

A Battle of Identity(ies): Deconstructing Spaces of Belonging in Saleem Haddad's Guapa and Hasan Namir's God in Pink

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Abstract : This paper explores the interconnectedness of belonging, space, and identity in Anglo Arab literature, particularly Saleem Haddad's *Guapa* and Hasan Namir's *God in Pink*. This paper suggest that Rasa and Ramy, the queer Arab characters respectively, do not belong in either the Middle East or the West. Using Amin Maalouf's analysis of the Arab identity, specifically his argument that an individual identifies strongly with the aspect of their identity that is under attack, this paper argues that all of Rasa and Ramy's spaces are politically charged - a term that denotes that all values and beliefs instilled in Arabs and their spaces are heavily influenced by Arab politics, culture, and, often times religion. Therefore, the politically charged environments Rasa and Ramy inhabit will always be against one part of their identity, which is why they cannot identify as queer and Arab simultaneously. For Rasa, the unnamed Middle Eastern country, his home environment, as well as the so-called safe space nightclub, condemn his queerness, leading him to connect more to his sexual orientation. However, Rasa associates himself with his Arab roots when he migrates to America, a different form of politically charged space that minoritizes his ethnicity. Similarly, Ramy's spaces are naturally religiopolitical after Islam heightened in Iraq during the Iraq War; as a result, Ramy's home environment, Sheikh Ammar's house, the mosque, and the nightclub are influenced by the religiopolitics and bombard his ability to identify as not only a queer Arab but a queer Arab Muslim. Ultimately, because Rasa and Ramy are constantly in movement, their identity attributes are also in movement. This paper is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on *Guapa* and the Arab Spring's politics, mainly its influence on queer Arabs in and around the Middle East. Drawing from a number of queer and Arab gender theories, I analyze all of Rasa's spaces as politically charged that prevent him from the means to be queer and Arab. The second section examines *God in Pink* in close connection to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Ramy's spaces are religiopolitically charged, that prevent him to embrace all of his identity attributes - nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation - concomitantly. The last section considers the rapid use of technology and social media in the Middle East as a means to provide deviant heterotopic spaces for queer Arabs. With the rise of subtle and covert queer heterotopias, there is a slow and steady shift of queer tolerance in the Arab world.

Keywords : belonging, identity, spaces, queer, arabness, middle east, orientalism

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