JOSEPH MASSAD AND THE ALLEGED VIOLENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Sahar Amer

Desiring Arabs
Joseph Massad

Joseph Massad’s *Desiring Arabs* is without question an erudite, well-researched monograph that seeks to show the “influence and impact that Orientalism has had in shaping the Arabs’ own perceptions of themselves and each other since the [early-nineteenth-century] Arab Renaissance to the present” (48). Whether or not one agrees with his basic premise, there is no denying that Massad displays a thorough command of the key Arabic and Western sources relevant to his project and that he is familiar with the medieval and contemporary literature on sexuality in the Arab world, be it Islamist or secular.

The monograph is divided into three parts, each consisting of two chapters. The first part provides an overview of the ways Arab intellectuals (from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1990s) have endeavored to recover their own literary, philosophical, and theological past to construct an “Arab culture” (*turath*) and civilization that would affirm the rights of Arabs to belong to the Western project of modernity. Massad argues that Arab intellectuals from every critical horizon (nationalist, Islamist, liberal, Marxist, psychoanalytic, secular, or feminist) have adopted without reflection Western views of modernity and progress, thereby internalizing a Western assessment of their culture as “decadent,” their hierarchical positioning as “backward,” and their inferiority on the civilizational scale whose telos is democracy and freedom. At the same time, Arabs, according to Massad, have also internalized Western Victorian attitudes toward sexuality that privilege heterosexuality and devalue all nonnormative sexual expression or
desire. As he reviews the complex debates in Arab intellectual circles to explain Arab decadence, recover the Arab past, delimit the Arab classical canon, and posit it as a legitimate turath that could serve as a basis for present and future progress, Massad asserts that Arab intellectuals have failed to question Western categories of culture and modernity, even though the emergence of these categories coincided with the colonial and imperial conquests of the Arab world. Massad devotes much time reviewing the polemic surrounding Abu Nuwas’s poetry and particularly his ghazal in the masculine (poems written for young adolescent boys). He carefully reconstructs the various questions surrounding the morality of medieval Arabic literature that intellectual historians and literary critics have debated since the turn of the twentieth century, particularly with relation to Abu Nuwas’s oeuvre: should his poems be considered part of the newly constructed Arabic literary canon, or should they be banished on the basis of their foreignness (Persian influence) and their questionable morality?

If colonialism was the political context of the intellectual debates over modernity, culture, and civilization throughout the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century, a contemporary form of Western imperial power begins to exert its power on Arab societies in the 1980s and 1990s, and it is to this new form of imperialism that Massad devotes the highly controversial second part of his monograph and the central argument of his book. The new form of global power that Massad discusses in chapters 3 and 4 is what he dubs the “Gay International,” referring to the universalizing and missionary role that Western (U.S. and European) human rights organizations, Western gay rights activists, feminist organizations and publications, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) play in the Arab world. According to Massad, the Gay International universalizes the categories of gays and lesbians and seeks to transform Arab and Muslim “practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as ‘homosexual’ and ‘gay’” (162). In doing so, the Gay International, guided by an orientalist, assimilationist impulse, unleashes epistemic, ethical, and political violence on the very people it claims to defend. It also destroys existing subjectivities from Third World nations that are organized differently and imposes a heterosexual/homosexual binary where none exists in non-Western societies.

In the last two chapters, Massad surveys representations of same-sex desire and acts in Arabic fiction and film from the late 1940s to the early 2000s, beginning with Naguib Mahfouz’s Midaq Alley (1947) and ending with ‘Ala’ Al-Aswani’s Yacoubian Building (2002). Massad argues that the evocation of same-sex desire in contemporary Arabic literature evolved from being a detail in a novel that added depth to fictive characters to becoming the central organizing allegory
to critique the state of Arab society (postcolonial nationalism, globalization, and Islamism) from the 1970s to the 1990s. Rather than deal with the question of sexuality itself, the novels, novellas, short stories, and play that Massad analyzes represent tropes of national decline. According to Massad’s reading of contemporary Arabic literature, the failure of the postcolonial Arab world, the disappointment in Abdel Nasser’s Arab nationalism, and the rise of globalization and Islamism have led to a crisis of Arab masculinity. This failure in the emergence of the modern Arab subject has translated into literary representations of rape and torture, masturbation, impotence, castration, passive homosexuality, and sexual deviance. Moreover, Massad posits that the fictive depiction of same-sex relations undergoes a significant transformation over the half century he examines, from being one of multiple existing and tolerated deviances of the lower middle class and the poor to a medicalized condition of the upper classes, signaling the infiltration into Arab societies of Western taxonomies and Western sexual epistemology vehicled by the Gay International.

There is no question that Massad’s Desiring Arabs is a valuable contribution both to Western and non-Western (Arab especially) scholarship if only because the author makes available to the non-Arabic-speaking audience a vast repertoire of writings by Arab intellectuals on questions of sexuality, the construction of the Arab canon, and the creation of an Arab culture based on heterosexual norms. This archival material, quoted at length and much of it translated into English for the first time, introduces the reader to multiple Arab scholarly voices (Islamists and secular) from various theoretical, political, and critical horizons that add a crucial, often overlooked, perspective to current debates over sexuality in the Arab world.

Moreover, Massad’s Desiring Arabs raises fundamental questions about homosexuality that echo those that had faced Western feminists in the 1980s, namely, the suitability of the aims of the movement to Third World, non-Western women. Similarly, Massad asks: Are Western discourses and theories about homosexuality applicable to non-Western societies? Is “homosexuality” a universal category that is suitable to the non-Western world? Should Western human rights organizations and gay activist groups play any role in defining non-Western gay identities? For the social constructionist Massad, the answer to all these questions is a resounding no. In addition, Desiring Arabs engages with some of the core questions that continue to be hotly debated in queer theory in relation to the distinction between acts and identities, between social constructionist and essentialist views of homosexuality, and between premodern and modern categories of sexuality. These are undoubtedly crucial questions that must be asked, and Mas-
sad does ask them. The strategy he adopts to answer them, some of the analyses he proposes, and some of the conclusions he draws, however, remain highly problematic and promise to continue to fuel much debate.

Perhaps the most controversial element in *Desiring Arabs* is the concept of the Gay International. Massad argues that desiring Arabs are different from desiring non-Arabs, and further, that anything coming from the West has been unproblematically internalized by Arabs, leading to moralizing discourses about sexuality among Arab intellectuals and causing further oppression of Arab societies. Massad does not see any positive contributions from Western human rights organizations (accused of “benign” ethnocentrism [418]), nor does he acknowledge how, despite some likely mistakes, they have also raised much-needed awareness about abuses and persecutions both in the West (e.g., Eastern Europe) and in the Third World of those who resist social, political, and religious conformity or those living nonnormative lives. Reading Massad’s work, one gets the sense that Arabs are passive, always in a reactive position vis-à-vis the West, never actors or in charge of defining their own lives or sexualities. In addition, even though Massad acknowledges the existence of some contemporary Arabic novels and short stories that engage with the topic of same-sex contact with little moralizing (332n202), he does not discuss them, perhaps because they would have challenged his view that the Gay International has transformed the status of homosexuality in the Arab world and rendered it “a major public and policy concern for the Islamists . . . , and increasingly, for the state and its instruments of repression and production” (416).

Even as he denounces the violence of the Gay International claims, Massad seems to be perpetrating another kind of violence himself, namely, that of excluding Arabs altogether from the category homosexuality. If for the Gay International, an Arab who rejects the label gay is victim of self-hatred or internalized homosexual homophobia (43), it would appear that for Massad, an Arab who asserts a gay identity is a victim of orientalist fantasies, of colonial imposition, and of the universalizing claims of Western gay rights groups. Based on *Desiring Arabs*, there are no gays in the Arab world prior to Western imperialism; there is no romantic love between members of the same-sex either, only same-sex desire (consummation).

In fact, a similar epistemological violence permeates Massad’s entire discussion with his unproblematic definition of homosexuality. Even as he criticizes the Gay International, Massad adopts what he perceives to be its definition, limiting homosexuality to exclusivity in sexual object choice. Such a narrow view renders the category inapplicable not just to gays in Arab societies but in fact to most
Western gays as well. The notion that being gay means one thing and one thing only in either the West or the Third World is highly problematic and does not take into account the multiple variations in that category (across individuals, life span of a given individual, location, etc.) that have been at the heart of recent Third World gay and lesbian studies.

Last, but not least, most of the arguments presented in this book concern male homosexuality; one could erroneously reach the conclusion that the only “Desiring Arabs” of the past or present are desiring male Arabs. Except for an occasional reference or footnote (or the brief analysis in chapter 6 of Hanan al-Shaykh’s *Misk al-Ghazal*), very little is said about lesbians in the Arab world. To be fair, the lack of attention to lesbians in *Desiring Arabs* reflects the comparatively limited information about them in either primary or secondary Arabic sources. Nevertheless, material about lesbians exists in medieval sources and is increasingly also addressed in contemporary Arab fiction. Moreover, a growing number of young and midcareer Arab (and Western) scholars have begun to investigate representations of lesbians in medieval and contemporary texts since the late 1990s. None of this scholarly debate is even mentioned in *Desiring Arabs*, leading one to wonder whether a more accurate title for Massad’s work could not have been *Desiring Arab Men*. Taking into account writings about Arab lesbians and engaging with those progressive intellectuals who have been working to recover the voices of desiring Arab women would have enriched Massad’s argument and offered a more-nuanced retelling of the debates that have shaped (male and female) Arabs’ perceptions of their past and their present.

*Sahar Amer* is professor of Asian studies and adjunct professor of French and international studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

DOI 10.1215/10642684-2010-010
Raya Morag

Raz Yosef
*Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema*

The cover photo for Raz Yosef’s *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema* shows a meticulously directed event of mourning performed by two models dressed as Israeli soldiers in a staged battle scene. One, who seems to be a medic of Mizrahi origin, holds the head of the other, dead, soldier, supposedly Ashkenazi, in a pietà-like pose while using a brush and palette to paint the scar on his half-naked body. The death scene depicts the major contradictions and deep ambivalences embedded in the Israeli cinematic militaristic-national ethos of maleness, traced by Yosef in this pioneering study.

Yosef investigates the development of the culture of masculinity, sexuality, and nationality in Israeli cinema from the 1930s to the 1990s. He does so not through a chronological historical depiction but by exploring Israeli cinema’s role in the creation of national identity and the complex ways the dialectics of heteronormativity versus queerness embodied in conflicts over race and ethnicity shape this identity.

Yosef analyzes the Zionist dream of a new masculinity in Zionist films. Focusing on the Zionist body master narrative, he follows scholars such as Sander Gilman, Daniel Boyarin, and David Biale, who describe hundreds of years of European tradition “that associated the male Jew with disease, madness, degeneration, sexual perversity, and femininity” (17). The Zionist films prove the ambivalence that structures Zionist male body politics: Yosef suggests, “On the one hand, the Nazi is the racist emasculator and,” referring to Boyarin’s famous claim, “on the other hand, the Aryan male is the model for the Zionist hypermasculinity” (36). The Sabra (native-born Israeli) masculinity is therefore a counterimage not only to the old Jewish “feminine” physiognomy and mentality but, in what might be termed a complementary inversion, the fascist-Aryan body image.

One striking characteristic of this Zionist fantasy is its “whiteness.” Yosef follows Edward Said and Ella Shohat, among others, in inquiring of Zionism’s
Eurocentrism in Israeli cinema: “Zionist films linked the new Zionist manhood and body hygiene as a condition for ‘racial’ improvement and nation-building” (47). Accordingly, he claims, Zionist society reinforced and legitimized its nationalism through this whitened racism, based on the marginalization of both the external enemy, the Arab-Palestinian male, and the internal enemy, the Arab-Mizrahi Jew.

Two of Yosef’s major contributions are his exploration of the construction of the Mizrahi body and sexuality in mainstream Israeli cinema and his examination of the practices of resistance of Mizrahi filmmakers to Zionist-Ashkenazi manhood discourses. Through an attentive reading, he claims that while 1980s and 1990s films address questions of homophobia and gay subjectivity, they are marked by “disavowal of ethnicity in Ashkenazi gay sexual politics and the incorporation of Mizrahi men into stereotyping and sexual objectification” (143).

Beyond Flesh analyzes the quintessential Israeliness embedded in the figure of the soldier in the military films of this period, which mark a crisis in Israeli male subjectivity that, according to Yosef, took place after the 1973 war and was aggravated by the war in Lebanon and the Intifada. This crisis is revealed in the films’ representation of the disavowal of the soldier’s submission to the Law of the Zionist Father, the soldier’s seeking of pain and passivity as a way to act out queer identification with other soldiers, and the cinematic focus on the mutilation of the soldier.

Discussing interracial sex, Yosef points out that as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict became more violent, more films transgressed the taboo of interracial sex. Some of the films use these representations to critique the heteronormative national ideology and the identity politics of the Israeli gay community. The author emphasizes the colonial scene of conquest as saturated with fears of impotence, emasculation, and death, as well as sexual fantasies. Following Leo Bersani, the body becomes a battlefield in which anal sex is regarded as a form of warfare.

Though Yosef neither raises the question of defining queerness nor suggests a final overall taxonomy, his book refers, as I see it, to three major performances of queerness that construct the evolution of national/sexual identity in Israeli cinema. First is the twofold queerness of the diasporic Jew: the queerness “without,” that is, the one projected on him by anti-Semitism, and the queerness “within,” that is, the one the Jew adopted as a self-defining image against the hypermale Gentile. Second is what I see as the repressed queerness of the Sabra patterned physically after the fascist-Aryan model—what Yosef calls the “new muscular Zionist Jew” (18–20). And third is what the author terms the new
(mostly Ashkenazi) queerness of the 1990s, based on the ethnic disavowal of the Mizrahi and a colonial-corporeal fantasy about the Palestinian.

The differences and similarities between these performances of queerness (based on various processes of disavowal, adoption, mimicry, and masquerade) point to the complex ways cinema partakes in building the Jewish-Israeli body-nation. Put another way, the five decades of films discussed in *Beyond Flesh* demonstrate that race and ethnicity have played a major, though somewhat tragically circular, role in constructing Israeli national cinematic identity. Moreover, the contradictions embedded in the unconscious symbiotic negativity that, in a somewhat perverse inversion, adopted the idealized body of the monstrous other—the fascist-Aryan, for instance—raises questions about the meaning of queering as part of “queerness.”

No wonder, then, that the beautiful sacred death of the pioneer soldier’s body idealized by the Zionist movement, as Yosef claims, turned out as depicted in the cover photo, a Sleeping Beauty death. It is unclear from the photo whether the Mizrahi-like soldier is applying makeup to the wounds of the Ashkenazi-like dead or actually creating them with his palette. As the proliferation of war films in Israeli cinema in the first decade of the 2000s suggests, this sexual-ethnic fantasy needs further investigation. In light of the post–second Intifada period, the Separation Wall, the ongoing occupation, and the deepening social-ethnic division, it is not untoward to suggest that the condensed bloody melancholy of the photo shared by prominent Israeli films of the 1930s to the 1990s will accompany queer Israeli cinema through the next decade.

**Notes**


**Raya Morag** is an assistant professor of cinema studies at the Department of Communication and Journalism, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

DOI 10.1215/10642684-2010-011
THE PROMISES OF VIOLENCE

Jin Haritaworn

Figurations of Violence and Belonging: Queerness, Migranthood, and Nationalism in Cyberspace and Beyond
Adi Kuntsman

Figurations of Violence and Belonging straddles, with admirable virtuosity, areas that are often kept unhelpfully separate: racism and homophobia, interpersonal violence and institutional violence, queer and postcolonial theory, the local and the global, the smaller and the bigger picture. Starting with the particular—an ethnography of a queer online space set up by Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel—Adi Kuntsman interweaves the complex negotiations of a queer diaspora on a virtual forum with the big theoretical and political questions that concern many of us today: the study of affect and intimate publics, the increasing prominence of gender and sexuality in war and racism, the role of new media in cultural formations, and the future of queer studies and activism, to name just a few.

One of the book’s great achievements is to break with simplistic accounts of violence, of the kind long popular in feminist, and increasingly now also queer, analyses. Kuntsman exposes the depoliticizing effects of the single story, which all too often distracts us from the wider workings of power. In the place of an essentialist victim-perpetrator narrative, Kuntsman proposes a far messier view of the world. Here, people are never just innocent victims. Nor do they need to be to deserve our solidarity. Kuntsman’s subjects trouble dichotomies of “Us versus Them,” colonizer versus colonized: persecuted as Jews in the Soviet Union, they nevertheless received instant citizenship privileges over Palestinians as “returnees” to Israel. Faced with homophobia in the Russian-speaking migrant community, they are nevertheless invited to imagine themselves as part of a sexually exceptional nation whose colonial and military transgressions are increasingly reinvented as liberating.

Kuntsman’s intervention, however, goes beyond traditional analyses of identity, citizenship, or even intersectionality. Combining theories of gender, nation, and sexuality with ideas from psychoanalysis, studies of affect, performa-
tivity, figuration, and cyberculture, and keeping an eye on the material, the semi-
otic, and the psychic, Kuntsman shows that violence is not merely something that
excludes. In the forum, belonging is often performed through violence. Racism
against Palestinians (and at times Arab Jews) is the very vehicle through which
queer migrants are able to imagine themselves as Israeli. Such violence can be
sexy, a source of bonding and communal pleasure. It is often specifically queer.
Kuntsman shatters any fantasies of queer innocence by highlighting how fantasies
of gender, nation, and sexuality come together in figures such as the homoerotically
adored Israeli soldier and the queerly raped and tortured terrorist. These
figurations both conform to and exceed identitarian lines. Following Jasbir Puar,
Kuntsman describes the “terrorist” in particular as an abjected figure whose
queerness is not recuperable through narratives of sexual identity. Then, there
is the violence that escapes those lines altogether: Kuntsman’s great contribution
to new media studies lies in her analysis of the flame wars or online fights that
regularly ravaged the forum and often targeted, melancholically and ambivalently,
queer diasporic spaces and figures themselves.

One theme threading through the book is the past and its tendency to seep
into the present. Drawing on Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters*, Kuntsman argues
that the observed figurations of violence and belonging are haunted by the past, or
rather by multiple pasts, some of which (the Holocaust) are commemorated more
extensively than others (the gulags, the Nakba). While dedicating the book to
the memory of those who suffered in the past, Kuntsman keeps bringing us back
to the violent present, where Palestinian lives appear completely ungrievable.
Kuntsman explores these contradictions more closely through two figures that
haunted, in very different ways, the debates around homophobia in the Russian-
speaking migrant community. The first, the Jewish victim of the Holocaust, was
frequently invoked by the participants in analogy to their own victimization as
queers. Kuntsman interprets this as an attempt (albeit not always successful) to
insert migrant queerness into the nation. The ghosts of the Soviet past, on the
other hand, constituted an absent presence, which was neither remembered nor
commemorated. “What happens to ghosts when they migrate?” Kuntsman asks
(62), and traces the figure of the “Shadow by the Latrine” from homophobic texts
by Russian speakers in Israel to the memoirs of intellectuals incarcerated in the
gulags. There, experiences of sexual abuse and other degradation were frequently
attributed to the depravity of fellow prisoners, who were characterized as sexually
and gender nonconforming lowlifes and reified as the “real criminals.” This care-
ful rereading of the gulag literary corpus through a queer and transgender lens is
especially exciting and promises to make a highly original contribution to critical prison studies and other emerging areas of scholarship.

Kuntsman’s first monograph will be of interest to many: from scholars of violence; affect; gender, sexuality and nation; media and cyber/cultural studies; East European studies; and Middle Eastern studies to scholars of relatively new areas such as queer diaspora and migration, and transnational sexuality studies. In particular, it is an important, early contribution to the new body of writings on homonationalism, queer necropolitics, and the “war on terror” emerging in the aftermath of Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages*, with which Kuntsman is in close dialogue. Theoretically challenging and conceptually dense, *Figurations* is not an easy read, but it is worth every page. This is politically committed scholarship at its finest.

Notes


**Jin Haritaworn** is a fellow at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies at Helsinki University.

DOI 10.1215/10642684-2010-012
The Men We Loved: Male Friendship and Nationalism in Israeli Culture
Danny Kaplan

The Men We Loved explores the relationship between friendship, an experience usually interpreted as a private emotion, and nationalism. Following the work of Jacques Derrida, Danny Kaplan reads fraternal friendship as an “emotional-ideological” space, a collective system of often contradictory, shared emotions (9). The book focuses on male friendship in Israel and argues that some of the emotions associated with it can be experienced only through a sense of loss. As they enter the public discourse, these emotions are transformed into rituals of passionate commemoration, suggesting a dynamic of collective necrophilia. Kaplan analyzes the relations between haverut, the general Hebrew term for friendship, and re’ut, a more literary term that connotes heroic male friendship, most often associated today with combat fraternity. He shows how circumstances of anxiety and loss on the verge of death bring men closer together and present a unique instance in which desire between men is publicly declared and legitimized. The rituals of re’ut serve the double function of masking a national ideology that demands self-sacrifice and martyrdom, and of producing a symbolic stance of collective necrophilia, an erotic gazing on the dead, thus transforming a repudiated personal sentiment into a national genre of relatedness. Kaplan shows forcefully how the ideology of re’ut and its cultivation as a national emotion create an intensive, collective homosocial fantasy, operating through a double bind: re’ut acts as a hegemonic script for Israeli men, a frame for interpreting their friendships in light of the model of life-and-death situations; at the same time, some men actually play down the significance of combat fraternity in their personal experiences (145). Fraternal rituals of commemoration provide a crucial link between individual friendship and national solidarity because they are gendered and eroticized: commemorative desire is an emotional construct that plays a significant role in the national identity (147).
Bereavement and commemoration assume a special significance in Israeli society. Themes of the idealized sacrifice and heroism of “the fallen” are central to the Israeli ethos of bereavement and commemoration and are deemed essential to the persistence of the “Jewish state” in the “promised land.” Israeli culture endows “the fallen” with an aura of symbolic immortality, and the depiction of bereavement in Israeli literature and poetry, too, has been largely ideological, uniform, and uncritical. Moreover, as argued by Meira Weiss, this ideology has institutionalized bereavement and commemoration as a part of the larger national discourse of soldiering and commitment that is generally taken for granted.1 Casualties among soldiers—indeed, the war experience in general—have been constructed by dominant groups as an inevitable price to be paid for Israel's survival.

Kaplan's contribution, which is rooted in his analysis of the ideological aspects of friendship as associated with hegemonic masculinity (1), is to show how the rituals of commemoration are both gendered and eroticized, how the act of declaring the lost and yet eternal friendship symbolizes the passionate “blood pact” between men (a “love sanctified by blood,” as the poet Haim Guri put it in his popular “Song of Re’ut” [96]), and explains the precedence of the imagined ties of the national over ties of kinship and matrimony. At the same time, the death of the friend signifies the cultural notion that sexual love between men equals death, but also enables this desire, allowing it to appear when its object has disappeared (138). Death is imagined in men’s friendship even if it is implicit (140). Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s exposition of the denied continuum that exists between the homosocial and the homoerotic (11), Kaplan looks at how the gendered nature of nationalism is mediated by practices and emotions associated with male bonding (12). Interestingly, Kaplan’s heterosexual interviewees sharply denied the idea that desire played a role in their male bonds, adopting a narrow definition of desire as a sexual attraction, associated with homosexuality (74). Against this backdrop, Kaplan argues that heroic death becomes the cultural marker that fends off the continuity between the homosocial and the homoerotic. Homosocial desire is transformed, through collective acts of commemoration, into an ideologically recognized emotion, namely, nationalism (148).

The melancholy that Kaplan, following Sigmund Freud and Judith Butler, describes as crucial to commemorating the loss of a love that “never was” (147) is thus central to this structure, and Kaplan’s suggestion that rituals of commemoration in Israel may be understood as the impression of this melancholy is highly instructive.
Kaplan’s book is illuminating in showing how the “bereavement myth,” which plays such a central role in Israeli society, contributes to forging a gendered and eroticized nationalism by both enabling and disabling desire between men. What the book does not explore is the flip side of the same coin: the extent to which this eroticized nationalism excludes those who are not part of the “love sanctified by blood,” most notably Palestinians—including Palestinian citizens of Israel, who do not serve in the Israeli military—and women—who are, for the most part, excluded from combat roles and, no less importantly, from the imaginary realm of re’ut. Kaplan’s unique perspective on Israeli nationalism thus implies a new facet of the subordination of these groups.

Another interesting question to be considered concerns the role of gay men in the story told by Kaplan: for these men, the model that insists on the break between the homosocial and the homoerotic may simply fail to tell the full story. It is thus instructive that the popular Israeli film Yossi and Jagger, which introduced the bereavement myth to the context of same-sex relationships through a love story between two Israeli army officers, closed with the death of the officer who had demanded that the two come out about being gay and about their relationship. The film offered gay Israelis a ticket to Israeli citizenship, but conditioned it on a reenactment of the bereavement myth and on an affirmation of death and the melancholy associated with it as securing the break between the homosocial and the homoerotic—even in a context where such a break does not seem to make sense, unless indeed the relationship remains closeted. Even this restricted ticket to citizenship, however, is denied to those who are altogether excluded from the framework Kaplan discusses. Thus, not only the precedence of the imagined ties of the national over ties of kinship and matrimony, as discussed by Kaplan, is enabled by the structure he describes; so, too, are the Israeli policies of the exclusion, occupation, and dispossession of those who remain outside its gendered national structure. Moreover, the necrophilia Kaplan describes may be instrumental in understanding the perpetuation of war, which seems a precondition to the continued imagination of death as integral to men’s friendships.

Notes
2. See Kaplan’s previous work on gay Israelis who serve in combat units: Brothers and Others in Arms: The Making of Love and War in Israeli Combat Units (New York:


Aeyal Gross is associate professor of law at Tel Aviv University and visiting reader at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

DOI 10.1215/10642684-2010-013