

Narrative (sub)Versions:
How *Queer* Palestinian Womyn 'Queer' Palestinian Identity

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Abstract

In asking ‘How do queer Palestinian womyn ‘queer’ Palestinian identity’, the present research focuses on the various forms of traditional, narrative, and creative resistance practices of Palestinian womyn who challenge the following three narratives: 1) the national narrative which tags ‘queer’ as ‘Other’ and which posits the national movement at the top of the hierarchy of struggles; 2) the colonial narrative which is sustained by the Israeli public relations campaigns aiming to portray Israel as a modern, progressive, safe gay haven for queers, in opposition to a Palestine and Arab World which are said to be integrally homophobic, barbaric, regressive, etc. in an attempt to ‘pinkwash’ the occupation; and 3) the neocolonial narrative in which Western and Israeli Jewish queer movements reproduce colonial dynamics in their attempt to ‘save’ Palestinian queers who are deemed to be powerless, voiceless victims in need of saving.

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My connection to the subject of queerness in Palestine has many deep-founded roots. My relationship with Palestine began at a very young age. 1948, 1967, Intifada, apartheid, occupation, war, colonialism, Zionism... all of these are words that I was well accustomed to as a child. The fight for the freedom of Palestinians ignited my thirst for activism and has never left my grid of analysis of injustice throughout the years. I found myself wanting to translate that activism within my own scholarship and fell upon many like-minded people who have made ink spill on the subject. This being said, my activism and areas of interest in the academic world are – like me – never singular, and tend to reach each other through webs that translate the multiplicity of my identities.

While many people's sarcastic reactions to the topic of my thesis resembled questions such as 'Is queerness the *only* issue you found to talk about in relation to Palestine?', the importance of queerness within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seemed clear to me and it was a subject that I could pursue with passion for two main reasons. Firstly, being an Arab in the West has subjected me to a continuous feeling of displacement. The mediation between the 'here' and 'there', the search for home in traditionally static terms, the unfamiliarity of familiarity, and on a macro scale, the systematic racism of the West, tie me to Palestine through my diasporic identity. This brings me to the second driving force that has motivated me to focus on the subject of queerness within Palestine. My experience as a diasporic Arab living within the West has greatly influenced my perceptions and experiences related to queerness. My consciousness of my queer identity was formulated mostly in spaces that were dominated by white people. Therefore, the model I had of the 'steps to take' following my own awareness was also calqued on experiences of those surrounding me. Questions such as 'Does this exist within my community?', 'Have I been assimilated?', etc.

occupied my mind. It is at a later age that I discovered how these internalized thoughts were actually tied to a much larger global process that worked beyond me but expressed itself through me. I began unearthing evidence of homosexuality in the Middle East in the scarce books I found on the subject, and began to realize how national, colonial, neocolonial, and racist tropes informed my own ideas and those of my family in relation to queerness, to Arab identity, to Western identity, etc. How did we come to define what was ‘Western’ and what was ‘Arab’, and where did queerness fit in the picture?

These personal – and evidently political – questions were being tossed around in my mind but they came to the foreground and gained my attention when I began to read about queerness in Palestine. I outlined three main narratives associated to queerness that seemed to offer answers to my questions and greatly informed the experiences of queer Palestinian people. The first is what I’ve called ‘the national narrative’. It served me in better understanding discourse that associates queerness with foreignness, with the West and, - in the case of Palestine – with the West within ‘the East’, Israel. Conjointly, it brought to my attention how queerness, and sexuality more generally, are rarely discussed because they are pushed to the bottom of the hierarchy of struggles that privileges national freedom above all others. The second narrative is ‘the colonial narrative’ and it is interested in the colonial fabrication of criteria that assesses ‘modernity’ and ‘progressivity’. I discovered that openness to queerness, or ‘progressive’ views and laws towards sexuality, have found their place in this criteria and are today being used by colonial and imperial powers to justify violence against peoples and nations who are deemed ‘backwards’. In the case of Palestine, this narrative has materialized explicitly through Israel’s relatively recent launching of a public relations campaign aimed at ‘rebranding’ it as modern and progressive in the eyes of

the West, and which uses ‘pro-gay’ discourse as one of its tactics. The third and last narrative, ‘the neocolonial narrative’, focuses on the study of ‘solidarity discourses and practices’ by Israeli Jewish and Western queer movements. My goal here has been to problematize ‘solidarity’ and reflect on its neocolonial framework through, for example, its negligence in recognizing the agency and capacity for self-determination of the people it aims to ‘save’, its imposition of oppressive models of ‘Western queerness’, as well as its racist discourse.

These three narratives have led to the formulation of my thesis question which poses itself as such: How do *queer*¹ Palestinian womyn ‘queer’ Palestinian identity? In other words, this research concerns itself with the ways in which *queer* Palestinian womyn subvert/challenge/defy the oppressive national, colonial and neocolonial narratives outlined above². Whether it be by questioning the non-existence of queerness in Palestinian society or the unimportance of struggle for sexual freedom and diversity by the national narrative, by challenging the portrayal of Palestinian society as integrally homophobic and of Israel as a safe haven for queers by the colonial narrative, or by refuting the assumption that Palestinian queers are passive victims in the need of saving, the queer Palestinian womyn interviewed during this research have ‘queered’ Palestinian identity by providing new critical discourse and by redefining what it means to be *queer*, what it means to be Palestinian, and by asserting their right to honor both these identities. Even more so, they have ‘queered’

¹ The first time *queer* is used, it is meant as an umbrella term comprised of all womyn who ‘deviate’ from heterosexuality (Gopinath, 2005: 11). Further in the question, ‘queer’ is used once more, this time employed as a verb which refers to the subversion of dominant national and (neo)colonial narratives mentioned above (Hayes, 2000). The second use of the term will be explained more thoroughly in the theoretical chapter.

² Which will be explained in great detail in the literature review

Palestinian identity by recognizing how both these identities inform each other and are interconnected in ways that they cannot ignore.

The choice of writing the word ‘womyn’ with a ‘y’ throughout this research is motivated by two main aims: firstly, I wished to question the sex/gender binary in order to recognize that other expressions of sex/gender exist beyond traditional conceptions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’, ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’; secondly, I searched to subvert the power relations inherent in the spelling of the word ‘wo-man’ which linguistically only recognizes women in reference to men.³

The first chapter of this research will give an overview of the national, colonial, and neocolonial narratives studied. It will contextualize these narratives by rooting them in the literary contributions of numerous authors in order to set the ground for the analysis chapter. The literature review will also reflect on the gaps left by the consulted literature in order to better justify the possible contributions of the research I have undertaken. The second chapter will present the theoretical, methodological frameworks that have guided my analysis. The theoretical section will reflect on such concepts as ‘sex’, ‘gender’ and ‘womyn’. It will also serve to reveal the theoretical basis of my thoughts on ‘solidarity’ and ‘resistance’ in an effort to better frame my reasoning throughout this research. Finally, this theoretical framework will present Edward Said (2003)’s *Orientalism*, an undeniable influence in my work and those of many authors that deal with studies of colonialism in a said ‘postcolonial’ world, especially when these studies concern the Arab world. As a logical follow-up, the methodological chapter will answer questions related to epistemology and methodology. Briefly, I will discuss my perceptions of ‘valid knowledge’ (informed by a

³ This will be discussed in greater detail in the theoretical framework.

hybridization of postcolonial and materialist epistemologies), the methodological framework behind my research (such as my thoughts on homogeneity, reductionism, essentialism, universalism, and objectivity), the methods used and their implications during the ‘data production’⁴, as well as the ethical questions which arose and the deontological process undertaken. The core of the research will be found in the fourth chapter where I will present the experiences and thoughts shared with me by the interviewees. Similarly to the literature review, this chapter will be divided in three sections reflecting the three narratives studied. First, the impressions of the interviews in relation to the narratives will be introduced, followed by an analysis of how the queer Palestinian womyn interviewed resist them.

The research will conclude with a summary chapter which will also open the debate and outline the gaps of this thesis, inciting following researchers to pursue work on this topic in an effort to address issues left out by my study and those of others. This humble effort to answer the question ‘How do ‘queer’ Palestinian womyn *queer* Palestinian identity?’ had many limitations and was taken on after one of the members of *Aswat* - the main local organization for queer Palestinian womyn that I worked with – rose the issue of the lack of academic writing on the subject. While it is, without a doubt, not all-encompassing of the diverse experiences of queer Palestinian womyn, I hope that it – along with the other works interested in similar subjects – will provide a ground from which to build on, will create much needed dialogue, and itself *queer*, as ‘queer’ Palestinian womyn have, our notions of ‘queerness’, ‘modernity’, ‘solidarity’, ‘resistance’, and other terms confined in boxes, in order to liberate them and ourselves from national, colonial, and neocolonial frameworks.

⁴ The difference between ‘data production’ and ‘data collection’ will be explained in this chapter through the work of Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002)

CHAPTER 1: LITTEATURE REVIEW

The academic writing on the subjects related to this thesis is quite scarce despite the fact that in recent years it has increased, forming a body of literature that invests itself in the study of queerness in the ‘Arab World’ or the ‘Muslim World’. Specific to the Palestinian context, I faced a notable shortage in sources on which to base my findings⁵ at the beginning of my research, a situation which changed just as I was about to start writing: *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* published a full number dedicated to ‘Queer Politics and the Question of Palestine/Israel’⁶. To my surprise, many of the themes addressed in this issue of *GLQ* were pertinent to my thesis and allowed me to deepen my reflection on the multiple narratives I had set out to study. Hence, the present literature review feeds off this *GLQ* special, as well as numerous authors who have written about related themes in a more overarching manner or in the ways they were explored in other contexts. Of particular relevance for my own research is a body of critical texts about three dominant narratives: the national narrative, the colonial narrative of the State of Israel, and the (neo)colonial narrative of ‘solidarity’ by Israeli Jewish and Western queer movements.

A. Narrative 1: The National Narrative

No nationalist discourses decry the colonial imposition of heterosexuality. (Jarrod Hayes, 2000)

⁵ Hence, in part, my decision to conduct interviews in the field.

⁶ *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 16, no 3, 2010.

‘Xenophobic Queerphobia’: The Unified ‘Nation’ and the ‘Other’, Queered

In many contexts of conflict, sexual identities judged to be perverse or deviant have been attributed to ‘the Enemy’. Bacchetta (2005-2006) has named this recurring narrative ‘Queerphobie xénophobe’⁷, by which she signifies the notion of queer sexualities or subjects as originating from outside of one’s society or community (197). Many authors have revealed this recurrent discourse through their analysis in multiple locations: Atluri (2001) covers the representation of queerness as a British import in numerous Caribbean countries; Bacchetta (2005-2006) discusses the tagging of lesbianism as a Western import by Nationalist Hindus (197); Gopinath (2005) informs us of the use of propaganda to portray Muslim Indians as sexually deviant during the foundation of the Indian nation (17, 135); Whitaker (2008) speaks of the representation of ‘queerness as a foreign disease’ after the *Queen Boat* controversy in Egypt (66-67); Stein (2010) notes that Israel was founded on a strong link between ‘nationalism and heterosexuality’ in ‘Israel’s demographic war with its Arab neighbors’ (518); Corriveau (2006) speaks of the Western queer subject in Canada being tagged as Communist during the Cold War; and finally, Hayes (2000) reveals the use of this narrative in the Maghrebian context (79). Conjointly, in the opinion of Gopinath (2005) and Whitaker (2008), these discourses must continually be reaffirmed since the strengthening of the nation becomes dependent of such a narrative, the heterosexual regime being at its basis. For this reason, homosexuality is often proper to the diasporic subjects in Indian films (Gopinath, 2005: 191) and xenophobia directed towards Israelis is expressed in Egyptian newspapers by, for example, depicting Golda Meir as a lesbian (Whitaker, 2008: 66). For Whitaker and Maalouf, this can be seen as a mechanism of ‘cultural protectionism’ in the face of Western modernization – the ‘Trojan Horse of western cultural domination

⁷ My translation: Xenophobic Queerphobia

(Maalouf, 1998: 100) - to which 'female nudity and male homosexuality' is often associated' (Whitaker, 2008: 9). This anti-colonial discourse has in fact been used by postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon⁸ and more recently by Joseph Massad in *Desiring Arabs* (2007), both dismissing queerness as a 'white thing', the former equating homosexuality with a white pathology, and the latter seeing in international gay movements a colonial project aimed at forming 'native informants' who serve to reproduce the 'Western cultural episteme'⁹ (Hochberg, 2010b: 505).

In a close historical reading of texts from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, Massad (2007) explains the birth of this discourse in Arab thought by linking it to its colonial context. For in fact, colonial writings on the Arab world, but also on colonies in general, did not fail to use this discourse in reverse, the sexualities of the colonized often being represented as deviant and perverse, and therefore justifying conquest and colonialism.¹⁰ In Massad's study, he explains how Arab authors challenged these depictions by using the Western model of progressive history to present deviant sexualities as 'contaminations' of non-Arab influence, relegating them to cultural imports (Kamran Asdar, 2008: 541).

It was in this colonial context that Arab intellectuals and scholars were unearthing evidence that would contradict, question, and interrogate the Orientalist claims and conclusions that produced Arab 'civilization' and 'culture' and placed them low on the European civilizational scale. Arab intellectuals would employ a number of strategies in

⁸ Who attributed homosexuality to white racism (Hochberg, 2010b: 506).

⁹ While Massad recognizes that non-heteronormative sexualities have existed in the Arab world before the arrival of the 'Gay International', for him, these sexualities were expressed through practices and only became *identities* due to the influence of Western ideologies (Hochberg, 2010b: 506).

¹⁰ For a close reading of the 'marking' of Native sexualities as perverse to justify conquest and colonialism, see Smith (2010) and Morgensen (2010). Also, for an in-depth collection of the depictions of 'Oriental sex' - i.e. deviant, at times homosexual sex - in literary works, see Massad (2007) and the original study he bases many of his facts on by Said (2003). For Massad (2007), André Gide's *L'immoraliste* published in 1902 is 'the prominent example of the new Western fiction of homosexual self-discovery in the Orient.' (11).

response, including explaining away certain ‘cultural’ phenomena identified as uncomplimentary either as unrepresentative of the ‘civilization’ of the Arabs or as foreign imports that corrupted a pure Arab ‘culture’; or as universal, in that they existed among Arabs as they did or do among Europeans and others. (Massad, 2007: 5)

In this sense, ‘rather than deal with the question of sexuality itself, the novels, novellas, short stories, and play that Massad analyzes represent tropes of national decline.’ (Amer, 2010: 651). Furthermore, national decline through homosexuality or sexual deviance can be understood through the notion of the heteronormativity of the nation-state and its reliance on gender differences and procreation to sustain itself (Hochberg, 2010a: 586)¹¹. In addition, Massad (2007) explains that the internationalization of the Western gay and lesbian movements intensified the association between queerness and ‘Western decadence’ in the 1980s while Islam was gaining importance in Arab countries ‘in the wake of the Iranian Revolution’ (Massad, 2007: 177), with a heightened inward interest to the modern queerness of Arabs after the Queen Boat incident in Egypt (181). In his view, it is through the combination of the ‘rise of Islamism in the Arab world’, the intensification of the ‘discourse by the Gay International’, and the spread of the ‘AIDS pandemic on a global scale’ that the ‘Western deviance discourse’ and its association with the West emerged in Arab countries (Massad, 2007: 192). Briefly, the efforts of the ‘Gay International’ unfolded ‘in the context of expanding imperialism¹² and was correctly seen as part of it’ (Massad, 2007: 194).

Queer(s) (in the) Trenches: The Israeli-Palestinian Context

It is in this context then that we can understand Palestinian queers as caught in the trenches of an ideological war embedded in the occupation context (Kuntsman, 2008: 150). In fact, it

¹¹ For an in-depth analysis of the heteronormativity of the nation-state, see Alexander (1994).

¹² Massad (2007) explains that this period had at its highlight the defeat of 1967, a turning point in Arab politics and in the configuration of relations between the Arab world and the international community. The insurgence of the United States – financially, political, and militarily- in the region and the ‘death of state-sponsored Arab nationalism’ are by far the most noteworthy occurrences of this period (193).

would be inaccurate to attempt to understand homophobia within Palestinian society without taking into account the occupation and apartheid context (Amireh, 2010: 639). While most of the studies on queer Palestinian men tend to focus on how they are thought of as traitors collaborating with Israeli authorities (Whitaker, 2008: 202; Amireh, 2010: 639; Hochberg, 2010b: 507), this is rarely the case for queer Palestinian womyn. The accusations directed towards them are mainly concerned with them being thought of as ‘inauthentically’ Palestinian or as assimilated by the West and/or by Israel, a discourse which Palestinian feminists and leftists were also subject to: ‘their ideologies, lifestyles, and political agendas are (said to be) marks of contamination by ... an imperialist West’¹³ (Amireh, 2010: 644). According to Kuntsman (2008), this made-up opposition and mutual exclusivity between queer and national identities denies the existence of queer Palestinian subjects (148):

Palestinians who self-identify as queer (or gay or homosexual) are often seen as Arabs who have given up their Arabness in favor of queerness and who by the same token become less Palestinian and more Western or Israeli (if not altogether devoutly Zionist). (Hochberg, 2010b: 508)

Furthermore, the recent effort invested by the State of Israel to portray itself (by way of extravagant public relations campaigns, for example) as being gay-friendly and progressive within a said homophobic Muslim region¹⁴ has led to the strengthening of this belief of the Queer as ‘Other’/Israeli Jewish/Western (Kuntsman, 2008: 149). In sum, it is misleading to consider homophobia within Palestinian societies in isolation; in fact, its existence and manifestations stem from a deeper source, one which is fed by colonialism, occupation, and racism. Hochberg (2010b) explains:

¹³ Or a West within the East: Israel.

¹⁴ This will be the second narrative studied

Rather, it (homophobia) must be understood as the counterreaction of postcolonized societies to years of epistemological violence imposed by the West¹⁵, through the use of sexuality to affirm white racial superiority and Western cultural advantage. If white imperialists have in the past associated homosexuality with the primitiveness and promiscuousness of the non-Western savage, Hoad argues, in the counteractive anti-imperial discourse, homosexuality comes to represent a white pathology imported from the West and imposed on a local tradition originally free of homosexuality. (Hochberg, 2010b: 508)

Trouble in the National Narrative: Proof of Queerness Within Arabic Literature

The issue with the national narrative which tags ‘queer’ as ‘Other’ is that it is often a-historical¹⁶, and therefore it can be overthrown as illustrated by recent studies revealing the presence of queer subjects in the Arab world throughout history. The most notable of these writings are those of Habib (2007), Massad (2007), and Amer (2009). Habib’s *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East* (2007) is by far the most in-depth analysis available today specific to female homosexuality in the Middle East. This author retraces the history of female homosexuality within Arabic literature, discovering ‘material from the Middle Ages to the present that has not been discussed in a modern context’ (Habib, 2007: 3). Her research has shown that the ‘prohibitions of either male or female homosexuality in Islamic doctrine were (not) taken seriously prior to the mid-thirteenth century’ (48) and that the discourse attributing homosexuality to a foreign import only emerged in the Arab world during the 20th century (140). She reveals the existence of female homosexuality as early as the time of the Prophet, with a particular abundance of such representations from the ninth to the thirteenth century (65). Secondly, while Massad’s *Desiring Arabs* (2007) serves to deny

¹⁵ I include Israel in ‘the West’.

¹⁶ ‘Time, as expected, is never factored in when the topic is Arabs and Muslims.’ (Massad, 2007: 167).

the existence of a homosexual *identity* in the Middle East¹⁷, his study is nonetheless a testimony to the abundance of literary work related to homosexuality spanning centuries. Finally, Amer's work (2009) recovers 'the evidence of lesbianism and lesbian-like attachments in the medieval Arabic tradition' (Amer, 2009: 236).

The Hierarchy of Struggles

A second national narrative concerns the hierarchy of struggles inherent in any nation that feels threatened by an 'Other'. In this context, 'the nation' becomes the 'center of all political gravity' (Hochberg, 2010b: 505). Habib states that while 'heterosexist colonialism' is important, it 'does not precede racial colonialism' (2003: 55). In her words,

People who are far too busy dodging exploding bombs and learning the art of providing food and water for themselves in long and heavily besieged ghettos, have not the luxury of queering their cultural beliefs around sex. (Habib, 2003: 59)

Said otherwise, the national struggle is perceived as 'too serious' to trouble itself with queer or sexual politics (Hochberg, 2010b: 505). This logic, often used in national projects, seems to say 'Free the Palestinians and then argue with them against homophobia' (Habib, 2003: 55). While this is a widespread point of view, Palestinian queers have often rejected this

¹⁷ While Massad (2007) denies the existence of a homosexual identity in the Middle East before the insurgence of what he calls the 'Gay International' (meaning the neocolonisation of western gay movements), Habib's *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East* (2007) reveals the existence of lesbian subcultures in the Arab world. For example, Habib uses Ahmad Ibn Yusuf Tifashi's thirteenth century text *Nuzhat al-Albab* to demonstrate how female homosexuality existed as a category in the 'premodern Arabian imagination' (4). Also, Habib speaks explicitly of a community of homosexual women: 'Tifashi reveals that a thirteenth-century Arabian bi/homo woman called herself *Tharifa* – meaning the 'witty one'. This reveals a more obscure possibility, that there were communities of grinder-identified women, who designated themselves a name – or a code word. Very much in the same fashion that a lesbian attends a 'dyke' bar, or fully understands when her friends refer to another woman as an 'embankment', these women would have needed subcommunities or subculture through which the code word *Tharifa* can be disseminated and understood, otherwise it could not be feasible. And in this way their identities come to resemble what has been obscurely labeled as 'modern' homosexual identities.' (70)

hierarchy of struggles (Amireh, 2010: 644), arguing that such prioritizing keeps societies stagnant and are a simplistic excuse to ignore societal problems that are not only important but also often strongly intersect with colonialism, occupation, racism, and other forms of oppression.¹⁸

B. Narrative 2: The Israeli Colonial Ideological War

Rebranding Israel: The Emergence of an ‘Ideological War’

The State of Israel is currently in the process of ‘rebranding’ itself through a massive investment in a public relations campaign in an effort to appear modern and progressive through its supposed adherence to newly internationally recognized criteria in the matter, like environmental consciousness and acceptance of queers. In fact, by visiting www.bluestarpr.com, one can watch videos about Israel as an innovator in green energy, and as a gay oasis, for example¹⁹. These resources have been invested not to speak to the population within Israel/Palestine but, more so, they are aimed towards the West. According to Kuntsman (2008), Israel has, in this fashion, embarked in an ‘ideological war’²⁰ (150) against the Arab world, and more importantly Palestine. In this sense, queerness is used as an ideological tool within this war, one that serves to portray Israel as modern, progressive, and pro-gay (in other words, Western) in the face of an Arab Muslim enemy said to be religious,

¹⁸ Amireh quotes Haneen Maikey, the director of Al-qaws, stating that she rejects ‘the idea of political hierarchies’. A more in-depth report of numerous Palestinian queer womyn’s experience with this issue will be given in the analysis section of this thesis, based on the interviews conducted for this research.

¹⁹ The direct link to watch the videos is <http://www.bluestarpr.com/israel-documentaries.html>.

²⁰ While Kuntsman (2008) uses the term ‘ideological war’, other authors such as Amireh have used the term ‘culture war’. While this could be debated, it seems to me that this is an ideological war (because of its political orientation and aims) that is wrongly based on notions of ‘culture’ in an effort of naturalizing it. Throughout the research, the use of ‘culture’ as an explanation for Israel’s supposed acceptance of queers and Palestine and the Arab’s word homophobia will be discussed at length, and demystified.

barbaric, regressive, and integrally homophobic (in other words, Eastern) (Amireh, 2010: 636; Gold, 2010: 626). In the words of Alisa Solomon,

In today's Israeli culture war, (...) queerness — or at least the tolerance of queerness — has acquired a new rhetorical value for mainstream Zionism: standing against the imposition of fundamentalist religious law, it has come to stand for democratic liberalism. (Amireh, 2010: 636).

It is also noteworthy that this PR campaign is accompanied by an increasing amount of cinematographic representations of this narrative. In other words, a notable number of films hailing from Israel have served to portray this country as a gay oasis, in contrast to a rampantly homophobic Palestine. El-Shakry (2010) offers a brief yet extensive account of this phenomenon:

Films celebrated in specifically queer cinematic circles include Parvez Sharma's 2007 documentary *A Jihad for Love* on reconciling being gay with Islam; Eytan Fox's body of cinematic work, which includes *The Bubble* (2006), a film about a left-wing Israeli youth who during his military service falls in love with a Palestinian Muslim at a checkpoint at which he is stationed; Adi Barash and Ruthie Shatz's 2003 documentary *Garden*, about two young male prostitutes — Nino, a seventeen-year-old Palestinian, and Dudu, a Mizrahim Israeli — who both work in the "electricity garden," a central pickup location in Tel Aviv; and A. Yun Suh's 2009 documentary *City of Borders*, about Shushan, a Jerusalem bar that functions as a multicultural meeting point for ostracized Israeli and Palestinian gays. While *Garden* and *City of Borders* consciously attempt to move beyond the standard narrative in which an "Israeli boy falls for a Palestinian boy who must 'pass' as Israeli in order for their relationship to survive" (for it only ever works in that one direction), *The Bubble* and *A Jihad for Love* fall prey to the same predictable tropes: celebration of Israel's progressive stance toward gays, the (617) intolerance of Islam, and the ability of sexuality to single-handedly subvert political oppression (618).

'Pinkwashing' Violence

In a similar way that the European colonialist project used the representation of 'Natives' as savages who were said to be sexually perverse to justify imperialist conquest (Morgensen,

2010: 111), the depiction of Palestine – and the Arab world more generally – as an inherently homophobic society in opposition to Israel as the bearer of gay rights in the Middle East, serves to ‘divert attention from its gross violations of human rights in the occupied territories’ (Ziv, 2010: 537). In effect, most writings about queerness in Israel/Palestine – including the legendary article of Halevi published in the *New Republic* one year into the U.S. War on Terror and two years into the second Intifada (Ritchie, 2010: 558) – are founded in a deep cultural racism which understand homophobia within Palestinian society as a ‘timeless pathology’ without any sociological or historical analysis (Ritchie, 2010: 559). This being taken for granted, authors such as Halevi see this ‘pathology’ as justification of the denial of Palestinian rights for self-representation, stating that ‘free elections will not make much of a difference’ (Ritchie, 2010: 559).²¹ Such representations promote ‘cultural hierarchies’ – a traditional colonial strategy – in this case representing some cultures as ‘homophobic by nature while others are (said to be) inherently progressive’ (Hochberg, 2010b: 510). Hochberg (2010b) explains how these fundamental ‘differences’ are ‘created (and preserved) as a discursive effect of a tainted political imagination that seeks to present the conflict as both ‘natural’ (if not unavoidable) and irresolvable’ (502). In this sense, Ritchie (2010) explains that occupation, apartheid and violence are not attributed to racist Israeli nationalism but more so to the need to discipline the ‘backward’ and ‘inferior’ ‘essence of Palestinian culture’ (Ritchie, 2010: 559). This discourse has influenced numerous queers and queer movements in the West to ally themselves with Israel, declaring that supporting Israel is ‘the gay thing to do’ (Hochberg, 2010b: 502), Israel being understood as

²¹ Numerous articles in the media promote the same discourse, such as James Kirchick’s statement in ‘Queers for Palestine?’, published in *The Advocate* on January 28, 2009: ‘Palestinian oppression of homosexuality isn’t merely a matter of state policy, it’s one firmly rooted in Palestinian society, where hatred of gays surpasses even that of Jews.’ (Hochberg, 2010b: 510)

‘the only state in the Middle East that legally enshrines the rights of gay people’²² (Hochberg, 2010b: 502). And so, while recognizing the progressive sexual politics of the Israeli State, there is often no mention of its daily atrocious violation of human rights, and its regressive racial politics, one positive narrative obscuring another negative one (Gold, 2010: 626; Stein, 2010: 527), a practice that can be understood as ‘pinkwashing’.

The term ‘pinkwashing’ has become in use by many queers outside of the Palestinian queer community, reaching the vocabulary of prominent authors such as Jasbir Puar and Judith Butler. Jasbir Puar (2010: n.p.²³) explains pinkwashing as:

a potent method through which the terms of Israeli occupation of Palestine are reiterated – Israel is civilised, Palestinians are barbaric, homophobic, uncivilised, suicide-bombing fanatics. It produces Israel as the only gay-friendly country in an otherwise hostile region. This has manifold effects: it denies Israeli homophobic oppression of its own gays and lesbians, of which there is plenty, and it recruits, often unwittingly, gays and lesbians of other countries into a collusion with Israeli violence towards Palestine.

Similarly, Judith Butler (2011: n.p.) uses the term pinkwashing to refer to how Israel is ‘advertising its ostensible tolerance for gays and lesbians as a way of deflecting from the illegal and unconscionable subjugation of over two million Palestinians.’ Meanwhile, Israel is claiming itself to be a ‘safe haven’ for Palestinian queers, a topic that Judith Butler (2011: n.p.) has also denounced openly:

It is true, though, that we have to be careful when we see something like the state of Israel claiming to be a haven for gay people and that Palestine is not. I think that the Brand Israel campaign has come to deflect. It’s trying to say, “We’re free. We’re a place where you can enjoy freedom and mobility.” But the state of Israel has restricted freedom and mobility for 1.5 million people on the West Bank alone. So if we go and think, “Oh, Israel

²² This is the explanation given by James Kirchick in his article ‘Queers for Palestine?’ where he questions the said illogical stance of queers who stand in support with Palestine (Hochberg, 2010b: 502).

²³ The abbreviation ‘n.p.’ is used throughout the research to tag online articles that do not have numbered pages.

is free,” we have to rethink what is freedom? And who is free and who is not? And are we capitalizing on this freedom to deflect from an un-freedom that others suffer?

Nathalie Kouri-Towe, a PhD student in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the University of Toronto and a member of *Queers Against Israel Apartheid* who has focused some of her work on the Israeli pinkwashing campaign, gives some insight during her interview with *Bekhsos*. She explains how claiming to be gay-friendly does not rid a country of existing homophobic, gender-based, or state violence— and Israel is not an exception:

When you make these claims, you ignore and erase all the continued violence. When Israel makes the claim, it ignores the fact that it’s a very homophobic and patriarchal society towards its Jewish citizens and a racist society towards its Arab citizens and an occupier of the West Bank and Gaza. (Nadz, 2010: n.p.)

Another flagrant use of queer positivity to mask the violation of human rights in Israel was reported by Hochberg (2010b). This author speaks of the ‘hijacking’ of the killing of two gay teenagers in Tel Aviv in August of 2009²⁴ by state officials, including Prime Minister Netanyahu who praised ‘Israel for being ‘a country of tolerance’, declaring the murder ‘anti-Israeli’, an idea echoed by Livini, who announced that the incident was exceptional and ‘does not reflect the Israeli society’ (Hochberg, 2010b: 494). In this way, this incident was manipulated ‘to promote a hyperpatriotic agenda. It solidified the image of Israel as a modern, liberal, progressive, democratic, and all-inclusive state, a ‘Thou-Shall-Not-Kill Nation’, as declared by President Peres...’ (Hochberg, 2010b: 494). Hochberg (2010b)

²⁴ Where an armed individual killed two teenagers and wounded others at the Israeli GLBT Association HaAguda.

illustrates how this killing was portrayed as an ‘exception to the otherwise peaceful, tolerant, and liberal nature of Israeli society’ (Hochberg, 2010b: 494)²⁵.

Impossible Queer Subjects and Obscured Jewish Homophobia

According to Kuntsman (2008), ‘heterosexualizing Palestinians and queering Israel work in tandem to mark ‘Palestinian gays’ as impossible subjects’ (148). Similarly, Amireh (2010) explains how ‘Palestinian queers occupy two extreme locations: either they are hypervisible or they are invisible. In both cases, it is their Palestinianness, not their queerness, that determines if and how they are seen.’ (Amireh, 2010: 636). Amireh’s study reveals that Palestinian queers were either used to serve the interest of the State, being a vehicle of propaganda, and therefore given the right to speech only if they give an account of the ‘cultural differences between the repressive Palestinians and the liberal Israelis regarding homosexuality.’ (636). In opposition, Palestinian queers who contradict this narrative, by for example not presenting themselves as victims of a homophobic Palestinian society or by linking homophobia to the occupation context, are denied the right to speak (636). On another level, this narrative gives an incomplete picture of reality for it omits to mention that most of the representations of queer cultures in film or in writing concern only a miniscule part of Israeli reality, often centered around Tel Aviv, rightly referred to as ‘The Bubble’ (Stein, 2010: 526). It therefore fails to speak of Israeli Jewish homophobia, as it was witnessed during the Jerusalem pride parade in 2006, where many Zionist Israeli Jews stood

²⁵ While this example may seem anecdotal taken alone, many interviewees consulted in this research spoke of this event to me, as well as in international conferences, as a prime example of pinkwashing and of the censorship of Palestinian queers. Despite the time that has elapsed since this event, it seems to have had a traumatic effect on many members of the Palestinian queer community. See page 113 for accounts on the subject.

in opposition to the parade using ‘anti-gay rhetoric’ by the use of ‘vocabulary of terror’ (Gold, 2010: 629)²⁶.

What rights and for whom?: Progressive(?) Sexual Politics / Regressive Racial Politics

According to Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem (2008), such a narrative fits within a neoliberal narrative which idealizes the ‘West’ or countries of immigration – here, Israel – as a safe haven meant to protect queer subjects by its guarantee of rights (83). Needless to say, such a narrative is pure propaganda as it is clear that Palestinian or Israeli Arab queer subjects do not have access to the same rights as Israeli Jewish queer subjects, nor do they necessarily have the possibility to immigrate to Israel if they live within the Palestinian territories. Even more critical is that the advancement of ‘gay rights’ emerged in a context of notable regression of the rights of Palestinian people:

...during the 1990s Israel’s gay communities were being recognized in unprecedented ways in Israeli legal spheres, while changing Israeli policies vis-à-vis the occupied territories were creating new forms of unrecognition for its Palestinian population; gay communities were enjoying new forms of social mobility within the nation-state while the literal mobility of Palestinians from the occupied territories was being increasingly curtailed. (Stein, 2010: 521)

Ironic examples of this back and forth movement are multiple. I have surveyed the available literature to retain two examples that portray evidently how ‘gay rights’ and ‘sexual freedom’ are not void of discrimination; in fact, they reinscribe the State of Israel’s racist politics and

²⁶ Among the opposition was Eli Yishai, ‘the head of the Haredi Shas government party and, at the time, Israel’s vice prime minister’ who attempted to cancel the parade by appealing before the high court of justice. In reference to homosexuality, he stated: ‘We are talking about an explosive belt with the capacity to shake the entire Middle East’ (Gold, 2010: 629). Also, Hillel Weiss, an employee of Bar Ilan University was noted saying: ‘The matter of gender and queerness...is like a terrorist organization against the entire world.’ (Gold, 2010: 629).

at times even serve to pinkwash or even openly support military action. The first example has to do with how most cinematographic representations in Israel/Palestine, such as *The Bubble*, center on queerness within Israel's 'primary institution': the army (Stein, 2010: 518; El Shakry, 2010: 617). According to El Shakry (2010):

Much of the body of cinema that addresses gay issues in the context of Israel or the occupied Palestinian territories tends to valorize the democratic freedoms of the gay community within Israel, often contrasting them with more "oppressive" measures and stances against homosexuality among Palestinians or Muslims. Painfully transparent in this burgeoning cinematic genre, such a tactic inevitably attempts to justify Zionism by demonstrating its compatibility with Western democratic and liberal ideals. Often absent from such representations is the underlying politics of Israeli gay rights, which, some have argued, are tied to other expansionist Israeli policies such as an effort to increase numbers in the military and to bolster birth rates. (617)²⁷

Finally, another notable example involves the 2005 World Pride which took place in Israel, under the name 'Love Without Borders'. Gold (2010) and Wahbeh (2006) speak of the irony of this name, revealing how queer Arabs living in the Palestinian territories and in most Arab countries were deprived of participation specifically in cause of 'borders World Pride 2005 seeks to do "without"' (Wahbeh, 2006: 22). Gold (2010) pushes this further by asking the question: 'Does global queerness – if there is such a thing – not include Arab queers?' (630).

C. Narrative 3: 'Neocolonial Solidarity'

'White Queers Saving "Brown" Queers from "Brown" Heterosexuals'

As mentioned previously, the colonial project often justified its violence as a 'mode of social control in the new colonial moral order', serving to discipline sexually perverse/deviant

²⁷ The mainstream gay rights movement in Israel that is lead by Israeli Jews is concerned with the inclusion of queer subjects in the definition of citizenship. This will be explored more deeply in the literature review of the following narrative on 'neocolonial solidarity'.

societies (Morgensen, 2010: 108). While it is understood that formal colonization has generally ended²⁸, Massad (2007) explains that a ‘contemporary form of Western imperial power begins to exert itself on Arab societies in the 1980s and the 1990s’²⁹ (Amer, 2010: 650), marking the emergence of the internationalization of the ‘agenda of sexual rights’ to that era and noticing how sexuality began to be associated with ‘notions of “civilized” and “uncivilized”’ (Massad, 2007: 37), reversing premodern discourse.

While the premodern West attacked the world of Islam’s alleged sexual licentiousness, the modern West attacks its alleged *repression* of sexual freedoms. (Massad, 2007: 37)

Similarly, Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem (2008) have studied the emergence of the interest of queer transnational movements³⁰ in the study of and ‘solidarity’ towards Arab and Muslim queers. For these authors, this recent wave of interest can be understood through the ‘global context of violent Islamophobia’ (Feinberg, 2006 in Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 71) and the launching of the ‘War on Terror’ (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 74) which arose post-September 11, in response to the attacks of the Twin Towers in New York City. Conjointly, these authors reveal how ‘gay rights’³¹ have slowly been accredited ‘criteria’ status in the evaluation of a society’s ‘modernity’ and ‘civilisation’ (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 79). In other words, with womyn’s rights and gay rights being more and more included in the redefining of, or the additions to, what is today considered as modern and progressive in international discourse (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008:

²⁸ And that it was the ‘political context of the intellectual debates over modernity, culture, and civilization throughout the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century’, according to Massad (2007) (Amer, 2010: 650).

²⁹ This is understood as ‘neocolonialism’ in this research. A clear definition of this concept will be given in the ‘Theoretical Framework’ section.

³⁰ Their study mostly focus on queer movements based in the UK.

³¹ In a similar way as ‘democracy’ and ‘womyn’s rights’ not long ago (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 79).

79), western queer transnational movements have found a privileged position from which to join the post-September 11 wave of ‘civilizing mission’ (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 79). In this sense, these authors believe that a faction of queer western movements participate in the neocolonization of queer Arab/Muslim³² subjects. Similarly, Massad’s *Desiring Arabs* (2007) dedicates its chapters 3 and 4 to the study of what he ‘dubs the “Gay International, referring to the universalizing and missionary role that Western (U.S. and European) human rights organizations, Western gay rights activists, feminist organizations and publications, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)³³ play in the Arab World’ (Amer, 2010: 650) as well as their role in the creation of new ‘objects’ of ‘human rights discourse’ (Massad, 2007: 37). Massad (2007) explains that it is ‘these missionary tasks, the discourse that produces them, and the organizations that represent them which constitute what I [he] call[s] the Gay International.’ (161). In this context, while the ‘War on Terror’ aims to free Muslims from their oppressive societies, these queer movements take on the task of ‘liberating’ queer Muslims from their integrally homophobic societies (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008 : 74). It is clear then that the importance of these movements in the ‘political mainstream’ stems from the importance of racism and Islamophobia in the present global political context (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 72). In fact, it is of little importance if the subjects of imperial violence are tagged as ‘savages’ or ‘terrorists’, ‘sexually deviant’ or ‘homophobic’; the creation of the ‘Other’ as a homogenized subject – no matter what tag is used – has been a long tradition during wars, ‘as attempts were made to understand our enemy (the ‘others’) through comparative studies of ‘national character’

³² There seems to be no difference made between the two by the queer transnational movements in question.

³³ More specifically, Massad (2007) gives the examples of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) (161), and the Al-Fatiha Foundation, among others (175).

(Gagnon, 2006: 41). In the present imperialist context, as it was during formal colonization, this homogeneity and demonization of the ‘Other’ is used to justify exterior intervention. In this sense, the same discourse that defends human rights is used to violate them: ‘Indeed the very same discourse that calls for the “liberation” of Arabs from dictators and “defends” them against human rights violations is what allows both imperial ventures and human rights activism.’ (Massad, 2007: 47). A prime example of this process from the women’s movement is how the ‘promotions of international human rights’ by the women’s movement in the United States served as a basis to justify war in Afghanistan (Morgensen, 2010: 125). And so, if I may ‘queer’ Spivak, while ‘white men (*and womyn*)³⁴ save brown women from brown men’ (Spivak, 1988, in Kapoor, 2004: 627), ‘white queers save ‘brown’ queers from ‘brown’ heterosexuals’.

The ‘Narrative of Progress’ and the ‘Savior Narrative’: The Construction of the ‘Other’ and the ‘Self’ to Justify Intervention

The justification of this neocolonial intervention by Western/Israel Jewish queer movements is built on a double effort of construction: the construction of the ‘Other’ and that of the ‘Self’. While Arab/Muslim queers are said to be powerless and voiceless victims of an inherently homophobic and oppressive culture, Western queer subjects self-identify as sexually liberated and therefore superior subjects, the ultimate identity that the ‘Other’ should aspire to embody, a goal achievable by following the direction of the superior subject. This ‘narrative of progress’ which situates certain subjects in a superior position sets the foundation of the ‘savior narrative’ which calls for a neocolonial project of liberation by these subjects, meant to free the ‘inferior objects’ of their intervention.

³⁴ The italic addition is mine

Constructing the ‘Other’

Building an Integrally Homophobic Arab/Muslim World

Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem (2008) revealed that ‘Muslim and ‘homophobic’ were ‘treated as interchangeable signifiers’ (72). In fact, it is a common occurrence that Islam or the Arab world is represented as a unified front against homosexuality. Furthermore, homophobia is thought of as being inherent to Islam or to Arab culture, meaning that it is deeply rooted in them and is caused by them specifically. Often times, it is through sheer and dangerous generalizations that this sentiment is expressed. In other words, this analysis is devoid of any historical knowledge, and omits to take into account the local contexts of what is broadly referred to as the ‘Arab world’ or even ‘Islam’³⁵. One piece of evidence of this is how authors will often use terms such as ‘in general’ or ‘generally’ when expressing this sentiment, as can be seen in Wahbeh’s (2006) work. Another noteworthy observation concerns how this argument is often accompanied by a comparison ‘to the West’. For example, in the following excerpt, Wahbeh (2006) informs us of how ‘tradition’ explains homophobia in Palestine by stating:

To be sure, Arab culture in general, unlike the West, does not accommodate open homosexuality. Queer or gay sexuality cannot be found in any industry, culture, or city quarter. Palestinian society, like many others, is bound by tradition. (Wahbeh, 2006: 22)

It is clear here that Wahbeh’s analysis is devoid of any context and is, in fact, inaccurate.

Even a superficial review of literature on the subject would reveal that queer or gay sexuality

³⁵ Not to mention how these terms are also used interchangeably (which explains why it is also done as such in this literature review – in a way, a point in case to illustrate how the differences between these categories are ignored. Evidently, this will be avoided in the ‘analysis’ section of the present thesis).

can be found in ‘industry, culture, or city quarter(s)’ in many Arab countries such as Lebanon, Jordan Egypt, and even Palestine!³⁶

Similarly to the way Western feminists came to understand ‘the Third World Woman’ as an oppressed powerless victim (Mohanty, 1997: 272), representations of Arab/Muslim queers often stop at the level of oppression (‘how queers are oppressed’) and omit to consider experiences of resistance which do not fit the *à priori* narrative. Through this, the promoted discourse has primacy over the material realities of the people discussed (Mohanty, 1997: 269). For this reason, change is left unrecognized, resistance falling outside the a-historic frame of analysis built on generalizations which serve the ‘saviors’ and legitimize their intervention (Whitaker, 2008: 112).

In sum, Palestinian (or Arab or Muslim) queers are constructed as passive victims of an inherently homophobic culture/religion. In Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem’s words: ‘They are the ideological token victim who must be liberated from its ‘barbaric, backward’ society’ (2008: 78). While these authors speak of the worldview of western queer movements in Britain, Ritchie (2010) extends this to Israeli Jewish queers who represent ‘queer Palestinians as a helpless victim of Palestinian homophobia in need of the benevolence and protection of the Israeli state.’ (563). This representation of the ‘Other’ as a powerless victim is so strong that when individuals contradict this narrative they are treated as a notable exception, one which must have assimilated Western values (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 83) or, in Massad’s (2007) wording, one who is a ‘native informant’, a blind agent of the West (173). We therefore have a standard representation of Palestinian or Arab queers as victimized people with no sense of agency: they are either oppressed or assimilated, a

³⁶ I will demonstrate this in the remainder of my thesis.

‘faceless victim without agency’ or a ‘notable exception’ (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 72). For Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem (2008), neither of these representations can be understood outside of the colonial, imperial and neocolonial narratives which constitute them (72).

Constructing the ‘Self’

In parallel to the construction of the ‘Other’ with ‘an unchanging cultural essence of which sexism and homophobia are integral parts’ (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 87), and in dependence to this construction, the ‘Self’ – here, Western/Israeli Jewish queer, civilized, modern, developed, and ‘emancipated’ – is also created (78). For Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem (2008), it is in this dichotomy that the ‘representational power of white queers’ is produced (87), a practice which traverses activist endeavors, academic research, media productions, etc. in which Western/Israeli Jewish queers theorize sexual oppression and sexual liberation, draw processes towards emancipation based on their own experiences, and silence alternate voices that they consider to be nonexistent (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 73, 75). Yet, it seems that these voices are in fact available, but the control that Western/Israeli Jewish queers have over them is put in use to preserve the gap between Western/Israeli Jewish queer identity and that of Arab/Muslim/Palestinian queers:

Rather, political events, academic research projects and media productions about gay Muslims are controlled by white people who determine which Muslims participate, what kind of questions they get to answer, and how their contributions are edited. Ironically, Muslim gays are invited to speak only when they give their voices up to white people, who can then appear to generously give it back to them. (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 75-76)

Ritchie (2010) informs us of how Israeli Jewish queer activists also adhere to this discourse,

affirming their superiority to Palestinian queers by using the linear Western model of queerness which emphasizes visibility as a main criteria of emancipation, the assumed closeted expression (or lack) of queerness being associated to Palestinian queer realities and therefore being proof of their inferiority (566). The linear conception of sexual liberation that Israeli Jewish queer activists have adopted is borrowed from the colonial ‘narrative of progress’ (Gopinath, 2005: 12) often used to represent non-Western societies as premodern while Western society is thought of as the final point to reach, the epitome of progress (Gopinath, 2005: 142; Bacchetta, 2005-2006: 182).

We also understand here the link between the ‘national narrative’ and the neocolonial one; in fact, both rely heavily on the notion of civilization. Massad (2007) explains:

Thus, the Gay International and the Islamists both agree that deviance/gayness has much to do with civilization. For the Gay International, transforming sexual practices into identities through the universalizing of gayness and gaining ‘rights’ for those who identify (or more precisely, are identified by the Gay International) with it becomes the mark of an ascending civilization, just as repressing those rights and restricting the circulation of gayness is a mark of backwardness and barbarism. For the Islamists, in turn, it is the spread and tolerance of sexual deviance that mark the decline of civilization, just as repressing, if not eliminating, it will ensure civilization’s ascendance. (195)

Savior Narrative

For Ritchie (2010), this self-proclaimed superiority of Israeli Jewish queers, with its orientalist underpinning, gives birth to a traditionally colonial ‘savior narrative’ (Spivak, in Bacchetta, 2005-2006: 182) and fuels a ‘missionary’ project aimed at saving queer Palestinians from their oppressive societies and selves (566). Ritchie (2010) bases his argument on the discourse and actions of Israeli Jewish queer groups such as HaAguda, an organization that claims to work towards ‘LGBT solidarity’. For Ritchie, this only sets

ground for a rescue mission based on the ‘persistent trope of the (Palestinian) victim’ (568). This victim/savior narrative also allows the ‘saviors’ to set the process necessary for emancipation. Based on a Western conception of queerness, two main examples are explored in the current literature on the subject: the definition or criteria associated to queerness and visibility.

While it is clear to me that queer ‘identity’ did exist in the Arab world before the influence of the Western world³⁷, it is noteworthy to be aware of the present disagreements on this subject. Massad (2007) and Habib (2007), as I’ve mentioned previously, disagree on this debate: the first stating that gay identity is an import from the West³⁸, and the second giving proof of the existence of lesbian subcultures within Arab history. What interests me more so is how the definition of what is queer and what is not queer gets established through colonial relations, Western/Israeli Jewish queers occupying a privileged position in the evaluation of levels of queerness and therefore their acquisition of superiority through the criteria they have edified. In this sense, I share Massad’s concern in the obscuring effect of the monopolizing voices of Western/Israeli Jewish queer voices. It is in fact dangerous when Western/Israeli Jewish queer activists claim an entitled position from which they define ‘non-Western gay identities’ (Amer, 2010: 651) for subjects they categorize as ‘unfit to define or defend themselves’ (Massad, 2007: 42). As Amer (2010) states:

³⁷ In part because I believe in people’s self definitions when it comes to identity, but also because of Habib’s (2007) amazing work in recovering the existence of lesbian subcultures – who self identified as loving women – throughout Arab history.

³⁸ In Massad’s (2007) words: ‘The categories gay and lesbian are not universal at all and can only be universalized by the epistemic, ethical, and political violence unleashed on the rest of the world by the very international human rights advocates whose aim is to defend the very people their intervention is creating.’ (41) Further, he pursues this thought by stating that: ‘This is unfolding (...) as an effect of the serious ongoing attempts by the Gay International and their adherents to impose their own sexual taxonomy and transform the medically and sociologically marginal figure of the ‘deviant’ (itself a European invention) into the ‘homosexual’ (mithli), a juridical subject endowed with legal rights (another more recent European invention), and then posit the existence of homosexuality as a communitarian societal group category.’ (Massad, 2007: 416).

The notion that being gay means one thing and one thing only in either the West or the Third World is highly problematic and does not take into account the multiple variations in that category (across individuals, life span of a given individual, location, etc.) that have been at the heart of recent Third World gay and lesbian studies. (Amer, 2010: 653)

Or, in Diana Fuss' (1995: 159, quoted in Massad, 2007) words:

Is it really possible to speak of 'homosexuality', or for that matter 'heterosexuality' or 'bisexuality', as universal, global formations? Can one generalize from the particular forms of sexuality takes under Western capitalism to sexuality *as such*? What kinds of colonizations do such translations perform on 'other' traditions of sexual difference? (41)

Crossing the Checkpoint

In Israel/Palestine, the politics of visibility of Israeli Jewish queer activism have been hotly debated. For Ritchie (2010), the importance of visibility for Israeli Jewish queers 'is embedded in – and supportive of – an increasingly significant strain of Israeli nationalism' (558). In this sense, visibility takes the form of a plea to the Israeli state, one which urges it to recognize its queer citizens as equal citizens (Ritchie, 2010: 562). As stated by Hamel, a prominent Israeli Jewish queer activist interviewed by Ritchie (2010), 'The real (gay) emancipation is to become an everyday part of the whole' (563). Through this 'mantra'³⁹, 'visibility' has become a central project to Israeli Jewish queer activism, in the same way as it has been a driving factor in Western queer activism. Seen how problematic this is for Palestinian queers, it is interesting to note how their queer activism dissociates from this

³⁹ This is what HaAguda has named its 'visibility' mission. (Ritchie, 2010: 563).

agenda and rather aims to express a ‘politics of social change that offers a potentially subversive alternative to the normalizing project of queer visibility’ (Ritchie, 2010: 558).

The interesting – and recent – analogy of ‘the closet and the checkpoint’, which has emerged in numerous works such as those of Ritchie (2010), Amireh (2010) and Hochberg (2010a,b), explains the diverging relationships Israeli Jewish queer activists and Palestinian queer activists have with ‘visibility’, and illustrates the neocolonial relationship between these two queer factions. For Amireh (2010), the checkpoint represents ‘the border between the here and the elsewhere’ (640). In other words, the checkpoint is the divide that needs to be crossed to adhere to another sphere. While the checkpoint is a state ‘apparatus of power that seeks to perform, produce, and reproduce the power relationship between occupiers and occupied’ by acting as ‘an arrest, a stop, a meeting point of sorts between the scrutinizing gaze of the state and the bodies put under surveillance’ (Hochberg, 2010a: 584), its imagery is also significant to queer realities. In fact, it has become a sort of alternate metaphor to ‘the closet’ of the West/Israel, embodying more accurately the experiences of queer Palestinians (Ritchie, 2010: 558). In his analysis of Sharif Waked’s short film *Chic Point: Fashion for Israeli Checkpoints* (2003), Hochberg (2010a) explains how ‘as a visible display of military force, checkpoints sharply divide Israelis from Palestinians, occupiers from occupied, according to ‘those who give permission and those who need to ask for it’ (577).

The metaphor of the checkpoint allows us to understand the power relations between Israeli Jewish and Palestinian queers. The ‘visibility’ agenda of Israeli Jewish queer activists in itself is therefore embedded in power: while ‘coming out of the closet’ aims to give Israeli Jewish queers a sense of ‘normalcy’ (Hochberg, 2010a: 578) - as equal citizens of the nation -, ‘normalcy’ in citizenship is not a luxury permitted to Palestinians more generally, be they

queer or not (Ritchie, 2010: 558). Furthermore, rejection from the state is reproduced within queer circles, where inclusion implies exclusion: being admitted to queer spaces/identity needs to translate into the abandonment of Palestinian spaces/identity:

...queer Palestinians are acceptable, and visible, only insofar as they mute or repudiate their Palestinianness; the most effective strategy for achieving that goal — and passing through the checkpoint into the space of Israeli gayness — is to confirm the racist narrative of gay-friendly Israel versus 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. (Ritchie, 2010: 562-563)

Ritchie’s study (2010) – in which Haneen Maikey, the director of Al Qaws, and Rauda Morcos, one of the founding members of *Aswat*, speak on the subject - also informs us of how queer Palestinians activists reject the checkpoint, meaning that they do not answer to the gaze of Israeli Jewish queers, nor do they follow the lead of their nationalist Israeli Jewish queer project of visibility (568-569). In fact, both visibility and nationalism are intertwined, with authors such as Stein (2010), Ziv (2010) and Ritchie (2010) drawing strong parallels between the two. Stein (2010) explains how coming out of closet signifies coming into the state for Israeli Jewish queers (518), a strategy fueled by the ‘legal revolution’ or what is referred to as the ‘gay decade’ of the 1990s in Israel (519), lead by a ‘longing for assimilation and (...) a republican notion of citizenship...’ (Ziv, 2010: 539). Hochberg (2010b) explains how ‘the nation-state provides the most appropriate frame for a gay self-narration’ (495). The two main struggles of the mainstream queer movement portray this search quite clearly: ‘abolishing the discrimination against gays in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the right to same-sex parenthood and particularly motherhood’ (Ziv, 2010: 539). Through these examples, it becomes evident how contradictory the Israeli Jewish queer project is from the Palestinian one: while one entrusts the State in guaranteeing equality, the

other identifies the State as the source and perpetuator of inequality (Ritchie, 2010: 567). In this sense, the divide created by Israeli Jewish queer activists between queer issues and political issues is violent in the sense that this divide is permitted by the privileged position that they occupy. The omission of considering the intersection of systems of oppression in the Israeli-Palestinian context by Israeli Jewish queer activists allows for the reproduction of oppression and renders the model of homosexuality which they adhere to ‘privatized, depoliticized’ (Ritchie, 2010: 559)⁴⁰. While it is evident through numerous authors’ analysis that ‘sexuality is not something that can be explored in isolation from other markers of otherness and social or political injustice’ (El Shakry, 2010: 618), there is a strong rupture between queer struggles and ‘political’ struggles among Israeli Jewish queer activists, especially in relation to ‘the conflict’ (Ritchie, 2010: 560). This rupture or avoidance is evident in the practices of the State and Israeli Jewish queer activists. For example, when Issam Makhoul, a former Israeli Palestinian Knesset member, was refused the right to speak at the memorial ceremony of the killing of the two queer teenagers in Tel Aviv because he denied the organizers the right to read his speech before the ceremony, the spokesperson of Tel Aviv’s HaAguda explained that the organizers feared that Makhoul would ‘make any connection between our memorial ceremony and the occupation’ (Hochberg, 2010b: 495). Palestinian queer responses to the victimization being imposed on them troubles this narrative. As Ritchie (2010) states:

Their refusal is not, contrary to the assumptions of queer Israelis, a refusal to leave the closet but a rejection of the language of the closet altogether, a reliance not on the projection of visible, intelligible subjects but on the subversion of the state’s need to see in the first place. (Ritchie, 2010: 571)

⁴⁰ Although it is arguable that this depoliticized stance is in itself political.

In sum, while Israeli Jewish queer activists ask Palestinian queers to choose between their Palestinian identity and their queer one, their refusal to do so (Morcos, in Amireh, 2010: 642) creates a space that lies outside the neocolonial discourse of Israeli Jewish queer ‘solidarity’⁴¹.

Finally, while some authors such as Schmitt (2003: 591) do not see how the insurgence of Western/Israeli Jewish movements causes harm, authors such as Massad (2007), Kamran Asdar (2008), Chahine (2009) and Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem (2008) express serious concerns about the implications of what is disguised as ‘solidarity’. For these authors, the discourses of Western/Israeli Jewish queer activists, as well as their imposition of a model of homosexuality that might not fit local realities can perpetuate oppression or even worsen it. For example, Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem (2008) explain that by always speaking for Palestinian/Arab queers, Israeli Jewish/Western queer activists sustain the national narrative which equates queerness with otherness (83). Massad (2007), on his part, supports the notion that homophobia was imported from the West⁴² ‘as sexuality in its modern ‘Western’ formulation turns into a matter of identity and as such a matter of public control’ through the influence of the ‘Gay International’ (Hochberg, 2010b: 507). Furthermore, he explains how the discourses against queerness in the Arab/Muslim world are replicas of the same preceding discourses that the West used⁴³, a truth that ‘escapes the notice of both the Islamists and the Gay Internationalists’ (Massad, 2007: 195). Finally, this author explains

⁴¹ A space from which emerges resistance. This will be further elaborated in the analysis section of my thesis.

⁴² Habib (2007) reveals that other authors have held the same argument, such as Abu Khalil who stated that ‘Islam did not have the same Biblical judgment about homosexuality as Christianity (and that homophobia) as an ideology of hostility towards people who are homosexual, was produced by the Christian West’ (64).

⁴³ Through ‘Western Christian fundamentalisms and Orientalist constructions of the Arab and Islamic past’ (Massad, 2007 : 194-195). While Habib (2007) explores the main discourses against queerness in the Middle East, this author also fails to tie these discourses (based on religion, medicine, psychoanalysis, etc.) to their colonial origin.

that the Islamist resistance to queerness stems from its rejection of Western hegemony and so, when ‘Western governments, the media, and the Gay International, regularly attack ‘Islam’ as the culprit’, it intensifies this resistance (Massad, 2007: 195). While the effects of queer neocolonization are debatable – many authors forgetting the agency of Arab/Palestinian queer subjects within their analysis – it is clear that the relationship between Western/Israeli Jewish queers and Arab/Palestinian queers are embedded in power relations that are often true to colonial relations. In light of these issues, other authors have begun exploring how ‘solidarity’ can be reconfigured outside of the neocolonial framework. Some of the main propositions are ‘respect for oppressed people’s right to self organisation’ (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 89), and a recognition of the ‘links between different oppressions and struggles’ (Ziv, 2010: 538)⁴⁴ combined with a recognition of how these oppressions and struggles are different (Amireh, 2010: 643).

D. Lacks in the Present Literature

This final section briefly outlines the main lacks I have identified within the consulted literature: the exclusion of womyn’s experiences and histories, the absence of in-depth studies specific to Palestinian queers, and the uneven focus on oppression rather than resistance to oppressive narratives. Firstly, as many other authors have noted (Habib, 2003 and 2007; Chahine, 2009; Amer, 2010), the available literature on queerness in the Arab and Muslim worlds, as well as more generally on sexuality in these regions has shown little

⁴⁴ Stein (2010) gives the example of Black Laundry, a (mostly) Jewish Israeli queer group that had a strong anti-occupation stance and recognized the interrelation between the oppression of Palestinian people and that of queers in Israel/Palestine (531). Although the group has now fallen apart, it was quite active during its existence and famous for its slogan during Tel Aviv’s pride parade in 2001, which read: ‘There is no pride in occupation’ (Stein, 2010: 531). While Amireh (2010) applauds Black Laundry for making this connection, this author finds problematic its valuing of sexuality as a substitute for nationality as a basis of identity which ‘is not likely to be shared by many Palestinian queers who do not wish to have their nationality supplanted by sexuality, but would like to own both forms of identity’ (642).

interest in womyn. As Habib (2007) has stated: ‘...studies on female homosexuality in this region are relatively unknown, which resonates with the neglected literature of female sexuality in general.’ (Habib, 2007: 3). Similarly, Amer (2010) reflects on this issue within one of the most important works on queerness in the Arab world done by Massad (2007) in *Desiring Arabs*. She notices how

...most of the arguments presented in this book concern male homosexuality; one could erroneously reach the conclusion that the only ‘Desiring Arabs’ of the past or present are desiring *male* Arabs.’ She continues: ‘To be fair, the lack of attention to lesbians in *Desiring Arabs* reflects the comparatively limited information about them in either primary or secondary Arabic sources. Nevertheless, material about lesbians exists in medieval sources and is increasingly also addressed in contemporary Arab fiction. Moreover, a growing number of young and midcareer Arab (and Western) scholars have begun to investigate representations of lesbians in medieval and contemporary texts since the late 1990s. None of this scholarly debate is even mentioned in *Desiring Arabs*, leading one to wonder whether a more accurate title for Massad’s work could not have been *Desiring Arab Men*. (653)

In fact, new studies have started to fill this gap – such as Habib’s *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East* (2007) – although most of these works serve to reveal the presence of queerness in the past, and often within literary works. Hence, it can be said that there exists very little literature concerning exclusively – or in majority - queer womyn in the Arab/Muslim world in the present day. This is problematic since gender is an axis of analysis which can help us understand the divergence and conflicts between the lived realities of subjects⁴⁵. Secondly, while the articles in the *GLQ* issue that focuses on the Israel/Palestine context are impressive in the diversity of subjects they address and the depth of their analysis, there is, to date (and to my knowledge), no work which exceeds the length of an article that focuses on queerness in

⁴⁵ This thought will be expanded on in the Methodology chapter through the use of Patricia Hill Collins’ (1999) ‘Matrix of Domination’ theory.

Israel/Palestine, with a primary interest in Palestinian subjects. One of the problems within the body of literature available is that it often times concerned with Israeli Jewish queer subjects, whether it be to study the struggles they face, their successes or to analyze the impact they have on Palestinian queers. This mainly leads to leave Palestinian queer subjects in the shadow and sustains the neocolonial narrative which posits Israeli Jewish subjects in a superior position. Finally, since the current studies on Arabs/Muslims queers are mainly concerned with portraying how they are oppressed, there is a shortage of positive stories (Chahine, 2009; Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008) that could serve to challenge the oppressive narratives that are being studied.⁴⁶

The aim of this research will be to offer accounts of the resistance of queer Palestinian womyn, in an effort to counter these notable gaps within the present literature.

⁴⁶ Left out from this statement are the notable efforts of Ritchie (2010) and Gold (2010), these authors showing an interest in how Palestinian queers challenge Massad's analysis (2007) and how drag performances serves are resistance for Palestinian queer womyn, respectively.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL

FRAMEWORKS

A. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Theory is ‘how people imagine things to be’ (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 150). Thus, this section will aim to present which disciplines of thought have influenced my research. Feminist postcolonial and postmodern/poststructural theories have guided my research, with the addition of the theories of feminists and queers of colour. While material and postmodern feminist theories have allowed me to think about sex and gender, feminists of colour of the Third Wave and postcolonial feminists have informed my knowledge of interlocking oppression⁴⁷ as well as my questioning of universalism and dualistic thinking. Along with the theories of queers of colour, these feminist theories have also framed my criticism of alliances across differences, and more specifically transnational alliances and solidarity. Postmodern, postcolonial feminists and feminists of colour, as well as cultural theorists, have influenced my conceptualization of ‘resistance’. Conjointly, I am indebted to feminists and queers of colour, along with postcolonial thinkers, for the presence of notions of hybridity, diaspora and borders throughout this research.

‘Any words you use to convey meaning already carry meanings’ (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 160). For this reason, this section will allow for a better understand of what I mean when I use certain words that are at the core of this research: ‘womyn’, ‘solidarity’, and ‘resistance’. Finally, I have found it important to take a brief look at Said’s *Orientalism*, which relies heavily on Foucault’s conception of discursive power, to value its importance in

⁴⁷ For more on the interlocking nature of oppression, see Hill Collins (2007), Beale (1970), Davis (1981) and hooks (1981).

my research and that of the numerous authors⁴⁸ I have relied heavily on throughout my writing process. Said's work have been used and reused across disciplines to understand research, representation, and colonial projects of 'solidarity'. In my research, Said's *Orientalism* was used as a foundational theoretical framework to understand the gaze of the 'Other' as a form of colonial exercise permitting the constitution of monolithic and essentialist narratives meant to differentiate the 'Us' from the 'Them'.

Sex, Gender, 'Womyn' and Post-feminism

Generally speaking, feminist theory is interested in power relations between sexes which are indicative of the fact that the dichotomy between sexes is not natural, but rather a construct revealing itself through 'gender' (Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000: 32)⁴⁹. Gender is understood as a social system meant to differentiate womyn from men through biological and psychological dichotomous characteristics in order to determine the role of each sex within society in an unequal fashion and normalize these divisions to benefit the dominant sex, i.e. men (Parini, 2006: 31). Understanding this 'system of gender' (Parini, 2006: 31) means understanding gender as political, or as 'a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated' (Scott, 1996: 227, in Regard, 2002: 8). This also allows us to understand these sexed/gendered categories outside of an essentialist framework, not only recognizing differences among each subgroup, differences according to historical, geographical and cultural locations, but also to subvert the *existence* of these categories beyond their material existence. In fact, post-feminist theorists have raised the following question: If sex and gender are social constructs, and if they are produced by power relations,

⁴⁸ Such as Mohanty

⁴⁹ This thought has been paraphrased and translated from French by the researcher.

shouldn't feminism re-evaluate itself or redefine itself? (Regard, 2002: 10). While the aim of my research is not to delve into this debate, I have chosen to write 'womyn' with a 'y' for multiple reasons, including to challenge the oppositional assumption that two sexed/gendered categories exist. All the while allowing me to challenge the reflection of power through language (spelling) - 'wo-man' being marked linguistically as a referent to 'man' - it has also allowed me to acknowledge that 'womyn' is a fluid concept that is interpreted differently by a wide variety of people who use it for self-definition. Whether these people be transsexual, transgender, queer, gender queer, feminist, etc., the reappropriation of this word is quite significant and is used throughout my research purposefully in an effort to stay true to the diversity of 'womyn' taking part in my research.

Theorizing Transnational Alliances and Solidarity

Authors such as Mohanty, Spivak, Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, Bacchetta, and Gopinath have been essential to my understanding of transnational alliances and solidarity. Their study of the mistakes of transnational feminist or queer movements through the reproduction of colonial dynamics between the 'West' and the 'Third world' have allowed me to reveal how these dynamics are present in the context of Palestine and have pushed me to think of how solidarity can exist outside of a neocolonial framework. While Mohanty's most valuable work on the subject – in my opinion – is *Feminism Without Borders. Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003) which includes a reviewed edition of her renowned essay *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (p. 17-42), Spivak has also challenged transnational feminism⁵⁰ through her theories of the 'narrative of progress', of the

⁵⁰ In fact, Spivak self-identifies as a theorist in Cultural transnational feminist studies (Bacchetta, 2005-2006 : 182).

'colonial savior narrative' (1987), as well as by asking 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1988). Both these authors have denounced the reproduction of colonial dynamics by Western feminists in their mission to 'save' 'Third World women' who were often thought to be powerless, voiceless victims in need of saving from their oppressive societies in order to reach 'progress', meaning to replicate Western struggles and finally be 'liberated' in the idealized fashion of the West. Similarly, Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem's (2008) study revealed that transnational gay movements conceptualize Muslim queers as voiceless and powerless victims of their oppressive society while Western queers self-identify as sexually liberated subjects within progressive gay-friendly societies (Haritaworn, Taquir and Erdem, 2008: 78).

Spivak explains that Western feminists rely on a western 'grid of intelligibility' which contains assumptions, concepts and ways of thinking proper to the West, to understand and theorize the existence of the 'Third World woman' (Bacchetta, 2005-2006). Through this grid, 'women' were conceptualized as a universal category, yet some women were different in the sense that they were ahead in the 'narrative of progress', the West being at the summit of progress and Western women being at the summit of the progress of women (Bacchetta, 2005-2006: 182; Gopinath, 2005: 142). Mohanty names 'ethnocentric universalism' (Mohanty, 1997: 259) the practice of placing the West as the point of reference, or the ideal to achieve. As the category 'women' is seen as universal, so is 'oppression', patriarchy being conceptualized as a universal reality that manifests itself in the same way across borders (Bacchetta, 2005-2006: 182). Similarly, black feminists named 'white solipsism' the way that white feminists understood oppression exclusively through their own experience, projecting it as the experience of all women (Dorlin, 2005: 88). Ironically, while these

categories were seen as universal, a violent process of ‘othering’ also took place, what Mohanty calls the constitution of the ‘Third World Difference’ (1997: 257). Along these lines, the queer transnational movements Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem speak of group Muslim queers in one homogenous category of analysis oppressed in the same way on the basis of their common religious or ethnic identities (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008 : 83).

For Spivak, this plowed the way for a ‘colonial savior narrative’ to emerge in transnational feminist projects and writings. Similarly, Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem (2008) witness the construction of the ‘savior’ taking on the ‘burden’ of freeing subjects who cannot free themselves in transnational gay movements (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 78). For Mohanty these power relations lead to the treatment of colonized peoples as oppressed ‘objects’ needing intervention, depriving them of their ‘subject status’ which emphasizes their agency (Mohanty, 1997: 271). As eloquently expressed by Césaire, ‘colonization = ‘thing-ification’ (1972: 6). Moreover, this ‘savior narrative’ allows these transnational movements to appropriate the right to ‘speak for’ or ‘in the name of’ the subjects they ‘represent’ and to establish the priorities of these subjects (Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem, 2008: 73).

To the presumption that ‘Third World women’ are powerless, voiceless victims, Spivak raises the question: ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ (1988), to which she answers that the subalterns *are* speaking but this western grid of intelligibility makes the West deaf to their voices (Bacchetta, 2005-2006: 183). In the light of this literature, I have analyzed ‘solidarity’ through my conviction of these words by Foucault:

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to hyper- and pessimistic activism. (Foucault, in Abrahamsen, 2003: 210)

In other words, I do not call for the end of alliances and solidarity, but more so a continuous critical awareness of the history of such alliances and their potential danger when they are articulated or expressed in replica of colonial dynamics.

Orientalism

What Said (2003) calls ‘Orientalism’ has framed my research in relation to my understanding of the process of ‘Othering’ as well as through its influence on what and how my eyes came to read, watch and analyze the experiences and content before me. For Said (2003), Orientalism is multidimensional and expresses itself in many ways but, generally speaking, it has been a practice that emerged in the 18th century and continues on today. He explains that Orientalism is ‘a way of coming to terms with the Orient’ (Said, 2003: 2) not only as a geographical entity but as a ‘cultural contestant’ (Said, 2003: 2) of Europe/the West and as ‘one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other’ (Said, 2003: 2). Orientalism can then be understood as a process of conceptualization of the Orient as an ‘Other’ by the production of knowledge through discourse by way of ‘supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles’ (Said, 2003: 2). It is through this discourse that the Orient is ‘othered’. In Said’s words, ‘Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’ (2003: 2). The discourse producing the Orient does so ‘by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by

teaching it, settling it, ruling over it' (Said, 2003: 3). In this sense, discourse about the orient – *Orientalism* – is embedded in power: the power to give birth, produce, define, and control the Orient. Finally, for Said, the power of Orientalism is dependent on the 'flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand' (Said, 2003: 7). Thus, Orientalism does not only serve to produce the Orient but, simultaneously, requires the continuous production of the West as inherently superior.

Theorizing Resistance: How Queer Palestinian Womyn 'Queer' Palestinian Identity

One determining element of national and colonial narratives is the omission of marginal or contradictory realities, hence why the representation of queer resistance has been quasi-absent in the present literature concerning the Middle East. Haritaworn, Tauquir and Erdem encourage scholars and transnational movements to pay attention to such resistance in order to defy the West/Middle East dichotomy introduced previously, as well as to question the conception of homophobia and heterosexism as systems of oppression which are unchanging and incontestable from within (2008: 76). As mentioned previously, along the same lines as Bacchetta, the goal of this research is not to bring forth the silence of queer womyn but instead, their deletion or erasure from the dominant discourses (2005-2006: 174). Power, as thought of by Foucault, cannot be understood without a context of resistance (Mohanty, 1997: 272) and, as Spivak's writings have shown, it is not that the subalterns cannot speak but that we are (still) unable to hear them (Spivak, 1993: 104). Resistance, then, in the way that it will present itself within this research is not limited to its traditional form⁵¹. Fonow and Cook (2005) have pointed out that '...resistance and power reside in many different

⁵¹ While traditional resistance such as protest, legal battles, etc. are nonetheless valued.

locations and arrangements and that agency is always an ongoing, changing accomplishment' (2225).

For the purpose of this research, resistance will refer to the subversive re-codification of power relations (Foucault, 1984) or a re-writing of dominant neocolonial and national narratives to include the marginal realities which often contradict them. These forms of resistance often manifest themselves in a subtle fashion and can be witnessed in the day to day lives of the subjects (Abrahamsen, 2003: 208). Abrahamsen gives the 'Empire writes back' practice as an example of resistance acted out by postcolonial subjects with the objective of destabilizing (neo)colonial narratives (Abrahamsen, 2003: 207). Another example brought up by Butler (2004) is the reappropriation of discourse in order to rid it of its previous context or connotation (in Dorlin, 2005: 95), which could be associated with the constitution of a new queer dictionary void of negative connotation by queer Palestinian womyn⁵². In fact, language, while being known as a vehicle of power, can also be a creative tool in 'talking back' (hooks, 1989) and reclaiming power. Furthermore, Hill Collins (2007) has identified as resistance the way in which marginalized communities engage in a process of 'self-definition' and 'self-valuation' to break free from their depiction as 'Others', meaning as 'objects lacking full human subjectivity', considering that it is this 'othering' that permits the 'rationale of domination' (310).

The insistence on Black female self-definition reframes the entire dialogue from one of determining the technical accuracy of an image to one stressing the power dynamics underlying the very process of definition itself...When Black women define themselves, they clearly reject the taken-for-granted assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to describe and analyze reality are entitled to do so. Regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definition, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects. (Hill Collins, 2007: 310)

⁵² This will be talked about in the analysis section of the research.

Through these notions of resistance, activism, and agency I have shifted my focus on apparent manifestations of these and held account of day to day experiences, initiatives, projects, ways of speaking, dressing, being, sharing, challenging, raising consciousness, building community, etc. as sites of resistance. To end, the following sub-section is concerned with the implications of using the term ‘queer’⁵³ as a verb throughout this research to grasp a dimension of resistance.

‘Queering the Nation’

Nation-building requires the establishment of a narrative which defines criteria to differentiate the insiders from the outsiders, the ‘Us’ and the ‘Them’. In other words, the Nation is not only constituted of physical borders but also of metaphoric ones related to identity. Thus, this ‘criteria’, despite it being an ‘unattainable ideal’, is presented as the norm. And yet, the ‘Nation’ is continuously being rewritten with its subjects defying its criteria and revealing the ruptures and contradictions which inhabit it (Gopinath, 2005: 144). In fact, in the same way that gender is presented as fixed and without contradictions all the while the criteria of the ideal ‘womyn’ or ‘man’ being out of reach, the ‘Nation’ incessantly fails to produce subjects who can represent the ideal national narrative (Hayes, 2000: 120).

⁵³ As suggested by Devault (2004), I have used ‘strategic imprecision’ as a tool during the writing process of my research. For Devault, it is better to use ‘several different labels, sometimes more or less interchangeably, and sometimes to refer to subtle shadings of meaning that we are just beginning to interpret. This strategy recognizes that different labels will capture different parts of reality we are working to construct (245). Devault suggests this because as ‘language is man-made, it is not likely to provide, ready-made, the words feminist researchers need to tell what they learn from other women’ (245). I have extended this thought to research being done by and about queer subjects. Devault explains that ‘Instead of imposing a choice among several labels, none of which are quite right, feminist texts should describe women’s lives in ways that move beyond standard vocabularies, commenting on the vocabularies themselves along the way. Instead of agreeing on what to call women’s activity, we should make our talk richer and more complex – we should use many words, and put them together in ways that force readers to imagine the reality we’re describing in a new way – to taste it, try it out, turn it over, take it apart.’ (245).

This brings me to make evident how queer Palestinian womyn ‘queer’ Palestinian identity through the subversion of numerous narratives: that of compulsory heterosexuality (said to be integral to the control of female subjects by the ‘Nation’ according to Gopinath (2005: 136)), of sexual bicategorization, of the Palestinian ‘Nation’, of the Israeli public relations campaign, as well of the Western gaze. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler sees the incoherence in these types of narratives as a sign of their theatrical character (Hayes, 2000: 133). Bhabha agrees by stating how these types of narratives must always be learned and relearned (what he calls ‘national ideal pedagogy’) (Hayes, 2000: 134-135). It is in fact accurate to say that these narratives and their ‘performance’ or ‘acting out’ by the subjects they ‘represent’ cannot be superposed. It is this dissonance that pushes Bhabha and Butler to encourage the ‘rewriting of the Nation’ (or of gender, in Butler’s case), meaning its subversion by the voices of the subaltern (*‘minority discourse’*) (Hayes, 2000: 134-135). In brief, the use of queer as a verb in the research question is inspired by this concept of subversion: ‘If the Nation is narrative, then... (the) tactic of ‘reading (the) oppositional (in) narrative’ might be deployed in a similar rewriting, what I have called queering the Nation.’ (Hayes, 2000: 232-233). Here the refusal of sexist, racist, homophobic colonial and national discourses is a political act which contests the logic of these oppressive discourses (Gopinath, 2005: 28). Hence, while ‘queering’ is associated here to the Nation, it has been extended within my research in a fashion where any system of oppression can be ‘queered’.

B. Epistemological Framework

Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between knowledge and power, as well as the search for what constitutes ‘authoritative knowledge’ or ‘true’ or ‘objective’ knowledge

(Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 151-152). Some of the main questions related to epistemology are ‘What is knowledge? Who can know and by what means? How do we recognize, and evaluate knowledge claims?’ (Fonow and Cook, 2005: 2212), as well as ‘Do you believe you⁵⁴ can produce objective knowledge?’ (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 151-152). A great amount of epistemologies exist, ranging from realist epistemology⁵⁵, to empiricist knowledge⁵⁶, to postmodern epistemology⁵⁷.

In this study, it has been quite difficult to limit myself to one epistemological framework. While I study discourses/narratives as productive of knowledge, I am also interested in how these discourses affect material realities, how they are perceived by the subjects affected by them, and how these subjects challenge them. In other words, while I am concerned in studying the superstructure of knowledge, I also perceive knowledge as a broken-up series of individual accounts and therefore as partial fragments of experience. In order to arrive to the description of the hybrid epistemology that has guided this research, I will first present Foucault’s conception of power as discursive, and then I will move on to offer a brief portrait of feminist standpoint epistemology and its understanding of the knowledge of the oppressed as privileged knowledge. This will allow me to then explain the value I give to ‘partial knowledge’ in this research, as well as explain why both discourse and material realities are worthy levels of analysis.

⁵⁴ The authors are referring to the researcher.

⁵⁵ Which states that a severe application of reason and theory allows us to find ‘true’ knowledge that is independent of people’s awareness of it (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 151-152)

⁵⁶ Which values ‘observation, experiment or the evidence of the senses’ to access knowledge of social reality (a model often thought of as a replica of the guidelines of natural sciences) (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 151-152)

⁵⁷ And its belief in a multiplicity of realities – and therefore of ‘truth’ - that can be accessed through the study of ‘representations of culture, or deconstructions of language and discourse’ (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 151-152)

Foucault: Discourse as Productive of Knowledge

For Foucault (1977, 1980), power and knowledge are always interconnected, as knowledge always implies power, and power relations, to exist, depend on the establishment of a field of knowledge. It is power that allows subjects to produce knowledge, but also knowledge is productive in the sense that it is ‘creative of subjects’ (Abrahamsen, 2003: 198). Discourses are where ‘knowledge’ can be found since it is produced by them. ‘...Discourses, in the foucauldian sense, are ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Abrahamsen, 2003: 198). Seen as ‘truth’ is produced and sustained through systems of power, Foucault has imagined ‘truth’ as being ‘a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980). Abrahamsen gives a concrete example of how this epistemological framework and theory can be concretely manifested in research by evoking Said’s *Orientalism*⁵⁸, a study which has demonstrated how the ‘Orient’ came into being through the discursive power of the ‘West’:

Said provided a compelling demonstration of how the West had managed to establish an authoritative and dominant knowledge about the Orient and its peoples, and argues that the study of the Orient was ultimately a political vision whose structure promoted a binary opposition between the familiar (the West/us) and the strange (the Orient/them). (Abrahamsen, 2003: 200)

In true *foucauldien* fashion, Said (2003) explains how discourse, while not being in a ‘direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw’, ‘is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power’:

power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canon of taste, texts, values), power

⁵⁸ *Orientalism* (2003) is a central work in my research and it will be briefly explained in the following chapter which is dedicated to the theoretical framework.

moral (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do). (Said, 2003: 12)

While postmodern epistemology privileges the study of representations and discourses as gateways to knowledge, standpoint epistemology generally emphasizes lived material experiences as sites of knowledge production.

Standpoint Epistemology: Seeing from Below / Privilege Obscures Privilege

In feminist standpoint epistemologies, oppressed subjects are thought to be the only subjects capable of revealing the real nature of power relations. For this reason, the experiences of the oppressed are granted a greater value than those of the privileged (Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000: 75). In other words, ‘by virtue of their knowledge of both the oppressor’s views of reality and that of their own subjugated groups’ (Fonow and Cook, 2005: 2212-2213), oppressed individuals are said to ‘have access to truer or better knowledge’ (Fonow and Cook, 2005: 2213). In opposition, a privileged position is said to blind subjects from seeing their own privilege and others’ oppression (Nagy Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004: 103). In Harding’s words:

Knowledge claims are always socially situated, and the failure by dominant groups critically and systematically to interrogate their advantage social situation and the effect of such advantages on their beliefs leaves their social situation a scientifically and epistemologically disadvantaged one for generating knowledge. (2004: 43)

While I am inspired by this epistemological framework, it has many flaws that have served to challenge it. First, Ollivier and Tremblay (2000) question the claim that two subjects with opposite material conditions (ex: one being of higher class and one being of lower class)

would have fundamentally opposed worldviews or accounts of reality (75). Secondly, these same authors question the notion that all the members of a group would have a coherent account of their experiences or would even live the same experiences because of a shared identity (75). Finally, this epistemological framework may mislead us into believing that all oppressed people are aware of their oppression. Winddance Twine (2000) speaks of racialized people in this effect:

...racial subalterns are assumed to possess a sophisticated understanding of racism. When they do not, this is misinterpreted as an absence of racism. Thus it is presumed that if racial inequalities existed, racial subalterns would have a critique of their subordination; they would not have 'the privilege' to be able to avoid the issue of race. (21)

Fragmented Standpoints: 'Concrete Universalism' and Situated Partial

Knowledge(s)

Fleeing the 'universalizing' potential of the original standpoint epistemology – meaning its possible effect of misleading us to believe that people sharing an identity also share the same account of their experiences -, I have searched for other ways to value the view 'from below' and I have found a noteworthy contribution by feminist and postcolonial feminist thinkers on this subject. To begin, Löwy's configuration of 'truth' as 'concrete universalism'⁵⁹ frames 'truth' as communication, or a conversation⁶⁰ between individuals that are socially situated (Ollivier, 2004: 63). In this sense, Löwy values individual accounts of experience and finds knowledge in the meeting of these accounts, all the while calling out the power relations that silence the voice of the oppressed in larger discourses and therefore valuing the knowledge of 'the oppressed' as a way to transform and make knowledge more complete (Ollivier,

⁵⁹ She names this «l'universel concret» (Löwy, 1992: 146, in Ollivier, 2004: 63). 'Concrete universalism' is my own translation.

⁶⁰ In the way that Haraway (2007) has understood knowledge as 'shared conversations' (119-120, 131).

2004: 63). In the same way, Haraway (2007) understands ‘science’ not as the chase for the extraction or ‘discovery (131) of ‘true’ knowledge of reality but as a search for a more just narrative of the world (127) through ‘conversations’ and a ‘confusion of voices and views’, even a ‘division of senses’ (127)⁶¹. These authors have answered the criticism addressed to standpoint epistemology all the while some still identifying their thoughts on knowledge as being part of this same epistemology. For example, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) associate ‘knowledge from a feminist standpoint’ to knowledge that is ‘always partial (...) both in the sense of being ‘not-total’ and in the sense of being ‘not-impartial’ (66). We then understand how this epistemology values the multiplicity of individual accounts situated in different locations engaging in a shared conversation, as a more ‘just’ narrative of reality. Bacchetta (2005-2006) applies this epistemology practically by studying what she calls a ‘fragment’⁶² in order to stress the fact that all narratives are multiple and multidimensional (173). A more accurate account of reality can therefore be captured through the study of ‘fragments’.

I therefore see this research and the knowledge it has produced as a conversation⁶³ between text, video, the people I met during my field work, the interview participants, and myself – an outsider within⁶⁴ researcher – all of us in our own particular non-static locations, embodying multiple identities which have shifted through time and continue to.

⁶¹ I have translated Haraway’s thought into English here, seen as her French work was used for this research.

⁶² In her case, a part of the lesbian movement in India. This term (‘fragment’) is inspired by Gramsci’s work and later by Subaltern Studies.

⁶³ Obviously not devoid of power relations; this will be discussed further on.

⁶⁴ The term ‘outsider within’ was coined by Patricia Hill Collins (1999) to express the particular position of scholars who belong to marginalized communities. In the author’s view, all the while being ‘insiders’ within their discipline, these researchers remain ‘outsiders’ due to marginalization. On the other hand, while they are ‘insiders’ in their own communities, they develop an ‘outsider’ position through the knowledge they gain in academia. This thought can be extended to any researcher who shares similarities *and* differences with the

Material(izing) Sub(versive)-Discourse

While postmodern epistemology and standpoint epistemology (as universalizing or as partial knowledge) might seem disconnected, authors such as Smith (1997) and Wittig (2001) have attempted to draw the links between experience and discourse, valuing situated voices to better understand discourses, or to subvert them. In Smith's view, it is not that oppressed subject occupy a privileged position to understand reality but that when they 'speak from their experiences of subordination, they produce knowledge that does not exist in dominant discourses' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 72). Smith also explains that standpoint epistemology 'gives access to a knowledge of what is tacit, known in the doing, and often not yet discursively appropriated (and often seen as uninteresting, unimportant, and routine)' (Smith, 1997: 394, in Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 73). Wittig (2001), on her part, has studied how the *discourse of heterosexuality* has a concrete effect on queers, by denying them the possibility of defining themselves outside of the terms of this discourse (Wittig, 2001: 68-69). For this author, discourses can translate themselves into material violence; in other words, oppressive discourses can equate to material oppression (Wittig, 2001: 69)⁶⁵. In true *foucauldien* fashion then, Wittig seems to be saying that reality and discourse are not separate entities; rather, they inform each other, with discourse being an 'exercise' of oppression (Wittig, 2001: 70). For Wittig, since discourse shapes reality, discourse *is* reality (Wittig, 2001: 70). Finally, Wittig notes that it is precisely scientific discourse that discredits the production of knowledge 'from below'... it is discourse that says 'your discourse is not

subjects of their research. In my case, for example, while I shared an Arab and queer identities with the subjects of this research, being part of the diaspora and not being Palestinian made me an 'outsider'. For Hill Collins (1999), the 'outsider within' position is a privileged one epistemologically. In this research, I do not privilege this position while I do recognize that it has its advantages (and its disadvantages). For this reason, I maintain the epistemological framework I have presented in this chapter.

⁶⁵ Wittig references Guillaumin (1978), a feminist author who has inspired this statement.

scientific, not theoretic, (...) you are confusing discourse with reality, (...) you are not saying what you are saying'⁶⁶. To conclude this section, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) sum up my view on epistemology quite clearly by acknowledging the following:

While analyses of language, discourse and representation can show how bodies are made meaningful, and how these meanings can vary and change, bodies also have a material and social existence that is not entirely produced by language. (153)

C. Methodological Framework

My methodological framework is primarily informed by postcolonial feminist methodologies. This section will present the two-tone feminist project of deconstruction and reconstruction, the criticisms I hold against homogeneity, reductionism, essentialism, and universalism, as well as the power relations I aimed to stay aware of during every step of my research, and finally my conception of 'objectivity' as 'reflexivity'.

Two-Tone Feminist Project: Deconstruction/Reconstruction

The organization of my research follows the feminist two-tone project of deconstruction/reconstruction. The first phase of deconstruction consists in the critique of knowledge which is taken for granted (Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000: 26-27). More concretely, this translates into the deconstruction of the narratives presented above, as well as the revelation that the present literature is, in majority, androcentric. For example, it aims to deconstruct the discourse which presents Palestinian society as being integrally homophobic in opposition to Israel being a 'safe haven' for queers. It also wishes to subvert the narrative which tags queers as 'Others' within Palestinian society. And finally, it hopes to deconstruct

⁶⁶ My translation

the image of Palestinian queers as being helpless, voiceless victims within mainstream gay discourse in the West. The second phase of reconstruction focuses on offering a more accurate representation of reality as being made of multiple and contradictory voices, as well on provoking social change (Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000 : 26-27). Thus, this research sets out to acknowledge and celebrate the multiplicity of voices within the communities of queer Palestinian womyn, their experiences serving as a contestation of the prejudice flagrantly present in the studied oppressive narratives. In this sense, the research will raise counter-hegemonic discourses to the fore front. The social change possible through this type of research is, first, the contribution of literature which gives importance to the lives of an obscured community in academic knowledge production. Also, it aimed to create an environment in which the participants and I could collaborate in a deepened discussion surrounding identity, oppression, resistance and solidarity. Finally, it hopes to contribute to the rethinking of solidarity among western transnational movements, moving forward to a form of solidarity which does not express itself in neocolonial terms.

Defying Homogeneity, Reductionism, Essentialism and Universalism

According to Mohanty, colonization is practiced by way of the suppression of the heterogeneity of the subjects it colonizes (1997: 256). This concern for the recognition of the diversity of experiences within communities is a central theme to postcolonial feminist methodologies. For Ollivier and Tremblay, the representation of marginalized womyn as well as the rejection of homogenous categories is at the heart of the feminist project (2000: 22). Similarly, for Mohanty, homogenization leads to a false representation void of contradictions and nuances and is therefore an act of cultural reductionism (1997: 267). Finally, Stanley and Wise (1990) explain that postmodern feminists are skeptical ‘of all

universalizing claims' (27). As explained earlier, it is for these reasons that this research is guided by the concept of 'concrete universalism' elaborated by Colin. This implies to leave behind the search for an absolute truth and to replace it with the conviction that reality is expressed through a multiplicity of often contradictory voices (Löwy, 1992: 146). Writings that criticized universalism often stemmed from the realization that what was being broadcasted as 'universal' was often the experience of people in a privileged position. For many Black and lesbian feminists, it is understood that

Within this universal category, differences in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, culture, and patriarchy are ignored, 'Women' are white, middle or upper class, heterosexual, and Western. (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004: 104)

Meanwhile, an error in proposed counter-discourses, was to question the concept of a 'universal woman' all the while reproducing essentialism in subcategories, speaking then of '*the Black woman*', '*the lesbian*', '*the Third World woman*', etc. (Dorlin, 2005: 83); in brief, 'each difference became its own universal. Women of color told one story (Harding, 1991), Third World women were treated as a singular monolithic subject (Mohanty, 1988)' (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004: 105).

This is something that I have tried to avoid all through my research. I am highly critical of the 'universal gay movement' as well as speaking of 'the Palestinian queer woman'. In fact, this research aims to claim an opposite position, one that celebrates diversity of identities but also diversity of experiences and processes. The case-study approach of my research was meant to focus on a small-scale location in order to not get lost in broad statement about the 'Arab World' but even within Palestine, I have been wary of broad statements meant to generalize the experiences of the people who collaborated with me. I have tried to

circumvent this problem by valuing self-definition (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004: 108) and by shying away from the search for one truth or one story as a prime example that can sum up the whole of experiences that were shared with me. I have also been cautious to always relate these experiences to larger historical, political, and geographical locations (Parini, 2006: 33). Finally, Patricia Hill Collin's (1999) 'Matrix of domination' theory has served me as a methodological tool to understand how inequalities and systems of oppression interlock and influence individual experiences. According to this theory,

People will experience race, class, gender, and sexuality differently depending upon their locations within the social structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In other words, two people of the same race living within the same society and culture will experience race differently if they are of different class, different genders, and/or different sexualities. (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004: 114)

For example, this thesis cannot be generalized for the whole of Palestinian queers. Rather, it is a testimony offered by (present and former) members of *Aswat* and the director of *Al-Qaws*, to which I have added their written and audio-visual productions which may have been done in partnership with other Palestinian queers. Also, the interviewees all live either in the North of the country or in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem and therefore their experiences may or may not apply to Palestinian queers living in the West Bank or in Gaza. Furthermore, a higher proportion of Christian Palestinians were interviewed, as well as 'middle class' – that is a very relative term, especially in Israel – people. *Al-Qaws* offer us a brief look at how, even solely based on geographically differences, claiming to speak about (or often, for) Palestinian queers is an impossible (and dangerous) task:

Unfortunately, most Western representations of Palestinian in general—and LGBTQ Palestinians in particular—tend to ignore the incredible diversity of the Palestinian people. The total worldwide population of Palestinians is estimated at somewhere

between 10 and 12 million people, with around 2.5 million in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, 1.5 million in the Gaza Strip, 1.25 million in Israel, and most of the remainder in surrounding Arab countries, the Americas, and Europe. Although the vast majority identifies as Palestinians and shares the historical experience of the Palestinian people, this geographical diversity brings with it a wide variety of social and economic realities that make it impossible generalize about “Palestinians” in simplistic terms. (*Al-Qaws*, 2005)

Similarly, while I often refer to ‘Israeli Jewish queers’ or ‘queers abroad/in the West’, my intention is not to essentialize these groups either. In no way do I figure that they are monolithic, homogeneous or devoid of a wide variety of people and experiences. Rather, my research aims to speak of the knowledge shared by the Palestinian queer womyn interviewed which is based on their own interactions with individuals and organizations who have been tagged under these terms for the purpose of this reflection. By choosing Palestinian queer resistance as my focal point, I have centered my research on oppressive narratives and therefore I have left out resistance by certain Israeli Jewish queer or ‘Western queer’ individuals and organizations who may be internally subverting mainstream discourses. While this is true, the concerns of the Palestinian queer community I worked with in relation to ‘neocolonial solidarity’ have made me invest my energy on this subject.⁶⁷

Power Relations

Postcolonial theory has taught us that ‘...the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism’ (Tuhiwai, 2002: 1). In fact, research has concretely often been ‘an encounter between the West and the Other’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2002: 8) where ‘knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2002: 1). In fact,

⁶⁷⁶⁷ This being said, this could be a subject matter for other researchers to explore.

...knowledge is always imbricated with power, so that getting to know (or ‘discursively framing’) the Third World is also about getting to discipline and monitor it, to have a more manageable Other... (Kapoor, 2004: 632)

In this sense, the relationship between researchers and their ‘subjects of study’ is often a colonial one when it is known that in most research, the researcher defines the object of study and holds a privileged position through the production of knowledge (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004: 107). The true danger of this is that research can ‘maintain, perpetuate, create and recreate the power and hierarchies operating in society’ (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004: 107). For Haraway (2007), it is through the gaze of the researcher that bodies are marked, and that the researcher can claim the right to see without being seen (115). While power relations were evident between myself and the womyn involved in this research simply by the position I occupied as a researcher, I consciously aimed to subvert this dynamic early on. For example, I did not submit a proposal to carry on this research before I consulted numerous womyn to get their opinion as to if they thought this research was relevant to them, if it could be useful to them, and if they would like to collaborate with me on it. Also, I have aimed to be apparent in this research by being reflexive, meaning by explicitly showing awareness of my role in the production of knowledge and by stating how I approached this research and what personal views have influenced how it was carried through (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004: 109)⁶⁸. I have been particularly careful as to not impose my own experience on the womyn I worked with, as well as to not self-position as a so-called ‘expert in sexual liberation’. My research has also been conducted in light of my personal conviction that true agency exists within the community I worked with. Finally, a great deal of modesty

⁶⁸ The sub-section concerning my ethical framework will give a more in-depth analysis of certain techniques used to subvert the power relations inherent in this study.

was inherent to my research. While I do hope that my research can be beneficial in one way or another to the womyn concerned with this research, I have avoided at all costs to play the part of a savior who believes that they know all the problems that need to be dealt with and all the solutions to these problems. In fact, my research has made me witness a great deal of creativity, agency, and empowerment, and has made me question the notion of ‘problem’ in and of itself⁶⁹. On another note, power did not act solely in a one-way direction.

Current scholarships also emphasize how race, class, gender, and sexuality operate simultaneously. At the structural level, these hierarchies of oppression are connected and embedded in all social institutions. We can each exist at different locations along all dimensions, leading to the possibility that we can be both dominant and subordinate at the same time. We can be both constrained and enabled by the social structure of inequalities. (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004: 109)

For this reason, while I was advantaged by my researcher position, at times this same position gave me a disadvantage while, for example, I had to rely on others to get where I needed to be for an interview, and other positions informed by my age, me being a diasporic Arab, or my gender performance gave others power over me. Finally, power relations also existed between the womyn I worked with, with the most important variables being age, seniority in the queer movement and geographical location. While I aimed to avoid letting this influence the research – by, for example, being aware of this when booking interviews and directing the group interview in a way that everyone had a chance to speak – these power relations are nonetheless important to mention.

Reflexivity as Objectivity

The acknowledgement of my position as an Arab queer womyn researcher who has relied heavily on ‘personal accounts’ of Palestinian queer womyn as a ground of ‘true knowledge’

⁶⁹ This will be discussed in the following chapter.

has pushed me to reflect on what constitutes ‘objectivity’. In other words, I have asked myself the following questions: Do the identities that I embody discredit my work as a researcher? Do my openly stated political stances render my research biased? Are my interviewees’ experiences more or less ‘objective’ than others’ thoughts on their experiences? In fact, one of the strongest accusations directed towards feminist methodology concerns its said lack of objectivity. However, feminist studies have denounced the androcentric nature of traditional objectivity (Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000: 45). According to Spencer (1981), ‘mainstreams’ in disciplines are best seen as ‘malestreams’ (Stanley and Wise, 1990: 44). Similarly, Adrienne Rich has pointed out that ‘objectivity’ is in fact the name that is given to ‘male subjectivity in patriarchal society’ (Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000: 68). For this reason, feminist methodology doesn’t set out to oppose subjectivity and objectivity but rather to question the hidden subjective character of knowledge which claims to be neutral. Also, feminists have broken the dichotomy generated in traditional science between reason and emotion, recognizing ‘emotion as both a legitimate source of knowledge and a product of culture that is open to analysis as any other culturally inscribed phenomenon’ (Fonow and Cook, 2005: 2215). Similarly, one could say that ‘mainstreams’ are in fact ‘straightstreams’ or ‘whitestreams’ or that ‘objectivity’ is the name given to ‘straight subjectivity’ in ‘heteronormative society’ or even to ‘white subjectivity’ in ‘white supremacist society’. In fact, ‘race’ has often been a terrain of debate in concern to subjectivity, with people of colour being tagged as ‘biased’ if they study subjects deemed ‘too narrow’ by a discipline dominated by privileged (white) people (Winddance Twine, 2000 : 23)⁷⁰. Feminist

⁷⁰ Winddance Twine (2000) speaks of Black researcher Micheal Hanchard’s experience on this matter: ‘...when white researchers study white-controlled institutions and movements, their research is not perceived as ‘biased’. However, when he (Michael Hanchard) chose to study a black movement in another national context, concerns were raised about his topic being too ‘narrow’ and possibly biased.’ (Winddance Twine, 2000 : 23) The author

methodology recognizes that all projects are motivated and influenced by personal and political experience and convictions and that these positions are often influential in all stages of the research (Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000: 43-45; Stanley and Wise, 1990: 23). Said (2003) agrees with this by stating:

No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society. (10)

Since this fusion between experience and scholarship is inevitable, feminist research encourages a continuous effort to demonstrate transparency all through the research process, redefining objectivity as an insistence on making the researcher apparent within the study (Rose, 2001: 6). Harding (2004) has coined the term 'strong objectivity' to theorize the exercise of 'placing the researcher on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge' (55). In other words, 'strong objectivity' equates to 'strong reflexivity' (Harding, 2004: 55). Hesse-Biber and Yaiser explain reflexivity as:

...the process through which a researcher recognizes, examines, and understands how her social background, positionality, and assumptions affect the practice of research. The researcher is as much a product of society and its structures and institutions as the participants she is studying. One's own beliefs, backgrounds, and feelings become part of the process of knowledge construction. The process of explaining and interpreting the data draws upon the researcher's knowledge and understanding, both of which have been influenced by society and one's location within its social structures. (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004: 115)

This has taken the form of my own personal reflection on my presence and influence in this

explains that 'Race, of course, greatly affects one's authority to make certain knowledge claims.' (Winddance Twine, 2000 : 22)

research, but it has also manifested itself through the practice of ‘self-revelation’⁷¹, meaning making explicit my personal and political motivations on the subject of this research to the people I worked with during the study, as well as to the readers of this research.

Data Production

I have borrowed the term ‘data production’ for this subsection to discuss the methods used in this research. For Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002):

The term ‘data production’ implies that information gathered by the researcher is produced in a social process of giving meaning to the social world. This is distinct from ‘data collection’, which, at its simplest, can imply that ‘facts’ are lying about waiting for the researcher to spot them. (154)

Furthermore, I am influenced by Bacchetta’s (2005-2006) views on data production. Similarly to her, I did not aim to ‘retrieve information’⁷² as though Palestinian queers needed me to retrieve their voices (Bacchetta, 2005-2006: 174). Like this author, I acknowledge that the subjects I have worked with during this research have their own medias, are often highly educated and are able and do speak for themselves (174). For this reason, my aim here is not to unearth the ‘silence’ of Palestinian queers but rather to expose their ‘erasure’ within mainstream discourses (174).

Methods of Data Production: Qualitative Triangulation

Methodological triangulation implies the use of multiple methods to collect data in order to more accurately represent the diverse realities in question as well as to assure an analytical credibility (Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000: 23). Although I recognize the advantage of

⁷¹ Translated from French: «autorévélation» (Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000: 133)

⁷² ‘Information retrieval’ is here taken from Spivak’s (1998) work by the author.

quantitative methods, temporal and financial limits have pushed me to invest in four qualitative methods of data collection: content analysis, group and individual semi-directed interviews on the field and participative observation. Fonow and Cook (2005) have pointed out that triangulation – or what they call ‘multimethodism’ may give more weight to some methods rather than others (2228). In my case, the multiple levels analyzed have pushed me to value some methods to answer some questions, while other methods were more important to answer others. For example, content analysis has been essential to studying the multiple narratives concerned by this research while interviews and participative observation were central to study resistance and to better grasp lived realities.

Content Analysis

Angers defines content analysis as an ‘indirect technique of scientific investigation based on written, audio or audiovisual productions by groups or individuals’ (Angers, 1996, in Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000: 138). In this research, I have combined a general literature review with the study of Al Qaws and Aswat’s websites and written and audio-visual productions, videos of their members speaking at conferences, videos produced by *Blue Star PR*, and newspaper articles.

Semi-Directed Field Interviews

The core of my research is found in the series of interviews I conducted in the summer of 2010. These interviews took place in Nazareth, in Haifa, as well as through *Skype* with a diasporic Palestinian queer womyn living in Canada. In total, 10 individual interviews took place – with 9 being semi-directed and 1 resembling more of a ‘life story’ format with very little direction – as well as 1 group interview with members of *Aswat*. Semi-directed

interviews are defined by Ollivier and Tremblay (2000) as interviews where the researcher establishes the themes of discussion and the interviewee has the liberty of answering the questions of the researcher as they wish, in their own terms (128). Indeed, during my semi-directed interviews, interviewees sometimes skipped questions, talked for extended periods of times to answer others, and brought their own knowledge to challenge the pre-established questions and even ask some of their own. For the case of the single ‘life story’, the format was different with the interviewee having the liberty of speaking about themes she thought to be relevant to the overall subject of research I presented to her. My role in the interview became minimal, it being mostly that of listening and asking for precisions where needed. Seen as the interviewee was among the first womyn to start mobilizing in Palestine around queer politics, it allowed her to give me an overall picture of how *Aswat* began and this in turn gave me a better understanding of how it has evolved through the years. This exception aside, both individual and group interviews were conducted with a questionnaire⁷³. The group interview questionnaire was slightly changed – all the while addressing the same themes – in order to foster discussion among the interviewees and create a space where ‘aswat’ – meaning ‘voices in Arabic’ – debate and meet. Both questionnaires were available in Arabic and English and the interviews went back and forth between these languages, most interviewees speaking in both.

Ollivier and Tremblay (2000) see in semi-directed interviews a potential for interviewees to feel empowered as they find themselves in a space where they can name their experiences and identify what is important to them (and what is not), as well as speak about issues on their own terms (130). Follow and Cook (2005) further this thought by identifying group

⁷³ These can be found at the end of the research in annex.

interviews as ground for consciousness-raising (2218). I was able to witness this during the group interview with *Aswat*. A particularity of this group interview was that both old (members who founded the group) and new members were present. I recall one of the newer members sharing with me how this interview allowed them to think about issues that they rarely get to speak about and how it was an opportunity to learn from other members who had been around longer than them. In parallel, an older member expressed her gratitude for being able to ‘hear the younger ones’ speak. Despite these advantages of conducting interviews, some challenges or limits also arose. While I must say that, in general, the interview process went very smoothly, the biggest challenge was the restrictions in time, money as well as mobility, which lead to the marginalization of people who were left out of the interview sample. For example, as I have noted beforehand, no interviews were done with Palestinian queers in the West Bank or Gaza. While at times it was difficult to interview people because of our limited time together and the lack of space to do so, we tried to compensate in a way by having discussions together on related subjects⁷⁴. Also, another limit to interviews is reaching ‘accuracy’ in the transmission of spoken word unto text:

However closely you aim to represent and respect your research subjects, human life is so complex and multifaceted that researchers constantly have to make decisions on selecting, refining and organizing their perceptions to avoid drowning in data (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 159)

In fact, ‘smoothing out’ talk makes speech vulnerable to being distorted by researchers and it possibly discounts ‘those parts of women’s experience that are not easily expressed’ (Devault, 2004: 243). This is a testimony of the researcher’s position of power in the relationship (Ollivier and Tremblay, 2000: 130). Without a doubt, it is a challenge to give an

⁷⁴ See the section below on participative observation for a better account of how this was done.

accurate account of people's experiences and of what they share during interviews all the while keeping a coherent text. In my case, I acknowledge that the excerpts from the interviews were chosen by me, and that these choices may have been made in relation to an interviewee's eloquence in speech, for example. Nonetheless, while some participants were quoted less often, I have made an effort to keep a maximum of the ideas brought forth apparent in the research. Furthermore, seen as many interviews were conducted in Arabic and could not appear in the text as direct transcripts, I faced the challenge of staying true to the interviewees thoughts while I translated them. As Said (2003) states: 'In any instance of at least written language, there is no such thing as a delivered presence, but a *re-presence*, or a representation.' (21).

Interview Sample

As I have previously noted, I do not intend to generalize when I speak of 'Palestinian queer womyn' throughout this research. The following section will give an overview of the interview sample in order to better contextualize the experiences of participants on the basis of their geographical location, religion, class, age, and seniority in the movement.

Firstly, the sample comprises the testimonies of a select amount of Palestinian queer womyn living within the borders of what is today widely known as the State of Israel. In fact, 9 out of the 13 interviewees live in the North of Israel, a part of the country where cities and towns are quite varied. For example, Nazareth is one of the most highly populated Arab city, Akka is known for its geographically ghettoized Palestinian and Israeli population, Haifa is more mixed geographically but contains a higher Israeli Jewish population, etc.⁷⁵ Also, 2

⁷⁵ I have decided to not associate the interviewees to their respective cities/towns in an effort to not 'out' them.

interviewees live in Tel Aviv, 1 lives in Jerusalem, and 1 lives in the West. It was hard to categorize interviewees according to rural/urban criteria that seem more apparent in the West. Nisreen Mazzawi (II)⁷⁶ challenged my question when I asked her if Nazareth was a city or a village, stating that the lines are blurred for her and most Palestinians living in Israel.⁷⁷ Nidal (II) also explained that there are ‘not many urban areas left for Palestinians’.

Secondly, 9 interviewees are Christian, while 3 are Muslim, and 1 is Druze. Religion was rarely brought up during the interviews, other than in reference to ‘Israeli Jews’. Also, it was rarely talked about amongst participants on a daily basis. This might be due to the fact that *Aswat* is not a religious organization.⁷⁸

Thirdly, class belonging was mostly relevant due to the financial independence and mobility it allowed certain participants.⁷⁹ While all interviewees self-identified as belonging to the ‘middle class’ – with certain variations such as ‘middle-low’ or ‘middle working’ class- , Ms.S explained that what is considered ‘middle class’ differs according to one’s identity (Palestinian or Israeli Jewish). That being said, it is accurate to say that all interviewees met their basic needs, and were either attending university, had graduated from university, or were planning to attend in the coming year. Nonetheless, there were apparent differences between participants, with some coming from wealthier prestigious families and owning their home, to others living with many siblings and having to provide for their family.

⁷⁶ ‘II’ here represents ‘Individual Interview’ and ‘IG’ will be used to signify ‘Group Interview’ as to not clutter the text. All Interviews were conducted from July 2010 to August 2010.

⁷⁷⁷⁷ She explains how Nazareth is the center for the Arab population living within Israel but it is the periphery of Israeli ‘cities’. Also, while Nazareth is a city by standards of the density of its population, its lack of services, its traditional and communal mentality (such as the fact that people still live within the same house surrounded by their family for generations) may categorize it as a town...

⁷⁸ While it respects the belief of its participants and welcomes all, it is a secular organization.

⁷⁹ Ms.S explained that what is considered ‘middle class’ differs according to one’s identity (Palestinian or Israeli Jewish).

Fourthly, age was a very important factor to consider, seen as it exposed certain womyn to parts of Palestinian history that others were not subject to. For example, Samar explained the shaping of her 'national identity' by her upbringing during the first and second Intifadas. In fact, mixed with participants' geographical location, age was often a determining factor of participants' self-identification as 'Israeli Arab' or 'Palestinian'. Younger participants who lived in Haifa or Tel Aviv tended to identify as 'Israeli Arab' as opposed to others who had lived most of their life in Nazareth or other towns in the North who adopted Palestinian as a political identity. In summary, the interviewees are between the ages of 19 and 36, with 6 of them being under the age of 20 and 7 being 30 years of age or older. Finally, participants' level of seniority within the queer movement was a determining factor that influenced participants' thoughts on topics such as queerness, solidarity, resistance, etc. I had the chance of speaking with some of the pioneers of the movement, as well as some members of *Aswat* who had just recently joined the group. Activists who had been around longer tended to have a deeper analysis of the interconnectedness of struggles, while activists who were newer to the movement tended to have a better idea of how life is for Palestinian queers in Tel Aviv, for example.

Throughout the analysis presented in the next chapter, some of these categories will be evoked to specify a participant's belonging to them when they appear relevant to the statements made by the interviewees. Otherwise, I have avoided sharing information that might disclose the identity of the participants. To preserve their confidentiality (when applicable), I have named them: Rima, Diana, Nisreen Mazzawi, June, Ms. S., Noura, Haneen Maikey, Samar, Rauda Morcos, Nidal, Sana, Inaam, and Karolen.

Participative Observation

The last method that was used for the purpose of this research is ‘participative observation’. In Lapassade’s *L’observation participante* (2006), this type of observation implies that the researcher joins the collective life of the participants and consciously watches, listens and partakes in conversations, keeping track of information that may be of use. This method was primarily used to observe forms of resistance carried out by the participants since they might not think to report them during the interviews. Coming from outside the community, I may have identified some actions as ‘resistance’ meanwhile individuals or the community might take such actions for granted, falling into what Devault (2004) tags as ‘activities that most women learn to take for granted, activities that are normally only partly conscious, learning without attention’ (232). I have chosen to limit the use of this method to the recording of resistance, a subject that does not lead to the victimization of these womyn, because I did not want the participants to feel continuously watched in a negative manner and thus affect the trust they invest in me. To make this method more accessible, my accommodations were ensured with members of the community and my days were spent among them which allowed me to take notes during informal discussions as well simply through observation. I regularly visited *Aswat*’s office and I also attended queer events organized by the queer community (such as parties and poetry readings organized by *Al Qaws*), *Aswat*’s book launch, workshops organized by *Aswat* or facilitated by its members, as well meetings involving both members from *Al Qaws* and *Aswat*.

Ethical Framework

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Ottawa before any interviews were conducted, although the ethical process did not end there. It was very important for me to think of ethics outside of pre-determined guidelines and to consistently integrate ethical principles throughout the research process. Rather, ethics were thought of as ‘an ongoing process of critical reflection, action, and accountability throughout the research rather than as an act of compliance and approval at the beginning of the research’ (Halse and Honey, 2005: 2158).

This being said, the starting point of my reflection on ethics came from the guiding principles of the Canadian *Tri-Council Policy Statement* related to research involving human subjects. Firstly, this research has concretely aimed to respect the autonomy of the subjects and their right to make an informed decision to participate (or not) in the research. Thus, the objectives of the research were clearly explained to all participants during the field research in order to obtain their verbal consent to be interviewed. Also, the participants were explicitly informed that they may end the interview at any given moment and they had the freedom to skip any questions they did not wish to answer. Secondly, this research was concerned with the respect of the private life of the participants (97-98) by insuring confidentiality of the information shared during the interviews as well as complete anonymity of the subjects if they so wish, with some participants providing me with an alias to use if I were to quote them. For this reason, the interviewees will be referred to by a pseudonym or solely by first name throughout this research, with the exception of Haneen Maikey, Nisreen Mazzawi, and Rauda Morcos, who have given permission to use their full

names.⁸⁰ Finally, in order to minimize the potential disadvantages as much as possible, the participants were informed of the potential dangers and benefits of their participation. Also, when possible, interviews were conducted at *Aswat*'s office in order to provide immediate support to the participants if the interview were to trigger them in any manner. I was careful not to put potential participants in situations that could be dangerous for them (which denied me access to additional interviews in some cases), their safety being of greater concern than the objectives of this research.

Tuhiwai Smith (2002) has also brought up important considerations to better ethical relationships between researchers and the communities they work with. This author has revealed the importance of giving back to the community through two principles, that of 'reporting back' and that of 'sharing knowledge' (15). While 'reporting back' means providing the community with a final copy of the research, 'sharing knowledge' is much deeper.

I use the term 'sharing knowledge' deliberately, rather than the term 'sharing information' because to me the responsibility of researchers and academics is not simply to share surface information (pamphlet knowledge) but to share the theories and analyses which inform the way knowledge and information are constructed and represented. (...) To assume in advance that people will not be interested in, or will not understand, the deeper issues is arrogant. (Tuhiwai Smith, 2002: 16)

Finally, another ethical dilemma I had to struggle with concerns trust. The seven weeks I spent seeing the participants daily obviously created a certain proximity between them and I. As people became 'accustomed to my presence', this also meant that they might have revealed more to me than they wished to (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 158). I attempted

⁸⁰ These activists are well known locally and internationally, and commonly use their full names during interviews, conferences, etc.

to circumvent this potential problem by making the participants aware of the fact that I was I was also taking part in participative observation and informed them when I took notes about experiences or discussions we had together. In sum, I remained conscious of this reality throughout the interview process, and insisted on keeping ethics and accountability in producing knowledge as essential concerns to my research.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS

This chapter will focus on how resistance is expressed by Palestinian queer womyn; in other words, how they have ‘queered’ the oppressive national, colonial, and neocolonial narratives presented above. As I have stated in the methodology chapter, I have based my analysis on ten individual interviews, one group interview with members of *Aswat*, a content analysis of the written and audio-visual documents including the voices of Palestinian queer womyn, and on my own participative observation during my seven weeks with them.

A. What is Resistance?

Revolution begins in the womb of sadness. – Nizar Qabbany

When asked what ‘resistance’ meant to them, the womyn interviewed offered a variety of responses. For most, they could not name solely one system of oppression they were resisting, and seemed to have a strong comprehension of how colonialism, patriarchy, heterosexism, and racism interconnected and reinforced each other. For Nidal (II), one of the founders of *Aswat* who is still an active member but now lives in the West, these systems of oppression didn’t necessarily express themselves in obvious ways. She explains:

Seen as oppression is more subtle and hidden nowadays, resistance is knowledge and power. One way to resist is if someone attacks you, you divert the strength of their attack towards them. You use their body that is attacking you to attack them back. You are working within the system and you need to find the holes in it, finding basic premises of an ideology and trying to flip it upside down.

The tactic of changing discourse and offering an alternate voice was the most clear form of resistance identified by the interviewees (it is no coincidence that one of the group’s name is *Aswat* – meaning ‘voices’ in Arabic). In addition to that, these womyn spoke of reclaiming

language, using art and the written word, refusing to respond to expectations, etc. as forms of resistance.

B. Narrative 1: The National Narrative

How Does the Apartheid/Occupation Context Affect Palestinian Queers?

The apartheid and occupation context has added to a social and political hierarchy making Palestinian queer womyn a ‘minority within a minority within a minority’, says Diana (II). Furthermore, it has pushed Palestinian communities to strengthen their traditions and hold on to their culture in a quasi-nostalgic way, in an attempt to freeze their identity, creating a strong fear and rejection of whatever seems ‘foreign’ (Rima, GI). Similarly, Samar (II) notes that ‘Western ideas clash with the status quo or culture here’. In this sense, the rejection of queers has become synonymous to the rejection of the West or Israel (Rima, II). For example, the opposition to *Aswat*’s conference⁸¹ in Haifa stated that *Aswat* is a ‘fatal cancer that should be forbidden from spreading out within the Arab society and from eliminating the Arab culture.’ (Bourke, 2007: n.p.).

A short text published on *Aswat*’s website explains this sentiment further:

In order to understand our reality as Palestinian Lesbians, it is very important to understand that Palestinians are an indigenous minority in Israel. My people have suffered and are still suffering from traumas of land expropriation, house demolishing, occupation, discrimination and threats of citizenship dismissal. For these reasons and others, the Palestinian society is very zealous about its traditions and culture. The majority of the society rejects behaviors and changes that “threaten” its heterosexuality and patriarchy since it is perceived as a threat to the continuity of the uniqueness of our culture. They

⁸¹ The conference, titled *Home and Exile in Queer Experience*, will be discussed in length further on.

romanticize the past and sometimes I feel like they want to freeze everything that was in the past and reject any change. (*Aswat*, 2005)

In fact, most of the womyn interviewed recalled hearing the discourse that equates ‘queer’ with ‘Western’ or ‘Israeli’, and understood that the occupation has created, or for the least strengthened, this sentiment (Nora, II). Others explained that this is not limited to queerness, and that in fact, it extends to ‘everything out of the norm’ (Haneen Maikey, II), to how womyn dress or them going to clubs at night (June, II), or even concepts such as feminism or individualism (Nidal, II). For both Rima and Nisreen Mazzawi (II), this portrays deep ‘hypocrisy’ within Palestinian societies, seen as much of their culture is Western (they spoke of ‘consumption, technology’ and ‘car, pants, television’). Nisreen also acknowledges that ‘the West has taken a lot from the Arabs’, and this cultural exchange makes it difficult to determine ‘what’s from Arabs or not’. For Rima, this logic is embedded in a double-standard way of thinking, in the sense that it’s like saying ‘this is okay from the West, and this isn’t’... Who gets to decide?

Clear and Visible Political Agenda

One of the ways that *Aswat* and *Al-Qaws* have managed to subvert the notion that queerness is a foreign import or that queers have assimilated Western or Israeli values, and therefore have turned their back to their culture and Palestinian identity is by having a clear, vocal, and visible political agenda. Nidal and Nisreen Mazzawi (GI), both founding members of *Aswat*, recall that when the group first started, although the reactions of Palestinian communities were varied, they could barely use the accusation of traitorship or of Westernization against them because their political agenda was ‘clear’ (group). Similarly, Haneen Maikey (II), the

director of *Al-Qaws*, believes that being nationalist is in itself resisting this narrative. Both groups struggle for both national and sexual freedom, and have been clear about their ‘anti-imperialist’ stance as well. In an article written by Leslie Feinberg (2007: n.p.), *Aswat* is quoted as saying:

We belong to a people facing occupation and racism, and we are fighting for its political, human and cultural freedom. Together we shall oppose all forms of imperialist domination. *Aswat* is acting to create a space within our Arab society where we can struggle on both the political and the social levels.

In fact, even calling the group ‘*Aswat – Palestinian Gay Women*’ was a political act seen as even the word ‘Palestinian’ ‘was formerly used as an insult and feared because of political terrorism’, says Nisreen who’s mother, born in 1949, already considered herself at that time as ‘Arab Israeli’ (II). She traced this back to the military rule which persisted until 1966, producing ‘silenced political bodies’, and explained that it is only after events such as Land Day in 1977 and the uprising of October 2000 that this political identity saw itself be revived.

Other ways in which this political stance has been expressed is through the production of statements or press releases by both *Aswat* and *Al-Qaws* in an effort to openly condemn crimes against Palestinians by the Israeli state. An example of this is a statement named ‘Voices (*Aswat*) of Anger and Solidarity’ released by *Aswat* in June 2010, which expresses opposition to the recent flotilla attacks by the State of Israel.⁸²

⁸² The statement reads: ‘*Aswat - Palestinian gay women, condemns the inhumane Israeli military attacks on the Freedom Gaza flotilla and calls people all over the world to exercise their right to protest the apartheid regime in Israel and elsewhere. As Palestinians we feel that targeting supporters for our families, friends, and fellows in Gaza is targeting our struggle for abolishing racism, inequalities or violence. As women we are also disgusted by the sexist, chauvinist and racist language used by Israeli Knesset Members against MK Haneen Zoabi in the Israeli Knesset describing her as a “traitor” and “Trojan horse”. Ms. Haneen Zoabi was on the ship when the Israeli Army attacked and she witnessed the killing of activists and was heard on television shouting*

Changing Society and Taking Ownership of Discourse

One of the main and most pressing struggles *Aswat* faced as it formed was homophobia in society. As Rauda Morcos (II) explains ‘they had no tools to deal with us’, and ‘we cannot be in a bubble when it comes to community. We need to work on the community. Otherwise, we have no life.’ Similarly, *Al-Qaws*’ mission is very clear on the necessity of working within, and not against Palestinian communities.⁸³ At an individual level also, many of the womyn interviewed saw challenging and changing society’s view on sexuality as one of their own personal struggles. For example, Rima, who’s sexual identity is today accepted by her family, has moved on to a wider objective of ‘promoting sexual diversity’ (II). She says that she does so for example by speaking about sexual diversity as something normal and natural to the children in the classroom where she teaches, in order to empower them to think differently. For Haneen Maikey, one of her main struggles at the moment is ‘reframing what it means to be an integral part of Palestinian society’ and making sense of the role queers should play in Palestinian society (II). Rauda Morcos (II) insists that sometimes it is about

in Hebrew and English to the Israeli Army that “we are civilians” and “there are killed and injured people” on the ship. Ms. Haneen Zoabi was also told in the Knesset Assembly by MK Yohana Palsner to “go back to Gaza and see how they treat unmarried 38 year old women”. This language is not only racist towards Gazan women and men, but also sexist by highlighting the fact that she is an unmarried woman as if this is the sole aspect of Ms. Zoabi’s identity or life. As women who reject being told what to do and how to do it, we find MK Palsner’s humiliating and disrespectful speech to be the very cause of our resistance to patriarchy, heteronormativity, homophobia or sexism.’ (<http://www.aswatgroup.org/english/activities.php?article=467>)

⁸³ In its mission statement, this is self-evident: ‘Al-Qaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society seeks to promote the development and growth of the Palestinian Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ) community in Israel and the Palestinian occupied territories. This process is inextricably linked with the larger mission of building an equal, diverse and open Palestinian society. Within this context, Al-Qaws is an enthusiastic partner in the development of a Palestinian civil society that respects and adheres to human and civil rights and allows individuals to live openly and equally, regardless of their sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity. Al-Qaws aims to achieve its mission through challenging attitudes, breaking social and religious taboos and norms, empowering, educating, developing leadership skills, and promoting social change and social transformation. Our mission is to create a safe and mature space to fertilize open and responsible dialogue at the societal level, promote diversity, meet the vast and differentiated needs of Palestinian LGBTQ persons and promote their well-being and capacity to engage in and contribute to the larger society.’ (<http://www.alqaws.org/>)

changing one person at a time. She shared with me an important moment in her individual activism where she called into a radio show aimed at youth as she heard callers answer the host's question: 'If your brother or sister was gay, what would you do?', with such hatred. She offered moral support and resources for youth who are gay and might have been listening, and a few weeks later received a call from *Al-Qaws* telling her that a young boy who was contemplating suicide heard her and decided to seek help. At the end of her story she tells me: 'To me, this is an example of why our voices should be out.' Nisreen Mazzawi (II) visits schools and community centers and gives workshops for Palestinians where she shares with them her personal narrative and traces homosexuality's existence in all cultures and time periods. In a similar way to Rima, her three years of work with her mother, before she passed away, got her to accept her and her partner, and now she feels like her main struggle has extended to a more global focus on 'social awareness' in the hopes of changing society. This openness to 'not shut doors with family', as Nidal (II) puts it, as well as using the space that they are in, such as universities or the workplace, to challenge common views on sexuality, or 'deal with people's questions instead of closing communication' (June, II) – all the while not necessarily 'outing' themselves in a Western sense⁸⁴ – was a shared view by most of the womyn.

Other than these individual acts of resistance, both *Aswat* and *Al-Qaws* have created specific projects addressing this issue. *Aswat* has an 'Advocacy, Outreach and Education Project' which consists in 'a series of empowerment workshops on women's sexuality, sexual identification and gender for the Palestinian community' to 'raise awareness regarding homosexuality and lesbianism in relation to and in the light of gender oppression and

⁸⁴⁸⁴ The question of 'visibility' and 'coming out' will be discussed in the last part of this chapter, in the section dedicated to the analysis of the third, neocolonial narrative.

national oppression' (*Aswat*, 2005). Also part of this project are lectures and academic conferences organized for high schools and NGOs. Furthermore, *Aswat* has also developed an 'Educational Project for Service Providers', such as teachers, counselors, youth group leaders, community center workers, etc. who work with youth in order to better equip them with tools to cater to queer youth and to demystify stereotypes around sexuality. In *Al-Qaws*' 'Raising Awareness and Educational Programming' project, the group is clear on the fact that these initiatives are 'not merely to 'educate' others' about '(their) homophobia' but rather 'to engage different audiences through an open dialogue about sexual and gender diversity' in the hopes of building 'a wider personal and collective engagement with questions of sexuality and gender and set the groundwork for a real restructuring of social discourse altogether' (*Al-Qaws*, 2005).

These projects inscribe themselves in an even grander initiative of taking ownership of discourse. *Al-Qaws* (2005) explains: 'We believe that we can transform prevailing attitudes in our society toward sexuality and gender only by preventing individuals and groups who do not value sexual and gender diversity from taking ownership of discourse about these issues'.

In its 2009-2010 Strategic Plan, the group expands on the necessity of this strategy:

Discussion of sexuality-related issues—and especially homosexuality and gender-variant expressions—is a total taboo in Palestinian society. And on those rare occasions when such issues are discussed, the dominant language whether among professionals, the media, students, or civil society organizations, is negative, judgmental, and at times, violent. There are, however, positive, affirming words/ways to talk about identities and behaviors in the Arabic language and in the context of Palestinian culture. Al-Qaws will utilize these tools, attempt to make them a familiar, regular part of public discourse and work to increase awareness of the wider implications of language and discourse.

Similarly, one of *Aswat*'s aims is to 'combat distortion of information, censorship and

ignorance created by social taboos regarding women's sexuality and lesbianism by disseminating alternative, resisting knowledge' by producing alternative materials and increasing 'accessibility of information by gathering, translating, editing, and posting on-line materials and links on our web-site, and at the same time creating hard copies for those who haven't got access to the web' (*Aswat*, 2005). As Haneen Maikey (II) explains, 'We don't have much visibility in mainstream media so we write our own media.' Whether it be through this collective efforts of inciting new positive discourse around sexuality, or through individual attempts to do so by some members such as Nidal (II) who publishes articles in online newspapers and has her own blog that she uses to 'respond to media', the bottom line is clear to Rauda Morcos (II): 'We found that it doesn't work that we work to empower a community of lesbians and then send them out to a society that doesn't accept them.' Thus, creating 'alternative media' along with introducing new alternative discourse within existing media has been central to the work of Palestinian queer womyn.⁸⁵ This has helped create an environment within Palestinian society where sexual diversity becomes more commonly discussed, for as Haneen Maikey (II) states, 'not just queer groups need to talk about sex!'

On Writing as Resistance, and Reclaiming Language

'A people without poetry is a defeated people.' – Mahmoud Darwish⁸⁶

Language was also a recurring theme when discussion of resistance arose during the interviews I conducted. Mainly, people spoke of either using language through written or spoken word or reclaiming and transforming it. *Aswat* has been very active in the production

⁸⁵ According to Rauda Morcos (II), they have found themselves quite successful in doing so, gaining support from local radio shows such as *Radio Shams* for example, and getting coverage from prominent newspapers such as *Koul el 3arab* and *Al-Iti7ad*.

⁸⁶ Taken from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8WS-QT86Sk>, a video produced by adab.com

of historical archives of Palestinian queer womyn writings through the publication of three books in the past few years. Rima (II) spoke to me of the lack of existence of written documents in Arabic, and how these publications allowed womyn to ‘feel like someone else is going through the same thing’. Documenting history and publishing written texts in Arabic about sexuality is part of *Aswat*’s ‘Information and Publication Project’:

As most of the information, including literary and theoretical material on lesbianism - such as coming out stories, lesbian and queer theory - is not translated into and published in Arabic, the extensive lesbian/queer writing of the past four decades has skipped those who cannot read western languages. Palestinian gay women have thus been prevented from acquiring political-ideological awareness and self-affirmation gained by relating to such a cultural legacy and vital discourse. (*Aswat*, 2005)

In addition to *My right to live, to chose, to be, Home and Exile in Queer Experience*, and *Waqfet Banat* (which means ‘Women rise up’ in Arabic) – the three books published by *Aswat* – the group has also published 20 booklets and 6 information papers/newsletters, their themes ranging from sexual identity to the history of sexuality in the Arab world, to lesbianism and health. *Home and Exile in Queer Experience*, a collection of articles about lesbian identity from a feminist perspective, was accompanied by a conference by the same name taking place in Haifa and bringing together over 300 people. *Aswat* (2005) explains that the book and the conference served to ‘raise awareness within the Arab society on freedom of choice concerning sexual preference and on the very existence of lesbians in the Palestinian Arab society.’ This conference received wide coverage – and practically no visible opposition, omit less than 35 protesters – and the book was said to be a ‘linguistic revolution’ in which *Aswat* succeeded in ‘naming the nameless’ according to Dr. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a lecturer at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (*Aswat*, 2005). The opportunity to write and speak about sexuality in Arabic has had an empowering effect on

many members of the Palestinian queer community. For example, Diana (II) recalls that when she began writing for *Aswat*, 80% of her writing was in Hebrew, and that now she feels able to submit writings to journals such as *Bekhsoos*, an important media outlet for queer womyn in the Arab world⁸⁷. Samira's enthusiasm had more to do with her feeling of having the opportunity of being 'a part of history' (Gazzar, 2007: n.p.). In addition to leaving traces of Palestinian queerness in history – something that has been obscured from Palestinian history until now – the idea of creating and reclaiming language by unearthing words relating to sexuality and sexual diversity which have positive connotations, and inventing other ones to better reflect diversity has been a common struggle to both *Al-Qaws* and *Aswat*. For *Al-Qaws*, their 'Creating Language, Engaging Others' strategy aims to restructure 'public social space by promoting a relevant, non-pejorative discourse of gender and sexual diversity that is based on the actual experiences of our (their) community' (*Al-Qaws*, 2005). *Aswat* has taken the lead in this initiative by producing two 'alternative glossaries' relating to sexuality in an effort to form a 'mother tongue with positive, un-derogatory and affirmative expressions of women and lesbian sexuality and gender' (*Aswat*, 2005). Rauda Morcos sees this reclamation of the Arabic language as a necessity in order to change the negative, oppressive connotations associated with sexuality. 'I have forgotten my language, I don't know how to say *to make love* in Arabic without it sounding chauvinistic, aggressive and alien to the experience', she says (Bala, 2005: n.p.). Although now, not only are Palestinian queers equipped with new positive words to talk about sexuality, but Palestinian society is also catching on. For example, the first press release published by the Islamist party against

⁸⁷ *Bekhsoos* is a queer Arab magazine published by queer and trans people who are part of Meem, a community of queer people living in Lebanon. The online journal covers topics relating to sexuality, including but not limited to homosexuality, in the Arab world, and can be found at <http://www.bekhsoos.com>. To find out more about Meem, visit <http://meemgroup.org/>

Aswat in 2005 as well as the second one in 2006 used negative language to refer to homosexuality (words like *louwat* and *sou7aq*⁸⁸), but in 2007, they started using the same language as *Aswat* when referring to homosexuality (such as *mithliyeen* and *mithliyat*⁸⁹) (Rauda Morcos, II). ‘At least there is some change...’, says Rauda Morcos (II).

Connecting with People’s Humanity

Both the education projects and the written productions mentioned above have an underlying goal of connecting to people’s humanity. By giving workshops in Palestinian spaces, Nisreen Mazzawi reveals a human face to a feared identity. Likewise, the personal stories published in *Aswat*’s latest book, *Waqfet Banat*, demonstrate a lot of courage and a lot of strength through pain, feelings that most people can relate to. ‘In *Aswat*’, Rima says, ‘we always believe that the way to get to other people is to connect with their humanity... In *Waqfet Banat*, we say to everyone who believes for one reason or another, that they are not the “norm”, that despite all we have faced in our daily lives, we still stand firm, in the forefront or in the backdrop, in our desire to create an inclusive society for everyone’ (Rima, Radio Interview, 2010). It is clear therefore that one way the Palestinian queer community has succeeded in connecting with its national community is by evoking feelings and struggles that all people face, whether it be towards their sexual, gender, racial, or national identity. Another example of this - provided by Rauda Morcos (II) - is when *Aswat* launched a campaign for which its members distributed stickers all across the city of Haifa that said ‘My right to live, to chose, to be’ without including their logo on the stickers. They were amazed

⁸⁸ Both are old terms that refer to homosexuality while holding negative connotations. They are said to have religious meaning. For example, *louwat* can be understood in reference to the *People of Lot* in the Bible. To give a general idea, the words could be translated in English as having a similar meaning to the slurs ‘sodomite’ and ‘dyke’.

⁸⁹ These are words claimed by the Arab queer community that directly translate to ‘homosexual’ (the first being in reference to gay men and the second to lesbians).

to see these stickers being stuck on restaurant windows, on the streets, on cars, and the slogan being used as Facebook statuses. A little while later, once they published and launched their book by the same name, they reproduced the stickers and this time included their logo. Interestingly, even after discovering who produced these stickers and what they were referring to, many establishments and people kept the stickers up. In Rauda Morcos' words (II), 'A lot of people could connect to it'. These forms of resistance, for Rauda Morcos, helps the community understand that 'just because we are gay, we don't stop being human or nationalist'.

Challenging the 'Hierarchy of Struggles' Narrative: Talking Intersections

When I asked the womyn interviewed what are some of the repercussions of the occupation and apartheid contexts on the Palestinian queer community, many spoke of how any struggle other than the national struggle is not a priority. According to Nisreen Mazzawi (GI), even those who are considered 'liberal' will have a 'We accept you but it's not your time' attitude towards groups fighting for sexual liberation. This hierarchy struggle, in her opinion, is partially due to the 'fear of getting weakened', meaning that the Palestinian community comes to fear internal division, something that is thought of potentially having grave repercussions on a united national front. This discourse is not only directed towards queer movements but also the larger 'sexual struggle' (Ms. S, II), or feminist and environmental ones (Nisreen Mazzawi, II), although 'even in feminist struggles, straight women are considered before lesbians', says Samar (II). This logic is resisted by the Palestinian queer community. Recognizing the intersections within the systems of oppression which call for all of these struggles, Samar (II) tells me 'gays shouldn't wait for their time', while Haneen Maikey (II) refutes the idea of 'identity hierarchy' and favors the concept of 'identity

complexity’ and Nisreen Mazzawi (II) stresses the necessity of ‘honoring all her identities and struggles’. Nonetheless, it has been a challenge to unite these struggles, reason enough for the Palestinian queer community to establish strategies grounded in their socio-political context to resist this identity/struggle hierarchy.

Working from Within

Many groups that the Palestinian queer community wishes to build coalitions with ‘face multiple obstacles and fears that make them hesitant to discuss these issues and sometimes unwilling to cooperate such as social and political legitimacy’, says Haneen Maikey (Sex Intern/national Panel, Video recording, ‘On building Coalitions’, 2010). This is especially true for political or social groups – such a feminist ones – that already face scrutiny within Palestinian society. This is taken into account by *Al-Qaws* and *Aswat* and for this reason, they customize their educational workshops based on the specific needs of the organizations that approach them. Another way of going about is to understand that the simple involvement of Palestinian queers within certain ‘radical grassroots circles’ – without them being openly queer in the Western sense – is at times sufficient to generate discourse around sexual and gender diversity where it might not have taken place otherwise:

It’s not about doing this in public (...) We didn’t see a positive movement from approaching mainstream organizations (...) There is a momentum in the West Bank at least for grassroots political young based groups like Stop the Wall Campaign (...) and there are groups that are working to promote that struggle and I think what we did is to be part of these campaigns and movements and naturally we have brought in sexuality and gender struggles and made the intersections more clear and more valuable and more relevant to these struggles. It’s not visible in the sense that Stop the Wall campaign will say yes we have queer activists in our group but we are there and it’s a very spoken discourse... (Sex Intern/national Panel, Video recording, ‘On building Coalitions’, 2010)

For *Aswat*, collaboration with the feminist movement has been very successful when it comes to the back and forth exchange of ideas and resources. The solidarity of feminist womyn within Palestinian society has been overwhelming, with members speaking openly about struggles dear to *Aswat* such as during the *Home and Exile in Queer Experience* conference in 2007:

When we did the conference in 2007, these women were willing to put themselves at risk and speak. (...) I salute all of these women. This tells me a lot about our success. In 4 years, we were able to bring these women who are not gay - and who might not have even known the term 'mithlitya' beforehand - as our guests at this conference. (Rauda Morcos, II)

This specific presence of feminists at *Aswat*'s conference reflected how *Aswat* has become part of the feminist movement. Among their allies are two prominent feminists who both spoke at the conference: Rula Deeb, the Director of the Palestinian feminist organization *Kayan* – which *Aswat* works as a subgroup of – and Aida Touma-Solaiman, the General Director of the Arab organization for Women Against Violence in Nazareth, (Feinberg, 2007). During my stay in Palestine, staff from *Kayan* were also very supportive during the book launch for *Waqfet Banat* with one of their members being on the panel to speak about the book. I also noticed how these two organizations – *Kayan* and *Aswat* - work in close proximity with each other and are firm supporters of each other's projects, finding a common struggle for freedom. In this sense, *Aswat* has succeeded in allying their struggle for sexual diversity with that of feminism in a very concrete manner.

Queering the National Struggle

A graphic art project by Nisreen Mazzawi and a friend of hers (see figures 1 and 2) represents the struggle of Palestinian queers in tying the knot between their national and

queer identities. In figure 1, Nisreen Mazzawi represents how queers are ‘queering’ the national movement by transforming its ‘kick’ into a queer one. In ‘*La teez teezi*’⁹⁰, she uses famous late cartoonist Naji El-Ali’s legendary *Handallah*⁹¹ and adds the colors of the rainbow to his ‘nationalist kick’ in order to represent the combined echo of queerness and Palestinian identity. In figure 2, Mazzawi uses the *Handallah* once more but this time to represent the recognition of Palestinian queers of the intersections of identities and their insistence on embodying all their identities, with the *Handallah* superposed on a rainbow background. For both *Al-Qaws* and *Aswat* the interconnection between struggles is evident and there is a strong refusal on the part of both these groups ‘to prioritize one struggle over the other or to choose (an) ideological ‘loyalty’ (*Aswat*, 2005). Both groups are clear on their aims to challenge this hierarchy and to ‘encourage other civil society organizations to take a proactive role in the struggle for sexual and gender equality and raise their voices on these issues’ (*Al-Qaws*, 2005).

Furthermore, *Palestinian Queers for BDS* (PQBDS) was created by members of *Aswat* and *Al-Qaws*, in collaboration with other Palestinians queers, as a group committed to join the call for Boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) by Palestinian civil society.

Palestinian Queers for BDS (PQBDS) is a group of Palestinian queer activists who live in the Palestinian Occupied Territory and inside Israel, who came together to promote and stand for the Palestinian civil society call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel, that was launched in July 2005. As an integral part of Palestinian society we believe that the struggle for sexual and gender diversity is interconnected with the Palestinian struggle for freedom. We believe that the BDS campaign is an effective way of resistance that represents the majority of Palestinian people: the refugees in exile, Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the subjugated Palestinian citizens of the Israeli state. (*PQBDS*, 2011)

⁹⁰ Meaning ‘Bite me!’ or ‘We do not care’ in English.

⁹¹ The drawing of a little boy who refused to turn his face to the world until Palestine was free, and that has become an emblem of Palestinian resistance.

In part, the founding of *PQBDS* has been done in a direct effort to subvert the hierarchy struggle imposed by national liberation projects. In an interview with *Bekhsoos*, a queer Arab online journal, *PQBDS* expands on this:

Also in the Palestinian nationalist struggle, sexual and bodily rights definitely take a backseat. Unfortunately, we often hear political activists delegitimize sexual and bodily rights, claiming it is not the right timing, and that we must all focus on the national struggle only – as if it is a sterile struggle. We believe PQbds can contribute, challenge, and hopefully in the future, break the current struggle’s hierarchy, and instead suggest to mainstream political movements (including the BDS movement) alternative ways of doing and changing that are based on real engagement between struggles and deep understandings of the intersections between them. (...) In a way, PQbds is an additional strategy and not only a new discourse. It is a strategy to make the wider Palestinian society understand that we are an integral part of this society, that we understand the local context, and that we do not come from mars nor live up in the clouds. (*PQBDS*, in Lynn, 2010: n.p.)

It is through efforts like this that the Palestinian queer community is today claiming its place in Palestinian society, reclaiming its identity and language, challenging mainstream discourse and offering a different voice that not only injects sexual liberation struggles into people’s and organizations’ discussions and concerns, but also connects this struggle with wider movements such as national and feminist ones by challenging their exclusivity and rather pushing for an understanding of the interconnection of systems of oppression. This insistence of remaining acknowledged as an integral part of Palestinian society has in turn contributed to the dismissal of the idea that queerness is a Western/Israeli import that implies a compliance with imperialism and occupation, as well as a denial of Palestinian identity and its struggles. Rather, these individuals and groups are clearly and loudly saying ‘We are here, we are a part of you, and we both need each other’.

C. Narrative 2: The Colonial Narrative

At the beginning of both the individual and group interviews, when I got to the questions related to the Israeli pinkwashing campaign, I showed the participants the first five minutes of a video produced by BlueStar PR⁹² named *Out of the Closet and into the Streets of Tel Aviv* in which Israel is portrayed as a Western, modern, progressive safe haven for queers within a said barbaric, regressive, religious, and violent ‘Arab World’. During the video, I felt a lot of cynicism and heard a lot of laughter from the womyn watching it. The first part of this section will focus on why that is; in other words, what the reactions of these Palestinian queer womyn were towards the video and Israel’s PR campaign more generally. Will follow the many strategies used by Palestinian queer womyn to resist this narrative.

For the West

Most of the womyn interviewed had already heard of the pinkwashing campaign although all of them told me that this is not a campaign that is used within Israel or Palestine. Rather, it is a campaign aimed at the West. Nidal (GI) was stunned at the language used in the video. As soon as she heard one of the gay men in the video say that gays were everywhere - ‘in the army, on the streets, on the subway’, he says-, she jumped out of her seat and said ‘Which subway? There is no subway!’ When I asked her why she was disturbed by those words, both her and Nisreen (GI) told me ‘Because they know they are talking to people who already know what is a subway.’, seen as there is no subway in Israel. Nidal continued by saying that the video is using Western speech: ‘It’s like if you ask me how it is to be gay in Nazareth and I say I watch the L word, etc. (...) The symbols are universal...’, ‘universal’ being equalized

⁹² As explained in the literature review, BlueStar PR is a public relations agency hired to ‘rebrand’ Israel.

here with 'Western'. Other womyn were not fooled by the campaign, seeing in it a political strategy aiming to portray Israel as Western, freer, more progressive in the international point of view (Rima, Diana, Nora, II). Another way in which this is proven is by how queers or 'gay culture' is depicted. Israel is presented as gay-friendly because of the presence of gays in the military, in restaurants, in Pride parades...but 'He doesn't talk about queers in literature or in activism', says Nidal (GI), and Nora (II) told me that this video only shows Israeli Jews and it is all about fun and sex. To Nisreen (II), this should be considered an insult to queers around the world who believe that their identity encompasses something beyond parties and sex, that 'struggles of gays should be based on a struggle for minority rights.' These womyn's views on how gayness is presented calls us to question what criteria is used to determine which countries are modern, which are 'free', which are queer-friendly, etc. In Nidal's (II) words, 'We should question our presumption of what is modern', and I would add, we should question who produces these signifiers and not blindly assume that they are what represents 'freedom' to the people living in the space that is talked about, and also be aware of what is omitted, left out, and silenced to claim this illusion of 'freedom'.

The Problems with Comparisons

Another irritancy for the interviewees was the way the video, and the whole PR campaign, feeds off comparisons to give Israel the allure of superiority in relation to what is broadly and simplistically dubbed the 'Arab world'. Many of them found that the main problem was this comparison that leads to both an exaggeration of some realities and experiences, and a suppression of others.

Out of the Closets and into the Streets of Tel Aviv begins with the sounds of the Muslim call for prayer, accompanied by images of Arab villages and empty deserts, of men praying while sporting *3abayas* (long robes) and womyn wearing *hijabs* (head scarves). Subsequently, in what appears to be a *cause-effect* fashion, we are shown photographs of gay men blindfolded, either in court, in jail, or in the streets, but always surrounded by police officials⁹³. During the streaming of these sounds and images, the narrator makes his opening remarks:

Democracy and human rights have barely reached most of the Middle East...Not surprisingly, life for gays and lesbians in the Middle East can be difficult. Members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans communities are frequently harassed, persecuted and sometimes even executed. It's a place where many lesbian and gay people live in fear and isolation...

After this declaration appears a map of the Middle East from which Israel is brought to the foreground. At this point, the narrator continues: 'But in the Middle of all this, you'll find Israel and open-minded gay friendly Tel Aviv...'

Throughout the video, while the 'Middle East' or particularly its Arab population is represented as something foreign, to be feared, religious, and barbaric, Israel is shown in pictures familiar to the West, with Israel's sunny beaches, techno music blaring at Pride parades, streets filled with restaurants and cafés with people rollerblading while holding hands. While 'The Arab' is silent, blind-folded, unwelcoming and repressed (read: religious), the Israeli – and it is implied here that they mean 'Israeli Jew' seen as only Jewish people are

⁹³ According to the interviewees, these images seem to be taken from the Queen Boat controversy in Egypt.

interviewed in this first segment⁹⁴ - is outspoken, interested in ‘nightlife’, inviting and free. Rima (GI) sees this comparison as ‘the issue’, seen as ‘islamophobic images’ are quickly followed by those of ‘Western openness, understanding, etc.’. She believes that the intention of the PR campaign is clear when one understands that generally ‘comparing should only happen with a situation that is better’. Nidal (GI) has other concerns: ‘Why did he take Israel from the map and not Tel Aviv⁹⁵, and why did he compare it to all the other countries in the Middle East. You know what? He compared it to something like 100 million people. He compared 1 million to 100 million.’ Nidal (GI) also identifies that this kind of comparison is ‘based on negation, on dichotomy’, one which in this case bases ‘Israeli queer-friendliness on the elimination of queer Palestinian existence, and if Palestinians are queer, their life is hell and Israel is the only safe-haven for them.’ She continues (GI), ‘I am bored of talking about the issues with comparison (...) He talks about how gays are oppressed by Arab society but he doesn’t talk about (the fact that) we live in Israel and Israel oppresses us as Palestinians.’

The Misrepresentation of Israel

In this PR campaign, Israel is misrepresented on many levels: by its use of Tel Aviv as a general representation of the whole country, by its obscuration of Jewish homophobia, by its exaggeration of its progressive laws aimed at queers, by its claim to be a democracy, as well as by its omission of any reference to apartheid and occupation.

⁹⁴ In the second part of the video, some representation of Palestinian queers is given but always to justify the narrative that they are oppressed victims of Palestinian society. For example, an interview with Haneen Maikey during her time as an employee at the Jerusalem Open House serves exactly that purpose.

⁹⁵ Many of the interviewees called out the PR campaign’s misleading depiction of Israel as being exclusively Tel Aviv while the reality of the rest of the country is completely different. This will also be discussed further.

Firstly, 'Israel is not Tel Aviv', says June (II), a sentiment supported by many of the other interviewees. While it is true that (Israeli Jewish) queers live well in Tel Aviv, 'Go to Jewish towns outside of Tel Aviv and that life does not exist', says Rima (GI). This campaign, according to June (II), 'makes them (referring to Israel) look more open than they actually are.' The goal of the womyn interviewed is not to erase the possibility of living as an Israeli Jewish queer outside of Tel Aviv⁹⁶ but rather to nuance the discourse. Whether they have worked in Jewish villages, as Nora (II) has, or befriended many Israeli Jewish queers, as Nidal (GI) has, they offer a testimony of how Israeli Jewish queers face their own challenges within their societies. Sana (GI), who was the only member of *Aswat* present during the group interview that lives in Tel Aviv, explains that this city – that she refers to as 'The Bubble', as it is commonly called - doesn't feel the war and the effects of the political context.

Secondly, many of the interviewees found it ironic that Israel would dare to call itself 'one of the most progressive countries when it comes to gay rights', seen as it has in fact very few laws that cater to queers. Rima (II) explains that, other than the interdiction of workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation and the law that prohibits criminalization and persecution of queer people, 'there are no actual laws or bills in the Knesset (...) People who want to fight for these rights need money, a liberal judge, and a precedent.' While there are nonetheless noteworthy accomplishments that must not be ignored, Haneen Maikey explains the main issue of the PR campaign with a hint of embarrassment for the State of Israel:

It's really pathetic that the Israeli state has nothing besides gay rights to promote their liberal image," says Maikey. "Ridiculous, and in a sense hilarious, because there are no gay rights in Israel. There are specific court cases that, when won, allowed certain

⁹⁶ Something that is being done to them in relation to Palestinian society by this exact campaign

individuals for instance to adopt a child. What is worth noting is that these decisions are case-specific, in the sense that they are made for this specific case, for this specific child and for these two mothers. You cannot build a human rights campaign on court cases that are not ratified. (Berthelsen, 2009: n.p.)

Thirdly, Ms. S., Samar and Nisreen Mazzawi (II) all pointed out that Israel cannot be considered a democracy. Samar tells me ‘Israel is democratic for Jews. (...) At the same time as saying there are rights for Jewish people, you need to say that there is oppression for Palestinians’, while Ms. S. evokes the occupation and the lack of equal rights for Palestinians within Israel as indicators of Israel’s non-association with democracy, and finally, Nisreen Mazzawi asserts that Israel is a ‘Jewish state, not a citizen state!’. She continues,

They say they are the only country that is democratic but they are not. (...) How can it be a democratic state if it is a religious state? Lebanon is democratic and Gaza has democratically voted for Hamas. The country is run by security forces. There are guns everywhere. There is no democracy for Palestinians (...) It is not a democracy when a majority can decide to kill a minority, when there is no actual constitution, and no official border. Is it 48? 67?

Furthermore, Palestinian queers have denounced the myth that Palestinian queers are eligible candidates for gay rights in Israel and that they are immune from Israel’s brutality against Palestinian people more widely. In fact, it is impossible for Palestinian people within the West Bank or Gaza to gain asylum under Israeli law, whether they are queer or not. No matter the sexual orientation of Palestinian citizens living within the State of Israel, they remain second-class citizens who are subject to the same institutionalized and commonly-accepted and normalized racism that the remainder of their community is subject to, ‘from courtrooms and boardrooms to hospitals and universities, from the streets of small villages to

the streets of Jerusalem, from the floor of the Knesset to the floors of Tel Aviv's hippest, gayest clubs' (Maikey and Ritchie, 2009: n.p.).

Nonetheless, many Arab queers do chose to go to Tel Aviv in the hopes of finding a safer place to live their sexuality. This new found freedom is generally enjoyed for a few years but many of the womyn interviewed told stories of how, after this period, issues of racism present many with challenges, that they either face and resist, or that push them to leave Tel Aviv altogether. Rima (GI) explains how 'at first you feel like you can be part of that community, and then you realize you can't... You have to be Jewish, white, have money, go out every night... And if you are Arab, people will always look at you different, either exotify you or (there is) tension.' Haneen Maikey (Aljazeera Video Interview, 2007) explains how the Israeli Jewish community of queers in Tel Aviv have a difficult accepting Palestinian queers unless they reject their Palestinian identity:

It is very easy to change your name and to dress or to talk differently. I can describe this as if identity would be a product in the supermarket that you sell for another identity. Your sexual identity develops at the expense of your Palestinian identity. The Israeli gay community has a lot of difficulty in honestly accepting the gay Palestinian community in all its identity. If you were a gay Palestinian who speaks Hebrew, and does not discuss politics and doesn't bring your other identities into relationships and clubs and so on you would be accepted. When you start revealing your Arab identity, your language, the music you like or a different mentality, then the problem occurs.

Two members of *Aswat* – Ms. S and Sana – shared with me their experience of living in Tel Aviv. Ms. S. (II) left home at 18 and felt anonymous in Tel Aviv which allowed her to come to terms with her sexual identity. 'But two years ago', she says, 'I stopped going to gay places and hanging out with Jews. Cultural and political issues came up.' It made Ms. S. feel like she 'didn't belong'. She recalls how her first year going to a Pride parade made her 'really, really, happy' but that the second year she found it 'too Zionist' and decided to stop

going. She explains how, while Tel Aviv allowed her to ‘come out’ as gay, it continuously demands of her to ‘come out as Arab’ which she finds very tiring.

Sana (GI) has been living in Tel Aviv for six years. When she first moved there, it was difficult for her to be ‘the only Arab person in the whole university’. She tells me that she would hide to answer her phone in Arabic. This uncomfortable self-consciousness made her change herself but ‘After two years, you crack’, she says, ‘As if I’m going to pretend I’m not Arab.’ She has taken a strong stand against racism and feels like people have begun to change around her as well. She has succeeded at times to convince people ‘that the Arabs they see on TV are not all Arabs...’, although many see her as an exception in the sense that they say comments such as ‘You are different’ or ‘You are one of us’, to the point where some of her friends at school invited her to a pro-army protest one day. Also, she feels like she is often tokenized at her university – where she is a student in graphic design - but she has also found ways to resist this. One of her art projects was a response on people – including her teacher’s – fixation on her Arab identity. In figure 3, Sana shares with us her identity card which she has modified by inserting a picture of herself smiling (a sharp contrast with the ‘serious look’ of a traditional identity card), and by replacing the stars at the bottom of the card - which serve to identify Palestinian Arabs - by stickers. She enlarged this identity card to the size of the wall in her classroom and surprised her teacher and classmates. The shock of this art project allowed her to have their attention and explain the intention behind her work, allowing her to claim her space and speak for herself. She tells me that at the end of her presentation, ‘they were all clapping’.

The Misrepresentation of the 'Arab World' and the Suppression of Palestinian Queer Existence

Nidal (GI) was concerned that people who would watch videos like the one I showed them or read articles that support the ideas propagated by the Israeli PR campaign would believe that 'all gays are oppressed here and liberated there'. To her, this kind of generalization made it seem as though all queers in the Middle East – except in Israeli Jewish communities – 'weren't doing well'. But she refutes this, as Rima (GI) does, the latter calling it 'propaganda', seen as big cities in the Arab world, like Lebanon or Jordan, 'are nothing like that'. Furthermore, many of the womyn interviewed were openly queer to their friends and/or family and are accepted by them. While there are stories of persecution, repression, and/or rejection that do exist within the Palestinian queer community, there is no 'organized, widespread campaign of violence against gay and lesbian Palestinians' (Maikey and Ritchie, 2009: n.p.), and experiences of acceptance, openness, and transformation are solid testimonies that contradict Israel's effort in portraying Arab societies as 'integrally homophobic'. These testimonies are not 'an insignificant group of a 'few lucky Palestinians' who are seeking asylum in Israel: they are actively engaged in changing the status quo in Palestinian society by promoting respect for sexual diversity' (Maikey and Ritchie, 2009: n.p.). To Maikey and Ritchie (2009), this type of propaganda renders Palestinian queers either dead at the hands of their own community's 'deeply rooted' homophobia, or lucky enough to have fled to free Israel. More importantly, this kind of discourse that grounds homophobia in the 'nature' of Palestinian society not only renders it as static, and therefore incapable of change – and therefore dismisses all the efforts of the Palestinian queer community to change it – but also, through this, slows down the process of change. One way

this is done is by consuming the energy of Palestinian queer activists who now have to create alternate discourse to demystify these racist assumptions. Palestinian activists, as I have demonstrated in the first section of this analysis, are ready to challenge homophobia within their community, but this colonial racist discourse is something that has added to their workload and slowed down that process:

On one side, my society is very homophobic. I don't feel like it's a rooted sickness that will not end ever...Palestinian society is a very homophobic society like other societies... I think what we started to do is to deal with homophobia in a different way. I don't think that if I want to be engaged in my society's other struggles it is constructive to say who is homophobic or not, as in who is more progressive and radical and who is not. I see homophobia as a really good material to work with, to challenge the discussion and the discourse with the larger community but not as a tool to exclude some groups. I don't see my struggle as a solo struggle without the community. (...) The other kind of dance is with other groups, media, Israeli organizations, Western organizations, groups, whatever that is using this homophobia to pinkwash Israel's image as an apartheid state and to say who is a progressive country or not. (...) What is funny is that I don't get angry from Palestinian homophobic groups... but on the other side, I really get angry using my society's homophobia to pinkwash images of other groups (...) The most amazing title ever in the media about Palestinian queer community: 'Sleeping with the enemy – Two men, an Israeli Jew and Palestinian Muslim, risk harassment, jail and death for their love'. These images are doing harm to my community, to our ongoing struggle, and not homophobic Palestinian groups, which I am committed to fight and to promote alternative discourse about sexuality... (Haneen Maikey, *Inter/national*, 'On The Dance', 2010)

To Nidal (GI), the discourse behind pinkwashing has a colonial logic in the sense that the campaign was created by 'very heteronormative, patriarchal minds' whose sole goal through this is to 'create a Palestine that is homophobic' and 'construct Palestinians and Israelis as different from each other'. Nisreen Mazzawi (II) reminds us that the 'liberation for gays took 30 years in the West'. Somehow though, countries in the Global South are supposed to transition at a rapid rate, on the West's terms, and not their own. Seen as their 'process' of liberation is not calqued on that of the West, or of Israel, Palestinian society is automatically

thought to be integrally homophobic and therefore incapable of change. Furthermore, the tagging of Arab countries as integrally homophobic often leaves aside all analysis of how imperialism, colonialism, and racism have molded thoughts about queers in Palestine and in other countries, and how these oppressive systems and processes might have strengthened homophobia in the first place.

Not In Our Name: Subverting the Israeli PR Campaign

One way some of the womyn have resisted this narrative is by consciously deciding to not move to Tel Aviv. Diana (II), for example tells me that she wants to ‘be free’ where she is, and not pick a place to live that would supposedly ‘give her freedom’. Rather, she wants to challenge people around her, reject labels and claim her space as an Arab in an Israeli Jewish society. Similarly, Nisreen Mazzawi (II) has chosen to stay in Nazareth, the biggest Arab city within Israel, to be close to her family.⁹⁷

Secondly, like Ms. S, many of the other womyn spoke of their decision to not partake in the Pride parades held in Israel. For Samar (II), ‘there is nothing to be proud of’, while June (II) feels uncomfortable at the parade because it is very nationalistic, with ‘Israeli flags everywhere’. In an interview conducted with Rauda Morcos in 2006, she explains why *Aswat*, as a group, decided not partake in World Pride which was held in Jerusalem that year:

The reasons for such a decision [are because] we don't agree with having WorldPride in Jerusalem in Israel at the same time there is an occupation. We don't agree that WorldPride can happen in a place where there is war. We don't agree that WorldPride can happen in a place where many people cannot attend - Arabs from the Arab world and Palestinians from the West Bank. We don't agree to have a WorldPride in a country that

⁹⁷ All the while she does not blindly obey by the societal rules of her community by living as she pleases (staying out late, smoking, having friends over from out of the country, etc.) and is committed to changing her community.

oppresses other minorities. We don't agree to participate in a WorldPride that does not take a political stand against the occupation. (DiGiacomo, 2006: n.p.)

Haneen Maikey also brings up another reason for many Palestinian queers' refusal to participate in Pride:

People who go to Pride Parade do so to celebrate their gayness and their sexuality, [but] automatically Palestinians and other Arabs will be busy identifying where the cameras are, busy buying make-up or specific hats to hide. I don't see why participating in the main tool of liberation by hiding yourself is a good and healthy thing for the liberation cause of the LGBTQ community. (Berthelsen, 2009: n.p.)

A third way this narrative is resisted is by the production of a counter-narrative; in other words, by the demystification and the deconstruction of this narrative. By being vocal on this subject when talking to the media or organizations worldwide, both *Aswat* and *Al-Qaws* have aimed to discredit this campaign. *Al-Qaws* is for example currently working on creating an alternate website to 'Gay Israel' that they will call 'Gay Palestine'. They would basically be using the same format as 'Gay Israel' but, for example, instead of showing the beaches of Tel Aviv, they would show the neighboring beaches of Jaffa, Tel Aviv's twin city that does not enjoy the same funding as Tel Aviv because of its majorly Arab population (Haneen Maikey, II). This is one example of how *Al-Qaws* is 'rebranding rebranded Israel'. Nidal (GI), a founding member of *Aswat* that is still an active member although she now lives in the West, has been doing her own work abroad, resisting the PR campaign by producing counter-knowledge to what is being conveyed by the campaign. Her membership in queer Western movements has given her a privileged position to 'flip things upside down', she says. Also, 'Pinkwatching', a new website created and sustained by a collective of individual queer Arabs living in Arab countries, has emerged recently. It defines itself as:

...project to monitor and analyze Israel's use of queer rights as a wedge issue to promote itself as a beacon of tolerance rather than the settler-colonial state that it is and to leverage support for its murderous political agenda in Palestine and the region. (*Pinkwashing*, 2011)

Examples such as these are testimony to the work that Arab queers, and particularly Palestinian queers, are doing in response to Israel's aggressive PR campaign. Most of them seeing in this a ground for legitimate solidarity by Western queer groups, they have called out for action from their allies on numerous occasions, asking them to beware of this campaign and do their own work in their respective countries in order to counter the effects of Israel's propaganda.⁹⁸ The main message of these kinds of action call-outs is to remind whoever stands in solidarity with Palestinian queers that this solidarity must involve their support in combating Israel's use of queer bodies to oppress Palestinian communities.⁹⁹

D. Narrative 3: The Neocolonial Narrative

While the kind of solidarity wanted by the Palestinian queer womyn interviewed had its differences, most agreed that solidarity had some benefits. *Al-Qaws* explains that dialogue and collaboration with queer organizations abroad allows the group to learn from their peers, share experiences, and be exposed to successful strategies that have worked for others (*Al-Qaws*, 2005). For Diana (II), a member of *Aswat*, solidarity allows Palestinian queers to not

⁹⁸ Some examples of these calls for action are *PQBDS'* letter to the International Tourism Fair in Berlin, in which they are asked to not host 'Tel Aviv Gay Vive', a campaign led by the Israeli government to 'promote gay tourism in Tel Aviv' ([ITB, Take Apartheid and Pinkwashing Out of Your Fair](#)) or *PQBDS'* support letter to the University of Berkley when its students succeeded in calling for their university's divestment from companies that are involved in supporting Israel's war crimes (*PQBDS Support UC Berkley: Letter of Support to Students for Justice in Palestine at UC Berkeley*: <http://pqbds.wordpress.com/2010/04/27/16/>).

⁹⁹ The following subsection will speak thoroughly on the last narrative explored, that of solidarity.

‘feel alone’ and it gives them a ‘push’. Nisreen Mazzawi (II) ‘expects’ solidarity because of the ‘common struggle for freedom’ she believes should tie Palestinian queers to other queers around the world. Nora (II), an old member of *Aswat* who doesn’t organize with any queer groups presently, sees, like Nisreen Mazzawi, solidarity being evident because although ‘some things are different’, she says, ‘we share similarities’. Finally, both Samar and June (II), also members of *Aswat*, speak of how solidarity fosters a sense of ‘connection’. Despite this openness to solidarity, certain experiences have pushed most to beware of solidarity, and rethink what it means to them, and what new terms it needs to obey by in order to avoid it being an oppressive relationship, whether it be with Israeli Jewish or Western queer organizations.

Separation from Jewish Gay Life / Creating Arab-Exclusive Spaces

While Palestinian queers still collaborate on some projects with the Israeli Jewish queer community, the creation of *Aswat* marked a conscious split between the two communities (Rima, GI). Nidal and Nisreen Mazzawi (II), two founding members of *Aswat*, recall that before *Aswat* was created the only visible spaces for queers were Israeli Jewish. Joining these organizations allowed many Palestinian queer womyn to find a space to express their sexuality but more often than not, being queer came to signify ‘having to alienate yourself from Palestinian society’ (Nidal, II). *Aswat* was then founded for numerous reasons, the first being that the womyn who started *Aswat* wanted to create a space where Palestinian queer womyn could find each other and bond over their similar culture, limitations, and difficulties (Nidal, GI); a space that fosters a sense of community (Nisreen, GI). Nisreen Mazzawi (GI) explains that the presence of Israeli Jewish queers automatically changes the dynamics of a group because of very evident power relations; meaning that the language, priorities, needs,

political views and culture of Israeli Jewish queers would often guide the organization at the expense of those of Palestinians. She compares this to mixed gender groups saying ‘It’s nothing against Jews or men. It’s for us.’ There are in fact very important differences between the main priorities of the Israeli Jewish queer community and the Palestinian one. For example, Rima (GI) tells me that often the main concern of Israeli Jewish queer groups is the struggle for legal rights in relation to their queer identity. As we have witnessed so far, Palestinian queers have a more social agenda, as well as a political one that focuses on struggling for freedom from apartheid and occupation. Hence, many ‘political tensions’ (Nidal, GI) would arise in mixed organizations, and often Palestinian queers felt like these organizations could accept their queer identity but there was no space for their Palestinian identity, especially that ‘many gays in the Jewish community are Zionist’, Nisreen Mazzawi (GI) tells me. Similarly, *Al-Qaws*¹⁰⁰ recognizes this political tension and speaks of the difficulty that arises from challenging the Israeli Jewish community which seems to feel that it is entitled to a ‘liberal get-away card’ in reason of its queer identity:

The Israeli gay community is a microcosm of Israeli society in general, which privileges Israeli Jews and marginalizes Palestinians. Within gay Israeli spaces and the Israeli gay community, LGBTQ Palestinians face similar forms of discrimination that they face in their daily lives. Despite the assumption that LGBTQ communities tend to be more liberal, racism and discrimination are just as commonplace. Indeed, the Israeli LGBTQ community likes to imagine itself as more liberal than Israeli society in general and somehow free from or immune to racism. That pretension makes it all the more difficult for LGBTQ Israelis to acknowledge racism in the community. (*Al-Qaws*, 2005)

Aswat has also denounced the ‘colorless’ struggle of the Israeli Jewish queer community. Its hesitation to deal with issues surrounding ‘race’ renders them ‘color-blind’, they say, and

¹⁰⁰ Which was created after its Director, Haneen Maikey, left her position at the Jerusalem Open House, a center open to both Israeli Jewish and Palestinian queers

therefore insensitive (or ‘blind’) to the privilege they have, the power relations between them and the Palestinian queer community, and how and why the Palestinian queer struggle goes beyond a struggle for rights for queers (*Aswat*, 2005).¹⁰¹

Faced with these issues, Palestinian queers have resisted being confined in such spaces by providing ones exclusive to their community. *Aswat* provides support groups, monthly meetings, a support and consultation line (managed in partnership with *Al-Qaws*), awareness raising workshops, etc.¹⁰² Similarly, *Al-Qaws* also holds meetings¹⁰³ that are meant for ‘self-development and reflection’. In addition to this, *Al-Qaws* is known across the country for holding the only bi-monthly Arab queer dance parties which have come to be the ‘biggest gathering for LGBTQ Palestinians’ in the country (*Al-Qaws*, 2005). These nights offer Arabic music exclusively, as well as performance art that blends gender, sexuality, and nationalism through such things as drag shows. In sum, these organizations have succeeded to create spaces that cater to the needs of their communities, where Palestinian queers’ culture, language, priorities and needs are at the top of the agenda. Furthermore, Palestinian queers have also recreated links with other Arab queers across the region and in the West with whom solidarity was very important. In fact, Israel’s occupation of Palestine has forced

¹⁰¹ The ‘colour-blind’ accusation is one that queer people of colour have also had issues with in relation to the queer white community in the West. Haneen Maikey has made this link by stating that the ‘white community is in front of my office... We don’t have to go to Canada to meet the ‘white community’. The Israeli community plays the same role.’ (Haneen Maikey, *Sex Inter/national*, ‘On Homonationalism in Israel, 2010). In ‘What Can Brown Do For You: Race, Sexuality and the Future of LGBT Politics, Urvashi Vaid (2010: n.p.) explains how colorblindness is oppressive:

‘Tim Wise names a “well intentioned but destructive colorblindness” as one of the mechanisms by which the progressive left marginalizes racial justice and fails to address race. *Colorblindness* is promoted by neo-conservatives as Dr. King’s ultimate dream, and certainly Dr. King envisioned a day when color would not matter, but merit would. However, to claim that color does not matter in this moment, is to ignore how racially biased outcomes arise out of the structure of our social, economic, and daily lives – not just as a result of intentional and malicious racial prejudice.’

¹⁰² Mostly in the North of the country

¹⁰³ in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, and the West Bank

most of the Palestinian communities to see their families dispersed and their link to the rest of the Arab nations caught off. Nisreen Mazzawi (II) tells me, ‘They took the land but the case is not just a case of land (...) Israel has broken links between Palestinians and we are working on rebuilding those links between Palestinians and between Palestinians and Arabs.’

Queering ‘Queer Struggles’

While rethinking solidarity with each other, the Palestinian queer womyn interviewed identified as a prime demand towards ‘allies’ who wished to ‘show solidarity’ that they recognize that Palestinian queers have a strong understanding of the interconnection of various struggles that are part of their daily lives. In fact, many of the womyn interviewed were quite clear on the fact that they had many systems of oppression to resist. For Ms. S., this included ‘sexism: my right as a womyn to live my life; homophobia: living as a lesbian; racism: living as an Arab and not feeling inferior’, and Nora expressed that there are ‘many occupations: by the government, by identity, by patriarchy, and by queers’. For Nisreen Mazzawi (II), like for many, ‘that hardest thing is being Palestinian, not gay’. She adds that she found her place within her (Arab) society, but there is still no place for her within the State of Israel. Recently, one member from *Aswat* and two members from *Al-Qaws* did a panel discussion tour around the United States and when they were asked what they wished to accomplish foremost during this tour, the member from *Aswat* answered: ‘Allow people to understand that there is a very strong link between our struggle as Palestinian and our struggle as gay. If they want to support us as ‘gay’, they have to support us as Palestinian’ (Radio Interview, Outfm, 2011). The absence of consideration for the interlocking nature of systems of oppression has been a main area of criticism directed towards Israeli Jewish and Western queer organizations by Palestinian queers. Rauda Morcos has called the ‘lack of a

stand on the Palestinian occupation' by the Israeli Jewish community a 'very problematic issue' (DiGiacomo, 2006: n.p.).

Lynn (2010), an Arab queer contributor to *Bekhsoos*, echoes this fixation with and monitoring of what is considered a 'gay issue' by calling out the double-standards of queer 'solidarity movements' who often are quick to want to 'rescue' Palestinian queers who are oppressed by their society's homophobia, all the while 'turning a blind eye' to Israel's repression against Palestinian people:

We turn a blind eye to acute restrictions and dangers imposed on a daily basis on Palestinians living in the West Bank. We sweep the racism emanating from the Israeli Jewish state under the rug. But when one of these Palestinians happens to be a homosexual facing threats from his community, we are quick to adopt our positions of saviors, yes saviors, in the name of justice and compassion. We forget that locating the grounds from which we speak about the subjugation of the Other is just as important as speaking about the subjugation of the Other. We do not live in vacuums. (Lynn, 2010: n.p)

Reframing Solidarity/Recognizing Neocolonialism

It is the opinion of many Palestinian queers that Western or Israeli Jewish models do not apply to their community, and therefore they refuse to simply integrate these identity constructs and mimic the ways of the Western or Israeli Jewish queers; rather, Palestinian queers are having internal discussions as to what their process could look like (Maikey, 2008) and also take into account how even within their community, there are important differences between cities, and regions, and religions, etc. that make them question a 'one-size-fits-all recipe'. For Haneen Maikey, this should not be the way that solidarity is framed and true solidarity can only begin when, she says, '...we admit that we as radical and progressive groups fall in these traps. We also sometimes colonize each other and patronize

each other...' (Video recording, Sex Inter/national, 'On The Music', 2010). *Al-Qaws* has dedicated a whole page on its website aimed at giving tips to journalists, academics, activists, etc. that wish to engage with or write about the Palestinian queer community, which includes 'A note on 'homosexuality' and 'gay and lesbian rights' that reads as such:

For a long time, writers and theorists in the West have been deconstructing "homosexuality" and assumptions about "gay rights" and what it means to be "lesbian" or "gay." Many LGBTQ Palestinians identify as "lesbian," "gay," "queer," or "trans," and many feel a sense of camaraderie on that basis with other LGBTQs around the world. But just as there is no single, universally accepted definition of these identities in the West, as LGBTQ Palestinians, many of us experience and understand our sexual and gender identities differently. For example, "coming out of the closet" and being visible in our communities is important to many LGBTQ Palestinians, but many others have different goals and aspirations. And so we urge journalists who are interested in representing our stories and experiences to the world not impose some pre-determined standard, but to consider our own, equally valid ideas about "freedom" and "liberation" and what it means to be an LGBTQ person.

In fact, the concept of 'coming out of the closet' – as a narrow definition of 'visibility' – has been strongly criticized by Palestinian queers. While some Palestinian queers are 'openly gay' or 'out' in a Western sense, others have created their own version of what that could look like for them. For example, Samar (II) is 'strategically out' in the sense that she organizes with *Aswat* and shares this part of her identity with other Palestinian queer womyn but she does not feel the need to extend this into her home or in conversations with her family in an explicit manner. 'Visibility' in this sense becomes a fluid concept, rather than a predetermined narrative which calls for a continuous, linear process that leads one from 'invisibility' to 'visibility' by following predefined steps. 'For many people', says Haneen Maikey, 'it can be enough coming out to their younger sister – or even just telling yourself.' (Berthelsen, 2009: n.p.). Nonetheless, Palestinian queers do not ignore the concept of 'visibility', they are 'working on visibility while exploring what that means' (Haneen

Maikey, II). Meanwhile, it seems that the number of queers who are ‘out of the closet’ is a criteria that Western and Israeli Jewish queers have chosen to judge how ‘free’ queer communities are. ‘It is as though coming out (which is in itself a very Western way of validating your gay identity) is the only form of activism you can do, as if by refusing to do so, you are cowardly and useless to the movement.’, says Natalie Kouri-Towe (in Nadz, 2010: n.p.). Conversely, Palestinian queers have begun to frame visibility in new terms, ones that are less about an individual ‘coming out’ narrative and instead as a collective effort to create discourse and dialogue around sexual diversity within their society. Here we see a shift in this search for legitimacy which is often the basis for ‘visibility projects’ of Western and Israeli Jewish queer organizations, towards a search for societal change through the injection of a ‘visible discourse’ where none existed before.

(Mis)Representation

Another frustration Palestinian queers have towards Western and Israeli Jewish queers has to do with how they often misrepresent them. When asked what would ideal solidarity look like to them, Rima, Nisreen Mazzawi and Ms. S. (II) all asked ‘allies’ to ‘talk accurately and ‘get their facts right’. For Rima (II), Palestinian queers have their own voice and are producing knowledge already, and so she asks: ‘We tell our stories through our books, so why do you chose to tell it differently?’. Having been approached on numerous occasions by journalists, activists, etc., as I’ve said above, *Al-Qaws* (2005) has created a ‘Before you write...’ section on their website. Its introduction reads:

Wait a second, before you write, though you are so passionate to write about us... We think it would be helpful for you and our cause, to take a few minutes, have a cup of coffee, and read BEFORE YOU WRITE...

One way to start is to not make assumptions or generalizations. As there are many differences between ‘Arab queers’ – with Rauda Morcos (II) arguing that she sees more similarities between Palestinian queers and Native American or Black or Chicana queers and feminists than with queers from other Arab nations – , there are also many differences ‘within a same group’ (Nora, II), such as between Palestinian queers. In this sense, *Al-Qaws* (2005) has a challenge for whoever wishes to write about Palestinian queers:

We challenge journalists to try to understand the common struggles and experiences of LGBTQ Palestinians in ways that do not ignore our diversity or represent us in simplistic terms.’ From geographical, to economic, to religious, to political differences, it is not possible to speak of one uniform Palestinian queer community, let alone of one ‘Palestine’.

This insistence on honoring diversity and complexity is a central request that Palestinian queers have towards their allies. While being a speaker at an event held in Toronto in 2010, Haneen Maikey reveals this as a core issue that should be taken into account when speaking of solidarity:

We aspire to build a queer solidarity based not on racist assumptions about ‘others’ who look different, speak different languages, or live in different places but on a willingness to listen to each other and stand together against violence even when some among us try to justify it in our name. We are not oppressed victims who identify with each other’s suffering but courageous queer activists, thinkers, artists, writers and everyday people who identify with a common dream of a better reality where we can express and celebrate our full and beautiful complexity... and I think complexity is a key word here. (Video recording, Sex Inter/national, ‘On What To Do’, 2010)

A second issue with ‘representation’ that has been expressed is the focus of most writings and speeches about Palestinian queers on stories of sorrow, oppression, and victimization. Rima (II) explains that it’s as though people are only interested in hearing about their

‘biography of sadness’. Haneen Maikey has noticed through experience that most of the time when a journalist from Western or Israeli media approaches them, ‘it’s obvious that the article is already written’, seen as the questions that are asking are always the same: ‘How many gay people were killed by their families last year?’ and ‘Can you help me find an oppressed gay Palestinian that has suffered an attempted honor killing by his family?’ (Berthelsen, 2009: n.p.). Nisreen Mazzawi (GI) adds to this by saying that what is often missing in these representations is talk about activists all across the Arab world, such as *Aswat*, *Al-Qaws*, *Meem*, and *Keef Keef*. To her, all the while talking about oppression, one needs to recognize resistance, or else the discourse is propaganda. To Nidal (II), these representations are dangerous for they run the risk of ‘de-empowering Palestinian queers who are portrayed as dead bodies.’

One way these narratives of oppression and victimization are sustained is through the censorship of alternative Palestinian queer experiences that contradict them. ‘They only take what they want to hear from what you say. If you talk about many things and then bring up issues with your parents, they will only keep that part.’, says Nisreen Mazzawi (GI). A very troubling event for many queers within the community was the censorship they were subject to after the shooting of two Israeli Jewish queers in a center for gays in Tel Aviv a few years ago. Hence, this example has been brought up numerous times during the interviews I conducted for this research. The refusal of the organizers to let *Aswat* speak at the memorial is explained by the fact that ‘the presence of *Aswat* doesn’t feed their agenda that Arabs are primitive and kill and etc.’, said Nisreen Mazzawi (GI), ‘They push us into the closets against our will even if we are out of the closet and our community accepts us, by force they push us back and lock us with a key to sustain that image’. ‘You don’t get to decide what I

get to say if you want me to speak.’ is Haneen Maikey’s (II) response to this censorship, a stance that has stopped people who use to invite her to speak from inviting her again, because of her ‘political view’, she says. Samar (II) agrees that this is not what solidarity should look like. She believes that it should be based on empowerment, not on censorship. Palestinian queers are saying ‘No!’ to the victim position that is being forced upon them. Rather, they are wishing to engage in meaningful discussions that lead to proactive strategies to fight oppression (Video recording, Sex Inter/national, ‘Haneen Maikey Introduces Al-Qaws’, 2010).

Rethinking Solidarity in Terms of ‘Duty’

Some of the womyn interviewed were skeptical about ‘solidarity’, feeling like they didn’t truly understand why people would focus on Palestinian or Palestinian queer rights versus combating the many issues that exist within their own respective countries, such as homelessness or drug abuse. ‘When you are working on internal issues, you are asking your government to invest in internal issues instead of investing in ‘fixing’ other countries’ issues’, said Rima (GI). Nisreen Mazzawi (GI) continued:

The occupation is an economic occupation. What is happening in a world level between the North and the South, the West and the East, is what is happening here on a smaller scale between Israelis and Palestinians. When you make a change in the economical policy inside your country, you also affect what is happening outside your country.

In fact, the question of solidarity was among the most heated discussion during the group interview that I conducted. While we could not arrive at an all-encompassing solution to issues around solidarity, Nisreen Mazzawi (GI) reframed my question by rejecting the term ‘solidarity’ and replacing it with the term ‘duty’:

Solidarity is not enough to make a change. And I don't think that making a change for liberating Palestinian people is suppose to be from the place we call 'solidarity'. It is suppose to be from a place we call 'duty'. (...) Solidarity from Canadians, and Europeans and Americans is duty because all their countries/governments are part of the colonization problem of Palestinians. (...) They keep it running. I call for change not from a place of solidarity but of duty. I expect that from people living in Canada, US or Europe more than from someone living in India. It is part of their colonial history. Their way of life and living conditions is based on this colonial history. (...) These governments and the citizens of these governments are profiting off our situation.

Through reframing the question of 'solidarity', our conversation became more about how people can influence their own respective governments to take action to affect Israeli policies. Samar recognized that a central role of 'allies' should be to 'put pressure'. A good place to start is supporting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign, and for queer groups abroad to evaluate how queers contribute to Israeli apartheid and occupation through gay tourism, for example. Queers abroad can then question the premise that Israel is a 'safe haven' for queers, says Nidal (II), and engage in discussions within their own communities and educate. 'In North America, she says, 'queers are very depoliticized. Educating that community is essential'. It seems that this message is starting to be received by queers groups in the West, with successful actions increasing in the past few years, such as the widely talked about and hotly debated case of Toronto's *Queers Against Israeli Apartheid* (QUAIA)'s insistence on marching in the city's Pride Parade despite the city of Toronto and Israeli lobby groups' attempts to censor the group by banning the term 'Israeli apartheid' from the parade.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ For more examples, see Puar (2010).

On Self-Determination and Humility

How do we shift the work that groups like IGLHRC do that had been then (there has been many changes in these organizations) but had been then centered on this notion of victimhood, on this notion of human rights work particularly when it targets the global South; it's about action alerts and asylum, it's about horror. And how do we shift it to frame of recognizing that organizing is happening there and how do we channel our efforts and our relationships around 1) respecting and 2) helping build or capacitate that organizing? How do we frame international solidarity work fundamentally around the leadership people it is going to benefit? (Colin Robinson, Video recording, Sex Inter/national, 'On Diasporic Politics', 2010)

While being on the same panel as Colin Robinson, Haneen Maikey (Video recording, Sex Inter/national, 'On What Works and What Doesn't', 2010) gave a concrete example of what kind of solidarity her and her community are not looking for. It is that of IGLHRC, a well-known LGBT organization based in the West that decided to open a Middle East bureau without consulting any of the local activists. Gladly, the institution that was providing IGLHRC with funding demanded that the Palestinian queer community be consulted which allowed them to explain to IGLHRC that they were not interested, seen as they were already organizing at a local level and establishing strategies and solutions emanating from within the community.

This example brings me to the last theme related to solidarity shared with me by a majority of the interviewees: the respect for self-determination. The insistence of Nora (II) on not having others 'dictate' was echoed by many other participants and more generally by *Aswat* and *Al-Qaws*. For *Aswat*, this is a way to queer the national narrative that has deemed queerness as a foreign concept. In the group's point of view, respecting that 'change should come from within the Palestinian society' helps to not strengthen this narrative. The general rule tends to be 'Let us lead, be there to help' (Haneen Maikey, II). This can mean to support

what is already being done (Rima, II), by inviting Palestinian queers to voice their experiences and concerns at events and by publishing their press releases (Samar, II) or their articles, or by selling their books (Diana, II). This also means that allies need to be humble and not assume that they have fix-all answers to problems they might not even understand, or some that might not even be considered ‘problems’ by the community they are trying to help (or ‘save’). Activists who wish to build alliances with Palestinian queers are invited to problematize their obsession with ‘saving the Other’ when in reality the Other does not need saving. In fact, as we have seen so far, the said ‘Other’ is imploring to not be ‘saved’.

CONCLUSION

In ending, I will reflect on the potential contributions of this research as well as outline the conclusions I have been able to draw during the analysis. Prospects for future research will then follow in an attempt to bring forth the gaps left by this research due to its limits.

A. Conclusions: Narrative (sub)Versions

One of the most difficult processes during my work was the task of deciding which ‘narrative’ all the articles, data, and interview results collected belonged to. While some were evident to classify, many seemed to fit in more than one narrative or even all of them. This reality has made me understand how, as the Palestinian queer womyn interviewed explain it, systems of oppression works in interconnected ways. For instance, national narratives related to queerness can be reinforced by Israel’s colonial narrative which continuously projects an image of an integrally homophobic Palestine. In parallel, the homophobia of the national narrative, when exaggerated, helps form the basis of the propagandist arguments of Israel’s colonial narrative in relation to queerness. Similarly, the continuous occupation and apartheid system in Israel/Palestine makes the challenging of the ‘hierarchy of struggles’ – which posits ‘national freedom’ as the main struggle – a difficult task. Furthermore, when Israeli Jewish and Western queer activists take on an unwelcomed role of ‘speaking for’ and leading the struggles of Palestinian queers, queerness appears to be a ‘foreign import’ that is disjointed from local experience, and may therefore reinforce the Palestinian national narrative which disowns its queer population. These are brief examples that concretely portray how, as I have mentioned before, homophobia in Palestine cannot be understood without the consideration of racist, colonial, or neocolonial discourses and processes. In the

same way that our identities intersect, so do the systems of oppression which shape these identities. The main goal of this research has been to value the recognition of the agency, self-determination, and capability for resistance of the Palestinian queer community. In fact, it seems that, as in most struggles, locally-based and lead movements, when supported through global networks, offer the best ground for fruitful resistance.

This being said, resistance existed long before I undertook this research although many texts that came before mine often focused on oppression, on victimhood, on hopelessness. This brings me to the second conclusion drawn, which comes from a question I have asked myself many times during my research: Is resistance, ‘resistance’ if we do not call it resistance?

What has been the most striking for me is how my grid of analysis has shaped my findings. In fact, even the form of my research question (‘How do *queer* Palestinian womyn ‘queer’ Palestinian identity?’) directs the purpose of the inquiry. In other words, if I had asked ‘How are Palestinian queer womyn oppressed?’, my findings would have been quite different. My approach to the subjects of this research permitted a ground for empowerment. Resistance then became apparent to the interviewees and me, and it created discussions which fostered agency rather than victimhood.

These two main lessons – the one concerning the interconnection of systems of oppression and the one related to resistance – lead to defy the normalization and appearance of ‘permanency’ that the narratives studied exuded. In fact, examples such as the change in language of the opposition to queerness within the Palestinian society studied, the new alliances created between Palestinian queers and other local groups, the change in discourse and of the way of doing ‘solidarity’ of Western queer groups abroad, and the weakening of

the effects of the Israeli public relations campaign through a combined effort by Palestinian queers and queers abroad to demystify its discourse, all prove that resistance can provoke change. We then understand that, for instance, no nation or culture is 'integrally homophobic', no colonial or neocolonial project is justified by 'civilizing missions', and no universal identities exist, nor are they static. The refusal of the queer Palestinian womyn interviewed to obey to pre-defined notions of what it means to be 'Palestinian' or 'queer', or even 'Palestinian queer', has been at the basis of their struggle. Not only are they rejecting these definitions, but this has allowed them to take on pro-active approaches to redefine themselves and their society in ways that differ greatly from the narratives studied, such as through their celebration of diversity, their flexibility in readjusting their goals and tactics in concordance with their needs, and the patience to recognize which battles are theirs to fight with commitment, no matter the time they might take to achieve. Resilience in resistance has equipped them in continuing their own internal empowerment all the while facing challenges, talking back, creating new discourse and changing existing ones. Herein lies their 'narrative (sub)versions', meaning their subversion of existing narratives, through the creation of 'substitute' versions from the ground-up.

B. Prospects of future research

Due to the fact that the topic of this research has been written about so little, I have chosen to overview three narratives as well as resistance to these narratives, which was quite an ambitious task. I often found myself having new ideas or thinking of opening new discussions or debates and being confined by limitations in time and format. For this reason, this final section aims to discuss the gaps left and the subjects dismissed in reason of these boundaries in order to possibly trigger further research on the subject.

To begin, this study was limited to a select amount of interviewees. As I have explained in the chapters dedicated to the methodological framework and the analysis, age and seniority in the queer activist scene were widely covered factors but others were much less taken into account. For example, religion was barely considered other than in an introductory question to each individual interview, where I asked the participants to self-identify in relation to religion if they wished to do so. Possibly because of this, it was rarely brought up during the interviews, but also very little talked about between the womyn I worked with. Also, the geographical location which my study concerned itself with had boundaries. Although this had its advantages, such as reducing the tendency of generalizing findings, it also further marginalized Palestinian queers living in places such as the West Bank, Gaza, or in the diaspora. In this sense, a research which would enlarge its interview sample, focus its questions on different factors, or pose a different research question altogether could potentially bring forth different contributions than the ones hoped for within this study. It could also benefit from the increasing amount of texts produced recently which are interested in topics such as ‘Arab queers in the West’ or ‘Islam and homosexuality’ which I could only use as secondary sources in this case.

Secondly, the study of each of the narratives was only done in a fast-paced manner in order to include them all in the analysis. For this reason, they are incomplete and new projects could potentially fill the voids in my work. The study of the ‘national narrative’ could be extended to take into the consideration the role of womyn in nation-building and the influence of this on the attitudes towards queerness in Palestine¹⁰⁵. I chose to not focus on

¹⁰⁵ A country in which womyn have been very active in the national struggle since 1948 (although Nidal (II) explained that the least active Palestinian womyn were found in ‘1948’ or within the borders of Israel. this could be another interesting research topic.)

this theme topic because it seemed like a very heavy subject matter with which to diverge from the findings of the analysis. While it was not brought up by the participants, my interview with Nidal (II) touched briefly on the subject when I asked her if the reason why queer Palestinian womyn were less thought of as ‘traitors’ than men because of their queerness was due to the fact that their role within the national struggle was more feminized - through such things as ‘giving birth to the nation’ - rather than overtly political frontline roles. We did not carry on the conversation but this seems like an entirely new ground for research which others could potentially take on. Another topic which could be extended on in relation to the ‘national narrative’ would be a more in-depth study of the ways in which homophobia was produced through colonial processes which are specific to the case of Palestine. While in the literature review chapter I gave a very brief explanation of the ways in which this translates in numerous countries, a small-scale profound analysis could potentially build a solid argument to further dismiss the narrative which associates queerness with a foreign import. At a locally grounded level, it could help answer the question: ‘Is rejecting queerness a form of resistance to (neo)colonialism or an internalization of (neo)colonialism?’. As for the ‘colonial narrative’, my reading of the public relations documents produced by Israel and their PR agencies were not fully explored since the prime focus of this research was methods of resistance to this narrative. Following researchers could, for example, provide a more thorough content analysis (of films, tourism campaigns, billboards, workshops in the West, websites, etc.) in order to draw similarities and differences between them to better understand the extent of this campaign and its effects. Furthermore, when the research took place, new strategies were being developed by *Aswat*, *Al-Qaws*, and *PQBDS* - such as the new ‘Gay Palestine website’ mentioned in the analysis – which were not yet completed. These, as well as the stronger collaborations being built

between Palestinian queer groups and queer movements in the West could be a prospect for research. The latter could even be a way to elaborate on the study of the ‘neocolonial narrative’ I have touched on in this study. Case-studies of partnerships between Palestinian queer groups and queer groups abroad, as well as the study of the impact of such efforts as the recent cross-American tour by members of *Aswat* and *Al-Qaws* on the way that queer groups abroad practice ‘solidarity’ would offer an interesting follow-up to the problems raised in my research. Researchers interested in the topic of solidarity could also potentially explore on what grounds alliances can be built. For example, links between the struggles faced by diasporic queer Arabs in the West and Palestinian queers living within Israel might be an interesting starting point. In fact, this research has made me ponder on the relation between ‘queerness’ and ‘diaspora’ more broadly. Questions such as ‘Does the feeling of displacement that many queers experience once they begin to come to terms with their sexuality compare to that of the geographical displacement of diasporic people?’ might incite researchers to work on this subject. In fact, while some Palestinians – especially those living within what is known as Israel – may not have ‘moved’ geographically after 1948, many feel a sense of displacement and experience a strong identity crisis. The feeling of not being ‘home’ while ‘being home’ are witnessed in some of the poetry written by interviewees of this research, such as in Rauda Morcos’ (2003) poem which ends with:

I am displaced in my land, and my home
Illegal in every place
Even my identity does not exist
Without “status” or poems¹⁰⁶ (*Aswat*, 2005)

¹⁰⁶ Translated from Arabic to English on *Aswat*’s website

Similarly, Dayna writes:

Exilic in my own self
Belonging to the state
Of paradoxes

Exilic with a home
That looks for a late
Unwanted Gust

This was a long day
A day where my body
Disagrees, revolts confiscates
The spaces where I thought
To be mine

Scars were left as a tattoo
Hinder the travel of
A diasporic queer

Whose 'real'
Home does not exist. (*Aswat*, 2005)

For this reason, the concept of 'metaphoric borders' – which I have teased the reader with throughout this research but was incapable of developing further due to other more pressing issues that were addressed by the participants during the interviews – would be worth exploring more deeply. Subtopics related to 'metaphoric borders' could be the reclamation of verbal, metaphoric and geographic space, the crossing of metaphoric identity borders, the practices of 'passing' as subversion, etc.

Finally, no matter where my research leads following scholars to venture, my main concern is that researchers remain humble and give ethical questions weight in their decision to conduct studies. If there is one thing that this research has taught me, it is that no one is immune from reproducing (neo)colonial dynamics. For this reason, I hope to have incited researchers and activists who are struggling for social justice in communities in which they

do not ‘belong’ to think carefully about the experiences shared by the Palestinian womyn interviewed in this research and to follow some guidelines they have established to create healthier alliances across differences.¹⁰⁷ The undertaking of a true common *queer* struggle, which leaves homonationalism for a search for justice based on the recognition of the interconnection of systems of oppression, and therefore of struggles, may be ground for an anti-apartheid, anti-occupation, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, anti-heterosexist movement from within Palestine/Israel. While I hope to see this in the future, I believe that the separation of Palestinian queers and their reluctance to collaborate with Israeli Jewish queer movements should be seen as a source of self-empowerment which is necessary at the time being. Simultaneously, this separation is a chance for ‘allies’ to reflect on the reasons leading to this break. Considering power relations, being open to challenges, staying humble, following the lead of grassroots movements, and being committed to question our own motives will, I hope, allow us as researchers and activists to, like queer Palestinian womyn, ‘queer’ our own solidarity framework and approaches, in order to offer narrative (sub)versions in which (neo)colonial relations are recognized and resisted.

¹⁰⁷ While these guidelines are proper to the community I have worked with, they may differ for other communities. I encourage all researchers to approach potential participants to know what these guidelines are for them.

ANNEXES

Figure 1: 'La Teez Teezi', by Nisreen Mazzawi



Figure 2: Rainbow and Handallah, by Nisreen Mazzawi

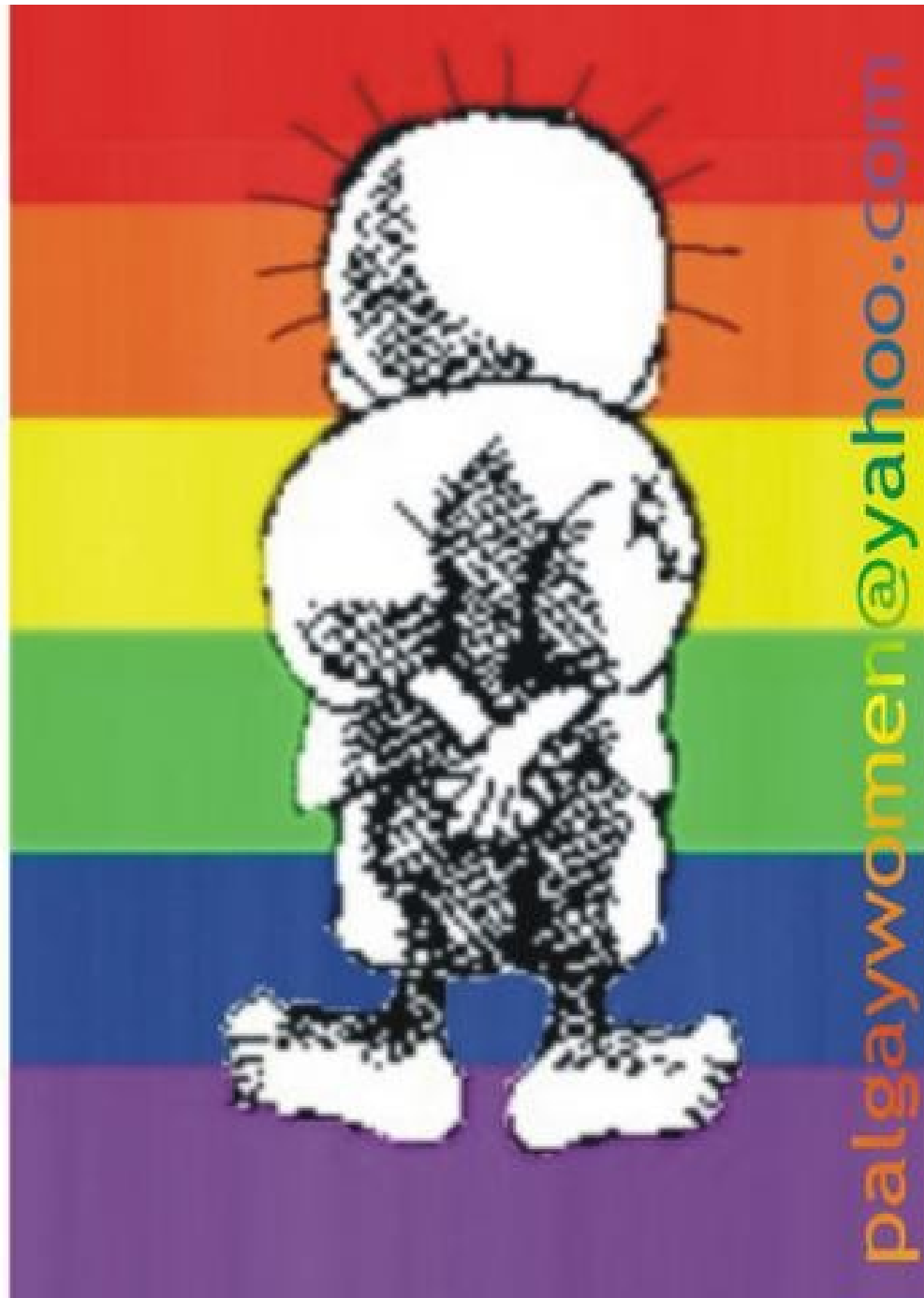


Figure 3: ID Card by Sana



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