QUEER CHECKPOINTS:  
SEXUALITY, SURVIVAL, AND THE PARADOXES OF SOVEREIGNTY IN ISRAEL-PALESTINE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Based on eighteen months of field research in Israel-Palestine, this dissertation is an ethnography of the experiences of queer Palestinians. Simultaneously embraced (as victimized homosexuals) and rejected (as dangerous Palestinians) in the discourses of Israeli nationalism, queer Palestinians embody a set of paradoxes that exposes the constructedness of the nation and its categories of belonging. But in the corporeal spaces of everyday life, they navigate a geographical and discursive terrain structured by the very real practices of the Israeli state, which regulates populations on the basis of rigidly defined categories.

The dissertation begins with an analysis of representations of queer Palestinian suffering in the queer Western and Israeli imaginations. I argue that such representations—of the suffering and "death" of the racialized/non-national queer other—are central to the constitution of a properly national queer subject, whose biopolitical incorporation into the life of the nation depends on the abjection of racialized queer others. By offering up grotesque, often exaggerated stories of queer Palestinian suffering, queer Israelis articulate a properly national/properly liberal queer subject against the improperly queer (non-national/illiberal) Palestinian and, at the same time, provide moral and philosophical justification for the violence of the state by conjuring the specter of the intolerant terrorist, who is always understood as the source of queer Palestinian suffering.

The remainder of the dissertation draws on ethnographic fieldwork with queer Palestinians in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Israel to explore how contradictory discourses of queerness, Israeliness, and Palestininess coalesce in the experiences of queer Palestinians to create a ubiquitous set of "checkpoints" where markers of identity are evaluated and policed against cultural scripts of national belonging to grant or deny individuals access to spaces and
resources. Just as the literal checkpoint system regulates the movement of Palestinian bodies in Israel-Palestine, queer Israeli space is organized around a set of literal and figurative checkpoints that regulate the movement of queer Palestinian bodies. As expressions of sovereign power and its assertion of total control over matters of life and death, these checkpoints are enforced in often violent ways that engender a kind of queer Palestinian "suffering" that differs radically from Western and Israeli narratives in that it implicates the practices of the state rather than an amorphous, intolerant Palestinian "culture."

The dissertation concludes by suggesting that the concepts of "resistance" and "complicity" are inadequate for understanding how queer Palestinians respond to violence and endure their suffering. It argues instead for a sort of "agency of survival," a kind of "getting by" in the face of violence, in which queer Palestinians manage to survive—and even find "pleasure" and "have fun"—by creating and maintaining affective connections to family, religion, and community. What arises out of this notion of agency is a queer subject that does not fit within the schema of liberal humanist assumptions about personhood: a queer Palestinian subjectivity that insists on its Palestinianness and its queerness but subtly redefines the contours of both.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The quintessential Palestinian experience . . . takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short, at any one of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified. What happens to Palestinians at these crossing points brings home to them how much they share in common as a people. For it is at these borders and barriers that the six million Palestinians are singled out for “special treatment,” and are forcefully reminded of their identity: of who they are, and of why they are different from others.


One night not long after I arrived in Israel-Palestine to begin my fieldwork, three Palestinian friends and I decided to go to the weekly “gay party” at a popular dance club in West Jerusalem. After a stroll through Independence Park, Jerusalem’s notorious gay cruising spot, we walked a few blocks west and waited for a taxi on a quiet street corner in the upscale neighborhood of Rehavia. In a dizzying series of events, a police car appeared—out of nowhere, it seemed—and a group of Israeli police officers surrounded us and began shouting questions in Hebrew. As we produced our IDs and struggled to make sense of what was happening, another car—with more officers—arrived.

After confirming my American citizenship, one of the officers pulled me aside, while his colleagues—members of the Israel Security Agency (or *Shin Bet*), I later discovered—continued to interrogate my Palestinian friends. A few minutes later—and for no reason I could discern—they threw Muhammad onto the ground and began kicking him in the groin, torso, and head. Muhammad wept and screamed for help, and when he was sufficiently beaten and bloody, we were thrown into police cars and driven to a local police station, where we were held for the night and separately interrogated. One of “the Arabs,” I was told during my questioning, had re-

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1. Except for activists and public figures who explicitly requested not to remain anonymous, names and other identifying information have been changed to protect the anonymity of research participants.
fused to offer proper identification, and that act of defiance, which occurred not far from the entrance to the street on which the Israeli prime minister lives, was sufficient ground for suspicion. I protested that, in fact, we had all willingly provided identification and the whole incident was, as far as I could tell, unprovoked. And just as abruptly as it all began, I was warned to stay away from Arabs and sent home.

Muhammad, Amjad, and Hussein—being Arabs—were not, of course, so lucky. No formal charges were brought against them, but the three were held in jail until the following night before finally being released. Muhammad later explained, as I struggled to find some logic in the violence he had suffered, that his crime was to respond, when asked what he was doing there—in West Jerusalem, just steps away from the prime minister’s residence—that he had every right to be there. (In fact, as a “permanent resident,” like most of Jerusalem’s Palestinians, he was legally entitled to be there—and, for that matter, anywhere else in Israel and Jerusalem.) Even so, the encounter was, at least outwardly, significantly less traumatic for Muhammad, who proudly displayed his wounds and recounted the story for weeks, than for Amjad and Hussein. Unlike Amjad, a university-educated Christian, and Hussein, a self-consciously Westernized Muslim from a middle-class family, Muhammad was already well acquainted with the violence of the Israeli state: as a teenager, he had spent six months in jail, where he learned to speak near-fluent Hebrew, for hurling a stone at an Israeli settler during the Second Intifada. Also unlike Amjad and Hussein, Muhammad did not identify as “gay.” As a Palestinian man—who happened, on occasion, to have sex with other men—Muhammad’s violent encounter withIsrael was a confirmation of his place in the world and a banal, if painful, reminder of “who [he was], and of why [he was] different from others” (Khalidi 1997, 1).

For Hussein and Amjad, however, the encounter brought to a head the paradoxes that
mark the lives of most queer Palestinians, and it was a negation, rather than a confirmation, of their place in the world that prompted a series of existential questions Muhammad was not forced to confront. “None of this would have happened,” Amjad later explained to me, “if I hadn’t been in West Jerusalem going to a gay party.” For Amjad, who had recently informed his family that he was “gay,” seeing the disappointment on his father’s face when he arrived at the jail to retrieve his youngest son was even more traumatic than being harassed by Israeli police and spending the night in a roach-infested cell with “a bunch of crazy people and drug addicts.” The experience, moreover, seemed to support his family’s insistence, not only that queerness and Palestinianness were irreconcilable opposites, but that queerness, which they associated with Israeliness, represented a moral and physical danger to Palestinians, a potential violence, which—like the potential violence inherent in all people, things, and spaces Israeli—one should avoid.

Like Amjad, Hussein was profoundly traumatized by the experience and similarly resolved to avoid queer/Israeli spaces and people, set aside the “selfish” pursuit of his (queer) desires, and create a proper (Palestinian) life that would not subject his family to further shame and dishonor. But while Amjad focused on furthering his education, finding a better job, and conforming to a generally secular discourse of Palestinianness, Hussein found religion. A few weeks after the incident, during which time Hussein had not returned my calls and I had not seen him in the usual places, a mutual friend assured me that I should not worry. “He’s decided to be a good Muslim again, praying and going to mosque all the time. But he’ll be back.”

That prediction ultimately proved true for Hussein and Amjad, whose quests for meaning and coherence in Palestinianness, in both its secular and religious variants, were no more fruitful—and no less problematic—than their ventures in queerness. Neither Amjad nor
Hussein, however, came “back” to the same place. The contradictory narratives of Israeliness, Palestininaness, and queerness—and the concrete measures of their enforcement (and the enforcement of their incommensurability)—structured how Hussein and Amjad responded when confronted with the violence of the Israeli state (and made possible the encounter in the first place). Those forces did not, during the eighteen months I knew Hussein and Amjad, become any less real or significant. But as they struggled to make sense of their place in the world, amidst an unending series of confrontations with discourses and practices that positioned them in different places—and denied them any place—Amjad and Hussein, like many other queer Palestinians I met, began to create a kind of “belonging,” a place in the world, in the languages and spaces of an emerging queer Palestinian community. Those languages and spaces did not somehow cancel out the power of other (queer, Israeli, and Palestinian) languages and spaces, in which all kinds of literal and symbolic violence were imposed in the constant regulation of bodies and selves; but they did provide, however tentatively and incompletely, an alternative discourse of Israeliness, Palestininaness, and queerness and an opportunity to imagine a different kind of life—and a different kind of world—governed by a different set of rules.

**Between Life and Death**

The life of the bandit, like that of the sacred man, is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to law and the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, physis and nomos, exclusion and inclusion: the life of the bandit is the life of the loup garou, the werewolf, who is precisely neither man nor beast, and who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither.

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*

Our encounter with the Israeli state that night on Aza Street in West Jerusalem—and the diverse ways in which Muhammad, Amjad, and Hussein interpreted it—casts into sharp relief the complex, often contradictory discourses and practices that organize and regulate bodies
and the spaces they inhabit in Israel-Palestine. Whether the more extreme physical violence experienced by Muhammad was a result of his refusal to conform to the script of Israeli-Palestinian interactions—which demands, especially in the face of the state, a docile Palestinian subject who does not talk back—or whether it was a result of his relatively greater embodiment, in affect and appearance, of a stereotypical Palestinian masculinity (greater, that is, than Hussein’s and Amjad’s more perceptibly queer masculinity), the abuse inflicted on him was a reminder for Amjad and Hussein—in a way that it was not for me—of the threat of violence that they also faced. Motivated, in part, by persistent representations of Israel as a haven of liberal tolerance for queers, including queer Palestinians, their pursuit of queer life took them across the border between “Israel” and “Palestine,” and in that unauthorized “crossing,” they encountered the limits of liberal tolerance and the violence of the state, which returned them to the space of death reserved for Palestinians (Lugo 2000, 355).

If “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the capacity to dictate who may live and who may die,” the contradictions of sovereignty in Israel-Palestine crystallize nowhere more perfectly—and painfully—than in the experiences of queer Palestinians, who are simultaneously invited, as queers, to participate in the life of the (Israeli) nation, and consigned, as Palestinians, to a realm of suffering and death (Mbembe 2003, 11). An unstable, forever inchoate set of discourses and practices that claim final authority over populations and territory—that assert the absolute right, in other words, to legally, politically, and militarily control people and space (Howland and White 2009)—sovereignty is no longer the exclusive domain of the state, but it is, especially in Israel-Palestine, primarily the domain of the state, which maintains a ubiquitous presence, even—or especially—in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip, still subject, years after the official Israeli “disengagement,” to regular blockades,
military incursions, and other forms of violence.

In the eyes of Israeli citizens, the sovereign state derives legitimacy from its perceived adherence to the “rule of law,” the legal/juridical limits on the power of the state over those to whom it is ostensibly accountable; but in the lives of Palestinians, citizens and non-citizens alike, the sovereignty of the state is chiefly constituted in the imposition of violence in a permanent “state of exception,” a geographical and discursive space where “everything is possible,” where law is suspended, the state may act with impunity, and Palestinians, reduced to bare life, “may be killed but not sacrificed.” Neither “homicide” nor “sacrifice,” Palestinian death becomes permissible, but never meaningful (Agamben 1998, 77, 96). Alongside this emphasis on (Palestinian) death, however, the project of Israeli sovereignty has always—and, of course, more publicly—been guided by a concern with (Jewish) life, manifested in a host of discourses and practices aimed at the proliferation, rather than extermination, of regulable populations that can be properly incorporated into the fold of the nation. The flip-side, that is to say, of Israeli sovereignty’s biopolitical incorporation of Israeli Jews—including the nation’s one-time sexual other, the homosexual—is the necropolitical abjection of Palestinians (Foucault 2008; Mbembe 2003).

Situated squarely at the intersection of these seemingly contradictory forces—the simultaneous fostering of (queer/Israeli) life and (Palestinian) death—queer Palestinians, as the ultimate victims of—and yet dangerously close to—the ultimate other (the Palestinian terrorist), are an object of considerable ambivalence in the Israeli imagination. As victimized queers who deserve to live and potential terrorists (i.e., Palestinians) who deserve to die, queer Palestinians navigate a borderzone between the politics of life and the politics of death, a dangerous space in the margins of Israel-Palestine that confounds the logic of sovereignty by exposing its inescapable paradoxes, a space where the “legitimacy of [sovereignty’s] boundary . . . between the
citizen and the exile . . . between the legal and the non-legal,” between the nation and its other, “is challenged” and “the edges of the sovereign field are made to appear arbitrary” (DeCaroli 2007, 51). That space is, as a result, full of subversive potential, but it is also, as a result, marked by the violence of the state and its efforts to reassert the right to regulate populations on the basis of rigidly defined categories.

History & Context

Birth of a Nation: Colonialism, the Nakba, and the Jewish State

A sliver of land on the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea, Israel-Palestine is home to approximately 11 million people: 5.6 million Jewish Israeli citizens, including 364,000 settlers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank; 1.5 million Palestinian Israeli citizens; 280,000 Palestinian “permanent residents” of Jerusalem; and 3.8 million Palestinian non-citizens in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. A fuzzily demarcated space, externally bounded—and internally fragmented—by a series of shifting and contested borders, the state of Israel confronted, from its outset, a crisis of sovereignty that has more recently, in the wake of globalization and ever-increasing movements of people across borders, come to plague many other contemporary nation-states: the presence of citizen nationals beyond the borders of the state (Israeli settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem) and non-national others within the borders of the state (Palestinian Israelis and Jerusalemites), together with a military-juridical regime that exerts authority over all of Israel-Palestine but bestows the protections of the state—and the benefits of national belonging—only on some Israelis and Palestinians, shatters the traditional sovereign equation.

of territory and nation and exposes both “the gap between the powers of the state to regulate borders, monitor dissent, distribute entitlements within a finite territory and the fiction of ethnic singularity on which [the nation relies]” (Appadurai 2003, 346).

Established on May 14, 1948, the day the British Mandate of Palestine expired, the state of Israel was the product of a nationalist movement for the “emancipation” of European Jews and a colonial project, structurally and ideologically aligned with Western powers, which, together, aimed to create in Palestine a “pure, or homogenous, [European Jewish] settler colony” that would satisfy the national aspirations of the Jewish people through the “forcible removal or destruction of the native [Palestinian Arab] population” (Shafir 1999, 74, emphasis added). When applied to Israel, the “colonial” appellation is contentious in academic discourse—and blasphemous in Israeli popular and political discourse—but while Zionism, as a colonial movement, differed in important ways from other forms of colonization and was motivated by different goals, it was similarly embedded in “the ethos of a European mission civilisatrice—nineteenth-century, colonialist, racist even—built on notions about the inequality of men, races, and civilizations, an inequality allowing the most extreme forms of self-aggrandizing projections, and the most extreme forms of punitive discipline toward the unfortunate natives whose existence, paradoxically, was denied” (Said 1979, 18-19). “Zionism,” as one mainstream historian puts it, “[was] a response to antisemitism” (Laquer 1972, 590), and while early Zionist thinkers and “pioneers” were, in fact, driven by the realities of anti-Semitism in Europe—by the fact of their marginality in European culture—they nonetheless identified as white Europeans, and they hoped to establish a state in Palestine that would be fundamentally European in character. As Theodor Herzl proclaimed in his address to the First Zionist Congress, “It is more and more to the interest of the civilised nations and of civilization in general that a cultural station be estab-
lished on the shortest road to Asia. Palestine is this station and we Jews are the bearers of culture who are ready to give our property and our lives to bring about its creation" (quoted in Massad 2006, 17-18).

As Herzl's remarks suggest, the Zionist project justified itself to the (Western) world with the rhetoric of a civilizing mission in the self-evidently uncivilized Arab Orient; but as Said's critique suggests, Zionists publicly alternated between two paradoxical narratives of Palestine and its people (or lack thereof). On the one hand, Palestine was represented as an empty, virgin land, ripe for European development and cultivation; it was, in an often repeated phrase coined by Israel Zangwill, an early Zionist writer, “a land without a people for a people without a land” (Prior 1999, 181). At the same time, however, acknowledging the existence of “a people” in the land of Palestine, Zionists frequently argued that the benefits of Western civilization would naturally defuse any resentment they might feel toward the benevolent state of Israel, which they would, in fact, come to appreciate for the material gifts it would bestow.3

While Herzl's utopian dream of a modern, pluralistic state provided important ideological support for Jewish settlement in Palestine—and would remain profoundly influential in the

3. In *Altneuland* (Herzl 1960), Herzl's novel outlining his Zionist vision, a lengthy monologue by Reshid Bey, the novel's representative (friendly/elite) Arab, sums up political Zionism's hope—or at least the public face of its hope—for how the state of Israel would be received by the indigenous population. After detailing his own material advancement in Herzl's utopia as an elite landowner, Reshid Bey assures an incredulous European visitor that the poor (Arab) masses similarly benefited: “Those who had nothing could only gain. And gain they did: employment, better food, welfare. There was nothing more wretched than an Arab village of fellahaen at the end of the nineteenth century. The tenants lived in buildings not fit for cattle. The children were naked uncared for, their playground the street. Today things are changed indeed. Willy nilly, the fellahaen shared in the benefits of the grand welfare institutions we provided—whether they became members of the New Society or not. When the draining of the swamps began, when the canals were built and the eucalyptus groves and avenues were planted, these indigenous labourers were used for the work and well-paid. Look at these fields! I remember very well that all this was swamp when I was a boy. These swamps were bought at low prices by the New Society and the soil below proved to be the best in the land. These fields belong to the pretty village up there on the hill. It is an Arab village—you can see the minaret of the mosque. These people are far better off than before; they are healthy, they have better food, their children go to school. Nothing has been done to interfere with their customs or their faith—they have only gained by welfare” (95).
development of Zionist (and later Israeli) culture and thought—realities on the ground combined with alternative (and emphatically not pluralistic) variants of Zionism to shift the emphasis of Zionist settlers in Palestine onto the creation of a homogeneous economy and society—and ultimately, a state—that would chiefly benefit its Ashkenazi Jewish founders. The earliest settlers attempted to create what Gershon Shafir calls an “ethnic plantation colony,” which was content with Jewish supremacy in a labor market saturated with working-class Arabs. But the demographic imbalance inherent in such a model clashed with national aspirations for a Jewish homeland—dominated politically, economically, and demographically by Jews—and so the “pure” settlement colony quickly supplanted the “ethnic plantation” as a model more conducive to the future state of Israel as envisioned by most Zionists. The struggle for Jewish supremacy in Palestine morphed into a “struggle for the ‘conquest of labor’ [and land that] . . . transformed the Jewish workers into militant nationalists who sought to establish a homogenous Jewish society in which there would be no exploitation of Palestinians, nor would there be competition with Palestinians, because there would be no Palestinians” (Shafir 1999, 78).

But if there would be no Palestinians, there would also be no labor force to fuel the developing economy, given the relatively small number of Jewish settlers in Palestine in the decades leading up to the establishment of the state. Mass immigration (of Jews) thus became central to Zionist ideology, promoted not just as a cultural solution to the “problem” of the diaspora, but as a pragmatic means—a requirement, in fact—for ensuring the establishment and survival of a pure Jewish state. Philosophically and practically, the state of Israel was constituted in a foundational double movement of exclusion (of Arabs) and inclusion (of Jews), which would continue to structure the gamut of its relations with citizen-subjects (and their others) and its efforts to regulate the geographical and cultural spaces they inhabit.
Cleansing Palestine: The Exclusion of Palestinian Arabs

Mainstream histories of Israel-Palestine—and official Israeli narratives reproduced by the state in textbooks and other pedagogical and public relations materials (Bar-On and Adwan 2006)—generally explain the mass exodus of approximately 700,000 indigenous Palestinians from what would become the state of Israel in one of two ways, both of which, however, assign blame either to the Palestinians themselves or to “the Arabs” generally. In the first and most common account, Palestinian leaders, in anticipation of an Arab assault against the Jewish state, urged Palestinians to leave. As David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel and the generally acknowledged “father” of the state, explained in a statement to the Knesset in 1961, the Palestinians “left Palestine following instructions by the Arab leaders, with the Mufti at their head, under the assumption that the invasion of the Arab armies at the expiration of the Mandate will destroy the Jewish state and push all the Jews into the sea, dead or alive” (Teveth 1990, 222). In a second account, the historical tragedy of the Palestinian Nakba (“catastrophe” in Arabic) is indirectly acknowledged but only as an unfortunate side-effect of the stubborn refusal of neighboring Arabs to accept the legitimacy of the state of Israel. “The Arab mass flight from Israel and Israel-occupied territory is the direct effect,” Israel’s foreign minister wrote to the United Nations in 1948, “of Arab aggression from outside. . . . but for the intervention of the Arab states, there would have been an overwhelming measure of local Arab acquiescence in the establishment of the state of Israel” (United Nations 1978, 50).

In recent decades, however, many historians—in particular, the “new” or “revisionist” Israeli historians—have revisited the archives and interrogated historical orthodoxies to definitively show that, in fact, the founders of the state—and Zionist thinkers and ideologues before them—were keenly aware of the “problem” of indigenous Palestinians and the necessity of
their removal as a condition for a viable—that is to say, homogeneously Jewish—state. Masalha, for instance, has meticulously documented the evolution both of the concept of “transfer” in Zionist thought and specific proposals for how, when the state would finally be established, to fully de-Arabize Palestine (1992). Benny Morris, perhaps the leading historian of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—also an avowed Zionist and by no means a sympathizer with the Palestinian cause—has argued (1) that there was no Arab campaign to encourage Palestinians to leave (Morris 1988; Morris 2001a), (2) that “the transfer idea . . . goes back to the fathers of modern Zionism and . . . was one of the main currents in Zionist ideology from the movement’s inception” (Morris 2001b, 139), and (3) that, “while there was no blanket policy of expulsion,” Plan Dalet (or Plan D), a military strategy adopted two months prior to the declaration of statehood by the Haganah, the paramilitary precursor to the IDF (Israel Defense Force), for consolidating Jewish control over areas earmarked for statehood, “clearly resulted in mass flight. Commanders were authorized to clear the populace out of villages and certain urban districts, and to
raze the villages if they felt a military need" (Morris 2001b, 256). The bulk of the 700,000 Palestinian refugees, Morris concludes, were directly expelled by military forces, fled under threat of expulsion, or left in a “psychosis of flight” resulting from news—intentionally spread in a campaign of psychological warfare—of organized rapes of Palestinian women and girls and massacres in numerous Palestinian villages by Zionist forces. “The echo of the slaughter on April 9 of the villagers of Deir Yassin,” the most notorious Zionist massacre, characterized even by Morris as a war crime, “both reinforced and symbolized [the psychosis of flight phenomenon]. Fear that the same fate might befall them propelled villagers to flight, and this ‘atrocity factor’ was reinforced periodically during the months of fighting by other Jewish massacres” (255).

By the end of 1948, less than a year after the British evacuated Palestine and the state of Israel was declared, 800-1000 Palestinian civilians had been massacred (“peanuts,” in the pantheon of genocides and ethnic cleansings, according to Morris), at least a dozen Palestinian girls and women were raped (only reported cases and “just the tip of the iceberg,” according to Morris). Plan D was the “master plan,” complete with detailed orders for expulsion based on a thorough accounting of existing Palestinian populations, through which the Zionist forces sought to “take over the land and expel the indigenous population by force” (Pappe 2007, 41). Morris’s somewhat puzzling interpretation of Plan D—as a military “plan,” but not really a plan per se—may have something to do with his disappointment that, as a plan, it was not properly, fully implemented. In a notorious interview with the Israeli newspaper, Haaretz, Morris offers a moral and philosophical justification for the “ethnic cleansing” of Palestine, bemoans the failure of early Zionists to completely cleanse it of Palestinians, and advocates the eventual “transfer” of Palestinian Israelis. “A Jewish state,” Morris explains, “would not have come into being without the uprooting of 700,000 Palestinians. Therefore it was necessary to uproot them. There was no choice but to expel that population.” But “if [Ben-Gurion] was already engaged in expulsion, maybe he should have done a complete job. . . . If he had carried out a full expulsion—rather than a partial one—he would have stabilized the State of Israel for generations.” Moreover, while Morris does not support a transfer of Palestinian Israelis “at this moment”—because “the world would not allow it, the Arab world would not allow it, it would destroy the Jewish society from within”—“acts of expulsion will be entirely reasonable. . . . [even] essential . . . in other circumstances, apocalyptic ones, which are liable to be realized in five or ten years.” The fundamental problem for Morris is that Palestinian Israelis, who constitute at least a quarter of the Israeli citizenry, “are a time bomb. Their slide into complete Palestinization has made them an emissary of the enemy that is among us. . . . In both demographic and security terms they are liable to undermine the state.” (Ari Shavit, “Survival of the Fittest,” Haaretz, August 1, 2004, http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=380986&contrassID=2).

4. Ilan Pappe—also, like Benny Morris, an Israeli historian—rejects Morris’s assertion that there was no official Zionist policy of expulsion to argue that Plan D was the “master plan,” complete with detailed orders for expulsion based on a thorough accounting of existing Palestinian populations, through which the Zionist forces sought to “take over the land and expel the indigenous population by force” (Pappe 2007, 41). Morris’s somewhat puzzling interpretation of Plan D—as a military “plan,” but not really a plan per se—may have something to do with his disappointment that, as a plan, it was not properly, fully implemented. In a notorious interview with the Israeli newspaper, Haaretz, Morris offers a moral and philosophical justification for the “ethnic cleansing” of Palestine, bemoans the failure of early Zionists to completely cleanse it of Palestinians, and advocates the eventual “transfer” of Palestinian Israelis. “A Jewish state,” Morris explains, “would not have come into being without the uprooting of 700,000 Palestinians. Therefore it was necessary to uproot them. There was no choice but to expel that population.” But “if [Ben-Gurion] was already engaged in expulsion, maybe he should have done a complete job. . . . If he had carried out a full expulsion—rather than a partial one—he would have stabilized the State of Israel for generations.” Moreover, while Morris does not support a transfer of Palestinian Israelis “at this moment”—because “the world would not allow it, the Arab world would not allow it, it would destroy the Jewish society from within”—“acts of expulsion will be entirely reasonable. . . . [even] essential . . . in other circumstances, apocalyptic ones, which are liable to be realized in five or ten years.” The fundamental problem for Morris is that Palestinian Israelis, who constitute at least a quarter of the Israeli citizenry, “are a time bomb. Their slide into complete Palestinization has made them an emissary of the enemy that is among us. . . . In both demographic and security terms they are liable to undermine the state.” (Ari Shavit, “Survival of the Fittest,” Haaretz, August 1, 2004, http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=380986&contrassID=2).
and 700,000 Palestinians were expelled from or fled their homes to the West Bank, Gaza, and neighboring Arab states. Having almost completely “cleansed” Palestine of Palestinians, the new Israeli government quickly enacted a law permanently barring the return of Palestinian refugees and embarked on a project of re-populating Palestinian villages with Jewish immigrants, Hebraizing place names, and generally washing the geographical space of any remnants of an indigenous (Palestinian/Arab) population (Benvenisti 2000; Kimmerling 2001, 40). “The IDF general staff ordered its units to stop would-be returnees with live fire. . . . Abandoned villages were razed or mined or, later, filled with new Jewish immigrants, as were abandoned urban neighborhoods; fields were set alight, and landowners still in place were urged to sell out and leave” (Morris 2001b, 257).

Creating Israel: The Inclusion of Arab (and Other) Jews

When the state of Israel was declared, its Jewish population (approximately 717,000) was overwhelmingly Ashkenazi (European Jewish): 61.3% of Jewish immigrants came from Eastern Europe and the USSR, 24.1% from Western Europe and America, 4.2% from the Balkans, and 10.4% from Asia and Africa (Al-Haj 2004, 42; Lipshitz 1998). In 1950, the Israeli Knesset enacted the poetic inverse of its law barring the return of Palestinian refugees, the Law of Return (Hok Hashvut), which granted the right of citizenship to all Jews and retroactively bestowed citizenship on “every Jew who has immigrated into this country before the coming into force of this Law, and every Jew who was born in this country, whether before or after the coming into force of this Law.”6 The Law of Return was part of a broader project of creating an economical-


ly and demographically viable state by encouraging mass immigration of Jews. Only in the
1950s—when it became clear that European Jews, including Holocaust survivors and refugees,
the preferred immigrants, were opting for the United States rather than Israel—did Zionists
and the Israeli government reluctantly shift their emphasis to Mizrahi Jews from Arab and Mus-
lim countries (Abdo and Yuval-Davis 1995). As a result of an intensive Israeli campaign to en-
courage immigration—including occasional covert (Israeli) operations such as bombings of Jew-
ish centers in Arab/Muslim countries intended “to create hysteria . . . and thus catalyze a mass
exodus to Israel” (Shohat 1988, 12)—along with increasing popular resentment against Israel di-
rected at Jews in Arab/Muslim societies, from 1948 to 1964, approximately 700,000 Mizrahi
Jews immigrated to Israel (ironically, about the same number of Palestinians expelled when the
state was established).

As Arab Jews, Mizrahim were regarded by Israel’s Ashkenazi (European) elite as cultural-
ly inferior, and they were met, upon their arrival in Israel, with assimilationist projects that
aimed to de-Arabize them and, at the same time, exclusionary practices that aimed to marginal-
ize them (economically, politically, socially, and geographically). Mizrahi Jews were, as Ella
Shohat argues in her important critique of Zionism “from the standpoint of its Jewish victims,”
imported to Israel to populate a state dominated by Ashkenazi Jews, “and once there they were
systematically discriminated against by a Zionism which deployed its energies and material re-
sources, differentially, to the consistent advantage of European Jews and to the consistent detri-
ment of Oriental Jews” (1988, 1).

Despite the continued cultural, economic, and political marginalization of Mizrahi Jews,
who now constitute a demographic majority of Israelis, in recent decades a powerful Mizrahi
middle class has emerged (Cohen and Leon 2008). Owing to advances in social mobility, higher
educational levels, and other markers of “progress” in liberal Zionist discourse, Mizrahi Jews now constitute a formidable political force (represented largely by conservative, ultra-nationalist political parties) that has radically altered the nature of Israeli politics, once dominated by Ashkenazim (DellaPergola 2007). Moreover, in spite of higher levels of poverty (relative to Ashkenazim) and the maintenance of a distinct collective identity, Mizrahim have overwhelmingly “endorsed many of the dominant [Ashkenazi] culture’s premises and undoubtedly see themselves as part of the collective . . . fully [identifying] with the territorial unit defining the Israeli nation” (Ben-Rafael 2007, 78-79). Whether the trajectory of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants, who began to arrive in the 1980s and in much smaller numbers, or Russian Jewish immigrants, more than 750,000 of whom immigrated to Israel in the 1990s, will parallel that of Mizrahi Jews remains unclear. But it is significant that, in the face of widespread everyday racism against Ethiopians (Ben-Eliezer 2004; Schwarz 2001) and discrimination against Russians—who constitute a cultural, if not clearly racial, threat to hegemonic constructions of Israeliness (Siegel 1998)—the state of Israel has, in general, taken a paternalistic approach to (Mizrahi, Ethiopian, and Russian) Jewish immigrants that aims to assimilate them, despite their obvious racial and/or cultural differences, into the fold of national belonging (Kaplan and Salamon 2004).

Alongside the incorporation of ethnic, racial, and cultural others—and in the context of neoliberal reforms and an explosion of “identity politics” and discourses of diversity and multiculturalism (Peled 2005)—Israeli Jewish queers have, in recent decades, witnessed increasing social acceptance, the emergence of a visible queer Israeli community with “out” public figures, and significant advances in “gay rights.” IsRealli, “the official blog of the State of Israel” (maintained by the Consulate General of Israel in New York) outlines some of the major “progressive” legal developments that have helped move “the gay and lesbian community . . . from the
margins of Israeli society to visibility and growing acceptance,” including: decriminalization of homosexual sex (1988), prohibition of employment discrimination (1992), prohibition of discrimination in the military (1993), recognition of same-sex partner benefits in the private (1994) and public sectors (1992), and the recognition of adoption (2000) and marriage rights (2006). A largely “assimilationist” movement, organized around the tropes of mainstream Western gay activism (especially the “coming out” narrative), fundamentally supportive of the tenets of Israeli nationalism, and dominated by Ashkenazi men who regard more “radical” queers as “downright traitorous” (Solomon 2003, 160), the Israeli gay and lesbian movement has nonetheless achieved a level of success that highlights the fact that, “for the Israeli state, the drive to build and reproduce the Jewish nation . . . is more important than sexual identity, in law and politics.”

As with other potentially threatening minorities, “queers are acceptable to the government as long as they’re Jewish” (Aviv and Shneer 2005, 130, emphasis added).

The Internal Other: Palestinian Israelis and the Paradoxes of Sovereignty

While the importation of large numbers of other Jews—especially those from Arab and Muslim countries—to provide a cheap labor force and a demographic bulwark against surrounding (and apparently hyper-fecund) Arabs—would ultimately pose problems for the Europeanness of Israeli culture (and the privileged status of the European elite), the state adopted early on a policy of Jewish immigration and assimilation based on a belief in a “preexisting common Jewish nationhood . . . a common ethnic descent . . . membership in one Jewish people, a common single religion (Judaism), a common ancient language (Hebrew), a common history, and a common homeland (Eretz Israel)” (Smooha 2004, 50). Although the actual cultural, natio-

nal, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity of Jews continually called into question their essential Jewishness, the state invested heavily in the promotion of a cohesive nationalism that aims to eschew its internal differences—and the “newness” of the state—by continually constructing an underlying transhistorical, transcultural Jewishness.

However, together with the language of Jewish “blood” and common origins that became central to Israeli nationalism, early Zionists and the largely European founders of Israel also drew on the language of liberal democracy to establish a state that would continue, decades later, to be heralded, not just as the political embodiment of Jewish aspirations for national autonomy and self-determination, but as “a beacon of democracy in a neighborhood . . . [over]shadowed by radicalism, extremism, despotism, and terrorism.” Whether out of a genuine commitment to liberal humanistic notions of democracy and equality or a more cynical realpolitik, potential criticisms of the state’s explicitly Jewish character were tempered with a promise to respect the tenets of liberal democracy and honor the “rights” of its non-Jewish Arab minority. From its inception, when the founders declared the establishment of a “Jewish


9. The debate between Martin Buber and David Ben-Gurion typify a wider debate among early Zionists between liberal humanists and political pragmatists. In an oft-cited quotation, Buber claimed in his memoirs that Max Nordau, a colleague of Herzl, upon discovering the existence of large numbers of indigenous Palestinian Arabs, exclaimed to Theodor Herzl, “I have never realized this—we are committing an injustice” (quoted in Said and Hitchens 1988, 240). For others, such as Ben-Gurion, the necessity of creating a viable Jewish state superseded any concerns about its effects on the lives of Palestine’s indigenous population, and “the liberal idea of the state as equal handed . . . between members of different ethnic groups [was] upheld . . . only by subterfuge.” Regarding the problem of immigration, for example, Ben-Gurion argued that, “since the government cannot discriminate . . . the Jewish Agency” and other technically non-governmental organizations that were nonetheless controlled by the Israeli government “should take care of encouraging a rise in the [Israeli Jewish] birth rate.” (Fisk 1997, 312). Concerned about the dangers of a (Jewish) state as mainstream Zionism imagined it, Buber and other liberal Zionists advocated a binational state. While reluctantly embracing the new—and unapologetically national—state after his own arguments were rejected, Buber continued to “campaign on behalf of the Palestinian Arabs. In a series of debates with prime minister David Ben Gurion,” Buber answered “Ben Gurion’s argument that Israeli Arabs enjoyed economic, social, and education benefits” by insisting that “such benefits did not justify the inequities and indignities they were made to suffer” (Silberstein 1999, 50)
state . . . based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel” and, in the same proclamation, “appeal[ed] to [its] Arab inhabitants . . . [to] participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship,” to the adoption, decades later, of a statute that would condition political participation on the acknowledgment of Israel’s Jewish and democratic nature and the disavowal of “racism,” the Israeli state enshrined in law and made explicit the paradoxes usually effaced in the nation’s narratives of itself and its origins.

While the vast majority of indigenous Palestinians—around 700,000—were “ejected” from their homes (Morris 2001b, 252) or “fled under the [Zionist] threat of expulsion” when the state was founded (Pappe 2004, 138), approximately 150,000 Palestinians stayed in Israel and would become citizens of the state. A nation, Renan famously remarked, is founded in violence and sustained by the forgetting of that violence (1996 [1882]), and the Israeli nation is no exception: mainstream Israeli historiography, together with an array of state practices aimed at “Judaizing” the symbolic and geographical terrain of Israel-Palestine, has effectively erased the violent history that precipitated the establishment of the state (Pappe 2007). That project has largely succeeded in eradicating the historical presence of its other, but the nation-state continues to confront its Palestinian citizens, who now number more than 1.5 million and who were quickly—and appropriately—dubbed “present absentees” by the state, a paradoxical designation that highlights “the overt and formal inclusion of the Palestinian citizens . . . and their tacit and structural exclusion from the same state whose citizens they formally are” (Piterberg 2006,


11. “A list of candidates shall not participate in the elections for the Knesset if its aims or actions, expressly or by implication, point to one of the following: 1. denial of the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people; 2. denial of the democratic nature of the state; 3. incitement to racism” (Basic Law: The Knesset, http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/basic2_eng.htm).
A formal constitution, one of the hallmarks of “democracy” in normative political theory, has never been adopted in Israel, but a nationality law was eventually enacted that officially granted “full and equal citizenship” to Israel’s Palestinian residents. In practice, however, Palestinian Israelis are “second-class citizens” and continue to be subjected to various forms of state-sanctioned legal discrimination (Ashkenasi 1992, 172; Rabinowitz 1997, 18; Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker 2005, 113). In one of the most explicit legal manifestations of the questionable citizenship status of Palestinian Israelis, within a year of the establishment of the state, the Israeli Knesset revived a British Mandate law granting the state wide-ranging powers to impose martial law and declare a “state of emergency” (Davis 1997, 50). Under the Defence (Emergency) Regulations law, Palestinian citizens of Israel were, until 1966, subject to a strict military regime, characterized by “the large-scale confinement of the population to designated areas, the imposition of a military regime, and the deprivation of civil rights” (Davis 1997, 50). Ostensibly “formulated for the purpose of dealing with property abandoned by the refugees, [the law] was also imposed on . . . some 30,000 Arabs [who] had fled from one place to another within Israel” and were characterized present absentees who had abandoned their lands. “Estimates of land acquired by the state from its Arab citizens varied from 300,000 to one million dunams, as much as 40 percent of Israeli Arab land” (Peretz 1991, 93).

12. The Absentee Property Regulations of 1948 created a Custodian of Absentee Property, whose function was to “protect and preserve absentee [i.e., “abandoned”] property, but he had not received the legal right to dispose of it.” In 1950, the Absentee Property Law codified the earlier regulations and empowered the Custodian to transfer land to a Development Authority, which, in turn, was permitted “to sell land only to the state, the JNF [Jewish National Fund], a municipal authority, or to an institution for the resettlement of landless Arabs.” In practice, the vast majority of land was transferred to the JNF and the state (Wesley 2008, 109). Ostensibly “formulated for the purpose of dealing with property abandoned by the refugees, [the law] was also imposed on . . . some 30,000 Arabs [who] had fled from one place to another within Israel” and were characterized present absentees who had abandoned their lands. “Estimates of land acquired by the state from its Arab citizens varied from 300,000 to one million dunams, as much as 40 percent of Israeli Arab land” (Peretz 1991, 93).

13. While the Declaration of the Establishment of the State promised “full and equal citizenship” to Israel’s “Arab inhabitants,” in the immediate aftermath of statehood, like “non-residents” of Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, they were denied citizenship by Israeli courts and considered “stateless.” The Nationality Law of 1952 allowed Palestinian inhabitants to apply for citizenship but imposed extreme conditions that the vast majority were unable to fulfill. Not until 1980 was an amendment to the Nationality Law enacted that removed most of those conditions and effectively bestowed legal citizenship on most Palestinians in Israel (Kassim 2000). Following the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem were classified as “permanent residents,” a status that grants a limited set of rights (e.g., the right to live and work in Israel but not the right to vote in national elections) and can be revoked if an individual lives “abroad” (including in the West Bank) for a period of seven years (Cheshin et al. 1999). In 1950, the Jordanian government annexed the West Bank and granted its Palestinian residents Jordanian citizenship until 1988, when Jordan unilaterally severed ties with the West Bank and revoked the citizenship of its population. West Bank Palestinians then joined Gazans in the category of “stateless” people who enjoy no citizenship rights under any regime (Talhami 2003).
tion of curfews and the requirement of special permits to leave their villages” (Abu-Saad 2006, 22).

The dismantling of Israeli military rule over Palestinian Israelis did not, however, signal their transformation into “full and equal citizens.” A range of policies and practices were developed and refined over the years to absolutely ensure the marginal status of Palestinian Israelis: funding for public education and social services, for instance, is differentially allocated to benefit predominantly Jewish municipalities (Abu-Saad 2004; Ganim 2001; Golan-Agnon 2006); various legal statutes and judicial rulings limit the rights of Palestinians to participate in the political system and own land (Kimmerling and Migdal 2003; Kook 1995; Rouhana and Ghanem 1999), while a host of other carefully worded laws employ criteria such as geography and military service to “indirectly” discriminate against Palestinians, who, “as a result of Israeli policy . . . suffer from low standards of living and considerable economic deprivation” (Kretzmer 1990; Lowrance 2005, 492). In addition, however, to their political and economic subordination, Palestinians are generally invisible in the official symbology of the nation—the rituals, myths, and narratives of Israeliness promoted by the state (Abu El-Haj 2002; Shafir and Peled 2002)—and if they do emerge, it is not as citizens (or even potential citizens) but as the natural enemy of the nation (Nasser 2005; Rouhana 2006), a phenomenon widely reflected in popular representations and everyday Israeli racism against Palestinians (Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005; Smooha 1989; Smooha 1992).

**Theoretical Overview**

*Violence, Paternalism, and the Nation-State*

The obvious paradox between the simultaneous commitment to (liberal democratic) equality for all the state’s citizens and to the legal and political privileging of one group (and dis-
enfranchisement of its other) has spawned heated debates about the nature of the Israeli political system—and the nature of liberal-democratic nation-states more broadly. Some apologists reject the exceptionalism of Israel to suggest that it is a “normal” democracy and, like all normal democracies, sometimes mistreats its “minorities” (Dowty 1999; Gavinson 1999). In a more critical vein, which nonetheless shares the assumption that something inherent to democracy facilitates—or worse, requires—structures and practices of inequality, political theorists such as Chantal Mouffe attempt to reconcile the conflict in many contemporary states between “the liberal conception of equality [which] postulates that every person is, as a person, automatically equal to every other person” and the democratic conception of equality, which “requires the possibility of distinguishing who belongs to the demos and who is exterior to it” (2000, 39).

Similarly concerned with the disconnect between discourses of inclusion/equality and realities of exclusion/inequality, many observers locate the problem, not in the structure of liberal democracy itself, but in illiberal, undemocratic forms of nationalism that compete with—or undermine—liberal-democratic forms: whereas “civic nationalism,” which tends to be historically associated with the values of French republicanism, is a rational nationalism based on the liberal-democratic ideal of equal citizens under the law, “ethnic nationalism,” a thoroughly irrational phenomenon most tragically manifested in Nazi Germany, takes as its starting—and ending—point the common ethnic and/or racial characteristics of “the people” (Brubaker 1992; Kohn
Some scholars maintain the distinction between these benign and malignant variants of nationalism—and maintain hope for a purely liberal-democratic nationalism (e.g., Tamir 1993); “ethnic” (or otherwise “bad”) nationalism, in this view, has eclipsed its “civic” counterpart in Israel, to the detriment of Palestinian Israelis (Lowrance 2005; Rouhana and Ghanem 1999; Yiftachel 2006). Others reject the distinction altogether, arguing that the two “strains” are constituent parts of the “Janus-faced character of nationalism” (Giddens 1987, 219). The real question then becomes how to balance the two impulses to include and exclude; how, in other words, to maintain a cohesive—and necessarily exclusive—national “community” and respect the democratic rights of individuals and groups excluded from that community (Grosby 1993; Peled 1992; Saban 2004).

Relying less on normative political theory, with its commitment to a more or less explicitly liberal set of terms and assumptions about politics and governance, Balibar asserts the primacy of structures and practices of exclusion—in particular, racist exclusion—in the constitut-

14. Histories of Zionism tend to subsume this dualism under the rubric of “political Zionism” and “cultural Zionism.” Political Zionism is mostly closely associated with Theodor Herzl’s liberal, pluralistic vision of a future state of Israel that would become “a nation like all others” (1902; Vital 1975). Cultural Zionism was an equally secular discourse but adamantly “illiberal”; it emphasized, not just the political establishment of the state of Israel, but the cultural/spiritual regeneration of the Jewish people through the establishment of a Jewish state (Laquer 1972; Tessler 1994). “The basic idea underlying purely political Zionism was not Zionist at all,” according to Leo Strauss. “It could have been satisfied by a Jewish state anywhere on earth,” while the cultural Zionists sought a more comprehensive solution to “the Jewish problem” in the “territory hallowed by Jewish tradition . . . its language, Hebrew . . . [and] Jewish culture” (Strauss 1989, 256). Neither form of Zionism (cultural or political) definitively triumphed over the other, and various other Zionisms—e.g., religious Zionism, Labor Zionism—emerged in competition. Nevertheless, the fundamental contradictions of liberal democratic nation-states were neatly embodied in political Zionism and cultural Zionism, and those contradictions continue to frame the amalgamation of discourses that constitute contemporary “Israeli nationalism.”

15. Smooha, however, rejects the assumption that the two are incompatible and offers the concept of “ethnic democracy,” of which Israel is his archetype, as a “new” type of democracy that responds to pragmatic pressures in a way that the “ideal” type of liberal democracy does not. Smooha’s ethnic democracy is “a diminished type of democracy” that is, however, morally and philosophically justifiable because it “meets the minimal and procedural definition of democracy” and is “congruous with [the] five most important international documents on the protection of human and minority rights” (2002, 478, 483).
tion of the nation, whose commitment to (liberal-democratic) equality is, at best, limited to a privileged few and, at worst, a discursive tactic meant to obscure that fact (Balibar 2004; Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). In his seminal work on nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson distinguishes between racism, which is organized around ideologies of “blood,” and nationalism, which originates in language (1983, 145). Balibar, however, cogently argues that racism “maintains a necessary relation with nationalism and contributes to constituting it by producing the fictive ethnicity,” the common (linguistic and cultural) identity and sense of shared past (and future), “around which it is organized.” The concept of “race” is, for Balibar, functionally inseparable from that project because of its particular utility—and its long history—in representing “the national character (which might also be called its soul or spirit) [as] immanent in the people” (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, 46, 99; for a related argument, see Williams 1989).16 Israel’s Jewishness, then, as the founding principle around which the state organizes the nation (and allocates the benefits of national “belonging”), only makes explicit the general—but generally implicit—rule of nationalism. Its unapologetic logic of racial privilege is not an aberration or accident, an instance of a “bad” (or less pejoratively, “special”) variant of nationalism, but its apotheosis.

If, however, nationalism is a fundamentally racist project, it is also, many queer critics argue, a fundamentally heteronormative project that “labor[s] to supplement . . . the lack of self-presence at its origin” by constructing a “national unity . . . modeled in a wide variety of national cultures on gender and sexual norms” (Parker et al. 1992a, 5-6). In his groundbreaking study on nationalism and sexuality, Mosse convincingly demonstrated the crucial role of bour-

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16. Mosse argues that, while there is no necessary relationship between racism and nationalism, the two became permanently wedded in nineteenth century Europe (1995).
geois “respectability” in the development of Western nationalisms, which congealed around notions of “normal” and “abnormal” sexualities and genders (1985). Numerous scholars have extended Mosse’s critique to further investigate the multiple ways in which the state invests in the production of a (hetero)normatively gendered/sexed national population through a host of ideologies, discourses, and practices that promote “oppositional gender identities [and sexual behaviors] in service to state-centric heterosexist reproduction and hierarchical relations . . . ideologically (through heterosexist language, philosophy, religion, political theory) and concretely (through the juridical and coercive powers of the state)” (Peterson 1999). In a particularly influential article, Lisa Duggan, noting that “the state is deeply involved [materially and discursively] in regulating and ‘promoting’ heterosexuality” and that “it is queers who have been excluded from the benefits of state support,” called for a political and intellectual “queering” of the state (1994, 8), while Berlant and Freeman explored the possibilities for a similar “queering” of the nation (1993). Although disagreeing, at times, about the radical potential for social change in queer critiques of nationalism and the state, these analyses shared a common emphasis on the marginality and exclusion of queers in the heteronormative discourses and practices of the nation-state.

If the racist underpinnings of nationalism generally are manifested, in an extreme but revealing way, in Israeli nationalism, the same can be said of heteronormativity, which took on a particular urgency for Zionism, conceived by many as a corrective to European “anti-Semitic descriptions of Jewishness [especially male Jewishness] as effeminate” and homosexual (Boyarin 1997, 277). The “ingathering of the exiles” from the diaspora in the new state of Israel would, it was thought, provide an opportunity for the regeneration of Jewish life—and, in particular, Jewish masculinity (Bunzl 1997; Presner 2007, 155-186). To that end, the early institutions of the
state invested heavily in the creation of a new—or renewed—Israeli Jewish (or “Hebrew”) culture in which the image of the properly gendered “sabra” (native-born Israeli) embodied notions of normal, respectable sexuality that were as integral to the nascent Israeli national culture as “bourgeois respectability” was to its European counterparts. Thus established in the hegemonic discourses of Israeli nationalism (Yosef 2004), heteronormativity, as queer Israeli critics have suggested, pervades popular culture, promotes widespread social “homophobia” (Kama 2002; 2005), and is enforced—in the practices and institutions of the state (especially the ubiquitous military)—through the imposition of “compulsory heterosexuality” and essentialist/patriarchal gender norms (Kaplan 2003, 118-122).

And yet, despite the apparent heteronormative predispositions of the nation-state, in recent decades in Israel (and in many Western countries), the demands of increasingly visible—and increasingly normal(ized)—queers have met with considerable legal and political success—owing, it would seem, to the liberal democratic state’s willingness “to embrace formal equality for sexual minorities with alacrity” (Harel 1996; Walzer 2002, 159). Against the general consensus on the (racist and heteronormative) exclusivity of the nation-state, this extension of the rights and benefits of national belonging to some Israeli and Western queers, alongside the continuing—and in many cases, intensified—exclusion of racialized others, presents something of a puzzle. How is it that a class of queer others, even one organized around “a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2002, 179), could intelligibly—and with some success—“[demand] access to the nuclear family and its associated rights, recognitions, and privileges of the [heteronormative] state” (Eng et al. 2005, 11), while the violence of the state continues to be imposed on—and all manner of rights, recognitions and privileges withheld from—racial others, (publicly) sentenced to suffer and die in faraway, war-torn
places, offshore legal no-man’s lands, and even on the not-so-distant shores of the nation (Caton 2008; Giroux 2006; Puar 2004)? How is it that, alongside the emergence of a queer Israeli community, whose legal victories have elevated the nation to “the ranks of better-known gay rights trendsetters such as the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands” (Walzer 2000, 16), Israel’s Palestinian citizens face increasing structural and everyday discrimination (e.g., Humphries 2009) and even calls for “expulsion” by high-ranking government officials (not to mention the continuing occupation of the West Bank and regular military violence against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip)?

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Biopower, the State, and the Centrality of Race

The answer to the puzzling fact of the parallel inclusion of queer others and exclusion of racial others in Israel (and elsewhere) lies neither in mainstream theories of nationalism nor in normative political theory. While the paradoxes of inclusion/exclusion and equality/inequality may, in some academic traditions, represent competing strains—or alternative forms—of nationalism, with distinct historical origins, or an inherent philosophical tension in the structure of liberal democracy, with its contradictory notions of “equality,” my approach here is not to take for granted the essential meaning of these terms—nationalism, liberalism, democracy—but to view them instead as governmental rationalities that structure the exercise of sovereign power (Foucault 1991; Rose and Miller 2010). Like all techniques of power—and their underlying logics—this is a diverse, “polymorphous,” and sometimes contradictory set of relations, the contours and effects of which are not always predictable or coherent (Foucault 1990, 100). And by a specifically sovereign form of power, I mean to indicate its stubborn but sometimes uneasy


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relationship to the “state,” which I understand, not as some isolable entity (Abrams 1988), but as a cluster of institutions, discourses, and practices that aim (1) to produce “atomized individualized subjects molded and modeled for governance,” (2) to organize individuals into regulable collectivities, (3) to produce “a language and a knowledge” and the “theoretical and empirical tools [to] classify and regulate” those collectivities and (4) to “[produce] boundaries and jurisdiction” (Trouillot 2001, 126).

Within this framework, liberalism, democracy, and nationalism—and the practices these terms aim to describe—can be understood as uniquely modern forms of power that do not, as they claim, “‘liberate man in his own being’ . . . [but compel] him to face the task of producing himself” as a proper, recognizable subject of the state (Foucault 1984, 42). Foucault’s notions of “discipline” and “biopower,” as the constitutive elements of state power, help to explain how and why the liberal-democratic incorporation of some and exclusion of others, though seemingly contradictory, actually work together. Disciplinary power, for Foucault, emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the wake of the final demise of the “divine right” of the monarch, as a series of “techniques of power . . . centered on . . . the individual body” that aimed to produce individuals who could be surveilled and controlled (1997, 242). But by the end of the eighteenth century, disciplinary power was supplemented with what Foucault calls “biopower,” which focused on the production and regulation of populations (rather than individuals). Together, these forms of power finally and completely “brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations” (1990, 143). Whereas earlier forms of sovereignty were defined chiefly by “the right to take life or let live,” contemporary sovereignty is constituted more by “the power to ‘make’ live and ‘let’ die” (Foucault 1997, 241). The state now “exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subject-
ing it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault 1990, 137).

Echoing the long-standing interest in the contradictions or paradoxes of the nation-state, “modern governmental rationality,” for Foucault, “is simultaneously about individualizing and totalizing,” about disciplinary power and biopower (Gordon 1991, 36). Insofar as it interpellates the individual as an atomized, self-regulating, rational subject, equal to (i.e., undifferentiated from) all other subjects (Samuels 1999), liberalism is a disciplinary logic, manifested in all kinds of institutions and practices, that aspires to produce a particular type of subject with a particular relationship to the state; and neoliberalism, even as it appears to indicate the waning of the disciplinary state, is not so much a retreat of the state from its disciplinary projects and institutions as an outsourcing of them, “an intensification of an economy of moral regulation first developed by liberals” (Peters 2001, 73) that “[induces] . . . free individuals . . . to self-manage according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness” (Ong 2006, 4).

Furthermore, as “the realignment of [those] atomized subjectivities along collective lines within which individuals recognize themselves as the same” (Trouillot 2001, 126), that is to say, as equal citizens and members of “populations,” whose collective will is represented in/by the state, liberal democracy is, in some ways, the perfect expression of a regime of total (disciplinary and biopolitical) control: the sovereignty of the state can now be conceptualized—and legitimized—as the “popular sovereignty” of the people, who, in turn, are produced as regulable—or better, self-regulating—subjects and populations. If liberal democracy is, then, an amalgamation of techniques of power aimed at creating certain types of subjects, organizing those subjects into recognizable populations, and regulating the types of relationships that can be imagined with—and the types of demands that can be made of—the state, all of this relies, at the same time, on an underlying sense of sameness.

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“Democracy requires,” as Carl Schmitt famously—and somewhat eerily, given his association with the Nazi regime—argued, “first homogeneity and second—if the need arises—elimination or eradication of heterogeneity” (1985, 9). The state labors to construct this homogeneity through the idea of the “nation,” and it invests, even as it refines a taxonomy of populations and groups, in the “invention” of a national consensus, a sense of the common destiny—and the common history—of the people (Hobsbawm 1983). But as the many popular and academic critiques of nationalism suggest, however strenuous the effort to construct a homogeneous national culture, “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 1983, 7), the success of that effort, particularly in contexts marked by recalcitrant difference, is unpredictable and, quite often, unrealizable. Here, of course, the “foundational [paradox] of the modern nation-state” emerges most clearly: on the one hand, in “the denial of difference” through the production of the people as a group of undifferentiated citizen-subjects and, on the other hand, through the “universalization of difference” in the biopolitical production of diverse populations and groups with distinct “identities” (Alarcon et al. 1999, 2-3).

By asserting a kind of national sameness—a kind of homogeneity—predicated on and inclusive of difference, identity politics and the “new social movements,” whatever their radical pretensions, do a lot to resolve this paradox. As the dominant—sometimes, the only perceptible—form of democratic political participation in many contemporary contexts, identity politics is not just a distraction from “real” structures of (economic/class-based) domination (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Žižek 1999) or a natural characteristic of democratic polities that may or may not be “compatible with . . . democratic justice” (Gutmann 2004, 192). It is, rather, an entirely logical exercise of (liberal democratic) governmental power. By “[fixing] the identities” of populations and fostering a relationship among them “to law in particular and the state more
generally as neutral arbiters of injury rather than as themselves invested with the power to in-
jure,” identity politics constrains possibilities of identification, affiliation, and political action
(Brown 1995, 27). Moreover, with a goal of “correcting certain inequalities” that relies on the
demand of the state to “include the different identity groups that make up the country” (Rosaldo
2006, 124, emphasis added), identity politics shifts the emphasis from homogeneity to diversity
to manufacture an ostensibly—or potentially—more inclusive “multicultural” nation and affirm
the conceptual and territorial borders that define it.\^18

A versatile category capable of incorporating, however tentatively and hierarchically, its
others, “national” identity, like “ethnic” identity, thus becomes more about the “boundary that
defines the group . . . [than] the cultural stuff that it encloses.” (Barth 1969, 15). Balibar makes
precisely such a point in suggesting that nationalism “rests upon the formulation of a rule of ex-
clusion, of visible or invisible ‘borders,’ materialized in laws and practices” that deny “access to par-
ticular goods and rights depending on whether one is a national or a foreigner” (2004, 23). In a
similar vein, Connolly argues that, in practice, democracies maintain themselves—and resolve
their internal contradictions and ambivalences—by employing the power of the state to produce
(and punish) “others” who threaten the security of the nation (1993, 379-380). In both these
analyses, the exclusionary discourses and practices of the nation-state are not simply logical ex-
pressions of the “inherently limited” nature of the nation, which “has finite, if elastic, bound-

\^18. My goal here is not to dismiss identity politics as a meaningless “politics of recognition” that seeks purely
“affirmative remedies,” which, unlike “transfomative remedies,” aim to “[correct] inequitable outcomes of social
arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them” (Fraser 1997, 23). I find
convincing the arguments of many scholars about the inextricability of the material/economic and symbolic/
discursive in the subordination of women,queers, and people of color (Butler 1997a; Hale 1997; Hall and Held
1989; see,e.g., Rosaldo 1997). My point, rather, is that, whatever its potential for effecting a modicum of social
change, identity politics remains fundamentally embedded in the “contemporary, categorical order of nations” and
supportive of the sovereign prerogatives of the nation-state (Malkki 1995, 253).
aries, beyond which lie other nations” (Anderson 1983, 7, emphasis added). The production of its other, in fact, is as central to the constitution of the nation as “the cultural stuff” it ostensibly contains. Included through its exclusion, the non-national other ironically emerges as definitionally necessary, if only as a threat, to the life of the nation (Agamben 1998, 18).

In the governing logic of biopower, however, not just any other—or any threat—will do. Biopower aims its sights on the life of the nation, but the “the underside of [this] power to guarantee [the nation’s] continued existence . . . [is] the power to expose a whole population to death,” what Mbembe calls “necropower” (Foucault 1990, 137; Mbembe 2003). Foucault historicized the notion of sovereignty to arrive at a conception of power that emphasizes its productive force, typified in the diffuse—and not always state-centric—disciplinary and biopolitical production of subjects and populations. But this radical “de-centering of the state” may have gone too far because “modern political power,” as Wendy Brown argues, “not only manages populations and produces certain sorts of subjects, it also reproduces and enlarges itself.” Following Brown, my notion of sovereignty builds on but extends Foucault’s theory of governmentality to “attend not only to the production, organization, and mobilization of subjects by a variety of powers but also to the problem of legitimizing these operations by the singularly accountable object in the field of political power: the state” (2006, 82-83). As Agamben (1998) and Mbembe (2003), in particular, have shown, even in the context of the proliferation of sophisticated, polymorphous technologies of power that work to produce and regulate life, the state continues to invest in “older,” destructive forms of power, institutions and practices traditionally identified with sovereignty—e.g., the violence of the military, the rule of law and the courts, the “sovereign right” to police territorial borders and bestow (or deny) citizenship.

Where disciplinary power and biopower “give life,” so to speak, through a multitude of
“benign” institutions and practices that produce useful subjects and governable populations, its “persecutory powers” reify the “collective illusion” of the state “as the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence” by producing the specter of its “threatening Other,” as a justification for—and the rightful object of—the violence of the state (Aretxaga 2003, 400-402; Weber 2004, 33). As the biopolitical state cloaks itself in the “popular sovereignty” of the people, in a never-ending effort to blur the line between nation and state, the constitutive other to the nation-state, like the people itself, is inevitably conceptualized in a language of race. And as the state fosters the people for living, its other is met with the violence of a “state racism” that aims to eradicate the threat and “[improve] the species or race” through “direct murder” (in the form of war) or “indirect murder . . . [by] increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, [exposing them to] political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on” (Foucault 1997, 256). Not merely a “scapegoat theory,” which “posit[s] that under economic and social duress, particular sub-populations are cordoned off as intruders, invented to deflect anxieties, and conjured up precisely to nail blame,” racism, as Foucault understands it, “is internal to the biopolitical state, woven into the weft of the social body, threaded through its fabric” (Stoler 1995, 69).19

While Foucault relied heavily on biological life (and biological racism) to articulate his theory of biopower—unsurprisingly, perhaps, given its historical proximity to the most horrific manifestation of biopower (the Holocaust)—I want to broaden the notion to include those forms of power that aim to “administer, optimize, and multiply,” not just biological life (and

19. Though not explicitly utilizing the language of “the state” or biopower, Bhabha similarly argues that racism should be seen, “not simply as a hangover from archaic conceptions of the aristocracy [as Anderson suggests], but as part of the historical traditions of civic and liberal humanism that create ideological matrices of national aspiration, together with their concepts of ‘a people’ and its imagined community” (2004, 359).
death), but also spiritual—or more accurately, cultural—life (and death). To be sure, this is not a radical move. The most unapologetically racist regimes—e.g., apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany—have always employed notions of the cultural inferiority of racialized others, even if it is presumed to originate in their biological inferiority. Moreover, the explosion of theories of “new” or “cultural” racism in recent decades draws attention to forms of racism “whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences” (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, 21; Hall 1996). Focusing especially on increasing practices of racist exclusion in liberal democratic nation-states, such theorizations attempt to understand the emergence of “a racism which has taken a necessary distance from crude ideas of biological inferiority and superiority and [that] now seeks to present an imaginary definition of the nation as a unified cultural community” (Gilroy 1992, 53).

The scholarly attention to these forms of racism attests, in the first place, to the importance of conceptual specificity when one speaks of racism and the need to “[locate] the meanings of race and racism . . . within particular fields of discourse and [to articulate their meanings] to the social relations” in particular socio-historical contexts (Solomos and Back 1999, 73). At the same time, of course, all racisms share certain common features, the most important and consistent of which is “to fix social subjects in place and time,” to essentialize individuals as members of groups that, whether united in culture or biology, are defined by their insurmountable differences (Goldberg 1993, 73). While the “new” racisms may, in some contexts, draw more explicitly on cultural differences to racialize particular populations, their emergence

20. In a cursory footnote, Mbembe, citing David Goldberg, alludes to the possibility that “necropower can take multiple forms: the terror of actual death; or a more ‘benevolent’ form—the result of which is the destruction of a culture in order to ‘save the people’ from themselves” (2003, 22 n. 38).
in academic discourse speaks, more than anything, to the growing realization of a much older collusion of race, nation, and culture. “The ‘novelty’ of the new racism is often located in its strong cultural inflection, embedded in wider structures of domination . . . and tied to nationalist sentiments.” In fact, however, as Stoler argues, “these features of the ‘new’ racism are familiar colonial conventions firmly rooted in earlier discourses that linked race, culture, and national identity,” that were refined and “elaborated in Europe’s ‘laboratories of modernity’” (2002, 97), and that constitute the particular variant of racism—state racism, as Foucault calls it (1997, 239)—that structures life (and death) in the “modern” liberal democratic nation-state.

Sovereignty in modern liberal democratic nation-states is thus defined by an assemblage of power regimes that, while originating at different historical moments, should not be seen “in terms of the replacement” of one by the other but as a refinement and constant supplementation of existing mechanisms (Foucault 1991, 102). As governmental rationalities, discourses of liberalism and democracy—and liberal democracy—work together to frame the production of autonomous citizen-subjects and articulate their proper relationship with—and the proper (“limited”) functions of—the state and hierarchically organize those citizen-subjects into populations whose collective will is represented in and by the state (Hindess 1996). The state, in turn, wields the violence of its juridical and security apparatuses, “the old sovereign right to take life,” to produce the non-national other as a fundamental biological and cultural threat to the life of the people, whose existence depends on the eradication of its other (Foucault 1997, 259). Ideas about race, culture, and nation are consolidated in—and indispensable to—the disciplinary/biopolitical production of citizens and populations and, through the exercise of what I am
calling “state racism,” the abjection of non-national others.21

Tolerance, Liberalism, and the Utility of Queers

Against this backdrop, “the fleeting sanctioning of a national homosexual subject” begins to make sense as a project that hinges, first, on the articulation of a properly national population of queer subjects, and, second, on the “engendering and disavowal of populations of sexual-racial others who need not apply” (Puar 2007, 2). On the heels of critiques of the increasing normalization of queers—and efforts to re-think the possibilities of queer politics as queers become less and less queer (Duggan 2003; Jakobsen 2005)—a number of scholars have noted the rise, especially in Western nation-states, of a kind of “queer liberalism,” allied both with the dictates of (neoliberal) capitalist consumption and liberal assumptions about the nature of politics and subjectivity (Eng 2007; Eng et al. 2005; Puar 2005).

Typified in what Lisa Duggan calls the “new homonormativity” (2002), queer liberalism allocates the benefits of national belonging, not just according to a rationality that privileges the economically mobile queer monad, but also according to the racial/ethnic hierarchies inherent to the nation-state. The biopolitical state’s impulse to organize and regulate national populations, after all, does not stipulate that such populations be treated equally; and many queers of color, especially, have regarded with suspicion—or dismissed altogether—the apparent successes of “gay rights” and the emergence of a normalized community of queers as a severely limited

21. I may be accused here of “failing to discriminate analytically (as well as politically) between different domains of exclusion” by using race “as a kind of master concept, organizing other domains of human existence and radiating far beyond its origin in somatology” (Bunzl 2005, 536). In the first place, I agree with Stoler that, while “racism is commonly understood as a visual ideology in which somatic features are thought to provide the crucial criteria of membership . . . [in fact] racism is not really a visual ideology at all. Physiological attributes only signal nonvisual and more salient distinctions of exclusion on which racisms rest” (Stoler 2002, 84). Although I am therefore rejecting the view that racism is a necessarily somatic phenomenon, “state racism,” as I use it, refers to a historically-specific form of racism, in which culture, race, and nation are integrally connected in the discourses and practices of the biopolitical state, but not always—that is to say, not in every state—connected in the same way.
form of inclusion, the benefits of which are not equally shared by all queers (Cohen 1997; Ferguson 2005; Halberstam 2005). Not surprisingly, then, the much-heralded attainment, since the 1980s, of

a degree of civic legitimacy for gays and lesbians in the central institutions of Israeli society—the army, the family, and motherhood [and, of late, fatherhood] . . . [has been] limited to a group made up largely of Ashkenazi [European] Jews and financially secure gays and lesbians who could adapt themselves to the normative model of citizenship (Yosef 2005, 285).

The national inclusion of some Israeli queers is not, however, a purely “negative” phenomenon: a function, that is to say, of the fact that normalized queer liberals do not fundamentally threaten the overall organization of (racial, economic, and political) power. While it is clear that “the terms of degeneracy have shifted such that homosexuality is no longer a priori excluded from nationalist formations” (Puar 2007, 2), the inclusion of homosexuality in nationalist formations has also assumed a “positive” value in two of the primary expressions of modern state sovereignty: as a confirmation of the “tolerance” of the liberal democratic state—epitomized in stories of the suffering of racialized, non-national queers—that, in turn, justifies the “state of emergency” required by the threat of the nation’s illiberal, undemocratic (“intolerant”) other.

In recent decades, the liberal democratic state—and the Israeli state, in particular—has increasingly responded to perceived challenges to its political and territorial sovereignty, from the economic pressures of globalization to the increasing movements of populations to the rise of “terrorism,” with a versatile discourse of “tolerance.” A strategy for restoring a (seemingly fragile) loyal citizenship with the “[promise] to protect and tolerate individuals, not groups whose fealty is to some higher or lower god, to some other national formation, to some elsewhere,” the discourse of tolerance also legitimizes the violence of the state by producing a liberal, multicultural citizenry endangered by “the unfree, intolerant peoples who menace us . . .

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This virtue and liberty contrast with the direct racialized violence of the state; however, in conferring the virtue of tolerance upon the people, in calling for tolerance, the state allies itself with virtue, regardless of what it actually does” (Brown 2006, 95, 103). The biopolitical state’s production of the people relies on a simultaneous production of its other as a “[threat], either external or internal, to the population” (Foucault 1997, 256), and that phenomenon has increasingly taken the form of a state of emergency (or “state of exception,” as Agamben calls it), a suspension of the “normal” juridical rules limiting state power that allows the limitless imposition of violence against populations identified as threats (Agamben 2005). As Brown suggests, the discourse of tolerance functions here both as a means of effacing the violence of the state and, when it must be acknowledged, for justifying that violence—for justifying the suspension of norms of liberal tolerance—as a righteous defense against intolerance.

Although the discourse of tolerance casts a wide net in framing the objects of its benevolence, tolerance of homosexuality has emerged as a particularly potent barometer of progress and modernity, with queers, especially racialized queer others, the chief indicators of a people’s position on a hierarchy of civilizations defined by the terms of Western liberalism. Just as the culture of confession in the Christian West established sexuality as a privileged site for discovering “the deeply buried truth” of the self (Foucault 1990, 69), the biopower of contemporary nation-states, with its emphasis on the population, has similarly established sexuality as a privileged site for discovering “the deeply buried truth” of the nation. As an article in Foreign Policy, a popular quasi-academic American magazine, poetically states:

Samuel Huntington was only half right. The cultural fault line that divides the West and the Muslim world is not about democracy but sex. . . . The way a society views homosexuality constitutes . . . a good litmus test of its commitment to equality. . . . [T]he va-
ues separating the two cultures [Islam and the West] have much more to do with eros than demos.\(^2\)

If indeed “the way a society views homosexuality” indicates the level and sincerity of its “commitment” to liberal democratic values, where a society’s commitment to liberal democratic values indicates its allegiance more broadly in a cataclysmic “clash of civilizations,” the lives (and deaths) of queers have taken on new significance in the exercise of sovereignty. The trinity of race, nation, and culture—so central to the violence of state racism—meet up with discourses of liberal tolerance to create a space for the incorporation of queer “citizens” that relies—in ironic, sometimes absurd, sometimes disturbing ways—on the suffering and death of non-national, racialized queer others. Grounded in the empirics of ethnography, this dissertation asks what the exercise of Israeli sovereignty actually looks like, what it feels like, and what it means in the mundane, quotidian spaces of everyday life. And to what extent, it asks, as the “apparatus [of the state] produces subjects,” from the triumphant queer Israeli citizen to the suffering queer Palestinian victim, does it also “[bring] into discourse the conditions for subverting that apparatus itself” (Butler 1997b, 100)?

**Overview of the Dissertation**

One of the reasons for the success in orchestrating progressive legislation and obtaining far-reaching judicial decisions is what I’ll call The Mantra: there is no homophobia in Israel, only heterosexism. Most every lesbian and gay activist I interviewed . . . repeated this line . . . that Israel has virtually no antigay violence. . . . [One queer activist] suggests that the absence of antigay violence might have a connection with the wider Arab-Israeli conflict: “Aggression against Arabs perhaps has something to do with the lack of gay bashing. The fact that we’re (gays and lesbians) all Jews helps us be adopted into the national consensus.”

Lee Walzer, *Between Sodom and Eden: A Gay Journey through Today’s Changing Israel*

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The emergence of some Israeli queers into the space of national belonging hinges, in the first place, on their (disciplinary) production as proper liberal subjects and their (biopolitical) production as a recognizable collectivity that presents no threat to—and may even help to sustain—the body of the nation (note, after all, the centrality of defending and reproducing the nation—through military service and marriage practices—to queer activist projects). But that process of queer incorporation is also dependent on—and supportive of—the abjection of Palestinians generally and queer Palestinians in particular. In a telling explanation, approvingly quoted in two popular discussions of Israeli gay culture, of “why antigay violence is virtually non-existent in Israel,” a queer Israeli activist succinctly articulates the relationship between (queer) life and (Palestinian) death: “Aggression against Arabs perhaps has something to do with the lack of gay bashing. The fact that we’re all Jews helps us be adopted into the national consensus” (Aviv and Shneer 2005, 130, emphasis added).

The lack of gay bashing, here, signifies the national incorporation of queer Israelis—their right, that is, to live within the space of the nation—and the interlocutor’s hunch that it “has something to do with” violence against Arabs, though seldom stated so explicitly, symptomatizes a deep (and generally “invisible”) structural relationship between the Israeli incorporation of queers (and other minorities) and violence against Palestinians. In Chapter 2 of the dissertation, I draw on popular sources and ethnographic interviews with a diverse group of queer Israelis to analyze the emergence of a sort of queer Israeli nationalism that allies itself both with liberal democratic norms—about the nature of (queer) personhood and politics—and with Israeli state racism against Palestinians. I then focus specifically on the significance of representations of queer Palestinians—and especially queer Palestinian suffering—for queer Israelis and the ways in which many queer Israelis engage in the production of a popular knowledge about
queer Palestinian suffering in order to advocate for their own political projects and demonstrate their rightful place in the nation by justifying violence against Palestinians. The narrative of queer Palestinian suffering, I argue, is one of the primary mechanisms with which queer Israelis strategically—if not always consciously—demonstrate the value of tolerance of queers to the nation-state. By offering up stories of queer Palestinian suffering, queer Israelis articulate a properly national/properly liberal (read non-threatening) queer subject against the queer Palestinian and, at the same time, provide moral and philosophical justification for the violence of the state by conjuring the specter of the illiberal, intolerant terrorist, who is always understood as the source of queer Palestinian suffering. But while the official discourse among queer Israelis uniformly posits queer Palestinians as victims, in practice—in their actual interactions with and talk about queer Palestinians in the less regulated spaces of everyday life—queer Palestinians are regarded with caution (and sometimes disdain): as queers who refuse to disavow their Palestinianness, queer Palestinians threaten the coherence of a queer Israeli subjectivity and politics that render Palestinianness incompatible with—and a mortal threat to—queerness.

The two subsequent chapters utilize my ethnographic research with queer Palestinians to interrogate the concepts of “suffering” and “resistance.” In Chapter 3, I set aside the fantasies—and nightmares—of queer Israelis to explore the meaning(s) of suffering for queer Palestinians. The significance of suffering more broadly in Israel-Palestine only heightens its relevance in the lives of queer Palestinians. In the first place, suffering functions as one of the central metaphors in the discourses of Israeli nationalism, which continually draws on the collective memory of the Holocaust and representations of the Jewish people as threatened by anti-Jewish forces, and Palestinian nationalism, which is similarly oriented around the memory of a historical trauma (the Nakba) and profoundly influenced by the culture (and economy) of “human
rights,” in which the degree of one’s suffering becomes a measure of one’s worth and, quite often, determines one’s access to material resources. Moreover, queer politics in Israel, as in most Western contexts, is above all a politics of ressentiment, a politics of righteous suffering and victimization that demands the redress and recognition of the paternalistic state. Finally, as I have briefly argued, suffering and victimization, from the perspective of Western and Israeli queers, take on added significance for queer Palestinians—not just as symptoms of the universal struggle of nascent queer liberals against the tyranny of family, community, and religion—but as symptoms of the deeper pathology of Palestinian/Arab/Islamic (and sometimes generally “non-Western”) culture.

In Chapter 3, I explore the quotidian ways in which discourses of suffering coalesce with contradictory notions of queerness, Israeliness, and Palestinianness in the experiences of queer Palestinians to create a ubiquitous set of “checkpoints” where markers—and performances—of identity are evaluated and policed against cultural scripts of national belonging to grant or deny individuals access to (geographical, cultural, and discursive) spaces and resources. To be queer and Palestinian is, as one of my informants explained, “like being ripped in two, pulled in two directions.” Contrary to the presumptions of most queer Israelis (and Westerners), queer Palestinian suffering is not about an easy—if sometimes, unfortunately, impossible—choice between (queer) life and (Palestinian) death, but a function of a more complicated impulse to reconcile one’s (national/Palestinian) loyalties and (sexual/queer) desires in a context where the two are rendered incommensurable on multiple fronts. Rejecting the tendency of Western and Israeli queers to orient themselves around the metaphor of the closet and the “coming out” narrative, I focus instead on the metaphor of the checkpoint. The politics of recognition and visibility that dominate Israeli (and Western) queer activism privilege a particu-
lar vision of the state (as the ultimate source of queer liberation). But the metaphor of the checkpoint, by drawing attention to, rather than eschewing, the violence of the state, more effectively captures the reality of queer Palestinian suffering and highlights the ways in which “ordinary” citizens—even ostensibly radical queer citizens—become proxy agents of the state who reproduce wider practices of domination and exclusion in their everyday interactions with non-national—or questionably national—others.

As the redemptive antidote to “suffering,” the concept of “resistance” figures with equal prominence in the lives of queer Palestinians; and just as suffering takes on contradictory meanings, with regard to notions of queerness and Palestinianness, so too does resistance. On the one hand, the tragic hero in the liberal queer Israeli story of queer Palestinian suffering—tragic because he generally fails to realize his proper role in the story—is the queer Palestinian victim, who comes into being (if, in fact, he survives) as a self-actualized queer only through his resistance to the shackles of Palestinian culture, religion, and family. But if culture, religion, and family are thus understood as antithetical to (liberal) queerness, the opposite is true of Palestinian nationalism, an anti-colonial movement in which resistance is increasingly associated with loyalty to—and the defense of—embattled Palestinian culture, religion, and family.

In Chapter 4, I suggest the inadequacy of the notions of “resistance” and “complicity” to understand the everyday lives of queer Palestinians and their collective efforts to effect social change. Constantly pulled in two directions—pressured to demonstrate their loyalty to queerness/Israeliness, on the one hand, and to Palestinianness, on the other—what it means to resist or be complicit (that is, to collaborate) is never a straightforward question for queer Palestinians. Moreover, the fact that the violence and paternalism of the state—the right to live (or not)—in Israel-Palestine are allocated based on one’s real or perceived loyalties necessitates a strategic
performance of self that capitalizes on discourses of identity and belonging in ways that demand a serious reevaluation of the terms “resistance” and “complicity.” The will to survive, after all, among a group of people assigned—for different reasons and by different actors—to a space of suffering and death may be the greatest act of resistance, but it is a kind of resistance that, for queer Palestinians, fits neatly neither within Palestinian, Israeli, nor queer conceptualizations of resistance, and it engenders a kind of subjectivity that differs radically from Western and Israeli formations of queerness.

Chapter 4 continues to analyze the strategies of queer Palestinian activists to create a language and space that rejects the presumed incommensurability of queerness and Palestinian-ness and, at the same time, offers a powerful critique both of the heternormativity of Palestinian society and the racism of Israeli society. Drawing on interviews and participant-observation with queer Palestinian activists—including, in particular, twelve months as a volunteer for the Jerusalem-based Al-Qaws—I explore the efforts of queer Palestinian activists to engage with multiple communities, from queer Palestinians and queer Israelis to Western queer activists and “mainstream” Palestinians. The diversity of queer Palestinian activists’ audiences and the requirement of speaking (sometimes literally) in so many different languages have, I suggest, dictated a level of openness—or, as some frustratedly view it, disagreement—both about what it means to be queer and Palestinian and the proper strategies and goals of queer Palestinian activism. While some queer Palestinian activists have historically adopted—largely wholesale—the strategies and goals of queer Israeli (and Western) activism, I focus especially on queer Palestinian activists who self-consciously strive to create a different form of activism that responds more effectively to the particular needs of queer Palestinians and orients itself around a language of radical critique and social change rather than “visibility” and “recognition.”

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Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with a discussion of its broader implications for contemporary debates about the globalization of “gay” and “lesbian” identities, particularly in the “Arab World” and a discussion of the ways in which queer Palestinians’ lives shed light on—and complicate—our understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and, more broadly, the role of sexuality and race in many other contemporary nation-states in which the sexuality of racialized others is increasingly used to shore up a seemingly threatened national sovereignty and justify the state violence that remains the defining characteristic of sovereignty.

A Note on Methods

This dissertation is based on eighteen months of fieldwork conducted in Israel-Palestine from July 2007 to December 2008. Building on exploratory research in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv during the summer of 2006, when I began establishing contacts within the queer Palestinian community, surveying the field, and conducting informal interviews, I returned to Jerusalem the following July to formally begin my dissertation fieldwork. For the first twelve months of the research, I was based in Jerusalem, and for the remaining six months (July 2008-December 2008), in Tel Aviv.

Although I traveled widely and established contacts throughout Israel and the West Bank, I decided to base my research in these two cities for a number of reasons. In the first place, Jerusalem, as both a borderzone and a socially divided and politically contested urban space, was an optimal location to study the everyday realities of life in a context where alternative systems of meaning collide (Herzfeld 2001, 133-138). On a more pragmatic note, Jerusalem is home to a large number of queer Palestinians and a meeting ground for many others from elsewhere in Israel and the West Bank.

Tel Aviv, however, provided an interesting—and ethnographically productive—counter-
point to Jerusalem. For most Israelis (and for many Palestinians), Tel Aviv and Jerusalem are symbolically invested with enormous weight. “It’s as if,” one of my Israeli informants explained to me, “we have Tehran and New York in one country.” Though problematic, that statement reflects the consensus among Israelis and many Palestinians that Jerusalem—with its history, religiosity, and large Arab presence—and Tel Aviv—with its newness, aggressive secularism, and large gay presence—constitute two symbolic extremes. As such, both figure prominently in the worldviews of many Israeli and Palestinian queers. An equally important reason for these two primary field sites was my early discovery, during preliminary fieldwork, of two distinct but overlapping communities of queer Palestinians, one based in Jerusalem and populated heavily by Jerusalemites and West Bankers, and the other based in Tel Aviv and populated heavily by Palestinians from Jaffa, Haifa, and the northern region of Israel.

Upon my arrival in Jerusalem, I re-established contact with individuals and community leaders I met during my exploratory fieldwork and began to re-immerses myself, as a “participant-observer,” in the social milieu of queer Palestinians (Spradley 1980). In addition to utilizing the “snowball method” as a means of meeting informants and analyzing the social networks queer Palestinians create among themselves, I continually made contact with “new” informants—and networks—in a variety of settings where queer Palestinians associate, including, for example, gay bars (and other bars that hold weekly “gay nights”); spaces and activities organized by AlQaws and Aswat, the two queer Palestinian activist organizations; public parks, saunas, and other “cruising spaces”; and websites such as the wildly popular Israeli dating site, Atraf (dating.atraf.co.il). These different kinds of spaces were all valuable, first of all, in the access they afforded me to different populations that do not always overlap. (The sex workers and illegal immigrants I met at Independence Park, for instance, do not tend to frequent gay bars or AlQaws
activities, either—or both—because they lack the material resources to do so or because they do not identify as “gay.”) More importantly, however, I began to view these diverse social spaces as ethnographically valuable “microcontexts” of daily life, where questions of power and “resistance” most clearly emerged and were constantly negotiated (Dirks et al. 1994).

Throughout my fieldwork, I took copious notes recording my thoughts and observations on experiences in the field and informal conversations with a range of people, some of whom, particularly the more transient populations, disappeared after our first encounters and did not become regular participants in my research. Upon developing strong relationships with a sufficiently large and diverse group of queer Palestinians, I began conducting in-depth ethnographic interviews. While guided by my overarching research questions, these interviews were more open-ended and structured around a sort of “positive naiveness” (Madison 2005, 32), in which I strove to allow my informants, rather than my preconceptions, to dictate in their words the issues of significance to them. Additionally, in order to explore the ways they relate to and represent queer Palestinians—as well as their particular experiences of sexual and national identity—I conducted interviews with a range of queer Israeli Jews, including activists and “ordinary” queers from different ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds.

In order to provide an element of diachrony to a project situated in a particular historical moment and mitigate the understandable tendency of marginalized individuals in situations of conflict to recite prefabricated nationalist narratives when asked to reflect on their lives (Sayigh 1996), I collected “life histories” from a range of queer Palestinians, whom I intentionally selected in an effort to explore the diversity of queer Palestinian experiences—that is to say, the different experiences of men and women; Muslims, Christians, and Druze; citizens, permanent residents, and non-citizens; and individuals from different economic strata and educational back-
grounds. Although I succeeded in collecting interviews and life histories from a number of “older” queers, most of my research participants, like the majority of “visible” and “active” queer Palestinians, were under 35 years of age. As a result, I quickly realized that my research was really about, not just the experiences of queer Palestinians generally, but the emergence over the last decade or so of a particular queer Palestinian subjectivity, community, and politics, none of which existed before. (This is not, of course, to say that self-identified “lesbian,” “gay,” or otherwise “queer” Palestinians did not exist, rather that an identifiable community/social movement as such did not exist, and their modes of identification and subjectivication differ radically.)

Beyond the question of age, the group of queer Palestinians who are the primary focus of this dissertation are stratified along other demographic markers. For interesting but not altogether surprising reasons—namely, their relatively greater access to power, whether in the form of economic resources, citizenship status, fluency in Hebrew, or masculine privilege in a patriarchal society—the “leaders” of the queer Palestinian community tend to draw disproportionately from middle-class and elite men who are Israeli citizens (rather than Jerusalemite permanent residents and non-citizens in the West Bank). Although I was careful to include marginalized voices in my research—i.e., marginalized voices within an already marginalized population—one of the central questions of the dissertation is the extent to which the effects of the social movement this relatively small group of queer Palestinians aims to instigate—and the forms of identity they articulate—reverberate (or not) beyond their particular subject and class positions. At the same time, by looking critically and from a variety of perspectives at the space carved out for/by queer Palestinians, I hope to guard against the “danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful,” their efforts to effect change, and their
struggles to survive, all of which are made possible—and constrained—by the wider discursive universe in which they are embedded (Haraway 1988, 583).
CHAPTER 2: THE BIRTH/DEATH OF THE QUEER PALESTINIAN

On November 8, 2006, ostensibly in response to Palestinian rocket fire on Israeli border towns, the Israel Defense Forces attacked the village of Beit Hanoun in Gaza, killing nineteen Palestinian civilians, including nine children, and wounding more than forty. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert dismissed the deaths as the unfortunate result of a “technical failure,” which, Israel’s UN ambassador argued the following day, “would never have happened” anyway if Palestinians would “stop using terrorism as a means to achieving [their] goals.”

Two weeks later, the Israeli High Court of Justice ordered the government to recognize same-sex marriages conducted abroad, in a decision that would, most significantly, extend to same-sex couples the right to adopt children. The decision fell short of an outright legalization of gay marriage—its benefits, after all, would be enjoyed only by bourgeois queers wealthy enough to travel to Canada or Europe—but it was, as proof of the (greater) incorporation of Israeli queers into normative kinship and family structures, and as a formal recognition of their right to reproduce the life of the nation, widely viewed as a crucial step forward in the struggle for gay rights.


2. Civil marriages—i.e., secular marriages conducted outside a religious institution—cannot legally be conducted in Israel, but such marriages, when conducted abroad, are recognized by the state. Although same-sex Israeli couples are granted many of the same rights and benefits as married heterosexual couples, and although limited adoption rights have been granted to non-married same-sex couple in recent years, the right to adopt children has traditionally been limited to legally married couples (Yossi Ben-Ari v. Commissioner of Population Registry, Ministry of the Interior, HCJ 3045/05, November 21, 2006).


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Separated by a span of a few weeks, these two moments of inclusion and exclusion might seem coincidental. That is, at least, the consensus among most queer Israelis, for whom, as Mike Hamel—the director of HaAguda, Israel’s oldest and largest gay rights organization—explained to me, “the struggle for gay rights and the struggle against the occupation . . . are separate issues.” Homophobia and racism, in other words, are discreet, unrelated phenomena, and the struggle against one bears no relation to the struggle against the other. To be sure, there was no direct causal relationship between the Israeli military’s imposition of violence against Palestinian villagers in Beit Hanoun and the High Court’s extension of marriage rights to Israeli queers. Those two seemingly contradictory gestures were, however, embedded in the long history of inclusion and exclusion that defines Israel-Palestine and framed by the common logic of Israeli sovereignty: the violence and paternalism that constitute the state (Aretxaga 2003, 407) and materialize in an assemblage of discourses and practices that “endeavor to administer, optimize, and multiply [Israeli/Jewish] life, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault 1990, 137), and at the same time, “to regulate the distribution of [Palestinian] death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state” (Mbembe 2003, 17, emphasis added). If, together, these forms of power constitute the foundational paradox of sovereignty and the “nomos of the political space in which we are still living” (Agamben 1998, 95), in Israel-Palestine their mechanisms collide/collude nowhere more clearly than in the figure of the queer Palestinian, the embodied object of biopolitics and necropolitics, of “liberal-democratic” inclusion and racist exclusion, of the simultaneous violence and paternalism of the nation-state.

It is, then, not surprising that, in the popular and activist discourse of queer Israelis—and, for that matter, queers in many other “liberal-democratic” contexts—the “queer Palestinian” emerges with increasing frequency as both a ghostly counterpoint that haunts queer life and
a grotesque embodiment—and vindication—of Palestinian death. Validating the collective nightmares of Israeli national security, which is forever haunted by the bogeyman of the intolerant Palestinian terrorist, properly domesticated gay and lesbian Israelis are enlisted—sometimes literally—by the state to manufacture stories of victimized Palestinian queers that rationalize the marginalization of—and justify all manner of violence against—Palestinians as a result, not of the exclusionary logic of Israeli nationalism or the racist practices of the state state, but the “backward” and “inferior” essence of Palestinians. The national incorporation of (some) queer Israelis—and the promise of the state’s protection—is thus “racially demarcated and paralleled,” not coincidentally, “by a rise in the targeting of queerly raced bodies for dying” (Puar 2007, xii).

As queer Israelis enter into the space of national belonging and recognition, they (and their liberal defenders) relegate queer Palestinians to a discursive space where the possibilities of being—or not-being—are limited to “stoning . . . torturing and disfigurement . . . brutal harassment and honor killings,” in the words of a popular—and vocally Zionist—gay porn producer/actor, a space marked not by life, liberty, and the pursuit of (queer) happiness but suffering, victimization, and death. (See Figures 2.1 and 2.2 for an appropriately severe visual representation)


of the contrast between queer Israeli life and queer Palestinian death.)

One palpably “liberal” (read “pro-gay rights”)—and otherwise unintelligible—commentary on the Israeli gay marriage ruling makes sense only within this discursive framework. After briefly praising the High Court’s defense of liberal ideals and queer (Israeli) life—and bemoaning the greatest threat to both, religious fundamentalism, which, even in the face of Jewish religious fundamentalism, apparently emanates from non-Jewish (Arab) sources—the writer conjures, somewhat abruptly, the specter of queer Palestinian death: “Gay Palestinians are often simply murdered,” in “honor killings” usually committed by “a brother or other close member of the family.” Properly constituted as (almost) “free and equal” queer citizens by the “reasoned” extension of political rights, queer Israelis are embraced by the modern state, while their queer Palestinian others suffer and die under the weight of collectivism and traditionalism, typified in the oppressive, “unreasoned” Palestinian family (Mbembe 2003, 13). As a result, we are told, in a vague but telling conclusion, queer Palestinians “take refuge in Israel.”

Torn between the incorporation of normalized queers and the abjection of racialized Palestinians, the queer Palestinian is an object of considerable ambivalence in the (queer) Israeli imagination. As a symptom of the threat posed by the dangerous Palestinian terrorist, the hypermasculine “brother or other close member of the family,” the queer Palestinian functions as

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6. “Civil marriage is not permitted in Israel. Historically—that is, when the state was founded in 1947-1948—this was less a concession to the rabbis than to the Muslims and especially to the Christians of Palestine . . . slowly but surely the Supreme Court of Israel impinged on the monopoly in family law of the sectarian religious courts. . . . This week, the Supreme Court, in a ruling of six to one, recognized same sex marriages performed abroad. . . . [A] fervently religious member of Knesset declared, ‘We don’t have a Jewish state here. We have Sodom and Gomorrah here.’ . . . And what do they have in Palestine? Don’t ask. That’s why so many gay Palestinians take refuge in Israel. O.K.: do ask. Gay Palestinians are often simply murdered. But this is an honor killing so the killers don’t get punished. . . . Who performs these honor killings? Usually a brother or other close member of the family.” (“Gay Marriage in Israel,” New Republic, November 24, 2006, http://www.tnr.com/blog/the-spine/gay-marriage-Israel).
an ideological-discursive mechanism with which queer Israelis disassociate themselves from class- and race-based politics and articulate a properly national (politically non-threatening) subjectivity. By continually reproducing stories of queer Palestinian suffering, however fantastical and unmoored from any empirical reality, activists, journalists, artists, and other queer Israelis insert themselves into the nation as “normal,” patriotic citizen-subjects and provide ideological support for the sovereignty—that is to say, the violence—of the state. At the same time, though, in the less regulated codes of everyday talk—and sometimes even in the more careful discourse of public life—queer Palestinians are practically regarded with suspicion: their proximity to—and suspected sympathies for—Palestinianness, on the one hand, and their perceived reluctance—or inability—to fully and properly partake of the queer “good life,” on the other, consign them, over and over again, to a space, neither here nor there, between queerness and Palestinianness, between life and death.

In this chapter, I draw on popular sources and ethnographic data to analyze the significance of representations of queer Palestinians in the discourse of queer Israelis. In recent years, many queer Israelis, together with their queer allies abroad, have worked hard to articulate—and widely disseminate—a particular narrative of queer Palestinian suffering. Inspired especially by Jasbir Puar’s important work, I suggest that this project is a crucial element of an emerging Israeli “homonationalism” that relies, like the hegemonic discourses of Israeli nationalism of which it is a part, on the constant “invocation of the terrorist . . . [a] discursive tactic that disaggregates” Israeli queers from Palestinians—including queer Palestinians—and constitutes a properly “domesticated” queer Israeli subject, whose newfound sense of national belonging hinges on his capacity to “provide ammunition to reinforce [Israeli] nationalist projects.” As Puar acknowledges, the incorporation and normalization of (some) queers does not indicate an
absence of heteronormative discourses and practices; it may, in fact, “support forms of hetero-
normativity and the class, racial, and citizenship privileges they require” by deflecting attention
onto the presumably more extreme homophobia of the non-national other (Puar 2007, 39, 9).

While representations of queer Palestinians as “victims” have, for reasons I will discuss,
taken on greater currency in the wider economy of images, occasional contradictions do
emerge in popular sources, with queer Palestinians sometimes represented, not as victims, but
as threats. Ironically, though, in the everyday speech of queer Israelis, precisely the inverse is
ture: queer Palestinians are primarily represented—and practically regarded—as threats. Relying,
in particular, on ethnographic interviews with queer Israelis, I argue that, while narratives of
queer Palestinian suffering and victimization draw heavily on liberal-humanistic discourses, rep-
resentations of queer Palestinians as threats draw on equally prominent, if officially disavowed,
racist discourses; and while the queer-Palestinian-as-victim narrative is engendered by the effort
to consolidate a “normal,” acceptable queer Israeli subject, the queer-Palestinian-as-threat nar-
ратive reflects widespread fears, doubts, and insecurities about the fragility of that project and
the terms on which it is based.

**Queer Liberalism and the Suffering of Queer Others**

**The Palestinian Rescue Project and the Infamous Case of Tayseer**

Two years into the second intifada, and just months after the election of Ariel Sharon—
on whose behalf he and other right-wing “Gays for Sharon” enthusiastically campaigned—Shaul

7. Indeed, it was only with reference to Palestinian homophobia that the commentary, with which I began this
chapter, on the Israeli High Court’s same-sex marriage ruling could ignore the fact that the court explicitly warned
that its decision did not legalize gay marriage but merely ordered the Population Registry to record such
marriages—a fine legal distinction, perhaps, but one that belied the persistence of heteronormativity even in the
midst of seemingly monumental advances in “gay rights” (Talia Einhorn, “Same-Sex Family Unions in Israeli Law,”
Ganon, the head of HaAguda’s Palestinian Rescue Project, embarked on a mission to expose the suffering of queer Palestinians to the world. For several years, Ganon had worked to provide food, clothing, and condoms to a number of Palestinian male sex workers, most of whom lived illegally in the slums of Tel Aviv. But in the aftermath of the intifada, letters from HaAguda verifying the queerness of their holders were no longer sufficient to protect his “children,” as Ganon calls them. The Israeli police began arresting and deporting Palestinians who had, until then, flown under the radar of the state as harmless queers. In response, Ganon began issuing press releases, contacting Israeli and Western journalists, and circulating transcripts of interviews he had conducted with a few queer Palestinians, who recounted in disturbing detail their stories of suffering and victimization at the hands of Palestinian fathers, brothers, police, and other terrorists. 8

In August 2002, Ganon struck gold when Yossi Klein Halevi, an American-Israeli journalist, wrote an article in the New Republic that would become the authoritative text on the suffering of queer Palestinians. 9 Cited and recycled in countless popular and journalistic sources,

8. This chronology of events is based on an interview with Shaul Ganon conducted on December 13, 2008.
Halevi’s article documents a supposed epidemic of anti-gay violence in Palestinian society. “Because the world hasn’t forced the P.A. [Palestinian Authority] to tolerate gays, Palestinian homosexuals are increasingly seeking refuge in the only regional territory that does: Israel. In the last few years,” Halevi writes, “hundreds of gay Palestinians . . . have slipped into Israel . . . beyond the reach of their families and the P.A.” Halevi speculates that “the liberal world has never taken interest in their plight . . . because that might mean acknowledging the pathology of the nascent Palestinian polity extends well beyond Yasir Arafat and won’t be uprooted by one free election.” In a textbook case of cultural racism, Halevi understands Palestinian homophobia, whose widespread existence he takes as a given, not in specific historical or sociological terms, but as evidence of a timeless “pathology.” That pathology, in turn, becomes a philosophical justification for the denial of Palestinian agency, and in particular, of their rights to democratic self-representation; after all, according to Halevi, free elections will not make much of a difference.

Halevi’s article is important, not so much because of the nature of his claims or the frequency with which they have been regurgitated, but because it articulates in the clearest terms


the multiple uses of homosexuality—and the complicity of some homosexuals—in the ideologi-
cal work of the nation-state. To validate his proclamations about the nature of Palestinian socie-
ty—and the suffering of queer Palestinians—Halevi, like most journalists after him who would
take an interest in the subject, relies primarily on interviews with Shaul Ganon; and he focuses,
in particular, on the story of one young Palestinian man whom he calls “Tayseer.” Before
“seeking refuge” in gay-friendly Israel, Tayseer was “arrested and hung by his arms from the
ceiling . . . forced to stand in sewage water up to his neck, his head covered by a sack filled with
feces . . . thrown into a dark cell infested with insects . . . and forced to sit on a Coke bottle.”

Tayseer’s horrific story was quickly circulated among American, European, and Israeli
queers, many of whom raised money and successfully lobbied on his behalf for asylum in a Euro-
pean country. It was also quickly severed from its particular social and historical context and
took on significance, not just as the story of one queer Palestinian’s escape from the homopho-
bic backwaters of the Arab/Muslim East into the secular/liberal/gay-friendly West, but as a time-
less representation of the suffering of queer Palestinians generally. Indeed, Tayseer would ulti-
mately cease to exist as a noteworthy element of his story, the details of which, however,
would continue to be resurrected—without reference, even, to the original journalistic account
that made them famous—as a symptom of the “pogrom[s]” faced by queer Palestinians, who
are apparently regarded (by Palestinians) as “criminals plain and simple.”

In the following years, Shaul Ganon and countless journalists, activists, filmmakers, and

12. Without naming Tayseer or the New Republic article, an American lesbian activist and journalist writes: “One
21 year old Palestinian gay man was caught having sex with another man by his brother. . . . He was hung by his
arms from the ceiling. He was forced to stand in sewage-filled water up to his neck, his head covered by a sack
filled with feces. . . . and forced . . . to sit on a Coke bottle” (Libby Post, “Supporting Israel—It’s the Gay Thing to
other queers—examples of the “Gay International,” as Massad calls them (2002)—would build on Tayseer’s story to develop and refine a robust corpus of gory representations of queer Palestinian suffering. In magazine and newspaper articles, books, films, and even the public relations materials of pro-Israel advocacy groups, they would offer up queer Palestinian horror stories as proof of a widespread campaign of anti-gay violence in the Palestinian territories. To be sure, there are occasional acts of violence against queer Palestinians (perpetrated by other Palestinians), especially those who adopt Western and Israeli practices of visibility and “coming out,” but the actual extent and intensity of that violence is vastly overstated by local “experts” and activists such as Shaul Ganon and their queer Israeli and Western collaborators. The barbarism and homophobia of Palestinian society—and the suffering of queer Palestinians as Israelis and Westerners imagine it—is, in fact, largely a fiction, based more on the fears and fantasies of Western and Israeli queers—and the utility of the suffering of queer others in the constitution

of a normalized queer subject—than the lived realities of queer Palestinians. Although such an effort would be worthwhile—particularly given the irony that the narrative of queer Palestinian suffering is regularly used to justify all kinds of violence against Palestinians generally—as an ethnographer, I am less interested in refuting the facticity of that narrative than understanding how and why it becomes intelligible (and valuable) in a discursive regime where suffering has assumed such ideological and cultural weight. In subsequent chapters, I take up the question of how representations of their suffering are interpreted by—and what effects they have in the lives of—queer Palestinians, but here I want to ask: Why is it that a particular set of stories about queer Palestinians emerges so consistently—and so frequently—in the discourse of queer Israelis? What kinds of assumptions—about personhood and politics, for instance—define the contours of those stories? And what does it mean, in the first place, that the queer Palestinian came into discourse, as a subject, chiefly through the efforts of queer Israelis?

Queer Activism and the Politics of Victimization

As a gay Israeli activist whose work focuses almost exclusively on Palestinians—and by

14. Absent a radical restructuring of the social and political terrain queer Palestinians inhabit and the sorts of institutions and practices that govern it, it would be impossible to accurately quantify the extent of violence against queer Palestinians in Palestinian society. It is, however, instructive to note a number of facts: (1) the vast majority of media reports on such violence offer vague generalizations without any pretense of evidence—the violence, after all, is self-evident—or rely on the expertise of Shaul Ganon and others; (2) over a period of four years (2003-2007), Tel Aviv University’s Refugee Rights Clinic, which mounted an unsuccessful effort to challenge Israel’s refusal to grant sexual orientation-based asylum to Palestinians, assisted three Palestinians in obtaining asylum outside Israel-Palestine; and in an unusually nuanced report based on their four years of work and interviews with “several” queer Palestinians (six of whom are quoted), the authors are unable—because of the “relatively small” number of “documented” cases of homophobic violence against Palestinians (ten)—to “draw any conclusions about the scale of persecution against sexual minorities in the OPT [Occupied Palestinian Territories]” (Kagan and Ben-Dor 2008, 7-8); (3) Haneen Makey, the director of AlQaws (and before that, the head of a program at Jerusalem Open House aimed at Palestinians), recalls only two or three instances of actual or threatened physical violence against queer Palestinians over the last several years and insists that such occurrences are rare; and (4) during eighteen months of fieldwork, I met two individuals who claimed to have faced physical violence and a small number of people who had heard stories and rumors of such violence, but the vast majority of people agreed that, while such violence is conceivable, it is not common—and certainly not “epidemic.”
implication, on “political” issues—Shaul Ganon is something of an anomaly. He explained that, when he began his work with queer Palestinian refugees, “people actually came to [him] from HaAguda and told [him] to drop it . . . because it makes HaAguda look bad.” Without commenting on the merits of Ganon’s work, Mike Hamel, the current chair of the organization, explained that it “[tries] to shy away from Israeli-Palestinian issues . . . because beyond everybody’s sense of moral justice, these are really political issues,” as opposed to “GLBT issues.” Minutes after he asserted the apolitical nature of HaAguda’s activism, Hamel offered a lengthy description of his work with Israeli politicians to demand recognition of “gay rights” to representation and legal redress against homophobia.

In fact, however, even if Hamel had described such work as “political,” there would be no logical contradiction because politics is conceivable and appropriate, in the discourse of liberal Israeli (and Western) gay activism, only to the extent that it shies away from “transformative” demands in favor of “affirmative remedies for injustice,” such as visibility and recognition, that aim to “[correct] inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them” (Fraser 1997, 23). “Politics,” as Hamel and many mainstream gay activists use the term, refers to transformative demands for precisely such a restructuring of the underlying social framework—in particular, a restructuring of relations between Israelis and Palestinians—and such demands, “beyond everybody’s sense of moral justice,” fall outside his sense of the gay quest of justice. This “depoliticization” of Israeli gay activism—which continues to be dominated by Ashkenazi men and has been harshly criticized by women, Mizrahim, and other marginalized Israelis—is arguably a function of the privileged positions of its leaders, who can afford to avoid the “political concerns of less privileged groups. But the case of Israel is unique from many other contexts insofar as entrenched, widespread
representations of Palestinians as the common enemy of Israeli Jews create a particular incentive—and opportunity—even among marginalized queer Israelis, to ensure their proper place in the nation by disassociating themselves from “the conflict” as a “political” issue that has no necessary connection to “gay and lesbian” issues.

After all, HaAguda has, Hamel insisted, learned from its history of exclusion and now aims to represent “the Israeli GLBT population at large,” including women, Mizrahim, immigrants, religious Jews, and even “gays and lesbians in the settlements in the West Bank,” who might be offended if the organization takes a stand on “the conflict.” When pressed about whether he was concerned that not taking a stand might alienate another part of the “GLBT Israeli population,” namely, queer Palestinian Israelis, Hamel said, somewhat resignedly, “damned if you do, damned if you don’t,” leaving unsaid an obvious assumption about exactly who constitutes as “Israeli GLBT,” or at the very least, who matters. That assumption reflects a broader set of discourses in Israeli society, with a long genealogy in Zionist thinking, that equate “Israeli” with “Jewish” and continually enforce the invisibility of non-Jewish, Palestinian others.

There is, however, at least in the case of queer Palestinians, one important exception (apart from the hyper-sexual “active” Arab, whom I will discuss later and who, in any case, is generally not understood as “gay”): the queer Palestinian victim, whose visibility, in fact, is passionately endorsed by queer Israeli activists, liberal (Western and Israeli) Zionists, and even, sometimes, the Israeli state. While the primary sources of representations of queer Palestinian suffering are queer Israelis (and Westerners)—and my focus here is on the significance of those representations for queers—it is important to note that the Israeli state (and its more or less loosely affiliated propaganda machines in Israel and abroad) has also discovered the utility of queer Palestinian suffering as a means of defending the state against potential criticism of its
treatment of Palestinians by redirecting the attention of liberal-humanists to the presumed
treatment of queers by Palestinians. The Israeli Embassy in London, for example, published a
pamphlet on “Democracy and Civil Rights” in Israel, which juxtaposes the tyranny and repres-
sion of its Arab neighbors with the virtues of Israeli democracy and the benevolence of the Is-
raeli state in its treatment of minorities, including queer Palestinians, “hundreds of [whom] are
now trying to live within the Israeli community, where they are safe from persecution.”

In its press kit for then US presidential candidate Barak Obama’s visit to Israel, the Jerusalem office of
the Israel Project for Freedom, Security and Peace—a conservative US-based Israel advocacy
organization—offered as evidence that “Israel has become one of the most progressive coun-
tries in the world and the most tolerant country in the Middle East” the fact that “gay Palestini-
ans commonly seek refuge in Israel, as they fear for their safety in the West Bank and Gaza,
where they are subject to torture.”

In a similar vein, StandWithUs, another US-based organi-
zation that aims to “[ensure] that Israel’s side of the story is told,” has circulated a number of
brochures and pamphlets, including one that informs its audience that “sexual orientation under
the Palestinian Authority is a matter of life or death” (Figure 2.1). The pamphlet cites two
newspaper articles to give authoritative weight to that proclamation, making it clear in text and
images that queer Palestinians “are extremely vulnerable to violent attacks,” a symptom of a
pathological brew of “fundamentalist Islamic beliefs, government officials,” and, interestingly,

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LGBT_booklet.pdf.
“Palestinian families.” The tragic story of (queer Palestinian) suffering and victimization concludes, however, with a happy ending: the illiberal homophobia of Palestine, where queers are tortured and killed, is contrasted with the enlightened liberalism of gay-friendly Israel, “a sanctuary for the LGBT community” (Figure 2.2).

One might argue that queer Israelis—as the presumed beneficiaries of a liberal-democratic tolerance that, in practice, falls short of its own pretensions—are just as strategically (and just as cynically) used by the Israeli state and its defenders as queer Palestinians. But as they critique the homophobia/heteronormativity of the state to demand greater access to the privileges and benefits of national belonging, traditionally reserved for heterosexuals, queer Israelis actively assuage any fears about the radical content of their demands by demonstrating their complicity with the violence of the state and the usefulness of tolerance of queers in the maintenance of that violence. In one concrete example both of the alliance of normalized queers with the state and the value of stories of queer Palestinian suffering to both, Mike Hamel and a number of other HaAguda activists joined forces with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a speaking tour of Europe and the US to expose “European and American liberals . . . [to] the gay community in Israel,” so as to “highlight [its] support of human rights and to underscore its diversity in a population that tends to judge Israel harshly solely on the basis of its treatment of Palestinians” (emphasis added).† Hamel’s joint venture with the state brings to the fore the interconnectedness of queer inclusion/Palestinian exclusion; the very existence of queer Israelis, after all, is offered as an answer to critiques of Israeli violence against Palestinians. At the same time, it suggests the centrality of queer Palestinian suffering to that project: queer Palestinians, Hamel

informs his Western audiences, “have been killed and tortured . . . [and] Israel is the only country that is trying to help them.”

The ubiquity of the victim motif in Israeli stories about queer Palestinians is perhaps not surprising; in addition to the ideological value of queer Palestinian suffering as a public relations strategy for defending the state against international criticism, the liberal gay politics of visibility and recognition is ultimately about the “[development of] a righteous critique of power from the perspective of the injured” (queer) victim, who demands the protection of the benevolent state from the “social injury” of homophobia (Brown 1995, 27). To be sure, there are modes of radical queer activism that employ strategies of visibility to challenge the narratives of nationalism and the practices of the state. Groups of queer Israeli activists sometime stage public spectacles—at Tel Aviv’s annual gay pride parade and Independence Day celebrations, for example—in which they offer harsh critiques both of the assimilationist politics of mainstream gay activism and of the violent militarism of the state. However, “the relative weakness with which economic, racial, ethnic, and non-American cultures have been enfolded into queer counter-publicity” in the United States similarly characterizes the “counter-publicity” of queer radicals in Israel. That both “[remain] bound to the genericizing”—and fundamentally exclusionary—“logic of [national] citizenship,” moreover, suggests the limited “radical” potential of the tactic of “visibility,” one of the key terms in the vocabulary of identity politics (Berlant and Freeman 1993, 215). Whatever its potential, in the discourse of hegemonic liberal Israeli and Western queer activisms, visibility is narrowly understood as the right to “come out of the closet” as a respectable queer citizen, rather than a strategy for challenging the repressive discourses and practices through which the respectable queer citizen is constructed.

If Israeli gay activism, in its conceptualization of the state as the compassionate protec-
tor of injured queers, supplies the language of victimization, the added utility of the *queer Palestinian* victim in the discourses of Israeli nationalism makes explicit a narrative that might otherwise remain implicit: queer Palestinians are acceptable, and *visible*, only insofar as they mute or renounce their Palestinianness; and the most effective strategy for achieving that goal is to confirm the racist narrative of gay-friendly Israel/homophobic Palestine by becoming the queer Palestinian victim, who flees the repressiveness of “Arab culture” for the oasis of freedom and modernity that is Israel. Most popular references to queer Palestinians are vague invocations of a generic queer Palestinian, whose suffering is taken for granted as a representation of the backwardness of Palestinian (or Arab or “Islamic”) culture and the enlightened liberalism of Israel. Queer Palestinians, in these stories, can not speak: they are spoken for (or spoken of) by queer Westerners and Israelis (most often, Shaul Ganon). But on the rare occasions when queer Palestinians emerge as self-conscious agents who *can* speak, they do so with a voice—and in a language—that conforms to the structure of the dominant narrative of queer Palestinian suffering and that does not offend the sensibilities of their Western/Israeli interlocutors.

20. “Palestinian runaways eke out a dangerous living on Israel’s streets. For these gay men, life in the seedy parts of central Israel is far better than the virtual death sentences they fled in the West Bank and Gaza Strip” (Dan Baron, “For Homosexual Palestinians, Israel is their Best Shot at Safety,” *JTA: Global News Service of the Jewish People*, March 20, 2006, http://www.jta.org/page_view_story.asp?intarticleid=13623); “Palestinians are coming to the Jewish state for the freedom to live as God created them” (Davi J. Bernstein, “Gay Palestinians Suffer under Arafat,” September 13, 2002, *Yale Herald*, http://www.yaleherald.com/article.php?Article=933); “Gay Palestinians have long been sneaking into Israel to enjoy a freedom unknown in their own, much more conservative, society” (“Not So Glad to Be Gay,” *Economist*, June 9, 2007, http://www.economist.com/node/9304285); “So for Nawal [a queer Palestinian from the West Bank] and his friends, the only place where they can pursue a full social life is across the border in Israel” (Matthew Kalman, “West Bank Gays More at Home in Israel: They Fear New Wall Will Trap Them Where Their Lifestyle is Taboo,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 5, 2007, http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2007/02/05/MNG5L5UQAG1.DTL); “[T]he only country in the Middle East in which gay people safely leave the closet is Israel, which is why, for gay Palestinians, Tel Aviv is Mecca” (Kathleen Parets, “For Gay Palestinians, Tel Aviv is Mecca,” *The Jewish Daily Forward*, February 24, 2006, http://www.forward.com/articles/1125/); “After suffering beatings, imprisonment, and death at the hands of their families and the Palestinian Authority Police, many gay Palestinians seek—and often find—refuge in Israel” (StandWithUs, “LGBT Rights under the Palestinian Authority,” 2007, http://www.standwithus.org/pdfs/flyers/LGBT_booklet.pdf).
So begins one popular documentary, *Shunned*, about “the internal struggle” of queer Palestinians, “who have chosen to be who they are despite living in a society that refuses to accept them and shuns their true identity.” In one of the opening scenes, Rian, a gay “Israeli Arab” from Jaffa, reads, in fluent Hebrew, a plaintive poem about the impossibility of “being oneself.” Although the film presents the scene as a spontaneous moment, Rian’s comment at the conclusion of his reading (that “it’s nice, not bad”) suggests a certain intentionality on the part of the director that clearly emerges in the film’s arrangement of images and words. Alternating, for the most part, between interviews with Rian and another queer Palestinian man, Adel—who continually reiterates his family’s inability to accept his homosexuality, an indication, he suggests, of the “primitive” nature of Palestinians—the film juxtaposes images of cold, repressive Palestinian families with tolerant, loving Israelis: Rian’s brother and mother appear briefly to ask, in a judgmental tone, about his participation in the documentary, while the film focuses at length on his friendship with two self-consciously gay-friendly Israeli women; and in one of the final scenes, Rian serendipitously meets an old (Israeli) elementary school teacher, who—all smiles and hugs—radiates a kind of warmth that sharply contrasts with the subsequent image of a veiled, stern-looking Arab woman making coffee. Similarly, while Adel’s family remains absent from the film, he makes it clear how they feel: his father wanted to take him to a psychologist to cure his homosexuality, and “it’s like [his parents feel] they [are] unlucky to have me.” As with Rian, however, Adel finds comfort in the love and support of an Israeli Jewish friend, Katya, whom Adel and the filmmaker visit in Beersheba for a reunion.

This dichotomy, the film suggests, between Israeli tolerance and Palestinian intolerance,

is the source of the existential dilemma queer Palestinians face. “As Israeli Arabs,” Adel explains, “we’ve got the gift of being part of Israel, and because of that gift, we’ve got some kind of rights, of expressing ourselves. The Arab culture does not accept it, but we still have another place to go to.” Relying on a commitment to the essential truth and inflexibility of identity—of Israeliness, Palestinianness (or Arabness), and gayness—the film hints at something tragic, even deficient, in Rian’s rather unapologetic proclamation about his own Israeliness.

I wish I could say that I am a proud gay Palestinian and that my grandfather is from the 1948 Arab era, and I listen to Fairuz and Umm Kulthum every morning when I wake up. But what can I do? I grew up on Dana International . . . and Shiri Mimon . . . I grew up on an Israeli mentality.

In fact, many queer Palestinians, for whom essentialism is just as powerful a force as for anyone, do experience conflicting discourses of identity as a kind of “internal struggle,” as the synopsis on the film’s website describes it. But what is interesting here is that, in the narrative of queer Palestinian suffering, the only intelligible response for queer Palestinians is to renounce their Palestinianness—it, after all, renounces them—and strive to be Israeli, even though, as in the case of Rian—who speaks perfect Hebrew, listens to Israeli pop, and “grew up on an Israeli mentality”—their authenticity will remain forever suspect. Representations of queer Palestinians are potentially threatening insofar as they violate the Zionist erasure of Palestinians generally, but they are conceivable—and tolerable—in the liberal queer Israeli worldview precisely because they confirm (Israeli) perceptions of the collective other by representing queer Palestinians as helpless victims of Palestinian homophobia in need of the benevolence and protection of the Israeli state.

There is also, however, even with proper victims such as Adel and Rian, an added dan-

ger built into the structure of narratives of queer Palestinian suffering. National categories have “been endowed with increasing authority to define and to classify Israel’s population[s] in exclusivist, essentialist terms,” according to which the benefits of national belonging are granted to (or withheld from) certain populations (Handelman 2004, 45); and queer Palestinians—who are exhorted, in representations of their suffering, to repudiate their Palestinianness in favor of a more gay-friendly Israeliness—present a potentially devastating challenge to the essential nature of those terms and the boundaries that define them. But if, as I have suggested, stories of queer Palestinian victims are, in some sense, engendered by an effort to confirm the fundamental goodness—that is, the liberal tolerance—of the Israeli state, their recalcitrant Palestinianness continually emerges as a safeguard against any disturbance to the categorical logic that organizes power in Israel-Palestine.

Culture, the Closet, and the Making of the (Queer) Self

Having worked for fifteen years providing social services and seeking political asylum for homeless queer Palestinian sex workers and drug dealers in Tel Aviv, Ganon has emerged—with a little help from Yossi Klein Halevi and the New Republic—as the local “expert” on queer Palestinians, and in my interview with him, he was at ease making broad, though frequently inaccurate, proclamations about “Arab culture.” Although Ganon is forthright about the racism

23. For example, Ganon incorrectly informed me that the Qur’an is replete with examples of sex between men, “but they don’t call it homosexuality”; that Sura 87 of the Qur’an, which includes no mention of (homo)sexuality, “says very clearly what Muhammad thinks about homosexuality”; that Muslims pray six (rather than five) times a day; and, most interestingly, that the Arabic word for lesbian, sahiqqyya, comes “from the word, ‘games,’ because she’s really just playing games,” a broader statement, for Ganon, about “the Arab culture,” in which a woman who says “I want” will inevitably be answered with, “What? You don’t want. You are a possession of the man.” In fact, sahiqqyya is a derogatory term that comes from the root for “to grind” or “crush,” but if pronounced with a contemporary Israeli Hebrew accent, sounds much like the Hebrew word for “to play.” Most of Ganon’s “knowledge” about “Arabs,” while presented as objective truth, is similarly refracted through the lens of Israeli culture.
Palestinians face in Israel, the bulk of his knowledge production is devoted to locating the *cause* of their suffering in a sometimes quaint but generally repressive “Arab culture.”\(^{24}\) As most racialist ideologies go, Ganon’s analysis of Palestinian homophobia is largely an articulation of the other’s *lack* of what ostensibly constitutes the privileged self. Because the queer Israeli Jewish self is constituted chiefly through the personal/collective journey out of “the closet” and into “visibility,” the metaphor of the closet emerges as the sine qua non of the queer Palestinian.

In hegemonic Israeli formations of queerness, “coming out of the closet” represents the formative rite of passage into proper self-realization. As Mike Hamel explained, queer “emancipation” comes about through “visibility,” which is an “extremely important” element of the overall mission of HaAguda, whose “mantra right now [is] that we are an integral part of Israeli

\(^{24}\) While most Israelis “believe that theirs is a nonracist society because they have no history of biological racism,” and racism against Palestinians/Arabs tends, at least publicly, to be expressed in “cultural” terms, the pervasiveness of biological racism cannot be understated. As Torstrick notes, “physical appearance is commonly used to mark significant others,” from the blond, blue-eyed saba to dark, “Arab-looking” Mizrahim to visibly “black” Ethiopian immigrants (2000, 34). A conversation with Moshe, a “mixed” queer Israeli—his father is an Iraqi Kurdish Jew and his mother is Canadian—illustrates a common refrain from my fieldwork, the emergence of a distinctly biological racism, even among self-declared non-racists, especially in discussions of “attractiveness.”

Jason: You said you’re not attracted to Arabs. Why not?
Moshe: Most of them are not my taste.
Jason: Because?
Moshe: Because of the way they look.
Jason: What do you mean? The way they dress, the way they walk, the way they talk, the way they smell, the way—I don’t know, what?
Moshe: Their facial structure, and they dress a little bit strange. I don’t know. There are some Arabs that I find attractive, but—I don’t know. I prefer dating Israelis.
Jason: Even Mizrahim? You know, for some people, for me sometimes, I can’t look at someone and tell the difference between an Israeli and a Palestinian.
Moshe: I can tell. I can always tell. I haven’t met one Arab that I thought was Israeli. And I’ve seen a lot at work. [Moshe works in a hotel.]
Jason: How can you tell? What do you see?
Moshe: I don’t know. I guess the eyes. You can see in the eyes.
Jason: Really? What about the eyes?
Moshe: Their facial structure looks—they have something unique about it. I’ve seen Israelis, and I didn’t know if they were Israelis or Americans. But Arabs have something special about their facial structure. I think it’s mainly about the eyes.
society . . . part of this weave that makes Israeli society . . . [We want] to start seeing more and more public figures . . . being out, showing themselves as a part of whatever life, if it's in the academy, if it's in the military, in any place.” Visibility, for Hamel and HaAguda, is both a tactic and a goal, the means and the end of gay activism: “the real [gay] emancipation is to become an everyday part of the whole,” to establish queers as normal, productive members of the nation. Sa’ar Netanel, a prominent queer activist, the former owner of Jerusalem’s only gay bar, and the first openly gay member of the Jerusalem City Council, echoed that sentiment and explained that, while “one of the things that the gay community in Israel is fighting [for] is visibility,” queer Palestinians, “even Israeli-Palestinians . . . don’t really have visibility. For them it’s more difficult to come out.”

The question whether queer Palestinians need or want to “come out” and attain “visibility” is rarely asked, and the possibility that the normalizing project of visibility, becoming an acceptable part of the “weave that makes Israeli society,” is “difficult” for Palestinians because they are forever locked out of that “weave” is even less conceivable. Such an admission would, in fact, turn the liberal gay activist project on its head, for it would expose “the logic of the closet” and the call to “come out,” not just as a mechanism that “allows for [a normalized] homosexuality to be included in the national discourse . . . [and] reproduces and perpetuates oppressive heteronormative practices,” but one that reproduces and perpetuates oppressive racist practices that are equally fundamental to the constitution of the nation (Yosef 2005, 286). Because, as I have argued, the only acceptable “out” (read “visible”) queer Palestinian is the victim, the only logical explanation for why “there are no [other] ‘out’ Palestinians,” a constant refrain in my interviews with queer Israeli activists and non-activists alike, is the repressiveness of the racialized collective Palestinian/Arab other.
If one symptom of the pathology that characterizes Palestinian culture—aside from the imagined pogroms against queer Palestinians—is their inability to “come out of the closet,” Shaul Ganon articulated a sophisticated analysis of its etiology: a dangerous combination of Islamic fundamentalism and a tribalistic emphasis on the “honor” of the family, both subsumed under the rubric of an all-encompassing “Arab culture.” According to Ganon, Islam is a profoundly homophobic religion, in which “sex between men is not allowed. The punishment is death. God thinks this way himself.” Given this trenchant Islamic homophobia, queer Palestinians, whom Ganon seems to assume are all Muslims, are in an impossible dilemma, because secularism “doesn’t exist [in Arab culture]. A Jew or anyone [else], you can ask him . . . if he’s religious or doesn’t believe in anything . . . [but] there is no such thing in the Arab culture. It’s whether you are less religious or more religious.”

Arab “culture,” in this formulation, is a static force that absolutely determines the character of Palestinians and an analytic panacea for understanding why they act the way they do. It is constituted, above all, by religion, and it is the antithesis of secular “Western culture.” As Netanel put it, for “Palestinians, their Islamic way of looking at homosexuality is different from how Western culture looks at [it].” Islam, however, is not the only culprit in the Arab cultural crime against queer Palestinians. Ganon expressed an admiration for the “rich” Arab culture, which “has wonderful things . . . that our people, we, coming from the West could learn from,” such as the code of respect for strangers. But, in addition to the stifling influence of religious sentiment, those charming elements of Arab culture are overshadowed by a tribalistic emphasis on “the honor of the family,” which contrasts markedly with Western culture’s respect for the individual and creates an insurmountable barrier to self-realization for queer Palestinians, who cannot “come out” for fear of “shaming” the family.
The overwhelming majority of queer Israelis whom I interviewed described coming out as a liberatory experience, the benefits of which outweigh the risks. (Even most “closeted” queers agreed, describing coming out as one of their greatest aspirations and their inability to do so as one of their greatest sources of angst.) As Yaakov, a young queer Israeli man from Jerusalem explained, “I came out and my family accepted me. But even if they hadn’t, I don’t think I would regret it. I’d rather be alone than have to lie to the world.” Manalansan argues that coming out, understood in mainstream queer discourse as a “liberation from the closet, is founded on a kind of individuation that is separate from familial and kin bonds and obligations” (2003, 23). But as Yaakov expressed it, liberation from the closet and familial/kin bonds and obligations are not separate but equal: the imperative to come out trumps any attachment to family and community.

While the metaphor of coming out thus functions, for many queer Israelis, as an index of their liberation, the metaphor of the closet functions as an index of the suffering of queer Palestinians. “There are no ‘out’ gay Palestinians,” Eli, an avowedly liberal queer Israeli, matter-of-factly informed me as he struggled to explain why he would not consider dating a Palestinian. “Coming out and being open about yourself—this is important to me, but they can’t come out of the closet. It’s too dangerous.” The source of that danger, the perceived barrier for queer Palestinians between the closet and liberation, gets precisely at the heart of the real significance of the closet for queer Israelis: as a disciplinary technique, coming out produces a properly atomized queer subject, severed from—or at the very least, not unduly wedded to—the bonds of family and community and inserted into a manageable collective (of queers). Appropriately, then, in queer Israeli narratives of queer Palestinian suffering, the tyranny of family and community is inevitably represented both as the source of their suffering and of their inability to prop-
erly come out.

However, the omnipotence of culture in determining the character of Arabs extends beyond families and communities—and their refusal to allow queer Palestinians to come out—and beyond the apparently repressive religion of Islam to queer Palestinians themselves. Ganon explained that even those queer Palestinian victims who flee to Israel and repudiate their Arab-ness and/or their Muslimness ultimately cannot escape it. While most normal queers reject religion in favor of Western secularism, “you cannot disconnect an Arab guy from his religion.” As evidence, Ganon recounted a story about an Israeli Jewish friend who was dating a Palestinian man. When the two were “having sex . . . every time the muezzin” performed the call to prayer, the Palestinian said to his boyfriend, “‘Don’t touch me now.’ And he was unable to explain why. It was, in his words, ‘It’s bigger than me.’” And in another story, about another Israeli Jewish friend dating a Palestinian, Ganon explained that queer Palestinians are incapable of ridding themselves, not only of religious sentiment, but the Arab cultural emphasis on family honor. Ganon’s friend and his partner have dated for eighteen years, and the Palestinian partner’s family knows about the relationship, but whenever they come to visit, the couple is forced to arrange the apartment as if they are roommates. The family even, Ganon explained, allows their son to bring his boyfriend to weddings and other events. “But don’t kiss, don’t hug, don’t show it in public. Don’t let people talk . . . And he’s giving them money, supporting them . . . but it doesn’t matter. It’s culture.”

Ironically, although Ganon stressed the impossibility for queer Palestinians of transcending the oppressive elements of their culture, he noted a troubling impulse among many to shed its quaint elements: after finally making it to gay Tel Aviv, they stop speaking Arabic, start dressing differently, and try to pass as Israeli/Jewish. “They see how other people dress, so they
lower their jeans and they buy big belts and some of them [even wear the] Star of David . . .
They try to walk the walk and talk the talk of the Jewish people.” But identity is, for Ganon, not
something to be played with. Jews are Jews, Arabs are Arabs, and eventually, with his help,
“they come to understand that . . . they are Arabs. Nothing will change that.” In an effort to
(re)educate queer Palestinians about their identities, HaAguda hosts a regular support group in
which “we try to teach them back. People like Khalil Jibran, like Emil Habibi. All kinds of texts
and songs. Sometimes we show a movie in Arabic. And they connect back. They say, ‘Oh yes, I
remember . . . my mother used to sing this song.’” Motivated, perhaps, by need to guard against
the destabilizing potential inherent in their encounters with queer Palestinians, Ganon and his
colleagues remind queer Palestinians who they really are and where they do—and don’t—
belong.

While Ganon and many other queer Israelis speak in uniformly negative terms about
“homophobic” elements of Palestinian/Arab culture—ostensibly anti-gay religious mores and
ideas about family and “honor”—there is another “cultural” obstacle to the development of a
properly gay consciousness among queer Palestinians: a wild Arab sexuality in which hypersexu-
al Arab men fuck anyone and anything, for pleasure and pleasure alone (not, that is to say, like
proper gays, for love or higher ideals). Not unlike most other racialized populations, Arabs and
Palestinians become, for Israeli Jews—and in particular, for queers—“a psychic screen on which
to project fantasies of illicit sexuality and unbridled excess” (Boone 1995, 89). According to
Ganon, because of the segregation of the sexes in Arab societies and the importance of female
virginity,

what’s left is to have sex with animals, for instance, like sheep. There are all kinds of
people in the villages that do that. Or between themselves [men]. And it doesn’t mean
anything, if you let someone suck your dick . . . as an active, if you do it with Jewish peo-
ple, with a Jewish woman or whatever, it’s okay. It doesn’t mean anything. They don’t consider themselves as bisexual. . . . Many Palestinians say, ‘As long as I can fuck a woman, that [sex with men or other non-women] is fine with me. You know, a Jewish guy can suck my dick. That doesn’t say anything.’"

To be sure, this hypersexualization of the active Arab man sometimes transforms him from a dangerous racial other into a fetishized dangerous racial other, but what is more interesting for my purposes here is the way in which the perceived Arab sexual ethos is viewed by queer Israelis as a hindrance to the proper development, among Palestinian men who have sex with men, into self-consciously gay men.25 Sa’ar Netanel explained, in less colorful terms, that in “the Islamic way, homosexual [acts] are not connected to if you are gay . . . [to penetrate] old people, the young, or tourists” does not make an Arab man “gay.” But Shaul Ganon, always vigilant in his mission to protect and educate queer Palestinians, assured me that, although it is hard “work . . . to persuade” a Palestinian that he’s “gay,” because he “will have a really difficult time to see himself as a gay man,” with “enough time in Israel, outside of his village,” the transformation might eventually happen. Ganon takes it upon himself, it would seem, not only to fix the broken national/cultural identities of queer Palestinians, but to fix their broken sexual identities, which—ironically, precisely because of their Arabness—resist such fixing.

The Gay Israeli and the Arab World

In his now (in)famous critique of the “Gay International and the Arab World,” Joseph Massad aptly deconstructs the orientalist tendencies of queer Western scholars, activists, journalists, and artists who take an interest in the sexuality of Arabs (Massad 2002; Massad

25. Sexual fetishes among queer Israelis for “active” Arab men are particularly common among those who frequent sex workers, who are generally understood not to be “gay.” One such man, Alon, whom I met in a Jerusalem park known for gay prostitution (not Independence Park), explained to me that he patronizes only Arab prostitutes and that their appeal, for him, lies in the combination of their ultra-masculinity and the danger they pose (as Palestinians). “Once I was even robbed by one of them,” Alon informed me. “But I keep coming back. I’m just more careful now. Maybe the danger is part of the excitement.”
Two of the most popular “scholarly” examinations of same-sex sexualities in the Middle East—Sexuality and Eroticism among Males in Moslem Societies (Schmitt and Sofer 1992) and Islamic Homosexualities (Murray and Roscoe 1997)—justifiably bear much of the brunt of Massad’s criticism. Murray and Roscoe take an unapologetically essentialist approach and reject the “social constructionism” of Schmitt and Sofer, who argue that same-sex behavior in the Arab/Muslim World—the distinction between the two not always being clear—is governed, not by some “identity” construct that attaches particular cultural meanings to those acts, but by an overarching sexual ethos organized around power, masculinity, and “the right of men to penetrate and their duty to lie on top” (Schmitt 1992, 2). As Massad suggests, however, despite the theoretical gulf that ostensibly separates these two collections, both rely in the end on a kind of essentialism in which an all-encompassing (“Arab” and/or “Islamic”) “culture,” stuck in a distant past, absolutely determines the sexuality of Arabs, whose desires and practices are thus “cast as ‘pre-modern’ or ‘unliberated’” (Manalansan 1995, 486).

Massad’s critique of the orientalism of Western representations of queer Arabs is unassailable, and it just as accurately describes their Israeli counterpart, as Shaul Ganon’s explanations on the nature of queer Palestinians, their suffering, and its causes make clear. Like the “Gay International,” Ganon and his colleagues have identified a population of (potential) gays and lesbians, whom they work “to ‘help’ liberate . . . from the oppression under which they allegedly live by transforming them from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who

26. In the conclusion to the volume, for example, Roscoe positions “Islamic” homosexualities, which fit into his and Murray’s taxonomy of homosexualities as “status- and gender-differentiated homosexuality,” on a sort of historical teleology in which all expressions of same-sex sexuality naturally march toward “egalitarian” (Western) homosexuality. “[T]here appears to be a recurrent tendency for . . . status- and gender-differentiated homosexuality . . . to develop . . . not quite the same as but much closer to the contemporary Western category of homosexuality” (Roscoe and Murray 1997, 312-313).
identify as ‘homosexual’ and ‘gay’” (Massad 2007, 162). But what Massad does not appreciate—or at least does not explicitly consider—is the actual significance of those representations for Western (and Israeli) queers, who are, after all, the primary producers and consumers of such representations. As I have suggested, representations of queer Arabs and Palestinians—and international and Israeli activist projects directed at them—are conceivable because they employ the terms of a conciliatory politics of visibility that positions the state as the guarantor of equality, rather than the source of inequality, and desirable because they provide moral and philosophical justification for the violence of the state, which increasingly depends on the imagined threat to the nation posed by the Muslim/Arab/Palestinian terrorist. The queer Arab/Palestinian, in this sense, is little more than a narrative device for conjuring up the image of his oppressor, the all-purpose enemy of the liberal state and its liberal queers: the dangerous, illiberal Arab (terrorist).

In addition, however, to providing a mechanism with which normalized queers insert themselves into nationalist politics by allying with the violence of the state, representations of queer others (especially the queer Muslim/Arab/Palestinian other) stand as a foil against which a properly liberal, properly national queer subjectivity is articulated. Building on Lisa Duggan’s groundbreaking analysis of “homonormativity”—the emergence, in neoliberal contexts, of “a [gay and lesbian] politics [and identity] that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (2002, 179)—Jasbir Puar has eloquently shown how, in the US, the liberal queer “consumer-citizen” is constituted as a subject, not just through consumption practices, advances in “civil rights,” and an allegiance to heteronormative sexual and kinship norms, but
also through an “exceptional form of . . . national sexuality . . . a rhetoric of sexual moderniza-
tion that is simultaneously able to castigate the other as homophobic and perverse, and con-
struct the imperialist center as ‘tolerant’ but sexually, racially, and gendered normal” (Puar
2006, 122, emphasis added). As Puar also suggests, the queer liberal subject—and its biopolitical
incorporation into the life of the nation—depends just as much on the abjection of racialized,
non-national queers. Their suffering and death circulate, not only as an indication of the “intol-
erance” of the nation’s other (and a confirmation of the “tolerance” that gives life to the queer liberal), but as a means of constituting a definitionally necessary antithesis to the queer self, the inadequately queer other, victim and representative of an illiberal “culture,” defined by religious sentiment and collective attachments, that limits the capacity of its queers to properly self-real-
ize as secular, liberal subjects of the biopolitical state.

Whatever their actual motivations—and I do not mean to suggest that they are any-
thing other than benign—Shaul Ganon’s advocacy on behalf of queer Palestinians, HaAguda’s
Palestinian Rescue Project, and the countless Western and Israeli appeals to the plight of queer
Palestinians are all functions of a deeper structural equation of (queer) Israeli life and (queer) Palestinian death: the suffering of queer Palestinians is self-evident to queer Israelis; their suffer-
ing is interpreted as a symptom of an essentialized Palestinian/Arab culture; and the queer
Palestinian subject engendered by it—this intolerant culture and the suffering it creates—has less to do with the reality of queer Palestinian experiences than with those of queer Israelis, who articulate, in opposition to the queer Palestinian, a “normal” queer self, embraced by the lib-
eral state as a secular, rational, individualistic subject, unencumbered by “cultural” loyalties to family and religion.

This arrangement is grounded in an essentialism of categories, the stability and coher-
ence of which require constant policing; and precisely because they present a particular threat to the stability and coherence of those categories—and the forms of subjectivity and politics that depend on them—queer Palestinians require constant policing. So, for example, even when they escape the backwaters of Arab Palestine for Tel Aviv, speak Hebrew, adopt Israeli cultural norms of dress and appearance, and establish romantic relationships with queer Israelis, they remain somehow unable to make the final leap into queerness. Queer Israelis such as Shaul Ganon take up the task of helping queer Palestinians overcome the (Palestinian/Arab) cultural obstacles to realizing their true (queer) selves; and yet, in the rare instances when they succeed—either in effectively passing as Israeli or in fully discarding their Arabness—Ganon reigns them in and reminds them that “they are Arabs” and “nothing will change that.”

In subsequent chapters, I address the significance of these efforts in the everyday lives of actual queer Palestinians, and while queer Palestinians, as particular threats, become particular objects of surveillance, it is important to remember that the normative dictates of queer liberalism apply more broadly, limiting also the possibilities of being for queer Israelis. As a popular Israeli documentary about the controversy surrounding the 2006 WorldPride parade in Jerusalem demonstrates, the threat of the Palestinian other—for the queer Israeli—is rivaled only by the threat posed by the religious fundamentalist, such that secularism and the perceived problem of religion in Israeli society create one of few acceptable spaces from which queer Israelis may offer critiques of the state.27 Even in such critiques, however, the figure of the queer Palestinian lingers as a safeguard against any potential radicalism, a reassurance to the queer

27. A production of InterPride, a consortium of mostly American and European “gay pride” organizations, the second WorldPride event, held every five years, was initially scheduled to take place in Jerusalem in 2005 but postponed because of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the violence surrounding it. Not coincidentally, the first WorldPride in 2000 took place in Rome.
subject and the liberal state about the nature—and integrity—of their bond.

*Jerusalem is Proud to Present* narrates the eventual cancellation of the parade by Israeli authorities as a defeat of Israeli liberalism—and in particular, queer liberalism—by forces of religious fundamentalism. Under pressure from Israel’s powerful orthodox (and ultra-orthodox) Jewish communities, the Israeli police canceled a previously obtained permit, and the queer activists who had organized the march cooperated, opting instead to hold a rally in a tightly guarded stadium. While the state offered “increased terror threats” as its official justification, the film makes it clear that religion, not terror, was the culprit. Interestingly, though, while the state of Israel is not generally beholden to the interests of Muslim (or Christian) fundamentalists, the film utilizes the stories of two particular queer victims—one a Palestinian Muslim, the other an Israeli Jew—to isolate a generalized threat posed by religion to queer liberals.

*Jerusalem is Proud to Present* begins by contrasting the intolerance of religious fundamentalism with the tolerance of queer liberalism. Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, the North American chair of WorldPride 2006, urges an American audience to join the WorldPride festivities and “stand together, Arabs and Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Jews, Israelis and Palestinians, to declare that we believe in a world, in which all deserve to be free.” Back in Jerusalem, Sa’ar Netanel, then-owner of the city’s only gay bar, Shushan, describes the bar as a center of tolerance and diversity that, like the “gay community” generally, offers a radically different vision of the world, one where, as Kleinbaum explained, “all deserve to be free.”

If Jerusalem looked a bit like Shushan, we would be much better off. Every night [you] have a gay man here, sitting beside a religious gay man wearing a skullcap, beside a lesbian girl, a straight couple, an Arab gay man from East Jerusalem, either Christian or

Muslim. Sometimes an ultra-orthodox man comes by. And everyone’s living peacefully here. Everyone feels at home here. This actually is my vision for Jerusalem.

Having established the virtues of queer liberalism, the film goes on to present the stories of two queer victims to illustrate the dangers of religion to the queer liberal’s vision of the world. Boodie, a Palestinian drag queen from Ramallah who performs at Shushan, quickly disappears from the film because, as one character explains, “He has to leave the country because Hamas caught him because he’s gay [sic]. And it’s either leave the country or become a martyr.” Luckily, though, the filmmakers catch Boodie before his exit, and he offers a terrible (but by now familiar) story of victimization:

They [a group of Hamas activists, he later explains] kidnapped me and took me to a mountain. They took cold water and poured it on me. They said, “Admit you’re gay.” They tied my feet and dragged me, humiliated me and spat on me. They tried to shoot me and put a gun in my mouth and told me, “Recite the shahada [a standard declaration of faith in Islam]. You’re going to die now.” And I prayed. I was sure it was the last day of my life.

Unlike Boodie, who appropriately disappears as a character in the story, the film’s other queer victim, Adam Russo—who, two years earlier, was famously stabbed by an ultra-orthodox Jewish protestor at Jerusalem’s gay pride parade—emerges as its hero. After being stabbed, Russo immediately became the posterchild for queer liberalism in Israel (and a poignant reminder of the threat of religious sentiment), regularly appearing on television and in magazine and newspaper articles to speak about issues of “gay rights” in Israel. Ultimately, the film concludes on a bittersweet note as the march is canceled and Russo delivers a fiery speech at the rally in which he berates “those Israeli parliament members who call themselves liberals [but
are] afraid of protecting the rights of other minorities in Israel openly.”

Queerness, as Jerusalem is Proud to Present renders it, is antithetical to religiosity, and the queer subject is necessarily a secular subject. While this formulation of queerness clearly leaves little room for religious queer Israelis, it does, at least, leave room for their redemption, for a queer triumph over religion through a secular (and uniquely Israeli/Western) liberalism not available to queer Palestinians. The film works hard, in line with liberal discourses of tolerance, multiculturalism, and diversity, to equate the suffering of queer Israelis and queer Palestinians. In the end, however, the queer Palestinian fades away, an unredeemed victim of the hopeless illiberalism of Palestinian culture, just as the queer Israeli comes into being, out of (or against) the violence and intolerance of religion, as a guardian of liberal democratic values. “Today,” as one queer Israeli activist in the film says, on the day of the rally, “we’re making the history of Israeli democracy.” But if queer Israelis are the agents of that history, queer Palestinians are its casualties, useful to it—and visible—only as a deathly inverse of the queer liberal subject.

The narrative of queer Palestinian suffering is most often utilized, as I have argued, to defend the state against potential criticism of its treatment of Palestinians by representing it as a liberal democratic sanctuary for queers (and other minorities). In this spirit, the coordinator of iPride—a joint venture between StandWithUs, the Tel Aviv Municipality, and the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs that brought together a number of Western and Israeli queer activists and public figures at a widely publicized conference in Tel Aviv—explained that the project aimed

29. In a more recent documentary, City of Borders (Directed by Yun Suh. San Francisco: Center for Asian American Media, 2009), Boodie and Adam are again featured. To its credit, the film, which is discussed more extensively in Chapter 3, takes an unusually honest approach to Boodie’s rather anti-climactic escape to the US, where he ends up in a small midwestern town that falls short of his expectations of gay-friendly America. The film also, unlike Jerusalem is Proud to Present, depicts the increasingly right-wing, anti-Palestinian politics of Adam, who, in addition to being the consummate secular queer liberal, is a settler in the West Bank.
“to improve Israel’s image through the gay community.”

Apparent, “gays around the world are liberal usually and they tend to identify with the Palestinians,” but the organizers of iPride found that “a bit ironic because you can’t really be gay in the Palestinian territories.”

But even when, as in *Jerusalem is Proud to Present*, criticisms are allowed—even when the *incompleteness* of liberal democracy in Israel is admitted and a queer critique is lodged—the queer Palestinian victim remains, as a grotesque affirmation of the possibility, however faint, of queer Israeli life and an ironic means of holding the liberal state accountable to its own queers.

**You Never Know Who They Really Are: Queer Palestinians as Threats**

In the official discourse of the state—in public relations materials directed at international audiences—Israel is a haven of liberal tolerance that has, in the words of openly gay US congressman, outspoken liberal, and proud defender of Israel, Barney Frank, “established itself as a

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31. In a similar but much more pejorative use of queer Palestinian suffering, queer “radicals” who “identify with the Palestinians” are castigated, not simply as uninformed, but as hypocrites who willfully ignore—or apologize for—the “Palestinian Authority and its totalitarian ethos that seeks to destroy Jews and homosexuals” (Davi J. Bernstein, “Gay Palestinians Suffer under Arafat,” *Yale Herald*, September 13, 2002, http://www.yaleherald.com/article.php?Article=933). “When,” one American queer liberal Zionist asks, “will the progressives who are taking up the mantle of Palestinian freedom also take up the mantle of humane treatment of LGBT Palestinians?” (Libby Post, “Supporting Israel—It’s the Gay Thing to Do,” *SheWired*, January 12, 2009, http://www.shewired.com/Article.cfm?id=21339). Less diplomatic (and unabashedly neoconservative) queers are more explicit in their critiques: “Of all the slogans chanted and displayed at anti-Israel rallies over the past month, surely ‘Queers for Palestine’ ranks as the most oxymoronic . . . . What makes QUIT [Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism] oxymoronic is that their affinity for Palestine isn’t reciprocated. There may be queers for Palestine, but Palestine certainly isn’t for queers, either in the livable or empathetic sense” (James Kirchick, “Queers for Palestine?” *Advocate*, January 29, 2009, http://www.advocate.com/exclusive_detail_ektid71844.asp). And in a similar discussion of QUIT, Michael Lucas flatly states that, “if you are queer and for Palestine it means that you are for the stoning of gay people . . . . the torturing and disfigurement of gay people . . . . the brutal harassment and honor killings . . . because these are the things that Palestinians do to us” (“Queers for Palestine?” *Advocate*, October 5, 2009, http://www.advocate.com/Politics/Commentary/Michael_Lucas_on_Queers_for_Palestine_1). Not surprisingly, when Canadian filmmaker John Greyson refused to attend the Tel Aviv International LGBT Film Festival, in protest of “Israeli apartheid,” he was widely condemned by queer liberals in Israel and abroad for committing “an act of violence both against Israeli gays as well as [gay] Palestinians, for whom this festival is a rare ray of light” and for “slickly [sidestepping] the baltant gay apartheid in Gaza” (Cnaan Lipshiz, “Israeli, Canadian Activists Slam Director for Boycotting Local Gay Film Festival,” *Haaretz*, April 17, 2009, http://www.haaretz.com/israeli-canadian-activists-slam-director-for-boycotting-local-gay-film-festival-1.274278).
place of refuge for gay Palestinians to escape oppression under Palestinian rule.”  

Such statements, if taken literally, would suggest that Israel therefore grants political asylum to queer Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza (or at least tolerates their presence). In fact, however, queer Palestinians are regarded by the Israeli state not as queers but as Palestinians; like all Palestinians, they are ineligible for asylum, and those without proper documentation are subject to detainment, deportation, and other forms of violence reserved for Palestinians.  

Similarly, in the official discourse of queer Israelis (and Westerners), queer Palestinians are uniformly represented as victims, and they are welcomed with open arms into the Israeli “gay community” and its spaces—oases of diversity and tolerance, from community centers where “Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Muslims, and Christians . . . come together to create change” to bars where “Arabs, Jews, Christians, Israelis, visitors, women, men, trans people and the rest of the entire spectrum of sexuality . . . [dance, sing, and flirt] freely and openly.”  

But just as a wide gulf separates what the state says about queer Palestinians and what it does, in practice queer Palestini-


33. In an embarrassing flap, Barney Frank himself was forced to confront the gap between reality and his assumptions about Israel’s treatment of queer Palestinians. In an interview with the Jerusalem Post in 2006, Frank answered a question about “what can be done to counter criticism [of Israel] on the left” by explaining that he “spend[s] a lot of time making the point on gay rights. Israel gives asylum to gay Palestinians who flee the territories for fear of their lives” (Hilary Leila Krieger, “Out in the Open,” Jerusalem Post, January 18, 2006, http://www.house.gov/frank/articles/2006/01-18-06- jerusalem-post.html). Two years earlier, Alan Dershowitz, another prominent liberal Zionist, stated that “I support Israel because I support gay rights. Recently, a progressive congressman, Barney Frank from Massachusetts, worked with me and Israel to grant asylum for 40 Palestinian gays.” Israel, of course, does not—and never has—granted asylum to Palestinian gays. When confronted with that fact, Dershowitz curiously responded, “The reference to working with Barney Frank is incorrect. Barney Frank told [me] the story.” Frank then “confessed to being Dershowitz’s source, to getting things a little wrong, and to confusing ‘house arrest’ and ‘area arrest’ with ‘asylum’—a little like confusing slavery with freedom” (Kathleen Paretis, “For Gay Palestinians, Tel Aviv is Mecca,” Jewish Daily Forward, February 24, 2006, http://www.forward.com/articles/1125/).  

ans are regarded by most queer Israelis much like the state regards them: not as victims but as threats; and in the cultural and geographical spaces of Israeli queerness, marked more by its exclusivity than its inclusivity, queer Palestinians are inspected, policed, subjected to regular forms of symbolic (and sometimes physical) violence, and tolerated—cautiously and unpredictably—only to the extent that they do not challenge hegemonic assumptions about Israeliness, Palestinian-anness, and queerness.

In Chapter 3, I draw on ethnographic research with queer Palestinians to explore how queer Israeli perceptions of queer Palestinians as threats create a kind of “suffering” that radically challenges dominant narratives of queer Palestinian suffering. Here, I want to gesture to the fact that, even as a proper victim of Palestinian homophobia, the queer Palestinian is an ambivalent figure, onto which queer Israelis project all sorts of fears and anxieties; and while that ambivalence is usually kept in check in the careful speech of public figures, it does sometimes surface. Shaul Ganon, for instance, explained that, in addition to Arab/Islamic “culture,” the suffering of queer Palestinians results from widespread Palestinian perceptions of gays and lesbians as potential collaborators with Israel. The absurdity of that proposition is abundantly clear to Ganon. “These boys,” according to Ganon, “are nice, sweet boys . . . [who] don’t even care about the political situation; they just want to be loved.” At the same time, however, Ganon informed me—as he often assures his Western/Israeli audiences—that a number of queer Palestinians in his care have cooperated with Israeli police to expose Palestinian terrorist

plots. It is not clear, in the queer Israeli worldview, whether queer Palestinians are political or apolitical, whether they are with “us” or with “them.” They may be victims, invited to renounce the terror of everything Palestinian/Arab/Muslim in favor of the freedom and democracy of gay-friendly Israel—or they may themselves be terrorists.

Gay Israeli director Eytan Fox’s popular film, *HaBuah (The Bubble)*, makes explicit this confusion about the allegiances of queer Palestinians. The violence of the state is not, in Fox’s film, avoided: Ashraf, the gay Palestinian character, meets his soon-to-be lover, an Israeli soldier, during a violent encounter at a checkpoint. But in a tragic series of events, Ashraf’s Palestinian family—chief among them his hypermasculine, Hamas-affiliated brother-in-law, appropriately named Jihad—discover his queerness and, as one would expect, demand that Ashraf conform to the requirements of normality, respect the honor of his family, and marry his cousin. The film concludes with a poignant allegory of the conflict: Ashraf’s sister, the innocent Palestinian woman, is mistakenly killed by a group of Israeli soldiers responding to a terrorist attack in Tel Aviv. Ashraf—also, like his sister, an indirect victim of Jihad, the generic Palestinian terrorist—is presented with a choice between (queer) life and (Palestinian) death, a choice between fleeing to Tel Aviv and living happily ever after with his Israeli lover (but, in the process, forsaking his Palestinian family), or avenging the death of his sister by becoming a martyr. Frustrating the narrative of queer Palestinian suffering and the teleology of redemption it prescribes,

36. “Gonen [sic] tells of a Palestinian runaway in Tel Aviv who helped catch a terrorist. The gay runaway grew suspicious overhearing an illegal Palestinian laborer speak. The man’s accent was Gazan, but he claimed to be from the West Bank. The runaway reported the laborer to the authorities via an Israeli friend, and police who arrested the laborer discovered he was a terrorist figure” (Dan Baron, “For Homosexual Palestinians, Israel is their Best Shot at Safety,” *JTA: Global News Service of the Jewish People*, March 20, 2003, http://www.jta.org/page_view_story.asp?intarticleid=13623).

Ashraf chooses death, strapping on a bomb and trekking to Tel Aviv, where he explodes, killing himself and his Israeli lover.

To be sure, the film is amenable to alternative readings (in particular, as a critique of the naïveté and inadequacy of queer liberalism), but it is most powerful in—and, I would argue, its enormous popularity among queer Israelis had everything to do with—its use of the queer Palestinian as a device for expressing queer Israeli anxieties about the fragility of a subjectivity allied with the violence of the state, a violence simultaneously condemned as excessive and counter-productive and praised (or at least, justified) as a response to the legitimate threat of Palestinian terrorism (“jihad”). As a suffering queer, appealed to by the paternalism of the liberal state, and a recalcitrant Palestinian, targeted by its violence, Ashraf—the queer Palestinian—embodies the contradictions of Israeli sovereignty. In a tragic ending—tragic for Ashraf and, more importantly, for the queer liberal Israeli—those contradictions collide as he exposes the porosity and constructedness of the borders—between queerness, Israeliness, and their others—to threaten the integrity of the queer/national body.

One Israeli man expressed the danger of this ambivalence about queer Palestinians to me in an appropriately vague story, which he heard from a friend of a friend, about a queer Israeli man who dated a Palestinian. Yehuda informed me that, while he’d never met a real queer Palestinian before, he had heard about one. The queer Palestinian and his Israeli partner “were together for more than a year,” Yehuda explained, “and then [the queer Palestinian] just disappeared one day.” Eventually, the police found his dismembered body in a dumpster. Until that moment, the queer Palestinian had passed as Israeli—speaking perfect Hebrew, taking a Jewish name, and inventing a personal history—and only in his death did his queer Israeli lover discover the truth. “You have to be careful with them,” Yehuda warned me. “You never really
That the queer Palestinian here was murdered in an act of homophobic Palestinian violence was self-evident (and unremarkable) to Yehuda. What was significant and meaningful about the story, rather, was that it expressed the threat posed by the queer Palestinian, even in death, to the presumed inviolability of identity constructs and the ability—and right—to know oneself and one’s others. Yehuda’s fears about the uncertain loyalties of queer Palestinians—and their dangerous ability to pass as something else—similarly undergird much of the activism of Shaul Ganon. While most representations of queer Palestinians work to prop up, by way of opposition to the inadequately queer Palestinian, a queer liberal subject, Ganon and his colleagues at HaAguda work to protect that subject by keeping queer Palestinians in their place. The significance of that project, HaBuah suggests, may be nothing less than to safeguard against the very dissolution of the queer subject, whose bodily and psychic integrity, the film hints, is already fragile.

**Visions of the Other: Colonialism and the Making of the Queer Self**

Black skin splits under the racist gaze, displaced into signs of bestiality, genitalia, grotesquerie, which reveal the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

In his wildly influential article, “Necropolitics,” Achille Mbembe utilizes the concept of “necropower” to understand the multiplicity of discourses and practices, which exist alongside disciplinary and biopolitical forms of power that invest in the creation of regulable subjects and populations—the management of life—to ensure the “maximum destruction of persons [identified as threats to “the people”]” and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead.” Mbembe further argues that “late-modern colonial occupation differs in
many ways from early modern occupation, particularly in its combining of the disciplinary, the biopolitical, and the necropolitical,” and, significantly, that “the most accomplished form of necropower is the contemporary colonial occupation of Palestine” (Mbembe 2003, 27, 40).38

Late-modern colonialism, for all its historical disjunctures from—and refinements of—early modern colonialism, remains similarly dependent on “enduring hierarchies of subjects and knowledges—the colonizer and the colonized, the Occidental and the Oriental, the civilized and the primitive, the scientific and the superstitious, the developed and the underdeveloped . . . dichotomies [which reduce] complex differences and interactions to the binary (self/other) logic of colonial power” (Prakash 1995, 3; see also, Dirks 2006). Within this binaristic logic, racist representations of the “other” take on enormous discursive weight as a means of constituting the (colonial) “self” and legitimating its rightful—even necessary—authority over the other (Sivak 1988). Homi Bhabha understands the production of such knowledges through the framework of the “stereotype,” which is “not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality . . . [but] a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic an social relations” (2004, 107). For Bhabha, the stereotype—and colonial discourse generally—is defined

38. Mbembe relies heavily on Agamben’s theorization of the “state of exception,” the logical outcome of biopolitics, in which “life” and “politics” become indistinguishable and the imagined threat of the racialized/non-national other (the “state of emergency”) justifies the suspension of legal norms and the most extreme reduction of certain populations to “bare life”—as, for example, in the case of Nazi death camps (Agamben 1998; 2005). For Foucault and for Agamben, the emergence of biopolitics is constitutive of a uniquely modern sovereignty. Michael Rothberg, among others, has eloquently criticized this historical myopia and the ways in which it overlooks “the colonial encounter, which in [his] reading constitutes a key moment in the development of biopolitics” (2009, 62). This is an interesting theoretical debate, and while it is beyond the scope of this inquiry, I would suggest that Mbembe’s theory of necropower, together with his emphasis on the historical continuities of “early” and “late-modern” (i.e., contemporary) colonialisms—and the centrality of biopolitics to both—does a lot to recuperate Foucault’s and Agamben’s theoretical lapses.
above all by its ambivalence: the stability and coherence of the colonial self is affirmed through the negation of the other, even as the other comes to embody anxieties about the stability and coherence of that self; “otherness” becomes “at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity” (96), with the “native” object of the colonial project represented as both “progressively reformable” (“innocent as a child . . . mystical, primitive, simple-minded”) and hopelessly unreformable (“embodiment of rampant sexuality . . . the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces”) (118).

With the increasing salience of “national security” discourses in Israel, representations of the dangerous Arab/Palestinian have significantly overshadowed earlier representations, equally central to Zionist philosophy, of “Arabs as Oriental supermen, ‘primitive’ natives who possess all the traits . . . like courage, pride, constancy, passion, a strong sense of self, and love for the land” (Peleg 2005, 75-76). As “sensual, powerful and physical,” Arabs for many early Zionist writers and artists were “the paradigm of rootedness and connection with nature, the absolute opposite of the stereotypical frail, ethereal diaspora Jew” (Zalmona 1991). In recent decades, however, the liberal state, for whom Palestinians once were a problem to be solved, has shed all pretenses of paternalism—at least where Palestinians are concerned—in favor of the “creation of a permanent state of emergency” that aims not to incorporate but to eliminate “entire categories of citizens [and non-citizens] who . . . cannot be integrated into the political system” (Agamben 2005, 2). As a result, “the Arab [has been] transformed into a menace to the Israeli’s very existence, a shadow projected from the innermost depths of the Israeli psyche and preventing the Israeli protagonist from extricating himself . . . from his imprisonment in a state of siege” (Ben-Ezer 1999, 11, emphasis added).
And so, as the state of Israel cautiously incorporates its queers into the life of the nation, its racial others are consigned to a space outside the nation, where death is the rule. And as queer Israelis work to cement their newfound national recognition and consolidate a queer Israeli subject, a uniquely colonial knowledge about queer Palestinians emerges, ambivalent and contradictory, but organized around the overarching themes of suffering and death. Queer victims and queer threats—potential queers who might be reformed but, because of their racial/cultural essence and improper sexuality, never really can be; unreliable queers who manipulate the categories and boundaries that organize the world—queer Palestinians are “deemed to be both the cause and the effect of the system,” both the cause and effect of their suffering (Bhabha 2004, 118). As a subject of the colonial state, the queer Israeli comes to know himself through—and against—the queer Palestinian other: norms of politics and identification are constituted in opposition to the assumed irrationalism, collectivism, and religiosity of queer Palestinians. More interesting (and disturbing), in the end, is the value of queer Palestinian suffering—the obsessive production and consumption of mutilated queer others—as a tool for making real the fantasy of queer life and realizing the “myth of the undifferentiated whole white[/queer] body” (Bhabha 2004, 131): a very queer expression, indeed, of the nature of sovereignty—and the cost of belonging—under late-modern colonialism.
Figure 2.1. Sexual Orientation under the Palestinian Authority is a Matter of Life or Death

The suffering of Tayseer is visually represented in a photograph of a man being dragged along the ground by two keffiyeh-clad Palestinian men. The fine print suggests that, while the victim here is a collaborator (not a queer), this is how queers are treated too.
Israel's laws guarantee equal rights for gay and lesbian Israelis. Gay Israelis:
  - have LGBT organizations and community centers
  - hold gay pride parades
  - are members of parliament
  - serve openly in the military
  - enjoy TV programs with LGBT themes

After suffering beatings, imprisonment, and death at the hands of their families and the Palestinian Authority Police, many gay Palestinians seek—and often find—refuge in Israel. While in Israel they enjoy freedom from persecution, however, Palestinians who illegally enter Israel are subject to deportation.

Figure 2.2. Israel is a Sanctuary to the LGBT Community.

The tragic story of queer Palestinian suffering has a happy ending (in Israel). The publication asserts that queer Palestinians “seek—and often find—refuge in Israel,” even as it notes that those “who illegally enter Israel are subject to deportation,” a fact that might damper the contrast between the “beatings, imprisonment, and death” in Palestine and the “freedom from persecution” in Israel if the reader were informed that queer Palestinians are ineligible (because they are Palestinians) for asylum in Israel.
This postcard, which I appropriated from a bulletin board in the Tel Aviv headquarters of HaAguda, demonstrates the inextricable relationship between queer incorporation and state violence. The fully realized right of Israeli queers to “serve their country” confirms, not only the state’s tolerance of queers, but its democratic nature more broadly and its exceptionalism in the apparently undemocratic Middle East.
A flyer published and distributed by a pro-Israel advocacy group graphically illustrates the “treatment of gay men by the Palestinian Authority.” While the Israeli state enlists its queers to defend the nation, its Palestinian equivalent “arrest[s] and torture[s]” (and apparently hangs) its queers.
CHAPTER 3: REGARDING THE PAIN OF (QUEER) OTHERS

**suffer**: 1. to undergo or feel pain or distress. 2. to sustain injury, disadvantage, or loss. 3. to undergo a penalty, as of death. 4. to endure pain, disability, death, etc., patiently or willingly.

*Random House Unabridged Dictionary*

To designate a hell is not, of course, to tell us anything about how to extract people from that hell, how to moderate hell’s flames. Still, it seems a good in itself to acknowledge, to have enlarged, one’s sense of how much suffering caused by human wickedness there is in the world we share with others.

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

“But it really does happen, Jason,” Amir said to me, dismissing my critique of Eytan Fox’s film, *HaBuah*, that it was a stereotypical representation of Palestinians as a “primitive” people dominated by outdated cultural and religious mores. We had just finished watching the film, and as we discussed it over coffee at a trendy cafe in West Jerusalem—safe, it seemed, from the violence suffered by the film’s two protagonists—Amir, a gay Christian from a middle-class, “socially liberal” family of Marxists, and Fatima, a lesbian Muslim from a devoutly religious, working-class family, lamented the homophobia of Palestinian society and its effects on the lives of queer Palestinians, especially those in the West Bank and Gaza. Both Israeli citizens from the northern region of Israel, Amir and Fatima shared a vague sense of identification with queer Palestinians in the territories, and despite their differences in social class and religious affiliation, both agreed that *HaBuah*’s depiction of Palestinian homophobia was a plausible, if not entirely accurate, portrayal of some queer Palestinians’ experiences.

Like many Palestinian Israelis, Amir’s and Fatima’s knowledge about queer Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza was largely a reflection of Israeli “knowledge” about their lives (and deaths): Fatima, after all, had never visited the West Bank (certainly not Gaza), while Amir recalled only faint memories of a trip with his family to Ramallah as a child. But unlike most queer
Israelis, who do not differentiate between the experiences of queer Palestinians—in terms of geography (Israel, Jerusalem, and the Palestinian Territories), religion (Christian, Muslim, and Druze), legal status (citizen, permanent resident, stateless), and other markers of difference—Fatima and Amir understood the suffering of queer Palestinians depicted in *HaBuah* as a complicated product of social and historical forces (in particular, the Israeli occupation and its effects on Palestinian society)—not, that is to say, as an inevitable expression of Palestinian culture *per se*. The more extreme suffering of “those” queer Palestinians was an odd sort of comfort to Amir and Fatima, an ambiguous indication of a potential violence that, *but for historical accident*, they too might have faced, and evidence that, as Amir said, “things are bad for us, but at least they’re not that bad.”

I begin with this awkward moment—a moment in which my critique of the uses of queer Palestinian suffering was mistaken for a statement that queer Palestinians do not suffer—not to suggest that queer Palestinians such as Fatima and Amir possess a kind of “false consciousness” of the oppressed. To be sure, their perceptions of *other* queer Palestinians, particularly in terms of the extent and intensity of violence they are imagined to face, draw heavily on Israeli assumptions about the intolerance and homophobia of Palestinian “culture.” In the end, though, the question of how the suffering of queer Palestinians is *represented*—and why—was less important to Amir and Fatima than the *fact* that they suffer; and yet, even as they disclaimed any interest in the ideological and discursive utility of queer Palestinian suffering, Amir and Fatima offered a radically different interpretation of it, one that situated the suffering of queer Palestinians—and the violence of which it is an effect—in a particular time and place and that explained it as a result of particular social and historical forces rather than a symptom of the timeless pathology of Palestinian *culture*. 98
In Chapter 2, I attempted—perhaps, at times, unsuccessfully—to remain agnostic about the veracity of Israeli and Western representations of queer Palestinian suffering and ask, instead, what those representations mean for their primary producers and consumers. In this chapter, I offer a reading of queer Palestinian suffering that removes it from the ethereal realm of “culture” and contextualizes queer Palestinians’ heterogeneous, often contradictory experiences—and understandings—of suffering in a (geographical, social, and discursive) space marked by the constant imposition of multiple forms of violence (physical, structural, and symbolic).

“Suffering” is, of course, a slippery concept, which denotes an experience of “pain,” itself a slippery concept, usually inflicted by an act of “violence,” which, if matters were not complicated enough, assumes different meanings in different contexts.1 Furthermore, I am conscious, here, of the fact that “ethnographic truths are . . . inherently partial—committed and incomplete” (Clifford 1986, 7), and I am profoundly skeptical of the fantasy that “the representational form of [ethnographic] writing,” especially when it comes to questions of violence and suffering, can ever really “[find] an objective, neutral vocabulary and analytic framework . . . [that provides] transparency between writer/reader and reality” (Daniel 2000, 335). At the same time, however, I agree with Susan Sontag, who dismissed the “cynical” assertion—in opposition to the critique that “there is still a reality that exists” (despite “the relentless diffusion of vulgar and appalling images”)—that “there is nothing to defend: the vast maw of modernity has chewed up reality and spat the whole mess out as images” (2003, 109). “Radical” as it is, the

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1. Schroder and Schmidt, for example, note that “the categorisation of violence tends to be contested . . . Cultural performances like human sacrifice, which seem extremely violent and revolting to the Western mind [sic], are considered completely legitimate and ordinary by members of other cultures . . . Closer to home [sic], the opinions about the death penalty as a common instrument of justice differ widely from Texas to Germany” (2001, 12).
real problem with that perspective, Sontag argued, is that “it assumes that everyone is a spectator. It suggests, perversely, unseriously, that there is no real suffering in the world” (110).

Following Amir’s and Fatima’s—and Sontag’s—lead, I suggest in this chapter that, in fact, queer Palestinian suffering is real but that it is misrepresented and misinterpreted in the popular discourse of Western and Israeli queers. Any effort on my part to finally and “objectively” represent the “reality” of queer Palestinian suffering (or any other reality) would be naïve and misleading—as it would obscure my role, not as a reporter, but as both a “filter for and interpreter of the data” on which this dissertation is based (Borman et al. 1986, 43). On the other hand, to suggest that the reality of queer Palestinians’ experiences is irrelevant—because there are, in the end, only images and representations—would be “to divorce [my interpretation] from what happens—from what, in this time or that place, specific people say, what they do, what is done to them . . . and render it vacant” (Geertz 1973, 18). Of course, suffering, as I have noted, is a relative term: as the cliche goes, “one man’s dream is another man’s nightmare.” That does not imply, though, that suffering is not real, only that it is experienced and understood as such—it becomes real—in a given cultural and historical context, governed by structural and discursive arrangements that facilitate the imposition of violence on certain individuals and groups.

In this chapter, I begin by exploring the broader significance of suffering as an organizing trope in the discourses of Israeli and Palestinian nationalism. Turning, then, to my ethnographic data, I attempt, first, to demystify—but not, of course, justify or “apologize” for—Palestinian violence against queer Palestinians as a complex product of particular historical-social forces. Moving on, then, to my ethnographic data, I offer a narrative of queer Palestinian “suffering” oriented around the metaphor of the “checkpoint.” In hegemonic Western and Israeli represent...
sentations, queer Palestinian suffering is understood primarily as a result of their inability to “come out of the closet” (itself a result of the pathologies of Palestinian culture). By drawing attention to the violence of the state, the metaphor of the checkpoint, I argue, more accurately captures the reality of queer Palestinian suffering as I witnessed it and as it was described to me. Offering an alternative interpretation of the multiple forms of violence queer Palestinians actually face—and the ways in which they experience and themselves interpret that violence—I situate the suffering of queer Palestinians “in the larger social matrix in which it is embedded” (Farmer 2005, 30) and analyze it as a form of social suffering that “results from what political, economic, and institutional power does to people” (Kleinman et al. 1997a, ix). In so doing, I suggest that Western and Israeli representations—which, like all “representations are interpretations” (McRobbie 1991, 69)—of queer Palestinian suffering are deficient, not in their assertion that queer Palestinian suffering exists—that, as Amir said, “it really does happen”—but in the claims they make about why it happens and what it means.²

Suffering Nations

Organized around the memories of two historical traumas, the Holocaust and the Nakba, Israeli nationalism and Palestinian nationalism legitimate their aspirations and demands—the claims they make about themselves and the world—by continually drawing on narratives of suffering and victimization. While Israeli nationalism, unlike Palestinian nationalism, has realized its dream of statehood, both remain, much more so than most nationalisms, fundamentally contest-

². Admittedly (and unapologetically), I plead guilty to the crime of ascribing greater authority to this text than, for example, to those which I critiqued in Chapter 2, based on a “claim to represent a world as only one who has known it first-hand can” (Marcus and Cushman 1982, 29). My “first-hand” knowledge of the world queer Palestinians inhabit is incomplete—and paltry, of course, in comparison to their knowledge of it—but if it does not equip me with the capacity to at least offer a “better,” more reliable, or more convincing representation/interpretation of their reality, then the whole anthropological project is, as far as I can tell, a waste of time.
Their defensive reliance on metaphors of suffering and victimization may have something to do with a growing popular consensus, particularly among liberal humanists, that “nationalism is the main cause of bloodshed in our times” and “new” (or disputed) “national rights” are legitimate only as “corrective means, as a way to right a wrong, to compensate those who were victimized by [another] nationalism” (Tamir 1993, ix). But if suffering is thus established as a valuable moral/ethical argument in support of nationalism, it takes on even more currency in the context of the biopolitical state, whose sovereign right to impose the “state of exception” hinges on the identification of threats to the nation: suffering then becomes an ironic vindication—and indication—both of the right of the nation to exist and of the reduction of its threatening other to “bare life” (see Agamben 1998; 2005, discussed more extensively in Chapter 1).

The “key element” of Israeli nationalism, Rebecca Torstrick argues, “is the victimization of the Jewish people,” evidenced in a “catalog of suffering [that] begins with the Egyptian captivity and Babylonian exile; swells to include persecutions suffered in different lands at various times during their exile (diaspora); peaks during the horror of the Holocaust; and culminates in the losses suffered in five wars” and ongoing violence (by Arabs and Palestinians) against the forever embattled state of Israel. This history—and present—of suffering, Torstrick further suggests, works to legitimate “the national concern with security, in which the state of Israel, as the sole legitimate protector of the Jewish nation, stands alone against a hostile world” (Torstrick 2000, 31). Baruch Kimmerling argues even more forcefully that “the code of security”—a set of “militaristic and power-oriented values . . . [oriented around] the perceived need

3. In fact, that discourse, Tom Nairn argues, has a longer history in leftist and socialist critiques of nationalism—what Nairn calls “internationalism”—which held that “all nationalist struggles and movements are bad,” except in “special” circumstances (i.e., anti-colonial nationalisms) marked by “an adequate quote of suffering” (1997, 39).
for institutional violence . . . [and] permanent preparation” for war—is “all that remains of the original Israeliness of Israel” (2001, 209). Setting aside the curious claim that there is (or was) some “original Israeliness,” Israel is, most scholars agree, governed by a “militant national security culture,” in which “Arab threats” are regularly invoked to represent the nation as a potential (if not actual) victim, whose survival requires constant vigilance (Shapiro 2000, 87). The Holocaust, in this context, is a powerful national symbol not just of the historical suffering of the Jewish people but the potentiality of their continued suffering, against which the militaristic state is the only safeguard. As “the constituent myth of the Zionist-Israeli meta-narrative,” the discourse of the Holocaust facilitates the perpetual “Nazification of the enemy, whoever that enemy may be, and the transformation of security threats into danger of total annihilation” (Zertal 2005, 167, 174).

Much like its Israeli counterpart, Palestinian nationalism is also organized around a historical tragedy: the Nakba, an Arabic word meaning “catastrophe” that refers to the uprooting and dispersal, upon the establishment of the state of Israel, of some 700,000 Palestinians and the subjection of the approximately 150,000 who remained to a government that would appropriate their lands and regard them—in the most optimistic assessment—as second-class citizens. While the memory of the Holocaust is continually recalled as a warning about what happens when threats to the people go unchecked, the narrative of the Holocaust in the discourses of Israeli nationalism is one of their “destruction and redemption” in the land of Israel (Young 1993, 212, emphasis added). The Nakba, on the other hand, “overshadowed by the heavy presence of what was represented and understood internationally as a birth or rebirth,” became a story (without a happy ending) of “fear, helplessness, violent uprooting, and humiliation. It embodies the unexpected and unstoppable destruction that left [Palestinians] in disarray, politically,
economically, and psychologically” (Abu-Lughod and Sa’di 2007, 4, 9). In the years after 1948, Palestinian nationalism coalesced around the narrative of the Nakba to create a “culture of victimhood,” in which the continued suffering of Palestinians—which, ironically, was often likened to the suffering of Jewish victims of the Holocaust (Webman 2009, 35)—constitute the only means for calling “the world’s” attention to the plight of Palestinians and evidence of its indifference (see, e.g., Masalha 2005).

More recently, the emergence of a sort of human rights industry in the Palestinian Territories has only heightened the significance of suffering as the prism through which people “come to see and show themselves.” Where suffering, in Israeli discourse, validates the sovereign power of the state—as an armament against the threat of the non-national (Palestinian) other—in Palestinian discourse, “the bare lives . . . of bloody corpses,” as metaphors of the broader suffering of Palestinians, are offered up to critique the “sovereign through the very forms that are the basis of its authority . . . [and] make the simple point . . . that the occupation does have the ultimate control over . . . their lives and deaths” (Allen 2005, 195-196; see also Allen 2009). The grotesque reality of Palestinian suffering, then, becomes the only articulable critique of Israeli sovereignty, while the memory/possibility of Israeli/Jewish suffering sits at its heart.4

In the end, both the Israeli and the Palestinian narratives of suffering—organized around the key moments/symbols of the Holocaust and the Nakba—inscribe a certain telos. The suffering Jew is redeemed in the Promised Land, and a “new Jew” emerges, “the pioneer and Sabra, a

4. While the claims I have made here apply broadly (but in different ways) to Palestinians in Jerusalem, Israel, and the West Bank and Gaza, for Israeli Palestinians, the Nakba—and the larger discourse of Palestinian suffering—is further complicated by the fact that it simultaneously signifies their connection to Palestinians generally and their disconnection: as Israeli Palestinians, their Palestinianness is always suspect.
proud and self-respecting Jew who heroically [understands] the nation’s enemies and even [defeats] them,” unlike the weak “Diaspora Jew, who was ostensibly led ‘like a lamb to the slaughter’” (Almog 2000, 83). Never, of course, redeemed, the suffering Palestinian resists, defined now, not by the imagined paralysis—and weakness—of Arabs and Palestinians in the face of the Nakba, but by the courageous resistance of the Palestinian fighter, committed to armed struggle and revolution (see, e.g., Schulz 1999). In Chapter 4, I turn to the notions of redemption and resistance and interrogate their significance (or not) in the lives of queer Palestinians, as a way out of—or a way of dealing with—the experience of suffering. But here I want to ask: What is that experience? What kinds of violence are actually imposed on queer Palestinians? And what does it mean—what does it feel like—to suffer its effects?

Suffering Queers

In the popular discourse of Israeli queers, queer Palestinian suffering is understood—and represented—almost exclusively as a physical experience. As embodied subjects, queer Palestinians, as I will show, do quite often suffer in very physical ways (although, as I will also show, the sources of that suffering are not always the same as those in popular representations). But the danger of this obsession with physicality is that it represents violence (and the suffering it engenders) as a primarily somatic phenomenon and obscures less obvious forms of violence (and less obvious ways of suffering). Slavoj Žižek articulates a “triumvirate” of violence that includes “directly visible ‘subjective’ violence . . . performed by a clearly identifiable agent” and two forms of “objective” violence: the “‘symbolic’ violence embodied in language and its forms” and “‘systemic’ violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (2008, 1-2). Žižek’s distinction between these forms of violence is not, of course, anything radical: Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence draws attention
to the subtle (i.e., not obvious) ways in which “the dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural” (Bourdieu 2001, 39), and many others have employed the concept of “structural violence” (and its corollary, “social suffering”) to understand forms of violence “built into the [social] structure” (Galtung 1969, 171), from poverty to unequal access to healthcare, a violence that is “exerted systematically—that is, directly—by everyone who belongs to a certain social order” (Farmer 2004, 307; see also, e.g., Bourgois 1996; Cohen 1998; Kleinman et al. 1997b; Scheper-Hughes 1992). What is really useful about Žižek’s theorization of violence is his analysis of the relationship between its multiple forms:

The catch is that subjective and objective violence cannot be perceived from the same standpoint: subjective violence is experienced as such against the background of a non-violent zero level. It is seen as a perturbation of the “normal,” peaceful state of things. However, objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this “normal” state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent. Systemic violence is thus something like the notorious “dark” matter of physics, the counterpart to an all-too-visible subjective violence (Žižek 2008, 2).

In Chapter 2, I interrogated hegemonic Israeli and Western narratives of queer Palestinian suffering. For a number of important reasons, I want to resist the impulse to similarly reduce queer Palestinians to a series of images of physical brutalization and suffering. In the first place, as Elaine Scarry notes, physical pain is characterized by an impossible “unsharability . . . [a] resistance to language” (1985, 4). More importantly, though, as Žižek suggests, the “fascinating lure of . . . directly visible” violence may actually impair our ability “to perceive the contours of the background which generates” such violence and, ironically, “sustains our very efforts to fight violence” (2008, 2). A “focus solely on the body and its violation” also, as Ross argues in her discussion of women’s testimonies at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commis-
sion, “fixes an experience of violence in time, in an event, and draws attention away from ways of understanding that experience as a process that endures through time” (2001, 271). Finally, and not insignificantly, many of the queer Palestinians I met did not chiefly narrate their struggles—the pain and suffering they endured—in physical terms. Instead, they shared experiences—and understandings—of suffering (quite often contradictory) that, rather than implicating an identifiable actor who had violated the sovereignty of the individual body, implicated broader forces—sometimes, in fact, so appallingly broad that they could not be identified—and that situated their particular suffering in a history of collective suffering—sometimes queer, sometimes Palestinian, sometimes queer Palestinian.

But such is, of course, not always the case, and so I start with a more conventional narrative of suffering that conforms to—rather than confounds—the expectations of the queer Western/Israeli consumer of Palestinian.

This Is What It’s Like to Be Gay and Palestinian . . . Or Is It?

In the summer of 2006, a few days into my first visit to Israel-Palestine (for “preliminary fieldwork”), I met Tariq, a 21-year old gay Palestinian Muslim from a middle-class family in East Jerusalem. After chatting briefly on a popular website, we decided to meet for coffee at a nearby cafe. Not yet having developed a real sense of—or sensitivity to—the practice of ethnographic fieldwork, I explained almost immediately that I was a doctoral student in anthropology and that I was generally interested in “understanding what it’s like to be gay and Palestinian.” Tariq opened up with a slew of slurs about the backwardness and intolerance of Palestine—which he would gladly abandon, if only he were not stuck there—before unbuttoning his shirt to reveal a scar extending along his chest from his collarbone to his armpit. “They did this to me,” he said. “This is what it’s like to be gay and Palestinian.”
Tariq related a story that—perhaps because of its poignancy, perhaps because of my “freshness” in the field—stuck with me: He was on a first date in Tel Aviv with an Israeli man, and as they walked down the street holding hands, a group of Palestinian men from Tariq’s neighborhood approached the two. “What are you doing here?” they asked. “And why are you holding hands with him?”

“But,” I interjected, “Arab men hold hands all the time. What did they see wrong with that?”

“That’s true,” Tariq said, “but he wasn’t Arab—he was Jewish, so they knew.”

Sensing danger, Tariq’s Jewish date fled, and the group of Palestinian men proceeded to hold him down while one among them pulled out a knife and stabbed him in the chest. The men left Tariq to die on the street, but he managed somehow to summon the strength to hail a taxi and take himself to the hospital.

More shocked than skeptical—the proof, after all, was displayed in all its grotesquerie when Tariq revealed his scar—I asked the obvious questions (obvious, anyway, to me). “How did you find the strength to hail a cab and take yourself to the hospital? What did you do? How did you survive? Did you call your parents?”

“No,” Tariq said, with a kind of finality that demanded my admiration. “I went to the hospital. They stitched me up. I told my parents I was mugged.”

More than a year later, when I returned to Jerusalem for my fieldwork, I became close friends with Tariq’s best friend, Sami. In a casual conversation one day, when I inquired about the sexual orientation of a young man I had met at a dinner at Tariq’s home (prepared by his mother and with his family and a group of friends—most of them queers—in attendance), Sami laughed and informed me that he was “a slut and all the boys in the neighborhood have fucked
That such knowledge was widespread and unremarkable—and would go unpunished—was surprising to me, and I recalled Tariq’s story of victimization.

“What are you talking about?” Sami asked and then informed me, after I elaborated, that Tariq’s scar had nothing to do with his gayness. “He was walking by the Old City late one night, and a group of drunks cut him and took his wallet and phone.”

Deciding that the matter should not be pursued, I accepted Sami’s correction and dismissed my confusion as the result of poor memory. Several months later, though, I conducted a formal, recorded interview with Tariq, and I asked him to recount the details of his story, which had, in fact, changed considerably since I’d first heard it a year earlier:

Jason: So I wanted to ask you about it—you told me about the time—
Tariq: Yes, this [pointing to his scar]. I was just walking with a friend, and some neighbors—not neighbors, they live on the same street [as my family here] and work in Tel Aviv.
Jason: And you were dating him? Or he was just a friend?
Tariq: It was kind of the first and last date. Of course he wasn’t going to see me again after that.
Jason: He’s Jewish?
Tariq: Yeah.
Jason: So what happened?
Tariq: They just caught me by surprise. I didn’t think they were—they were just talking, saying manyak [an all-purpose Arabic word for a “pervert” or “sexual deviant,” literally the passive noun for “one who is fucked”].
Jason: This is—they had said that before, or this was the first time?
Tariq: I get that when I walk in [my neighborhood]. Girl, manyak, blah blah blah. I don’t know why. I mean, I’m not—I’m gay, I look gay, but I’m not that gay, I think.
Jason: So you were in Tel Aviv with this friend. Were you holding hands or did they see you—
Tariq: Yeah, holding hands.
Jason: And they’re yelling at you.
Tariq: Just making fun of me.
Jason: And so what did you think? Did you think—I’m trying to imagine how you must have felt when this happened. Were you scared, or you just thought, “Oh, these are idiots”?
Tariq: I am used to it, getting these things. Last night, Sami and I were walking on the main street in [the neighborhood], and they were like—somebody was in the car and they yelled “homo.” I laughed. Sami and I laughed. Sami asked, “Who was
that?" I said, "I don’t know. They said ‘homos.’" I know, we are, but I don’t care. I get that. I never said to anybody, “I’m gay,” but I guess if you’re not a man with hair on your face, with a knife in your pocket, and a cigarette in your mouth, you’re not a man.

Jason: So, back to that story—they were yelling at you—

Tariq: And then they told me to stop, and I ignored them and continued walking. Then they came and said, “We told you to stop.” I said, “So what are you going to do if I don’t stop?” Then he took the knife and—that’s it.

Jason: And where was your friend?

Tariq: He was with me. He helped me. He took me to the hospital, and I got my treatment there. I have Israeli medical insurance, so—

Jason: So, what? They stabbed you and ran away?

Tariq: Kind of. They stabbed me, and they just walked. They didn’t even run away. But then my parents didn’t know I was gay, so I didn’t do anything about it.

Jason: What did you tell them happened?

Tariq: Just that some people wanted to steal from us, and, you know, because the same thing happened to me last December, exactly around this time last year. On the 14th of December, I was coming back from Jaffa Street to East Jerusalem, and seven guys with knives attacked me and took my wallet and my phone.

Jason: Arabs?

Tariq: Yeah.

Jason: And do you think the fact that you’re gay had anything to do with it?

Tariq: No. Just random drunk thieves.

In the interest of frankness, my suspicion is that Tariq fabricated his initial story of victimization—that, as Sami suggested, and as Tariq himself seemed to indicate, he was actually mugged by a group of “random drunk thieves.” At the time, that suspicion aroused in me a sense of discomfort—and a lingering set of doubts—about the nature of my research and my romantic assumption that the “rapport” I had, like any good ethnographer, worked so hard to build would translate into some pure exchange based on “honesty” and “trust.” Ultimately, though, the possibility that Tariq’s story is not “true” in an objective sense is more interesting because of the deeper truth it reveals about the availability—and value—of Western/Israeli narratives of queer Palestinian suffering as means of understanding actual experiences of violence (that may have nothing to do with “Palestinian homophobia”) and articulating the reality of suffering for many queer Palestinians.
These issues are poetically amplified in the story of Yusuf, a queer Palestinian man from Ramallah who would become, in some circles, the posterchild for queer Palestinian suffering. Even before I had met him, a number of queer Israelis shared one version or another of Yusuf’s story with me as evidence for their claims about the violence queer Palestinians face. An aspiring singer/actor/performer, Yusuf has recounted his story in various popular Western and Israeli sources (which, in an effort to protect his identity, I do not list here): Yusuf and a friend, the story goes, were kidnapped by a group of Palestinian men, who brutally tortured the two and threatened them with death if they did not desist in their queer activities/behaviors and conform to proper norms of masculinity. As with Tayseer (discussed in Chapter 2), their story was widely circulated among Western and Israeli queers, who successfully lobbied on their behalf for asylum in—and financed their transfer to—Western countries.

Yusuf has offered a number of very different accounts of his experience: sometimes, for example, the perpetrators are Hamas activists, sometimes Palestinian police; sometimes the two are physically beaten and tortured, sometimes the abuse is only verbal and they are threatened with physical violence; sometimes they are taken to an empty field, sometimes to an abandoned building, and so on. Because of these discrepancies—in addition to rumors that Yusuf and his friend fabricated the story as a ticket out of the West Bank (going so far, the rumor has it, as to inflict physical wounds on one another to make their story more credible)—most queer Palestinians regard Yusuf’s story with a great deal of skepticism. Yusuf, of course, insists
that his story is true and that suggestions to the contrary are motivated by jealousy. One queer Palestinian from Ramallah confirmed at least his resentment of Yusuf, who “got a free ride out, while we’re all still stuck here.”

Tariq’s story of suffering illustrated the significance of Western and Israeli narratives of queer Palestinian suffering, for some queer Palestinians, as a sort of “structure of feeling,” a discursive formation wherein “the objective and the affective . . . the doubleness of culture . . . [as] material reality and lived experience” come together and are negotiated (Eagleton 2000; see Williams and Orrom 1954). Yusuf’s story, on the other hand, demonstrates not just the utility of those narratives as a way of making sense of the world but their ideological—and material—currency in a world that generally deprives Palestinians access to such resources.

Finally, the skepticism and disbelief of most queer Palestinians, when confronted with stories of “obvious” (i.e., physical) violence against queer Palestinians by Palestinians paints a very different picture of Palestinian “culture” (different, that is, from the Palestinian “culture” of Western and Israeli discourse). This might, at first glance, seem like a paradoxical statement, given the anecdote with which I began this chapter, in which a queer Palestinian cautioned me that the violence represented in HaBuah “really does happen.” What Amir was really saying, I want to suggest—in a perhaps arrogant interpretive move—was that “it could happen.” Within Palestinian society, queer Palestinians do, in fact, face multiple forms of structural and symbolic violence, which do not regularly—certainly not in “epidemic” proportions—translate into phys-

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5. Yusuf and I have what I consider a “friendly” relationship. However, for reasons he did not elaborate, he declined multiple requests for an interview. When I expressed my confusion—and frustration—to a mutual friend, he explained it like this: “Yusuf wants to be famous, and he knows your dissertation isn’t going to make him famous.” There may be some validity to that explanation, but I would re-interpret it in a less judgmental way, as an indication of Yusuf’s very strategic use of what is, after all, his story.
ical violence but nonetheless make such violence conceivable. But that most queer Palestinians respond with skepticism to specific claims of “homophobic” physical violence—claims made in the realm of everyday life, by “real” people, rather than avowedly fictional claims which ask only that one imagine some possibility—indicates that such violence is not “normal” and exposes as ignorance (or willful misrepresentation) Western and Israeli declarations that there is “a vicious campaign against” queer Palestinians, who are subjected to an “intense, violent homophobia” that requires that they be “publicly hanged, stoned, mutilated, [and] thrown from . . . roofs—often by their own families (Aviv and Shneer 2005, 135).”

Palestine and Its Queers

To suggest that popular representations of Palestinian violence against queers distort the reality of that violence—or to critique the ideological uses of those representations—is not, as I have said, to suggest that it does not exist. But in order to understand it, one must contextualize it in the long and complicated history of the Palestinian experience—a collective experience of displacement and victimization—and the particular histories of Palestinians in Israel, Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the diaspora.

The Presence/Absence of Queers under the Law

There is a widespread presumption among Western and Israeli queers, not only that Palestinian “culture” is violently homophobic, but that this homophobia is reflected in and supported by the systems of law—in the policies and everyday practices of the political regimes—


7. Although I suspect that many of my arguments might apply, in very different ways, to queer Palestinians in Gaza and in the diaspora, my research focused on—and I confine my remarks here to—the experiences of Palestinians in Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank.
that govern Palestinians in the territories. (Palestinians in Israel and Jerusalem are subject to
Israeli law, which, needless to say, is generally construed as “modern,” progressive, and gay-
friendly.) The Palestinian National Authority—the quasi-sovereign administrative entity estab-
lished in 1994, pursuant to the Oslo Accords, to govern parts of the West Bank and Gaza—is
typecast, in stories of queer Palestinian suffering, as a generic Arab/Muslim terrorist organi-
zation that is “conducting a vicious campaign against its own homosexual population,” whom it
“systematically harasses” and an entity that “uses Islamic law” to justify torture and impose
harsh punishments ranging from extended jail sentences to death; that, in short, “the torment
of gays is very nearly official Palestinian policy.”

In fact, however, Palestinian “law” in the West Bank specifies no penalties for—nor
makes any mention of—same-sex sexual acts. While criminal law in the Gaza Strip continues to
apply British Mandate law, which does criminalize sex between men, in the West Bank, courts
abide by the Jordanian Penal Code, which decriminalized “sodomy” in 1951 and set the age of
consent, without regard to gender, at 16 (Ottosson 2007; Sable 2010; Schmitt and Sofer 1992;
regarding the general applicability of Jordanian law in the West Bank, see Welchman 2000). This
absence of illegality does not necessarily signal approval (or even “tolerance”) of same-sex be-
havior—that Palestinians (and Arabs/Muslims generally) have “ignored . . . mildly negative [and
primarily religious] attitudes toward homosexuality” to treat it “with indifference, if not admira-
tion” (Boswell 1980, 194)—but rather that, historically, “homosexual behavior” did not warrant

http://www.advocate.com/exclusive_detail_ektid71844.asp; Libby Post, “Supporting Israel—It’s the Gay Thing to
is Better Than the Paradise of Arafat,” Middle East Quarterly, Spring 2005, http://www.meforum.org/702/the-hell-of-
israel-is-better-than-the-paradise; Yossi Klein Halevi, “Tel Aviv Dispatch: Refugee Status,” New Republic, August 19,
mentioning in Palestinian legal-juridical discourse because it did not assume the same—or even a comparable—kind of symbolic weight that propelled Western legal efforts to regulate and repress it.

To be sure, “homosexual” behaviors existed, and their seemingly unstigmatized appearance (contra Europe) was an object of considerable fascination for Westerners as long ago as 1885, when Sir Richard Francis Burton detailed the prevalence of “the Vice” among Arabs and Muslims in his scandalous “Terminal Essay” to *The Arabian Nights*. The content and meaning of those acts (and the extent to which they did or did not attach to some identity formation) have been extensively debated elsewhere. I am more concerned here with the fact that, even when—for example, in the discourse of some religious scholars—same-sex acts (or desires) were condemned as “sinful” or “unnatural,” they were not “seen as instances of one overarching phenomenon,” i.e., “homosexuality,” that described an identifiable *population* of subjects (El-Rouayheb 2005, 6). El-Rouayheb, in one of the most careful and well-documented analyses of “pre-modern” or “classical” Arab discourses on same-sex sexualities, shows three dominant “cultural strands” in discussions of same-sex behavior and desire (between men): (1) “Sexual intercourse [was] a polarizing act in which the dominant, ‘male’ penetrator asserts his dominance over the subordinate, ‘female’ penetrated. The active and passive . . . [were] assimilated to opposing sides of the fundamental dichotomy between genders.” (2) Same-sex desire (and some-

9. Samar Habib, for example, takes an even more radically essentialist approach than Murray and Roscoe (1997) to document “evidence of (a medieval) Arabian epistemology of sexuality, desire and identification, whose features feel strangely contemporaneous with recent discourses on sexuality” (2007, 22). Schmitt and Sofer (1992), on the other hand, offer a dangerously ahistorical, decontextualized account of “sexuality and eroticism among males in Moslem societies” that draws on religious and literary texts to describe an exotic, unchanging Arab/Muslim sexuality organized chiefly around penetration. Others have offered much more sophisticated analyses of such texts—e.g., the contributors to Wright and Rowson’s volume, *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature* (1997)—but still sometimes fall into the trap of reading contemporary phenomena through classical texts (e.g., Rowson 1991).
times, behavior) was “dissociated . . . from the fornication and sodomy condemned by religious law” through an aesthetic idealization of “a man’s love of beautiful women and [male] youths.”

(3) “The religious-juridical strand focused on acts to the exclusion of desires and inclinations. . . . [and while there was] no single juridical concept, and no single punishment . . . sexual acts between men were part of the general category of unlawful intercourse.” However, sexual desire for—and even the non-physical expression of “love” for—young, beautiful men was neither “punishable” nor “objectionable . . . [for] a significant number of Islamic scholars” (153). It was not, Rouyaheb suggests, until the onset of colonialism and subsequent efforts to “modernize” (and sometimes “Westernize”) Arab cultures and societies that an overarching concept of shudh jinsi (“sexual perversion”) was adopted in medical-scientific and literary discourse to disavow all forms of same-sex desire and behavior—a concept that, however, “has never really been [widely] adopted” in Arab societies, in which “it is still a common assumption, particularly in the less westernized segments . . . that engaging in homosexual intercourse as an ‘active’ partner does not compromise one’s masculinity, nor reveal any constitutional abnormality” (161).

My research with queer Palestinians attests, in many ways, to the continued relevance of the “cultural strains” El-Rouayheb identifies,10 but the crucial point I want to emphasize is that, in Palestinian society, as in most Arab—and many Muslim—societies, the concept of “homo-sexuality” does not have deep historical/cultural salience, and same-sex acts have generally been

10. For example, I met a large number of men who engaged, as “actives,” in intercourse with other men. For most of these men, the concept and discourse of “homosexuality” were by no means unfamiliar; they chose simply to draw on another sexual epistemology, in which sexual acts need not dictate one’s “identity.” Moreover, stories of early adolescent sex with older men emerged in my research with an unexpected frequency (unexpected to me anyway). Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, such experiences tended to be reflected on and understood as traumatic or painful—that is to say, as “molestation” or “rape”—only by those men identified as queer (or “gay,” “homosexual,” etc.).
understood within a very different logic, which neither condoned nor (“violently”) condemned them. Queers have, for the most part, been absent from legal and political discourses in Palestinian society, and their emergence in popular and nationalist discourse—among Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank—is a recent phenomenon that makes sense only against the backdrop of key historical developments, all of which are inextricable from the defining factor in the Palestinian experience of “history”: the ceaseless imposition of Israeli state violence.

Collaboration and the Rise of Islamism

For their part, knowing that gays are despised in the PA [Palestinian Authority], the Israeli police and military apparatus target Palestinian gays for blackmail, thus turning many into their own informants. All this is turn feeds the hatred and mistrust of gays in the PA, and the perception that we are “collaborators.” The PA police accordingly seek to “smoke out” every homosexual and secure him as their agent and informant. Those who do not cooperate are harassed, beaten, tortured, imprisoned and eventually killed.

D, a queer Palestinian man from the West Bank, quoted in Michael Kagan and Anat Ben-Dor, *Nowhere to Run: Palestinian Asylum-Seekers in Israel*

Whatever the validity of D’s empirical claim about the extent and regularity of violence queer Palestinians face as suspected “collaborators,” it speaks to the centrality in the discourses of Palestinian nationalism, as in many other nationalisms (Parker et al. 1992b), of ideologies of “normal” sexualities and genders and the identification of abnormally sexed/gendered others as threats to the nation. “Collaboration” has a long history in Palestinian nationalism: since the Mandate era, suspected collaborators with the British and Zionists were punished as traitors to the national cause (Lesch 1973). But it was not until the first (1987-1993) and second (2000-2005) intifadas—and the devastation wrought on Palestinian society by Israel's violent response—that the notion of the collaborator gained prominence to indicate, not just a political traitor, but a moral traitor; “collaborator” became a vague term encompassing a wide range of behaviors and a wide range of actors, including “'drug dealers' and ‘prostitutes’ . . . [and] all out-
casts in Palestinian society” (Schulz 1999, 73).

On the one hand, the abjection of collaborators—who were, particularly during the first intifada, often brutally murdered in public spectacles—was “a response to external [Israeli] threats to Palestinian claims to sovereignty,” which worked to legitimize itself by demonstrating its capacity—and its right—to identify and eradicate collaborators as “symbol[s] of potential Palestinian corruption and moral weakness” (Kelly 2008, 170, 157). On the other hand, there was some objective weight to the widespread assumption that “social marginals” were more likely to be collaborators. Since at least 1967, the Shin Bet (or Israel Security Agency, also popularly known as the Shabak, its Hebrew acronym) has engaged in a concerted effort to create a network of Palestinian collaborators, and the primary groups identified as most fruitful sources of collaborators include: social and economic elites who historically functioned as intermediaries between “the masses” and the “ruling power” and might perceive collaboration as a means of ensuring their continued privilege; Palestinian victims of the Israeli criminal justice system who are offered reduced sentences in exchange for “information”; and, most importantly for our purposes, “socially marginalized” groups—including individuals known or suspected to have engaged in same-sex activities—who are viewed as more likely to be willing to cooperate and, in actual cases where they refuse to cooperate, are sometimes pressured to do so under threat of exposure (Peteet 1994; Robinson 1997).

Under the rubric of collaboration, this constellation of forces worked to assign queers—along with prostitutes, drug dealers, and other moral threats—a discursive significance that they had never before had in Palestinian culture, and that significance was only multiplied by another important historical development: the rise of Islamists. Especially during the first intifada, the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization, then dominated by the secular Fatah) initially
responded ambivalently to the problem of collaborators—prescribing harsh punishments but also offering collaborators the chance to re-enter the national fold and renounce their activities—and later even discovered an ironic utility in collaborators as themselves “intelligence assets.” Eventually, though, the PA bowed to “popular pressure . . . in particular threats from Hamas paramilitaries, who vowed to continue lynching collaborators,” and began to validate its nationalist credentials with a violent (and unforgiving) approach to collaborators and an increased attention to questions of “morality,” going so far as to establish a Moral Guardian Police Unit (شرطة مراقبة الأخلاق) in Gaza (Lia 2006, 331-333). These events foreshadowed the incipient coupling of morality—specifically, a rigid sexual morality—and nationalism that would be fully inaugurated by the rise to power of Islamists, on the heels of decades of occupation and unabated Israeli violence, the widely discredited Oslo Accords, and the total failure of secular nationalists to effect meaningful change in the lives of Palestinians.

The decline in recent decades of secular variants of Palestinian nationalism—and the concurrent rise of religious nationalisms, typified in the ascendency of Hamas to power in Gaza—is part of a broader historical trend in the Arabic-speaking Middle East that, ironically, revolves around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the humiliating defeat of Arab armies in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War breathed life into a nascent secular/socialist Pan-Arabism, embodied most clearly in the figure of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, their doubly humiliating defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War—when Israel captured the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip from Jordan and Egypt—sounded its death knell (Dawisha 2003). Religious nationalism—or Islamism—did not, however, spontaneously rise out of the ashes of secular nationalism: for a long time, the two constituted competing responses to Ottoman and European colonialism (Esposito 1984).
Similarly, in the Palestinian context, while the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—which would become the de facto representative of the Palestinian people in negotiations with Israel—was dominated by avowedly secular political parties (in particular, Fatah), Islamist groups had worked hard, since the beginning of the occupation, to establish themselves as a visible social force, creating hospitals and schools and providing other badly needed social services and, at the same time, offering a seemingly subversive alternative to established political parties (Tamimi 2007). The credibility of Islamism—of which Hamas would become the primary representative—was further amplified by its insistence on the regeneration of Palestinian society “through a retreat and commitment to Islamic values,” on the one hand, and a “radical refusal to negotiate the Palestinian cause,” on the other, a refusal that became even more meaningful in light of the complete absence of any benefits resulting from the PLO’s willingness to negotiate (Schulz 1999, 80, 83). The relationship between Palestinian secular nationalism and Islamism is popularly understood as an indication that “the Palestinians are a house divided” into “two rival . . . factions . . . [that] hold diametrically different ideological positions with regard to the role of religion and politics” (Schnazer 2008, 2). Lybarger, however, offers a much more nuanced argument that “the turn to violent jihad as a form of nationalist resistance succeeds in making Islamism an accepted and successful, if not yet dominant, alternative form of collective Palestinian identity.” As a result, the success of Palestinian Islamism has extended beyond merely establish-

11. Remarkably similar developments characterize the experiences of Palestinians in Israel. Since the 1980s, the Islamic Movement has gained considerable ground—as a social actor that, like Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza, operates schools and hospitals and provides welfare services not provided by the state (to Palestinians)—and as a political force with increasing representation in the Israeli Knesset (Payes 2005). In the wake of the second intifada, which marked an important moment in what some have called the increasing “Palestinization” of Israeli Palestinians, the Islamic Movement provided an alternative to the secular discourse of parties such as Balad and the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE). Unlike in Gaza and the West Bank, though, the significance of Islamism among Palestinian Israelis may be muted by the existence of a large Christian community (Frisch 2009).
ing it as an alternative to secular nationalism: “Its orientations have become diffuse within the society, integrating into Palestinian nationalist sensibilities and, in so doing, transforming, and becoming transformed by, these sensibilities” (Lybarger 2007, 10, 12).

These developments have had serious consequences for Palestinian queers, not because Islam is an inherently (or particularly) “homophobic” religion, but because Islamism has ascribed a (negative) ideological value to “homosexuality” that did not exist before. Out of a general “desire to reinstitute societal control over sexuality and gender relations,” which the secular nationalists were thought to have relinquished (Ismail 2006, 131), Islamists have instituted—and enforced—a strict code of sexual morality. Within that code, ironically, “homosexuality,” while largely absent from the discourse of secular Palestinian nationalism, has begun to emerge for Palestinian Islamists as one key element in a list of vices attributed to a lax Western/Israeli morality (Habib 2010; Schmidtke 1999). To be sure, this is not a sophisticated bio-medical discourse of homosexuality comparable to the Western production of the homosexual; it is not, in other words, the production of a knowledge about an identifiable Palestinian homosexual subject: to the contrary, homosexuality in Islamist discourse is a decidedly Western/Israeli phenomenon that has no meaningful content except as an amorphous, all-purpose metaphor for “immorality” that is incommensurable with—sometimes even a threat to—Palestinianness. In one absurdly poetic illustration of this fact, a few days after Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip, officials released surveillance videos of rival Fatah members “having homosexual intercourse . . . [as] evidence [of] Fatah’s ‘moral corruption.’” And in an illustration of the wide diffusion of Islamist sensibilities in Palestinian culture, Fatah responded by accusing a senior Hamas official of being “expelled from his refugee camp after he was caught having sex with a male colleague in a
In the end, this construction of “queer” as incompatible with “Palestinian” and synonymous with “Israeli/Western” constitutes a sort of symbolic violence against queer Palestinians that validates both the abjection of queer Palestinians in Palestinian society and the abjection of Palestinians generally, for it naturalizes the categorical order—the system of essential and incommensurable categories such as Palestinian, Israeli, and Western—on which the subordination of Palestinians depends. So, for example, Ghassan, a secular Muslim Palestinian from an elite family in Ramallah described the pain he experienced at his passionately anti-Islamist (and formerly Communist) mother’s reaction when she “found out.”

When she first knew, she blamed it on those Westerners who come here to help the Palestinians. “We don’t need their help,” she said. “They should not be here.” And then she said, “You know, they’re trying to do this so we won’t care about Palestine anymore.” So I said, “What? Mom? Are you suggesting that I’m not Palestinian? That I don’t care about Palestine anymore?” And she said, “I don’t know. I don’t know.” That really hurt, when she said that. And that just reminds me, that’s what we’re accused of. We’re either a conspiracy from the West or from Israelis, and we’re traitors who deal with the Israelis. That’s a general feeling. That’s how people see us.

Interestingly, Ghassan’s mother’s reaction to the news of her son’s sexuality, which was expressed in wholly secular terms, illuminates a “general feeling” that queerness, as a Western/Israeli phenomenon, remains a threat to the nation, even if not in a moral sense. As Julie Peteet has argued, the regulation of sexuality is also an important component of secular Palestinian nationalism, but it was—prior, at least, to the rise of Islamism—most often expressed in terms of the regulation of women’s sexuality, and homosexuality was seldom mentioned (2002). Ironically, though, a “puritanical Islamism,” in its effort to articulate an authentic Muslim sexual morality, has refined and extended the regulation of sexuality by “[adopting] the very same vocabulary

and classifications of the Gay International [Western gay activists who advocate on behalf of queer Arabs and Muslims] to disqualify the very same gayness that the Gay International [has] been trying to legitimize.” Islamism, in “making the state the arena where [once unremarkable] sexual practices are transformed into identities” and subject to repression, has transformed homosexuality into a salient—and threatening—category even among those Palestinians, such as Ghassan’s mother, who do not accept its sense of morality (Massad 2007, 265).

The broad cultural and geographical reach—beyond, that is to say, Muslims in the Palestinian Territories—of Islamist discourses of homosexuality and its real effects in the everyday lives of queer Palestinians are acutely illustrated in two experiences of Elias, a queer Israeli Palestinian Christian from a predominantly Arab town, known especially for its large number of Islamists, who have become a powerful political force in local and national politics. Elias had come out to his family, and while their initial reaction was not supportive—“they told me I needed to go to church and be more religious, or go to a therapist because maybe I have a problem”—after a period of several months, the family seemed to have come to terms with it. Their actions said to Elias, “Yes, it’s okay. We’re with you.” But that all began to change one day when Elias’s family informed him that they’d received a few “scary calls.”

In one, they called my aunt. She was at my house. And they said, “Elias is a homo. Take care of him [dir baalik ‘alayy].” So there was a big fight. Then there was another phone call. “Elias is wearing make-up.” And it was another big fight. They were all there, all my family, and my dad was crying because he was worried everyone would find out. And my sister was crying, and she told me I couldn’t be around her daughter anymore. Then it all calmed down for a while until the calls started again. . . . The scariest thing that happened was we got a call from a Muslim. He said, “He’s a homo. He should be killed.” My dad answered that call, and they said, “Your son is a homo, and we will do what the Qur’an says.” My dad told me about it, and I said, “Okay, I want to go to the police.” But he showed no interest in that at all. He said, “Call the police about what? Tell them that you’re a homosexual? What? You want everybody to know it?” I really didn’t expect that from my family. So, I didn’t feel like I belong to them anymore . . . But about two weeks ago, it got a little better. My sister started giving me money and helping me
find a new job, and my brother’s helping me too. And my dad—he’s sweet somehow. Sometimes I talk to him in an emotional way. I kind of trick him and say, “Yeah, dad, I love you. I belong to this house,” even though I don’t feel like that, but when I say these things, it makes him feel better. He’s so scared that everyone’s going to find out and I’m going to leave. This idea really scares him. So I try to calm him down. “No, I’m here, I’m with you,” even though I just want to leave. I want to run away.

Where Ghassan’s mother understood his queerness as incompatible with—and threatening to—the nation, Elias’s family understood his queerness as incompatible with—and threatening to—the family, a distinction that makes sense (and perhaps becomes less significant) when one considers the metonymic relationship between “family” and “nation” in Palestinian discourse, which imagines the nation as “an extended family writ large” (Moghadam 1994, 4). Elias later explained that he did not ultimately take seriously the threat of violence: the calls, he suspected, were probably orchestrated by someone—maybe even another queer Palestinian—who was, for some reason, angry at him; and even if that were not the case, “I don’t think they really wanted to hurt me. I think they wanted to scare me.” Whatever the credibility of the physical threat, the real danger—for Elias and for his family—was that he would be exposed as a queer; that danger is, in large part, the product of a sexual morality that renders queerness a threat to the family/nation; and it worked in concert with a set of seemingly unrelated discourses—in particular, queer Israeli discourses about the incompatibility of queerness and Palestinianness—to impose a set of impossible contradictions that saturated Elias’s narration of the event and would continue to structure his understanding of the world and his complicated place in it. Elias wavers, after all, between a desire to belong and a sense that he does not, between an irrepressible love of family/nation and a desire to just run away: “I didn’t feel like I belong to them anymore,” he explained, even as he “tricked” his father and assured him (only half-disingenuously, it seems), “I belong to this house.”
A few months later, the phone calls subsided (and with them, any indication that Elias was in danger). To my surprise, Elias—who had often laughed, for instance, at my love of Umm Kulthum, telling me, “inte aktar ‘arabi minni” [“you are more Arab than me”]—discussed a budding interest in “re-connecting” with his Palestinian identity, which he eventually decided to express in a performance at one of Al-Qaws’s Queer Palestinian Parties (further discussed in Chapter 4). Together with another Palestinian friend, Elias donned a kaffiyeh, the traditional Palestinian headdress, and performed an emotional rendition of a Palestinian nationalist song before a crowd of dozens of queer Palestinians. The performance was, to say the least, a huge success, and I was anxious, as we walked outside, to hear Elias’s thoughts about it. I was, however, more than a little disoriented when a queer Israeli man stopped Elias to compliment him on his performance. “Where are you from?” he asked, in English, to which Elias responded, also in English, “I’m from Lebanon.”

That moment might, of course, be read as a creative performance of self that subverts the assumed essentialism of identities, but Elias did not, as he later explained it to me, understand—or experience—it as such. “I don’t know. To be honest, I didn’t even think about it. I guess it just made sense at the time.” In a striking display of the collusion, of which Massad is so critical, between queer and Islamist discourses, outside the space of the party—a uniquely, unusually queer Palestinian space—and once again in a queer/Israeli space, the incommensurability of queer and Palestinian reasserted itself, and Elias responded in the only way that made sense.

Ideologies of Gender/Nation

If, in recent decades, Palestinian nationalist discourse—particularly but not wholly owing to the influence of Islamism—has incorporated a rigid sexual morality that isolates queers as one of its most contemptible others, (queer) women have disproportionately felt the effects of
its violence. The gendered nature of Palestinian nationalism and the material oppression of
women in Palestinian society have been well-documented. Like many other nationalisms, Palest-
tinian nationalist discourse allots to women the duty of culturally and biologically reproducing
the nation, which, in turn, is symbolically represented as “woman” (Katz 2003), a fact that has
further implications for actually existing women—and their sexuality—given the narrative of the
Nakba as the rape of Palestine (Amireh 2003). While the private sphere has traditionally been
understood as the proper domain of women in Palestinian society—and the sexuality of
women, therefore, a private affair (Peteet 1991)—the realities of the occupation and the Pales-
tinian resistance to it have thrust women into the public sphere, with sometimes contradictory
consequences.

The active involvement of women in the first and second intifadas, for instance, chal-
lenged assumptions about their proper role (or lack thereof) in “public” life, while Israeli inva-
sions of the “private” sphere—from regular searches of homes to sometimes humiliating inter-
rogations and physical searches of women—have established “women’s sexuality . . . [as] an
arena where . . . power struggles [between occupier and occupied] take place (Mayer 1994, 78).
In response, “the secular and religious strands of Palestinian nationalism” have collaborated, es-
specially in the territories, to restrict “women’s freedom of movement, dress, and behavior”
(Massad 1995, 480). The increasing significance of Islamism has only heightened the value of
women’s bodies and sexualities as a site for bigger cultural and political struggles, exemplified,
for example, in the Islamic movement’s—and in particular, Hamas’s—imposition of the hijab
(headscarf) on women (in Gaza) “to redefine gender rules and establish [a] new political reality
on the ground” (Jamal 2001, 271). Finally, although Palestinian women in Israel, slightly removed
from the violence of the occupation, are afforded greater socio-economic opportunities than
their counterparts in the West Bank and Gaza, “within Palestinian society in Israel women’s identity is formed . . . by stereotypes and rigid norms through the patriarchal control systems of family, religious institutions, and social institutions, and thus women themselves have frequently internalized a sense of their own inferiority” (Espanioly 1994, 116).

As a means of illustrating some of the ways in which the violences queer Palestinians suffer are multiplied in the experiences of queer Palestinian women—and as a segue into a discussion of forms of violence typically obscured in hegemonic narratives of queer Palestinian suffering—I conclude this section with Amal’s story.

**Amal (in English, “Hope”)**

In her mid-twenties and a recent university graduate, Amal, who currently lives in Tel Aviv, is the youngest child in a large Muslim family from a city in the north of Israel. Amal described her childhood as “pretty miserable.” Beginning at the age of nine, she was repeatedly raped—over a period of several years—by two older male cousins. Amal explained that, even though, when it started, she had no idea what was happening, she protested. “But then they liked it even more.” When she was about twelve years old, Amal started thinking, “Maybe if I eat and eat and get fat, they won’t want me.”

But the abuse continued. In a gruesome embodiment of her emotional suffering, as a teenager Amal began cutting herself. Not being an expert in such matters, I set aside my impulse to read Amal’s self-mutilation as evidence of her self-devaluation and accepted her own explanation: “It was,” she told me, “a way of distracting myself from the pain I felt inside.”

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13. Although I met many Palestinian lesbians during my fieldwork, for reasons I have discussed—or perhaps because of my own deficiencies as an ethnographer—Amal is one of a small number of lesbians who formally participated in my research. Amal preferred not to be recorded, and I have reconstructed her “life story” from my notes.
her final year of high school, a friend of Amal’s noticed the wounds on her arms and alerted the school psychologist, who confronted Amal, demanded to know what was happening and, when she finally explained, insisted on alerting the police. Amal refused. “My family will kill me because they will think I’m not a virgin.” The psychologist relented, but, a few days later, Amal was called into his office, where two Israeli police officers were waiting. They took Amal to the local police station. “This is your file, girl,” they said, as they threw a pile of papers onto the table before her. “You have until four o’clock to tell your family. Otherwise we will charge them.” Amal, however, continued to refuse, and eventually the police gave up and decided that she had lied and was seeking “attention.”

Not long afterwards, Amal moved to Tel Aviv to attend university. Years earlier, she explained, she had “started to look at girls in a different way.” She did not, however, act on it, nor did she have a vocabulary with which to understand it—“we never talked about lesbians; I didn’t even know the word”—until, one day, she stumbled on an Israeli website and discovered a “girls looking for girls” chatroom. Amal began chatting with Dana, an Israeli woman. The two met and ended up dating for nearly two years, but Amal eventually realized that, because Dana was an Israeli Jew and she was a Palestinian Arab, their relationship was doomed. “I broke up with her,” Amal said, “and decided that, from then on, I would only date Arabs. With Dana, I had to explain everything. And then I had to suffer through all the shit about Arabs being primitive. She didn’t understand or respect Arab culture. . . . I played a song for her once, my favorite song, a beautiful song. I explained it, translated it for her and everything, and her response was, ‘Who the fuck is Majda [el-Roumi, a famous Lebanese singer]?’ With an Arab, I thought it might be more powerful, more real.” That feeling was only compounded by Amal’s more general sense of the racism among queer Israelis. “A lot of girls hit on me and are inter-
ested, then if they find out I'm Arab, they disappear. And if they don't, they always say, 'What? Impossible. You must be Christian.' It's so silly, but a lot of Jews say that, because of how I look. 'Are you Arab or Christian?' What does that mean?'” After Amal and Dana broke up, she focused on her studies and was content with being single until, a few months later, a friend introduced her to ‘Aida, the first Palestinian lesbian Amal had met.

Amal was instantly attracted to ‘Aida, and they began dating. But within a few months, Amal said, ‘Aida became depressed and started complaining that she had no money. “Maybe,” she said to Amal, “you can work as a whore. No, I’m just kidding.” But apparently she was not kidding: ‘Aida “started bringing guys to me and telling me she’d leave me if I didn’t have sex with them for money or alcohol. So I did.”’ After several months, Amal had what she described as a sort of epiphany. She left ‘Aida and, as if to rid herself of any trace of femininity—not unlike her earlier effort to “eat and eat” until she got fat—“cut my hair and started dressing like a guy.” By that time, Amal had dropped out of school and started working at a restaurant. She had not, of course, informed her family of these developments, which they discovered in a surprise trip to visit her. They reacted, Amal said, by telling her that she was “a loser and a slut. That’s what they told me. And then they left.”

Two years later, Amal met Sahar (who also was Palestinian). Amal and Sahar began dating, and she was shocked that, when she mustered the courage to “tell her about the being a whore thing,” Sahar was supportive and understanding. Ultimately, Amal and Sahar decided to part ways, and Amal recalled the experience with a kind of sad fondness. Having recently completed university, and by then reconciled with her family, Amal was, at the time of our conversation, looking for a job and struggling to evade her family’s increasing insistence that it was now time for her to marry. Her goal, she explained, was to get away. “There is nothing here for
me.” When I asked why, Amal thought for a moment and said, “Maybe it would be easier if I were a gay man. Look at my brothers. My family is not worried about them. Nobody cares what they’re doing. But women can’t be trusted with their sexuality. As long as I’m single, they’ll treat me like a child. I can’t deal with that.”

Some time after our conversation, Amal told me that, “the first thing I’m doing, when I get out of this place,” will be to get a tattoo on the nape of her neck of the word *hurriya* ("freedom"). The scars on her arms physically marked the pain of her lived reality, but Amal hoped, it seemed, to one day embody a different kind of life.

*Israel and Its Queers*

The danger of *telling* Amal’s story, as I suggested already, is that, in its articulation of such unspeakable violence—a violence that Amal attributes largely to “Palestinian” (or “Arab”) sources—it might distract from the deeper structural arrangements which make that violence possible in the first place. In the preceding pages, I tried to sketch out some of the ways in which Palestinian discourses of nationalism and sexuality engender multiple forms of violence—physical, symbolic, and systemic—against queer Palestinians; and rather than falling into the trap of simply *refuting* Western and Israeli “distortions” of queer Palestinian suffering, I tried instead to focus on placing that suffering in the social and historical contexts that make it intelligible (as a cultural fact) and possible (as a lived reality). I turn now to a kind of violence against queer Palestinians that is completely obscured in hegemonic narratives of queer Palestinian suffering: a violence that emanates, not even tangentially—as one might argue about the kinds of violence I have analyzed so far—but directly from the practices of Israeli sovereignty. I draw, in particular, on the metaphor of the “checkpoint” to illustrate the pervasive, if often hidden, ways in which the Israeli state structures the geographical and discursive spaces queer Palestinians inhabit, in-
cluding ostensibly “equal,” “diverse,” and “open” queer spaces.¹⁴

All the World’s a Checkpoint

Getting from Israel into almost all of the West Bank involves passing through an Israeli military-controlled checkpoint. The most ominous-looking of such constructions are the main checkpoint into Bethlehem and the Qalandia checkpoint into Ramallah, which both have more than a whiff of high-security prison about them. Getting through them, however, is simple, if—due to barked orders of soldiers and cattle-shed-style queues—rather undignified.

Lonely Planet Guide to Israel & the Palestinian Territories

fieldnotes entry, June 9, 2006:

I went to Shushan [Jerusalem’s gay bar] for the first time last night. I sat at the bar, trying to get my bearings. Within a few minutes, a man approached me and struck up a conversation. He introduced himself as Eli and said, “You’re not from here, are you?” “No,” I said and explained that I was a student and had just arrived in Jerusalem a few days ago. “How did you find out about this place?” he asked, and I told him, somewhat cryptically, that I had done my research. He laughed and said, “It’s amazing. You can drop a queer in the middle of the desert, and he will find the closest gay bar.” Eli wanted to know more about my research—I had told him already that I was a doctoral student—and when I explained that I was interested in working with queer Palestinians, he laughed, again, and said, “Are you serious? I didn’t know there was such a thing.” What does it mean that, in this place that is so completely foreign to me, my presence in the “gay bar” is natural and the presence of a queer Palestinian is unthinkable?

¹⁴. Because Palestinians in the West Bank can enter Jerusalem and Israel only on those rare occasions when they acquire special permission, queer Israeli spaces do not figure prominently—except, at times, as an abstraction—in the lives of queer Palestinians in the West Bank. My discussion in the following pages of queer Palestinian travels in the spaces of queer Israeliness refers, therefore, to those queer Palestinians who have been “lucky” enough—lucky, that is, in queer Israeli discourse—to have been born in Jerusalem or Israel.
fieldnotes entry, October 18, 2008:

A few days ago, I visited Mahdi in Nablus. It was my first time in Nablus, and I have to confess that, on some level, I had imagined it—as most Israelis imagine it—as the most Palestinian (and therefore most dangerous) of Palestinian places. But, aside from the general stares, which I'm not sure had more to do with my “whiteness” or my piercings, it was lovely . . .

Around 5:00 p.m., Mahdi told me that I should leave now because the checkpoint was closing soon. He wanted to go with me to [a friend’s] party in Ramallah, but he couldn’t because he had to work the next morning and, once the checkpoint closed, he wouldn’t be able to get back home. So I said goodbye and made my way to the checkpoint, where I joined a long line of people to wait my turn. After a few minutes, I noticed that people were staring at me and mumbling. It didn’t seem to be malicious, at all—more like a curious/confused interest. Finally, a young guy, probably in his late teens, turned around and looked at me, as if he wanted to say something. “What?” I asked (in Arabic). He looked surprised for a second and then asked why I was waiting there. “What do you mean?” I said. “I'm waiting here because I'm going to Ramallah, and I have to get through the checkpoint.” “Yes,” he said, “But you don’t have to wait here. You can go to the front.” I thought about it for a minute and considered the injustice. I thought, even, that it might be nice to be able to say later that I refused my privilege and waited in line anyway . . . but it was hot, and the line was long. So I walked to the front and flashed my passport at the Israeli soldier. He asked what I was doing in Nablus and where I’m from. I told him I was visiting a friend and that I’m from Chicago. “Do you know Michael Jordan?” he asked and then waved me through.

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In a brilliant discussion of the (literal) architecture of the Israeli occupation, Eyal Weizman analyzes the checkpoint, which “has become 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 . . . [that aims] to manage the circulation of Palestinians through ‘Israeli’ space” (Weizman 2007, 147, 142). As “part of a general policy of linking the economy of the Occupied Territories with that of Israel,” at the conclusion of the Six-Day War in 1967—when the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip began—Palestinians in the West Bank were issued permits that allowed them travel freely to Israel (Keshet 2006, 13). While temporary “flying” checkpoints were always deployed in response to intelligence reports of “security threats,” the current labyrinthine system of permanent “internal” checkpoints was not fully developed until 1991 (Bornstein 2002).

In response to a number of terrorist attacks in Israel, the Israeli military began constructing hundreds of checkpoints (and other physical barriers) that effectively granted it complete control over the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. As a result of this system of checkpoints and barriers, the West Bank, for example, was “splintered . . . into a series of approximately 200 separate, sealed-off ‘territorial cells’ around Palestinian ‘population centres’ . . . with traffic between these cells channelled through military-controlled bottlenecks” (Weizman 2007, 146). Moreover, Israel now claimed the power, which it has frequently exercised since, to impose both external “closures” on the West Bank and Gaza that sealed it off from Israel and the rest of the world and internal closures (and curfews) that further limited
the mobility of Palestinians to specific cities, villages, and other defined areas.\textsuperscript{15} As of March 2010, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs documented “505 obstacles blocking internal Palestinian movement and access throughout the West Bank [an area, after Israeli settlements are accounted for, about the size of Rhode Island] . . . [including] 65 permanently staffed checkpoints, 22 partial checkpoints (staffed on an ad-hoc basis) and 418 unstaffed obstacles, including roadblocks, earthmounds, earth walls, road gates, road barriers, and trenches.”\textsuperscript{16}

The checkpoint system, as Weizman argues, has “assumed an overall strategic layout, constituting a complete territorial system whose main aim is to dominate and manage the lives of the Palestinians” (2007, 146). Drawing on Weizman, I want to extend the metaphor of the checkpoint to understand it, not just as a literal site on the border, where agents of the state “inspect . . . what goes in and out” of the nation (Lugo 2000, 355), but a ubiquitous subjective process wherein citizens and noncitizens alike check themselves—and others—against “the field of signs and practices” in which the nation-state is represented (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 27). Dominant representations of queer Palestinians, as I have argued, tend to represent their suffering as a straightforward result of their assumed inability to “come out” of “the closet.” But the closet, I believe, is a subtle, “characteristically ‘postmodern’ [technique] of power,” and the struggle against it—and for the right to come out as respectable queer citizens—insulates the state from critique by representing it as a “neutral [arbiter] of injury,” to be appealed to for redress and protection, “rather than . . . [itself] invested with the power to injure”

\textsuperscript{15} In 2005, however, Israel unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip, limiting the exercise of its sovereignty there to the occasional military incursion or bombing campaign.

(Brown 1995, 18, 27). By drawing attention to, rather than eschewing, the violence of the state, the metaphor of the checkpoint more effectively captures the “suffering” of queer Palestinians and, just as importantly, the role of queer Israelis in the maintenance of that suffering. Moreover, while performances of identity are always evaluated by social actors against wider cultural scripts (e.g., Goffman 1959), in a world increasingly defined by the violence of the state, the checkpoint highlights—much better than another popular metaphor (the “stage”)—the ways in which those performances, like one’s “papers” at the literal checkpoint, “are checked and verified” to determine one’s right to access certain spaces and resources (Kelly 2006, 90).

My use of the checkpoint as metaphor should not, however, obscure its trenchant physical reality for many queer Palestinians, particularly those in the West Bank. In one popular story about Boodie, a queer Palestinian man from Ramallah—so popular, in fact, that a number of queer Israelis told me versions of it even before I had met Boodie and heard his version—the experience of the checkpoint is adapted to the narrative of queer Palestinian suffering to confirm the benevolence of the state with regard to queer Palestinians. Featured in the Israeli documentary, Jerusalem is Proud to Present, Boodie, like all Palestinians from the West Bank who do not have a valid permit, is not legally allowed to enter Jerusalem. As if, however, to reassure his audience that queers are exempt from the violence that Palestinians generally face, Boodie 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.’”


18. Boodie’s story was shared with me in an interview with one queer Israeli man: “Boodie . . . met some soldiers at the border, and they told him he can not go. He is not an Israeli inhabitant. He’s living in the West Bank. And he told the soldiers, ‘I am gay, and I want to go to the Shushan.’ And they let him in. So it’s a very nice thing.” It is not entirely clear, on re-examining the interview, what “it” refers to.
terestingly, in another popular account of the story, published in the English and Hebrew versions of the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, Boodie elaborates on his experiences at the checkpoint to give a very different impression: “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 narrative presented 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 [PA headquarters in Ramallah].”

Whatever the truth of Boodie’s story—as he or his interlocutors tell it—most queer Palestinians described their experiences at checkpoints (and with Israeli police and soldiers generally) in uniformly negative terms; and their queerness, to the extent that it emerged at all, tended to constitute an additional source of abuse rather than a means of tempering it, more of a liability than an asset. In one extreme illustration of this phenomenon, Dawud, a queer Palestinian from a village in the West Bank, told me about being detained at a checkpoint. He had met a European man who worked for an NGO in Ramallah, and the two decided to go to his home there. “They never really told me why,” Dawud explained,

but when we stopped at the checkpoint, they looked at my ID and told me to get out of the car. They told him to go, and then they took me to a room and questioned me for a long time. They kept saying I was a prostitute and asking how much money I got paid to do it. I was scared and crying and kept telling them I didn’t know what they were talking about. After a while, they let me go, but they told me if they ever saw me again, they would tell everyone in [the village] that I was having sex with foreign men.

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 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 and how that space should properly be inhabited. Ben-Ari notes that “the [Israeli] army categorises the Palestinian population into 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.”

Oddly enough, the relevance of the metaphor of the checkpoint emerges most clearly in the queer Israeli space seemingly most removed from “real life”: cyberspace. Atraf, a popular Israeli dating website, which provides free English and Hebrew versions of the site—both of which, however, offer access to the same database of users—was utilized by most of my queer Palestinian informants in Jerusalem and Israel (and familiar to the vast majority, except, of course, poor and working-class people who either did not have access to computers or were not literate in Hebrew or English). Just as the literal checkpoint explicitly depends on legible documents—i.e., identity cards—that translate the identities of their holders into a set of terms that can be evaluated against rules governing a given geographical space, Atraf, like all similar

sites, employs a textual format—the profile—with a standardized set of categories to organize its population. But unlike most Western dating sites, which tend to use categories of “race” or “ethnicity” to mark the identities of users, Atraf uses the Israeli euphemism for “race”: aside from the usual fields to denote age, gender, physical appearance, and sexual preference, the most important entry on every profile—one that indirectly racializes—is “religion.”

Every Atraf user has the option of not specifying her religion (lo relevanti or “not relevant”), but, as one queer Israeli bluntly put it to me, “lo relevanti ze omer aravi (not relevant means Arab).” What is more, most profiles include photographs, which become even more significant, as a somatic indicator, for profiles with the ambiguous category of “Christian,” which can 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 racial/national identity; when obvious signs (here, “religion”) are not present, individuals look for other—especially visual and linguistic—clues; these seemingly unremarkable processes, characteristic of human interactions in many contexts, 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). In the daydreams of some queer thinkers, queer space “crosses, engages, and transgresses social, spiritual, and aesthetic locations” (Desert 1996, 20), but Atraf, as queer Palestinians experience it, makes explicit (and oddly real) 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 should put to rest any romantic ideas about the transgressiveness of queer space—or at least queer Israeli space. Saed had read an article on a gay Israeli website that suggested, 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 about it. I only wish they would ignore me. I have a picture in my profile, but I don’t mention that I’m Arab. But when people send me messages and ask, I tell them I’m Arab, and they always answer in a bad 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 you 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 peculiar—to him or to the “virtual” space of Atraf: racist practices, borrowed from the same logic that engenders the occupation and its diverse techniques for identifying and regulating populations, were 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 not to do so. For many, the purpose of such spaces was purely erotic—and purely physical—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,

21. The significance of language as a marker of identity—and its complicated relationship with notions of attractiveness—was perfectly illustrated in one queer Israeli man’s struggle to explain why he finds the Arabic language “unattractive” (a fact that he had volunteered when I asked what he thought about queer Palestinians): “What is it that you find unattractive?” I asked. “I don’t know. I guess I just don’t like to hear a lot of Arabic. I just don’t like the language.” But, I asked, “I don’t understand. Why not?” “I don’t know. Just to hear it annoys me. There’s something ugly about it.” A queer Palestinian man, Halim, further confirmed that phenomenon with a story about his Israeli parter, Or. The two were “in the middle of sex. Well, not in the middle, more like the beginning,” and Halim’s phone kept ringing. Finally, Or told him to just answer the phone, maybe it was an emergency. “So I answered and it was [a Palestinian friend], and he was upset. I was trying to calm him down, and I was speaking Arabic. When I got off the phone, Or got very weird and very—he told me, ‘Hearing you speak Arabic turns me off.’” Queer Palestinians quickly learn—and are constantly reminded—of what is and is not “attractive,” and just as that knowledge shapes the behavior of many people in “cruising spaces,” the same is true of other queer spaces. On the way to the bar one night, for example, a queer Palestinian friend said to me, “Jason, don’t speak Arabic to me tonight. Maybe if we speak English, they’ll think I’m a tourist.” Not being fluent in Hebrew, he could not pass as Israeli, and so “tourist” was the next best option.
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 Jeghanchan argues, “constituted in the ‘anticipation of violence’” (2002, 360), the possibility of that violence is amplified in cruising spaces (e.g., 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, when I met a young man whom I—by then having begun to learn the language of identities in Israel-Palestine—suspected might be Palestinian. “Do you speak Arabic? [btighki ‘arabi?]” I asked him. “Yes,” he responded, “but don’t speak Arabic here.” When I asked why not, he looked around, lowered his voice, and said, “It’s not safe. Even the datim [the religious Jews who are something of a fixture in the park] don’t feel so bad about taking advantage of an Arab guy.” Arabness, it seemed, marked not only the limits of attractiveness but the limits of humanity.

Cruising spaces are, as has often been (rather approvingly) noted (Bell and Valentine 1995), a very “queer” complication of seemingly discrete “public” and “private” spheres. But even in the ostensibly private spaces of love and romance, the logic of the checkpoint continues to limit the “mobility”—understood in a broader, not purely physiological sense—of queer Palestinians. The significance of language and physical appearance, everywhere the staples in processes of racialization, have already been suggested, but another unseemly label—“political”—attaches to queer Palestinians to further restrict their access to queerness. In Chapter 2, I argued that queer Israeli activists tend to distinguish between “gay rights” and “Palestinian issues,” which are understood as “political” (rather than “gay”) issues; in much the same way, 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 queer 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” [i.e., 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 going out with 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 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 queerness, needless to say, did not). While Boutros stressed that their problems were not “religious,” as another salient marker of Palestinianness (and sometimes, Arabness), religion—and in particular, Islam—frequently emerges as a fatal factor in queer Palestinians’ romantic encounters with Israelis. In a remarkably similar story to Boutros’s (but with a more violent ending), Ali, a queer Palestinian Muslim from Jerusalem, 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, Ali moved into Nadiv’s apartment in Tel Aviv. In the beginning, Ali explained, things were “perfect,” but everything began to change when Ali met Nadiv’s friends and family. “I am Muslim. And my name is Ali 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, Ali said, Nadiv’s mother, “She couldn’t accept it at all. She treated me like shit.” Eventually, the pressure from Nadiv’s family and friends become too much. Not unlike Boutros’s partner who insisted that he “be” Israeli, Nadiv asked Ali to convert to Judaism.

22. An Atraf conversation I had with a queer Israeli further illustrates the association of “Palestinian” with “political” and the banishment of both from “queer” spaces. In the narrative section of my profile, I had written in Arabic and in Hebrew, “I’m a student from the US studying in Israel-Palestine.” The following series of messages ensued:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Queer Israeli:</th>
<th>you are in Israel, not palestine man</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jason:</td>
<td>thanks for the info. :)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer Israeli:</td>
<td>so change it. respect the place you come to visit. anyway, welcome to israel. enjoy it. what do you mean? i wrote &quot;israel-palestine,&quot; not &quot;israel&quot; and not &quot;palestine.&quot; i was trying to respect everybody here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason:</td>
<td>lets not get into it. but first learn some history. second, you don’t respect the place if you change its name. you go into politics, but this is an israeli dating site, not palestinian. you know that if you will tell them you are gay there, you will probably not stay alive. so cut the crap and respect the place. its called ISRAEL. sorry haa but this is the case. besides you are not in a political thing here. you are in a gay sex site. don’t mix. [emphasis added]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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One day he said we had to break up. And I said, “Okay, just tell me 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.

Ali’s exposition on his relationship to Islam suggested that it was, for him, a sort of axiomatic fact that did not contradict (nor present any serious problems for) his queerness, but it was not similarly unproblematic for Nadiv. Still, the two did not break up, and Ali 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

We were in bed sleeping, and I heard people shouting outside. So I put my pants on 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 from 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 policeman 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 do 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, outside 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 Ali’s arrest—and, while I have no reason not to believe him, whatever role Ali played in it—Nadiv’s complicity with the state in the imposition of violence against a queer Arab/Muslim other 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 carefully concealed, out of respect for the myth of tolerant, egalitarian queer space.

Inside the bar, a multitude of practices marks the Israeliness of the space and enforces 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. To be sure, a variety of subjective criteria, some of which having nothing to do with race and national identity, are employed in this process. But most queer Palestinians intuitively know—or quickly learn—that Arabness is high on 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, as illustrated in the two following ethnographic anecdotes.

Looking Gay

One night not long after I had moved to Tel Aviv, Muhammad—the same Muhammad

23. All residents of Israel over the age of sixteen are required to carry an official identity card (teudat zehut). Until 2005, the card identified its holder’s “ethnicity” (Jewish, Arab, Druze, etc.). In 2005, the orthodox Minister of the Interior dropped the category altogether rather than abide by a Supreme Court ruling that Reform converts be listed as “Jews.” The teudat zehut still managed, however, to distinguish between Jews and non-Jews: only the birthdates of Jews are listed according to the Jewish calendar.
who, in the vignette with which I began the dissertation, was beaten by a group of Israeli po-
lice—came to Tel Aviv to go with me to the “gay night” at a popular club. A working-class Mus-
lim from Jerusalem who does not generally identify as “gay,” Muhammad asked, before we left
for the club, if he could borrow a tank top and some gel for his hair because, he explained, he
looked “too Arab.” After his transformation, Muhammad inspected himself in the mirror, and I
jokingly remarked that now he looked “very gay.” “Good,” Muhammad said, “maybe they’ll let
me in.”

In the end, they did not let him in. Maybe it was because I forgot, as we approached the
door, to avoid speaking Arabic. Maybe it was because his ID—and his prototypically Arabic
name—betrayed his Arabness, despite his effort to offset it with a display of gayness. Maybe it
was, despite both our suspicions, for some other reason entirely. But I discarded that possibility
entirely when, a few hours later, after Muhammad decided he’d had enough of gay Tel Aviv, I
returned to the bar and was waved through, by the same selector, without even the require-
ment of showing my ID.

**Sounding Israeli**

A few weeks before it permanently closed, I went with three queer Palestinian friends—
Ahmed, Munir, and Hamdi, all East Jerusalemites who do not speak fluent Hebrew—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,” our experience of Shushan that night, as on many other
nights, suggested that maybe we were in the wrong Shushan.

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article2866308.ece.
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, and the doorman, obviously 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.”

It was a serendipitous ethnographic moment: a seemingly mundane social interaction structured by broader formations; all of the actors were required to act (or not act); and everyone knew what the possibilities for—and the consequences of—acting were. Ahmed bunted—that is to say, he did nothing—and if I were a better ethnographer, perhaps I would have done the same. Instead, I matter-of-factly informed the doorman that, although he might not be aware of it, there was an entire population of people in “Israel” whose native language is not Hebrew. He then returned Ahmed’s ID and told him that he could not come in. “Why?” I asked, “Because he’s Palestinian?” The doorman smiled and explained that he suspected Ahmed’s ID was fake. “It’s okay,” Ahmed said, “I don’t care. Let’s go.”

Munir and Hamdi, who had been standing behind us watching everything transpire, quietly told me to shut up and not worry because they would get us in. Ahmed and I then watched Munir and Hamdi apologize to the doorman and attempt to engage him in conversation until, about ten 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 re-
warded with access to a given “space.” But even when the “answer” is wrong—when one refuses to “be Israeli,” for example—the checkpoint still works: identities are checked, and the movement of bodies across space is properly regulated. The danger arises when the checkpoint fails, when a potential threat—what kind of threat and a threat to whom, of course, not always being clear—slips through, and in those moments, the “anticipated” violence of the checkpoint becomes real.

Such was the case one evening at Evita, a “hip” (that is to say, unapologetically pretentious) gay bar in Tel Aviv. Nabil, Adel—a self-consciously Westernized (and Israelized) queer Palestinian featured in the documentary, Shunned, discussed in Chapter 2—and I sat at a table outside talking and drinking. For reasons that were not clear to Adel or me, an Israeli man seated at a nearby table began ranting about how much he hated Arabs, how stupid and ugly Arabs are, and how all Arabs want out of life is to kill Jews. “Ignore him,” Nabil said. “He hit on me, and I told him I’m not interested.” A few minutes later, still sitting at the table, I turned around to talk to a friend who had just arrived. Without warning, I felt an impact that nearly knocked me to the ground: Nabil had been attacked. The force of the blow slammed him into me, and I looked around to see Adel and a few other patrons of the bar trying to restrain the man who had been ranting about Arabs. Eventually, his friends convinced him to leave, and 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 should not have been speaking Arabic.”

Nabil, who escaped with a busted lip and a ripped shirt, was—at least outwardly—not affected by the incident. Adel, on the other hand, was profoundly traumatized. Adel 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 exempted from Israeli military service, have not taken up the state’s call to instead 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 six months with a group of Yad VaShem [the Israeli Holocaust Museum] volunteers to research Holocaust victims. More recently, Adel had participated in a Canadian documentary about queer Palestinians, in which he railed against Islam and “primitive” Arab culture and confirmed, as only a queer Palestinian can, the liberal democratic tolerance of Israel. A good Israeli Arab, Adel—like the good Negro of the Antilles, “more ‘civilized’ than the African . . . closer to the white man”—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).

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 in The Garden (Shatz and Barash, Tel Aviv: Fig Films, 2003)

In this chapter, I began by interrogating the hegemonic narrative of queer Palestinian suffering and, rather than try simply to prove it as a “fiction,” look critically at actual developments in Palestinian society that have contributed to the often violent marginalization of queer Palestinians. While such developments, I suggested, are not entirely attributable in any direct causal way to the practices of Israeli sovereignty—and the ongoing horror of the occupation—they are inextricable from it. Moving, then, to an analysis of ethnographic research in Jerusalem and Israel, I offered a narrative of queer Palestinian experiences that focused, not so much on the “self-evidence and . . . objectivity of painful feeling” with an implicit appeal to “a feeling politics . . .
of protection, reparation, rescue,” but on the reality, however filtered and incomplete, of queer Palestinian suffering, “less as an effect of an act of violence, and more as an effect of a general atmosphere of it” (Berlant 2000, 36-37, 43).

The metaphor of the checkpoint, as I have argued, offers both a more empirically convincing and politically engaged account of violence against queer Palestinians—one that locates that violence in a specific time and place, structured by identifiable social and political processes, rather than a static, unchanging “culture.” The notion of closure, as the most extreme instantiation of the checkpoint system, further communicates, with the necessary incompleteness of language, something about the everyday weight of (queer) Palestinian suffering. It also emphasizes the potential of such spatial metaphors for offering a more expansive critique of power’s investment, not just in the regulation of bodies and subjectivities, but in their movement (or not) through time in space. The relative absence, in this chapter, of queer Palestinian agency should not indicate the total success of that project—the paralysis, in other words, of queer Palestinians. In the following chapter, I take up the question of “resistance” and ask how queer Palestinians manage, in this context, to survive.
CHAPTER 4: FEELING GOOD, FEELING BAD, AND THE WILL TO SURVIVE

comply: 1. to act or be in accordance with wishes, requests, demands, requirements, conditions, etc. 2. to be courteous or conciliatory.

resist: 1. to withstand, strive against, or oppose.

survive: 1. to remain alive after the death of someone, the cessation of something, or the occurrence of some event; continue to live. 2. to remain or continue in existence or use. 3. to get along or remain healthy, happy, and unaffected in spite of some occurrence.

Random House Unabridged Dictionary

In the preceding chapters, I mapped out the discursive and material terrain(s) queer Palestinians inhabit and the ways in which contradictory discourses and practices conspire to limit their “mobility” (as “bodies” and as “subjects”) to a severely, if not always clearly, defined space (or perhaps more accurately, non-space), neither here nor there. Both the discourses of Palestinian nationalism—particularly influenced, of late, by the rise of Islamism—and the discourses of (Israeli) queerness construct the queer Palestinian as a potential threat whose loyalties are suspect. While the construction of queers (and other sexual “deviants”) as “collaborators” in Palestinian society engenders multiple forms of (“Palestinian”) violence—including, sometimes, physical violence—against queer Palestinians, I insisted on the centrality—the ubiquity—of Israeli sovereignty in understanding that violence, as well as the more pervasive forms of violence that characterize the Palestinian experience generally. I argued that, in fact, the same logic—and practices—that mark the obvious (and obviously racist) violence of the occupation similarly structure ostensibly “egalitarian” queer spaces.

But queer Palestinians are not merely—or wholly—objects. As thinking, feeling subjects, they act in the world. In this chapter, I ask how, in a context geared against it, queer Palestinians survive. In focusing on how queer Palestinians, in the quotidian spaces of everyday life, man-
age to “get by,” I suggest that notions of “resistance” and “complicity” are inadequate to understand “politics, subjectivity, and the mutual constitution of affect . . . under conditions of violence” (Allen 2008, 475). Queer Western (and Israeli) “coming out” narratives, as many others have noted, privilege a form of “resistance” (to “homophobic” families, communities, cultures, and religions), out of which arises a properly self-realized queer subject. The inability (or refusal) of queer Palestinians to resist the tyranny of “the closet” and “come out,” as I have noted, is understood as both the sign and the source of their suffering. (“If only,” the story goes, “they could—or would—come out, their suffering would be no more.”)

While the implications of such popular uses of “resistance” may be clear, scholarly work—especially much ostensibly “transgressive” queer and feminist scholarship—has similarly relied on a “notion of human agency . . . that locates [it] in the political and moral autonomy of the subject” and that subject’s capacity to “resist . . . dominating and subjectivating modes of power.” In what follows, I reject that “binary model of subordination and subversion” and attempt to sketch out the emergence of queer Palestinian subjectivities, which are neither simple reflections of nor simple rejections of dueling queer and Palestinian formations of subjectivity. I then consider the implications of that phenomenon for understanding not only how subjects and bodies inhabit the world—and manage to survive even in the face of awful violence—but how they engage with the world; how, that is to say, queer Palestinians articulate a uniquely queer Palestinian subjectivity and politics that do not easily “map onto the logic of repression and resistance” (Mahmood 2005, 7, 14).

The Pleasures of Survival

fieldnotes entry, June 9, 2006:

On my way home from dinner with a friend tonight, I met Umri in Independence Park.
I'd decided I was taking a “break” from fieldwork and had no intention of talking to anyone, but as I passed by, he halted the conversation he was having with someone (an older guy I had never seen before and who I assumed—why, I'm not sure now—was a tourist), approached me and said, “shalom.” I said, “shalom. ma shlamcha? ani lo medaber ‘ivrit tov. ata medaber anglit? [Hello. How are you? I don’t speak Hebrew well. Do you speak English?]” He said no, and I thought that was a little strange, because every Israeli I had met spoke at least a little English (which is, after all, as central as math and science in the Israeli public school curriculum), so I asked if he spoke Arabic. He laughed and said, “aywa, bahki ‘arabi [Yes, I speak Arabic].” Naturally, I assumed he was Arab, but I asked, just to be sure—stranger things have happened (here)—and he told me no, that, in fact, he’s Jewish, and he speaks Arabic because his father came from Yemen. . . . How crazy and poetic that I, a WASP American, would meet an Israeli Jew in Jerusalem, and the only language we would have in common is Arabic.

Umri and I quickly became friends, and our relationship became more intimate.

fieldnotes entry, June 28, 2006:

I spent the day yesterday with Umri. We walked to the Old City and had lunch . . . He showed me where he works—in the Muslim Quarter as a guard for a small number of ultra-orthodox Jewish families who choose to live there. . . . Later in the day, we were sitting in his apartment talking, and he said, "You know, there are many different types of people in Israel. Jews, Muslims, Christians, Druze. Do you know about the Druze?" And all of a sudden, like a ton of bricks slamming down on my head, it all fell into place . . . the fact that he speaks Arabic but no English, that he is so careful not to speak Arabic in certain situations, that he is at once

1. At this stage, during my preliminary fieldwork, I had not been studying Hebrew long and had only the most basic conversational grasp of it.
harshly critical of Israeli policies and fiercely loyal to Israel, that he seems to experience some weird discomfort when speaking and interacting with Arabs . . . all of this, suddenly, began to make sense.

"I am not Jewish," he said, and although I was shocked, I said "I know," because, at that moment, I did. "What do you mean?" I asked. "ana druzi [I am Druze]," he said and explained that he thought I wouldn't like him and would want nothing to do with him if I knew he was Arab. . .

It would, of course, be disingenuous to say that I was not personally affected by Umri’s confession, but I had been in Israel-Palestine long enough to understand it as a sort of “dishonesty” that revealed more about the wider context than it did about Umri’s “personality.” His admission, some weeks later, that he was married and had a child (who lived with his wife in their village in the north) was, I must confess, more difficult to swallow. Although we had not talked much about issues of sexual “identity”—those questions, I thought, were better left to my “research”—I had assumed, incorrectly, that Umri identified as “gay.” But the inadequacy of my very Western sexual epistemology for making sense of Umri’s sexuality was neatly illustrated in a seemingly innocuous moment not longer after.

fieldnotes entry, July 17, 2006:

. . . Umri stopped by the other day. Amazed at the size of my closet—one of those old armoires not good for much other than taking up space—Umri stepped inside it and said, “By God [wallahi], it’s big enough for me.” And I—having forgotten, without even realizing it, the Arabic word for “closet”—laughed and said, “inte fi ha-aron,” jumbling together the Arabic words “you are in” and the Hebrew word for “the closet.” Umri laughed and said, “la, ha-aron taba’ak. ana ma ‘indish aron [No, the closet is yours. I don’t have a closet].” I didn’t think much of it at first, but that moment seems to speak volumes: that I could only express the idea of
“the closet” in Hebrew and that Umri “got” my joke about it—and responded with one of his own—suggested that, while the closet was communicable in a particular language (i.e., not Arabic), it also was not some totally foreign concept with which he was unfamiliar. . . just one that didn’t belong to him.

*Everyday Affects*

I begin this chapter with Umri’s story because it is full of complexities and contradictions that demonstrate in the starkest terms the inadequacy of “resistance” and “complicity” as techniques for understanding the real complexities and contradictions of queer Palestinian lives. For example, Umri’s initial representation of himself to me as Israeli/Jewish might be read as an act of complicity with the symbolic structures that privilege Israeliness (and Jewishness) and demonize Palestinianness (and Arabness); it might also, however, be read as an act of “resistance” to discourses of essentialism that eschew the “performative” nature of identity. By the same token, Umri’s sexuality—the fact that he does not identify as “gay” (or “straight,” for that matter) and his rejection of “the closet” as inapplicable to him—might be read as a form of complicity or resistance. In the popular Israeli/Western logic of sexuality, of course, Umri is really in the closet, and his marriage and lack of a “gay” identity are evidence of his complicity with heteronormative structures. On the other hand, in a more critical academic discourse, sensitive to processes of globalization and cultural change, Umri’s *intentional*, fully conscious rejection of “the closet” and the (Western/Israeli) sexual ethos in which it is embedded seems to indicate the lingering possibility of resistance.

Setting aside the versatility of these terms—an indication, perhaps, of their conceptual weakness—what is more important, in the final analysis (or at least, in my analysis), is that Umri did not conceptualize these events in terms of “resistance” or “complicity.” Passing as Israeli
and getting married, for example, were matters of “survival,” everyday ways of getting by, functions of a kind of “embodied and somewhat automatic ‘knowledge’ . . . like peripheral vision, not studied contemplation . . . imageric and sensate rather than ideational” (Taussig 1991, 147, quoted in Allen 2008). Presented with a dichotomous set of choices, in a context where the violent consequences of any given choice were axiomatic, Umri responded not by contemplating the “political” ramifications of his actions but by surviving.

This is not, of course, to suggest that he was not capable of such contemplations, nor that he was, like the subject of classical liberal theory, motivated by a kind of calculated, rational self-interest. What I am suggesting, rather, is a sort of agency of survival in which, unlike that conjured by humanistic notions of “resistance,” agency “does not belong to the [subjects] themselves, but is a product of the historically contingent,” and—in the case of queer Palestinians—multiple and competing, “discursive traditions in which they are located” (Mahmood 2005, 32). “Survival,” as I use it here, does not indicate merely the avoidance of violence (in whatever form) but the strategies and techniques with which queer Palestinians navigate the violent geography I described in Chapter 3 and sometimes even manage to find pleasure—in culturally meaningful ways—in a context of endless suffering.

My emphasis on survival, however, as a trope for understanding queer Palestinian experiences, should not be taken as a kind of blind romanticization of their “resilience” or “creativity,” or of their capacity to magically transcend the violence and suffering that characterize their lives. In a harsh representation of the limited possibilities even for (the barest) survival, Palestinian Israeli director Tawfik Abu Wael’s short film, Diary of a Male Whore, offers a narrative of Palestinian queerness that simultaneously draws on a transnational Arab discourse of queerness
and the Palestinian discourse of the Nakba. Based on the semi-autobiographical novel, *For Bread Alone* (1973) by Moroccan writer, Muhammad Shukri (who became famously—and controversially—associated with the gay Orientalist, Paul Bowles), *Diary of a Male Whore* tells the story of Esam, a Palestinian male sex worker in Tel Aviv. The film alternates between Esam’s memories of the Nakba, visually represented in a Zionist soldier’s rape of his mother, and a scene in which an older Israeli man pays Esam to sit in his car and masturbate. While the film equates the sexualized violence of the Nakba with Esam’s dependence on prostitution as a strategy for survival—“you can,” he says, “make a living off of sex in the big city, [where] they pay fifty shekels for a five-minute blowjob”—it also maintains the ambiguous possibility of pleasure in the midst of pain and suffering and the relentless struggle to survive. “My physical pleasures,” Esam says, “make me forget my hunger.”

To be sure, Esam’s “pleasure” is represented as fleeting (perhaps even, in some sense, “fake”), but it is useful, for my purposes here, as a starting point with which to think about the broader significance of affect in queer Palestinian strategies for survival. A notoriously elusive term, “affect” has gained increasing theoretical cachet in recent years (see, e.g., Clough and Halley 2007; Massumi 2002; Pellegrini 2009; Stewart 2007). Inspired, in particular, by Jose Esteban Muñoz’s discussion of Latino/a identities in the US context, I use the notion of affect to explore in the following pages the ways in which queer Palestinians “specify and describe [their] difference and resistance not in terms of simple being, but through the more nuanced route of feeling.” While queer Israeli discourse, embedded as it is in an “‘official’ national affect . . . reads [queer Palestinian] affect as inappropriate,” I want to suggest that queer Palestinians nonethe-

less “‘feel’ differently and navigate the material world on a different emotional register” (Muñoz 2000, 68-69), that this sense of feeling—for oneself and for others, of affecting and being affected—is central to the agency of survival I am trying to sketch out, and that—whatever the skepticism of the empirically-minded for the realm of the touchy-feely—it has enormous consequences for understanding queer Palestinian subjectivities and politics.

Feeling Family

In Chapter 2, I argued, following Manalansan, that coming out in mainstream queer Israeli discourse “is founded on a kind of individuation that is separate from familial and kin bonds and obligations” (2003, 23), and that, moreover, representations of queer Palestinians posit them as both victims of the ostensibly repressive, homophobic Palestinian family and excessively loyal to it. In the first place, for many queer Palestinians (as for Palestinians generally), the realities of structural and economic marginalization—in Israel and in the West Bank—make the support of families a literal matter of survival. But more broadly, most queer Palestinians expressed a deep affective connection to family that far outweighed any desire to “come out,” and even in those cases where people chose to come out, they articulated a kind of patient willingness to wait for—and work on—an emotional support that was equally vital to their survival.

Zaki, a queer Palestinian man from a West Bank city known for its conservatism, explained that, while “life here is not easy, mainly because it’s so hard to meet other gays . . . I wouldn’t leave even if I could, not even to Ramallah, because my life is here, and my family is here. We have problems, but I love them. And I prefer not to ‘come out,’ as you say, because I don’t know if they can accept it, and . . . to be disconnected from the people you love, from your family, that seems worse to me than their not knowing I’m gay.”

Samira, a lesbian activist from Haifa, offered a lengthy account of her experience with
her mother, to whom she had come out, that made explicit the importance of feelings—both as an explanation for her mother’s difficulty “accepting” her queerness and as a means of describing the meaning of that “acceptance” for Samira.

Shaul Ganon [the Israeli activist discussed in Chapter 2] makes his statements about saving the Palestinian gays from their cruel Palestinian families, you know. . . People say there are two ways to be gay and lesbian in Palestinian society. Either very deep in the closet or dead. There’s no other way. And I say, “No, there are ways. First of all, you don’t know about it. Second, I want to tell you that there are tons of gay and lesbian Jews who are thrown out of their middle-class Ashkenazi families, and there are Palestinian gay women and men whose families embrace them.” Yes, they have difficulties. You know, my mother was crying and depressed when I told her. But I know a big part of it is because she had this demon in her head, that to be a lesbian means, “That’s it. You can not be a happy person because you will suffer and you will not find love.” But when she sees me now, she knows my life, and she acknowledges my lifestyle by talking to me in the plural and not in the singular [i.e., the plural “you” in Arabic], and she sends food to my girlfriend. One day, she looked at me . . . and she said, “ana mabsuta inno fi ‘indek kayyaan [I am happy that you have being or existence].” And it moved me so much, and I thought, “For me, that is so much stronger than her going to the parade and taking a flag or something like that.” For me, at that moment, she told me, “I can see you. I can hear you. I can feel you.”

As a critique both of Israeli misrepresentations of Palestinian homophobia and hegemonic formations of queerness that privilege a particular relationship—or non-relationship—to family, Samira articulated a vision of queerness whose very being is constituted, not in its atomization, but in its connection to others. My aim here is not to romanticize “family”—which, for many queer Palestinians (e.g., “Amal” in Chapter 3), is a painfully disciplinary institution—but simply to indicate the ways in which, for many Palestinians, the queer self emerges not so much through the severance of kinship and familial bonds as in their maintenance.

Feeling Religion

“Religion,” as Jasbir Puar argues, and “in particular Islam, has now supplanted race as one side of the irreconcilable binary between queer and something else. . . queer secularity understands observance of religious creed, participation in religious public spaces and rituals, de-
votion to faith-based or spiritual practices . . . as marks of subjugated and repressed sexuality void of agency” (Puar 2007, 13). In my discussion of queer Israeli representations of queer Palestinians, I noted the centrality of secularism for Israeli formulations of queerness—and the identification of religious sentiment as not only incompatible with but fundamentally threatening to queerness.

In fact, many queer Palestinian Muslims similarly identified religion—and in particular, Islam—as a “problem” for their queerness, but even in such cases, the problem was not generally resolved through a simple disavowal of religion. Fadi, for example, a highly educated Muslim from an upper-class family in Israel—a prime candidate, it would seem, for a secular worldview—explained that, while he did not “consider myself very religious, I do like to pray. I don’t like to miss prayer. I enjoy Ramadan . . . and I don’t just take it as a ‘tradition’ thing. I believe in it, as a Muslim.” Not just, in other words, a “cultural” practice out of the sake of “habit,” Fadi’s faith is deeply felt, and “it creates in me a real conflict. But I always tell myself that that’s how God created me . . . So I do know, and I do believe, that homosexuality is forbidden . . . But I believe anyway that that’s how God created me and I’m a good person . . . I’m sure that there is a place in God’s heart and he can forgive my mistakes, because sometimes it’s hard not to do what you feel . . . no one can live without emotions.” Still others, such as Ali—whose Israeli Jewish boyfriend pressured him to convert (Chapter 3)—struggled less with their religious sentiment. “I’m proud to be Muslim,” Ali explained, “even though I don’t really act like I’m Muslim. But this is my religion, even though I’m not religious.” Ali’s potentially confusing description of his religiosity/irreligiosity makes sense only when considered against the backdrop of a discursive tradition in which secularism as such does not figure prominently. Unlike Fadi, who experienced a kind of inner “conflict” between his queer sentiment and his religious sentiment—a
conflict, however, not so intense as to warrant choosing one or the other—Fadi found nothing contradictory: “I know Muslims who drink, and that’s haram [forbidden]. But they’re still Muslims.”

The importance of religious sentiment in queer Palestinian strategies to survive, on the one hand, and the complete illegibility of such sentiments in a queer Western framework, on the other, came to an almost absurd collision in a recent US showing of the documentary, City of Borders. The film documents the painful story of one queer Palestinian man, who was beaten and abused by a group of Palestinians, managed to escape to the US, and appeared at the showing of the film to participate in a question-and-answer session. Members of the largely gay white male bourgeois audience publicly applauded the courage and bravery of the triumphant queer Palestinian victim. “How did you survive all that?” someone finally asked, and an odd, uncomfortable silence fell over the audience when the young man answered, without hesitating for a moment, “Allah.”

Feeling Others

In Chapter 3, I documented the trenchant feeling of pain that frequently characterizes queer Palestinian “romantic” (or potentially romantic) encounters with queer Israelis. Rami, whose story is discussed in greater depth below, articulated a kind of strategy, informed by structural constraints and discursive realities, for establishing pleasurable, intimate connections with others. There are, Rami explained, several “types” of queer Israelis. “I hate that I’m putting them into types,” he said, “but that’s the situation.”

The first type . . . I was dating a guy. We didn’t talk much about [the fact that I’m Palestinian], and it was fine. But all the time he called me by an Israeli name. He said, “Oh, it’s

3. City of Borders (Directed by Yun Suh. San Francisco: Center for Asian American Media, 2009).
just a nickname.” And one day, he told me, “I don’t mind to be your boyfriend, [even though you are] an Arab, but I don’t want my friends to know. One of my friends once dated an Arab, and everyone was laughing at him and mocking him, and I don’t want to be in that situation.”

The second type . . . says, “I come to Jaffa and eat hummus, and I sit with my neighbors for Arabic coffee, and it’s amazing.” And I think—okay, Arabs and Palestinians are not coffee and hummus, but okay.

The third type . . . has a fetish for Arabs. . . and after they realize things about me and get to know me, they say, “You’re too Ashkenazi. You’re not a real Arab. You’re not tough.” One, he told me, as a joke, but I know he meant it, “Don’t change [clothes]. Come with dirty clothes like you’re a construction worker.” He wanted to feel this Arab in his bed. And when I would speak Arabic, it was very sexy and exciting for him.

Then there is the left-wing type who accepts you, they have compassion, but always—I always feel like they date Palestinians because of their ideologies or beliefs. “I struggle for Palestinians. I go to Bil’in [a Palestinian village and site of regular protests against the Israeli “security barrier”]. I go to demonstrations. So to date a Palestinian, it’s part of my struggle.”

And the last type is the people who don’t care, don’t even talk about it, don’t mention it—it’s like it doesn’t exist. . . it doesn’t matter what your language is, it doesn’t matter who you are . . . I feel there should be a certain dynamic. You know, you talk about things, about yourself, who you are, where you come from. But with this type, there’s nothing. They date the body, not the soul.

While this system of queer Israeli “types” left little room, in Rami’s view, for possibilities of “love” (with Israelis), “still,” he explained, “I have to survive sexually, and that means you have to compromise sometimes. . . you go and have sex for one night, so you don’t care. You don’t know the person’s name. He doesn’t know you’re Arab . . . you meet to have sex and go home.” The experience of sexual pleasure, for Rami, was an important part of the will to survive, and in the pursuit of it—in an exercise of agency that is neither obviously complicit nor resistant—Rami “compromises” to connect with others.

In a related spin on types of interactions with queer Israelis that are quite often felt as—because, in fact, they are—forms of (symbolic) violence, Samira explained how she survives through humor. “I could,” she said, “sit and do a lot of psychological analyses. Maybe I’d dis-
cover it’s because of their guilt, or something else,” but Samira decided instead to just laugh. In one example of what this practically means, Samira told of a woman she met who “found my accent very sexy. And she said, ‘Oh, please say again, ‘Samira’ [in heavily accented Arabic]. Please say it again. Oh, I love it. It’s so ... ’ And it was funny. I laughed.” And in another example of surviving objectification through humor, “I was in a bar dancing, and there was a very butch lesbian sitting there. And I talked to her, and she asked, ‘What accent is that?’ I said, ‘It’s an Arabic accent.’ And she said—you know, it was a bar, music, boom boom, but everybody could hear her because she screamed, ‘Yoooo, yesh li fantazia lizdayaane ma’ ‘araviya [I have a fantasy to have sex with an Arab woman].’ And I looked at her and smiled and said, ‘Okay darling, get in line.’”

Rami’s and Samira’s finding pleasure in such circumstances may, in some ways, be a function of the relatively “lighter” violence of those circumstances, but such strategies are significant, I am arguing, as part of a larger set of practices by which queer Palestinians—materially and discursively relegated to an affectively negative space of suffering—survive by establishing sentimental connections with “others” (even, as in the case of religious sentiment, the most disembodied Other). There is, of course, no one queer Palestinian subjectivity, no one way of being in—and moving through—the world, no one way of relating to the self (and others). But the small ways in which queer Palestinians manage to survive hint at the possibility of a kind of agency—and a kind of subject, “whose ethical and political status does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance” (Mahmood 2005, 14).

Bride of Palestine

Born in Jaffa to a “big Muslim family,” Rami described a “normal,” uneventful childhood. Rami explained that, until he was eighteen years old, “I knew nothing about my identity. I knew
I’m Arab—Arab-Israeli as they call them.” And then, entirely by accident, Rami, who had known for a long time that he wanted to be an artist, discovered—and began volunteering in the “arts” program of—a community center operated by a Palestinian Israeli socialist party. “We would sit and study Marx and Engels and analyze the situation in the West Bank and what’s going on. So I started to realize the hell I live. It was surprising for me . . . I started to learn that I’m Palestinian.” Although this realization was a long process that “took many years,” Rami laughed and said, “So I’ve been Palestinian since I was eighteen.”

A few years earlier, Rami had become “aware of my sexual identity . . . I felt that I’m gay. I knew that I’m gay, and I started to look for places to be a part of.” Rami discovered Tel Aviv’s queer spaces, and at first, “I felt so free, so good. That was at age fifteen . . . for being gay, I felt very comfortable. For being Arab, I was afraid to say I’m Arab, so nobody knew.” By the time Rami discovered his Palestinianness, the appeal of mainstream gay culture had worn off, and he became involved with Black Laundry, a (now defunct) Israeli lesbian anti-occupation group. The socialist party with which he was still involved, in turn, discovered Rami’s queerness and insisted that, while they could “accept him” because they were “democratic, socialist, and accept people,” he would need to “keep it a secret.” So Rami left the party and “chose my queer activist identity.”

Rami had been performing in drag occasionally—a kind of “silly,” meaningless drag, as he described it—and it was only when he was invited by a friend to see “a drag queen from Ramallah” that Rami began to, as he said, “combine” his queerness and his Palestinianness, generally and specifically in his drag performances. “I expected a diva from Ramallah, with the politics, and you know—the whole fucking situation in the West Bank. I was waiting for it. And there came a cute, girly belly dancer. I thought, ‘What the fuck?’ I was so disappointed. This was part
of my motivation when I performed” for the first time at a queer Palestinian party.

I chose to sing a Fairuz song, zahrat el madaen [rose among cities] about al-quds [Jerusalem], and the the [m.c.] asked me, ‘What’s your name? How should I present you?’ It was about two minutes before the performance. I said, ‘Just a minute. I need to think about it.’ I was thinking, ‘What the hell? What can my name be? Why didn’t I think of this? I can’t be Lolita singing for Jerusalem.’ And I said, ‘Okay, Jaffa. No, Jaffa—it’s too—I’m from Jaffa. Jaffa was the bride of the sea—Bride of Palestine.’ And from that day, the Bride of Palestine was born.”

As Bride of Palestine, Rami “theatricalizes a certain mode of ‘feeling brown [or Palestinian]’ in a world painted white [or Israeli], organized by cultural mandates to ‘feel white’” (Muñoz 2000, 68). Rami embodies the suffering of Palestinians generally—and queer Palestinians in particular—and he reconfigures that suffering in a way that does not privilege “coming out of the closet”—out, that is to say, of the repressiveness of religion, family, and community—into the freedom and independence of liberal queer modernity (Figure 4.1). His performances reject the set of choices offered queer Palestinians—the choice between queerness and Palestinianess—and create, instead, a space in which the terms are held together in a kind of ihtikaak, or “friction,” as he described it (see Tsing 2005), neither incommensurable opposites nor seamlessly integrated. Moreover, the suffering of queer Palestinians, as Rami performs it, is not a function solely of the violence of the Israeli state or the violence of Palestinian nationalism but both, and more importantly, that suffering is overcome, not through the redemption of the triumphant queer monad, but through a kind of queer affect and
connection precluded both by the discourse of Palestinian nationalism and the discourse of gay rights.

In one particularly powerful performance, for example—which was staged at a “storefront” gallery in Tel Aviv, with an audience of several dozen people—Rami resignifies queerness, not as the opposite of or incompatible with the wider experience of Palestinians suffering, nor as the simple antidote to it, but as a source of pleasure and connection—a source of life—within it. Set in a traditional Palestinian living room, replete with family photos, the Bride of Palestine, dressed in a blood-soaked wedding gown, begins with a plaintive Palestinian song that commemorates the violence and horror of the Nakba (Figure 4.2). As the song concludes, Bride of Palestine turns defiant, taking up a stone, which she offers to the Palestinian man, who is, until then, sitting with a palpable sense of resignation in a corner of the room. He hurls the stone at a picture of AlAqsa mosque—one of the primary symbols of Palestinian nationalism—and then tears off the wedding gown, beneath which she wears the colors of the Palestinian flag (Figure 4.4). Stripped of—rather than reconstituted in—the trappings of nationalism, and revealed as two queers, they embrace, still bloody and marked by the violence of the state, still within the space of Palestine and its history of suffering, but somehow affirmed in a defiant act of queer...
love (Figures 4.5-6).

There are multiple possibilities for reading Rami’s performance, and rather than attempting to offer a definitive reading here, I want to conclude this section by gesturing to how he utilizes suffering, queerness, and Palestinian-ness—and queer Palestinian suffering—not so much to “subvert” as to re-work the politics of life and death that position queer Palestinians as simultaneously deserving—and undeserving—of both.

The trope of suffering and victimization is, I have argued, not limited to constructions of queer Palestinians, and its currency may derive, in large part, from the wider value of victimization as a contemporary technique of power and a powerful mode of subjectivation that engenders a particular relationship with the state that insulates it from critique by representing it as a “neutral arbiter of injury rather than . . . [itself] invested with the power to injure” (Brown 1995, 27). Rami’s performance cannot, in any measurable sense, challenge the real power of the state to injure; it retains, after all, the ultimate right to decide who lives and who dies.

But if Mbembe is right to characterize life “under late modern occupation” as a “permanent condition of ‘being in pain,’” (2003, 39), then it does not seem a romantic overstatement to read a certain radicalism in Rami’s insistence on being in love. At the very least, it signals a failure in the capacity of the state and its regimes of control to squelch the appeal of one queer, not to
the racist/heteronormative discourses of the nation(s), not to the redress and protection of the paternalistic state—but to the radical, life-affirming potential of affect and connection—the potential of queer love—even, or particularly, among those left to suffer and die.

**Activism and the Politics of Affect**

While the trope of “survival,” I have argued, more effectively captures the reality of queer Palestinian subjectivities—which depart in significant ways from (ostensibly) secular, liberal, individualistic queer Western and Israeli subjectivities—than that of “resistance,” many queer Palestinian activists explicitly think of their work in terms of resistance against social and political structures that marginalize queer Palestinians, aiming, for example, to “change public opinion about the concepts of sexuality, sexual orientation, gender and homosexuality,” to fight for “our sociopolitical rights as a minority group,” to “[challenge] attitudes, [break] social and religious taboos and norms . . . and [promote] social change and social transformation.” In fact, however, I want to suggest that, much like certain affective qualities animate the everyday agency of queer Palestinian survival, queer Palestinian activists conceive of “resistance”—and concentrate their efforts to effect “social change and social transformation”—through an overarching logic and politics of affect.

**Feeling “Bad”**

Founded in 2002, Aswat (aswat filasteeniyaat mithleeyaat [“Voices of Lesbian Palestinians”]) grew out of “an internet forum . . . started by two women” who wanted to created a “safe,” anonymous space for Palestinian lesbians to “connect,” Rauda, the former director of


the organization explained. Funded primarily by grants from North American and European feminist and lesbian organizations, Aswat is based in Haifa, where it shares an office space with a Palestinian feminist organization. AlQaws (alqaws li-ta’addudiya jinsiya wa jinderiya fi almajmua’ alfilasteeniya [“the rainbow,’ for sexual and gender diversity in Palestinian society’]), which is based in Jerusalem and boasts a much larger membership and wider name recognition in the queer Palestinian community, has a slightly more complicated history.

In 2003, Jerusalem Open House, Jerusalem’s gay and lesbian community center, as part of an outreach effort to “gay and lesbian Arabs,” placed an advertisement for an “Arabic speakers coordinator.” Haneen, a Palestinian lesbian from the north of Israel and then a social work student at Hebrew University, responded to the ad. Haneen explained her first encounter with the Open House:

They called me to set up an appointment, and they asked if I know where the place is. And I said yes, the building with the [pride] flag, and she said, “Yes, okay, have a nice day and well see you in a few days.” And that day, when I arrived, it was like this was the most shocking thing they have ever seen: a Palestinian woman that knows we exist downtown and this flag. They assumed I knew what this flag means, but I didn’t. I googled “Open House” and read that there is a flag, but I didn’t have time to do more research about this flag . . . I think I thought when I got to Ben Yehuda [Street], I’d see a building with a flag, and I would understand, “This is the place.” And they were like, “Whoa, someone Palestinian knows about this flag,” which is a bit of a paternalistic way of understanding, explaining me . . . it was all paternalistic, good intentions, but . . .

For the next year, Haneen worked on a part-time basis providing social services and developing “outreach programs” for queer Palestinians. When, a year later, the program was awarded a major grant, Haneen began working full-time, and that’s when, she said, she “started thinking about myself in this position, if I want to keep answering the phone and providing services to individual people or if I want to create more change, deep change, to take this project to a point where it has an impact on—real life, reality.” A few years later, owing largely to the
perceived “paternalism” of the queer Israeli activists to whom they were tied—the feeling, Haneen explained, of being “in this position of always having to defend something, sometimes your sexuality, sometimes being Palestinian”—Haneen and a group of queer Palestinians severed their ties from Jerusalem Open House (much to the dismay of its leaders) and registered AlQaws as an independent, legally-recognized (Israeli) non-profit organization.

In my conversations with Haneen and Rauda, the significance of their interactions with queer Israelis (and Westerners) continually re-emerged as a crucial factor in shaping their—and their organizations’—sense of “politics” and “activism.” Moreover, both consistently described these interactions in “bad” terms—in terms, that is to say, of bad feelings, and largely as a result of these bad feelings, they were pushed to articulate alternative ways of thinking about—and doing—politics and activism.

“Sometimes,” Rauda explained, “I feel very humiliated. “They [queer Westerner and Israeli activists and journalists] look at me as if I am in the zoo . . . they have their ideas and stories, and they’re not even willing to ask whether that works for us.” The “ideas and stories” with which queer activists objectify queer Palestinians are inevitably stories of suffering and victimization. Rauda, for example, recounted an experience with a European journalist who was collecting “personal stories of [queer] Palestinians and Israelis in this area.” When the journalist asked if Rauda might refer him to some individuals who could “tell [him] their suffering,” Rauda asked,

“Are you interested in only talking about suffering?” And he said, “Yes, that’s what most people like.” And I asked, “Who are these people? Who’s your audience?” He said, “The Europeans.” I said, “Do you want the Europeans to only be in solidarity with us through our suffering? Why don’t you take the struggle as your starting point? But suffering, it means you want miserable people. And I’m telling you I’m not miserable. . . . I am not a victim.
Not surprisingly, the persistent trope of the victim engenders in many well-meaning Israeli Jewish activists—for whom, as HaAguda’s Mike Hamel explained, “LGBT solidarity” is important—a paternalistic desire to “help” or “rescue” their queer Palestinian brothers and sisters. While such efforts are not generally as overtly paternalistic as, for example, Shaul Ganon’s fifteen-year “mission” (the Palestinian Rescue Project, see Chapter 2), they frequently leave queer Palestinians with the feeling of humiliation Rauda described, but more often, with a sense of indignation. “I want to tell them loudly,” Rauda said, “Leave us alone. Leave us alone.” Haneen articulated that sentiment even more clearly with an anecdote about a group of Israeli Jewish lesbians who offered to hold a counter-demonstration opposite the Islamic Movement’s protest at a conference organized by Aswat.

They suggested that they would hold a sign, something like, “I’m a Palestinian lesbian, and I’m here.” And we said, “Fuck off. We are Palestinian lesbians and we are here, so we don’t need you to speak for us and liberate us.”

The trope of victimization is so unrelenting that the only kind of “solidarity” most queer Israeli activists can imagine with queer Palestinians is through either teaching or preaching—an affect, in other words (and in multiple senses of the word), of paternalism. Rauda explained that, while she would like to—and sometimes does—“feel solidarity with these groups,” their almost religious conviction that “they have found . . . the cure” makes the goal of solidarity, for queer Palestinians, impossible to realize. Interestingly, Rauda likened the activist projects of Western/Israeli queers to Alcoholics Anonymous and the cultish multi-level marketing company, Herbalife. “It becomes a religion at a certain point. . . . Go to one meeting, and you’re going to throw up afterwards.” Haneen explained with a similar sense of frustration that, while AlQaws has “spent a lot of energy trying to explain to the Israeli gay movement that we are capable of helping ourselves,” at a certain point, the endless overtures from activists and journalists become a
lot of “noise” that detract’s from the organization’s real goals. “They want to hear what they want to hear,” Rauda said, so eventually she learned to take a more strategic approach, especially with journalists, “use them to say what I want to say,” and when that doesn’t work, avoid them altogether.

If the “disease” queer Israeli Jewish activists imagine plaguing queer Palestinians is an intolerant society that does not allow them to “come out,” the “cure” of which Rauda spoke is, invariably, a politics of visibility. The Gay International, as Joseph Massad so passionately argues, exhorts queer Arabs—and Arab practitioners of same-sex activities—to publicly identify “these practices with the Western identity of gayness” (2002, 382). But unlike Massad’s Westernized, upper- and middle-class, urban elites, queer Palestinians do not unselfconsciously heed that call. “Visibility,” Haneen explained, does not figure into AlQaws’s goals, and Rauda added that “there are different kinds of visibilities,” and Western/Israeli queer activists do not generally understand that their kind of visibility “does not work for everyone.” The point, in other words, is that queer Palestinians are not “complicit” with the missionary project of the Gay International (or the Gay Israeli); they are, in fact, conscious of—sometimes even critical of—the hegemonic narratives of Western/Israeli gayness, as well as the sometimes ridiculous assumptions about queer Palestinians. And the moment of confrontation with those discourses and their proponents is not one of capitulation, but refusal—a refusal based on the sense that, as Haneen said, occupying a position of “always responding . . . to Israelis’ or foreigners’ or journalists’ requests” prevents queer Palestinians from focusing on their “internal needs and feelings . . . the really important things.”

Recently, for example, a Tel Aviv-based gay publication contacted Haneen soliciting “an Arab LGBT person” to participate in “a new [marketing] campaign with pictures and stories of
different people from all sectors in Israel.”

And I thought, okay, the short answer. “I don’t think there are Arabs who are willing to be ‘out’ in your magazine.” And she said, “Oh, really? I was hoping that maybe one or two would.” And I said, “No, no, there are no Arabs who can be so out.” We [a group of “out” Palestinian activists who were riding in Haneen’s car at the time] were laughing after that. I could have had a half-hour conversation explaining that your fucking magazine is not representing me . . . ten years, and there were no articles about Arabs . . . but I chose the easy answer. “Yes, we are very primitive. None of us is out yet.” . . . I could have explained the whole thing. But I am beyond this. Just leave me alone. Don’t make too much noise.

Not just, however, a refusal to speak—a refusal, that is, to submit to the objectifying Israeli Jewish gaze and play a prefabricated goal—queer Palestinian activists’ humiliating/infuriating/exhausting—even nauseating—encounters with queer Israeli and international activists have provided an unexpected opportunity for collective self-reflection and exploration. Haneen described the experience as

someone holding up a mirror to you and saying, “Look. Tell me what you see.” Understanding that they are holding up this mirror encouraged us, or made us more proactive about responding to this mirror, not to them, because it’s not an equal dialogue, but to us. What does this mirror mean? What are their expectations of us? What is the right mirror to hold in front of ourselves? And what do I see in it? It’s not really what they want me to see . . . all of these questions were a trigger to liberate ourselves from their expectations.

What exactly liberation from those expectations would mean is a question that they have not answered—and perhaps cannot answer, given the complexity of identity, especially for queer Palestinians in Israel—but it is a question with which they are passionately engaged. At an AlQaws “retreat,” attended by about thirty queer Palestinians, among the more heated discussions was the question, “meen ihna? [Who are we?]” With vasty different opinions, the group debated the role and meaning of Israeliness, Palestinianness, gayness, and other modes of identification; the extent to which there is a “we” in the first place; and the “authenticity” (or not) of this “we.” Fully cognizant of accusations of inauthenticity—from actors as diverse as Joseph
Massad and Islamist leaders—and, at the same time, determined not to normalize a particular “model” of identity that might privilege some and exclude others, the leaders and members of AlQaws have settled on an organizational structure based on a radical respect for diversity and democratic participation. The organization, for example, regularly holds open events in which members of the community are invited, not simply to take advantage of “social services” like those paternalistically offered by HaAguda, but to actively contribute to defining AlQaws’s mission and activities, all of which guided, at least outwardly, but an emphasis on respect for the multiple possibilities of being (more or less “Palestinian” or “Israeli,” more or less—or not at all—“gay” or “out,” etc.).

The same emphasis on respect for diversity and democratic participation guides AlQaws’s “external” political activities. In the first place, the fact that it does not “shy away from political issues” contrasts sharply with the de-politicized queer activism that predominates in Israel and most Western countries. Of course, Haneen explained that the realities of organizational funding, especially from European and American sources, sometimes require a strategic presentation of the organization’s philosophy, “in a language that they will understand.” But unlike the hegemonic Western and Israeli assimilationist projects of establishing queers as “normal,” legitimate members of the nation who deserve the rights to defend and produce more citizens for it, AlQaws has established as its goal the promotion of a queer Palestinian community, a project which, as the organization’s mission statement explains, “is inextricably linked with the larger project of building an equal, diverse, and open Palestinian society . . . that internalizes the non-hierarchical diversity of sexual and gender identity.” AlQaws’s practical efforts to realize those goals range from creating “safe” social spaces for queer Palestinians (in a context where such spaces—even, or particularly, in ostensibly gay-friendly Israel—are virtually nonexistent),
to publishing a series of Arabic-language booklets that aim “to create a space for public discourse on sexual and gender diversity in Palestinian society,” to pushing Israeli and Palestinian civil society organizations to confront the complexities of identity in Israel-Palestine.

Whatever the eventual success of their efforts—the actual extent to which they manage to effect “social change” as they imagine it—queer Palestinian activists have refused to emulate Western and Israeli activists’ politics of visibility, which takes its terms straight from the lexicon of neoliberalism and articulates its demands in a way that justifies state violence against racial others in exchange for recognition of a victimized class of domesticated queers. In that refusal, queer Palestinians can imagine a kind of activism that does not avoid politics in favor of normalization but articulates a vision of a society transformed by a fundamental restructuring of power. Rather than organize around a common identification as “gays and lesbians,” their activism aims to create a community based on a “common identification with a radical democratic interpretation of the principles of liberty and equality.” Such a community would not demand of the liberal state that it recognize and protect victimized queers, but that it live up to the promise of its democratic ideals (Mouffe 1992, 236).

Having Fun

If, as I have suggested, queer Palestinian activists’ emotionally painful encounters with queer Israelis and Westerners have played a crucial role in their efforts to re-imagine the possibilities of activism and politics, the recalcitrant impulse to find pleasure in the process of surviving has played an equally crucial role in dictating the strategies with which queer Palestinians act in—and on—the world. The real “turning point” for AlQaws came, Haneen explained, from a passing idea. “I was thinking, ‘No one is coming to these events. We have to get off the idea of these stupid social groups and support groups and go out and do something. A party was an
easy and accessible idea.” Together with a few other AlQaws activists, Haneen organized a party at a bar in Jerusalem: they invited two people; eighty showed up. Given its huge success, AlQaws made a tradition of its monthly Queer Palestinian Party.

People from all around started to come. From Ramallah, Bethlehem, Haifa, Nazareth. All over. . . A group from the West Bank did the drag shows, the music, and we didn’t have a DJ, a professional DJ. We were doing it like a homemade DJ. It was funny—embarrassing sometimes . . . We were just a few crazy people that wanted to party and to see each other and to create some space for engagement.

AlQaws encountered considerable criticism—including from other queer Palestinian activists—for organizing parties in a context of “years of being so oppressed, the terrorism and violence and war. ‘And these gay people are partying. This is not the place or the time to party.’” Nevertheless, that first party (Figure 4.7) was, Haneen said, the “formative” moment for AlQaws, the moment AlQaws, as a reality in the lives of queer Palestinians—and as a social force in the context they inhabit—was “born.” In pragmatic terms, the parties, which continue and are generally attended by upwards of one hundred (or more) people, exposed the organization to a wide and diverse group of queer Palestinians to whom they might not otherwise have had access. More important, though, AlQaws’s parties offered an opportunity—and created a space—for a kind of collective engagement that they did not anticipate. “Palestinians,” Haneen said, in response to her critics, “have to party sometimes, too,” and everyone that we spoke with, everyone who laughed and danced, everyone who cried and fought at these parties, everyone who broke up with her girlfriend, everyone who had some idea and came to the party to tell us about it—people started to see something big being created, something real, and wanted to be engaged.

“Powered by the pleasures of bitterness, cynicism and pain, as well as by ecstasy, empathy and solidarity,” AlQaws’s seemingly frivolous parties—“frivolous,” anyway, in liberal humanist metanarratives of progress and social change— “[gesture] . . . through hope to the concrete
utopias forged in . . . experimental intimacies and social forms” (Duggan and Munoz 2009, 280-281). And in a cultural/geographical space organized by the sovereign power of a state that relies on the ceaseless exercise of violence and a ubiquitous system of checkpoints that severely diminish the capacity of queer Palestinian bodies to move and “to affect other bodies and be affected by other bodies” (Lim 2007, 54, emphasis added), there may yet be something “subversive” in the creation of a space, however limited and temporary, where queer Palestinians can connect with others and have fun.

Figure 4.7. AlQaws Queer Palestinian Party flyer

abyad wa aswad ["black and white"]; pictured: legendary Egyptian singer, Umm Kulthum (bottom right); Lebanese singer, Fairuz (left).
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

You are erasing me, without even knowing me. I ask Joseph Massad, you know, I can understand the Israeli illusion about the threat of the Palestinian. But how do these activists threaten you, Joseph Massad? Why do you feel the need to fight them, to erase them, to question them and their work and their motives and principles? Why?

You can write this. Say it’s a Palestinian lesbian activist who said it.

Hanan, a Palestinian lesbian activist

It was a jarring moment. I had arranged to meet Hanan, a member of Aswat, to interview her about her experiences as a Palestinian Israeli lesbian activist. A few minutes into our conversation, Hanan asked if I’d heard of Joseph Massad and if I had read his famous article, “Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World” (2002). After angrily dismissing Massad’s critique of self-identified “gay” and “lesbian” Arabs—activists, in particular—as an elite, Westernized, “miniscule minority . . . of native informants . . . who consort with European and American tourists” (Massad 2007, 172, 182), Hanan (only half-jokingly) asked that I deliver the above message to “Professor Massad.” It was a jarring moment that simultaneously rattled my unexamined assumptions about the directionality of the ethnographic “exchange” and the unexamined assumptions about the directionality of processes of globalization on which Massad’s argument is based.

Reproduced in the same form (plus a few footnotes that deride his critics) in a more recent book (2007), Massad’s article begins with a devastating (and thoroughly convincing) critique of the “Orientalist impulses” of Western queer activists, journalists, and academics who write about issues of “homosexuality” in the “Arab World” (itself a problematic category that Massad never interrogates). This discourse, Massad asserts, “assumes prediscursively that homosexuals, gays, and lesbians are a universal category that exists everywhere in the world,”

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and on that basis, he correctly argues, the “Gay International” identifies Arab “gays” and “lesbians” and “[demands] that their rights as ‘homosexuals’ be granted where they are denied and be respected where they are violated” (163). As I showed in Chapter 2, queer Israeli Jewish activists—who proudly identify their variant of homosexuality as “Western,” in origin and in substance—take a “missionary” approach to their Palestinian others. Simultaneously drawing on a corpus of Orientalist (and “local,” uniquely Israeli) representations of Arab sexuality and a myopic chauvinism about the superiority of Western configurations of sexuality, they aim “to liberate Arab and Muslim ‘gays and lesbians’ from the oppression under which they allegedly live by transforming them from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as ‘homosexual’ and ‘gay’” (162). So far, so good.

Where Massad goes wrong is in his assertion that the Gay International’s activist and representational work on—and less commonly, in—the Arab World, by inciting a heretofore nonexistent discourse on “homosexuality,” has the sad, if unintended, effect of destroying, in Massad’s view, apparently more authentic “social and sexual configurations of desire in the interest of reproducing a world in its own image” (189). In the first place, as I argued in Chapter 2, Massad’s argument totally ignores the significance of the Gay International’s discourse about Arabs in the West. After all, the primary consumers of queer Israeli representations of queer Palestinians are not Palestinians—queer or otherwise—but Israelis (and to an extent, Westerners); similarly, while Massad provides anecdotal evidence for the emergence, among some Arab journalists and politicians, of public discussions of “homosexuality,” the primary consumers of the Gay International’s representations of queer Arabs are not Arabs—queer or otherwise—but Westerners. Massad thus ignores the real impetus—and the real impact—of the Gay International: in many Western countries, especially in the last ten years or so—and in Israel,
since the founding of the state—variations of the “clash of civilizations” discourse are regularly deployed to posit the incommensurability of Western liberalism and ostensibly illiberal Arabs. As the racialized Arab has emerged as the most salient and dangerous other, the properly domesticated homosexual, once the nation’s sexual other, has gained increasing acceptability. Against this backdrop, as I have argued, representations of Arab “intolerance” provide fodder for the wider abjection of Arabs, while representations of “repressed” or otherwise deficient queer Arabs provide a sort of foil against which to prop a fragile queer subject.

If Massad fails to appreciate the political and ideological effects of the Gay International in Western countries, he vastly overstates its effects in the Arab World. As my research with queer Palestinians shows, the Gay International has not “heterosexualized” Arab societies, and Arabs who identify as “gay” or “lesbian” (or “bisexual,” “queer,” etc.) are not simply Western-ized elites. Admittedly, Palestinians in Israel—and in the Palestinian Territories, for that matter—encounter and interact with Westerners (and, of course, Israelis) with a greater intensity and regularity than most Arabs in predominantly Arab states. But the impulse even to point out that distinction suggests two fundamental misunderstandings on which Massad bases his proclamations about “gay Arabs”: first, a misunderstanding of “culture” as a bounded and discrete thing that changes—if at all—at glacial speed and is tied to a specific geographical locale; and second, a misunderstanding of globalization as (1) a process that looks, ironically, a lot like Orientalist fantasies of “authentic” Arab sexuality—a non-consensual act of penetration by a more powerful actor; and (2) a process in which only “activists, tourists, and jet-setting elites” are implicated (Boellstorff 2006, 627). In fact, “Muslim Arab civilization,” to Massad’s dangerously reductive terms, is neither static nor bounded: Arab cultures, like all cultures, are dynamic, contested, constantly changing systems of meaning that overlap and interact with other cultural sys-
tems, and the assumption that the emergence of self-identified Arab queers is a straightforward result of the Gay International’s (neo)colonial imposition of Western values is, at best, naive.

And it is, at worst, insulting, especially to those Arab queers—such as Hanan—whom it caricatures as unsophisticated dupes of clever Western ideologues. Indeed, Massad’s argument is most problematic in his mistaken view of globalization as a simple “act of non-reciprocal penetration” (Gibson-Graham 2001, 244). To be sure, globalization is a hierarchically structured process in which certain ideas and discourses (not to mention people, capital, and things) move, with greater force, in certain directions. But anthropologists, in particular, have pointed out for a long time the flaws in arguments that Western gay and lesbian identities are supplanting alternative sexualities everywhere, showing the creativity with which “non-Western” queers interact with “Western” constructs of sexuality, the resilience of “local” constructs, even in “Western” contexts, and, more importantly, the inadequacy of simplistic theories of globalization that posit a simple, dichotomous choice between “this” or “that” formation of sexuality/sexual identity (e.g., Boellstorff 2005; Manalansan 2003; Sinnott 2004; cf. Altman 1996; Altman 1997).

In my discussion in Chapter 4 of the self-conscious efforts of queer Palestinian activists to formulate alternative conceptualizations of activism and politics rather than blindly adopt queer Western and Israeli forms, I suggested some of the problems in Massad’s argument about queer Arab activists. But where does this leave “ordinary” Arab men (it is not clear whether or how women fit into Massad’s paradigm), who, Massad argues, formerly engaged in same-sex practices under an Arab/Muslim sexual ethos, in which such acts had not implications for one’s “identity,” but are now “forced” to “fix” their behaviors in “a Western [hetero-homo] binary” (2007, 188)? According to Massad,
men who are considered the ‘passive’ or ‘receptive’ parties in male-male sexual contacts are forced to have one object choice and identify as homosexual or gay, just as men who are the ‘active’ partners are also forced to limit their sexual aim to one object choice, either women or men. As most ‘active’ partners see themselves as part of a societal norm, so heterosexuality becomes compulsory given that the alternative . . . means becoming marked outside the norm (188).

Such an argument, as I suggested, relies on a simplistic—and faulty—notion of Arab/Muslim “culture” that eschews historical realities of cultural change (and exchange), and it is a form of argumentation that is, in the end, a luxury of critics who choose not to engage with the complicated, ambiguous realities of living, breathing people. If Massad were correct about the “heterosexualization” of the Arab World, then Muhammad—the Palestinian man who appeared in the opening anecdote of this dissertation, who engages in same-sex practices, who regularly interacts with self-identified “gays” and frequents “gay” spaces (who is fully cognizant, in other words, of the Western discourse of homosexuality), but who nonetheless chooses not to “fix” his sexual behavior within that mold—could not exist. Or, for another example, Umri (discussed in Chapter 4), who also has sex with other men but does not identify as “gay.” In Massad’s world, because Umri rejects “the closet” and the Western model of homosexuality, he is left with only one option: as a normatively gendered man, he may penetrate other “non-men,” including women and—at the risk of being “marked outside the norm”—non-normatively gendered (passive) males. But not only does Umri reject the closet and its attendant sexual logic, he rejects (or at least does not adhere to) Massad’s traditional Arab model: Umri finds pleasure (“actively” and “passively”) in penetration and a whole range of non-penetrative acts; his intimate encounters do not preclude emotional attachments associated with “egalitarian” Western forms of homosexuality—he described with great passion men he had “loved” and who had reciprocated that love (not just, in other words, men he had fucked); he did not conceive of
those emotional attachments as a betrayal of his wife (which is not, admittedly, to suggest that she would feel the same); and, as with Muhammad, his social life included active participation in “gay” spaces. My point, in all of this, is that Massad’s simplistic conceptualization of a dichotomous, “traditional” Arab sexual ethos, on the one hand, and a “modern” (Western) gay identity, on the other, does little to illuminate the meaningful and affective content of sexual desire and behavior “on the ground.”

If Massad’s analysis falls short in its representation of Arab men who engage in same-sex behavior but do not identify as “homosexual,” it is glaringly deficient in its representation of self-identified Arab queers. While Massad’s suggestion that such queers are “a miniscule minority among those men who engage in same-sex relations” is empirically questionable, much more problematic is his assertion that their “[adoption of] a Western identity” is part of a more general “adoption of everything Western by the classes to which they belong” (173). The implication, of course, is that, when Arabs adopt a “gay” or “lesbian” identity, they also adopt wholesale the set of assumptions and narratives about personhood and politics associated with Western constructions of gayness. In fact, however, as I have argued in this dissertation, many queer Palestinians experience a certain “tension” or “conflict” between their queerness and their Palestinianess (or Arabness), and that conflict is a complicated product of Palestinian and queer discourses that render queerness and Palestinianess incommensurable. But even in the face of that presumed incommensurability, most queer Palestinians do not respond by simply “choosing” one or the other—as if matters of identity were so simple—but manage instead, not so much in calculated acts of resistance or complicity as in manifest acts of survival, to formulate modes of queerness that allow possibilities—e.g., religious sentiment, familial bonds, political commitments—foreclosed in Western and Israeli discourses of queer liberalism.
This incommensurability may be, as Boellstorff argues in the case of gay Muslims in Indonesia, precisely what constitutes the queer Palestinian experience (Boellstorff 2005). Boellstorff uses the metaphor of “dubbing” to describe “how some Indonesians come to think of themselves . . . [as] gay and lesbi,” and while he emphasizes “dubbing” as a tool for thinking about the globalization of (“gay” and “lesbian”) sexual identities in a way that does not “imply prior unities and originary points of dispersion,” it nevertheless seems an insufficient heuristic: it may be true that “in a dubbed film . . . each element articulates a different language, yet they are entangled into a meaningful until,” but the dubbed film is, in the end, a translation of some original (Boellstorff 2005, 5).

Inspired by Rami (Bride of Palestine), who described his experience of queerness/Palestinian-anness as a kind of ihtikaak (friction), and Anna Tsing, who also deploys the metaphor of friction—as a means of understanding globalization in “awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative” terms other than simple binaries like resistance and complicity or authentic and inauthentic—I suggest that the metaphor of “friction” provides a useful mechanism for thinking about the globalization of queer identities. Friction, says Tsing, “reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (2005, 4-5). Within this framework, then, we might view the “globalization” of queerness—and its political/theoretical implications and possibilities—not, like Massad, as a unidirectional imposition of Euro-American (or Israeli) ways of being on other contexts and peoples, but a complex of “encounters across difference” that reproduce relations of power but, at the same time, contain the seed—or seeds—for their alteration (3). So, for example, the encounter between queer Israeli activists and queer Palestinian activists is a profoundly unequal, hierarchical encounter, but it is also a productive—frictive—encounter, whose outcome can not easily be predicted, just as the some-
times painful encounter between discourses of queerness and Palestinianness holds within it at least the potential for a radical reconfiguration of the meanings of those terms and the relationship between them.

It is precisely that potential which this dissertation has aimed to explore and which it suggests—cautiously, hopefully, skeptically—might have something valuable to teach us—about Israel-Palestine, and about the world in which we live.

I began this inquiry by looking at how—and why—queer Palestinian suffering has emerged with such frequency in the discourse of queer Israelis. The significance of that suffering, I suggested, has less to do with the fact of it than the recent emergence into the space of national belonging of a normalized queer subject, whose very life depends on the discursive—and sometimes literal—death of his other. As the biopolitical state increasingly comes up against threats to its sovereignty, the power over life and death takes on unparalleled currency and is expressed in parallel practices of paternalism and violence. Queers, in this context, are no longer (if they ever were) necessary “others” to the nation, and—as the case of Israel demonstrates—they may even be of some value. By manufacturing a narrative of queer Palestinian suffering that both confirms the “tolerance” of the liberal-democratic state and provides moral and ideological justification for the ruthless imposition of violence against its racialized other, queer Israelis consolidate their place in the nation as properly liberal—secular, rational, individual—subjects with no loyalties except to the state. And they do so, crucially, against the figure of the improperly queer Palestinian.

To suggest, however, that queer Israeli representations of queer Palestinian suffering are ideologically, rather than empirically, driven, is not to suggest that such suffering does not exist.
In Chapter 3, I first explored the ways in which, for some queer Palestinians, hegemonic narratives of their suffering create a cognitive and emotional framework with which all kinds of violence can be understood and provide a rare kind of currency to queer Palestinians in an economy of images where they are visible only as victims. I then tackled the tricky project of setting aside dominant representations of queer Palestinian suffering to consider the concrete social and historical forces that have conspired to marginalize queer Palestinians in Palestinian society. I noted, in particular, the rise of Islamism and its construction of Palestinianness and queerness as mutually exclusive. Ironically, through the same mechanism queer Israelis employ—the “collaborator”—Islamists similarly regard queer Palestinians as potential threats to the nation whose loyalty is suspect.

In popular representations of queer Palestinians, queer Israeli Palestinians rarely emerge except, in contrast to the grotesque suffering of queer Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, as a confirmation of the liberal tolerance of (gay) Israel. Drawing on research with queer Palestinians in Israel, and utilizing the metaphor of the checkpoint system to understand the inextricability of control over the movement of Palestinian bodies through space, I argued that queer Israeli space—from the “privacy” of the bedroom to the gay bar—similarly invests in the regulation of queer Palestinian “mobility,” that similar strategies for “reading” queer Palestinians are employed to control their movement through—and access to—queer Israeli space, and, finally, that the threat of violence is always immanent (and sometimes realized) in those processes.

In Chapter 4, I argued that the concepts of resistance and complicity are inadequate for understanding the ways in which queer Palestinians respond to violence and endure their suffering. I suggested instead the notion of an “agency of survival,” a kind of “getting by” in the face of a violence and suffering so regular that they become ordinary, everyday realities. I further ar-
gued that affect is crucial to understanding how surviving, for queer Palestinians, is constituted in the creation—and maintenance—of sentimental connections to family, religion, and community. What arises out of this notion of agency, in the end, is a queer subject that does not fit within the schema of liberal humanist—or queer liberal—assumptions about personhood; a queer Palestinian subjectivity, in other words, that insists on its Palestinianness and its queerness but subtly redefines the contours of both.

Finally, in a discussion of queer Palestinian activism, I noted the pervasiveness of “bad feelings”—an experience of being negatively affected—in activists’ understandings of their encounters with queer Israeli and Western activists and the productive potential of those feelings in their efforts to articulate alternatives to (Western/Israeli) forms of activism and politics perceived as inadequate to meet the needs of queer Palestinians. I concluded, then, with an analysis of queer Palestinian parties and the political ramifications of “having fun”—the ramifications, that is to say, of experiencing pleasure—among a population defined, above all, by their suffering.

We linger in nondescript places, neither here nor there; we peer through windows without glass, ride conveyances without movement or power. Resourcefulness and receptivity are the attitudes that serve best.

Edward Said, After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives

If, as Said poetically suggests, “resourcefulness and receptivity are the attitudes that serve [Palestinians] best,” survival, for queer Palestinians—consigned as they are to the margins of Israel and Palestine—hinges all the more so on their capacity and willingness to act with resourcefulness and receptivity, to find ways of being—and ways of being with others—in a world where they are doubly “neither here nor there.” In countless large and small checkpoints that punctuate their lives, queer Palestinians manage to find spaces, within and between those
checkpoints, for pleasure and connection, in spite of a sovereign cartography that severely restricts their capacity to do so. Constantly engaging with an economy of images and narratives, in which certain performances of self accrue greater value than others, queer Palestinians sometimes “pass” through the checkpoint—as queers, as Palestinians, sometimes even as Israelis. That act—an act of survival—requires a sophisticated understanding of cultural scripts about what properly constitutes queer, Palestinian, and Israeli and that determine one’s passage, literal or discursive, into spaces reserved for certain bodies, both of which are monitored and policed according to a set of rules about the proper organization of spaces. The extent to which queer Palestinians recognize themselves in these performances—the extent, that is to say, to which instances of passing through the checkpoints are recognized as performances—is neither predictable nor a simple matter of authenticity or “false consciousness,” resistance or complicity. Such dualisms do not capture the ways in which constructions of queerness, Palestinianness, and Israeliness take on their own meanings for queer Palestinians, even in moments when their meanings may be self-evident to a given audience.

At the same time, however, relegated to a place where the paradoxes of sovereignty cannot be concealed—but, in fact, constantly re-emerge in the most grotesque and undeniable ways—queer Palestinians sometimes refuse to play the proper, predefined role (and pass), choosing instead to get by, with creativity and resilience and a stubborn refusal to submit to the imperatives of sovereignty. Such acts often meet with a violent rebuke; and whatever their potential for effecting any actual changes in the organization of power, they do, at the very least, signal that regimes of control, with their multitude of tactics and knowledges, sometimes slip. And in those slippages, a space sometimes opens up, not where subjects “discover what [they] are but . . . refuse what [they] are,” where they aim, not for the “[liberation of] the individual
from the state,” but for liberation “from the type of individualization linked to the state” (Foucault 2000, 336). The refusal—or inability—of queer Palestinians to assume a proper relationship with the state, as queers or Palestinians, as individual members of distinct populations that are precisely defined and regulated by the state, illuminates how power sometimes fails, if not in its trenchant capacity to wield unimaginable violence and dictate matters of life and death, at least in its capacity to quell the creativity of those whom it aims to define. In their everyday lives and in their collective efforts, queer Palestinians strive, not so much in an act of resistance as one of survival, “to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal” of the subjectivities sanctioned by the state and enforced by diverse actors (Ibid.), from the soldier at the checkpoint to the selector at the gay bar, from the police officers who patrol Independence Park to the queers who cruise Independence Park.

This dissertation was an exploration of queer selves, queer bodies, and the promises—and pitfalls—of queer politics in a context where queers have been included—if only, at times, through their exclusion—in the violent project of sovereignty. Grounded in Israel-Palestine—a place that, for all its historical and cultural particularities, typifies the defining contradictions of many “liberal-democratic” nation-states—it asked bigger questions, without pretending to offer any definitive answers, about the nature of power and subjectivity—and the possibilities for feeling, moving, and being—in a world where the state increasingly responds to threats, however fantastical and illusive, with paralyzing force.
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