

## **SAMAR HABIB**

### **Queering the Middle East and the New Anti-Semitism**

The Israeli Palestinian conflict presents a highly charged and ironic space for queer discourse. This paper explores how despite their anti-homosexual and anti-feminist cultural ideologies, the Palestinians have gained support from significant Israeli queer and feminist organisations. The overlap between sexual and national identity is explored in a bid to better understand this strange alliance, which calls for a liberating, all-encompassing way to end the Middle East conflict. The paper also examines how pro-Palestinian queer Jews realise their Jewish identity and its point of intersection with their queer or feminist selves, while also exploring the sexual anxieties of contamination that lurk in the pro-nationalist Israeli/Zionist mentality.

As far as we are concerned in international queer theory, the situation in/of Palestine is a key cultural development-in-the-process. The oppression of women and homosexuals in the Middle East is so deeply seated in the culture that it may seem impossible that anything save a sheer miracle can bring about any change, but such oppressions were rampant throughout the west only half a century ago. Interestingly however, for the first time in the modern history of the Middle East, something as strange

as a political alliance between feminists + homosexuals and Arabs is taking place, has taken place, continues to take place. Among the most creative and ardent protestors against Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories are two Israeli groups—*The Women in Black* and *Kvisa Sh'chora* (Dirty Laundry).

*The Women in Black* is a feminist organisation that holds protests on a weekly basis against illegal settlements, occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and the treatment of Arab Israelis as second-class citizens. It has since become a worldwide “loose” network of women protesting against any military aggression.<sup>1</sup> *Kvisa Sh'chora* is part of the Queer collective in Israel, which protests against the oppression of Palestinians; they see this as a parallel to the oppression of sexual minorities.<sup>2</sup> During the first Israeli Pride Parade of 2001 (held in Tel Aviv) a group of gay activists naming themselves “Gays in Black” marched under the banner, “There is no pride in Occupation.”<sup>3</sup> Hagai El Ad’s article entitled “Gay Israel: No Pride in Occupation” articulated the political sentiment of the action, although he is not affiliated with either *Kvisa Sh'chora* or the *Gays in Black*. He writes:

Jerusalem, FEB. 21, 2002. It appears that a meeting of gays and lesbians with Israel’s Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, will finally take place. Is this an achievement for our community, or an example of a lack of feeling, callousness and loss of direction...? It would be unbearable to simply sit with the Prime Minister and on behalf of our minority ignore the human rights of others, including what’s been happening here in relation to Palestine for the past year—roadblocks, prevention of access to medical care, assassinations, and implementation of apartheid policy in the territories and in Israel. The struggle for our rights is worthless if it’s indifferent to what’s happening to people a kilometre from here.<sup>4</sup>

This sense of fraternity with the Palestinian body is not common to the entire group of Israeli Queer activists, but those who are fraternal and maternal are of focal interest to

this study. In the United States a group of “queers” naming themselves QUIT (Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism) descended on a Starbucks Restaurant in Berkeley and claimed that it was now Queerkeley. A website dedicated to the event, explains:

About 25 queer settlers descended on a downtown Berkeley Starbucks on Saturday, August 17, claiming Berkeley as “a city without people for people without a city.” The group, organized by Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism (QUIT!), posted a banner proclaiming the reclaimed café “Queerkeley—A Prophecy Fulfilled.”

They also erected homes (transformed “Palestinian civilian homes reclaimed from another street theatre action), lawn furniture, and signs reading, “It Works In Palestine, Why Not Here?” and “It’s Ours Because We Say So.” They erected plastic palm trees to “make the concrete bloom,” and gave patrons a tract explaining their religious claim to the land as follows:

“Land of fruits and nuts...

“And the Lord saw that the queer people were harried in this land. And the Lord spake unto [sic] the prophet Harvey, “You will lead your people across the wide waters unto a new land.” Harvey was fearful, and he cried to the Lord, “How will we cross the wide waters? For they are cold, and they are filled with all manner of hazardous substances and raw sewage and other pollutants.” And the Lord responded, “fear not, Harvey, for a great bridge will be built, and the people will cross into this land. And this land will be called Berkeley. I say, Lo, I have promised the land of Berkeley to the lesbians and to the gays, and to the bisexuals, and to the transgenders and to the intersexed, and to all of the gender variant peoples. And this land shall be blessed with fruits and nuts, unto 50 generations.”<sup>5</sup>

Mocking the Zionist phantasm of “a city without people for people without a city” and the mythologies of both racial and religious continuities, the rhetoric of the organisers of QUIT clearly falls in the region of liberal politics. Together with El Ad, whose myopic criticism of Israeli mistreatment spans a mere “past year,” they negotiate a space where nationalist ideologies and racial continuities become barriers to interracial affinity. The queer group in Tel Aviv (The Gays in Black), the organizers of the Jerusalem Open House,<sup>6</sup> *Kvisa Sh’chora* and the *Women in Black*, would rather side with a people whose

religion and cultural practices strictly forbid same sex relationships (and are oppressive of women), but who are colonised, than with a state whose religion and cultural practices are far less oppressive but which colonises. The act of colonisation itself is seen as the foremost transgression against liberty and while anti-homosexuality (homophobia?) is an act of heterosexist colonialism in itself, it only follows from, but does not precede racial colonialism. The logic that follows seems to be expressible in the formula: Free the Palestinians and then argue with them against homophobia. This sentiment, that there are things that lgbt (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) and women's rights supervene on, follows from the movements' maturity in that region, albeit that the oppression of sexuality is intra-racial and is perhaps one of the oldest forms of colonialism. Racial colonialism however has had a more prominent historical front and in this way, the Palestinian case presents a human rights dilemma that forms a contingency with gay and lesbian acceptance. You cannot begin to accept gays and lesbians freely if there are questions of an other Other that continue to be grappled with.

In addition, the war condition in itself oppresses and depresses the otherwise liberal movements of bodies. There is in that region, and indeed any region undergoing the machinations of war, an inhibition of the body and a necessity for closetedness that can be represented in the figure of the bomb shelter, the nightly curfews (for Palestinians), geographical segregation and economic sanctions. It is not only the homosexual body that is affected here (though it is doubly affected) since this restriction on the body surpasses the sexuality distinction. And it is a naïve notion to consider the Palestinian body alone to be subject to these restrictions because the Israeli body is locked into (though unequally) the very prison system that the state, in order to protect

itself, aims to implement. For every prisoner there is a prison guard and for every terrorist (and I use this word ironically) or teenage hoodlum there is a conscript.<sup>7</sup> Not to mention that since the rise of the Al-Aqsa intifada, and indeed the numerous intifadas that preceded it, Israel has seen greater economic strife due to, as one would expect, a decline in participation rates in parades and demonstrations, in going to restaurants and cafes, nightclubs, cinemas and supermarkets. Therefore, despite the fact that each party insists on being separate from its Other, the other fact remains that they are inextricably linked in a multi-locational whole which encompasses these distinctions.

It comes as no surprise then, that among the Israeli protestors against occupation and aggression that we find the queer collective (though admittedly not the whole group) and the Women in Black. Their own identities are ambiguous. They are not Palestinians but they share a similar awareness of the depression of their bodies (as homosexuals/transgendered people/women/Israelis). This awareness of being the *same* as Palestinians makes them anti-Zionists (or as the right-wing Zionists like to proclaim, misguidedly, anti-Semitic), which in turn makes them unpatriotic, therefore un-Israeli. Thus emerges the forever ironic identity of the marginal thinkers who collide with the popular ideology of their culture and nation-state because they can perform its deconstruction.

However, to be “unIsraeli” is not the same as being Palestinian, thus these figures purport a new identity, which encompasses the whole. They are Pisraelis or Israelistinians, without any biological incorporation. The incorporation, therefore the embodying, of the Palestinian within the Israeli body (and vice versa) can only take place

through bedding the two ideologies together—a solution that the political systems on either side look far from implementing.

The situation is further complicated since it is hardly a secret that Arabic cultures are rampantly anti-homosexual and deeply patriarchal (misogynist). In nation states where Islamic law is the law of the state, homosexuality receives, along with fornication and adultery, the death sentence—the elimination of the deviant body itself, its erasure. And while Palestine is neither a state nor an observer of strict Islamic laws, because of the integration of Christian Palestinians, among other factors, it is also no secret that homosexuals are outcasts. But for the Palestinians it has long been apparent that any ally is a good ally, particularly Israeli ones. In a similar manner to the Irish Catholics, they feel that they have been horribly wronged and anyone who sees the misgivings is a friend, a defender of historical truth<sup>8</sup> and an upholder of justice and moral absolutes—anyone else besides can go to hell. So the Palestinian who has been culturally and religiously (let us say Ideologically) trained to inhibit the sexual body (not only the homo or bi or trans bodies) finds herself at an awkward point of self-rereading. I do not doubt that the great bulk of any nation on earth are either incapable of performing or unwilling to perform self-re-reading and will not fantasize that the Palestinian mass is an exception to the rampant rule. However, the Israeli Queer and feminist alliance that is voiced with and to them, puts them at conflict with their own cultural ideology. They have an important and necessary Israeli ally—a macropolitical ally that is constitutionally more radical than themselves in terms of liberating the body—not only the Palestinian body but also the homosexual and transgendered and the female body and the male body—liberating, then, not only the political but also the sexual self.

It remains unclear what diplomatic stance the many liberation organisations (also known as terrorist organisations) of Palestine take on their homosexual and feminist allies; however, it is worth noting that Pride Parades and anti-occupation vigils have never been the target of suicide bombers, to whom a mass gathering of this kind would be an ideal place for detonation. In addition, the Israeli feminist lesbian group, Claf, established a brief contact with Kayan—a Palestinian women’s movement group.<sup>9</sup> Although Claf had been traditionally a supporter of state Zionism as Yael Ben-Zvi’s 1998 article<sup>10</sup> demonstrates, in recent years there have been developments that may suggest a change of political motivation within the group. For example, Claf’s website is now available in Arabic as well as Hebrew and English, which suggests that an Arab-Israeli audience as well as a non-Hebrew speaking Palestinian audience is targeted.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Jerusalem’s “Open House”—the centre for queers (lgbt), welcomes Palestinian and Arab-Israeli visitors and has recently begun acquiring material written in Arabic. There is a movement within this pro-Palestinian queer Israeli movement which suggests reciprocity and open communication between the parties, though admittedly it remains confined to a minority group.

Perhaps it is a coincidence that in Lebanon, during these last four years that writing about and research into homosexuality has been published, more surprisingly it has been read and even more surprisingly politely ignored and not vitriolically attacked. I refer in particular to the Beirut publishing house of Riad El-Rayyess which published Elham Mansour’s novel *I Am You* involving Beirut lesbians and the company they keep, as well as Ibrahim Mahmood’s scholarly research into the history of homosexuality among the Arabs and in the Muslim Empire. Reading Mahmood’s work brings to one’s

attention that homosexuality (male and female) in the diverse Islamic history was not always as heavily frowned upon as it is today. Although it should not be overlooked that Mahmood's work predominantly stands as a testimony to the sheer brutality (I cannot help being subjective here) with which the majority of Arab cultures treat the question of homosexuality and in particular the female body and her sexuality.<sup>12</sup>

The Palestinians who have neither the resources, nor the headspace, nor the interest to contemplate these things, have awaked perhaps, among their other neighbours (other Arabs and Israelis), a realisation that the liberties of the sexual body have too long been neglected at the expense of political preoccupation, or neglected because this is one of the very exigencies that war imposes on the civilian as well as the militant body. 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. At the same time, if they did, political progression may follow, considering that races are created and destroyed by intermixed (or lack thereof) procreation and fucking for pleasure. In her most recent fictional work, Mansour speaks through her character Hiba:

In all the women's meetings I used to insist in particular that the woman needed to possess her body and all the things related to that possession. This possession would act as a first step on the road to her liberation. Of what I said they understood moral depravity. Maybe I meant that precisely. For this reason I used to always object and my opinion was rejected in regards to this matter. It was always perceived to be out of its time. "It's time now for fighting and to run things that are related to the war and the nations and their liberation and... all the big important banners, it's not time for pleasure and wasting time in discussing trivial and small things." And this was the way I was always responded to whenever I proposed the matter.<sup>13</sup>



It may seem, in the western world, that this is an outdated Freudian notion: That repressed (and frustrated) sexual desire is the source of all evil, the source of all conflict. But insofar as military and interracial conflict is concerned, this notion seems quite befitting and requires revisiting. In a speech commemorating the second birthday of Jerusalem's Open House, Hagai El-Ad observes:

The Open House represents a new phenomenon in Israel's GLBT landscape.... What makes the Open House unique is its pluralism—the fact that it promotes openness, tolerance, and mutual respect, in a city that is better known for its ability to create fear, distance, and segregation between people.... If you walk down Ben Yehuda mall, you will see with your own eyes the typical scenes: Yeshiva boys attempting to seduce those they happen by...into laying tefilin; the border police eyeing Arab-looking young men...and searching their things in the name of national security. And more such Jerusalemite scenes.... And indeed the most conspicuous visual element on the Jerusalem pedestrian mall these days is the Open House's flying rainbow flag.... Palestinian gays come to the Open House. And when they challenge us by asking, "Why isn't there more material in Arabic at the Open House? What about hanging posters in East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Ramallah?" we begin to understand how much more the Open House has yet to do in overcoming challenges that require courage and openness.<sup>14</sup>

The rainbow flag comes to resemble a cultural fluidity, a resolution of boundary problems in a metaphysical utopian state of mind—a gay oriented one at that, which encompasses the majority in its vision. The religious ritual of "laying" Teflin is subjugated for other motives, while the border police, "eyeing Arab-looking young men," use their uniforms and their state-commissioned surveillance to perform a different kind of search and to gaze with ulterior sexual undertones. Their overcoded function in the machine of the state (to use Deleuze and Guattari's terminology) is subverted to serve a contradictory function: instead of keeping the enemy at bay, the enemy is invited and seduced and national security, that is, the security in being one nation, is thwarted.

The notion of nation is important in the sense that it gives individuals a group identity. It functions not only in terms of race or geographical placement, but can also function for other group similarities like that of sexual orientation, gender and religion. In an acute reading of Nietzsche, which also offers a theorising of Jewish identity and development, Sedgwick writes that “any danger posed by nineteenth-century Jews to nineteenth-century Europe occurs because ‘that which is called a “nation” in Europe today [is]... something growing, young easily disruptable, not yet a race...’”<sup>15</sup> At the time that Nietzsche made such observations, the Jewish people were scattered throughout the planet and were not a nation but a diasporic race, as a result of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 700 A.D. But the rise of Zionism, which began as a cultural celebration of the rigorous survival of a horribly mistreated and remarkably resilient people, soon became a militant tour de force and the race was born again in order to experience what it is to be a nation. Suddenly, by the close of the nineteenth-century and with the decline of Internationalism, which was not at all devoid of Jewish European activists (such as Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman and even Karl Marx who was not entirely severed from his Jewish roots), Zionism began to gain favour in that it seemed more practicable and in tune with the cultural reality of the planet: that nations had a natural inclination to remain separate and the Jewish people would always be considered as outsiders to the nations in which they lived.

Sedgwick’s remarks on Proust, Wilde and Nietzsche are no less relevant or applicable in the context of this cultural study: “...the numinous identification of male homosexuality with a pre-national, premodern dynastic cosmopolitanism, through the figure of... the Jews, is no more than haunted by the specter of a sort of gay Zionism or

pan-Germanism, normalising politics on the nominally ethnic model that would bring homosexual identity itself under the sway of what Nietzsche called ‘that *névrose nationale* with which Europe is sick.’”<sup>16</sup> Hagai El-Ad observes a natural occurrence of “erotic decadence” which strips the body of its national garb. It seems that in the homosexual energy there is a greater attraction to erotic decadence and a greater fluency and readiness to band with the self-same (human) other. That is not to say, as Sedgwick contemplates, that the homosexual identity is not equally ready to adopt a kind of rigid fascism, a gay separatism, in terms of self-definition. Put to the test, in terms of the historical context that I am positing here, this seems far from happening, at least for a significant portion of homosexual Jewish or Israeli peace activists. However it is interesting to examine more closely how pro-Palestinian Queer Jews position themselves within their race whilst not compromising their queer identities, or rather, how they retain a sense of Jewish identity that is in itself queer – i.e. marginal, diasporic. The very question can be pursued by examining the mechanism that creates fascisms out of diasporic identities, the crux of Sedgwick’s intimation. How is the Jewish race haunted by the “specter” of “Zionism” and how is this historical mechanism of transformation possible?

The transformation from diasporic to pan-nationalist seems illogical and impossible if one’s view of history follows the progressive model, however a dialectical view of history not only allows for this transformation but anticipates it, in as much as alluvion can be anticipated.

Participating in one of the vigils held by the Women in Black, Susie Day writes:

In the line, they call us “lesbians,” “fucking dykes” . . . . But if they were to call me an anti-Semite—which is, in part, what they mean when they say “lesbian”—my heart would crack more deeply than it already has . . . . Some people come to scream at us. These are the Israeli arch-nationalists, followers of the assassinated Rabbi Meir Kahane. They call us women dykes; call our friend, who is Vietnamese, a gook. And they call Laura a self-hating Jew . . . . I didn’t know how to speak of this, when faced with so much justifiable anguish on the part of Jews, a people I have loved and admired all my life. I was afraid of being called an anti-Semite, especially when “anti-Semite” is only a millimetre away from meaning “Nazi.”<sup>17</sup>

The arch-nationalists, living in the “névrose nationale,” who rely on a long history of anti-Semitism (anti-Jewishness, that is) for validation, do not fully comprehend the social and political import of that history and fall victims to the same separatist logic of any fascism. In the same article, Day quotes her partner Laura, who is dubbed a “self-hating Jew:”

When I was a kid and I sat at a seder, my parents taught me that, to be Jewish, especially after the Second World War, meant to identify with humanity first. It meant to fight for human rights for everyone, especially the most oppressed, whoever was in the most trouble.<sup>18</sup>

In Laura’s understanding of Jewish identity there emerge the internationalist leanings (“humanity first”) that manifested themselves in nineteenth-century European anarchism. Such inclinations are a continuation of the diasporic sense of identity experienced by the Jewish people as a race, an understanding that regressed considerably when a significant portion of the race was confined to a new nation, even more so, to a powerful militant state. The Israeli groups of the Women in Black, the Gays in Black and Kvisa Sh’chora and The Open House’s executive director Hagai El-Ad, all resume the understanding of Jewish identity as a diasporic and international race and in this sense allow the possibility of topologising the non-rigid homosexual identity with the identity of the diasporic Jew.

Meanwhile, the arch-nationalists continue in a “line of flight” that mystically severs them from the developments in recent history that would qualify them as anti-Semites themselves—that is, “Arab-haters,” and continue to miss the irony. The arch-nationalists cease to be Jewish in the diasporic or ethnic sense but tend to lean much closer to fascism than their consciousness cares to admit.

In a separate article, Sara Pursley writes:

People have a right to exist; so do the cultures and societies they make. But why do states have rights at all? What gives any state the “right to exist”, in its present configuration for all time[?]<sup>19</sup>

Anarchist theory has always propounded in the works of Bakunin, Goldman and Kropotkin (and more recently in the works of Paul Goodman), that the trouble is in the machinations of states themselves and not in the people living under them. Recent developments in the war against Iraq (2003) demonstrate this more clearly than ever before. Never has opposition to a war been so popular amongst people on the planet and never before have governments (the Coalition of the Willing) so simply disregarded the opinion of their electorates. This demonstrates an otherwise obscure fact, that wars are often the deeds of managerial systems, the work of a handful of administrators and not the soldiers and the citizens, who, being blindly locked into an *esprit de corps*, follow their orders so as not to lose their means of *livelihood*. Given the opportunity to do with their bodies as they please, the civilians, both Israeli and Palestinian, occidental and oriental, may be able to engage in the disorderly and natural attractions that bodies impose on their inhabitants. Such a mystical “union” or intermixing between nations from which new races are born is only complicated by militancy, which places curfews, imposes segregation and propagates interracial hatred due to mutual violence. This is

illustrated in Fleru de Preneuf's online article entitled: "Sleeping with the enemy: Two men – an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian Muslim – risk jail and death for their love." She writes (reports?):

Ezra, an Israeli Jew, and Selim, a Palestinian Muslim, live, sleep—and hide together.

The gay couple faces arrest at any moment: Selim for being illegally on Israeli soil, Ezra for helping, hiring and sheltering him.

She also quotes Hagai El-Ad:

In many ways [Selim] should be the poster boy of the Oslo agreement.... He was engaged in terror during the first intifada and turn-about he's in love and living with an Israeli"<sup>20</sup>

However, this view, that civilians are not great participators in the conflict on a micropolitical level, is all too sentimental. Not only is there a military divide but a cultural chasm that maintains it, and as such the propagation of religious and racial hatred has seldom been the work of states and their politicians alone. It exists, similarly to anti-homosexuality, within the minds of individuals who support these governments. Hence, the attraction to a Palestinian body may pose a threat to the Israeli one and vice versa and fucking for pleasure in these instances turns to sexual violence, to violation. The expression "Fuck the Arabs!" or "Fuck the Israelis!" or "Fuck the Americans!" is seldom intended as an invitation to mutual pleasure. It is not an invitation to a play with bondage or sadomasochism, or to playing tops and bottoms as the vernacular would have it, in which the sexual parties are consensually asymmetrical. "Walid" is a Christian Arab Israeli, who grew up in Haifa in a largely Jewish community, who was engaging in sexual activities with Jewish men, some of whom were also soldiers. He reflected that:

The period when all this began was also the beginning of the Intifada. I was very strongly aware of the political implications of everything. Yes, I did feel the connection between sex, politics, the army—as the expression goes, “fuck the Arabs”—but then again, I was usually a top. No, no, that’s just a joke, just a joke. But seriously, I think I just managed to keep everything separate. I don’t know.<sup>21</sup>

Although he insists it was a “joke” the sexual politics of domination and submission manifest themselves and racial pride is preserved if you are a top. Of course, in a relationship devoid of power play neither tops nor bottoms are victors or losers, colonists or colonisers. The question of the colonized and the colonizing surfaces in sexual activity in which complexes (issues) of power are not resolved. The soldier that Walid had in mind in this instance, knew that he was an Arab (Walid likes to call himself Palestinian Israeli) and was not phased by this. But in another encounter, Walid decides not to divulge his racial identity to a soldier who turned out to be “very, very, very right wing. I mean very, very. OK—he didn't hide the fact that he was in Kach's youth movement, Kahane's political party.”<sup>22</sup> He reports their encounter as follows:

I was very afraid to have sex with him. Very, very much. For one thing, he would be able to see that I wasn’t Jewish. But when it got to that, I made something up... something totally unbelievable.... But, what can you do, he was very stupid. I just wanted to get it over with. When it was done, he offered me a ride back, and I said no, no, no, that’s all right. He asked for my telephone number.... I wrote six totally random numbers on a sheet of paper, and gave it to him. And I remember that I left the house, walked calmly to the corner and then, like, broke into a sprint.<sup>23</sup>

In this instance the symbolic top or bottom is irrelevant as it is overridden by the non-symbolic, by the fact that the colonizing soldier is in a position of power that cannot be simply reversed or forfeited during the act of sex. However, the soldier would not conceive of himself as a colonist but as a freedom fighter and is equally vulnerable, in his

state of mind, as a colonised figure. Rachel Persico, who was born and raised on a Kibbutz, writes that,

[p]aradoxically, among Jewish Israelis... the “Women in Black” are the bravest fighters against the injustices done to the Palestinians.... Although these women have become a target for harassment by men who pass by in their cars, who spit at them, throw rotten fruits and eggs at them and shout obscenities, they have been relentless. A member of the group who conducted a survey of the most popular obscenities shouted at them illuminates the greatest fear of the Israeli male ego: “You sleep with Arafat... All of you sleep with Arafat...” they shout. Typical, universal, racists, male fear, all entangled with sex and ownership, their women will be taken out of their possession and become the possession of the enemy.<sup>24</sup>

Although Persico is writing within a heterosexual context, the implications are equally applicable to Walid’s situation with the right-wing soldier. We do not know for certain whether Walid’s fears were grounded in fact but we have good reason to trust his intuition (Kach’s youth movement is extremist, to say the least). What might Helga, a member of the Hitler youth, feel, if she discovered that she was fucked by a “passing” German Jew? How angry might she feel for having been possessed by the enemy? Even though no such possession was thought to take place during the sexual act itself which was dominated by unknowing, by something similar to Edenic innocence? The consensual asymmetry of the sexual act—one being the doer, the other the done-to (which is by no means immutable)—suddenly transforms into a situation of power relations. It is suddenly unacceptable to be done to, whereas in instances of mutual consensus, the lines of power are irrelevant and obsolete, they do not exist. Colonialism, which is a form of rape (sexual and otherwise) is thwarted by continued resistance, by non-acceptance, by refusal. When colonialism ceases to manifest itself as rape, as a *tour de force*, and becomes an act of seduction aimed at mutual consensus, as it occurs in instances of interracial coupling (between Selim and Ezra, the “border police” and the



“Arab young men,” Walid and his first soldier, between the Celts and the Normans), equality and peacefulness is attained. In the meantime mutual violence continues and fluctuates; violence that is differentiated always by one kind being that of the instigator’s aggression and the other having the quality of defending against that violence with a retaliatory violence.

However, as far as the right-wing Zionists are concerned, they consider themselves to be the performers of retaliatory and not instigatory violence. There is an aporetic moment in their logic which does not permit them to contemplate the possibility that perhaps their separatist ideology, and their “rights” to Palestine are miserably flawed by any non-fascist calculation. In short they make very poor readers of Herzl’s *Jewish State* albeit they are its most ardent examiners. Unlike the English colonists, it does not appear that right wing Zionists see themselves as a superior civilisation that deserves to take the place of an inferior one (although they believe in the superiority of the Chosen people and there are class divisions in Israel based on the “colour” of non-European Jews<sup>25</sup>), but that they belong to a race of eternally persecuted people who must fight to secure a homeland—regardless of whether the enemy was deservedly chosen or whether they themselves continue to be that eternally persecuted race or not.

The figure of the homosexual, whom Sedgwick likens to the Diasporic Jew can also be likened to the Diasporic Palestinian, while the nationalist Jew takes on an identity that is severed from his internationalist heritage. Not surprisingly, then, support for Palestinian liberation, within Israel, comes from feminist, transgendered, gay and lesbian Jews who identify themselves with an international race (as women, non-heterosexuals or/and diasporic Jews) and not with their young and easily disruptable nation state, in

which the atrocities of the Second World War continue to manifest themselves in sombre and dark irony. The nationalist's greatest fear is simply the destruction of the nation and the sense of nation becomes a competing force within the collective's psychology, competing for supremacy over natural urges that are indifferent to difference, and war, in all its various aspects (gunfire, curfews, borders, sanctions, etc., etc.) is only symptomatic of the degree of the repression in question.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.womeninblack.net/mission.html> (2.3.2003).

<sup>2</sup> see Lars Krause's "The Queer Community in Israel: Findings of Research for the HBF April-June 2002." [http://www.boell.de/downloads/gd/queer\\_report\\_Israel.pdf](http://www.boell.de/downloads/gd/queer_report_Israel.pdf) p.16, last accessed 10.03.2003. It is noteworthy that "according to Lior [of the pro-Zionist gay and lesbian organization Agudah that] gays and lesbians and transgenders share political attitudes from the left to the right to almost the same degree found in the general public (there was an inquiry being conducted a couple of years ago, discovering this amazing result)." This is countered by Jerusalem's first Pride Parade (June 7, 2002) which was dubbed "A march against hatred" in which 5000 Israelis participated. See Hagai El Ad's report @ [http://www.gay.org.il/joh/eng/home\\_eng.htm](http://www.gay.org.il/joh/eng/home_eng.htm) (25/03/2003) ; also see Anon., "Coming Soon: Jerusalem Open House to Hold a First Pride Parade—in Jerusalem" Feb. 27, 2002. <http://www.gay.org.il/joh/eng/news/pridesoon.doc> (25.03.2003).

<sup>3</sup> See Lee Waltzer, "Queer in the Land of Sodom," [http://www.thegully.com/essays/gaymundo/020220\\_gay\\_Israel\\_history.html](http://www.thegully.com/essays/gaymundo/020220_gay_Israel_history.html) (17.03.2003).

<sup>4</sup> Hagai El-Ad, "Gay Israel: No Pride In Occupation," [http://www.thegully.com/essays/israel/020220\\_gays\\_meet\\_sharon.html](http://www.thegully.com/essays/israel/020220_gays_meet_sharon.html) (17.03.2003).

<sup>5</sup> Anon. 18.8.2002, [http://www.indybay.org/news/2002/08/141433\\_comment.php](http://www.indybay.org/news/2002/08/141433_comment.php) (17.03.2003).

<sup>6</sup> The first GLBT resource centre in Jerusalem.

<sup>7</sup> Yoram Hazony writes: "The Jews of Israel are an exhausted people, confused and without direction. This is not to say that they are unwilling to fight. Israelis still agree that they will carry on their struggle if they must. But... it was made clear to me that there was a vast gulf between their *willingness* to fight and sacrifice and their ability to understand *why* they should do so." See Yoram Hazony, *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel's Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xvii.

<sup>8</sup> The historical myth propagated by mid twentieth-century Zionism is that the land of Palestine was empty during the designed mass emigrations: a myth, which if I was not a direct descendent of the Palestinian diaspora itself, I would have no historical documents to prove, and a myth which is still widely accepted in Israel today. Zionists see themselves as freedom fighters. As European Jews this description is certainly true, they were historically oppressed in a great many nations for twelve hundred years and they had, before founding the state of Israel, a fight for freedom on their hands. The enemy they chose however was arbitrary and one who was not at all responsible for any of their persecution. Theodor Herzl himself wrote that the Jewish State had two options, either Argentina or the land of Palestine but that Palestine was the better choice, considering there were historical investments in that region. He also wrote that the land to be acquired for the Jewish state was to be acquired legally and within international law. This was complicated

when more and more Palestinian natives refused to sell their lands to the newcomers and the Zionist sense of legalism completely collapsed in what was dubbed the war for independence of 1948. (For a history of the Palestinian Diaspora and the erasure of villages and districts see <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Maps/index.html> and follow the desired links). Herzl's Zionism is not to be confused with the right-wing appropriations of his work; he did after all write with the hope that "whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our welfare, will react powerfully and beneficially for the good of humanity." See Herzl's *The Jewish State* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), 95-96, 100 and 157.

<sup>9</sup> However "after the escalation of March/April 2002 the connection was disrupted.... Rula of Kayan... was surprised by Claf's interpretation [a general distrust of Jewish organisations]: the only problem was that Simona's contact person in Kayan had left the organization—and that Kayan had other priorities in April.... Rula (Kayan) sees the need to put the issue of homosexuality on their agenda. At the same time...[it] is not perceived as being very relevant in present Arab society." See Lars Krause, "Queer Community in Israel..." 2002 [http://www.boell.de/downloads/gd/queer\\_report\\_Israel.pdf](http://www.boell.de/downloads/gd/queer_report_Israel.pdf) pp.17 and 18.

<sup>10</sup> See Yael Ben-zvi, "Zionist Lesbianism and Transsexual Transgression: Two Representations of Queer Israel" in *Middle East Report*, 1998, 28.1, 26-28 and 37.

<sup>11</sup> See Claf's website at: <http://www.gay.org.il/claf/> (1.3.03).

<sup>12</sup> See Ibrahim Mahmood, *The Forbidden Pleasure: Homosexuality: Sex in Arab History* (Beirut: Riaad El Rayyes, 2000). Text in Arabic. Although Mahmood is somewhat of a pioneer in speaking candidly about sexuality, sex and genitalia in the Arabic language, treatment of lesbianism in particular continues to be weakened by a general misunderstanding of the complexities and diversities of practice that constitute lesbian identity. Lesbianism is more often than not relegated to "the fact" that most men are poor masturbators of women or are indifferent to their pleasure. Unknown to Mahmood, or gone without mention, is the lesbian's sheer love for and excitement by the female body. Mahmood seems to think that all lesbians do is masturbate each other and that is because men are not up to the task. Mahmood is hardly guilty of a conceptual error of which the western stereotype is free. Amongst the most common obscenities one encounters is that "you need a good hard one..." and in the world of cultural representations, even to this day I have not witnessed a decent lesbian sex scene in which the heroines do anything other than "go down on each other" or are busy at work with a dildo—with the exception of one or two examples. Most other sex scenes depicting two women are over before they begin. Is this perhaps because sexual activity, particularly between two women, is so varied and diverse that no one is quite sure how to depict it?

<sup>13</sup> Elham Mansour. *When I was a Man* (Beirut: Riaad El-Rayyes, 2002), 187. My translation.

<sup>14</sup> Hagai El-Ad, [http://www.gay.org.il/joh/articles/knesset\\_eng.htm](http://www.gay.org.il/joh/articles/knesset_eng.htm) (25.3.03).

<sup>15</sup> Eve Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 177.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Susie Day, "Where Every Life Weighs the Same," 2002, <http://www.lgny.com/0182web/Snidelines182.html> (25.03.2003), archived at [archives.windycitymediagroup.com/0outlines/may8~02/day.html](http://archives.windycitymediagroup.com/0outlines/may8~02/day.html) (1.04.2003).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Sara Pursley, "Friends of Palestine," <http://www.lgny.com/0182web/SaraPursley182.html> (25.03.2003).

<sup>20</sup> Fleru de Preneuf, "Sleeping with the enemy," February 2002, <http://www.travelandtranscendence.com/g-israel2.html> (19.03.2003).

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<sup>21</sup> Walid, "Queer in Israel." Collected by A. Sumaka'I Fink and Jacob Press in C. Patton and Benigno Sanchez-Eppler, eds., *Queer Diasporas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 271.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 272-273.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>24</sup> Rachel Persico, "Growing up In Israel: A Personal Perspective" in F. Müge Gçek and Shiva Balaghi, eds., *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 121. For an intensive treatment of Israeli anxieties of (sexual) contamination by the Palestinian other see Raz Yosef's "Homoland: Interracial Sex and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in Israeli Cinema" (*GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8.4, 2002, 553-579); also see Anton Shamma, "Arab Male, Hebrew Female: The Lure of Metaphors" in F. Müge Gçek and Shiva Balaghi, 167-173.

<sup>25</sup> See Sammy Smootha, "Internal Divisions in Israel at Forty" (*Middle East Review* 20.4, Summer, 1988, 26-36).