



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.



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 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  
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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

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:



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







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

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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 Transexual 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

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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 Smooha, "Internal Divisions in Israel at Forty" (*Middle East Review* 20.4, Summer, 1988, 26-36).