Pinkwashing, Homonationalism, and Israel–Palestine: The Conceits of Queer Theory and the Politics of the Ordinary

Jason Ritchie

Department of Global and Sociocultural Studies, Florida International University, Miami, Florida, USA;
jason.ritchie@fiu.edu

Abstract: This paper offers a critique of the theory of homonationalism, which has become virtually hegemonic in contemporary queer thought and activism. Some theorists have tried to distance homonationalism from its popular/activist manifestation of "pinkwatching", which refers to the increasingly vocal efforts of queer anti-occupation activists to expose the Israeli government's efforts to "pinkwash" its treatment of Palestinians by touting its record on gay rights. The paper argues, however, that both suffer from fundamental conceptual flaws and ultimately have more to do with the contexts in which they circulate—"gay" cities in the US and Europe—than Israel–Palestine. The paper suggests a political and analytical shift away from the totalizing theory of homonationalism—and the simplistic critiques of pinkwashing inspired by it—to a more complex and contextualized focus on the ways in which ordinary bodies are regulated in their movements through time and space.

Keywords: homonationalism, queer theory, neoliberalism, Israel–Palestine

Pinkwashing in the (Queer) City

On 22 February 2011, Michael Lucas, a porn actor/producer and occasional columnist for *The Advocate* who describes himself as "the most mainstreamed, provocative, and controversial figure in gay adult entertainment" got word that a group of queer anti-occupation activists were planning to host a party at New York City's LGBT Community Center (http://www.michaellucas.com). In response, Lucas made some phone calls and issued a press release threatening a boycott that would "involve some of the Center's most generous donors" (Lucas 2011). Within hours, the Center's "open-door" policy was rescinded, the anti-occupation event was canceled, and Lucas was congratulating himself and "everyone who stood with [him] in support of Israel" (*Advocate* 2011). Ignoring complaints from progressive queer activists that the Center's decision sent a message that "issues such as racial justice, anti-imperialism, immigration, economic justice, disability justice and militarization are not genuinely welcome to be discussed" (The Audre Lorde Project 2011), the Center's executive director, Glennda Testone, explained that groups like Siege Busters, which had organized the party, would in fact no longer be welcome because they are not "LGBT focused" and distract from its "core mission" (Testone 2011).

Meanwhile, just a few days before the controversy erupted, Sarah Schulman—a prominent American lesbian activist, writer, and professor—said farewell to three queer Palestinian activists who had concluded a tour of major US cities organized

by Schulman. In a mostly auto-biographical account of the tour—and of her discovery of queer Palestinians and Israel–Palestine—Schulman documents her transformation into a "queer international ... [who] brings together queer liberation and feminism [and] the principles of international autonomy from occupation, colonialism, and globalized capital" (Schulman 2012:66). During a "solidarity visit" to Israel–Palestine a year earlier, Schulman had met Sami, "a young, sweet gay boy" (80) who was like "the courageous young brother [she] never had" (151), Ghadir, a "sharp, focused, frenetic femme" (99), and Haneen, a lesbian activist with "a great political mind ... a big-picture person [like Schulman]" (146). Immediately realizing that, if these charming, articulate queer Palestinians "could be seen and heard in the United States, American queers could start to understand" (100), Schulman organized a speaking tour, which she would later describe as a "perfect" success that tapped into "the hunger of a huge progressive queer community in the United States that is disgusted by marriage and military and that longs to return to the radical social transformation implicit in a feminist critique of gender and sex roles" (143–144, 155).

No mere coincidence, the controversy over Israel–Palestine at the LGBT Community Center was, according to Schulman, part of a wider "backlash" against the excitement the tour had generated (Dupuis 2011). A few weeks after the initial decision not to allow the anti-occupation event, the Center held a "community forum", which Schulman vividly narrates as an almost epic battle between good queers and bad queers for control over queer space in the city. On one side were a "generation" of assimilationist, homonormative queers who came from "corporate" rather than "grassroots-organizing backgrounds" (Schulman 2012:158): the Center's director, Glennda Testone, "a corporate femme in four-inch heels" who "treated icons of the community with complete disregard, disrespect, and lack of acknowledgement" (164, 158), and Michael Lucas, "a strange man ... [with] massive plastic surgery ... [whose] skin was pulled tight, his lips were swollen ... [and whose] face was somewhere between Faye Dunaway and Cher" (165). On the other side were "leaders from many stages of LGBT history", including Urvashi Vaid, Lisa Duggan, Jasbir Puar, and other activists and academics (164), who seem to fit Schulman's notion of "credible" and "authentic" queerness (24). After a heated debate in which Testone and Lucas justified the Center's actions in the interest of making all its constituents feel "safe", Schulman and the good queers "left despondent" (166). Several months later, the Center formally "announced a moratorium ... on renting space to groups that organize around the Israeli–Palestinian conflict" in an effort "to ensure that all individuals in [the] community feel welcome to come through [the Center's] doors" (LGBT Community Center 2011). For two years, the moratorium remained in effect, and Lucas's victory seemed complete.

Then, in February 2013, a few days after its refusal to allow a reading by Schulman from her book met with widespread criticism (Duggan 2013), the Center rescinded its moratorium and released new "space use guidelines", including a requirement that all groups agree not to "engage in hate speech or bigotry of any kind" (LGBT Community Center 2013). Although New York City Queers Against Israeli Apartheid, the group that had lobbied most vocally for an end to the Center's moratorium, expressed concern that the new policy might be "used to silence critics of Israel" (NYC QAIA 2013), Schulman praised the reversal and described it as a

"joyful" opportunity to "see our community unite in its commitment to free expression and social justice" (Osborne 2013). A group of openly gay and lesbian New York City officials released a statement in support of the Center's new guidelines but explained that they "vehemently oppose the absurd accusations ... that Israel is engaged in so-called pinkwashing ... [as] offensive and fundamentally detrimental to the global cause of LGBT equality". Michael Lucas, meanwhile, began "[advising] people to stop donating to the center" and demanding that the city "stop funding an organization whose original mission of helping gay people has changed to providing a platform to anti-[Israeli] hate groups" (Nathan-Kazis 2013).

Long before the NYC LGBT Community Center controversy, the battle lines were being drawn around representations of Israel–Palestine and what has come to be known as "pinkwashing", a term whose popularity owes much to a widely circulated *New York Times* editorial in which Schulman defines it as "a deliberate strategy [on the part of the Israeli state and its supporters] to conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians' human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life" (Schulman 2011). Borrowed from breast cancer activists who criticized the "cause marketing" of corporations that promote an image of breast cancer awareness while profiting from the disease, pinkwashing, Schulman explains, is one concrete manifestation of the broader phenomenon theorized by Jasbir Puar, "homonationalism", which Schulman translates as "the tendency among some white gay people to privilege their racial and religious identity" (Schulman 2011) and which—notwithstanding its avant-garde cachet among many activists and academics—drew heavily on Lisa Duggan's (2002) earlier critique of "homonormativity". Pinkwashing, in turn, quickly gave rise to "pinkwatching", which was coined by queer Palestinian activists in an effort to "[create] a global movement to promote queer-powered calls against pinkwashing" and has become something of a rallying cry for queer anti-racist activists in major North American and European cities (http://www.pinkwatchingisrael. com/about-us/). For Lucas and supporters of Israel, however, the efforts of "pinkwatchers" to expose the ideological nature of images of gay-friendly Israel and homophobic Palestine indicate a disturbing trend of anti-Semitism among European and North American "radical gay activists", whose "bigoted thesis" of pinkwashing "is nothing more than a new variation on a discredited old theme ... [E]verything the Jews do is wrong, and everything that is wrong is done by the Jews" (Dershowitz 2013).

Whatever the motivations behind the claims they make, one thing is clear: for pinkwashers and pinkwatchers alike, queerness in Israel–Palestine has become a powerful symbol of something bigger than—and far removed from—the actual space of Israel–Palestine. In "gay capitals" from New York, San Francisco and Toronto to London, Berlin, and Madrid, "mainstream" activists like Michael Lucas defend Liberalism and the hard-won gains of decades of gay activism against the attacks of radical and progressive queers who decry "the co-opting of white gay people by anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim political forces" (Schulman 2011). As the controversy over space at the NYC LGBT Community Center illustrates, the meanings of these debates vary widely. For activists like Schulman, the triumph of anti-pinkwashing activism confirmed the existence of a queer "community" united by the "common value [of] social justice" (Nathan-Kazis 2013); for the activists of NYC Queers Against Israeli Apartheid, it served as a reminder of the need for

continued vigilance against homonationalism; for gays like Michael Lucas, it reaffirmed their "duty as lovers of liberty to continue to fight against the lies of the Left" (Koenig 2011); and for New York City's lesbian and gay political elites, it was an opportunity to simultaneously verify their commitment to "free speech" and "diversity" *and* their loyalty to the state of Israel. Beneath this collection of seemingly contradictory interests, however, lies a common theme. The debate over pinkwashing among New York City queers had less to do with the realities of queerness in Israel/Palestine—or even the ideological uses of it by the Israeli government—and more to do with the utility of *pinkwashing* for making all kinds of claims to queer space in the neoliberal city.

My aim is not to downplay the political significance of those claims. For years, queer geographers have drawn on Duggan's (1994) theory of homonormativity to criticize the restructuring of "queer" spaces in ways that leave little room for practices that do not conform to neoliberal codes of privacy, domesticity, and consumption (eg Bell and Binnie 2004; Rushbrook 2002). At the same time, many have noted how racial others—especially queer racial others—become targets of neoliberal campaigns to "sanitize" the city (Halberstam 2005; Manalansan 2005). Against this backdrop, I read the successful efforts of groups like Siege Busters and Queers Against Israeli Apartheid—and, where they fail, the very existence of a public debate over pinkwashing—in New York and other global gay cities as a hopeful development at a moment that seemed otherwise hopeless (Duggan and Muñoz 2009): the emergence of a queer politics that works against the racism of neoliberal homonormativity and its narrow restriction of "politics" to identity-based claims for national recognition (witness the Center's initial dismissal of anti-occupation activities as insufficiently "LGBT focused").

Such a sympathetic reading of pinkwatching activism is, of course, not inevitable, and its critics are not just the usual conservative-Zionist suspects like Alan Dershowitz and Michael Lucas. In a recent effort to distinguish pinkwatching from the theoretical apparatus out of which it emanated, Jasbir Puar and Maya Mikdashi (2012) equate pinkwashing with the criticism of it and dismiss *both* as exercises in homonationalism. Arguing that pinkwashing *and* pinkwatching "speak the language of homonationalism", Puar and Mikdashi suggest that the only difference between the two, in the end, is that "one does so in the name of Israel, the other does so in the name of Palestine". While there is some merit to Puar and Mikdashi's criticisms of pinkwatching, including, for example, that its obsessive focus on Israel–Palestine risks obscuring similar processes in other contexts, in their zeal to salvage the theory of homonationalism from its less sophisticated iterations, Puar and Mikdashi miss the real strengths—and the limits—of both.

Implicit in Puar and Mikdashi's wholesale dismissal of pinkwatching—a dismissal that lumps activists like Queers Against Israeli Apartheid into the same broad category as "marriage equality" activists—is the assumption that these activists simply do not understand the theory of homonationalism or their complicity with the objective reality it aims to describe, ie neoliberal sovereignty's incorporation of white citizen queers (under the rubric of "tolerance" and "gay rights") and the parallel exclusion of racial others, who are "castigate[d] ... as homophobic and perverse" (Puar 2007:xii). Although Puar and Mikdashi (2012) note their confusion

over "the difference between how pinkwashing operates ... and [its] *supposed* counter-narratives", the object of their critique is perfectly clear. "[M]any of the same assumptions that animate the discourses of pinkwashing", they write, "are *unwittingly* and sometimes *intentionally* reproduced in the pinkwatching efforts to challenge the basis of pinkwashing" (emphasis added). This is a somewhat odd critique, given Puar's endorsement of pinkwatching—a year before she dismissed it—as a "broad" transnational movement that "involves many activists and scholars in the United States, Canada, Palestine, Israel ... and spans from queer of colour communities, to Palestinian activists, both in and out of Palestine, to diasporic, as well as Israeli Jews, and Palestinians ... [who] cannot be summarily dismissed through the reductive accusations of being racist, homophobic, or anti-Semitic" (2011:139). Setting aside the irony in Puar and Mikdashi's dismissal of pinkwatching activists, whom they subject to the reductive accusation of being unwitting—or worse, intentional—homonationalists, their argument suffers from two more serious flaws. First, as I argued earlier, debates over pinkwashing in Western gay metropolises have less to do with actual instances of pinkwashing than with struggles over the nature of queerness in the context of neoliberalism and the War on Terror. Such debates, moreover, have been instigated primarily by the ostensible victims of homonationalism—queers of color, trans people, working class queers, and so on—in their efforts to stake a claim on spaces traditionally dominated by the likes of Michael Lucas. Second, the problem with pinkwatching lies not in the inability of queer activists to understand homonationalism but in the conceptual limits of the theory, which they have taken up enthusiastically and which now means so many things that it no longer means much of anything.

The importance of *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007) and Puar's original articulation of homonationalism cannot be overstated. Puar extended the already well developed critique of assimilationist gay politics, crystallized most elegantly in Lisa Duggan's "homonormativity", to chart the connections between sexuality and race in neoliberal North American and European states. As a result, homonationalism opened up a multitude of new possibilities both for queer activism and for queer theory. But in elevating homonationalism to a kind of master narrative that explains all things in all places—in suggesting, for example, that homonationalism in Israel "is exactly what [has been] theorized, within the context of the United States, as well as some European states" (Puar 2011:136)—homonationalism's critics have removed the theory from the concrete socio-historical context it so lucidly described and released it into the ether of empty signifiers that can take on ideological value for any purpose, from a fight over who *belongs* in New York City's LGBT Community Center to an effort by two American academics to dismiss anti-homonationalism queer activists for engaging in homonationalism. It would seem, in fact, that—at least in the limited realms of queer thought and activism—homonationalism has eclipsed homonormativity "as a homogeneous, global external entity that exists outside all of us and exerts its terrifying, normative power on gay [sic] lives everywhere" (Brown 2012:1066).

To be sure, homonationalism is a useful heuristic device for understanding the discursive utility of "gay rights" and "tolerance" in "gay capitals" around the world—how and why, for example, representations of gay-friendly Israel are marketed by the Israeli government to European and North American queers and

passionately contested by queer anti-occupation activists—but it is severely limited in its capacity to shed light on the everyday experiences of queers for whom the language of pinkwashing and homonationalism does not have the same currency it has accrued in places like New York City. Paisley Currah (2013) criticized the ways in which this lack of attention to "the local, micro, particular sites where public authority is being exercised" often translates into a fetishization of the state as "a totalizing logic, an ordered hierarchy, a comprehensive rationality, a unity of purpose and execution". And in a terse but powerful review of an application of homonationalism to a very different context—settler colonialism in North America (Morgensen 2011)—Natalie Oswin asks whether "Native queers [are] necessarily resistant? Are they outside homonationalism, in relation to either settler or Native nations, or are Two-Spirit and Native queers also caught up in the web of complicity" (Oswin 2012:692)? Oswin's question hints at one of the fundamental flaws with the theory of homonationalism, a flaw that is perfectly—if more than a little ironically—demonstrated in a recent effort by Puar to advocate the post-humanist Deleuzian notion of "assemblage" as an alternative to the theory of intersectionality, which—in opposition to Puar's dismissal of it—I offer here as a more productive framework for understanding the actual operations of power in diverse socio-historical contexts.

"[W]hat the method of intersectionality is most predominantly used to qualify", Puar writes, "is the *specific difference* of 'women of color,' a category that has now become ... simultaneously emptied of specific meaning in its ubiquitous application and yet overdetermined in its deployment" (2012:52). Assemblages, however, "are interesting because they de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing" and do not rely on stale "identitarian frameworks" (57, 63). While I find some value in the notion of assemblage, in which "categories [like race, gender, and sexuality] ... are considered events, actions, and encounters between bodies, rather than simply entities and attributes of subjects", the theory of homonationalism has, as Puar suggests of intersectionality, constructed its own category—queers of color—that has been applied so ubiquitously and deployed in such an overdetermined way that it, too, has been "emptied of specific meaning". Homonationalism has morphed from an argument about the tentative and incomplete incorporation of some (white/citizen) queers by the neoliberal nation-state in a specific time and place (post-9/11 North America and Europe)—and the parallel and interconnected "targeting of queerly raced bodies for dying" (Puar 2007:xii)—into a totalizing framework that depends on a dangerously simplistic construction of reality. With "a unity of purpose and execution" (Currah 2013), the state entices privileged white queers with the illusion of equality as it relegates queers of color to a space of death and dying so complete—and completely inescapable—that even their critiques (lodged under the banner of pinkwatching, for example) are unintelligible except as a confirmation of the explanatory power of the theory of homonationalism. Indeed, one might ask—following Brown's critique of theories of homonormativity—to what extent Puar and Mikdashi's castigation of pinkwatching activists "ends up performatively (re)constituting those tendencies", against which both the activists and the theorists are ostensibly united, "as particularly one-dimensional and hegemonic" (Brown 2009:1497).

In the pages that follow, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork in Israel–Palestine with queer Palestinians to suggest that, whatever homonationalism tells us about

how and why images of gay-friendly Israel—or, their inverse, images of Palestinian homophobia—circulate with such frequency in urban gay centers in Europe and North America, it tells us very little about the everyday realities of queerness in Israel–Palestine—and even less about the actual experiences of queer Palestinians. Cognizant of the fact that "social differences are the effects of how bodies inhabit spaces with others" (Ahmed 2006:5), I employ an intersectional approach that is less concerned with deconstructing identity categories than understanding how "particular values [are] attached to them and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies" (Crenshaw 1991:1297). Focusing on a few concrete moments in a particular time and place, I argue that queer inquiry—especially those lines of inquiry informed by ethnic and cultural studies paradigms—might learn something from ethnography's stubborn insistence on the primacy of the quotidian. There are, after all, still some queers who cannot afford to "de-privilege the human body as a discrete organic thing" (Puar 2012:57), and they are constrained in their movements by overlapping structures and practices of power, which are best understood—and critiqued—not with recourse to totalizing theoretical catchwords but by understanding the circumstances of their emergence. In much the same way, for example, that the controversy over pinkwashing and the NYC LGBT Community Center can be understood only by situating it in its socio-historical context—a context characterized by the emergence of neoliberal homonormativity in the US and intense struggles over the meanings of queerness and queer space—the ways in which queer Palestinians navigate the space of Israel–Palestine cannot be understood outside of the specific context of Israeli sovereignty and its horrifyingly sophisticated techniques for regulating space and the flow of bodies through it (Weizman 2007).

Paying attention to "the specific relations that produce ordinary homosexualities in ordinary locations" will not boast the popular appeal of absolutist dogmas that do not require serious thought or self-reflection, but it does hold the potential to offer a more empirically convincing framework for understanding how and why queerness emerges—and the meanings and values it takes on—in particular times and places (Brown 2012:1071). Such a strategy would also require us to think about a kind of politics—and theory—of *the ordinary*: ordinary queers who live ordinary lives that are not effectively—nor, for that matter, humanely—described by "arguments about 'bigger' structures and underlying causes [that] obscure the ways in which a reeling present is composed out of heterogeneous and noncoherent singularities" (Stewart 2007:4).

Sexuality, Space, and the Logic of Israeli Sovereignty

In a brilliant discussion of the architecture of the Israeli occupation, Eyal Weizman analyzes the checkpoint, which is "so omnipresent and intrusive that it has grown to govern the entire spectrum of Palestinian life under occupation", as the defining technology in the toolkit of Israeli sovereignty and its "complex territorial, institutional and architectural apparatus", which aims, above all, "to manage the circulation of Palestinians through 'Israeli' space" (2007:147, 142). As part of a gradual process that began at the conclusion of the Six-Day War in 1967, the state developed a labyrinthine

system of checkpoints that has given it almost complete control over the mobility of Palestinian bodies, including the ability to impose both external "closures" on the West Bank and Gaza that seal them off from Israel and the rest of the world *and* internal closures (and curfews) that further limit the mobility of Palestinians to specific cities, villages, and other defined areas. (In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip, limiting the exercise of its sovereignty there to the occasional military incursion, naval blockade, or aerial bombing campaign.)

The *checkpoint system*, as Weizman demonstrates, has "assumed an overall strategic layout, constituting a complete territorial system whose main aim is to dominate and manage the lives of the Palestinians" throughout Israel–Palestine, whatever their legal status and regardless of the frequency with which they actually encounter a literal checkpoint (2007:146). As pinkwatchers and other critics have argued, the violence of the checkpoint system is consistently eschewed by representations of Israel as a modern, democratic state surrounded by repressive, totalitarian regimes, but even when critiques are allowed, the existence of fundamentally different (read "open" and "diverse") *queer* spaces in Israeli urban centers (most frequently Tel Aviv) is held up as proof that queers—and the spaces they create and inhabit—are somehow immune from the discourses and practices that structure the space of the nation more broadly. But as others have argued, the notion that "we can locate queer spaces that exist in coherent opposition to heterosexual spaces" is a "fiction" (Oswin 2008:97). Ostensibly "queer" spaces, from the gay bar to the bedroom, should be seen not as separate from but themselves structured by the same sovereign logic—in Israel–Palestine, the logic of the checkpoint—that regulates the movement of bodies through (hetero)normative space.

My use of the checkpoint as a *metaphor* for understanding how Israeli sovereignty penetrates even the most seemingly intimate spaces of everyday life—even, for example, sexual encounters between Israeli citizens in Israel—should not obscure its trenchant *physicality* for many queer Palestinians, particularly those in the West Bank who, unlike Palestinian citizens of Israel and permanent residents of Jerusalem, are stateless non-citizens with few recognized rights to mobility. In one popular story—so popular, in fact, that a number of queer Israelis told me versions of it even before I met its protagonist—Boodie, a queer Palestinian man from Ramallah, encounters the checkpoint on his way to Jerusalem's gay bar, Shushan. Featured in the Israeli documentary, *Jerusalem is Proud to Present* (Gilady 2007), Boodie, as if to reassure his audience that *queers* are exempt from the violence that Palestinians generally face, tells a story about an encounter one night with some soldiers at a checkpoint: "I showed them my Palestinian ID and told them I'm gay and going to Shushan, and they said, 'Okay, go. Bye.'" But in another account of the experience, published in the English and Hebrew versions of the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, Boodie gives a very different impression of what happens at the checkpoint: "Every time I cross a roadblock, even the women soldiers ask me if I am gay. Once she asked me *in Arabic in front of my mother*. After that she let me pass" (emphasis added). And in a re-telling of the same encounter approvingly noted in *Jerusalem is Proud to Present*, the article explains that, while the soldiers let Boodie and his friends pass through the checkpoint, they also "wrote down details about the guys" and suggested that, next time, they "go

and do [their] drag at the Mukata [Palestinain Authority headquarters] in Ramallah" (Kantorowicz 2006).

Whatever the truth of Boodie's story, as he or his interlocutors tell it, most queer Palestinians describe their experiences at checkpoints (and with Israeli police and soldiers generally) in uniformly negative terms; and their queerness, to the extent that it emerges at all, tends to constitute an *additional* source of abuse rather than a means of tempering it, more of a liability than an asset.

A Roadmap to Queer Israel

While queer Israeli space is popularly represented as an idyllic oasis of tolerance and diversity, as queer Palestinians traverse that space they encounter a never-ending set of roadblocks and obstacles, "checkpoints" where *queer Israelis* inspect and regulate the flow of queer Palestinian bodies. At times, the same techniques that soldiers employ at the literal checkpoint are available; in bars, for example, queer Palestinians are frequently denied entry when their *papers* reveal their Palestinianness. More commonly, though, individuals draw on discourses of identity to evaluate subtle markers of queerness, Israeliness, and Palestinianness and determine who does—or does not—belong in a given space. Eyal Ben-Ari notes that "the [Israeli] army categorises the Palestinian population in no less than four general classes and over forty sub-categories, each of which necessitates different regulations regarding movement through checkpoints" (2008:135). Similarly, the queer checkpoint relies on a complicated taxonomy of queer Palestinians that employs—not always predictably—multiple criteria to differentially allocate the benefits of (queer) access and "belonging".

The relevance of the checkpoint emerges most clearly in the queer Israeli space seemingly most removed from "real" life: cyberspace. Atraf, the most popular Israeli dating website/mobile application, provides free English and Hebrew versions—both of which offer access to the same database of users—and is utilized by most queer Israelis and many queer Palestinians in Jerusalem and Israel (http://dating.atraf.co.il). Just as the physical checkpoint depends on legible *papers* that translate the identities of their holders into terms that can be evaluated against the rules governing a given geographical space, Atraf employs a textual format—the profile—with a standard set of categories to organize its populations. At the same time, though, at the checkpoint and on Atraf, papers and profiles rarely provide all of the information necessary to make a decision, which depends on a much more comprehensive evaluation of the *other*. Like the soldier at the checkpoint, the Atraf user must *read between the lines*—and sometimes beyond them—to figure out where particular bodies fit in the hierarchies of citizenship that organize space in Israel–Palestine. The importance of these subtle strategies of *reading* people—and their profiles—is only compounded by the fact that, unlike most North American and European dating sites, which typically use categories of "race" or "ethnicity" to define individuals, Atraf employs a very different category to organize its members: religion. (The available answers include: "not relevant", "Jewish", "Druze", "Christian", "Muslim", "Buddhist", and "Hindu".)

Although Atraf users have the option of not specifying their religion (*lo relevanti* or "not relevant"), silence here is not neutral. As one queer Israeli man put it bluntly to

me, "*lo relevanti ze omer aravi*" (not relevant says Arab). This is a complicated statement that makes sense only in Israel, where citizenship has always been closely associated with Jewishness and where the distinction between Jewishness as a religion and Jewishness as an ethnicity (or nationality) has never been obvious (Ochs 2011). Moreover, the motivation to conceal one's religious affiliation is not surprising—and the impulse to interpret such an act as evidence of *Arabness* (whether Muslim, Christian, or Druze) is not unreasonable—given the long history of Israeli policies aimed at segmenting Palestinians and "[creating] a hierarchy within the Arab community: Druze are at the top, followed by Bedouins, and then Christians, with the remaining majority of non-Druze, non-Bedouin Muslims at the bottom as the least-favored type of citizen" (Kanaaneh 2009:10). As Rhoda Kanaaneh astutely points out, the effect of these categories, which draw heavily but not exclusively on religion—Bedouins, after all, are Muslims—is "to imply that the Druze, Bedouins, and Christians are other than Arab" or *less Arab* than non-Bedouin Muslim Palestinians (2009:10).

Despite its utility in the state's management of Palestinians, among Israeli Jews (including queers), religion most frequently emerges in popular discourse and everyday life as a tool for distinguishing secular Jews from religious Jews. Moreover, as in many other contexts, among Israeli queers, queerness and secularism are closely associated and religiosity is generally stigmatized (Ritchie 2010). But in the absence of other readily available markers of identity on Atraf, religion becomes a crucially *relevant* mechanism for queer Israelis—not to determine whether one is a secular or religious Jew, but to determine whether one is a Jew or an Arab, and if one is an Arab, where on the scale of Arabness—that is to say, how far from Israeliness/Jewishness—one sits. Most profiles also, of course, include photographs, which become particularly useful as somatic indicators where the ambiguous category of "Christian" might otherwise signal "Arab" or "foreigner". As a microcosm of queer Israeli space more broadly, Atraf standardizes a process that similarly characterizes the corporeal, everyday experiences of queer Palestinians in Israel. Profiles are *read* for signs of proximity to Israeliness, and when obvious signs like "ethnicity" or "religion" are not available, individuals look for other—especially visual and linguistic—clues. These seemingly unremarkable processes are governed by the same "rationale" that structures "the checkpoint system . . . the belief that the less Palestinians are permitted to circulate through space, the more secure that space will be" (Weizman 2007: 147)—a belief tempered, however, by the awareness that *some* Palestinians must be permitted to circulate through space, and some Palestinians are less of a threat to the integrity of that space than *others*.

Despite the tendency of some thinkers to celebrate queer space as something that "crosses, engages, and transgresses social, spiritual, and aesthetic locations" (Désert 1996:20), Atraf, as queer Palestinians experience it, makes explicit the contiguity of *queer* space and *sovereign* space. Saed, a young Israeli Palestinian man, offered a uniquely *queer Palestinian* spin on an otherwise predictable (Palestinian) narrative of the checkpoint that seriously calls into question any romantic ideas about the transgressiveness of queer space. Saed explained that he had read an article on a gay Israeli website that noted, in passing, that queer Palestinians:

face racism even on Atraf. And one guy commented [in the "feedback" section], "We're not ignoring Arabs. It's not true." And I can only laugh at that. I wish they would ignore me. I have a picture in my profile, but I don't mention that I'm Arab [or Christian]. When people send me messages and ask, I tell them, and they always answer in a negative way, like, "Sorry, Arabs are not my type," or "Sorry, I don't play with Arabs." Once someone even said to me, "You're hot." I said, "Okay, thanks." And he said, "But you're Arab? Can I ask a question?" I said, "Yes, sure." And he said, "Are you clean?" I said, "No. I'm Arab." Those kinds of things—it's true, I guess, they are not ignoring Arabs on Atraf. It's more like humiliating Arabs on Atraf.

Saed's experience on Atraf was not unique—to him or to the "virtual" space of Atraf: a complicated set of racist—but specifically *Israeli*—practices, borrowed from the same logic that engenders the occupation and its diverse techniques for identifying and regulating populations, is part and parcel of "queer Israel" generally. In cruising spaces, for example, I developed a habit of speaking Arabic with queer Palestinians, but I was warned on multiple occasions *by Palestinians* not to do so. For many, the purpose of such spaces was purely erotic, and their awareness of the widespread queer Israeli perception of "Arab/Palestinian" as "unattractive" prompted them to maximize their chances of finding a partner by muting their Palestinianness.

But these practices of muting—or outright concealing—one's Palestinianness (or Arabness) are not, I want to suggest, purely strategic, pragmatic responses to an environment whose rules are clear to everyone—not, that is to say, just a means of getting through the checkpoint. If the checkpoint is, as Jeganathan (2002:360) argues, "constituted in the 'anticipation of violence'", the possibility of that violence is amplified in cruising spaces (eg public parks late at night or "seedy" alleys in urban neighborhoods). That fact became painfully apparent to me one evening in Jerusalem's Independence Park, where I met a young man whom I suspected might be Palestinian. "*btihki 'arabi*?" I asked. He quietly nodded and, frustrating my naïve attempt to cultivate "rapport", responded in English that I should not speak Arabic because it was not "safe". Arabness, it seemed, marked the limits of attractiveness *and* the limits of humanity, and for many, concealing one's Arabness was motivated as much by the avoidance of violence as it was by the pursuit of pleasure.

Cruising spaces are, as has often been enthusiastically noted, a very "queer" complication of seemingly discrete "public" and "private" spheres (Bell and Valentine 1995). But even in the ostensibly private spaces of love and romance, the logic of the checkpoint continues to limit the mobility of queer Palestinians. The significance of language, religion, and physical appearance as tools for determining not only whether a particular body is or is not Israeli but for marking its distance from—and the parallel threat it poses to—*Israeliness* have already been suggested. Another unseemly label—*political*—is attached to queer Palestinians to further restrict their psychic and physical mobility. In much the same manner that mainstream queer Israeli activists tend to distinguish between "gay rights" and "Palestinian issues", which are understood as "political" (rather than "gay") (Ritchie 2010), in personal interactions between "normal" (non-activist) queers, "Palestinian" becomes synonymous with "political", and both are rendered incompatible with *queerness*. Still reeling from the pain of a break-up with his partner of five years,

Boutros, a Palestinian Christian from Nazareth, offered a personal account of their relationship that sheds light on how this equation (Palestinian = political ≠ queer) works—and, interestingly, *why* it works (because queer = Israeli). There was always, Boutros explained, a "problem" between him and Adam:

> And it had something to do with [the fact] that I'm Arab and he's Jewish. The problem was that—it wasn't a religious or an ethnic problem—it was more of a political problem, somehow. Adam likes to always think of himself as in the "center" [ie the political center]. He would say to me, "The Arabs in Israel should work harder to cooperate with Jews." And that was hard for me to hear, so in the beginning, we didn't talk about it. But later, we became more open with each other, and then there was the second war with Lebanon [in 2006] ... he couldn't understand why I felt sorry for the Lebanese people. "I want to be in the mainstream," he said. I asked him, "What mainstream are you talking about? This mainstream will kick you in the ass when they know you're dating an Arab" ... Adam wanted to be with me, but at the same time, he wanted me to be Israeli ... I couldn't take it anymore, so I said to him, "Look, this is me, and I am not changing." So he broke up with me. A few days ago, he actually called me. He said he had been going out with a Jewish guy, but he refused to see Adam again when he told him he had dated an Arab.

For Boutros's partner, belonging to the (Israeli) nation—being in the "mainstream"—was a major concern. But Boutros's sympathy for the suffering of Arab victims of Israeli violence constituted a ("political") critique of Israeli nationalism, and Adam's intimate/romantic association with Boutros (and his politics), he feared—correctly, it turned out—threatened his place in the nation (in a way that Adam's own queerness, needless to say, did not). Boutros stressed that their problems were not "religious", but in "real life" as on Atraf, religion—and in particular, Islam—frequently emerges as the fatal factor in queer Palestinians' romantic encounters with Israelis. In a similar story to Boutros's (but with a more violent ending), Murad—a Palestinian Muslim from Jerusalem who was (legally, linguistically, and religiously) even further from the Israeli "mainstream" than Boutros—described the sometimes confused slippage among his queer Israeli boyfriend (and his family) between categories of *Palestinian*, *Arab*, and *Muslim*.

After dating for several months, Murad moved to Nadiv's apartment in Tel Aviv. In the beginning, Murad explained, things were "perfect", but everything began to change when Murad met Nadiv's friends and family. "I am Muslim. And my name is Murad Muhammad [last name], so that means—when I would meet his friends or family, they would say, 'Oh my God, really? You are Arab?' First, they were in shock, and then they would talk—talk about me, I could tell—and they would act weird." Worst of all, Murad said, Nadiv's mother "couldn't accept it at all. She treated me like shit." Eventually the pressure from Nadiv's family and friends became too much. Not unlike Boutros's partner, who insisted that he "be" Israeli, Nadiv asked Murad to convert to Judaism:

> One day he said we had to break up. I asked why, and he said, "My mother and my friends, they're not happy with what I have with you." And I said, "Why? Because I'm Arab? Because I'm Muslim?" Of course. There couldn't be another reason. But then he said maybe it would help if I convert. I was laughing and crying at the same time. I told him no, that I'd rather be alone than convert. He asked me again a million times after that. I told him I would never convert for him or anybody else.

Murad's discussion of his relationship to Islam suggested that it was, for him, a sort of axiomatic *fact* that did not contradict (nor present any serious problems as a result of) his queerness, but it was not similarly unproblematic for Nadiv. Still, the two did not break up, and Murad tried, in small ways, to placate Nadiv and his family. He bought gifts for Nadiv's mother and even, during the family's Passover seder, read from the Haggadah in broken Hebrew. And then one night, the two were in bed sleeping and Murad "heard people shouting outside":

> So I put on my pants and went to the door, and the police were there. They wanted to talk to Nadiv. They told him, "You, or somebody using your ID, has been threatening and harassing people form a cellphone in your name" ... He went outside and was talking to them, and after a few minutes, he came back and asked me to put my clothes on. The policemen came and arrested me. I didn't know what was happening. I was screaming and crying ... So they took me to jail and kept me for 48 hours. We were together almost a year, and Nadiv didn't call or anything. They told me he said he didn't know if I was responsible but that he knew I could easily get his ID if I wanted to ... After I got out, I went back to the apartment, and all my things were packed in a suitcase, in the lobby with the doorman. And he left some money. So I left a letter for him. I wrote, "Fuck you. I'm not a whore. Fuck your mother. I'm not a stupid Muslim faggot you can do this to. I will never speak to you again."

Whatever role Nadiv actually played in Murad's arrest—and, though I have no reason not to believe him, whatever role Murad played in it—Nadiv's complicity with the state in the imposition of violence against a queer Arab/Muslim *other* (even, or especially, one to whom he was intimately attached) makes sense only in a context where queer bodies and spaces are organized and regulated according to the overarching logic of Israeli sovereignty. While the significance of that logic—and the particular logic of the checkpoint—is often, at least for queer Palestinians, painfully conspicuous in queer Israeli cyberspace, cruising spots, and even in the "bedroom", in the public spaces most clearly identified as *queer* spaces (bars and clubs), the practices with which queer Palestinians are abjected—or erased—are often carefully concealed, out of respect, perhaps, for the official myth of queer space as tolerant and egalitarian.

Inside the bar, a multitude of practices mark the Israeliness of the space and enforce the alterity of Palestinians within it, from drag performances that unabashedly draw on racist stereotypes of Arabs, Palestinians, and Muslims to the common reluctance of bartenders to serve customers perceived as Arab. ("It's not racist", one bartender told me. "They just don't pay, and if they do, they don't tip.") But the most troublesome barrier for queer Palestinians—and the one most structurally similar to the checkpoint—works to ensure that they do not, in the first place, make it in: the entrances to most Israeli bars (queer or otherwise) are staffed by a doorman or "bouncer", whose job is to ensure security, and a "selector", who inspects IDs and decides who may enter. A variety of subjective criteria, some of which have nothing to do with race, religion, class or national identity, are employed in this process. But most queer Palestinians intuitively *know*—or quickly *learn*—the list of qualities most likely to impede one's entry into the space of the bar. Often, an identification card that reveals an Arabic name is sufficient, but just as often, selectors and doormen rely on

familiar markers—especially language and physical appearance—to regulate the flow of queers into the spaces over which they are appointed.

The value of linguistic competency, in particular, was painfully demonstrated one night when I went with three queer Palestinian friends—Ahmed, Munir, and Hamdi, all East Jerusalemites who had not been educated in Israeli schools—to Jerusalem's only gay bar, Shushan. Hailed by tourists and queer Israelis as "an oasis of tolerance in Jerusalem: a place where drag queens, ultra-Orthodox Jews and Palestinians could hang out, dance and drink pints, side by side" (Wheeler 2007), our experience that night, as on many other nights, suggested that maybe we were at the wrong Shushan.

Ahmed and I approached the door first. The doorman asked for our IDs, glanced at mine and returned it, and then began inspecting Ahmed's. A number of questions in Hebrew ensued: "Where are you from? How old are you?" Ahmed struggled to respond in Hebrew until the doorman, visibly annoyed, asked in English, "How can you live in Israel your whole life and not speak Hebrew? I've only been here three years, and I speak Hebrew." As my façade of ethnographic distance faded and I grew angry, Munir and Hamdi, who had been standing behind us watching all of this transpire, pushed us aside and quietly told me to shut up and not worry because they would get us in. Ahmed and I then watched our two friends—who, having worked for Jewish-owned companies for years, spoke fluent Hebrew—apologize profusely to the doorman and engage him in conversation until, about 10 minutes later, he did, in fact, let them in.

When Checkpoints Fail

"For the checkpoint to do the work it claims—to check identity—the double play on both sides of the divide must match up: the soldier and I (or whoever is checked) must agree on the resultant answer of the irreducible play between citizen and subject" (Jeganathan 2002:364). Sometimes, the checkpoint works: queer Palestinians "answer" as expected and are rewarded with access to a given space. But even when the answer is wrong—when one refuses to act (or sound) "Israeli", for example—the checkpoint still *works*: identities are checked, and the movement of bodies through space is regulated. The danger arises when the checkpoint *fails*, when a potential threat—what kind of threat and to whom, of course, is not always clear—slips through, and in those moments, the "anticipated" violence of the checkpoint becomes real.

Such was the case one evening at Evita, a popular gay bar in Tel Aviv. I sat outside at a table drinking and talking with Nabil and Adel, an upper-middle class, highly educated queer Palestinian citizen of Israel. In a dizzying series of events that remain unclear to me, Nabil was suddenly attacked by a man who had been sitting at a nearby table ranting about Lebanon and his hatred for Arabs. Adel and a few other patrons of the bar quickly restrained the man, and his friends convinced him to leave. We followed soon after, but as we left, Adel approached the doorman, who had stood quietly watching as Nabil was attacked, and asked why he had done nothing to stop it. The doorman shrugged and said, "Maybe you shouldn't have been speaking Arabic."

Adel was profoundly traumatized by the event. He loved coming to Tel Aviv to eat sushi and have drinks at Evita. He spoke fluent Hebrew and maintained a large circle of Jewish friends. (He had even, he told me once, dated a soldier.) While most Palestinians, who are exempt from Israeli military service, have not taken up the state's call to participate in a "national service" program, Adel volunteered under it for an Arab-Jewish "coexistence" organization. A few years later, Adel went to Poland for 6 months with a group of Yad VaShem [the Israeli Holocaust Museum] volunteers to research the lives of Holocaust victims. More recently, Adel railed against Islam and "primitive" Arab culture in a Canadian documentary about queer Palestinians and confirmed, as only a queer Palestinian can, the liberal democratic tolerance of Israel. Adel, I thought, was the good Israeli Arab. Like the good Negro of the Antilles, "more 'civilized' than the African ... closer to the white man", he had learned "the language of the civilizing nation", but in that moment of violence—in, of all places, a *gay bar*—he was reminded that he was "the eternal victim of an essence ... incapable of escaping his race" (Fanon 1986:18, 26, 35, 67). And it was, in fact, a moment of profound disorientation for Adel, who was confronted with the capacity of "the body of color", *his* body of color, to "disturb the picture ... simply as a result of being in spaces that are lived as white, spaces into which white bodies can sink" (Ahmed 2006:160).

The next time I saw Adel, though, he completely confounded the categories and theories with which I had made sense of the event—and, more importantly, of *him*. A few days after the incident, Adel explained, he had set up a meeting with the bar's owner, whom he breathlessly described as a handsome and charming Spanish immigrant. The owner had apologized profusely and promised that he would talk with his staff to ensure that nothing of the sort ever happened again. Adel felt—and in some way *was*—vindicated. Although his encounter with the checkpoint was a function of Israeli state racism, his class position, linguistic capacity, and legal status all coalesced to afford Adel a greater capacity, if not to move through the checkpoint (or avoid it altogether), at least to mitigate the violence of its effects on him.

Closure

> "How can I explain it to you? It's as if I'm in the middle and there's a circle around me. I want to go this way, but it's closed. That way, but it's closed. Everything's closed" (Nino, a young Palestinian sex worker living illegally in Tel Aviv, in the Israeli documentary, *The Garde*, Shatz and Barash, Tel Aviv: Fig Films 2004).

Several months before I met Mahdi, a queer Palestinian man who lived in the West Bank city of Nablus, he had developed an online romance with an Israeli Jewish man who lived in Tel Aviv, and they were by then communicating every day. Mahdi talked about their relationship with a mixture of passion and sadness. Mahdi knew, after all, that no matter how intensely they might feel about one another, they would never actually meet. As a non-citizen Palestinian in the West Bank, Mahdi was prohibited entry into Israel and Jerusalem, and though Israeli citizens may move freely throughout Israeli settlements in the West Bank, they are

forbidden (by the Israeli state) from traveling to Palestinian areas. This restriction on Israeli mobility is not, of course, comparable to the restrictions on Palestinian mobility, and most Israelis Jews do not think of—or experience—their inability to travel to the West Bank as a "restriction" at all. For Mahdi, though, it was one more indication that he was, like Nino, *trapped*, that the possibilities for his movement were *closed*, and with them, the affective possibilities for connecting with *others*.

As he struggled to explain his frustration, Mahdi joked to me that if, on a clear night, he climbed to the top of one of the mountains that surround Nablus, he could see the lights of Tel Aviv, and if he screamed loudly enough, his Israeli Jewish lover might be able to hear him. Despite this physical closeness—and the ease with which they might, in a different world, *touch* one another—Mahdi knew that, because of the checkpoints that dotted the landscape of his world, the best he could do was hope, however unreasonably, for another. Mahdi's hope was not just some effort to escape from "the quagmire of the present", an apolitical (or anti-political) longing for an "abstract utopia ... untethered from any historical consciousness" (Muñoz 2009:3). Though rooted in the ineffable capacities of the imagination, it was a longing for the "*concrete* possibility [of] another world", and it was based not on a "denouncement of relationality" (Muñoz 2009:1, 11), as in the case of Western and Israeli efforts to constitute a "whole" queer self through the negation of the other, but an insistence on the right—the necessity—to *relate* to others, even forbidden, faraway others (Ritchie 2014). Mahdi imagined a world in which a queer Palestinian might *collaborate* with an other—queerly, intimately, and in a manner not defined by the violence of the checkpoint. The transformative potential of Mahdi's fantasy lies precisely in its conceit. Unlike the conceits of certain theorists who would, in the end, consign him to the same space of immobility and death that their theories and the checkpoint dictate, the realization of Mahdi's fantasy would require nothing less than a total restructuring of social relations in Israel–Palestine.

The Conceits of Homonationalism

In a recent effort to clarify the theory of homonationalism, Jasbir Puar muses on the "'viral' travels of the concept", which has been "deployed, adapted, rearticulated, and critiqued in various national, activist, and academic contexts" (2013:336–337). Attempting to distance the theory from its "reductive applications in activist organizing platforms", Puar explains that homonationalism is not "an accusation, an identity, a bad politics ... not simply a synonym for gay racism" (337). Although it seems likely, then, that Puar would dismiss as "reductive" Sarah Schulman's (2011) articulation of homonationalism as "the tendency among some white gay people to privilege their racial and religious identity", I want to conclude by suggesting that the concept has not really traveled that far from home and Schulman's iteration of it is not quite the distortion Puar would probably make of it.

Despite the care with which Puar works to explain that homonationalism is "an analytic to apprehend state formation and a structure of modernity", at its core, homonationalism describes a "historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states" (Puar 2013:337). Those bodies are, of course, *white* bodies. What is more, although Puar based her

original theorization of homonationalism on observations of particular—ie North American and European—nation-states and their particular histories of racism, the concept has taken on an increasingly global scope, such that Puar can declare without reservation that "Israel appears as a pioneer of homonationalism" (338).

My argument is not, of course, that racism does not exist in many contemporary contexts—including Israel–Palestine—nor I am arguing that "tolerance" of homo-sexuals has not, in many of those contexts, been marshaled to provide cover for the imposition of violence against racialized others (eg the Israeli occupation). My argument, instead, is that the popularity of the concept of homonationalism owes much to its oversimplifications. Power, in this framework, is reducible to racism, and racism is understood in a universalizing manner that allows the critic to avoid the messy work of "[locating] the meanings of race and racism ... within particular fields of discourse [and articulating their meanings] to the social relations" in concrete socio-historical contexts (Solomos and Back 1995:415).

I have utilized the metaphor of the checkpoint to demonstrate what I believe to be a more empirically convincing and politically engaged account of the everyday violence queer Palestinians face. Focusing on the checkpoint requires one to locate the racist violence of the Israeli state in a specific time and place, structured by identifiable social and political processes and inhabited by actual human beings who embody multiple subject positions that differently inflect the ways in which they encounter those processes *and* one another. Such a strategy will do little to challenge the monopolization of queer spaces in North American and European cities by racist neocons like Michael Lucas, nor will it provide a convenient mechanism for radical activists—or theoretically sophisticated academics—to validate their queer credentials. But if queers who live in *other* places have some value beyond serving as grist for North American and European queers to consolidate a properly radical subjectivity and mitigate their privilege, homonationalism's activist critics—and its theorists—might consider resisting the impulse to homogenize this or that queer as the victim or the victor and work instead to develop a nuanced framework for building coalitions to fight—rather than platforms on which to fight about—the complex and unpredictable ways space is organized, difference is enforced, and some bodies in some places are allowed to move more freely than others.

Acknowledgements

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