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RARELY INTERSECTIONAL: EXPERIENCES OF QUEER PALESTINIANS IN ISRAEL

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Introduction

This paper explores how identity expression of queer Palestinian citizens and residents of Israel locates them alternately within the Palestinian and queer communities within Israel, and addresses the questions of how and to what degree queer Palestinians do or do not see their own experiences intersectionally. In this ethnographic study, we examine the intersectional potentials of identity from the perspective of queer Palestinian citizens and residents of Israel, basing our writing and conclusions on their lived experiences.

Prior research projects on queer minority communities in Israel revealed a normative conception of the appropriate "queer Israeli" which parallels general conceptions of Israeliness; that is, Jewish, Ashkenazi, and middle-class (Gross 2014, p. 94, 122). Therefore, it is these characteristics – religious expression, ethnicity, and class – that underlie acceptance within the mainstream queer Israeli community. However, individuals inhabiting multiple minority identities, such as gay male Palestinians (Ritchie 2011) and lesbian Russian immigrants (Kuntsman 2003), are crafting new spaces that challenge the limits of both their ethnic communities and the Israeli sphere. This speaks to an ongoing academic debate about the regional applicability of "LGBT rights" discourse, which is derived from human-rights vocabulary, and hence presents queerness as a universalist characteristic. However, our findings show that shared queerness does not bridge the gap of racial segregation between Palestinians and Jews in Israel.

We came to our study intending to approach these multiple minority identities through an

intersectional lens. To this end, we compared queer Palestinians' understanding of their multiple socially marginalized identities to the original model of intersectionality as articulated by Black Feminism. We found that this model of intersectionality, by and large, does not apply to queer Palestinians in Israel. While our respondents did discuss their multiple identities with us, these identities were discussed in segmented ways, as this paper will show. Our respondents discussed being queer exclusively within their Palestinian communities, and being Palestinian in terms of interactions with Jewish Israeli society. Within the Israeli queer community, they experienced exclusion solely based on their Palestinianness. Due to these mutual exclusions, queer Palestinians do not generally have the opportunity to contextualize themselves as both of these identities at once, outside of spaces which they create themselves.

Finally, this study also makes an implicit contribution to the policy world. A deeper understanding of the experiences of queer Palestinians in Israel, and the degree to which the promotion of "LGBT rights" in Israel does not directly benefit them, holds valuable lessons for U.S. programs involving queer communities in the Arab world. As the promotion of human rights and the protection of sexual minorities are missions of U.S. foreign policy, better understanding of the groups these missions seek to support will improve the ability of those efforts to be successful.

Context of the Study

Popular representation of queer Palestinians in Israel has tended to atomize their individual identities, and consequently show them as queers oppressed either by Arab culture or by Palestinian culture specifically, and hence in need of a cultural intervention by the Israeli state. The various stages of this problem of representation are discussed following.

Queers and the Middle East

Queer studies remain an understudied aspect of gender studies as applied in the Middle Eastern context. Since its inception, queer theory has been predominantly Eurocentric (Roscoe & Murray 1997, pp. 4-6), whereas Western feminist scholarship on the Middle East has tended to focus on an imagined universalism of women's experiences (Mohanty 1988, p. 74-5), rather than the implications of feminist theory for other gender and sexual minorities. The contemporary research which does work with LGBT populations in the Middle East and the Arab world focuses almost exclusively on their persecution. Probably the most widely-used general-audience book on the subject, *Unspeakable Love* by Whitaker (2006), begins by explaining that the subject of gay relations in the Middle East is so taboo, no Arab could write the book, and so that duty fell to Whitaker as a foreign journalist (Introduction to 2011 edition). This focus on persecution directly leads to a tendency to focus on the LGBT subjects' gender and sexual non-conformity as their singular defining characteristic.

Moreover, discussion of "gay rights" in the international sphere commonly uses a universalist conception of both gayness and human rights (Gross 2013). Against this conception,

in which Western ideals of liberal humanism are both exported and naturalized, the Arab countries of the Middle East are usually compared and deemed inferior. Paradoxically, many current laws in Arab countries against certain types of same-sex sexual relations are directly derived from a previous exportation of Western values to the Middle East, namely British colonial laws that criminalized previously unregulated sexual behavior (Han & O'Mahoney 2014).

Palestinians in Israel

The historical experience of Palestinians within the borders of modern Israel is central to their current positionality. Following the massive demographic changes that took place during the 1948 war, there were 150,000 Palestinians remaining in Israel (Ghanem 2001, p. 1). These individuals were given Israeli citizenship, yet treated as enemies of the state who lived under a military government from 1948 until 1966 (Robinson 2013). During this time, the state worked systematically to prevent this population from strengthening its affinity with the Palestinian community. One component of this strategy was linguistic, and in all official material Palestinian citizens of Israel were denied their own national affiliation and referred to as "Arab Israelis", "the minorities", or "the non-Jewish population" (Lustick 1980, p. 133). The military government similarly distanced this minority from Palestinian history and culture through their regulation of school curriculum, printed materials, and political expression – methods of control which continued following the end of the military government, and are still present in Israeli society today (Smith 2007). The systematic alienation of Palestinian citizens from Jewish citizens of Israel has created a social reality that emphasizes difference between the two groups. This system, in which Palestinian citizens are educated separately and do not serve in the Israeli

Defense Force, a seminal component of Israeliness, marks Palestinian citizens as separate from their Israeli counterparts (Cohen 1997; Rimalt 2003; Walzer 2013, ch. 4).

Exacerbating this alienation, the Palestinian citizens of Israel have traditionally been distinguished as apart from their Palestinian counterparts in the West Bank, Gaza, and the Palestinian diaspora. Given the central role exile and opposition to the Israeli state play in the current Palestinian context, their position within Israeli borders and with Israeli citizenship separates this group from the experiences of most Palestinians. Combined, their status as neither typical Israelis nor typical Palestinians problematizes a singular identity.

Gay Arab Palestinians in Israel: A Suffering Archetype

Thus, both "gay Arabs" and "Palestinians in Israel" are frequently reduced to respective archetypes. As explored by Ritchie (2011), and discussed further following, when gay Palestinians have been the subject of media attention, the irreconcilable essentialism of being a "gay Arab" (defined by persecution) and being Palestinian (defined in terms of a relationship with the Israeli state) have been resolved by molding the gay Palestinian Arab into an image of the "suffering Palestinian", who is persecuted by Palestinian society but warmly received in Israel.

This conception of the "suffering Palestinian" has taken on a life of its own within popular discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The genesis of this image was Yossi Klein Halevi's article, "Tel Aviv Dispatch: Refugee Status,"[1] in where Halevi makes sweeping claims about the irreconcilability of homosexuality within Palestinian society, assuming an inherent and inescapable nature of homophobia among Palestinians. In this conception, LGBT Palestinians

1 Halevi, Y. K. (2002, August 19). "Tel Aviv Dispatch: Refugee Status," *The New Republic*, reproduced at http://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/world/palestine/psnews008.htm.

require the protection of the liberal Israeli state, which they receive by fleeing the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority and living within Israeli borders (usually Tel Aviv). This trope has continued in various popular publications, including but not limited to *The Economist, San Francisco Chronicle, The Jewish Daily Forward, Yale Herald*, and *Reuters News*.[2]

Scholars such as Jasbir Puar (2011) have criticized this rhetoric as part of a larger Israeli campaign of "pinkwashing" the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, meaning that Israel is trying to distract the world from its abuses of the Palestinian people by lauding its gay rights as a symbol of liberal and democratic achievement (pp. 133-142). While the debate over the political nature of the status of gay rights in Israel is beyond the scope of our study, situating the topic within this international discourse is both necessary and illustrative for seeing how even sympathetic academic researchers have framed the status of queer Palestinian Israelis primarily through the lens of nationalism.

By starting with an intersectional framework, we attempted in this study to move beyond a nationalist focus or a narrative exclusively of oppression, and to let our respondents situate their identities themselves. While stories about social and government discrimination did arise in our research, they feature in this paper only as part of relating to the respondents' queer identity and experience.

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2 *Economist* (2007, June 9). "Not So Glad to Be Gay," http://www.economist.com/node/9304285; Kalman, M. (2007, February 5). "West Bank Gays More at Home in Israel: They Fear New Wall Will Trap Them Where Their Lifestyle is Taboo," *San Francisco Chronicle*, http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/West-Bank-gays-more-at-home-in-Israel-West-Bank-2619436.php; Peratis, K. (2006, February 24). "For Gay Palestinians, Tel Aviv is Mecca," *The Jewish Daily Forward*, http://www.forward.com/articles/1125/; Bernstein, D. J. (2002, September 13). "Gay Palestinians Suffer under Arafat," *Yale Herald*, reproduced at http://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/world/israel/isnews004.htm; Williams, D. (2003, September 17). "Palestinian Gay Runaways Survive in Israeli Streets," *Reuters News*.

Research Question

How do queer Palestinian citizens and residents of Israel use identity expression to locate themselves within both the Palestinian and the queer communities, and what does the potential to stress different components of one's identity allow for people who inhabit multiple "other" identities in the Palestinian Israeli context?

Terminology and Scope of Respondents

In defining our respondents as "queer Palestinian citizens and residents of Israel," we are referring to individuals who self-identify as part of the LGBT or gender and sexual minority spectrum, and who self-identify by family or ethnic background as Palestinian or Arab, while maintaining Israeli citizenship or residence. We should note that in the Israeli context, "queer" is often used with connotations having more connection to both left-wing activism and gender identity (rather than sexuality) than the Israeli use of "LGBT," which is seen as more politically neutral and concerned only with sexual identity.[3] Nonetheless, in this paper we are using "queer" in the popular American sense as an umbrella term, as a way of being as expansive as possible with respect to our potential respondents. We do use the terms "LGBT" and "gay" occasionally when paraphrasing respondents.

However, we are deliberately identifying our respondents as "Palestinians" rather than "Arabs" precisely because Palestinianness is often seen as a threatening "other" national identity in an Israeli national context, whereas "Arab" can be a more generic, neutral, and less threatening term. As previously discussed, the term "Arab Israelis" has also been a means of

3 Personal interview, Atalia Israeli-Nevo, February 7 2016. Personal interview, Dr. Amlia Ziv, February 16 2016.

Israeli state alienation and erasure of Palestinians. Hence, we would rather be as direct as possible in this regard, and "Palestinian" can be specific in a way that "LGBT" or "queer" do not need to be for our purposes. When the term "Arab" is used in this paper, it is within quotes or periphrasis of respondents who referred to themselves or others as "Arab," and should not be taken as a sign of authorial intent.

We also interviewed two Druze respondents. The Druze operate in a unique ethno-national space in Israel, as they are considered an Arab minority by the Israeli state, sharing schools with the larger Arabic-speaking minority. However, their social experience differs in that Druze men hold the same requirements of military services as their Jewish compatriots. Whether or not Druze individuals identify themselves as Palestinian varies from person to person. In conversation with Palestinian Muslims and Christians about whether Druze should be considered Palestinians, all of them insisted that Druze are indeed Palestinian, and explained any non-identification as Palestinian by Druze as the result of governmental conditioning. Therefore, as Arabic-speaking queer minorities of ambiguous Palestinianness, we felt that it was worth including and analyzing their responses.

The core boundary condition with which we were concerned was to limit ourselves to studying individuals whom we thought would have personal experiences of intersectionality between their sexual or gender identity, and their ethnic, religious, or national identity. Our approach presumed that queer Palestinians in Israel, as simultaneously a sexual and ethno-national minority group, were best considered through an intersectional lens, as explained more fully in the following theoretical section.

Literature Review

The major theoretical approach we initially used to locate our project was intersectionality. Following this, we discuss academic works on gender and identity, as well as works dealing directly with queerness and identity in the Arab world.

Contextualizing Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the concept that multiple minority identities are inextricably linked, cannot be separated or treated as a simple additive process between the multiple identities, and create unique forms of discrimination for the group in question. It has also come to be used as a theoretical framework for discussing minority identities so as not to sideline one in favor of another, which was our reason for beginning this project from an intersectional perspective.

Intersectionality was first elaborated as an analytic concept through the lens of Black Feminism. In her seminal *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (1991) explains intersectionality among Black women as oppression structured through interdependent economic, political, and ideological dimensions, and their potential for ideological resistance as stymied by structural exclusion from the feminist and Black Power movements and from mainstream academia, lacking the identity characteristics necessary for full group membership: whiteness, maleness, or both (pp. 9-12).

Taking a legalistic approach, Crenshaw (1989) looked at U.S. court cases deciding that Black women were not a unique class specifically protected against discrimination, while Black men and White women were the presumed normative plaintiffs for anti-discrimination lawsuits

on the basis of race or sex, respectively. She concluded that this blind spot was a reason to rethink feminist theory that presumed a White woman as the normative, representational woman.

Building on these theoretical understandings, intersectionality is explicitly posited as a multidisciplinary tool by Dill and Zambrana (2009), one that involves a relational analysis of issues such as race, class, and gender with respect to topics of study, rather than considering each factor in isolation, and thus more closely approximating the lived experience of real people who must deal with all of these factors simultaneously (pp. 2-5).

In the specifically queer context, Ahmed (2006) characterizes intersectionality as setting institutional lines across which one may or may not pass with varying degrees of difficulty (pp. 136-7). This follows the notion that normative heterosexuality pulls in whiteness as a form of normative orientation, that "[t]he prohibition of miscegenation and homosexuality belong, as it were, in the same register." (p. 127). Therefore, we saw these lines as a potential means of understanding what we thought would be the intersectionality of the queer Palestinian experience in Israel.

Gender and Identity

The foundational work for modern theory on gender and identity is *History of Sexuality*, in which Foucault (1979) proposes that homosexuality did not exist as a social identity in the West before the social transformations of capitalism, and that identity prior to the systematic categorization of the population brought about by the Industrial Age was not codified by a preference for sexual acts with a partner of a specific gender. Following Foucault, Butler maintains that society's understanding of gender is framed by a compulsory heterosexuality that impels a dualistic classification of oppositional groups, and the collapsing of both behaviors and

attributes into these two groups, which are then labeled as either both “male” and “masculine” or “female” and “feminine” (Butler 1990, p. 23).

Furthermore, although modern LGBT (for Butler, specifically lesbian) terminology such as “butch” and “femme” may suggest a queer internalization of this heterosexualization of desire, the mere fact that both “masculine” and “feminine” identities can be juxtaposed onto any biological body discredits them as in any way natural categories (Butler 1990, pp. 156-7). Against these unformed and malleable categories, Butler sees performativity as a way of understanding what gender is; that gender is felt by re-inscribing a series of bodily acts as a substitute for internalizing gender categories, which Butler maintains can never fully happen (p. 179). Hence, “gender expression” is a misnomer, because the notion of outward expression presupposes a true internal identity that was never there (p. 180).

Ahmed (2006) uses phenomenology to follow the use of “butch” and “femme” terminology to a parallel conclusion: that these represent dividing lines and points of orientation in the world, not necessarily as reinterpretations of masculinity and femininity, but as part of what serves to situate people in both space and the landscape of desire (pp. 98-101); inhabiting a homosexual or heterosexual body is perceived as a different sort of physical existence in the world (pp. 101-3).

Foucault, Butler, and Ahmed are used here in order to help us situate our respondents’ answers, and reflect the theoretical dialogue on the construction and performance of identity. They also anticipate the specific debate about the universality of queerness, and whether queerness as a socially constructed or performed identity should be taken as a unifying factor across other dividing lines.

Queer Palestinians and Identity in Israel

There is an ongoing debate as to how much of the preceding theory on intersectionality and gender, largely taken from Western academia, is applicable in non-Western contexts. Mahmood (2011) opens her study of female Islamic piety by building on Butler to critique the notion of liberal humanism as universally exportable (ch. 1). Mahmood concludes that agency may take multiple forms, but should not involve transforming her subjects into "subaltern feminists" as part of a Western feminist agenda of advancing humanism (pp. 153-4), as this would constitute a disservice to their actual agency, which is not necessarily framed around resistance. Mohanty (1988) and Abu-Lughod (2002) previously voiced similar objections to Western feminist projects. In accordance with these concerns, our respondents should not be construed as subaltern LGBT activists for not explicitly subscribing to a Western human-rights agenda.

Even more provocatively (and controversially), Massad (2002) has argued that the entire promulgation of "gay rights" rhetoric as a universalist humanist project is an invention of Western NGOs, that any special attention these NGOs may pay to the Arab or Islamic world by way of concern for gay rights or human rights is a form of sexual Orientalism, and that there are no "naturally" occurring homosexuals in the Arab world. Rather, he insists that homosexuality as a social identity, as identified by Foucault (1979), is a specifically Western invention, and Arabs who positively self-identify as "gay" are largely upper-class and Western-educated, and are importing Western social concepts into an Arab context in which they do not fit.

We have attempted to address these concerns by letting our respondents speak for themselves in our work. Because the respondents were free to classify themselves as "gay,"

"lesbian," "queer," or any other terminology they desired, it does not matter to us if this terminology came from a Western point of origin, since people outside of the Western world live with Western influences and are free to use them, discard them, or appropriate them as they would like. As Gross (2013) points out in response to Massad, globalization is a process that occurs both outside of and within the gay sphere, and the internationalization of gay identity can also be seen as a response to the pressures of globalization (pp. 113-4).

Ritchie and Queer Palestinians. The most significant previous study of queer Palestinians is Jason Ritchie's dissertation "Queer Checkpoints – Sexuality, Survival and the Paradoxes of Sovereignty in Israel-Palestine" (2011). Ritchie documents how as LGBT rights have come be to seen as a sign of modernity and liberalism, the Israeli state has integrated gays into its "nationalistic project," which led to the incorporation of the gay citizen as part of accepted member of the nation (pp. 36-7). He determines that the image of the "suffering Palestinian," requiring the protection of the liberal Israeli state, is a mechanism through which Israeli society can reconcile their liberal values with the practice of "state racism" against its Palestinian citizens (pp. 36, 41). Israeli state usage of the "suffering Palestinian" both accepts queers into the citizenry, and simultaneously depicts Palestinians as threats, by making the queer Palestinian into a victim of their Palestinianness.

As an in-depth project on the queer Palestinian community in Israel, Ritchie's work provided a valuable starting point for our project. However, Ritchie focused on how the narrative of the "suffering queer Palestinian" fit into the national Israeli political narrative. In contrast, we focused on the personal experiences of queer Palestinians in Israel and their identities without imposing a political framework.

Methodology

In conceiving this study, we sought to remain open to the possibility of multiple configurations of identity for our respondents, to keep in mind our own positionality, and to let our participants' responses shape our analysis.

Critical Methodological Approaches

In its original Black Feminist context, Collins (1991) asserted that intersectionality was necessarily tied to a humanist worldview (p. 37) and requires creating a new epistemology as an alternative to the traditional academic "Eurocentric masculinist knowledge validation process" (p. 203). Collins' proposed Afrocentric feminist epistemology involves a rejection of positivism, while affirming the use of Black women's lived experiences and dialogue between subjects to validate knowledge claims, and a demand for personal ethical accountability in advancing knowledge claims (pp. 203-19).

Building on this approach, Alexander (2008) sought to take into account "indigenous knowledge" (p. 114) in constructing a specifically intersectional queer methodology, as a means of resistance to hegemonic forces around both gender and race. Following a critique of academic queer theory as insufficiently accommodating to intersectional perspectives and experiences, he offers an attempt at a postcolonial queer methodology that would take into account both sexuality and race as colonially constructed categories (pp. 113-5). Most aptly for our study, he writes:

A critical interpretive queer methodology is one that analyzes a social text to reveal how

> the cloistered gay lives in the text, living in a presumed democratic society, and is both celebrated – as a part of the commercial mainstreaming of queerness – yet penalized as sexual deviancy within the larger dominating construction of heteronormativity. (p. 114)

In this context, Alexander goes on to note "… the larger democratic ideals of queer theory … are uniquely American" (p. 114). Although Puar (2007) does locate the most extensive survey of homonationalism in a U.S. context, the American exceptionalism of homonationalism itself is debatable, as Puar's other work on pinkwashing (2011) focuses on how homonationalism is used by the Israeli state.

While Alexander's proposal for a critical queer methodology is located within the context of textual analysis, we have attempted to import this framework into an ethnographic approach. We chose ethnography, primarily semi-structured interviews and participant observation, as the main methodology for this study both due to our desire to prioritize the viewpoints of our respondents, and in order to work effectively within the limited timeframe of a final project for a Master's degree. Thus, in our short time in Israel, we sought to interview respondents whose responses would be reflective of the specifics of their lived experiences rather than attempting to gather enough respondents for a truly representative sample.

Fieldwork and Research

Our fieldwork took place from March 10 to March 24, 2016, for around 300 person-hours, primarily in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem, and was centered around semi-structured interviews with individuals self-identifying as gender or sexuality non-conforming Palestinians, as mentioned in the previous section on terminology and scope.[4] The other major component of our fieldwork was participant observation, conducted largely in bars and cafes with varying degrees

4 See Appendix B for semi-structured interview questions used.

of queerness, which helped to inform our analysis of queerness and spatiality in the Palestinian-Israeli context.

Ethnography has traditionally been more concerned with qualitative than quantitative data; however, Creswell (2014) has also advocated for mixed-methods research across disciplines and methodologies, and Burch & Heinrich (2015) similarly argued for mixed-methods research as a potential means to inform or explain the qualitative portion of a study with quantitative data, even in a relatively small-scale study focused on qualitative responses. Accordingly, this study was originally conceived of as a mixed-methods project, which would begin with an exploratory quantitative survey on the respondents' use of their identities in various contexts. The survey was to be conducted over email prior to our fieldwork.[5]

Respondents for the study were recruited through Israeli academic contacts, through queer activists currently or formerly affiliated with NGOs (alQaws, Aswat, and Jerusalem Open House), through social media and smartphone dating apps (Tinder, Grindr, and Atraf), and through a snowball recruitment method in which respondents suggested other potentially interested participants. Nine interviews were conducted in-person. Five interviews were carried out over the chat functions of social media or dating apps, for cases in which the respondents were reluctant to meet in person but interested in participating in the study. Names and online screennames of the respondents have been changed, and some identifying details have been changed or omitted, in order to protect the privacy of our respondents. The majority of interviews were conducted in English, with the remainder in Arabic. Interviews conducted in Arabic have been translated for presentation in this paper. Interviews conducted through online

5 See Appendix A, "Limitations and Further Research," for further discussion of the quantitative study, and Appendix C for the (unused) survey questions themselves.

media in English are presented verbatim, including some errors in spelling and grammar. Readers should bear in mind that respondents were generally using mobile devices to write, and were writing in what for them was a second or third language.

Out of the NGOs mentioned, Aswat, a Haifa-based organization for Palestinian lesbians, features most prominently in this study. Aswat explains that their mission of their publications is "to connect our voices with our society, so that society can get to know us, deepen understanding, raise awareness about our stories, maybe end ignorance, and so our voice will arrive at people who need to know that they are not alone." (Aswat 2007) Jerusalem Open House (JOH) features briefly in our study. They describe themselves as "a leading organization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people and their allies in the heart of Jerusalem [...] the JOH transcends political, ethnic and religious boundaries to build and unite a community in pursuit of the common goal of tolerance and mutual support."[6] alQaws, usually considered the main umbrella NGO "for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society"[7], is not represented in this study. There was no determining factor for NGO inclusion in this project besides which NGOs were willing to speak with us.

Supplementary materials used include previously-published collections of autobiographical stories by Palestinian lesbians in Israel (*Waqfet Banat* and *My Right to Live, to Choose, to Be*, both published by Aswat). Additionally, we conducted some background interviews with individuals involved in the queer or Palestinian communities but outside of our scope conditions (that is, not both queer and Palestinian). These interviews were used to inform our analysis but were not coded.

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6 Jerusalem Open House website, http://joh.org.il/index.php/english. Retrieved April 10 2016.

7 alQaws" own description on the header of their official website, http://www.alqaws.org/. Retrieved April 10 2016.

Coding and Analysis

Our framework for coding, analyzing, and interpreting ethnographic data from our interviews and supplementary material was informed by LeCompte & Schensul (2013) and Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (1995). Notes were coded twice, first through open coding in which themes from the text were marked in the margins. After all field notes went through this process, the notes in the margins were compiled in a secondary document so repetitive categories and ideas could be identified. Based on this first round of coding, we identified overarching themes. All field notes were then re-examined with a process of focused coding. Quotes with these themes were compiled in a third document. Integrative memos were then written for each of these quotes, which served as starting points for our analysis.

Results and Analysis

While queer Palestinians inhabit multiple identities simultaneously, their experience in mainstream Israeli societies, whether Palestinian or Jewish, is resistant to this overlap. Due to the inability of normative individuals to understand or accept non-normative subjectivity, they understand queer Palestinians within their prescribed social boundaries. Our research shows the desire of queer Palestinians to express and perform their identities as both queer and Palestinian by valuing friendships and spaces where respondents are recognized as simultaneously queer and Palestinian. However, respondents did not discuss these identities outside of these contexts with us using an intersectional framework, but as segmented experiences of being either queer or Palestinian.

Our analysis begins by discussing how our respondents self-identified, in order to interrogate how the globalized discourse of "LGBT" terminology is used or not used by our interlocutors. In this section we also dispel the idea that religion plays a formative role in our interlocutors' approach to gender and sexuality, as evidenced through their thoughts on the subject.

Following that, we seek to understand the context within which our interlocutors live. Our fieldwork revealed that queer Palestinians spend most of their time within Palestinian communities. They face unique challenges in navigating both Palestinian cultural norms and interactions with the greater Israeli queer community, which is mostly inhabited by secular Jews. Respondents' feelings of exclusion or discrimination on an individual level in the Israeli queer

community were also felt on an organizational and state scale from “Israeli LGBT” organizations and state policies. These discussions incorporate existing academic concerns about the individual regarding identity performance, but also debates about the implications of homonationalism.

While understanding themselves as distinct from the majority of their peer group, queer Palestinians repeatedly brought up stories of the first time they met another queer Palestinian who knew about their shared identity markers. Our interlocutors reported creating strong bonds with these individuals; many still called them their best friends. Furthermore, the relationships between our interlocutors and their like-identified friends served multiple purposes. These friendships often offered a combination of assurance, inspiration, feelings of acceptance or validation, and comfort. This component of our interlocutors’ experience reveals the multiple benefits they found in having a context where they were understood as both queer and Palestinian.

The following section on mentoring and NGO involvement demonstrates our interlocutors’ commitment to easing the path of others searching for similarly-identified individuals. Many respondents, regardless of socioeconomic status or education, reported serving as a mentor for other queer Palestinians. Some took this further by devoting their time to creating spaces such as NGOs, where queer Palestinians could express these identity components around other individuals with similar identity markers. Furthermore, their interest in increasing awareness and education within normative Palestinian spaces reflects optimism about creating a Palestinian society that is more hospitable and accepting of all types of non-normative identities, as opposed to seeking inclusion within queer Jewish communities. The importance of safety to

these communities can be seen in the ways they are protected, which is discussed in the context of our experiences in trying to enter these spaces. Finally, we address the construction of spaces for queer Palestinians in the three cities where we conducted our fieldwork: Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem.

Issues of Self-Definition

We begin with issues of self-definition as a way to explore the most surface layers of our respondents' identities, and explore how they both do and do not correspond to globalized "LGBT" terminology. Omar, an activist, described himself as "queer" for explicitly political reasons, dismissing "gay" as overly limiting.[8] Similarly, Eli, a Druze man currently in university, when asked how he sexually identified, initially called himself "gay," but then challenged the question altogether, writing:

> I don't really like labels. I mean I know I am gay and I love that and accept that but I don't like that people see us only as gay people and that's the only thing that comes to their mind when they see us, I believe sexual attraction shouldn't be something that identifies us, but part of us[9]

Omar's qualified use of "queer," and Eli's outright rejection of terminology, can be read as supporting Massad's (2002, 2008) argument that Western "LGBT" terminology is foreign to the queer Arab experience. However, a stronger interpretation is that Omar and Eli were rejecting terminology from an anti-system context, and were resistant to labels being forced upon them due to the overt politicization of labeling in the Palestinian-Israeli context.

Speaking about Palestinian lesbians, Leila, an Aswat representative, challenged the

8 Personal interview, Tel Aviv, March 10 2016.
9 Whatsapp chat, March 3 2016.

universality of western terminology. In her experience women were initially "just looking for a name," and were happy to learn there was a word that spoke to their feelings of difference. But she went on to add that once they are "exposed to the gay liberation movement, they see more complexity [...] For us language is very challenging, in English and in Arabic." However, they acknowledge that debates over terminology and their origins are divorced from the dilemmas of everyday life for most queer Palestinians, saying, "the whole theory engagement is very academic – do we [Aswat] really want to get into philosophical things when there is so much to do with daily life?"

In contrast, some respondents simply used Western terminology without qualifying their usage. The men with whom we made contact via dating and hookup apps uncomplicatedly described themselves as "gay." Additionally, two trans women with whom we spoke independently, Jamila and Nura, described themselves as "transsexual," or the Arabic term, "mutahowaleen al-jins," which is directly borrowed from English terminology. They tended to see their gender, at least aspirationally, as normative, expressing wishes to live life as "normal wom[en]."[10] Both of those individuals also occupied lower socio-economic and educational positions. This also supports a critique of Massad's claims raised by Gross (2013), that globalization influences people's identity conception across socioeconomic spheres. Upper-class status and Western education, rather than indoctrinating Palestinian queers into a Western "LGBT" framework, in fact give queers one potential means to resist or complicate these categories.

A different means for complicating categories of gender and sexuality was provided by

10 Personal interview, Haifa, March 14 2016.

another interlocutor, Amal. Amal was more ambivalent about their[11] trans identity. We interviewed them at the same time as Nura, and Nura frequently spoke on behalf of Amal. When we asked Amal if they wanted to undergo sexual reassignment surgery as Nura claimed, Amal said they were unsure, but just wanted to be able to live with a man and have a family. Nura then repeated that Amal wanted to be a woman but was scared about the surgery, and pointed to Amal's effeminate behavior as evidence of their femininity. However, in Amal's responses they did not indicate any internal desire to change their sex. Amal's ambivalence can be read as a wish to pursue relatively clear sexual and familial desires without the attendant obligation to clarify their gender expression, or alternatively, as a performance of one identity marker without a strong interest in performing the other.

Another way respondents classified or manipulated their gender or sexual identity was in terms of how other people perceived them. Razi, a respondent in contact with us over social media only, explained his hometown by beginning, "Everyone in the village thinks that I am "str8"."[12] In a confrontation with a fellow Druze classmate who was opposed to his "gayness," Eli identified himself as bisexual in order to make his identity seem more socially acceptable without compromising his frankness about his attraction to men.

Some respondents' responses reflected an awareness of the larger debate over terminology, but none thought that the expressions of their identities were contingent upon it.

Religion and Queerness. Contrary to Western attempts to characterize religion as a force for sexual repression, respondents were hesitant to link the ideas of gender or sexual

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11 We have chosen to use the singular "they" for a pronoun when referring to Amal, intended to be understood as a gender-neutral pronoun in English. Amal did not appear to have strong feelings on pronouns used to refer to them in Arabic. Nura insisted we use female pronouns for Amal, while other third parties seemed to conceptualize them as an effeminate man and use male pronouns.

12 Whatsapp chat, March 6 2016. Quotation marks in original.

identities and religious identities. Most respondents did not identify as religious, despite coming from religious families,[13] and also did not mention religion as a factor complicating their sexual and gender identities. Multiple respondents offered vaguely Deist or pan-religious sentiments, but again did not connect those sentiments with their gender or sexual identities. The closest any respondent came to directly connecting religion and gender or sexual identity was Bassam, a Palestinian from Jerusalem who identified as bisexual with a preference for men. While he was personally non-committal about religion, he understood how some gay people could hate religion on account of feeling excluded, and reject religion due to seeing it as mandating straightness. However, he added, "If God wanted me to be straight, he would've made me that way."[14]

The few respondents who identified as religious also declined to explicitly mention a connection between religion and gender or sexuality, although some linkages appeared as subtext. Ahmed, a closeted man from Haifa, wrote in chat:

> Ahmed: Well I'm believer and I practice sometimes
>
> Interviewer: What's your religious practice like? Were you always a believer or did it change over time?
>
> A: I'm Muslim. I'm always a believer. Practicing like praying and fasting.
>
> I: After you knew you were gay, did it change how you thought of yourself as a Muslim?
>
> A: No it didn't change anything cause it's not something I choose its God well. And I think you must know that I have never had hard sex
>
> I: What do you mean by "hard sex"? Anal?
>
> A: Yes

13 Eli, Razi, Bassam, Zahra, Jamal.
14 Personal interview, Jerusalem, March 19 2016.

> I: Ok. Is that a religious choice or you don't do it for some other reason?
>
> A: Its that I'm not have the attraction to it you know what I mean!!! Let me explain more… There is something in you that wants to fuck or get fucked but I don't feel that I want to fuck or get fucked.[15]

While Ahmed asserted that being gay did not impact his religious belief, his statement about abstention from anal sex reveals his possible perception of a religious prohibition against it.

The relationship between religion and gayness was also discussed by a Christian respondent, Kareem, who identified as religious. When asked if he found any conflict between his gay identity and his religious identity, he said:

> Religiously, no. I have met gay priests and they told me that I am doing the right thing somehow and that God will forgive me. I had no choice, I was born this way and it is something inside of me.[16]

When asked how he met this gay priest, he told the following story:

> I met him through volunteering with the church, they needed a member to drive a priest to a neighboring town one day and noticed something in me. Later, he invited me to a sauna for gays with him. The priest told me about him [his gay identity] and that he wanted to be a good friend to me. He was much older than me and would help me because he knew my salary was not enough to support my family. We still meet from time to time; I was very discreet in all those years. I have never told anyone about him [being gay].[17]

Despite the implicit motive of the priest for excusing same-sex sexual practices, Kareem

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15 Grindr chat, March 19-22 2016.
16 Personal interview, Jerusalem, March 21 2016.
17 Personal interview, Jerusalem, March 21 2016.

accepted his guidance as a sanction that enabled Kareem to consider that his sexual behavior was not a religious problem. Whereas Ahmed asserted that religion and sexual identity were separate categories, notwithstanding his disclaimer, Kareem seemed to feel that his religious and sexual identities simply co-existed in a way that might overlap but did not conflict with one another, thanks to the priest's blessing.

Although religion and sexuality are both frequently considered as major determinants of self-identification, our respondents did not see them as correlative categories. Respondents' hesitation to link their multiple identity categories also speaks to their general lack of assumption of intersectionality on a personal basis, as discussed in the following section.

Navigating Normative Spaces

In seeking to understand the identities of queer Palestinians, it is important to locate them within the contextual frames they inhabit. Within existing socio-political spaces, our respondents reported feeling alienated both within many of their native Palestinian communities and from the mainstream Israeli gay community. Bassam remarked, "Israelis and Palestinians both don't want me."[18] Similarly, Zahra, a queer woman living in Tel Aviv, elaborated on this feeling, saying, "I don't feel that I belong anywhere, in any group, no not to the Tel Aviv bubble of course, not to the gay community in Tel Aviv, not to the Jewish one, and not to the Arab one."[19] Zahra's comments on the separate "bubbles" of Israeli society are apt, not only as a reflection of predominant ethnic segregation, but also as a reflection of our respondents' tendency to compartmentalize their identity components, challenging a Western conception of intersectionality as first elaborated by Collins (1991, 1998, 2003).

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18 Personal interview, Jerusalem, March 19 2016.
19 Personal interview, Tel Aviv, March 23 2016.

Navigating Normative Palestinian Spaces. Narratives of exclusion from the Palestinian community were centered around pressure to conform to normative gendered behaviors, including expectations of marriage and family life. In describing issues around being queer and Palestinian, respondents expressed stress and fear that they would not meet these expectations.

Some respondents placed the blame for their feelings of exclusion on "Arab society." Jamila, a transgender woman from a Bedouin family said, "Arab society doesn't understand this matter, the society is not open [...] I would love for the Arab society to develop in these matters. I believe that difference people have is a natural feeling."[20] Ahmed also commented, "It's about Arab society. Arab society would fight you just because you're different."[21]

One marker of difference noted by multiple respondents was the pressure to conform to social expectations of heteronormative masculinity, including discrimination against both themselves and others for the exhibition of "gay" behavior. Ahmed said:

> I'm kind of girly and people don't like that [...] People despise me all the time just because of being me, gay or a homosexual as they say. They make me feel that my problems are just in being different and kind of soft while they expect me to be a tough guy with a husky voice.[22]

Tareq, another male respondent who has not and does not plan to tell friends and family about his sexuality, elaborated on his fear, "I know one gay person who is out and he is constantly mocked by everyone and are like he is a good man despite being gay."[23] Ahmed and Tareq's responses confirm the importance of perceived normativity within a system of hegemonic

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20 Personal interview, Haifa, March 14 2016.
21 Grindr chat, March 18 2016.
22 Grindr chat, March 18 2016.
23 Grindr chat, March 18 2016.

masculinity, in which heterosexual masculine performance is socially valued above actual personal sexual practice.

Eli wrote about his social ostracism after telling his close friends about his relationship with a male classmate:

> With time we told our close friends [...] they didn't have a problem with it at first, but when other people started noticing they kind of tried to walk away, kind of wanting not to be seen involved so [other] people won't say they support it, they told us when need to stop it, or at least not be together in school.[24]

In Eli's view, it was not that his friends were opposed to his gay relationship *per se*, but only cautioned him when their friendship with Eli exposed them to social criticism.

Amal, whose effeminate behavior marked them to others as either a gay man or a trans woman, reported an inability to hold a long-term job. After leaving school in 9th grade with a limited knowledge of Hebrew, their opportunities were limited to short-term menial labor in Palestinian neighborhoods. After employers witnessed Amal's effeminate behavior, Amal experienced verbal abuse and were eventually fired. This escalated to physical violence at least once, when they were beaten up while working as a cleaner in a West Bank neighborhood, and warned by their attackers not to return.[25]

These experiences speak to the weight of socially normative expectations surrounding compulsory heterosexuality and the perceived importance of maintaining a sexually normative peer group, which is also manifest in pressure to marry and start a family.

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24 Whatsapp chat, March 3 2016.
25 Personal interview, Jerusalem, March 20 2016.

Social Pressure Surrounding Marriage. Social expectations of marriage were also a cause of anxiety and tension for our respondents. When asked how it was to be a gay Palestinian, Ahmed replied, "Very difficult. No freedom [...] First of all with family who expects you to be married with children. Especially traditional families who may think homosexuality doesn't exist at all."[26] Eli noted the centrality of marriage with the Druze community by telling us about a gay friend who was forced into marriage.[27] Tareq, after writing that he felt guilty about being gay, cited pressure to get married as the first reason: "I think it's because there is this his expectation of me to marry a beautiful girl and I hear that all the time from my family."[28] When we asked Tareq if this pressure was mainly religious or social, he replied:

> It's not really religious, it may come from religious values and the thought you should marry a girl and have children the "normal" way, but its more on what it's gonna do to the family's reputation in society and what people are gonna say, that's the main concern.[29]

Alternatively, Zahra used marriage to alleviate pressure from her family and gain more personal freedom, both inside and outside of Israel. She chose to marry a gay man from Canada who was also looking for a way to end family pressure while maintaining his gay lifestyle. Her marriage now permits Zahra to travel to Canada and live a sexually permissive lifestyle there, while satisfying social obligations for her family at home.

Leila, an employee at Aswat, said:

> Some women's parents accept them totally, most have good relationships with their

26 Grindr chat, March 18 2016.
27 Personal interview, Haifa, March 13 2016.
28 Grindr chat, March 22 2016.
29 Grindr chat, March 22, 2016. Quotation marks in original.

> parents and live in their hometowns [...] Some made bigger decisions, some had fake marriages, some didn't get married at all, some gays and lesbians get married for children, there are women [...] who live in a partnership and have babies, there are different stories.[30]

The breadth of experiences concerning the institution of marriage shows the interplay between personal circumstance, social expectation, and individual agency. Our respondents' ways of acting (or not acting) queer within a Palestinian context recall Butler's (1990) work on performance of gender and sexuality within a framework of compulsory heterosexuality. Both in the context of pressure surrounding marriage and in the wider Palestinian context, respondents saw "society" or "Arab society" as enforcing a template of masculinity and heterosexuality. While there existed the ability for respondents to perform their gender or sexuality outside of this template, performance of those non-normative identities brought about social friction.

Moreover, respondents' own varying types of self-location, in which they discussed their queer identities as existing within certain contexts only, reflects a pushback against the theory of intersectionality with which we approached the project. In contrast to the Black Feminist concept of intersectionality as advanced by Collins (1991, 1998, 2003), the experience of discrimination for queer Palestinians was not expressed as interdependent between racial and sexual/gender discrimination. Rather, they discussed being queer Palestinians in terms of being queer within the Palestinian context, as many simply saw queer Jewish venues as unavailable to them.

Interactions with the Queer Jewish Context. Discrimination against queer Palestinians was not limited to Palestinian spaces; those with access to the wider queer community in Israel

30 Personal interview, Haifa, March 24 2016.

also experienced discrimination and exclusion there. Zahra told us about her experiences with the Jewish queer community in Tel Aviv:

> When I first moved here I wanted to go out and make friends, and I didn't really care about Jews and Arabs, but whenever they discovered I'm an Arab, it's like, okay, and [they] step back, and I'm like, this is discrimination, and yeah, I stopped going out [...] The gay community, they don't want to be with Arabs, they don't image having a relationship with Arabs, I think because they grow up on this, that Arabs and Jews just don't go together, and some people they realize that's false and some people don't.[31]

While Zahra maintains the possibility for some queer Jews to see Palestinians as equals, she was left with the impression that Palestinians will never be accepted members of the "Israeli community." Rather, she spoke about how entry into the Israeli queer scene depended on conforming to ethnic, political, and social lines:

> You can get a Jewish girlfriend if you look like me, not the typical Arab, you should be living in the city, acting the way they act, speak the language they speak, Hebrew, don't use your language, accept the army, be okay with the army […] I have friends [with Jewish girlfriends] – I can't be like them. They forget that they're Arabs – they want to forget everything, even the food, they stop eating their [own] food.[32]

Another pair of experiences speaks to a more surface level of ethnically-based exclusion or inclusion in the queer Jewish community. Omar told us about a time in his youth when he introduced himself and was immediately rejected for his "Arab name." Eli, who is Druze, noted that he had never experienced discrimination within the gay Jewish community, but felt this

31 Personal interview, Tel Aviv, March 23 2016.
32 Personal interview, Tel Aviv, March 23 2016.

might be because of his own name, which is often assumed to be Jewish.

Zahra's criticisms of Arabs who cross ethnic lines, and Omar and Eli's experiences with the power of the ethnic connotations of names, recalls Ahmed (2006) when she claims that miscegenation and queerness represent the same kind of boundary-crossing. However, in this case, queerness is a transgression understood as more acceptable than crossing racial lines. One explanation is that, although reflected from a Palestinian perspective, these experiences also reflect a queer Jewish internalization of homonationalism as articulated by Puar (2007, 2011). In this view, queer Jews can come to see themselves as ideal Israeli citizens in a way that was previously only available to straights. This sort of normalization of queerness, which explicitly declines to address the racial context in which it exists, results in continued alienation and exclusion of the Palestinian "other," regardless of the queer or non-queer status of the Palestinians in question. Thus homonationalism prevents the adoption of the "common cause" of queer universalism.

Interactions with Queer Jewish NGOs and the State. Respondents who were active in queer Palestinian organizing also saw discrimination against Palestinian groups and individuals within "Israeli LGBT" organizations. Omar cited one example: this year the Aguda, the "Israeli National LGBT Task Force,"[33] held an anti-homophobia lobbying day, at which they spoke in front of the Israeli government, without inviting a single gay Arab.[34] When he confronted the organization, they told him they were speaking on his behalf, so he didn't need to participate himself. Concluding the story, Omar told us, "If I needed white Ashkenazi Jew to

33 Description on official Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/TheAGUDA.ISRAEL/. Retrieved April 11 2016.

34 Personal interview, Tel Aviv, March 10 2016.

speak on my behalf, I wouldn't open my mouth from the start."[35]

Leila, the Aswat representative, explained that not only does the Aguda not further the aims of LGBT Palestinian citizens of Israel, but the government also ignores Palestinian communities as part of awareness-raising programs about non-normative genders and sexualities. As an example, she mentioned that the government had decided to mandate anti-homophobia programming in all schools after the 2009 shooting at the *Barnoar* gay youth center in Tel Aviv. However, while this programming is implemented in Jewish schools, "this doesn't happen in the Arab schools, no one checked or was interested to know if this was happen in Arab schools as well."[36] She told us that the government allowed Arab principals to reject this programming on the argument that it goes against their cultural values, "but if an Arabic Jewish school did this, it wouldn't be accepted. They would be held accountable for it and asked to designate the time."[37] Leila reflected on their work:

> Sometimes you do want to work with the system, to work with the government, and of course government means occupation, but you want to put in the effort, so that Arab schools will have things for sexual diversity […] but we were blocked […] and in a way we knew it [wouldn't] work to go through the Ministry of Education, but we still gave it a try and, we were blocked.[38]

Even when Jewish organizations make deliberate efforts to provide equal services for queer Palestinians they often fall short, as was also noted in conversations with queer Jews. We spoke with one individual who works for Jerusalem Open House (JOH), who expressed his

35 Personal interview, Tel Aviv, March 10 2016.
36 Personal interview, Haifa, March 24 2016.
37 Personal interview, Haifa, March 24 2016.
38 Personal interview, Haifa, March 24 2016.

admiration and pride in the work his organization does, but identified areas where he believed JOH was unable to offer comparable services to its Jewish and Palestinian constituents. Specifically, he noted the youth groups JOH offered for both religious and non-religious Jews, which were led by older "guides" that they cannot offer to Arab youth because they do not have Arabic-speaking guides. Additionally, there were no employees at the organization who spoke Arabic as a first language. Despite these shortcomings, we met multiple respondents who frequented JOH and none who were members of alQaws, the specifically Palestinian queer organization in Jerusalem.

These examples of discriminatory organizational representation and service provision show the Israeli state adoption and institutionalization of homonationalism, as mentioned by Puar (2011) and elaborated on by Gross (2014).[39] Thus queer Ashkenazi Jews can now see themselves as exemplars of Israeli queerness, and have this normalization confirmed by the state. Policies that give state funding and institutional support to queer organizations and projects are subject to the same level of discrimination as any other state policy, wherein Jewish citizens receive preferential treatment. As in the case of JOH, this division between queer Jews and queer "others" can extend even internally, within an organization that is actively trying to accept queers across ethnic lines.

Finding Others

A key development in the identity of our respondents came when they first realized they were not alone. For some respondents, these bonds created a space where they could speak

39 Gross traced the alignment of nationalist ideals with the Israeli LGBT community to a "deal" between the LGBT establishment and the government in the aftermath of the *Barnoar* attack in 2009. The state agreed to recognize and protect gay rights, as long as the protected form of "gayness" was performed in a normative and non-threatening fashion, while using this as a means to claim liberal and democratic practice.

openly, even if they are closeted in everyday life. For others, these friendships enabled them to accept themselves and encouraged them to be more open about their sexuality.

As one example, Jamila found affirmation simply in the existence of others like her. She spoke about her best friend, a fellow trans woman:

> She is a person who lived through the things I lived through. We talked to each other and listened to each other, because at that time I thought I was alone in this thing, and I began to think that there were other people with this same issue, and that really encouraged me, because I am not the only one in this world with this suffering.[40]

Kareem also found validation in meeting a similarly-identified individual. He saw his gayness as distinct from his conception of himself as a family man and did not want his sexual activity with men to ruin his family; he said, "This is my life, I have to live this way [...] I cannot come out and I hope that God will help me that my family will not find out." He told us that a significant moment in coming to accept this aspect of himself came as a result of a surprising conversation with a friend:

> There was a friend, unmarried, I was in school with, he's a Muslim, and we knew each other well. I had met his parents and he ate at my home with my wife and kids. We've been friends for twelve years and 5 years ago he asked to talk with me privately, he had something he wanted to talk about. I was confused, we talk all the time, I didn't know why he wanted to talk privately but I agreed and eventually we met. He told me, "I am going to ask you something, don't think before you answer, just say the first thing that comes to your mind." I said, "Okay" … and he said, "Are you gay? … I am." I didn't even hear the "I am" part, I was just staring at him wondering how he knew, why now, I

40 Personal interview, Haifa, March 14 2016.

> had all of these questions running through my head […] but in that moment when I told him, "I am," I felt like *releases deep breath* for the first time.[41]

Despite being unwilling to fulfill an idealized Western conception of "coming out," this friendship created a context in which Kareem was able to express components of his identity that he could not previously express simultaneously. Kareem greatly values this friendship, as he uses it to discuss the difficulties his constant performance creates, something that is impossible in any other context.

Zahra's first encounter with a like-identified individual came before she was certain of her own identity. She recalled this experience saying:

> I can't imagine my life without meeting her. She really changed my life. I used to look for something and I didn't understand what it is, I didn't understand myself – she never came and like, told me, "Hey, you're a lesbian" – she just, like, mentioned "Hey, I read something," or "Hey, I saw something," and I appreciated that [...] she knew about me before I knew about myself but she let me discover it for myself.[42]

Zahra values this relationship until today, telling us that they are still "best friends."

Our youngest respondents noted the influence of the Internet in coming to accept themselves, but also stressed that it was meeting someone else who was both gay and from their own ethnic community that was most significant. Razi wrote about his experience:

> When i was young i felt like iam different but i thought that being different isnt a big deal. In being different i mean i was into boys sexualy And i didnt like girls at all I thought that this is a thing that i can change when i get older. [...] One day, [my friend]

41 Personal interview, Jerusalem, March 21 2016.
42 Personal interview, Tel Aviv, March 23 2016.

> asked if iam gay. Until that moment i didnt actually knows anything about what it is to be gay. Ididnt knew myself. I started reading about homosexuality in wiki and hearing about it from my friend. A few weaks later I told him iam gay [...] I understood that i cant change and have to accept myself.[43]

Only one respondent did not report finding someone who shared their positionality. When we asked Tareq what it was like to be a gay Palestinian, he wrote:

> Honestly I'm not enjoying it so much, I feel guilty most of the time and I didn't tell anyone so I have nobody to share my thoughts with [...] I wish i could tell my friends, who would totally be fine with it, but i feel ashamed and that it would be a disappointment [...] I have no idea why I haven't told them[44]

Tareq's ambiguity over "coming out" to his non-queer friends, paired with his interest in sharing his thoughts with someone presumably more sympathetic, reflects the tension between "coming out" narratives as a universalist part of the queer experience and a more modest desire for personal connection with other individuals with shared identity markers. This can be seen to validate Ritchie's (2010, 2011) criticism of the "coming out" narrative as a specifically Western frame, which may not be applicable in the Palestinian-Israeli context. But these examples also serve to illustrate the specific nature of the Palestinian queer experience: even though multiple respondents previously learned about "LGBT" terminology, either from the Internet or popular culture, and felt that this terminology might apply to them, their experiences were fully validated only by finding others with the same positionality. This argues against a universalist discourse of queer experience.

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43 Whatsapp chat, March 6 2016.
44 Grindr chats, March 21 and April 5 2016.

Since respondents had seen benefits in meeting like-identified others, many spoke about their desire to "pay it forward" by offering support to others.

Reaching Out: Mentoring and NGOs

Another form of self-location as both queer and Palestinian available to our respondents was through participation in community-building activities. Respondents commonly expressed a desire to mentor others, especially younger queer Palestinians struggling with some of the same issues that they had previously faced. Either implicitly or explicitly, they mentioned their own positionality as credentialing them for being able to help others. Jamila was currently mentoring another trans woman from her hometown:

> There is someone from the village, I met her in the village and she has the same problem […] she doesn't have the guts to make the change. I had long hair and I wore women's clothes, but she is afraid and wears men's clothes and so forth. I want to help her by giving her moral support, and give her all the help she might need to make the move.[45]

Bassam framed his interest in mentoring more starkly by relating it to his own rape in adolescence, saying that anyone who has survived such an experience has a choice either to become a predator themselves or to become a mentor and try to help vulnerable youth. For that reason, he decided to volunteer with the Jerusalem Pride parade, and to take part in "Parent's Coffee," an organization that matches a self-identified queer person with parents of queer youth so they can better understand their child's identity and needs.

Similarly, Zahra talked about working with Aswat in a variety of ways, helping to publish and translate books, running booths on college campuses, and going to communities of both

45 Personal interview, Haifa, March 14 2016.

sides of the Green Line to distribute literature on the streets. She said that her personal history motivated her in this effort, but also that she derived joy from these activities:

> Everything [is rewarding], the fact that I know that I'm doing something for those women. Once I used to be this woman, who didn't have a chance to go experience things or know more about things and to go to the city. I know that when I do something, I want to get it into the small villages to those people who don't go to Tel Aviv or Haifa and don't sit on Masada Street and know everything and hear about everything and they experience everything. One day I couldn't do this so I wanted to reach these women and to get this information… it makes me feel good.[46]

The ability of our interlocutors to inspire change and ease the passage of others due to their shared positionality as queer Palestinians within Israel demonstrates the significance of these two factors to their identities. Although often compartmentalized, respondents valued having someone else who was both understanding of the difficulties of gender or sexual non-conformity in the Palestinian context, and the discrimination that they experienced in the wider gay community.

Our respondents' interest in small-scale community-building confirms the greater importance that this sort of activity held for them rather than promulgating a universalist discourse around "LGBT" terminology or enforcing "coming out" narratives.

Creating NGOs. Another way for queer Palestinians to navigate the lack of readymade intersectional spaces available to them was to create their own, especially through the formation of NGOs. Aswat explicitly stated that their *raison d'etre* was to provide a fully intersectional space for its members:

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46 Personal interview, Tel Aviv, March 23 2016.

> Our strength as women and as lesbians and as Palestinians does not enable us to choose one identity and separate it from the others, but to insist that there is a way to create space for them all together. [...] we are lesbians and we are women and we are Palestinians and these three identities cannot be separated from each other. (Aswat 2007)

Eli, one of our Druze respondents, opined that one of the factors making gay Druze life harder than gay Palestinian life was the lack of an organization specifically for LGBT Druze. He felt that he would not be accepted in Palestinian LGBT organizations. In his opinion, other gay Druze shared this feeling, but also avoided community organization due to fear of being inadvertently outed. Despite these limiting factors, he was actively trying to reach out to Jewish and Palestinian LGBT groups.[47] He wrote:

> I personally am working on changing gay life in the druze community […] because as a druze gay guy I grew up in a place where I never heard about a gay guy and I felt alone and confused, and I don't want that to happen to others teenagers[48]

Eli's optimism about his ability to help other queer Druze reflects a broader commitment to changing Palestinian norms, which other respondents shared.

Omar also spoke of his desire to start his own foundation one day. He elaborated on the vision of his foundation, saying it would be an organization "that won't boycott Israeli organizations, but try to partner with Israeli organizations to actually help LGBT Arabs on the ground." He explained his criticism of organizations that do not work with Israeli institutions, citing alQaws, which in his view "is just political, they don't take any important action. They

47 Personal interview, Haifa, March 13 2016.
48 Whatsapp chat, March 6 2016.

don't do anything besides "boycott Israel" calls."[49]

Omar and Eli's interest in organizing groups of people with shared identity markers can be read as an expression of intersectionality in accordance with the Western model, or even the Black Feminist model as previously discussed. Both of them were already queer activists to some degree, and from upper socioeconomic and educational groups, and thus may have been more predisposed to understand social activism through an intersectional framework. However, most other respondents with whom we spoke did interact with an NGO to some extent, and benefited from this interaction, even if it did not cause them to reconceptualize their identities as intersectional.

Gatekeeping. We faced various forms of gatekeeping during our fieldwork. Queer Palestinian NGOs were generally reluctant to give access to outsiders. alQaws mostly declined to respond to us over any medium, although one representative did reply that she wasn't able to meet. Aswat met with us, but only after a fair degree of persistence. When we met, Leila explained that Aswat did not normally meet with Westerners: in their experience, Western researchers would just repeat Orientalist views. She then interrogated us about our Arabic language background, personal positionality, and familiarity with theoretical feminist and post-Orientalist discourse, before she would talk about Aswat.[50] Jerusalem Open House was the most open of these three NGOs to outsiders, but our access was facilitated by Bassam, who volunteered there. In contrast to individuals we met who were enthusiastic about suggesting others for snowball recruitment, no organization or representative would agree to pass on our contact info to their members.

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49 Personal interview, Tel Aviv, March 10 2016.
50 Personal interview, Haifa, March 24 2016.

Gatekeeping manifested on a personal as well as institutional level. One individual wanted to interrogate our academic credentials and specifically the scope of our literature review, although he also cited a Western academic (Ritchie) as someone we should read. More commonly, interviewees wanted to know about our own sexual identities before beginning the interview; some respondents simply would not have been willing to talk with straight people. In this way, our own positionality both helped and hindered this study, and is reflected in who we did and did not have access to.

We believe that it is important, however, to contextualize this as a form of individual agency that respondents had over how they would express their gender or sexual identities, and to whom. This serves as an example, following Mahmood (2011), of how agency for non-Western subaltern groups may be expressed in ways that are not oriented around either resistance to local norms or conformity to global norms. Respondents' hesitancy to engage with researchers perceived to be outside of their own positionality also puts them in accord with Collins' (1991) argument for privileging lived experience as a necessary portion of intersectional epistemology.

In contrast to the difficulty of entering contexts strictly reserved for queer Palestinians, Palestinian spaces that were being used as venues for queer expression were generally much more open to the inclusion of Jewish Israelis or foreigners.

Created Intersectional Spaces

One way in which queer Palestinians dealt with exclusion from normatively queer and Palestinian spaces was to subvert the implicit heteronormativity of the majoratively Palestinian spaces available to them. During our background interviews with non-queer or non-Palestinian

interlocutors in Haifa, they would suggest over and over again that we go to Masada Street, a strip featuring many bars and cafes, where "all the gays are." But, they would immediately qualify, Masada Street doesn't really have "gay" bars or cafes, as such – just "gay-friendly" or "LGBT-friendly" or "queer-friendly" bars and cafes. Our observations bore out these qualifications – there were indeed many queer people along Masada Street's bars and cafes, but also plenty of straight people. These bars and cafes had a tolerant enough atmosphere for sexual or gender non-conformity, but there was venue no featuring a clientele composed exclusively of queer people and straight allies. Furthermore, despite being well-known to queers and allies, we found others in these venues who were ignorant of their status as queer spaces.

In general, racial demarcations of space seemed much more important than gender and sexual demarcations. Cafes and bars on Masada Street seemed to attract either a Palestinian or a Jewish clientele, while the overall atmosphere of the street was hospitable to non-normative expression in general. This dynamic was also present in the "downtown" Haifa nightlife scene, which paralleled Masada street in its ethnic demarcation of spaces. However, all the cafes and bars used as queer Palestinian spaces were primarily Palestinian and only secondarily queer.

In contrast to the variegated scene concentrated along Haifa's Masada Street, Tel Aviv, the cliché "gay capital of Israel," had many gay bars spread out in a much wider physical area, the clientele of which was overwhelmingly gay, Jewish, and male – paralleling a normative conception of the ideal gay citizen as reinforced by the Israeli state, as previously discussed (Gross 2013, 2014). Moreover, during our background interviews with queer Jews in Tel Aviv, most of them expressed skepticism that we would find any queer spaces in Haifa, or even that there were substantial queer spaces in Israel outside of Tel Aviv. This dichotomy came up in

chat with Tareq, who currently lives in Haifa:

> Haifa is now the gay refuge of the Arabs in this country, they run away from their village and start a new life here [...] Tel Aviv is for gays who are Jewish, Haifa is for Arabs, I think it's the new order which [is] being form[ed] [...] We all want to fit in somewhere somehow.[51]

Reflected in this difference is also a perceptual difference between the two communities: queer and allied Palestinians were keenly aware of the Tel Aviv – Haifa paradigm as representing racially separate queer communities, while queer Jews enjoyed the privilege of being ignorant of the existence of queer Palestinian communities.

In contrast to Haifa or Tel Aviv, Jerusalem's queer scene was centered on one bar (Video), which saw a notably more mixed Jewish and Arab crowd. Rather than serve as an intentionally planned space for social integration, however, Video was used by a religiously and ethnically diverse clientele due to the lack of other queer options in Jerusalem. Despite the presence of both Palestinians and Jews, one of the bartenders said, "They come in packs," describing the use of the space by Palestinians. During participant observation, we also noticed that the Palestinian clientele would stick together whether at the bar, on the dance floor, or chatting outside.

Queer spaces in these three cities therefore serve primarily as a reflection of the racial makeup of the city and the tolerance for queer visibility in the city, and secondarily as a reflection of the availability of spaces open for queerness. Ultimately, race is more important than gender or sexuality. For Leila, the Aswat representative, living in Haifa was preferential to

51 Grindr chat, March 22 2016.

Tel Aviv since Arabs in Tel Aviv are "living more exposed to political violence."[52]

One non-queer interlocutor explained the queer presence in Haifa generally as a function of its status as the creative center for Palestinians on the Israeli side of the Green Line, and especially as the main locus for the music industry. Hence, there was more tolerance of non-normative behavior in general, including non-normative genders and sexualities.[53] However, the queer Palestinian use of space in Haifa can also be seen to represent the potential for queer subversion of what would otherwise be heteronormative space, even if it were already "artsy" or "alternative" space.

52 Personal interview, Haifa, March 24 2016.
53 Personal conversation, Haifa, March 24 2016.

Conclusion

Since we started our research from an intersectional perspective, we repeatedly asked our interlocutors questions designed to elicit responses about their multiple intersectional identities. Strikingly, and frustratingly for us at the time, our respondents declined to take the bait, presenting their queerness and Palestinian identity to us as largely separate identity components. It was only later that we realized that this perceptual gap between the experience of queerness and Palestinianness was a direct result of our respondents not having available space to express both identity components simultaneously. Hence, discussion of queer identity and Palestinian identity was compartmentalized for them.

In this light, queer Palestinian intersectionality within Israel may be seen as both sharing characteristics with the original Black Feminist conception of intersectionality, and diverging from that theoretical template. Queer Palestinian intersectionality is like the Black Feminist conception in that members of both identity groups occupy a unique space which is not fully expressed through organizations and spaces devoted exclusively to one identity component. It is unlike Black Feminism in that queer Palestinian individuals do not frequently occupy spaces in which they are discriminated against on account of both identity components simultaneously. The compartmentalized perception and presentation of queerness and Palestinianness results from experiences in which queer Palestinians are asked to internalize only one identity component at a time, regardless of whether that internalization is positive or negative.

However, the desire of some queer Palestinians for venues in which they may assert both

identity characteristics simultaneously has led to the creation of unique communities. One form this may take is the queer subversion of spaces that were already Palestinian, but not specifically designated as queer, such as along Masada Street in Haifa. A less spatially rooted expression of this desire for a uniquely queer Palestinian community is the frequently-mentioned interest in finding other individuals with shared positionality. The most explicit means of seeking out these spaces is the establishment of organizations specifically for queer Palestinians, such as Aswat or the NGOs that Omar and Eli hope to found in the future.

Notably, all of the above attempts at community formation involve starting from a Palestinian positionality or shared social group, and then seeking to incorporate queerness into it, rather than the other way around. This suggests that the racial component of segregation and discrimination against queer Palestinians in Israel is still more powerful than gender- or sexuality-based discrimination.

Directions for Future Research.[54] Our research indicates two related research topics that are in need of further study. Firstly, comparing our demographic group of queer Palestinians within Israel with queer Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories would offer a comparison with a context in which the queer Palestinian interaction with queer Jewish society is radically different. Secondly, conducting ethnographic research among the queer Jewish population of Israel on the implications of homonationalism as explained by Puar (2007, 2011) could either confirm or deny the "on the ground" implications covered by Gross (2013, 2014) from a queer Jewish Israeli perspective.

54 Also see Appendix A, "Limitations and Further Research," for further discussion of future research suggested by the methodological limitations of this study.

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Appendix A: Limitations and Further Research

Methodological Limitations

We conducted this study as a final project in pursuit of a Master's degree. Our fieldwork took place over a span of two weeks, as mentioned previously in the methodology section, most of which coincided with academic Spring break. Ideally, an ethnographic study would involve significantly more time in the field.

Due to the short timeframe of the fieldwork, our selection of respondents was opportunistic and does not pretend to be a representative sample of queer Palestinians. Rather, we feel that our sampling has led to a group of respondents whose responses are evocative of many of the thoughts and concerns of queer Palestinians in general. While it would be very difficult for this sort of ethnographic study to have a truly representative sample, future studies could recruit respondents in a less opportunistic manner.

We traveled and spoke with respondents only in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem. Consequently, respondents tended to either be native city dwellers or individuals who had moved from their native villages to the cities. A further study could try to deal with queer Palestinians presently living in smaller towns or villages, although such a study would face greater challenges in terms of recruitment and confidentiality.

Our study was also geographically constrained to queer Palestinians living within Israel. This was also determined by the realities of obtaining ethics committee approval and funding for our work within the framework of a Master's program. We regret having been unable to conduct

research in the West Bank; a comparative study between queer Palestinians living on both sides of the Green Line would be very valuable.

The Survey We Couldn't Make Respondents Take

As mentioned previously in the methodology section, this study was originally conceived of as a mixed-methods project, which would begin with an exploratory quantitative survey on the respondents' use of their identities in various contexts, to be conducted over email prior to our fieldwork.[55]

In practice, however, it was much more difficult to recruit survey respondents over the Internet than it was to recruit interview respondents in-person during fieldwork. Only one respondent actually completed the survey, and so we abandoned it as a primary source of data. We take this as a learning experience on the difficulty of collecting quantitative data in ways that did not draw on our strengths as researchers. In contrast, our qualitative data collection was greatly aided by being physically present and being able to self-represent as part of a similar queer peer group to our respondents.

Future researchers considering quantitative studies of queer Palestinians should bear in mind the difficulties of self-presentation and trust-building with potential respondents, especially if their survey is designed to be conducted over the Internet rather than face-to-face.

55 See Appendix C, following, for the (unused) survey questions.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. "We really want to know how your sexual identity and your other ethnic, cultural, or religious identities interact with one another in your daily life."

2. "We'd like to know about when you first realized you were (Respondent's gender/sexual identity) and how that affected how you thought about yourself."

3. "How does your religion or ethnicity help you understand your gender/sexual identity?"

4. "How does your gender/sexual identity change how you perceive your status as a member of (Respondent's religious/ethnic group)?"

    Follow-up: "How does it change how others perceive you?"

Appendix C: Survey Questions (Unused)

1. What is your sexuality / sexual identity?

    Lesbian

    Gay

    Bisexual

    Queer

    Straight

    Other:

2. What is your gender?

3. Which groups of people are aware of your sexual and gender identity? Please select all that apply.

    Family

    Close friends

    Casual acquaintances

    Colleagues at work / school

    Members of your place of worship

    Other:

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is none of the time and 5 is all the time, how frequently do you feel socially excluded?

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is none of the time and 5 is all the time, how frequently do you

hear of other members of your gender / sexual identity being socially excluded?

6. (Asked if question 4 answered with anything higher than 1.) In what space(s) is this social exclusion most likely to happen to you? (For example, work, place of worship, school, street, other...)

7. (Asked if question 5 answered with anything higher than 1.) In what space(s) do you hear of this social exclusion being most likely to happen to other members of your gender / social identity? (For example, work, place of worship, school, street, other...)

8. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Secondary school or lower

High school

University

Professional/Postgraduate/Technical

9. Please rank the following languages in the order in which you use them on a regular basis, with 1 being your least-used language and 4 being your most-used:

Arabic

Hebrew

English

Any other language

10. What is your religious / ethnic identity?

Muslim

Christian

Jewish

Druze

Baha'i

Other:

11. How frequently do you attend religious services?

Every day

At least once a week

At least once a month

Less than one time a month

Never

12. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is none of the time and 5 is all the time, how frequently do you feel compelled to hide your ethnic or religious identity?

13. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is none of the time and 5 is all the time, how frequently do you hear of others hiding their ethnic or religious identity?

14. (Asked if question 12 answered with anything higher than 1.) In what context are you most likely to hide your ethnic or religious identity? (For example, work, place of worship, school, street, other...)

15. (Asked if question 4 answered with anything higher than 1.) In what context do you hear of others being most likely to hide their ethnic or religious identity? (For example, work, place of worship, school, street, other...)

16. Please rank the following characteristics of your identity by importance to you, where 1 is least important and 5 is most important:

Gender

Sexuality

Ethnicity

Religion

Other:

17. Are you more comfortable dealing with members of the same ethnic / religious identity as you or more comfortable with members of the same gender / sexual identity as you?

Ethnic / religious identity

Gender / sexual identity

18. Age:

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 - 64

65 +

19. Hometown:

20. Place of residence:

21. Citizenship:

Israeli citizen

Blue card holder / permanent resident of Israel

Green card holder

Other:

(The following questions were to be optional following completing the survey.)

22. If you would be willing to participate in further research on this topic, please enter your email address(es) here:

23. If you have any friends who you think would be interested in this survey, and would like to send them a link to this survey, please enter their email address(es) here:

24. Do you belong to any civil society organizations operating on behalf of LGBT/queer people?

Yes

No

24a. If “Yes,” what group(s)?