Coloniality of Sexuality: Sexuality as a Tool of Oppression

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Abstract

This article sketches the ways in which sexuality has been used from 1918 to the beginning of the twenty-first century as a tool to oppress Palestinians. Specifically, I look at the criminalization of male-to-male sexual acts during the British Mandate period (1920-1948), the sexualization of the land of Palestine during early Zionist colonization during the 1920s and 1930s, and oppression of Palestinians by the State of Israel. To uncover how sexuality was used as a tool of oppression, I use a 'scavenging methodology' (Murphy & Lugg, 2016) drawing on a variety of sources and data and using several approaches, such as legal and historical analysis. My findings suggest that sexuality has played a role as a tool of oppression in all of these differing periods and conditions. However, I argue that a notable inversion has taken place when it comes to how sexuality has been used. During Mandate Palestine, it was the *homosexuality* of Palestinians that was used to Otherize, whereas it is the purported *homophobia* of Palestinians that is used by the contemporary Israeli state. Using McClintock's (1995) concept of anachronistic space, Stoler's (2002) connection between race and gender, and Lugones' (2010) concept of the coloniality of gender, this article argues that we should think of the oppression of Palestinians as working through a coloniality of *sexuality*, where not only embodied sexuality but also purported attitudes towards certain forms of sexuality are used as an Othering tool.

Keywords

Palestine, queerness, coloniality of sexuality, tools of oppression, colonialism

> *if my rights aren't debatable as a Palestinian in the Arab world it's [sic] debatable as a queer and if my rights aren't debatable as a queer in the west it's [sic] debatable as a Palestinian.*

Introduction

The statement in the epigraph was left on the online platform Queering the Map, which seeks to map out LGBTQ2IA+ experiences on a virtual world map (QM n.d.). Posting on Queering the Map is anonymous – we only know the location of this post: north of Nablus in the Occupied West Bank. The post points to a two-fold problem. On one side stands an oppressive homophobic Palestinian society (Atshan, 2020). On the other stands Israel and the West which claim to safeguard queer rights but nevertheless ignores those of Palestinians. This

configuration was not always the case. In nineteenth-century Orientalist thinking Arab sexuality was portrayed as inherently homoerotic (Darr, 2017) which is in direct opposition to how Arabs are portrayed today. In this paper, I investigate this inversion. More concretely, I seek to uncover how sexuality has been used as a tool of oppression and as a justification for this oppression in the context of Palestine from 1918 until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

My analysis starts with the British colonization of Palestine after the end of World War I. I show how the criminalization of 'sodomy' by the British authorities led to the creation of the homosexual Other, who, consequently, could be controlled by the colonial state. The criminalization of sodomy in this period is a potential driver of the internalization of homophobic beliefs, which is why it is important to take this history into account when analyzing contemporary cases where sexuality is used as a means of oppression. Secondly, I focus the Jewish pioneers, or *halutzim*, who came to Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century. Their motivation for settling in the Land of Israel was largely construed through a discourse of sexuality. The land was portrayed as 'feminine' and 'ready to be penetrated' by the masculine *halutzim*, justifying its colonization. This ethos was to set the tone during the later foundation of the State of Israel (Neumann, 2011). Analyzing contemporary Israeli occupation of Palestine therefore requires this background. Lastly, I look at how sexuality is employed as a justification for the subjugation of Palestinians by the State of Israel in the twenty-first century. I argue that although sexuality is still used as a justification for oppression, the relationship between sexuality and oppression has been inversed. Palestinians are no longer portrayed as sodomites but as homophobes. However, the logic, employing sexuality as a tool to Otherize the Palestinians, remained the same.

I primarily draw on Anne McClintock's (1995) concept of anachronistic space and the myth of the virgin/empty land to understand the logic behind these processes. Furthermore, I use Ann Laura Stoler's (2002) connection between race and gender to analyze boundaries created by and through sexuality. María Lugones' (2010) coloniality of gender helped me formulate how certain hierarchies of gender (or sexuality, as I will explain below) permeate over time. Combined, these theories not only enable me to make sense of the way sexuality was used as a tool of oppression in itself, but also to uncover its intersectional character together with racism. As will become clear, the Otherization of Palestinians through notions of sexuality had and has as a primary function to differentiate them *as Palestinians* and not as queers.

This essay contributes to the existing literature by drawing attention to the different ways sexuality can be employed to Otherize and oppress in the context of colonization. Most importantly, it points to the phenomenon that sexuality does not have to be embodied by the colonized themselves for sexuality to be used as a tool of oppression. Instead, as will become clear below, contemporary Israeli practices of Otherizing rely on portraying Palestinians as inherently opposed to homosexuality, i.e. as homophobic. This helps us not only to understand the different ways Otherization happens but, more importantly, provides us with the understanding required to overcome oppression.

A brief discussion of the terms 'homosexuality' and 'queer' is required, as these are not necessarily applicable to various times and cultures. In the preface to *Islamicate Sexualities*, Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi (2008) argue that the term "homosexuality" is loaded with cultural markers and is therefore inappropriate to use in historical contexts like the region of Palestine under Ottoman rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Instead, they argue that so-called 'Islamicate' sexual practices and discourses should be analyzed in a specific

context to avoid essentializing Islam (Babayan and Najmabadi, 2008). With this in mind, I have opted to adopt terms that were most often used in a particular historical timeframe. For example, when discussing the history of Mandate Palestine, I will primarily be using the morally loaded term "sodomy" and the more neutral term male-to-male sexual acts. When discussing contemporary Israel/Palestine, I have opted to use the term "queer" when discussing the Palestinian context as this is the term queer Palestinians use themselves.

Additionally, I have to note the marked absence of women, and particularly lesbians and other non-male queers, in my essay. The legal framework of Mandate Palestine around sodomy was largely limited to male-to-male sexual acts, and specifically to anal penetration (Darr, 2017). Female sexuality did play a role in the early colonization of Palestine by the *halutzim*, but only by sexualizing the land in a gendered way. The contemporary role of sexuality in the oppression of Palestinians is inversed meaning that it is not the sexuality of Palestinians, but rather their purported hostile attitudes towards homosexuality that is used as a tool for their oppression. Consequently, all Palestinian queers are rendered invisible, because a queer Palestinian can pose a threat to the Israeli narrative that portrays all Palestinians as inherently homophobic.

I am aware that such an omission can contribute to the already evident marginalization of non-male queer stories and voices in scientific literature. Therefore, I want to make explicit that the argument presented here, focusing on male homosexuality, is by far not the only story of homosexuality in Israel/Palestine that can be told. Contemporary organization such as Aswat, Al-Qaws, and Palestinians Queer for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions show that Palestinian queer life is not exclusively limited to men.

I start by discussing the employed method. I use a 'scavenging methodology' (Murphy & Lugg, 2016) drawing on a variety of sources and data and using several approaches, such as legal and historical analysis. The main motivator is the scarcity of resources on sexuality in Palestine and the way it has been used by both the British and Israeli colonizers. Not limiting myself to a single discipline or method allows for a more complete and accurate depiction of the use of sexuality as a tool of oppression. Next, I discuss three periods that saw this tool being employed. Firstly, I look at two court cases in British Mandate Palestine that show that the law criminalizing homosexuality was used to differentiate between Palestinians and non-Palestinian colonizers. Secondly, I examine the *halutzim*, early Zionist 'pioneers' who used the feminization and sexualization of the land of Palestine as a justification for its colonization. Thirdly, I discuss how sexuality has been used by the Israeli state in more contemporary times. I observe a inversion of the role of sexuality in the Otherization of Palestinians. Whereas in Mandate Palestine, the homosexuality of Palestinians was used as a tool to differentiate them, in contemporary Israel it is the purported homophobia of Palestinians that justifies their oppression and legitimizes the State of Israel.

On Method

This essay is supposed to be only *a* history of the oppression Palestinians have faced and are still facing. It is a history that focusses on sexuality in a broad sense, incorporating not only the presupposed sexuality of Palestinians as a nation during the Mandate era but also the sexualization of the land of Palestine during its initial colonization. Moreover, as will become clear sexuality plays a rather different role in Israel's oppression of Palestinians nowadays by marking them as 'homophobic.' What all of them have in common is the application of

sexuality as a tool to create the Palestinian as an Other. My account is therefore deeply intersectional. It is impossible to understand the oppression Palestinians have undergone without understanding the complex ways sexuality and race have been used by the British and the State of Israel together as mutually reinforcing. This essay takes an initial standpoint from the point of sexuality, focusing on its specific application. However, we must understand sexuality not as separate from the racism targeting Palestinians, but rather as mutually constitutive.

Sources on sexuality in Palestine and the way it is employed as a tool of oppression are scarce, especially the further back you go in history. Therefore, I employ what can be characterized as a 'scavenging methodology' (Murphy & Lugg, 2016). Coming from Queer Theory, this methodology "uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13). Moreover, it explicitly refuses the "academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13) to overcome the problem of scarce resources and data (Murphy & Lugg, 2016). I base my analysis primarily on legal cases, historical and social science literature, and queer theory, which is aided by additional snippets from newspapers, personal experience of queer Palestinians, and statements by Israeli colonizers. The totality of different sources and approaches enables me to present a story of sexuality as a tool of oppression in historical and contemporary Palestine.

However, it must be noted that the argument presented here is all but generalizable. As notes earlier, this is a history – not the history – of oppression of Palestinians. Firstly, it is limited in scope of the oppression analyzed. I focus on sexuality, how it is used as a tool of oppression, and how it intersects with racial Othering. Additionally, although sexuality has been used as a means to oppress both in colonial and non-colonial settings throughout history, the argument presented here is specific to the context of Israel/Palestine. Secondly, my argument is limited by the lack of sources and data. Especially for the Mandate period, it is impossible to ascertain whether sexuality was consistently used as a tool of oppression and Othering or that it was limited to a handful of events. Nevertheless, it is still possible to show that some instances did occur and, moreover, that sexuality as a tool of oppression had many different facets throughout the history of Palestine, not only limited to its people but also applied to the land.

The British and Mandate Palestine

Palestine under Ottoman Rule

The British rule over Mandate Palestine from 1918 until 1948 saw fundamental changes to the legal framework surrounding male-to-male sexual acts. Before 1918, the region of Palestine was under the Ottoman Empire and followed the Ottoman Penal Code (OPC) of 1858. This Code did not criminalize male-to-male sexual acts specifically and referred to 'undesirable' sexual acts in gender-neutral terms only. Moreover, as the OCP was based on the Code Napoléon, undesirable sexual acts did not refer to consensual same-sex activity (Darr, 2017).

However, it is incorrect to state that male-to-male sexual activity was entirely decriminalized under Ottoman rule. As Elif Ceylan Ozsoy (2021) observes, the whole concept of decriminalization is inherently Western in origin. Namely, the OPC of 1858 criminalized "the abominable act publicly contrary to modesty and sense of shame", which was to be punished by three months to one year in prison and a monetary fine. Male-to-male sexual acts and male-to-male love were, therefore, only partially decriminalized in Ottoman Palestine. Decriminalization in

this context entails the "legalization of private same-sex activities" (Ozsoy. 2021, p. 1984). To say that the OPC accepted and tolerated male-to-male sexual acts is therefore not entirely true. However, what I will show next is that changes to the penal code in Palestine under British rule created a much harsher environment for people engaged in male-to-male sexual acts.

Mandate Palestine

After World War I, the Ottoman lands in the Levant were divided by the Allied countries. France took mandate over the Syrian region (now Syria and Lebanon), while the region of Palestine was mandated to Great Britain. The much-anticipated national independence among former Ottoman subjects was thereby squashed (Albright et al., 2023). Although Palestine was officially defined as a mandate supervised by the League of Nations, the British maintained *de facto* rule through military, political, legal, and administrative means (Darr, 2017).

The British largely upheld the Ottoman court system. But when it came to what they viewed as "sodomy," sweeping legal changes were made. The first major change was the gendering of sexual offenses in 1927 (Darr, 2017). As noted earlier, the OPC of 1858 did not use any gendered language. However, the British viewed the sexual offense of "rape" as "unlawful sexual intercourse with a female" which required vaginal penetration (Darr, 2017, p. 241). The sexual offense of "sodomy" criminalized anal penetration of any person. The category of rape was, therefore, exclusively limited to nonconsensual acts against women, whereas sodomy targeted, but was not limited to, men.

The second major change was the conflation of consensual and non-consensual male-to-male sexual acts when consensual male-to-male sexual acts were wholly outlawed in 1936 (Darr, 2017). Any male-to-male sex was then deemed illegal, regardless of consent. It was defined as "against the order of nature" and thereby not merely seen as an act but as a "category of personality" (Darr, 2017, p. 242). Men who had sex with men were no longer seen as just that but were classified as "homosexuals" in the eyes of the British colonial legal system. Moreover, by conflating consensual and nonconsensual homosexual acts, people engaged in male-to-male sexual acts were not only 'doing wrong,' they were inherently wrong.

The basis for the depiction of homosexuals as morally deprived went further than the identification of the person with the act. Section 152(2) of the Criminal Code Ordinance (CCO) of 1936 puts sexual acts "against the order of nature" in the same category as bestiality (High Commissioner for Palestine, 1936, p. 329). In this way, homosexuals were reduced to lesser-than-human by being equated to animals. Moreover, the British authority saw "sodomy" as a "prevalent depravity among the local population" (Darr, 2017, p. 247), thereby not only dehumanizing specific Palestinians but dehumanizing the entire population.

This logic follows the wider logic of coloniality of power and coloniality of gender. Introduced by Aníbal Quijano (2000, p. 218), coloniality of power refers to the "new pattern of world power that was based on the idea of 'race'." María Lugones (2010) adds to this by not only including the classification of people in terms of race but also in terms of gender. Moreover, she emphasizes that this classification entails a "process of active reduction of people" (Lugones, 2010, p. 745). Colonized people were subjected to strict European ideas of strict gender binaries, which served as a tool for their dehumanization. Indigenous women were codified as female, but lacked 'European femininity,' whereas men were feminized due to their inability to conform to the ideal of the White European Man.

Combining colonial racial and gender hierarchies, Ann Laura Stoler (2002, p. 75) argues that colonizers distinguished themselves from the colonized "through notions of racial difference constructed in gender terms." By imposing strict but differing gender norms on colonized subjects, on the one hand, and on Europeans in the colonies, on the other, clear boundaries could be drawn between the two. What we see in Mandate Palestine, however, is not just a race-gender distinction between colonizer and colonized but a race-*sexuality* distinction. Insofar as gender and sexuality can be separated ('sodomy' was *de jure* a gender-neutral offense) it would be more accurate to talk of a coloniality of sexuality instead of a coloniality of gender. This distinction becomes even more salient given how sexuality was (and is) used by the contemporary Israeli state. No longer was the sexuality (or gender) of Palestinians themselves a way to differentiate them from the colonizers, but rather it was the purported hostility towards certain forms of sexuality (homosexuality) that became the grounds for their Otherization. In other words, Palestinians under Israeli occupation were (and are) Otherized because of their purported attitudes towards (homo)sexuality, not their own sexuality. More on this below.

The suppression of male-to-male sexual acts in Palestine was also inherently linked to colonial racial hierarchies. In line with more general Orientalist thought, the British saw Palestine as a place of homoerotic degeneracy (Darr, 2017). In their colonial, 'civilizing' mindset, the British saw it necessary to regulate these depravities. Orna Alyagon Darr (2017, p. 247) argues that the British actually "expressly aimed to obliterate sodomy." However, following Stoler's (2002) notion of gender (and sexual) norms as a tool for creating boundaries and Lugones' (2010) conceptualization of coloniality as a dehumanizing process, the criminalization of homosexual acts, which were seen as inherent to Palestine, could also have served as a tool for demarcation and oppression of the colonial subject. I now turn to two court cases that show this logic in action. Namely, that the criminalization of homosexuality was selectively applied to Palestinians only and not to European colonizers.

Two court cases

With regards to social attitudes, it is impossible to fully discuss all the different opinions and views towards male-to-male sexual acts. Risking essentializing Palestinians in the same line they were essentialized by the British, I do not wish to argue for a general view held by all Palestinians under Ottoman or British rule. There was not one view. Instead, I want to counter and bring nuance to the essentializing narrative by giving two examples using court cases in Mandate Palestine.

In chapter two of *Plausible Crime Stories. The Legal History of Sexual Offences in Mandate Palestine*, Darr (2018) discusses the 'confession' of Mustafa Naif who was suspected of having had sex with another man in June 1943. Naif stated quite openly the love he felt for his "friend and mate" and how they had "sexual intercourse […] with […] consent and free will" (Darr, 2018, p. 30). It seems that, initially, Naif must have felt comfortable sharing his love and affection for another man without fearing repercussions, whether those be from the court or from society.

However, Naif quickly realized that being candid with the Mandate court could lead to severe punishment of him and his friend. Such "unnatural offences" could lead to a ten-year prison sentence (Darr, 2018, p. 30). Consequently, he retracted his initial statement and denied ever having sexual relations with another man. Darr (2018) interprets this as another act of love as both Naif and his friend were acquitted of having committed "unnatural offences" due to their contradictory accounts.

A similar story concerns Carlo Rykante, a sergeant from the Italian division, and Mohammad, who were caught having sexual intercourse. Again, Rykante was quite candid about their attraction to each other (Darr, 2018). But during the trial, Rykante learned of the British position towards male-to-male sexual acts and had retracted his initial statement. What is even more interesting in this case is that only Mohammad was charged, with Rykante merely testifying as a witness (Darr, 2018). Drawing on Stoler (2002) discussed above, it can be argued that the British Mandate authorities made a very clear distinction between Palestinian and non-Palestinian based on perceived racial differences. The result of this distinction was a very strict imposition of sexual norms on the colonized subject but not on the colonizer.

Jewish settlements and Israeli Occupation

Heteronormative conquest

Sexuality was also tied to some of the early Jewish settlements in Mandate Palestine. In *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, Boaz Neumann (2011, p. 1) focuses on the *halutzim* ('pioneers') and their "basic *desire* for the Land [of Israel]." The *halutzim*, in the context of Zionism, was a term first coined in 1919 to describe a specific type of settler who 'conquers;' not by appropriation or killing, but through working the land itself. During the 1920s, notions of defense were also added to its description (Neumann, 2011).

However, in the mid-1930s, the ethos of the *halutzim* became more aggressive. Not only were they thought of as guarding and defending the land that they worked on and therefore had made their own, but they were also perceived as warriors defending their nation (Neumann, 2011). Fighting for the land became as important as developing it. Moreover, Neumann (2011, p. 40) argues that the *halutzim* not merely needed the land, they felt a "desire for the Land [of Israel] as a desire for the Land's desire for them." "Pioneers came on aliya [settlement in the Land of Israel] because it "awaited" them" (Neumann, 2011, p. 41). This desire could also culminate in physical or erotic expressions towards the land. Some *halutzim* would kiss the land or penetrate it with their fingers trying to hold it (Neumann, 2011). A reoccurring Zionist narrative is exactly this falling in love with the land, romantically and sometimes sexually. Writing about the land, pioneers would always describe the Land of Israel in female terms, such as 'virgin' (Neumann, 2011), which is a reoccurring colonial trope linking (hetero)sexuality to oppression and conquest.

Zionist Jews, of course, had religious reasons for their desire for the Land of Israel. However, the desire for and, especially, the feminization of land has a longer history rooted in colonialism. Anne McClintock (1995, p. 30) connects this feminization, or "myth of the virgin land", to the "myth of the empty land." She argues that in patriarchal narratives, "to be virgin is to be empty of desire and void of sexual agency" (McClintock, 1995, p. 30). So, if a land is designated as "virgin" it is also empty, which means it is open for penetration and appropriation.

However, the Land of Israel was not empty. Palestinians and other peoples had been living there for millennia. A colonial 'solution' to this problem was to place the indigenous population into, what McClintock (1995) calls, anachronistic space. This trope places colonized people outside of history in a "permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans" (McClintock, 1995, p. 30). In the context of Palestine, the indigenous population was put in this anterior space where time had stood still, whilst the *halutzim* pioneers would fulfil the Land's desire to be developed and to be penetrated (Neumann, 2011).

This othering can clearly be distinguished in David Ben-Gurion's writing, who would later be the primary founder of the state of Israel. In 1915, he wrote: "*The Land of Israel is now a desolate and half-ruined land – and the small Arab element is incapable of reviving it and rebuilding its ruins*" (quoted in Neumann, 2011, p. 84; italics original). The creation of a Jewish nation, on the other hand, was, according to Ben-Gurion, a "*human cultural enterprise of great value,* a civilizing enterprise" (quoted in Neumann, 2011, p. 84; italics original). In this view, Palestinians lived in their own, static time from where they were incapable of building on and improving the land whilst the Jewish settlers were bringers of progress.

The othering of the Palestinian population also went further than merely the accusation of primitivism. The *halutzim* saw the Land of Israel as a virgin. The Palestinians, however, refused to penetrate it and therefore, in the eyes of the *halutzim*, did not love it. This perceived apathy towards the land, in turn, intensified *halutzim* desire (Neumann, p. 2011). The sexualization and feminization of the land served as a justification to settle the land and disregard the Arab population.

Although the *halutzim* were a relatively small minority of all Jewish settlers that emigrated to Palestine, they "set the tone for the Jewish community in Palestine and thus for the future state of Israel" (Neumann, 2011, p. 7). Neumann (2011, p. 7) further states that "[w]hen we Israeli Jews of today gaze at the Land of Israel, we see it largely through the eyes of the *halutzim*. When we feel it with our bodies and souls, we sense it largely through their sensibilities." These "hetero-conquest foundations of the Zionist project in Palestine" form the groundwork of Israel's contemporary homonationalism and the framing of Israel as a "gay haven" (Alqaisiya, 2020, p. 98). Therefore, it is essential to keep the *halutzim* ethos in mind when analyzing these processes and concepts.

Homonationalism

With the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the aggressive *halutzim* rhetoric was put into practice. It is estimated that between December 1947 and January 1949, more than 600,000 of the total 1.4 million indigenous Palestinians were displaced as a consequence of war (Albright et al., 2023). Most refugees fled to the West Bank, while others moved to Gaza. Around 150,000 Palestinians remained in Israel and by 1952 they represented roughly the same proportion of the Jewish Israeli population (Albright et al., 2023).

In the early 1990s, the start of the Oslo peace process was cause for optimism that there would finally come a resolution to the so-called 'Israeli-Palestinian conflict'. However, the 1993 Oslo Accords only further entrenched and created a legal framework facilitating segregated living and working zones, surveillance systems and overall contact between Israelis and Palestinians (Puar, 2011). At the same time, the 1990s were also a period of expansion of gay rights in Israel, for example greater protection against workplace discrimination and inclusion in the Israeli Defense Forces.

Jasbir Puar (2017, p. 2) argues that the "national recognition and inclusion" of gay and queer people in Israel was "contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary." This relationship between queer rights on the one hand and discriminatory policies on the other is what she called "homonationalism" (Puar, 2011, p. 136). Homonationalism plays a big role in Israel's public relations campaign, called "Brand Israel", that seeks to transform Israel's image on the international stage from a settler-colonial nation to a beacon of democratic liberalism (Puar, 2011).

Pinkwashing

The Brand Israel campaign was launched in 2005 with the explicit aim to rebrand Israel as "relevant and modern rather than only as a place of fighting and religion" (Popper, 2005). Israel's international image was among one of the world's worst in this period, with the survey of the Nation Brand Index from 2006 describing Israel as "the worst brand in the world" (Crilley and Manor, 2020, p. 143). Rebranding Israel would require enormous efforts.

The early stages of the campaign involved portraying Israel "as a productive, vibrant and cutting-edge culture" (Rosenblatt, 2005). However, in 2006, sexuality also became "part of [Israel's Foreign Ministry's] campaigns to break apart the negative stereotypes many liberal Americans and Europeans have of Israel" (Lazaroff, 2006). This campaign continued and in 2009 Israel announced the goal of promoting itself as a "world gay destination" (Schulman, 2012, p. 181). In 2010, around 88 million dollars was spent on branding Tel Aviv as a gay vacation destination and in April of the same year, the Brand Israel campaign organized Israeli Pride Month in San Francisco. In 2011, another 94 million dollars was spent to promote gay tourism to Tel Aviv (Schulman, 2012).

But, as alluded to earlier, this promotion of Israel as a gay haven does not stand on its own. Israel's progressive gay rights always stand in contrast to the Arab countries surrounding it (Alqaisiya, p. 2020). Moreover, the promotion of Israel's tolerance of and openness to gay rights diverts attention away from violations of Palestinian human rights, a practice known as "pinkwashing" (Atshan, 2020, p. 3).

Sa'ed Atshan (2020) has conceptualized the logic of Israel's pinkwashing as constitutive of four elements. First, it emphasizes queer Israeli agency whilst ignoring Israeli homophobia. Second, it emphasizes Palestinian homophobia whilst ignoring queer Palestinian agency. Third, it frames this contrast as a "civilizational discourse aimed at highlighting the superior humanity of [Israelis] and the subhumanity of [Palestinians]" (Atshan, 2020, p. 72). Fourth, Israeli pinkwashing represents Israel as a "gay haven" to attract tourism and solidarity.

What we can observe here, in terms of coloniality of sexuality, is that an inversion has taken place. Palestinians are no longer Otherized because of their homosexuality. Instead, they are Otherized because they are purported to be ultimately opposed to homosexuality. Sexuality is still used as a tool to differentiate, but the content of this sexuality has been changed. Ultimately, what does remain the same is the colonial logic that "Israel is civilised, Palestinians are barbaric" (Puar, 2011, p. 138). This barbarism is then used as a tool to rationalize the oppression of Palestinians (Atshan, 2020). The image of the Palestinian is still based on (sexual) backwardness, but what this backwardness entails has been changed to fulfil what is most important: the continuation of an Other and its subjugation.

Ultimately, the subjugation of Palestinians is not based on perceived sexual, but 'racial' differences. Going back to Stoler (2002), sexuality is again used to mark a boundary between 'races', or more concretely between Israelis and Palestinians. These differences are constructed through the Othering that emerges when the State of Israel designates itself as a guarding of gay rights whilst depicting Palestinians as the antithesis to these rights. That Israel's strategy is ultimately a way of differentiating itself is also supported by how inconsistently it fulfils this guardian role.

An example of this inconsistency is Israel's self-portrayal as a "gay haven," which is part of Israel's branding campaign (Alqaisiya, 2018). However, there have been numerous instances where gay Palestinian men from the

West Bank managed to flee from their abusive families to Israel, but, after having arrived there, did not receive asylum or any other promise for security (Atshan, 2020). Queer Palestinian activists joke that there is no "pink gate" through the Israeli wall, nor a "pink line" at Israeli checkpoints (Atshan, 2020, pp. 37-38). If Israel was truly a "gay haven" all gay people should have been welcomed. But in the end, queer Palestinians are treated the same as straight Palestinians, as colonial subjects.

Between hetero- and homonormative

The ones most marginalized by the occupation of Palestine by the State of Israel are the queer Palestinians. On the one hand, they face oppression under the Israeli regime. On the other, they face homophobia internal to Palestinian society. Atshan (2020, p. 10) calls this dual system of oppression "ethnoheteronormativity." This system erases both the experience and struggles of being queer in a heteronormative society and the difficulties faced by the Israeli occupation.

On one side, queer Zionist activists acknowledge (often problematically, as shown above) the homophobia in Palestinian society but refuse to recognize Israeli oppression. On the other side, the terms used by queer Palestinians to critique homophobia (like "gay" and "lesbian") are largely seen as 'Western colonial imports' in heteronormative Palestinian society (Atshan, 2020). Echoing Spivak (1998), their oppression in a heteronormative society is articulated by queer activists in Israel and the West; their oppression under Israeli occupation and genocide is articulated by Palestinian nationalists. Queer Palestinians themselves cannot speak.

This does not mean that queer Palestinian activists have not tried and succeeded to get their voices heard entirely. In 2010, two major queer Palestinian organizations Aswat (Palestinian Gay Women) and Al-Qaws (Rainbow) launched the initiative Palestinians Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (PQBDS). This initiative sought to make queer Palestinian voices heard globally and challenged the homophobic stereotypes in Palestine (Atshan, 2020). One year later, the initiative Pinkwatching Israel was launching, which aimed to debunk Israel's pinkwashing activities.

Conclusion

To conclude, it has become clear that sexuality has been used as a tool of oppression throughout the history of Palestine and Palestinians from the British Mandate to contemporary Israel. During British colonization, the Palestinian population was seen as sodomites. The criminalization of sodomy served to demarcate a boundary between colonizers and colonized, between the British and the Palestinians. Consequently, (perceived) sexuality was used as a tool of colonial oppression. The *halutzim* employed sexuality in a different way. Their sexualization of the land gave them the licence to penetrate and appropriate this land. At the same time, the perceived "impotence" of the indigenous Palestinian population served, again, as a tool to differentiate them from the Jewish settlers. Moreover, it justified and legitimized the *halutzim* settlements to themselves and the colonial West. In contemporary times, sexual stereotypes of Palestinians have been inverted. Instead of being viewed as sodomites, Palestinians are now blanketly portrayed as homophobic. But although the content of sexuality has changed, the oppressive logic has remained the same. Perceived differences in sexuality and attitudes towards sexuality serve

to differentiate and to justify violence. And as long as this logic is in place, it does not matter what the Palestinian does.

I have shied away from discussing actual homophobia in Palestinian society as I wanted to focus on the British and the State of Israel and how these actors in dominant positions of power use sexuality to create an Other in order to justify their oppression. Apart from the racist rhetoric employed by Israel, homophobia in Palestinian society is a real problem, with 95 percent of the population of the Palestinian Territories not finding homosexuality "acceptable" in 2019 (Atshan, 2020). In 2014, 'only' 43 percent of Israelis found homosexuality "morally unacceptable" (Atshan, 2020).

As I argue in this paper that neither homoeroticism nor homophobia is inherent to Palestine society (or any society for that matter), it would be interesting to have more research on the origins of homophobia in the Arab world. In the first section, I insinuated that the criminalization of sodomy by the British might have a role in this, as it is the exact same penal code from the British occupation that is still in force today in Gaza. I also showed that there was at least some tolerance toward (private) male-to-male sexual acts.

What is clear is that Israeli pinkwashing campaigns and its occupation of Palestine are not going to help queer Palestinians overcome homophobic oppression in their own society. In Sa'ed Atshan's (2020, p. 110) words: "[t]o help minimize the entrenchment of homophobia in Palestinian society, activists can simultaneously engage in naming homophobia, correcting stereotypes about LGBTQ people, challenging pinkwashing, openly identifying themselves as queer and their movement as a queer struggle, and introducing more positive representations of queer subjectivities into the public sphere."

Conflict of Interests

There are no conflicts of interest.

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