“Deviant Bodies, Proper Nations”

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By focusing on the orientalizing impulse of Western gay identity politics (Massad, 2007), scholarship on Arab sexuality neglected local hegemonic investments in the spectacular politics of sexual shaming. On May 11, 2002, the Egyptian police arrested fifty-five men at the Queen Boat, a gay Cairo discotheque, on the charges of debauchery. Almost ten years later, in June 2012, Lebanese security forces stormed a Beirut gay movie theater, Cinema Plaza, and arrested 32 men. In both incidents, the “perpetrators” were subjected to rectal examinations that “proved” that their anuses had been put to deviant use. Drawing on primary media sources, this paper uses the Cinema Plaza polemic to show how heteronormativity underpins a hegemonic Lebanese nationalist discourse. Following Lisa Lowe’s reading of Said (1991), I treat “orientalism” as a rhetorical trope of othering that may be deployed internally to reflect a range of socio-political issues. The paper ultimately argues that the political project of building the proper nation is often rearticulated in moral terms that diagnose improper bodies. Such projects repeatedly invoke an erotic “other” whose visible body is at once desired and banned. If orientalism is, following Said, a form of “paranoid knowledge” about the margins, how could anal probes - as extremely paranoid modes of knowing – inform our understanding of orientalism within the margins?