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Transnationalizing Homonationalism
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The Limits of Transnationalizing Homonationalism in/for Palestine

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Jasbir K. Puar posits that pinkwashing is one manifestation made possible "within and because of homonationalism" (Puar 2013, 337). This article challenges this assumption through a critical examination of Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques of pinkwashing by alQaws: for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society and Pinkwatching Israel. Foregrounding these critiques, this article argues that transnationalizing homonationalism in the context of Palestine limits the conditions of possibility for engaging Palestine liberation queerly. Through a critical reading of Puar's analysis in relationship to Palestine liberation and pinkwashing, this article asks how do we, outside of Palestine, want to transnationalize how to learn from Palestine as a place of/for transnational feminist and queer scholarship and struggle? And, how might an attentiveness to Palestinian critiques emerging from within the Palestinian context impact transnational feminist scholarship on homonationalism and Palestine liberation?

On July 27th, 2010, Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions published their first "[c]all upon all Queer groups and organizations and individuals around the world to Boycott the Apartheid State of Israel" (PQBDS 2010). With this call, the group joined the 2005 Palestinian civil society's call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (hereafter BDS), which calls for boycott, divestments, and sanctions of Israel until Israel 1) ends its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantles the wall, 2) recognizes the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel as fully equal, and 3) respects, protects, and promotes the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194 (BDS Movement 2005).

PQBDS was founded by a group of Palestinian queer activists both within Palestine and in the Palestinian diaspora to urge international LGBTQI communities to adopt BDS into their political agenda; reject collaboration with Israeli LGBTQI groups funded by the Zionist state; organize activities in their communities to initiate BDS campaigns; and condemn Israel's pinkwashing campaign (PQBDS 2010).[1] Currently, PQBDS has transformed into the Palestinian-led transnational initiative Pinkwatching Israel (Pinkwatching Israel n.d.). Pinkwatching Israel (PWI) is the transnational organizing platform of the oldest Palestinian national queer organization *alQaws: for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society* (alQaws n.d.). The term pinkwatching was originally used in 2012 as a means to return the gaze on Israel's pinkwashing campaign.[2]

Pinkwashing is one element of a nation-branding campaign initiated by the Israeli state in collaboration with an international Zionist marketing firm to promote Israel in a positive light (Pinkwatching Israel 2012a; Schulman 2011a, 2011b). The Zionist Brand Israel campaign is aimed at transforming Israel's traditional *hasbara*[3] and "crisis management" into a neoliberally oriented framework of niche marketing directed at "apolitical people" (Aharoni 2015), in which the entanglement between military industry, human rights violations, leisure, and the

entrepreneurial economy become intimately intertwined. The term pinkwashing was coined by Palestinian activists to call out Israel's "invocation of 'LGBT rights' to divert attention away from its atrocities against the Palestinians" (Pinkwatching Israel 2012a). Pinkwashing also increasingly structures debates on Israel and Palestine. A pertinent example is the *Democracy Now* debate between Israel pundit Joshua Hartman and Palestinian scholar Noura Erekat following Israel's assault on Gaza in 2014. In the debate, Hartman transformed Israel's atrocities perpetrated against Palestinians into a debate about homophobia in Gaza and how Hamas would never allow his "gay friends to express their sexuality freely" (Democracy Now "Gaza Debate"). This is one of a plethora of examples in which Israel pundits try to sugar-coat Israel's state and military violence against Palestinians by alluding to its alleged gay rights record.

Pinkwashing operates through the Orientalist and Islamophobic creation of the figure of the "oppressed gay Palestinian" and "liberated gay Israeli," which erases "relations of power and the political realities of occupation and the Apartheid wall" and invokes international LGBTQI rights discourse in support of the Zionist state and at the expense of Palestinians (Pinkwatching Israel 2012a). Although PQBDS's call was directed at LGBTQI communities, over the years Palestinian queer organizers have drawn attention to the broader importance of understanding and resisting pinkwashing as part of the larger struggle for Palestinian liberation and against the racialized sexual politics of Zionist settler colonialism. In a 2020 article, *alQaws* states, "[r]ecognizing pinkwashing as colonial violence can help us understand how Israel divides, oppresses, and erases Palestinians on the basis of gender and sexuality (alQaws 2020a).

The question of Palestinian liberation continues to be an anchor point and point of contention for transnational queer and feminist scholarship and activism on transnational social justice and decolonization. As a point of contention, mainstream LGBTQI communities in the global North reject PQBDS's call based on narrowly defined identity politics that seems to suggest that because Israel has gay rights, LGBTQI people cannot critique it and should furthermore embrace it.[4] As an anchor point for transnational queer and feminist scholarship and activism, Israeli pinkwashing has become a much debated phenomenon. The term is used to describe Israel's instrumentalization of gay rights discourse to divert attention from its ongoing occupation of Palestine. Critiques of pinkwashing also draw attention to the complicity of some LGBTQI communities with the Zionist state.[5] Over the past decade, pinkwashing has been adopted as a term and accusation to more broadly describe the entanglements between neoliberalism, imperialism, and gay rights discourse in the West, but also, for instance, in India to further entrench racial and economic violence against other minorities, refugees, and migrants.[6]

The rising momentum for anti-pinkwashing activism in the global North coincided with the increasing popularity of Jasbir K. Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* among queer and feminist scholarship and activism. It was especially in Puar and Maya Mikdashi's (2012a) opinion piece for Jadaliyya "Pinkwatching and Pinkwashing: Interpenetration and its Discontents" and Puar's (2013) follow-up article "Rethinking Homonationalism" that the concept of homonationalism became consolidated as the primary modality through which to understand and analyze Israel's pinkwashing campaign and anti-pinkwashing activism, or, in Puar's own words, "homonationalism and pinkwashing should not be seen as parallel phenomena. Rather, pinkwashing is one manifestation and practice made possible within and because of homonationalism" (Puar 2013, 337).

Puar's work has been ground-breaking for understanding the entanglements between U.S. imperialism, its sexual politics, and queerness as a racializing technology in a post 9/11 world. Puar's analysis continues to be valuable for understanding some elements of the embrace

of Israel's pinkwashing campaign and, in extension, the Zionist state by a majority of especially white gays and lesbians in the global North. At the same time, positioning homonationalism as a primary modality through which pinkwashing was made possible continues to sideline Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques of pinkwashing as Zionist settler-colonial violence (alQaws 2020a) embedded in the larger racialized sexual politics and spatio-temporality of Zionist settler colonialism. *alQaws* organizers Wala Alqaisiya, Ghaith Hilal, and Haneen Maikey contend that "the Zionist colonization of Palestine holds at its premise racial, sexual, and gendered discourses through which colonial power is exercised" and "its power hinges on the bodies and desires of the colonized" (Alqaisiya, Hilal and Maikey 2016, 125).

Although Israeli pinkwashing has received a lot of attention in the global North, Alqaisiya notes that "there remains limited engagement with *alQaws*'s work, in particular, and Palestinian queer politics, in general" (Alqaisiya 2018, 29). Furthermore, recent (Palestinian) critiques have drawn attention to some of the troublesome ways in which homonationalism as an analytical tool pre-empts a deeper engagement with other critiques of pinkwashing and radical anticolonial-queer politics emerging from within Palestine (Maikey and Schotten 2012; Abu-Hatoum 2013; Naber et. al. 2018, 64; Stelder 2018b, 48; Schotten 2016, 360-365; Alqaisiya 2018, 36; Alqaisiya, Hilal and Maikey 2016, 125). Furthermore, the Palestinian queer struggle for BDS quickly changed into a dispute about what constitutes "good and bad queers" in the North American metropolis, turning debates on Israeli pinkwashing into "struggles over the nature of queerness in the context of neoliberalism and the War on Terror" (Ritchie 2015, 620).

No matter how important homonationalism has been in furthering an understanding of how queerness operates as a racializing technique within the U.S. imperialist project, "it fails to take into account what meanings queer assumes from the standpoint of native, queered positionality, and grassroots work" (Alqaisiya 2018, 36). And, as I've argued elsewhere, attachments to critiques of homonationalism fail to recognize the limits that the concept itself imposes on the question of injustice in Palestine (Stelder 2018b, 56). There is a certain incommensurability at work between Puar's analysis of homonationalism and Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques and activism against Zionist settler colonialism and for Palestinian liberation (Stelder 2018b, 46).

For this article, I contend that transnationalizing homonationalism in Palestine and for Palestinian liberation has its analytic limitations. Drawing out these limitations might open up a critical attunement to the specificity of Palestine, while paying attention to its call on our global present. Although helpful for understanding Euro-North-American attachments to the pinkwashing project, it poses limits for more fundamentally understanding the role and currency of Zionist racial-sexual politics in the ongoing dispossession of and violence against Palestinians both inside and outside of Palestine. With this contention, I want to draw attention to the questions: how do we, outside of Palestine, want to transnationalize how to learn from Palestine as a place of/for transnational queer and feminist struggle? What queer and feminist theoretical approaches lend themselves to considering Palestine liberation queerly? How might an attentiveness to Palestinian queer critiques emerging from within the Palestinian context impact transnational feminist scholarship on homonationalism and Palestine liberation? In asking these questions, I acknowledge that my use of "we" can only be tentative and ever shifting. There is no such thing as a homogenous "we" or "us" and "we" might come to these experiences and struggles differently. In the context of this article, the "we" addressed is especially those of us non-Palestinians who mobilize for and write on Palestine liberation and pinkwashing outside of Palestine.

Taking seriously Talal Asad's warning that "every critical discourse has institutional conditions that define what it is, who it recognizes, what it aims at, what it is destroying and why" (Asad 2009, 55), I shift away from a critique of pinkwashing through the prism of homonationalism and the instrumentalization of gay rights towards a deeper engagement with Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques formulated by *alQaws* and PWI. In doing so, I problematize the politics of listening and the idiom of critique at work in transnational debates on pinkwashing.[7] Foregrounding the work of *alQaws* and PWI, I hope to attune to a different idiom and praxis of transnational struggle that creates a space for thinking Palestinian liberation queerly for those coming at the struggle from outside of Palestine. Queer politics, in the context of Palestine, becomes "a praxis that brings to the surface what is concealed or left behind" in order to "elicit what was rendered unintelligible, and foreground those political subjectivities and voices that are rendered most marginal" (Maikey and Stelder 2015, 100). In doing so, queer politics in Palestine brings to the fore the deep-seated and differential ways in which Zionist ideology operates and the necessity for an anticolonial-queer politics for Palestine liberation (Pinkwatching Israel 2012b; Maikey 2014; alQaws 2020a, 2021a). Looking for other avenues of critique, in this article I problematize what becomes (in)audible as a Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique to those outside of Palestine and hegemonic narratives of Palestinian liberation inside Palestine. It takes seriously the necessity to think more deeply about how to respond and be accountable to Palestinian queer calls for justice outside of Palestine and the need to move beyond a singular focus on complicity to an attunement to sites of struggle that emerge despite Zionism and neoliberalism's stranglehold on the political imagination. Ultimately, this article engages a practice of listening differently to Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques from within the context of their emergence that resist the order of colonization. *alQaws* and PWI develop an anticolonial-queer politics, which requires decolonial-queer and feminist modes of listening and knowledge production that radically transform the terms of engagement.

In what follows, I will first provide an overview of how the question of pinkwashing has been taken up in the context of homonationalism. Second, I discuss how the limits of homonationalism as analytical tool draw attention to the need to theorize from elsewhere. I look at the anticolonial-queer discourse and practice developed by *alQaws* and PWI as an alternative genealogy and temporality of struggle against pinkwashing that opens up other avenues for queer and feminist theorizing in the context of Palestine. In doing so, I hope to better understand how analytical hegemony operates; the ways in which it bears on the (il)legibility of anticolonial-queer struggle; and the need to attune to sites of struggle that might be "out of sync with settler time" (Rifkin 2017, xiii), while remaining entrenched in it.

Unforeseen Foreclosures

In 2016, U.S.-based scholar and Palestine-solidarity activist Heike Schotten published a follow-up piece based on an earlier critique she had co-written with *alQaws* founder Haneen Maikey in response to Puar and Mikdashi's (2012a) allegations that North American anti-pinkwashing activists remained complicit in furthering homonationalism.[8] In their response, Maikey and Schotten expressed their concern that the authors relied too much "on the conceptual framework of homonationalism in their analysis of pinkwatching, making it do more work than it can bear" (Maikey and Schotten 2012). This over-reliance risked erasing important features of anti-pinkwashing activism particular to Palestine and Palestine solidarity work. Maikey and Schotten also drew attention to the ways in which focusing on self-critique and complicity in this manner

occurred at the expense of movement building. What became known as the *Jadaliyya* debate created an impasse in anti-pinkwashing organizing in North America (Stelder 2018b, 47-48; Kouri-Towe 2015, 63).

In her follow-up article, "Homonationalism: From Critique to Diagnosis, or, We Are All Homonational Now" (2016), Schotten provides an overview of the transformation of Puar's critique of homonationalism from its initial articulation in *Terrorist Assemblages* to its contemporary version, perhaps most explicitly framed in "Rethinking Homonationalism" (Puar 2013). Schotten discusses three different stages in the development of the term. *Homonationalism1* concerns Puar's original formulation in *Terrorist Assemblages*. Here, Puar mobilized the term to draw attention to the ways in which the U.S. nation state "both sanctions homosexuality and produces it in sanitized forms" (Puar 2007, 2). In *homonationalism1*, queerness has become a biopolitical and necropolitical project "of the management of queer life and at the expense of sexually and racially perverse death" (Puar 2007, xiii). In other words, queer becomes regulatory. Second, homonationalism produces a form of U.S. sexual exceptionalism that now embraces some gay subjects. And, last, homonationalism produces the ascendancy of whiteness, not only in the reproduction of kinship and gender norms, but also racial, class, and national norms, specifically through practices of consumption. In this first articulation, homonationalism moves in multiple directions, from state to subject and vice versa, leaving room, according to Schotten, for critiques of homonationalism wherever it emerges. It also retains its geographical and historical situatedness in the U.S. (Schotten 2016, 2-7).

It is Maya Mikdashi who takes homonationalism in a different direction in what Schotten calls "homonationalism 1.5." In this reformulation, "queer as regulatory" is understood as one operation of neoliberalism. Mikdashi positions the nationalist racialization of gayness and gay rights as a "consequence of neoliberalism," rather than "co-constituted with it or a particular driver of it," as *Terrorist Assemblages* had suggested (Schotten 2016, 8). For Mikdashi, the importance of homonationalism lies in understanding it as a "homogenizing paradigm of gay rights that serves 'as a vehicle for neoliberal ways of producing politics and subjects more broadly'" (Mikdashi 2011 quoted in Schotten 2016, 8). Homonationalism becomes a critique of the restructuring force of neoliberal subject formations and "liberal attachments to identity and rights-based discourses that rely on identitarian formations," in particular LGBTQ (Mikdashi 2011). Here, homonationalism becomes explicitly related to the particular deployment of gay rights discourse and identity politics in furthering global Euro-U.S. (epistemic) imperialism (Schotten 2016, 8-10).

It is the third re-formulation of homonationalism, or "*homonationalism2*," which has most affected the conditions of possibility for anti-pinkwashing activism in North America according to Schotten. She argues that in this reformulation the radical potential of *homonationalism1* is lost. In *homonationalism2*, Puar and Mikdashi are particularly interested in articulating homonationalism as a global modern condition "we are all conditioned by and through" (Puar 2013, 336). Schotten holds that if homonationalism is now a general condition and *a priori* provides the "conditions of possibility for national and transnational politics" (Puar 2013, 337), then it becomes difficult for Puar and Mikdashi to accuse anti-pinkwashing activists in the U.S. of being complicit in reproducing homonationalism, as we are all always already complicit (Schotten 2016, 11-12). She argues that *homonationalism2* pre-empts the possibility for radical political organizing against pinkwashing in the United States and that Puar and Mikdashi leverage *homonationalism2* "for critical work it cannot do" (Schotten 2016, 14). For Schotten, the potential in *homonationalism1* resided in the possibility to resist homonationalist formations wherever they occurred. I would add, while recognizing one's inevitable complicity.

Her primary concern is that Puar and Mikdashi implicitly suggest that "anti-pinkwashing activism ought to be abandoned outright, insofar as it necessarily reiterates the terms of modernity and keeps us too narrowly focused on the wrong targets, reproducing empire in the process" (Schotten 2016, 15). Schotten's main focus here is on how *homonationalism2* makes it impossible to critique "domestic gay complicity with the nation-state, thereby making it difficult to hold activist work accountable to anti-homonational principles" (Schotten 2016, 16). On another note, feminist scholar and Queers Against Israeli Apartheid Toronto co-founder Natalie Kouri-Towe suggests that the Puar-Mikdashi article "destabilized the parameters of solidarity without generating a framework where activist attachments could be renegotiated" (2015, 63).

Both Schotten and Kouri-Towe problematize the closure of a possibility for a radical queer politics in North America brought about by *homonationalism2* in particular. Their critiques of *homonationalism2* are reminiscent of Arab queer and feminist critiques of Joseph Massad's "Gay International" (Massad 2002, 2007), which describes the ways in which global LGBTQI NGOs subject any and all forms of sexual difference in the South to western nomenclature around sexuality. From this, Massad concludes that any engagement with western nomenclature, especially in the Arab world, would always already render one complicit with its imperialist "epistemological underpinnings" (Massad 2007, 174). Palestinian feminist scholar Rabab Abdulhadi appreciates Massad's critique of western sexual imperialism, but draws attention to how this leaves Arab queer communities in "a straight-jacket with two bad choices: mobilize around sexual freedoms and be seen as an agent of the Gay International, or don't mobilize and be seen as part of the community, but suppress a movement that has to emerge alongside other movements for justice" (Abdulhadi 2010, 481).[9] Furthermore, this part of Massad's analysis has the potential to feed into a dangerous and Zionist-informed homophobic stereotype circulating within parts of Palestinian society – that Palestinians queers are informants to the Israeli state, with sometimes detrimental consequences (alQaws 2019, 2020a, 2020b). Postcolonial theorist Nikita Dhawan is equally concerned about radical queer critique's restriction to one dimension of domination, such as the Gay International or homonationalism, as it risks reproducing violence in different ways. She calls for a "more complex, multidirectional politics of critique that is directed at coercive practices across the secularism-religion divide," which would entail "contesting hegemonic heteronormativity as well as homonormativity, imperial as well as anticolonial discourses." For Dhawan antiracist and anti-imperialist queer critiques must be accompanied by a critique of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls "reproductive heteronormativity" (Dhawan 2013, 195).

Although I share Schotten's concerns about the place for transnational, radical queer politics within the context of *homonationalism2*, I perhaps also share Puar and Mikdashi's concerns that anti-pinkwashing activism in the U.S. remains too narrow in its exclusive focus on pinkwashing and elides questions about settler colonialism both in the U.S. and in Palestine.[10] Or, as Haneen Maikey asked a room of full scholars and organizers at the *Homonationalism and Pinkwashing* conference New York City in 2012 "are you in solidarity with Palestine? Or are you in solidarity with the queers in Palestine" (Darwich and Maikey 2014, 283; Maikey 2013b)? In her lecture, Maikey was particularly addressing the failure of transnational queer solidarity activists and scholars to address the larger context of Zionist settler colonialism. Together with Lynn Darwich, Maikey developed this critique of anti-pinkwashing solidarity activism further in "The Road from Antipinkwashing Activism to the Decolonization of Palestine" (2014). In this piece, the authors address that anti-pinkwashing activism in the context of Palestine is about decolonization, and not about "adding a bit of 'solidarity" to LGBT movements and a little "gayness" to Palestine solidarity work. If anti-pinkwashing activism is part and parcel of

Palestinian liberation then anti-pinkwashing is not a reformist but a "radically transformative strategy" (Darwich and Maikey 2014, 281-82).

Unlike Puar and Mikdashi, my conclusion would not be, however, that homonationalism is a global(izable) phenomenon of which pinkwashing is simply one feature and that our aim is to singularly focus on the question of complicity. The problem of homonationalism is that it renders the multidirectional Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques of pinkwashing only legible through homonationalism as a global construct "we are all conditioned by and through" (Puar 2013, 336), without making space for Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques of Zionism *and* (its impact on) Palestinian heteronormative patriarchal structures to emerge, and without holding those outside of Palestine who are invested in the struggle for Palestine liberation accountable to a multiplicity of Palestinian frameworks and analyses. Any critique of homophobia in Palestine would border on homonationalist complicity. The narrow focus of homonationalism and the Gay International on complicity erases other possibilities for attuning to anti-pinkwashing activism that emerge despite the fact that we are all impacted by and complicit in imperialist, homonationalist, and settler-colonial structures in different and differential ways. Rather than exclusively critiquing complicity, what other possibilities might emerge from acknowledging the fact that one cannot not be complicit, but one is called upon to act in the face of injustice? What Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has described as one iteration of the "double bind" – an acknowledgement that one might become complicit with what one seeks to critique, without understanding this as a foreclosure of political action – becomes what she calls an "enabling violation" (Spivak 2012). Puar and Massad's analyses restrict the possibility for thinking Palestinian liberation queerly (in and outside Palestine) and perform a closure of the political imagination.

Homonationalism is restricted to a particular U.S. temporality of struggle that, in its articulation as a global phenomenon, risks the erasure of other spatio-temporalities in which historic gay and lesbian movements have been constructing their relation to the nation-state form. In Israel, for instance, articulations of gay and lesbian belonging to the Zionist state far predate U.S. homonationalism. As I have explored elsewhere, the sexual politics of Zionism constitute a particular modality of settler-colonial subject making that can be dated back to early Zionist writings before the advent of the settler state that sought to nativize the settler through Orientalist, colonialist, and nationalist rhetoric (Stelder 2018a, 453-56). Appropriating these sexual politics, the Israeli gay and lesbian movement attempted to nativize the gay settler subject in order to articulate its belonging to the settler state. By aligning itself with the larger Zionist body politic, Zionism's racialized sexual politics remained unchallenged, if not deepened. It is Zionism's settler-colonial undercurrents that formed the conditions of possibility for Israel's pinkwashing campaign to emerge in the first place – its affective appeal runs deeper than simply the desire for fraternization between western gay constituencies.[11] To better understand pinkwashing's emergence warrants a situated account of settler colonialism in Palestine as a context of colonization that cannot be easily collapsed into the sexual-racialization of Arab and Muslim bodies post 9/11, featuring prominently in Puar, even though they sometimes operate together intimately (Stelder 2018a, 442-443).

A narrow focus on the analysis of homonationalism makes pinkwashing exclusively about the desires of the colonizer and the gay imperialist,[12] whereas *alQaws* and PWI's critiques understand pinkwashing's colonial violence as directed against the desires and modes of belonging of the colonized (Alqaisiya 2018, 35-36; alQaws 2020a). It seems that Puar's and Massad's emphasis on the gay subject's attachment either to the nation state form or the imperialist project collapses the complex geopolitical relationship between U.S. imperialism,

Zionist settler colonialism, and homonationalism. Although both analyses are valuable for attending to the (neo)liberal state's embrace of some queer subjects and the missionary drive of the Gay International to impose categories of sexual emancipation onto the South, they elide the relationship between the sexual politics of Zionism, settler colonialism, and critiques of dominant understandings of Palestinian liberation developed in the work of *alQaws* and PWI. These anticolonial-queer modes of analysis, furthermore, do not stand on their own and are deeply connected to Palestinian feminist analyses.[13]

It is the task of queer analysis, according to Darwich and Maikey, to resist "Israel's Zionist project and its manifestations, from ethnic cleansing and occupation to apartheid and colonialism" (Darwich and Maikey 2014, 283). And it is therefore the task of anti-pinkwashing solidarity activists to "understand and navigate our inevitable complicity with neoliberal constructs of gender and sexuality, and with the Israeli occupation" (283). At the same time, rather than a foreclosure of radical politics, this "inevitable complicity" is a motor for anticolonial-queer justice and decolonization.

As Maikey and Schotten write, "In Palestine, pinkwashing is part of the ongoing Nakba. Both Zionism and pinkwashing depend on a notion of the prior destruction and continued negation of Palestine and Palestinian belonging . . . Zionism must be understood as a historically specific, racialized process through which different discourses of sexuality emerge that bolster rather than undermine Zionist ideology" (Maikey and Schotten 2012). Alqaisiya argues that Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques have largely remained neglected in favor of U.S-Israeli relations and a narrow focus on Israel's pinkwashing campaign (Alqaisiya 2018, 36). In her implicit response to the *Jadaliyya* debate, Palestinian critic Nayrouz Abu Hatoum draws attention to what she calls "the burden of queer Palestinians" (Abu Hatoum 2013). She talks about the ways in which Palestinian queer activists are either invited to respond to discourse around pinkwashing, such as gay rights, become tokens of the global anti-pinkwashing movement, or are being called upon to be responsive to "particular academic notions as well as processes" that carry a particular genealogy and hegemonic modes of engagement that foreclose other avenues of struggle. This foreclosure sets "an agenda for Palestinian queers living inside Palestine (Occupied Palestinian Territories or citizens of the Israeli state); such [an] agenda mainly focuses on producing a burden locals should carry through the request to be politicized in accordance to [sic.] the international political standards or discourses and to speak the language of the international solidarity movements" (Abu Hatoum 2013).

The erasure of Palestinian critiques of Israel's Zionist settler colonialism constitutes one part of the structures of Zionism's control over Palestinian lives. In relation to the plight of queer Palestinians, Nadia Elia draws attention to the different ways in which Palestinian (feminist) critiques of Zionism are met with insidious forms of intransigence on all levels of the political spectrum that severely limit the conditions of possibility for Palestinian queer and feminist critiques of Zionism to be heard. No matter how eloquent or patient Palestinian critiques of Zionism are, the responses they elicit remain intransigent to the content of Palestinian anticolonial speech, and, much like pinkwashing, disregard it because Palestinians can only be recognizable through the prism of Zionism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab racism. Elia draws attention to the fact that under Zionist hegemony, Palestinian "protesting voices" always already have to navigate pre-established frameworks of (non-)listening and respond to Zionist incitement to discourse, while at the same time these protesting voices continue to speak in a language that is deeply anti-Zionist in order to survive. She calls this "the burden of representation" (Elia 2011, 157-58). Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques are equally caught in this double-bind of having to respond to Zionist and pinkwashing incitement to discourse about

gay rights, while at the same time continuing to develop multidirectional anticolonial-queer critiques of Zionism that do not reproduce these attachments.

As Abu-Hatoum argues, the burden of queer Palestinians in particular is not only impacted by Israel's Zionist pinkwashing project, but equally affected by the universalization of western modalities of queer politics, and hegemonic academic discourse that determine the ways in which Palestinian queer calls for justice and anticolonial liberation can be heard and understood (Abu-Hatoum, 2013). Elia and Abu-Hatoum's critiques of how Palestinian scholars and activists are required to make themselves legible to pre-existing frames of recognition, call for a deeper re-thinking of the ways in which "The Question of Palestine" can be addressed by those outside it. In the book of the same name, Edward Said argues that "the Palestinian experience" resists theorization (see also Schotten 2019, 13-14). It is an experience formed by and through Zionism, and it is through the ongoing resistance to Zionism that the question of Palestine must become legible (Said 1980, xv). For the purpose of this article, it is therefore necessary to attend to these modes of resistance through a (re)turn to Zionism as a structuring force, while at the same time attending to struggles for decolonization. This article is therefore not an effort to theorize the Palestinian experience from outside of Palestine, but to take seriously the call for justice emerging from within Palestine.

"How Sophisticated do you Have to be to Manage This?"

In her article "Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies," Lila Abu-Lughod discusses the ways in which Middle Eastern feminist scholars have taken up Said's *Orientalism* in their work. Her interest is in debates on "what kind of feminism is appropriate for the Middle East" (Abu-Lughod 2001, 106). At the center of her concern are the ways in which Middle Eastern feminists and feminist scholars have tackled the burden of representation and the risk of "playing into the hands of Orientalist discourse" in generating feminist critique in a context of Western hegemony (Abu-Lughod 2001, 107). Not unlike Massad, she is concerned with how the production of knowledge about women and the Middle East in and for the West continues to implicate scholars in establishing "Western authority and cultural difference" (Abu-Lughod 2001, 105). Rather than dismissing any engagement with feminist nomenclature in the Middle East as complicit with Orientalism, and therefore superfluous, Abu-Lughod argues that "condemning 'feminism' as an inauthentic Western import is just as inaccurate as celebrating it as a local or indigenous project" (Abu-Lughod 2001, 106). Not unlike queer Palestinians, Middle Eastern feminists, under Western hegemony, are caught between two "sometimes incompatible projects of representing Middle East women" (Abu-Lughod, 2001, 107). The first is the burden of representing Middle Eastern women as complex agents to the West, while at the same time engaging in a critique of patriarchy, which renders this feminism vulnerable to being understood through an Orientalist lens that understands Middle Eastern women as oppressed victims of conservative societies. This Orientalist trope is refashioned in Israel's pinkwashing campaign to locate homophobia as an essential characteristic of the Middle East in order to justify Israeli occupation and transform Palestinian queers into victims of Palestinian society and in need of saving.

On the one hand, the task is to remain suspicious of the ways in which Middle Eastern feminist issues and scholarship are appropriated by the West to reproduce Orientalist images and entrench (symbolic) violence (Abu-Lughod 2001, 107); on the other hand, Haideh Moghissi draws attention to how this single attentiveness to appropriation and complicity, prevalent in "the uncritical fascination with western postmodernism," sometimes constitutes a "costly

intellectual experiment" that is so deeply connected to being "anti-Orientalist" that it renders impossible critiques of patriarchal, religious, and political violence perpetuated by local institutions (Moghissi 1999, 63). In the context of queer and feminist issues in Palestine, this is further exacerbated because violence comes from a multitude of directions, such as the Zionist settler state; international support for Israel; LGBTQ organizations inside Israel and transnationally that only understand Palestinian queer issues through a single-issue identity politics (PQBDS 2011); and heteronormative, patriarchal institutions and structures within Palestine.

A similar challenge to the one pointed out by Moghissi lurks in Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques of pinkwashing as part of the Zionist project, which have been subsumed under the analysis of homonationalism, or outright dismissed as complicit in the logic of the Gay International.[14] A subsuming and dismissal that run the risk of amplifying, rather than unsettling, imperialism and homonationalism's reach. Not unlike Palestinian feminists, *alQaws*'s work is caught in a double-, or perhaps triple-bind. First, it needs to respond to incitement to discourse produced about queer Palestinians in both pinkwashing discourse and Orientalist views of queers in the Middle East upheld in scholarship and the NGO industrial complex. Second, a lot of its local organizing in Palestine itself is invested in fostering debates on gender and sexual diversity in Palestinian society and the impact of patriarchal violence on non-normative Palestinian bodies. And third, its work focuses on generating an anticolonial-queer politics aimed at dismantling Zionism and broadening the struggle for Palestinian liberation beyond its limited nationalist, patriarchal form.

Abu-Lughod is interested in moving beyond the question of complicity without losing sight of the seriousness of the ways in which Orientalism continues to be perpetuated and how people in the Middle East continue to be conditioned by and through it. Rather than dismissing feminism, or queer politics for that matter, as a Western project, she argues that "the solution is to refuse the tradition/Western modernity divide;" yet she also asks, "how sophisticated do you have to be to manage this" (Abu-Lughod 2001, 110)? In asking this question, she implicitly draws attention to the politics of listening and critique. What kind of alternative idiomatic registers and practices emerge from the ground that do not remain caught in a tradition/western modernity divide, or reproduce the western will-to-know, even as they continue to be affected by it? And how to listen for these registers outside the context of Palestine without reproducing western hegemony? Paying attention to the politics of listening and critique also means that when terms, such as queer or feminism, emerge in political organizing in Palestine, especially when they emerge in English, it becomes important to develop a practice of listening that remains attentive to what is said and how, and in what context, rather than simply position these terms as either western or authentically Palestinian.

For example, *alQaws* continues to debate the workings and meanings of queer within the Palestinian context. Its usage of the term has been very present in conversations among political organizers. There used to be a strong division among organizers about whether or not to use the term. Contentions emerged around its western origins; the project of developing a language on sexuality and gender in Arabic that is attentive to the Palestinian context; the need to tie into transnational political conversations that understand queer as politics rather than identity; the desire to adopt queer as identity or the need to outright refuse it. Although the organization continues to develop queer modes of political analysis, *alQaws* organizers underscore that the deployment of the term is simply pragmatic and "dependent on how communities engage with this new language" (Maikey and Stelder 2015, 85).[15] For *alQaws*, queer

is a "frame of analysis" that only holds political potential when it "encompasses feminism, sexual and gender diversity, anti-colonialism, and decolonial projects" (Maikey and Stelder 2015, 85).

Alongside contemporary reservations about the internationalization of the term pinkwashing through homonationalism, early Palestinian queer critiques have troubled both radical and liberal theoretical and activist approaches to Israel's pinkwashing campaign in the global North on their own terms. These critiques underscore a desire to foreground Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques of pinkwashing and the unequal relations of power between Palestinian, Israeli, and international queers emerging from it and entrenched by it. In "Eight Questions Palestinian Queers are Tired of Hearing" (2013), for instance, *alQaws* activist Ghaith Hilal addresses some of the liberal myths that come up when Palestinian queer activists address Israel's pinkwashing campaign, such as the assumption that Israel provides a safe haven for queer Palestinians, that the enemy of queer Palestinians is Islam, or that all Palestinians are homophobic (see also alQaws 2021b). In another piece, *alQaws* organizers Sami Shamali and Maikey address the problems underlying the universalist assumptions about queer politics in the International Day against Homophobia's emphasis on the need to come out of the closet and celebrate pride in order to become seen as a proper queer subject (Maikey and Shamali 2011). In "From the Belly of Arab Queer Activism: Challenges and Opportunities" (2011), Darwich and Maikey look at the impact of the reduction of queer struggles in the Middle East, and Palestine and Lebanon in particular, to "those who fight the west" and "those who fight those who fight the west" (Darwich and Maikey 2011).

In those first years of campaigning for BDS and against pinkwashing, *alQaws*, PQBDS, and PWI devoted a lot of energy to addressing the myths perpetuated through pinkwashing and a larger imperialist discourse of gay rights and gay identity. They also sought to address the ways in which incitement to discourse of the Gay International and homonationalism affected queer organizing on the ground.[16] Following the commotion surrounding the *Jadaliyya* debate, *alQaws* organizers have worked tirelessly to situate and clarify pinkwashing as a modality of Zionist settler colonialism and its racialized sexual politics – in other words, as a settler colonial technology that structures not only Euro-U.S. attachments to the Israeli settler state, but also deeply implicate queer Palestinian questions of belonging and resistance, and dominant narratives of Palestinian liberation. At Queer Visions at the World Social Forum: Free Palestine in 2013, Palestinian queer and trans activists and their allies gathered in Porto Alegre, Brazil in order to both situate anti-pinkwashing activism more firmly in Palestinian liberation and create a framework of analysis that better understands pinkwashing as Zionist sexual politics, rather than as a branding campaign (Pinkwatching Israel 2012b; Stelder 2019).

Not unlike Palestinian and Arab feminists, Palestinian queer activists have often faced allegations of either being complicit with sexual and gender categories imposed by the West, not only by scholars such as Joseph Massad, but also by patriarchal Palestinian nationalist who portray Palestinian queers as either informants for the Israeli state or as westernized (Alqaisiya 37-38), most recently visible in the police crack-down on *alQaws* organizers and their allies in Palestine (alQaws 2019, 2020b). Such portrayal of queer Palestinians is intimately intertwined with Israel's militarist practices of blackmail, which target "individuals involved in socially stigmatized activities—whether homosexuality, premarital sex, prostitution, or drug use" (Alqaisiya 2018, 37). Palestinian patriarchal nationalists have historically lodged complaints against Palestinian feminists for undermining the nationalist struggle through their feminist critiques of patriarchal violence (Ziadeh 2013; Amireh 2003, 760). In her discussion of the Palestinian women's autonomous movement, Abdulhadi describes how "Palestinian leadership

drew on existing societal norms of patriarchy and at times mirrored the discourses of their colonizers" (Abdulhadi 1998, 654-55).

alQaws holds that Palestinian liberation needs to include an attentiveness to the role of sexual and gender politics; the limits of heteronormative, patriarchal frames of liberation; and, to how homophobic stereotypes within Palestinian society are informed by Zionist settler colonialism (alQaws 2019, 2020a, 2020b). In other words, it needs to interrogate its own gendered and sexual prejudices and the ways in which these have been informed by, mirror, and further entrench Zionist settler colonial sexual politics (alQaws 2020b, 2019). This is one of the reasons why the organization's purview has never been gay rights, but rather working at the grassroots level on fostering conversations among Palestinian civil society about gender and sexuality, the influence of Zionist settler colonialism on Palestinian gendered and sexual lives, and patriarchy and neoliberalism in Palestinian society. Examples of this work include a special issue published in Arabic by *Jadal*. the journal of *Mada al-Carmal*, edited by Areen Hawari (alQaws 2015); the Sexuality Summer Schools organized by *alQaws*; and the Singing Sexuality Project (*Ghanni A'an Taa'rif*), which invited contemporary Palestinian musicians to reflect on the theme of sexuality, desire, and gender in their music (alQaws 2013).

Within the context of anti-pinkwashing organizing in Palestine, pinkwashing has never simply been about the ways in which queer and trans people in the global North are invited to support Israel, or the ways in which pinkwashing uses gay rights to divert attention from the occupation of Palestine. Pinkwashing is a symptom of a much more insidious phenomenon, which after Queer Vision was framed as "Zionist sexual politics" (Pinkwatching Israel 2012c; Stelder 2019, 186-87). Pinkwashing, in the context of Palestine, becomes particularly intertwined with Zionist settler colonialism's racialized sexual politics. These politics are deeply entangled with the Zionist state's formation and influence not only Palestinian queer self-perception, but also particular modes of sexual and gendered governance in Palestine (Alqaisiya 2018, 37). Developing a anticolonial-queer politics, *alQaws*'s work is aimed at connecting "historical events with the geopolitical power structures and processes of gendering that have defined Palestinian nationalism and its vision of a free Palestine" (Alqaisiya 2018, 37).

Especially the last few years, alQaws and PWI organizing has seen a shift away from responding to incitement to discourse, to focusing energy on the challenges faced by activists working on the ground in Palestine and towards developing a language around anti-pinkwashing activism that situates it more thoroughly within the Zionist context of its emergence and the need to think Palestine liberation queerly. In doing so, the organizations have attempted to shift the debate away from a focus on complicity in/with pinkwashing to the ways in which the violence of Zionist sexual politics operates and how dominant Palestinian patriarchal narratives have internalized settler-colonial ideas about gender and sexuality (alQaws 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b).

Conclusion

A central tenet that runs throughout *alQaws* and PWI's critiques of Israel's pinkwashing campaign is not simply what and whom the campaign is aimed at, but equally draws attention to the importance for feminist and queer scholars and organizers outside of Palestine, and nonqueers in Palestine, to attune to an anticolonial-queer Palestinian and Palestine-centered analysis of pinkwashing as colonial violence (alQaws 2020a). To situate analyses of pinkwashing within this settler-colonial context is not to give up on the potential for a transnational struggle,

but rather to take seriously the frames of analysis and tactics emerging from within Palestine about the geopolitics of Zionism and Palestinian liberation for queer and feminist political and theoretical work. Throughout this article, I have tried to think through how people outside of Palestine, myself included, seek to transnationalize how to learn from Palestine as a place of/for transnational queer and feminist struggle. Although situated elsewhere, our (unwilling) complicities with the Zionist state, especially in the Euro-North American context, run deep. Therefore, as the call for BDS shows, Palestine liberation is not not our struggle. A fundamental question remains: How to respond to Palestinian calls for justice? Although the answer to this question must remain open-ended if it wants to remain attentive to the ever-shifting politics of the Zionist settler state and the multiple terrains of Palestine liberation struggle, this article has tried to suggest one avenue of addressing and enacting this question queer-anticolonially.

The first section explored different ways in which the organizations *alQaws* and PWI have been compelled to respond to incitement to discourse around both pinkwashing and homonationalism in different ways. In particular, I addressed the ways in which the analytical tool of homonationalism has foreclosed other points of departure from which to analyze and resist Israel's pinkwashing campaign and in the process has (unwittingly) sidelined Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques that operate in multiple directions. Over a decade, Puar's concept has transformed from a means to address racist and imperialist violence in/by the United States and the complicity of queer subjects in reproducing this violence to a phenomenon on par with modernity itself as something that "can be resisted and re-signified, but not opted out of: we are all conditioned by it and through it" (Puar 2013, 336). To argue that pinkwashing is but one facet of homonationalism and can only be legible through it, disregards other temporalities of struggle particular to Palestine.

As a scholar and organizer, my thinking about the entanglements between queer politics and state violence has been deeply indebted to Jasbir K. Puar's work. At the same time, working alongside *alQaws* and Pinkwatching Israel for over a decade, I continue to encounter transnationalizing of homonationalism in the context of Palestine as a limitation rather than an enablement for participating in and responding to the production of knowledge about and for Palestine liberation outside of Palestine. Although not mutually exclusive, this article has drawn attention to what gets lost in transnationalizing homonationalism for Palestine. It has sought to unpack one way to better understand what it means to be located *outside* and still engage *in* the struggle. In doing so, I have drawn attention to the ethics and politics of listening.

This special issue's theme of transnationalizing homonationalism is highly pertinent and timely, especially homonationalism is taken very seriously – and for good reasons – by many queer, trans and feminist activists and scholars in Euro-North American contexts. But what does it mean to restrict our analyses of entanglements between queerness, colonialism, imperialism, and global heteronormative patriarchies to homonationalism? What other space is there for alternative forms of understanding and generating transnational complicities and resistances that take seriously the work of Palestinian anticolonial-queer activists in an effort to undermine, refuse, and resist western hegemony and Zionism? Puar's critique as opening, not endpoint.

This article has been an attempt to trouble the politics of listening at work in debates about pinkwashing and Palestine. My reading alongside Arab queer and feminist politics and analyses has drawn attention to the limits of a singular focus on complicity when homonationalism is positioned as a primary temporality and analytic. Furthermore, I have tried to attend to the burden of representation described by Palestinians queer and feminist scholars and activists in the face of intransigence, whilst seeking to acknowledge my own limitations as a non-Palestinian outside of Palestine writing alongside Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques

and activism. Whether I have succeeded at developing a practice of deep listening is an impossible question. Such success remains forever deferred and is subject to constant re-attunement and re-vision. Throughout this article, I have sought to question what determines the conditions of possibility for such a deep listening to emerge. Ongoing calls for the decolonization of queer politics and *alQaws*'s emphasis on the development of an anticolonial-queer politics for Palestine equally demand a decolonization of the politics and ethics of listening. Or, as David Scott asks, "Why might listening be so significant for, say, altering our … ways of talking about our life-worlds and the powers and relations and understandings that constitute it?" (Scott 2017, 41).

Notes

1. I used the term occupied Palestine and Palestine throughout in order to draw attention to Israel as a settler-colonial project. I use the term Israel/Palestine when talking about its particular geopolitical formation, the slash symbolizes Israel's domination over Palestinians. With the term Palestinian diaspora, I draw attention to the millions of Palestinian refugees who since the arrival of Zionist colonizers (and still ongoing) have been forced to live outside their historic Indigenous lands, or have remained internally displaced in refugee camps through what International Law calls the West Bank and Gaza. When talking about Israel, I talk about the Zionist state based on a settler-colonial ideology that led to the state's foundation. For Palestinian analyses of Israel as a settler-colonial state see, for instance: Sayegh 2012; Said 1980; Khalidi 1987; Masalha 2012; Massad 2006; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014b, 2016; Barakat 2018; Erekat 2019.

2. In their article "Pinkwashing and Pinkwatching: Interpenetration and its Discontents," Jasbir Puar and Maya Mikdashi (2012a) adopt the term *pinkwatchers* to refer to anti-pinkwashing activism. To avoid confusion and adopt Palestinian terms of engagement I will use anti-pinkwashing, rather than pinkwatching activism throughout this article.

3. *Hasbara* means "explaining" in Hebrew, but in the context of Israeli politics it is largely understood as Israel's propaganda strategy to disseminate positive information about Israel with the purpose of convincing its opponents of its legitimacy. It is a response to negative press, whereas Brand Israel no longer seeks to respond, but rather to provide a different image all together.

4. See for instance: Haaretz 2012; Halily 2010; Harel 2012; Hod 2013; Mason 2014. For a critique of single-issue identity politics see, Mikdashi 2011.

5. For documentaries see, for instance: Mahardy and Spade 2015. For opinion pieces and newspaper articles see, for instance: Puar 2010, 2012, 2011; Schulman 2011a; Puar and Mikdashi 2012a, b; Darwich and Maikey 2011; Ransby 2011; Abunimah 2013; Maikey and Schotten 2012. For scholarly articles see, for instance: Britt 2015; Ritchie 2015; Puar 2013; Stelder 2018a, b; Kouri-Towe 2015; Schulman 2013. In 2012, the City University of New York's *Homonationalism and Pinkwashing Conference* was entirely devoted to the subject.

6. See, for instance: Olwan 2019; Luibheid 2018; Schaffer 2018; Upadhyay 2020.

7. Drawing attention to the idiom of struggle and critique I am forever indebted to the teachings of Gina Dent, who constantly urges me to pay attention to what is being said, by whom, and how; the context of a critique's emergence; the (im)possibility of translation and transnationalization; and the need for a different kind of coalition politics that is attentive to different temporalities and sites of struggle (see also Dent 2012).

8. Maikey and Schotten's piece was met with a rebuttal by Puar and Mikdashi (2012b).

9. For more Arab feminist and queer critiques of Massad's "Gay International" see, for instance: Taha 2013; Amer 2010, 649-53; Abu-Odeh 2013, 6-7; Darwich and Maikey 2014, 281-83; Maikey 2013a, 2013c.

10. Dana M. Olwan warns against the too easy conflation between U.S. and Zionist settler colonialisms in the fostering of coalitional movements. She calls this "assumptive solidarity" and posits, "Although a relational framework of solidarity helps us recognize similarities and mutualities in struggles, it also runs the risk of disappearing the particularities and specificities of settler-colonial states and the regimes of violence they enact against Indigenous peoples" (Olwan 2015, 94).

11. It is beyond the scope of this article, but pinkwashing's affective appeal must further be situated alongside an historicization of Euro-North American support for the Zionist state.

12. Here, I am referring to important interventions staged by Tamsila Tauqir, Jin Haritaworn and Esra Erdem (Haritaworn et.al. 2008).

13. For Palestinian feminist scholarship on Palestinian women in the struggle for Palestine liberation and the role of Zionist sexual politics see, for instance: Abdulhadi 1998; Amireh 2003; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014a; Kanaaneh 2002; Kassem 2011; Kuttab 2008.

14. Especially Massad's *Islam in Liberalism* (2015) is riddled with footnotes delegitimizing Palestinian queer organizers and groups, without an actually examination of the work of these groups.

15. For a more recent reflection on *alQaws*'s deployment of this terminology see alQaws 2021b.

16. Most of these earlier writings can be found on *alQaws*'s website www.alQaws.org. See, for instance, Maikey 2013c.

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