identity that did not exist prior to the invasion. Thus, the claim of liberation of homosexuals has led to a series of terrible consequences in Iraq, the most important of which are the violence and persecution campaigns carried out against Iraqi homosexuals by local militias, as gay identity entered Iraq through the occupation. Not only was the word “gay” used by the US in its justification of war, but the American army also used systematic (homo)sexual abuse practices as a way of torturing Iraqi prisoners in the infamous Abu Ghraib prison. Moreover, the word “gay” was used in the context of the torture in Abu Ghraib as an insult towards the prisoners. According to al-Šadīdī, after these instances of torture, the English word “gay”, or its translation into Arabic, “*mitlī*”, came to be used in Iraq to define the identities of people who are attracted to the same sex (pp. 64-65). The word further appeared in the hate speech of local Iraqi militias, as well as in the discourse of NGOs operating in the West Asia and North Africa region.

It should be noted that al-Šadīdī approaches gayness as an identity, and not as a same-sex practice: within this category he elaborates on the non-normative sexual

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<sup>1</sup> al-Šadīdī, Mūsà. 2019. *Ǧinsāniyyat Umm Kultūm*. ‘Ammān: Self-published.

<sup>2</sup> al-Šadīdī, Mūsà. 2018. *al-Ǧinsāniyya al-lāmi yāriyya fī al-sīnimā al-‘arabiyya*. ‘Ammān: Self-published.

practices present in Iraq before the US invasion as well. In his endeavor, al-Šadīdī uses a variety of resources and references: journalistic reports, scientific articles, books, and even references to Iraqi popular culture. Nonetheless, in his approach to the topic, the author builds mainly on Joseph Massad's *Desiring Arabs*<sup>3</sup> and *Islam in Liberalism*<sup>4</sup> and Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*.<sup>5</sup> In the same way as these authors, Shadeedi challenges the idea of the universality of sexual identities and the politics which come along with universalization, i.e., policies that need epistemic and political violence to be enacted.

The book is divided into eight chapters that deal with three central axes of al-Šadīdī's analysis. The first axis focuses on the US's instrumentalization of homosexuality in the context of the war on Iraq, either through the rhetoric of liberating Iraqi homosexuals, or as a torture practice used against Iraqis. The second deals with non-normative sexualities present in Iraq at the time of Saddam Hussein's rule. The third focuses on the outcomes of the occupation, emphasizing two manifestations: the persecution campaigns against homosexuals carried out by local militias and how Western diplomacy and NGOs tackle the figure of the Iraqi "gays".

al-Šadīdī argues that the US emphasis on the liberation of Iraqi gays is more useful to the executioners than to the victims. According to the author, the violence carried out against Iraqi gays by the local militias has occurred not because of their sexual practices, *per se*, but because they are seen as a product of the US invasion. Similarly, the production of the Iraqi gay identity is an American strategy used to maintain the occupation and continued intervention in Iraq. Furthermore, al-Šadīdī stresses the double standards of US discourse about "liberating the gays". For example, the US did not condemn its allies in the West Asia and North Africa region, for incidents such as the Queen Boat raids by Egyptian authorities in 2001.

Meanwhile, in Iraq, prior to the 2003 invasion, people involved in same-sex activities did not suffer systematic repression from the regime, even if they were subjected to the derision of popular opinion. For example, after the war on Kuwait (1990-91) and the subsequent international embargo, Saddam's regime began a new policy of morality and religiosity, under which Saddam himself gave a green light to tribal leaders to execute people with non-normative sexualities. However, tribal leaders did not see this as a priority and did not act to do so. Another example of discrimination that is given in the book is the vandalization of the statue of the prominent medieval Arab poet Abū Nuwwās (known for his bacchic and homoerotic poetry) in the context of anti-gay cam-

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<sup>3</sup> Massad, Joseph. 2007. *Desiring Arabs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>4</sup> Massad, Joseph. 2015. *Islam in Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>5</sup> Puar, Jasbir. 2007. *Assemblages. Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke University Press.

paigns carried out by local Iraqi militias. It should be noted that the street named after Abū Nuwās was known before the invasion for its bars and nightclubs, which were frequented by crossdressers. As a conclusive remark, al-Šadīdī states that sexuality cannot be detached from politics and that the problem is not the sexual practices, *per se*, but the sensitivity bestowed upon it, which makes it an instrument for authorities to justify invasions, extermination campaigns, and political blackmail.

Despite solid argumentation, this book shows some weakness that may be resolved in a new edition. One problem is the referencing style, which is inconsistent at times and can be confusing, especially when it comes to journal articles. The book also lacks a detailed list of references. Another problem concerns terminology. Although the author is careful to clarify when needed whether he uses “gay” to refer to same-sex practices or identity, the use of these categories and concepts can be challenging for the reader to follow. The book would have been more enriching theoretically and conceptually if some reflection had been devoted to the ways in which these identities were defined and articulated prior to the occupation. Nonetheless, the book is a valuable piece of work among the Arabic speaking world’s contributions to the fields of Gender studies and Postcolonial theory.

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