

Claiming Space in the Middle East: The Politics of Queer Identity in Saleem Haddad's *Guapa* (2016)

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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring queer identities within the politically and socially charged Milieu depicted in Saleem Haddad's *Guapa* (2016). It examines Rasa's tumultuous journey as he navigates the complexities of his sexual identity in an unnamed conservative Arab Middle Eastern city. His experience exemplifies the emotional backdrop of the broader struggles faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in similar contexts. The paper contextualizes Haddad's portrayal of queer identity within the framework of Middle Eastern political instability. It also emphasizes the role of public crises in intensifying the personal struggles of queer individuals. Through a textual analysis, the paper illustrates the way Haddad's *Guapa* acts as a critique to the highly politicized environment that shapes these identities. Findings show that the novel articulates a form of resistance against normative structures in restrictive environments. It highlights how the narrative intersects personal defiance with public invisibility, and it reflects broader tensions within the Middle Eastern socio-political sphere.

Keywords: Middle East, public crises, queer identity, resistance, visibility