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Queer Beirut



Synopsis

Gender and sexual identity formation is an ongoing anthropological conversation in both Middle Eastern studies and urban studies, but the story of gay and lesbian identity in the Middle East is only just beginning to be told. Queer Beirut is the first ethnographic study of queer lives in the Arab Middle East. Drawing on anthropology, urban studies, gender studies, queer studies, and sociocultural theory, Sofian Merabet's compelling ethnography suggests a critical theory of gender and religious identity formations that will disrupt conventional anthropological premises about the contingent role that society and particular urban spaces have in facilitating the emergence of various subcultures within the city. From 1995 to 2014, Merabet made a series of ethnographic journeys to Lebanon, during which he interviewed numerous gay men in Beirut. Through their life stories, Merabet crafts moving ethnographic narratives and explores how Lebanese gays inhabit and perform their gender as they formulate their sense of identity. He also examines the notion of "queer space" in Beirut and the role that this city, its class and sectarian structure, its colonial history, and religion have played in these people's discovery and exploration of their sexualities. In using Beirut as a microcosm for the complexities of homosexual relationships in contemporary Lebanon, Queer Beirut provides a critical standpoint from which to deepen our understandings of gender rights and citizenship in the structuring of social inequality within the larger context of the Middle East.

Book Information

Hardcover: 304 pages

Publisher: University of Texas Press (October 15, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0292760965

ISBN-13: 978-0292760967

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Best Sellers Rank: #1,720,222 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #138 in Books > History > Middle East > Lebanon #889 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > History #3138 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Gay & Lesbian

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