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Other Scenes of Speaking: Listening to Palestinian Anticolonial-Queer Critique

MIKKI STELDER

Palestinian Queers for BDS first called on the international LGBTQI community to be in solidarity with Palestinians and support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign in 2010. PQBDS argued that Israel was using gay rights and gay lives to *pinkwash* state-sanctioned violence against Palestinians. Since then, much has been said and written about Israel's pinkwashing campaign and the violence it endorses and engenders. But much remains unsaid about Palestinian anticolonial-queer modes of engagement that persist despite Israel's settler-colonial project. With specific attention to the 2012 *Jadaliyya* debate between Jasbir Puar and Maya Mikdashi, on the one hand, and Haneen Maikey and Heike Schotten, on the other, this article discusses various activist and scholarly responses to Israel's pinkwashing campaign, and particularly how these responses elide Palestinian anticolonial-queer activism in different ways. Ultimately, this article asks: What becomes (in)audible as a Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique?

The present itself is but a moment of vision—vision of the freedom not yet come.
—Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics”

PALESTINIAN QUEERS FOR BDS launched their first public call for solidarity with the Palestinian people in 2010. The call highlighted Israel's utilization of gay rights and gay lives to *pinkwash* state-sanctioned violence against Palestinians.¹ It asked queer communities around the globe to support the 2005 Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions), which urges Israel to (1) end its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantle the Wall, (2) recognize the fundamental right of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality, and (3) respect, protect, and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.²

Originally founded by a handful of queer Palestinians in occupied Palestine, the group, now known as Pinkwatching Israel, has over the years widened its focus from anti-pinkwashing activities to a broader anticolonial-queer critique that uncovers the role of Zionist sexual politics in Israel's settler-colonial project.³ The underlying premise of the shift was that queer activists should be responsive to the larger context of Zionist settler colonialism, thereby upholding BDS,

and not reduce solidarity with Palestine simply to solidarity with queers in Palestine. In the words of Angela Davis, Palestinian Queers for BDS (PQBDS) “broadens the terrain of struggle against the occupation and against the Zionist policies of Israel.”⁴ By demanding that they engage the parameters of struggle formulated by the civil society movement for Palestinian liberation, the organization holds accountable both international activists and scholars. In parallel, it urges Palestinian and Palestine solidarity activists to deeply engage with the sexual and gendered politics of Zionist settler colonialism.⁵

A central question emerging from the PQBDS call is, How should one respond to it? And, additionally, how are responses to the question shaped by the larger political context, which narrows both the understanding of injustice as well as its alleviation? There are no quick answers or easy resolutions to such questions. In line with the epigraph to this article, what decolonizing visions of freedom *not yet come* do our responses enable and/or preclude? Achille Mbembe analyzes the figure of the (Palestinian) suicide bomber who finds freedom only in death as an instance of the temporal “space where freedom and negation operate” and where “the future . . . can be authentically anticipated but not in the present.”⁶ While I take seriously the violently restrictive conditions operating in the settler-colonial context,⁷ this article foregrounds visions of the future *not yet come*: in other words, visions anticipated in the present that remain denied. In other words, PQBDS’s call for supporting BDS and Palestinian liberation demonstrates that *visions of a different future for Palestine already exist*, and that even though they are rendered impossible in the present they persist under conditions of settler-colonial dispossession and death.⁸

Much has been said and written about Israel’s pinkwashing campaign and the violence it endorses and engenders.⁹ But relatively little has been said about Palestinian anticolonial-queer modes of engagement that endure under Israeli settler colonialism, or about the ways in which scholarly and activist responses to Israel’s pinkwashing campaign fail to engage Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique.¹⁰ In exploring the various responses to the PQBDS call, my central questions are, What becomes audible as a Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique? What does this critique demand of the listener? And, what other *scenes of speaking* become audible by engaging with Palestinian anticolonial-queer activism?

The theatrical metaphor of the scene highlights the issue of contexts—those that allow certain voices to become intelligible and audible and others in which certain voices remain unheard. Such scenes are also performative: they construct a particular hegemonic terrain of struggle, with protagonists and antagonists, scripts, and audiences. Briefly, they constitute the debates that shape the responses to the ongoing Palestinian catastrophe, and by highlighting how such debates relate to queer politics and Palestine, this article focuses on the ways in which they enable and/or inhibit activism, as well as the conditions for its occurrence. I call them scenes of speaking as *this metaphor more closely addresses the constructed and therefore also alterable character of such debates* and it engages the question of the listener. The scenes-of-speaking metaphor allows me to explore how the terrain of struggle is constructed and, in turn, how these constructions depend on particular preexisting forms of engagement. Tending to Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique as another scene of speaking demands acts of listening and responsiveness beyond the bounds of conventional scripts, and I foreground other visions of a future *not yet come*, which become audible by engaging these critiques.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak tackles the question of the listener in her work on the subaltern. The subaltern, Spivak explains, demands an engagement with issues of representation and subjectivity. Rather than being about the voice of the subaltern—a prevailing misreading of her work—Spivak’s provocative question “Can the subaltern speak?” is a demand placed on the listener. According to Spivak, one cannot *claim to speak* from a subaltern position. This does not mean that the subaltern does not speak (another misreading), but rather that “we” (those of us with access to lines of social mobility) refuse to listen.¹¹ In an interview that appears in *The Post-Colonial Critic*, she states: “For me, the question ‘who should speak?’ is less crucial than ‘who will listen?’ ‘I will speak for myself as a Third World person’ is an important position for political mobilization today. But the real demand is that, when I speak from that position, I should be listened to seriously; not with that kind of benevolent imperialism, really, which simply says that because I happen to be an Indian or whatever.”¹²

Although Palestinian queer activists have gained access to certain forms of social mobility due to the popularization of anti-pinkwashing activism in the Global North, whether “we” outside Palestine (will) listen, and who that “we” is, remain unanswered questions. Activist calls for justice continue to encounter *different forms of intransigence*, and the responses they receive fail to alter existing structures of power, even when allied groups express support. The case of Palestine complicates Spivak’s question of the subaltern: despite access to certain forms of social mobility for some Palestinian queer activists, the audibility of Palestinian anticolonial-queer activist critique remains largely foreclosed and/or elided.

This article unpacks those different forms of intransigence and also asks what other ways of responding and listening become possible if we consider the conditions of speaking created by the Palestinian queer movement. It engages the question of *listening differently* to a call for transformative justice, by attending to Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique as situated within the settler-colonial context. I argue that by listening to anticolonial-queer calls for transformative justice from the standpoint of the context in which they are made—rather than as an act of charity or through hegemonic frameworks—the possibilities for responding to them might be altered.

The dual problem of listening and critiquing in the context of Palestinian anticolonial-queer activism is exemplified by the 2012 *Jadaliyya* debate between U.S.-based queer scholars Jasbir Puar and Maya Mikdashi, on the one hand, and the founder of alQaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society, Haneen Maikey, and U.S.-based ally and scholar Heike Schotten, on the other. In that debate, Puar and Mikdashi criticized U.S. anti-pinkwashing activists for falling into the trap of homonationalism, a term coined by Puar to describe “the historical convergence of state practices, transnational circuits of queer commodity culture and human rights paradigms, and broader global phenomena such as the increasing entrenchment of Islamophobia.”¹³ Maikey and Schotten, for their part, were concerned that situating pinkwashing in the analytical framework of homonationalism elided the specific Zionist context of Palestinian queers, notwithstanding the fact that Puar and Mikdashi chided anti-pinkwashing activists for ignoring “‘divisive’ questions” regarding Palestinian liberation and Israel’s occupation.¹⁴ While Maikey and Schotten also problematized the singling out of queer Palestinians as objects of affection by transnational queer solidarity activists, they were

concerned that Puar and Mikdashi's critique ignored a decade of Palestinian queer activism that developed its own analytical lenses and strategies.

This debate was widely followed in anti-pinkwashing activism circles and it marked a watershed moment. It also revealed an incommensurability between Puar's analytic of homonationalism and Palestinian anticolonial-queer discourse regarding the Zionist context. Prior to the publication of the Puar-Mikdashi article, transnational queer organizing for BDS had been gaining considerable momentum, as evidenced by the Palestinian Queer Activists Talk Politics tour of the United States in 2011, which included activist, academic, and NGO events on several U.S. campuses; boycott campaigns such as "IGLYO Out of Israel" (IGLYO is the acronym for the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Youth and Student Organization);¹⁵ the emergence of a number of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) chapters across North American cities;¹⁶ the publication of popular and academic articles; protest marches in large cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, and New York; and, the organization of a large conference on homonationalism and pinkwashing held in the United States shortly after the online debate took place. In contrast, the period that followed the online debate was marked by a dearth of initiatives and discussion, even as Israeli pundits and their allies continued to mobilize pinkwashing discourses in Israel's favor.¹⁷ In the words of QuAIA cofounder and social movement scholar Natalie Kouri-Towe, the Puar-Mikdashi article "destabilized the parameters of solidarity without generating a framework where activist attachments could be renegotiated."¹⁸ This article scrutinizes the ways in which existing forms of solidarity remain narrow, precluding other forms of response to injustice in the Zionist context, and rendering them inaudible.

In what follows, I first introduce the different scenes of speaking that have emerged since the 2010 PQBDS solidarity call, with a specific focus on the *Jadaliyya* debate and on the analytical gap between homonationalism and Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique. In the second section, I provide a different reading of that gap by examining the time and context in which the debate occurred. Here, I suggest that engaging with questions of time and context, or temporality, might provide an insight into how the demands of Palestinians themselves get buried within international debates on the question of Palestine, and explore how the prisms of time and context may also point to alternative responses to a call for justice. In the third section, I analyze the ways in which the temporality of critique shaped responses to injustice within the *Jadaliyya* debate. Finally, in the last section, I posit a listening strategy that hears Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique differently by situating it within its specific Zionist settler-colonial context and the broader struggle for Palestinian liberation. Here, I foreground the analytical frameworks and liberation strategies developed within the Palestinian anticolonial-queer movement's own discourse.

Pinkwashing/Anti-Pinkwashing: An Impasse

At the Homonationalism and Pinkwashing Conference held at the City University of New York in 2013, alQaws founder Haneen Maikey addressed the question of transnational solidarity activism and scholarship in the wake of the 2010 PQBDS call. "Are we in solidarity with Palestine, or are we in solidarity with the queers in Palestine?" Maikey asked the audience.¹⁹ The conference was the second

large-scale event organized by gay rights activist, author, and academic Sarah Schulman following the well-attended Palestinian Queer Activists Talk Politics tour of the United States in 2011. The period between the two events witnessed the rising momentum of anti-pinkwashing activism in North America, while at the same time it created a particular scene of speaking from which (anti-)pinkwashing could be assessed and disputed within North American academy and activist circles. Maikey's question alluded to the ways in which *anti-pinkwashing solidarity activists undertook their engagement with Palestinian queers without reference to the context of Palestine as the site of Israel's settler-colonial project*. Her question invited the audience to imagine ways to respond to injustices against Palestinians that (1) were not limited to Palestinian queers, and (2) did not reenact a relationship of imperial benevolence, or a missionary impulse, but rather featured Palestinian liberation as the central parameter of engagement. Maikey's provocative question remains one of the main challenges to have emerged from the last decade of anti-pinkwashing activism and scholarship.

A particular strand of anti-pinkwashing activism became the new touchstone of what Schulman has termed the Queer International.²⁰ The figure of the Queer International was a riposte to Joseph Massad's Gay International, who characteristically imposes its own standards of gay emancipation and sexual identity on the rest of the world.²¹ Schulman's *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International* starts from the unvoiced assumption that same-sex solidarity provides a platform for Palestinian queer struggle (and not the struggle for Palestinian liberation) to be articulated and imagined within the United States. In doing so, Schulman consolidates queerness as a politics of identity based on a same-sex solidarity stripped of power dynamics, and thus falls into the trap of tokenizing and romanticizing a particular version of "the queer Palestinian" as the Queer International's new object of affection. Rather than incorporate a broader vision of the geopolitical context, Schulman turns Palestinian liberation into a question about U.S.-Palestinian queer solidarity.²² Maikey's question interrogates the limits of Schulman's figure as it attempts to make Palestine more appealing to queer people in the Global North.

Puar and Mikdashi critique Schulman's position in their *Jadaliyya* essay. "In fact," they write, "we note that many of the same assumptions that animate discourses of pinkwashing are unwittingly and sometimes intentionally reproduced in pinkwashing [anti-pinkwashing] efforts."²³ They also assert that anti-pinkwashing activists fall into the trap of homonationalism: where pinkwashing seeks to recruit international queers to support the Israeli state by inviting them to its gay-friendly shores, some forms of anti-pinkwashing activism draw on similar models by producing a Palestinian queer figure with whom North American queers can identify without having to engage the fundamental questions of Zionist settler colonialism raised by Palestinian queer activists.²⁴

In response to critiques such as Puar and Mikdashi's, Jason Ritchie has pointed out that the queer call for BDS quickly transformed into a struggle between "good" and "bad" queers in the metropolis. "Debates over pinkwashing in Western gay metropolises," he writes, "have less to do with actual instances of pinkwashing than with struggles over the nature of queerness in the context of neoliberalism and the War on Terror."²⁵ Ritchie points out that the appropriation of pinkwashing/anti-pinkwashing debates in North America is (perhaps productively) divisive since it serves to distinguish between radical and liberal queer politics in the era of post-9/11 angst and rising Islamophobia within predominantly white queer communities. Contrary to

Puar and Mikdashi, who criticize anti-pinkwashing activists for not *understanding* homonationalism, Ritchie posits that the fault “lies not in the inability of queer activists to understand homonationalism, but in the conceptual limits of the theory,” which, he says, privileges the Western metropolis at the center of inquiry.²⁶ In what follows, I examine the *Jadaliyya* debate with a focus on the way that homonationalism—as a globally hegemonic analytical framework to understand pinkwashing—elides the question of Palestine and the demands of the BDS movement.

Puar and Mikdashi’s article, “Pinkwatching and Pinkwashing: Interpenetration and its Discontents,” exemplifies the reification of the Western metropolis at the center of anti-pinkwashing efforts. Even as it critiques the failures of anti-pinkwashing activism in the Global North, the discussion operates under similar geopolitical assumptions. Schulman’s Queer International and Puar’s homonationalism make particular demands on activists as to how they can/should respond to Israeli occupation and pinkwashing, altogether eliding Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques of the sexual politics of Zionist settler colonialism. Given that the publication of the *Jadaliyya* article was followed by an impasse in transnational solidarity organizing, one must ask first, Why was that the case? And second, What kinds of analytical challenges emerged afterward?

Importantly, Puar and Mikdashi criticize the state of anti-pinkwashing activism in North America for operating in accordance with, rather than in resistance to, pinkwashing’s liberal narratives of progress, its single-issue identity politics, and its homonationalist underpinnings. In their view, such narratives are foundational to contemporary neoliberalism and the War on Terror, as well as U.S. and Israeli settler colonialism. They urge U.S. activists to ground their work in a larger analysis of settler-colonial violence both inside Israel/Palestine and in North America/Turtle Island.²⁷

The Puar-Mikdashi article generated heated conversations within both transnational and Palestinian queer activist circles. Maikey and Schotten’s response resulted from a collective writing process in which Palestinian and transnational activists, myself included, tried to voice their frustrations with the authors’ standpoint. I was invited because I had been active in queer transnational solidarity organizing since 2010; had helped develop the “pinkwatching kit” for Pinkwatching Israel; and also took part in the planning of Queer Visions at the World Social Forum: Free Palestine. The last initiative was a queer Palestinian-led effort to foreground Palestinian queer activism by bringing together queer and trans^{*28} activists (the majority of them Palestinian, Arab, and of color) working on BDS at the World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2012. In their response to Puar and Mikdashi, Maikey and Schotten write:

We fully appreciate the importance of self-critique, especially for activist movements. However, we think Puar and Mikdashi lean rather too heavily on the conceptual framework of homonationalism in their analysis of pinkwatching [anti-pinkwashing], making it do more work than it can bear. This overreliance on homonationalism obscures specific, politically relevant features of pinkwatching activism that are particular to Palestine and Palestine solidarity work. Moreover, we believe the authors’ self-exemptions from activist struggle pushes their criticism dangerously close to a rehearsal of academic critique at the expense of contributing to movement building.²⁹

In addition to pointing to the analytical gap between homonationalism and Palestinian queer activism, Maikey and Schotten also allude to the timing of the *Jadaliyya* article. By publicly engaging in the practice of self-critique, Maikey and Schotten argue, Puar and Mikdashi heightened the vulnerability of an already vulnerable claim, namely the Palestinian (queer) call for BDS. In the same vein, the argument goes on, they ignored activist initiatives resisting the strand of anti-pinkwashing activism they criticized. Maikey and Schotten urge Puar and Mikdashi to understand anti-pinkwashing as part of a broader struggle against Zionist settler-colonialism rather than reduce Palestinian queer analyses of pinkwashing to a struggle against homonationalism, or “settler homonationalism.”³⁰ They write, “In Palestine, pinkwashing is part of the ongoing Nakba. Both Zionism and pinkwashing depend on a notion of the prior destruction and continued negation of Palestine and Palestinian belonging. . . . Zionism must be understood as a historically specific, racialized process through which different discourses of sexuality emerge that bolster rather than undermine Zionist ideology.”³¹

Maikey and Schotten also take issue with the way in which Puar and Mikdashi leveraged the Palestinian anticolonial-queer struggle to make a point about homonationalism. They draw attention to the dangers of erasing the specificities of and differences between U.S. and Zionist settler colonialisms in the crafting of comparative solidarities, something Palestinian feminist scholar Dana M. Olwan calls “assumptive solidarities.” Discussing the complexities of comparative work among indigenous communities in Turtle Island and Palestine, Olwan writes, “Assumptive solidarity . . . make our allies’ causes and forms of resistance appear less foreign, less threatening, and less cumbersome. Assumptive solidarity does not move us; it moves others to us. It does not transform our relationships with one another or with the lands on which we live, nor does it require our sustained, long-term, and wide-ranging commitments to work that is, at times, difficult, uneasy, and complicated.”³²

In a rejoinder to Maikey and Schotten, Puar and Mikdashi argue that their critique was aimed only at U.S. anti-pinkwashing efforts and that regional organizing in the Middle East required its own strategies. However, they fail either to recount what strategies had already emerged from Palestine and the Middle East, or to discuss how such strategies might inform and challenge modes of solidarity and analytical frameworks available to activists and scholars in North America. Even though homonationalism seems to have become a “global condition,” Puar and Mikdashi argue that Palestinian organizing strategies to respond to such a condition and widen their impact are regional.³³ They elaborate (emphasis is mine),

Homonationalism and pinkwashing are not parallel phenomen[a], rather *pinkwashing is one manifestation and practice that is made possible within and because of homonationalism*. . . . Like modernity, homonationalism can be resisted and re-signified, but not opted out of: *we are all conditioned by it and through it*. . . . So a more accurate read of our argument, *rather than accusing us of somehow negating the specificity of Palestine*, is that *we were mapping out the relations between pinkwashing and homonationalism*, or more precisely, *the global conditions of homonationalism that make a practice such as Israeli pinkwashing possible and legible in the first place*. In connecting Israeli pinkwashing to a broader global system of power networks, we were not minimizing Palestine, rather demonstrating the myriad of actors that converge to enable such a practice.³⁴

In an implicit response to this debate, Palestinian activist and critic Nayrouz Abu Hatoum calls attention to “the burden of queer Palestinians.”³⁵ The burden is manifest not only in the demand to respond to existing dominant discourses around pinkwashing or in being tokenized by the global anti-pinkwashing movement, but it results specifically from being expected to be responsive to “particular academic notions as well as processes.”³⁶ For Palestinian anticolonial-queer activists, such notions set the terms of engagement, and if they want to become legible to academic and activist audiences in the Global North, they must adhere to an agenda that requires them “to be politicized in accordance to the international political standards or discourses.”³⁷ I argue that in addition to the tokenizing tendency of the Queer International, more progressive intellectual trajectories such as Puar and Mikdashi’s also remain intransigent vis-à-vis other forms of engagement taking shape outside and in response to such trajectories.³⁸ The next section addresses conceptions of time and the context of critique to further explore the burden set forth by Abu Hatoum.

The Burial of a Scene of Speaking

Puar’s homonationalism has become the dominant critical lens applied when challenging the relationship between sexual politics and the state. It attends to particular sites of violence within the context of the bio- and necropolitics of modernity. More specifically, homonationalism addresses the management of life and death through racialized and sexualized regimes of power. However, to understand homonationalism as a “global condition” that we “are *all* conditioned by and through” prevents from becoming audible other scenes of speaking that also seek to address violence and injustice, albeit in different ways.³⁹

Following Abu Hatoum’s argument about the burdensomeness of analytical frameworks to queer Palestinians, I turn to Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of the *differend*, and to the temporality of critique, as other starting points from which to reflect on the *Jadaliyya* debate. I will show how particular analytics, including some of those deemed the most radical, create a situation in which Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique is always already mediated by hegemonic critical frameworks. Such analytics do not only enact a burden on queer Palestinians, but they significantly limit the ways in which to engage Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques. Using Lyotard’s concept, it becomes clear that Palestinian anticolonial-queer conceptual and political interventions remain inaudible.

In his analysis of encounters between differently positioned groups and discourses, for example that of the Algerian struggle for independence and liberation from French colonial rule, Lyotard looks at the ways in which victims of injustice get caught up in what he calls the *differend*—a situation in which the victim cannot give an account of their victimization, not because they do not have the capacity to speak, but because their narrative cannot operate within the framework authorized by the law and its hegemonic discourse, such that the wrong done to a victim of injustice is not presentable as a wrong. “A case of a *differend* between two parties takes place when the ‘regulation’ of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom,” Lyotard writes.⁴⁰ As he goes on to add, it is the case “where a plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that

reason a victim”⁴¹ since there is generally no “universal rule of judgment between heterogeneous genres.”⁴² As regards the *Jadaliyya* debate, Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique is not signified in the idiom of Puar and Mikdashi.

In her brief discussion of the concept, Spivak quotes Lyotard as saying that the *differend* is evident when human beings are summoned by language to recognize that “what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase; and that *they must be allowed* [my italics] to institute idioms that do not yet exist.”⁴³ Spivak is interested in the question of “who” institutes new idioms and how this pertains to the question of what is allowed to become recognizable. She points to the limits of Lyotard’s conception of the *differend* when it is restricted to a subject becoming recognizable within the legal sphere. In other words, what are the structures of representation that accompany the quest for new idioms? I would add that even if the victim of injustice adopts the language of judgment, this does not necessarily guarantee her becoming audible/intelligible to that legal system, but rather consolidates the idiom in which that system gained its legitimacy. This renders other forms of struggle, especially those exposing injustice produced through law, either illegible or illegitimate.

Saba Mahmood turns to a different setting where the meaning of what constitutes injustice and its alleviation are at stake: the 2005 Danish cartoon controversy, in which a popular Danish newspaper published editorial cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammed in ways that elicited pain and outrage among some Muslim communities around the globe. Mahmood argues that instead of understanding what caused injury within these communities, the debate immediately turned to conventional legal paradigms—in particular, blasphemy and free speech laws. She posits that the distinction between religion and secularism within the modern legal paradigm is not as unbridgeable as it appears to be: she points to the ways in which two parties to a dispute operating from seemingly distinct starting points might ultimately not be that disparate in how they position themselves. This is important for my argument as it exemplifies how there might exist certain, perhaps unwitting, (discursive) reproductions of the structures of violence we seek to critique. In the case of the dispute between Puar and Mikdashi and anti-pinkwashing activists in North America, their reliance on a particular radical or liberal idiom might not be so disparate at all. At the same time, Mahmood also highlights how *certain* forms of Muslim pain and outrage over the cartoons remained illegible within the responses that circulated during and after the controversy. I am especially interested in Mahmood’s contribution as she attempts to draw attention to those sites of struggle that exceed or undermine hegemonic critical and analytical frameworks.

On the question of how to respond to injury, Mahmood problematizes liberal discourses of legal redress as self-evident sites for resolving injustice. She asks what “ethical and political questions are elided in the immediate resort to the law to resolve the dispute [on both sides of the controversy]?”⁴⁴ She understands modern law as enabling some injuries to become intelligible while keeping others invisible. She asks, “What are the conditions of intelligibility in a world where identity politics reign and the juridical language of rights dominates?”⁴⁵ Resorting to modern law or other hegemonic modalities of redress leads to an impoverished understanding of issues and restricts our imaginaries to juridical rights and state sanction.⁴⁶ The process of grasping what is left out “requires more than simply critique” and demands that we pay attention to the differing ethical and affective ways in which scenes of speaking become intelligible.⁴⁷

Mahmood's essay is insightful because it explores "the thick texture and traditions of ethical and intersubjective norms that provide the substrate for legal arguments (enshrined in the language of public order)." ⁴⁸ Central to the failure of the law to attend to injury is a problem of "the differential of power characteristic of minority-majority relations within the context of nation-states." ⁴⁹ Mahmood urges us to understand the ways in which idiom determines the operationalization of the question of injustice. She shows that there are different and sometimes overlapping scenes of speaking at work. More importantly, she attempts to provide a different starting point for reflecting on the problem of listening, urging us to see it as not only operating on the level of idiom, but through the very affective and relational attachments we have to hegemonic frameworks or particular modalities and concepts of critique. Mahmood implicitly shows the limits of Lyotard's insistence on idiom. By attending to injury as not only a linguistic but also as an affective and ethical structure, she draws attention to other elements that need to be taken into account in addressing the question of injustice and of listening. Lyotard's insistence on a certain language becoming audible within the rule of judgment does not account for what happens when the claim of the victim of injustice remains unintelligible to that system in spite of her use of that very language. For instance, when Palestinian BDS activists deploy the language of international law and human rights but that system remains unaccountable to their appeals, that lack of accountability is as much a matter of epistemology as it is one of colonial and imperial power.

The concerns raised by Mahmood are similar to those raised by Puar and Mikdashi. All three authors address the ways in which certain ideals and values, including those affirmed by the legal sphere, secure the ascendancy of the white modern subject to the detriment of entire populations. Mahmood's analysis, however, goes beyond a critique of single-issue identity politics and nationalist, settler-colonial, and imperialist structures of power. She seeks to destabilize the very ways in which critique operates by drawing attention to the problem of the critique's idiom and context. In her view, assumptions of time and context determine how injustice becomes (un)intelligible. These assumptions elide other scenes of speaking. Mahmood's attention to the temporality of critique allows a different entry point to the *Jadaliyya* debate that shows how despite Puar and Mikdashi's relevant interventions, the burial of another scene of speaking—Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique—continues to operate.

Anticolonial-Queer Critique and the Limits of Homonationalism

Politics is asymmetrical, it is provisional, you have broken the theory,
and that's the burden you carry when you become political.
—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

The *Jadaliyya* debate reveals how powerful a framework homonationalism is in its restriction of Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique to specific parameters (or idioms) of struggle. The Puar-Mikdashi article itself becomes the dominant framework that imagines homonationalism as the main terrain of struggle for queer Palestinians. In this framing, Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique only becomes audible as a critique of homonationalism. It disregards the multiple facets

of Palestinian anticolonial-queer activism that, in addition to anti-pinkwashing, insist on building new registers for thinking about gender and sexual diversity inside Palestinian society; dismantling patriarchal narratives of Palestinian liberation; and rejecting the racial-sexual politics of a settler-colonial regime of subjugation and control.⁵⁰ Rendering Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique simply regional or specific also risks precluding critiques coming from the so-called region as central conceptual interventions. Such interventions might be able to alter our understanding of homonationalism and/or the role of Zionist racial-sexual politics within global relations of power.

Viewing the *Jadaliyya* debate through the lens of temporality (that is, the time and context of the critique) provides insight into the ways in which Puar and Mikdashi's intervention precipitated a crisis in anti-pinkwashing circles. The transnational solidarity movement came to a standstill after the *Jadaliyya* debate critiqued the failure of North American anti-pinkwashing activists to engage in a more meaningful interrogation of settler colonialism and homonationalism, both at home (in North America) and abroad. This not only underscores the precariousness of activist commitments, but it also raises the question of "who" is responding to the PQBDS call for justice, and what kind of global power relations do such commitments (perhaps unwittingly) (re)enact?

By addressing the role of time and context in the *Jadaliyya* debate, I hope to point to the gaps in understanding between North American anti-pinkwashing efforts (radical and liberal) and Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique that led to the impasse described above. At the same time, I argue that conceptualizing these divergences as different scenes of speaking opens up other avenues for understanding Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique, with the hope that it might be scripted differently. The politics of pinkwashing and anti-pinkwashing can be (re-)negotiated when Palestinian anticolonial-queer politics are firmly situated within a Zionist settler-colonial context as well as the movement for Palestinian liberation and BDS. Starting with the demands of the BDS movement and the multifaceted forms of Palestinian resistance provides other frameworks for responding to injustice. I argue that we need to turn to different scenes of speaking that operate alongside Puar and Mikdashi's. Considering those other scenes illuminates the power dynamics and different contexts of critique at work. In doing this, I also address the challenge posed by Maikey and Schotten to think beyond the lens of homonationalism in order to foreground the violence of—and the resistance to—the Zionist settler-colonial state as the starting point from which to articulate a response to the PQBDS call. Not that Puar and Mikdashi deny that Palestine is a settler-colonial context or argue against BDS. Rather, these become mere backdrops to the articulation of the global valence of homonationalism. Even as the framework of homonationalism continues to operate on the audibility of Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique, attuning to other scenes of speaking opens a way out of the dispute and the impasse it created.

Palestinian anticolonial-queer activism draws on a decade of experiences with queer organizing in Palestine based on a two-pronged approach: considering the role of Zionist racial-sexual politics in Palestine and formulating an anticolonial-queer discourse under such violent conditions.⁵¹ Maikey and Schotten negotiate a different lens to engage in the debate, which remains illegible within the framework of homonationalism posited by Puar and Mikdashi. The latter state, "rather than accusing us of somehow negating the specificity of Palestine . . . we were mapping out the

relations between pinkwashing and homonationalism.”⁵² (I would argue that their decision to do so and not to emphasize resistance tactics formulated in Palestine itself diminishes Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques of Zionist racial-sexual politics.) Maikey and Schotten, on the other hand, foreground Palestine as the central context for anti-pinkwashing critiques to emerge. They worry about the reduction of activist struggles for Palestine’s liberation to academic debate or critique. They highlight the dangers of separating intellectual modes of critique from activist work on the ground and push for more accountability between these different fields of inquiry. Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique is a central conceptual intervention within the larger BDS movement, they argue. Rather than simply adding anti-pinkwashing to the larger BDS discourse, anticolonial-queer insights into Zionist settler colonialism’s racial-sexual politics represent a novel stand, one that tackles those politics head on.⁵³

The problem with the Puar and Mikdashi interventions lies in the authors’ reluctance to tackle other forms of engagement while persisting in their critique of the racial-sexual politics of modernity as one that no one can “opt out of.”⁵⁴ Rather than being responsive to different modes of engagement that operate both within Zionist settler-colonial modernity—and also in struggle with it—homonationalism becomes a globally hegemonic terrain of engagement that no one can “opt out of.” In the words of Schotten and Maikey, Puar and Mikdashi’s approach insulates them from the “politically relevant features of pinkwashing activism that are particular to Palestine and Palestine solidarity work.”⁵⁵

If everything is already steeped in homonationalism and modernity, does Puar and Mikdashi’s critique then render unintelligible the forms of political struggle emerging within the sites of violence their critique addresses? Does this mean that it becomes necessary to give up on, or extricate oneself from those sites for the sake of being theoretically salient or critically consistent? How does one reconcile critique and the political commitments within which the critique is made without reducing “one to the other”?⁵⁶ These questions warrant further exploration if we want radical theoretical critique to bear on activist practice and vice versa.

Where Puar and Mikdashi use homonationalism to critique the structural underpinnings of modernity, Mahmood offers a way to think beyond modernity’s dominant idioms. Her focus on the affective attachments to modern law and the practice of secular critique as determinants of the question of injustice provide a way to understand contemporary pinkwashing and anti-pinkwashing discourses differently. From this perspective, the problem with anti-pinkwashing narratives such as Schulman’s lies in their affective attachments to the idea of a queer solidarity that reproduces homonationalism’s scripts and its identity politics. Attachments to critiques of homonationalism operate in a similar manner, failing to recognize the limits that the concept itself imposes on the question of injustice in Palestine. Such attachments—we might call them liberal and radical within secular modernity’s script—usurp indigenous sites of struggle, and therefore remain unresponsive to the Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques from within Palestine. In this framing, Palestinian anticolonial-queer scenes of speaking stand out from these dominant attachments while also exemplifying their influence. Such scenes do not render a critique of homonationalism obsolete: they undermine its hegemonic sway and question how it bears upon the present in different ways.

Toward Other Scenes of Speaking

A few months after the *Jadaliyya* debate, Palestinian and transnational queer and trans* solidarity activists came together in Porto Alegre, Brazil, with an initiative titled “Queer Visions at the World Social Forum: Free Palestine.” The debate inspired the Porto Alegre participants to develop a deepened understanding of why Puar and Mikdashi’s critique generated such frustration among people working in the movement, especially for Palestinian queer activists, and to examine how Palestinian anticolonial-queer critique operates beyond simply articulating pinkwashing as a colonial project. As one of the co-organizers of the event, I remember a shift in discourse during the preparatory phase of Queer Visions from a pinkwashing framework to one featuring the framework of “Zionist sexual politics.” The shift enabled activists to clarify the racial-sexual politics of Zionist settler colonialism as the broader terrain for pinkwashing to emerge in the first place. Primary concerns were to promote “an analysis of the use of sexual politics in Israeli settler-colonial discourse,” to “explore the linkages between queer liberation and the struggle for Palestinian liberation” and the specificities of the struggles faced by queer BDS activists in their respective contexts, and to focus on how queer BDS activism “can productively address queer communities without falling into the trap of singling out queer communities, and without losing sight of goals” in line with core BDS demands (listed in the introduction at the beginning of this article).⁵⁷

At the World Social Forum General Assembly, Queer Visions positioned racial-sexual politics as central to understanding the Zionist context and to formulating tactics of resistance. It urged Palestine justice activists to understand the insidious racial-sexual politics of the settler state. It called on the larger BDS movement to integrate queer perspectives and analyses into their anticolonial work, and emphasized that Palestinian anticolonial-queer activism was not limited to anti-pinkwashing.⁵⁸ Queer Visions developed several BDS tactics, including a template for boycotting gay tourism to Israel, and it sought to consolidate and reflect on transnational queer BDS efforts. There was, unfortunately, very little follow-up after the WSF. Only in 2015 were some of the networks resuscitated to create a Boycott Gay Tourism to Israel campaign in collaboration with the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI).⁵⁹

Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques remain inaudible within the normative framework of secular modernity operative in both radical and liberal responses to PQBDS’s call for boycott. The *Jadaliyya* debate reveals how secular modernity acts as “an ineluctable aspect of our present condition, as both political imagination and epistemological limit.”⁶⁰ At the same time, foregrounding Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques might offer other forms of political imagination and of listening that address injustice within the framework of the settler state and in line with the demands of the BDS movement and Palestinian liberation. Rather than escaping the modern secular condition, this article has argued for valuing Palestinian anticolonial-queer practices that transcend dominant paradigms, pointing to different frameworks and contexts that can operate simultaneously alongside, and in refusal of, the colonized condition. Even if Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques are relegated to a secondary or subsidiary status within the parameters articulated by Puar and Mikdashi, it does not mean that they are not taking shape.

The superimposition of intellectual critique onto the politics of anticolonial-queer activism has had damaging effects on an already vulnerable movement. Talal Asad warns, “Every critical discourse has institutional conditions that define what it is, who it recognizes, what it aims at, what it is destroying and why”—meaning that nothing is neutral in critique.⁶¹ He provocatively argues that “conquest might be critique’s primary function.”⁶² Within the context of the *Jadaliyya* debate, how critique might determine what can be heard, seen, or felt reveals the difficulties of negotiating the relationship between academic writing and Palestinian resistance.

While the *Jadaliyya* debate highlights how academic critique runs the risk of erasing a context of struggle, it also reveals the ways in which Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques refuse to be relegated to a position of unintelligibility. Although Palestinian anticolonial-queer critiques always risk remaining unintelligible within existing critical frameworks, they simultaneously lay bare the question of how to respond to injustice and dictate the resort to terms of engagement that take into consideration the geopolitical context of Zionist settler colonialism. Israel’s settler-colonial occupation of Palestine is not simply a site of violent dispossession for Palestinians that reduces them to the status of immobilized victims in need of saving; it is also a spatiotemporal plane for anticolonial-queer imaginaries. These imaginaries operate in the present and they undermine both the legitimating processes and coercive mechanisms of Zionist settler colonialism and its racial-sexual politics. They not only draw attention to injustice committed against Palestinians but also offer a different lens through which to understand injustice, to listen to a call for justice, and to formulate a response. Such imaginaries demand attentiveness to the settler-colonial context of Israel/Palestine and to the ways in which local activist groups formulate tactics of resistance. Taking these imaginaries as a starting point might offer different insights into the question of injustice and the matters of its alleviation outside existing parameters of struggle.

By rejecting the existing parameters of critique and placing Palestinian liberation front and center in the path of engagement, Palestinian anticolonial-queer activism opens up other avenues for responding to a Palestinian call for justice that are predicated on creating more socially just futures beyond the settler state that persists under occupation. In the *Jadaliyya* debate, Maikey and Schotten refuse existing hegemonic parameters of struggle as all-encompassing. They draw attention to the need to think strategically about the relationship between activism and critique, and about the different but also overlapping contexts and frameworks in which the two operate. For its part, the politics of Palestinian anticolonial-queer activism creates a decolonial-queer imaginary beyond the racial-sexual parameters of the settler state, envisioning a future beyond the settler state and beyond conventional understandings of Palestinian national liberation. In fleeting moments, these modes of engagement experience a *freedom that is not yet come, that is simultaneously denied and imagined, as well as felt, lived, and embodied*.

About the Author

Mikki Stelder obtained her PhD from the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis in early 2018, with a dissertation titled “Queering the Occupation: From Zionist Sexual Politics to Palestinian Decolonial-Queer Imaginaries.” Her most recent publication, “From the Closet into the Knesset: Zionist Sexual Politics and the Formation of Settler Subjectivity,” appeared in *Settler Colonial Studies* in 2017.

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