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Processes of "Re-Writing:"
Queer Palestinians and Religious Identity in Israel and Diaspora

By

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Introduction

In global and Israeli media, there are still many people circulating the discourses of an Israeli propaganda project called Brand Israel. The venture relies many oppressive logics, propagated on the global stage, *including* that Israel is liberal and queer-friendly, and Palestinian society is homophobic, monolithic, and religious (Atshan 2020, 3-4; 6; Ritchie 2010, 560). Religion, however, is a category on the ground that is fraught with meaning and more fluid than this homogenizing logic allows. For example, activist Ghaith Hilal articulates ways in which queer Palestinian activists are often expected to critique and oppose the perceived religious conservatism of their own communities (2013).[1] When queer Palestinians are discussed in US media, the conversation is sometimes steered toward the effect of religion as an obstacle or source of oppression.[2] But, while many queer Palestinians are secular (Ibid.), others grapple with their own relationship to religious identity, as a measure for belonging to Palestinian society and a stereotype ascribed to them by Israel. My goal is to tell the stories of my interlocutors, queer Palestinians navigating a much thicker version and texture of religiosity that is not encapsulated in these false forms of global common sense. In short, they re-write their religious identities.

Below, I elucidate the ways in which my Palestinian queer interlocutors thus make conscious choices to subversively re-write new religious identities in addition to the ones they inherited from their communities. They do so in the context of seeking to self-narrate, speak publicly to international spectators, and temporally refigure their life stories. I discuss three contexts in which my interlocutors re-situate their religious identities. First, they re-appropriate the sovereignty of the divine, in the context of indigenous Palestinian issues, in the service of a

new God and narrative of resilience that allows them to question religion beyond a form of social control. Second, my interlocutors articulate a politics where queer and religious identities can be both Palestinian and universal. Here, religion is articulated as a tool for liberation, rather than an obstacle, going against pervasive Israeli discourses that queer Palestinians never challenge the problems from within their own communities. Third, they employ a religiously decolonial framework to navigate their lives as subjects in Western nation-states, re-writing religion as tethering them to a divine Palestinian community. These interlocutors' religious backgrounds include freedom *and* constraint (Abu-Lughod 2013, 19), and they are tied to Palestine and religion in related *and* separate ways. Islamic studies scholar Nijmi Edres says that queer Palestinians "reconfigure" religion as a matter of private belief (2020, 223). Anthropologist Naveeda Khan's reads Islam as constant "becoming" (2012) in the context of both public *and* intimate religiosities. Re-writing, as I discuss, also happens in public.

In my discussion, I ask the following questions: How do my interlocutors come to understand and re-write the sovereignties of God and nation-states in order to make sense of their queer religious and Palestinian identities? How do they re-articulate their backgrounds to buttress their identities in digital and actual "publics," as conceived by queer theorist Michael Warner (2002), as Palestinians as well as queer religious people? How are their stories (in)consistent with or in tension with Israeli tropes representing queer Palestinians as necessarily severed from their religion and society? How do they navigate both the nation-state logics of their homes and religious frameworks of the decolonial? How is this all related to, or separate from, their Palestinianness?

My discussion unfolds in three sections. First, I lay out the ways in which my interlocutors subvert and re-write their relationship to the divine, in relation to life trajectories of

development and growth. Second, I explore their relationship to queerness as universality, as well as their specificity in the politics of Palestinianness. My interlocutors re-write their religiosity on the public stage in ways that challenge religious and sexual norms (Edres 2020). Lastly, I suggest that my interlocutors are transforming their religious identities and upbringings into something informed by the religious aspects of Palestinian decolonial frameworks. While living in the West, they re-write their relationships to communities, as individuals.

Background

Queer Palestinians navigate law and sexuality. Since about 1988, Israel has made great strides in its queer human rights record for Israeli citizens (Adelman 2014, 240). For queer theorist Jasbir Puar, Israel's *liberal,* gay-friendly legal record is a starting point for undoing Israel's nation-state image, and is objectively accurate (2011, 139). Despite this, many religious Palestinian *and* Israeli political leaders have displayed significant instances of homophobia (Atshan 2020, 35-46; 84-92). Meanwhile, Israel renders the Palestinian population as religious, cultural Others whose deservingness of subjugation is justified by an Israeli (legal) progressivism (Ibid., 72). Palestinian-American anthropologist Sa'ed Atshan writes about how this imperialistic politic, in the context of Israeli queer tourism, erases queer Palestinians (Ibid., 78). Even more subtly, queer Palestinians are cleaved from their sense of belonging to Palestinian society by actual instances of religious *and* secular homophobia (Abdelhadi 2021). This alienation prompts Tel Avivian Palestinian activist Halah Abdelhadi to highlight the need for conversation with homophobic religious leaders (Ibid.).

In Israel, queer Israelis and queer Palestinians have different relationships to religious education, which privileges queer Israelis' re-writings of religion. Israel's settler colonial project often renders queer Jewish religiosities novel. In one popular podcast, a religious family

accepting their child through Jewish mysticism was lauded (Haaretz Weekend 2021, ~33:48). At the same time, my Palestinian interlocutor Faisal tells me how hard it is to re-write his religion.[3] Further, Nijmi Edres argues that Jewish queer Israelis, rather than Muslim or Christian queer Palestinians, are likely to have had a better chance to play with their religious identity, having a stronger basis for it in the *yeshivas* (Jewish religious schools) (2020, 224; 229). Groups like Palestinian queer Muslims often do not have the privilege of such robust infrastructures (Ibid.).

The queerly religious subjectivities of my interlocutors should be situated in the context of the many experiences of Israeli colonialism. Of the five people I interviewed, two are Christian queer Palestinians living in Israel; one in Tel Aviv, the other in Haifa: Yamen and Faisal. Both went to Christian schools in Israel and have Israeli citizenship and ongoing relationships with their families, freedom of movement, and a voice in Israel to potentially queerly re-write their religious backgrounds, as Yamen does in his art. Two others are queer Palestinians living in North America: Nour is a non-binary queer Palestinian who grew up in Jordan and is now a refugee in the US, in exile and estranged from family, and re-writing their religiosity by building a queer Islamic community in exile. They have not experienced occupation directly. Kareem is from a village in the central West Bank and lived in a major Palestinian city, and settled a new queer life in Canada. He rarely speaks about *his* experience of occupation, but rather about those who face state repression for being queer and Palestinian. He tells me about re-situating his Muslim identity in diaspora, finding relevant digital spaces and learning about queer Muslim history, fully cutting ties with his family. All four have relative civil rights in the West, though colonial politics shapes their lived experiences.

In 1948, Israeli paramilitaries launched an ethnic cleansing called Plan Dalet, which Palestinians call the *nakba*, or *catastrophe*, in which 750,000 Palestinians were "transferred"

from what the Zionists deemed the Jewish side, to make room for Jewish settlers (Pappé 2006, *xi-xii*). Thus, many families found themselves refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, and the surrounding Arab states. My Israeli interlocutors lived in so-called "mixed cities" like Haifa, Ramle, and Jaffa, which were depopulated, but where IDPs and Jews are still living a precarious co-existence. Many slowly came to identify as Israeli Arabs rather than Palestinians, in the face of an ongoing Israeli Judaization campaign (Ibid., 150). Thus, their religious identities stand in for their national ones. Often, *nakba* denotes an ongoing process of dispossession, in whose context both Yamen and Faisal narrate their experiences.

Jordan and the West Bank are different. Nour keeps Palestine strongly in their heart, and as part of their queer Islam, though the Israel-Jordan peace treaty of 1994 has made Palestinian politics there fairly apolitical. Thus, Nour holds a diasporic Palestinian identity on two fronts, eager to re-write their religion with affective bonds to Palestine, though lacking the privilege to live in the homeland. Kareem, on the other hand, has direct experience with the occupation of the West Bank, even though he has legal status as Canadian under the law. Nour and Kareem both use their diasporic privileges to re-situate their relation to a welcoming Islam. Nour organizes with a queer Muslim group in the US; Kareem talks occasionally with Muslims on social media audio rooms. This fragmentation of Palestinian experience reflects that Palestinian queerness is felt differently in many different geographical and political situations. Worse, queer Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza live deeply precarious lives, facing constant surveillance.

These conversations about queerness in historic Palestine are informed by two concepts: homonationalism and pinkwashing. There has been disagreements about their applicability to Palestine.[4] Anthropologist Sa'ed Atshan defines the former as "the phenomenon by which certain nation-states incorporate some queer subjects while disavowing other subjects (such as Arabs,

Muslims, Sikhs, and South Asians)" (2020, 31). Atshan articulates pinkwashing in four logics, the third of which is the most incisive: it dehumanizes Palestinians and humanizes Israelis, justified through a contrast of the purportedly more fervent homophobia amongst Palestinians than amongst Israelis (Ibid., 72). So, Israel prioritizes the vitality of its occupation through propaganda, rather than extend equality to Palestinians (Ibid., 3). Religious queer Palestinians are thus viable pinkwashing subjects, as I elucidate below: those who reject or are rejected by their "oppressive" Christian or Muslim communities and express belonging to Israel, or those who chart out or subvert their own religiosities in their communities.

Since both terms were coined, Atshan (Ibid., 31) and Ritchie (2015, 620-22) argue that they became "absolutist," "totalizing," "master narratives" lacking specificity of the Palestinian context (Stelder 2018, 51).[5] At the same time, the queer Palestinian organization alQaws argues that pinkwashing is expressed in lived experiences of violence and ways of thinking that scaffold ongoing colonization, and separates queer Palestinians from their own communities (2020a). As such, in the act of re-writing their religious identities, how do my interlocutors' narration of lived experiences subvert or adopt such ways of thinking? While the queer, Palestinian, and religious identities of my interlocutors are constantly being re-configured, many Palestinians want to encapsulate all three intersections into a coherent debate (Wolfson College, Oxford 2021, 1:10:00).

Methodology

I conducted five semi-structured interviews with four queer Palestinians from Palestine/Israel and Jordan, and from North American diasporas. I reached out to queer Palestinians of all stripes: women and non-binary people, US and diaspora, Christians and Muslims. I recruited Yamen and Faisal through a Palestinian colleague and fellow graduate

student. I reached out to my Canadian interlocutor Kareem on social media, who pointed me to Nour. I use textual data from a queer publication by the queer Palestinian organization Aswat called *Waqfet Banat* (2011), published in both Arabic and English and written exclusively about the journeys of queer women. I analyze many videos on Ahmad Ray's YouTube channel, which I found in my internet research; he is a Palestinian who is also living in Canada. I observed TikTok videos by queer Palestinians who take up religious themes. While I interview several non-binary, male-assigned-at-birth, femme-presenting people, I did not manage to interview any queer Palestinian cis-women. It was easier to find Palestinians in Israel and diaspora, especially Palestinians with light-skinned privilege, Arab Muslims, and Christians.

Literature Review

Below, I develop three groups of theoretical concerns in the ways that my interlocutors' re-write their queerly religious Palestinian subjectivities. First, I am concerned with the ways that my interlocutors represent their own stories and narratives, and how they position themselves in relation to the Israeli settler colonial project and pinkwashing logics. Second, I am concerned about how these narratives alter our broader understanding of sovereignty: the sovereignties that my interlocutors contest. These include: the divine, Israeli settler colonialism, homophobia, and nation-statehood, and structures like the organized Christian and Muslim communities. Third, I am concerned with how these narratives, on the global stage, re-write our understanding of the temporality of queerly religious Palestinian lives. When my interlocutors self-narrate, they are challenging linear formations that posit their inheritance of a homophobic religiosity, their battle with it and subsequent process of discovery, leading to a queerly religious subjectivity.

Recent ethnographic meditations on "resilience" help us to understand my interlocutors' constant narrations of their Palestinian, religious, and queer identities.[6] Among activists,

Palestinians are often globally referred to as a particularly resilient group[7] (Atshan 2020, *xv*),

deserving to be folded into life rather than occupation (Ibid., 176). Activists that I know often

famously portray Palestinians as having "steadfastness," or "sumud" in Arabic. On the other

hand, anthropologist Elana Resnick helps us understand that often people in power invoke

"resistance" and "resilience" in ways that elide the actual experience of oppression and

empowerment of marginalized people (2021, 9), whether it be inescapable religious norms,

working conditions, or racism. For my interlocutors, strength and resilience comes from religion

in their growth and development, as it relates to God and love for the land of Palestine. They also

gain resilience when navigating religious homophobia and rethinking the divine.

In addition to religion as resilience, my thesis is informed by the scholarship that deals

with the representation of gender and sexuality narratives. I am thus inspired by the work of

Palestinian-American anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, in *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*

(2013).[8] Abu-Lughod critiques the genre of "pulp non-fiction" (Ibid., 87-91). She describes this

genre as sensationalized stories of intimate and patriarchal male violence, "representing Muslim

women" while obscuring and distorting the actual cultural and political context under which

those women live (Ibid.). On the other hand, I want to highlight that a range of Islamic feminist

authors *have* taken up fiction or memoir that represents the experiences of women throughout the

Middle East,[9] taking seriously the project of representation globally. As such, we see how

narratives must be represented in terms of their local specificities.

However, this attunement to the contextual specificities of lived experiences can actually

restrict the telling of real narratives. Abu-Lughod's mandate for the contextualization of cultural

narratives is apt, yet problematic. She rightly mentions the pitfalls of "generalizing" (Islamic)

culture as patriarchal, "homogenized," and "alien," without showing peoples' complex daily

lives in different geographies (2013, 6).[10] Concomitantly, pinkwashing logics also tell us that like Muslim women, all queer Palestinians are culturally oppressed. These logics end up erasing the specificities of settler-colonialism. At the same time, while this political context is imperative, Atshan argues that the charge of "failing to provide sufficient context" actually constricts representation (2020, 152). The expectation to provide enough context leads to a slippery slope of constant demands for more context, and a deeper political analysis (Ibid., 172-73). Atshan argues that *all* queer Palestinian narratives are vulnerable to distortion by the pro-Israel establishment (Ibid., 2). In this way, scholar Drew Paul highlights the need to simply *tell* quotidian Palestinian gay stories, but situate them in political discourses like pinkwashing (2021, 552). Similarly, all narratives involve personal choices in the context of structural forces that constrict and constrain our behavior (Abu-Lughod 2013, 19). So too, context is relative: we may speak of different levels of context, or different regions or aspects. My interlocutors, in their discussions of pinkwashing's sovereignty over self-narrative, are asking which narratives of their queerly religious identities are representable and "audible," as sociologist Mikki Stelder uses the term (2018, 46; 52).

Building on this discussion of representation, so much of what queer Palestinians do is performed on the global public stage. Atshan describes the global "empire of critique" that queer Palestinians field from all sides of the movement (2020). We should thus read Atshan's politic of representation with political anthropologist Danilyn Rutherford's (2012) work on sovereignty in West Papua, who might help us see queer Palestinian activism as a contestation of Israeli (and Canadian and US) sovereignty, and of the sovereignties that the divine and religion, and national politics, exert over people, families, and communities. For Rutherford, sovereignty plays out and is *performed* with global "audiences" and "spectators" (Ibid., 2). This performance occurs when

my interlocutors self-narrate their struggles with religious identity. Rutherford employs a kind of intuitive semiotic analysis, where nearly any linguistic sign, as small as "pronouns [or] verb tenses," can be performances of sovereignty with an audience (Ibid., 18).[11] We must link up the experiences of my interlocutors with structures like religion, the divine, and the nation-state, as these performances often become represented and articulated on the public stage.

In addition to these public sovereignties, debates about sexuality and religion in private *and* in reaching publics are important for my analysis of Palestine. Queer academic Walaa Alqaisiya refers to the community building of alQaws, which involves the creation of "interior spaces" whose "networks of kinship and support" interact highly with Palestinian society (2018, 38). Similar spaces are small and internal, and they also reach what queer theorist Michael Warner calls smaller "publics" (Warner 2002). I am inspired by Nijmi Edres, who along with Halah Abdelhadi (2021), points to the lack of a "public debate" that treats tensions in "religious normativity" for Palestinian queer Muslims and Christians (2020, 232) in the established "religious sphere" (Ibid., 228).[12] My research discusses that these debates may be a next step in the public politics of Palestine.[13] Edres claims that religion and sexuality were understood through a "bilateral relation between God and each believer" by her Palestinian queer interlocutors (Ibid., 232). Within this frame, my interlocutors scale their internal religiosities up to their politics, which for them actually *does* constitute a public debate that reaches religious leaders. What I hope to add to Edres is an account of my interlocutors reaching publics in the dissemination of their stories of queerly subverting religious norms (Warner 2002).[14] Public conversations *are* happening, in online media spaces and periodicals that facilitate public debate. Edres thus helps us see the sovereignty of the Palestinian religious establishment over queer Palestinians,[15] while Alqaisiya shows us how these publics often contain nested smaller spaces.

Underpinning this discussion of religious "publics" is a literature about an individual-community binary of sexuality and religion under nation-state sovereignties. This binary is a context in which my interlocutors re-write their religious identities. Religious studies scholar Saba Mahmood argues that when Middle Eastern law has a specifically "religious basis," it is seen as a "failure" to achieve the liberal "state neutrality" of liberal systems based on individual subjects under the law (2013, 51), similar to Israel's gay rights record. Anthropologist Maya Mikdashi argues that Lebanese secular activists who seek to create a similar *one citizen, one vote* (2014, 292) system cannot escape the power dynamics "re-entrenched" in Lebanese sectarian-religious politics (Ibid.). In a similar way, my interlocutors navigate western state subjectivities as individuals *and* in community, undoing a binary that Stelder rethinks (2018). Namely, my interlocutors struggle to self-represent their religious identities as members of their communities, in the context of the nation-state sovereignties and the hierarchies found there.

Part of this tension around belonging to a community is a conversation about the sovereignty of God. Queer theologian Laurel Schneider develops a concept of God as tangible and corporeal, and resists sovereignties of God stuck in the "logic of the One" (2007, 5). Schneider critiques monotheistic traditions based on the one-ness of God with parallel traditions of divine "incarnation" (Ibid., 2), which helps us see divinity in both in community and as anti-nationalist (Ibid.). Queer scholars Jasbir Puar (2014) and Brock Perry (2014) play with this concept, also speak of rethinking religion and the divine into concepts that challenges sovereignties like empire and (homo)nationalism, as well as identity itself. Khan writes about "experimentation" among Pakistani Muslims, moving towards an Islam that is collaborative has "open futures" (2012, 6-7). This divine rethinking contrasts with the unitary sovereignty of God that underpins the religiosities my interlocutors inherited that are based on social control.

In addition to rethinking the divine, it is important for queer Palestinian representation on the global stage to address the politics of *articulation* of Western identity categories and sexual practice, as they interface with religion. A critique of Palestinian theorist Joseph Massad is necessary to engage the sovereignty of religion over my queerly religious Palestinian interlocutors. Saffo Papantonopoulou sees Massad's *gay international* framework as "reductionist," privileging same-sex behaviors over LGBTQ identities. For Massad, she says, any use of Western identity "signifier[s]" means tacitly supporting a global queer colonization (2014, 289-90).[16] The added question of religion provokes rethinking of who is given a voice among the *gay international*. Massad extends his argument to the formulation of not only sexuality but also "Islam," which is configured as a discrete religious identity in European discourse (2015, 213-74). Accordingly, I engage ethnographically with the diversity of queer Palestinians and their *articulations* of queer and religious identities together (see also: Atshan 2020, 35).

At the same time, most of the literature on queer Palestinian politics that engages pinkwashing speaks of the specificities of orientalist stereotypes of queer Palestinian Muslims embedded in the question of their identities.[17] When Ritchie writes (2010), Israeli queer activists were *representing* Palestinian religion as a "timeless pathology" that Palestinians are stuck with their whole lives, and can never fully dis-identify with; including a homophobic Islam (Ibid., 559; 565).[18] Alqaisiya argues that Palestinian Arab/Muslims are all stereotyped as homophobic (2018, 33), while both *religious* and *secular* forms of Palestinian nationalism define Palestine in heteronormative terms (Farsakh et al 2018, 9). So, an unchanging religious identity is already imbued within pinkwashing.[19] With my interlocutors, I seek to undo the pinkwashing logic of a homophobic religion that is unchangeably sovereign over all queer Palestinians. Differently,

queer Palestinian responses to pinkwashing are myriad: scholar activist C Heike Schotten says

that *queerness* and *Palestine* both "constitute a form of dissidence by their very existence," and

cause the colonizer much subversive "trouble" (2018, 15). Queer Palestinians resisting

colonialism "refuse to be relegated to a position of unintelligibility" and thus become audible

(Stelder 2018, 58). Similarly Moussawi traces the Orientalist logics constructing *Beirut* as queer-

friendly, where ordinary queers navigate deep political uncertainty with class, gender, religion,

and sexual identities, among others (2020, 76-104).[20]

In addition to pinkwashing representations, my queer interlocutors are navigating

religiosity and education work, which involves a constant struggle that interfaces with the above

conversations about representation. I am concerned with forms of affective self-education that

permeate my interlocutors' struggle with religion and queerness.[21] For example, Palestinian queer

feminist organization Aswat's publication *Waqfet Banat* (2011, 157-163) charts out the struggles

of its members across the intersections of queer Palestinian feminist identity (Ibid., 157),

including the religious and familial struggles. The stories challenge the idea that through

education, people inevitably and productively subvert biases. Rather, the book sees education as

a struggle of awareness-raising (Ibid., 158) that, with patient labor, can change skeptical people

(Ibid., 159-61). The book does subvert biases, but also "opens us up to worlds we did not know

and feared" (Ibid., 158). Building on Aswat, I discuss my interlocutors' struggle to *self-narrate*

their life trajectories, mired in fresh perspectives about the divine, Palestinianness, and the

religiously decolonial.

Beyond these struggles, I grapple with a long-term temporal template of my interlocutors,

which also makes their narratives (un)predictable. Drew Paul critiques a related teleology in the

lives of queer Palestinians in film, "from closeted to out, from darkness to daylight,…

Israel/Palestine to abroad" (2021, 558).[22] I propose a new one that is inflected with religious undertones: my interlocutors challenge the temporality that when religious queer Palestnian people grow up, they choose to depart form the divine, leave and work on themselves while momentarily set aside religion,[23] and then return to more self-reflexive, fluid, liberatory engagements with religiosity. My interlocutors reconfigure this above temporality in their narratives and their relationship to religion, in the spirit of engagement with a decolonial queer engagement with religion (Moussawi 2020; Alqaisiya 2018; Stelder 2018; Schotten 2018). Atshan (170-76) and Paul (2021) write about a documentary film, *Oriented*, following three queer Palestinian Tel Avivian men, peppered with references to religion.[24] I use two insights form the film that involve telling the world of the relationship of religion to this temporal trajectory.

Religious education helps us undo these temporal templates. Nijmi Edres writes about how Islamic education in Israel is not strong enough for individual Muslims to speak with confidence about religion and sexuality (2020, 224). For my interlocutors, religious education serves as a component of resilience to occupation and a reminder of religious trauma, relics of life while struggling with the divine. Nevertheless, queer communities of collaborative religion-making, do exist. I analyze my interlocutors' identities as always "becoming" as queers, religious or secular. Thus, I seek to understand my interlocutors' relationship to the divine, Palestinianness as politics, and the decolonial politics of religion.

1. God and the Divine

Most of my interlocutors encounter religion, Palestinian community, and family together with the divine. The family and the divine are important nodes of national belonging, where my interlocutors encountered both religious homophobia and a religion rooted in indigenous resilience. God was punitive, in their experiences, but they still felt ties to Palestine. However,

Atshan argues that in Palestinian society, queer youth feel special pressure to follow religious, familial, and societal norms in order to belong (2020, 10). I argue below that my interlocutors' re-writing of the sovereignty of God works in tandem with their tension with belonging to family and to the Palestinian polity. In rethinking forward-looking temporal trajectories of religious development, my interlocutors grappling with God and employ a language of growth and resilience. I end this section with a call for an expansive, prophetic, embodied God concept that rethinks queer Palestinians' place within Palestinian society.[25]

God holds the first sovereignty I address here. As Danilyn Rutherford argues, "Some audiences… seem to possess a spectral sovereignty" that might, "without actually appearing on the scene," change they way we think of divine power (2012, 5). Such is the spectral sovereignty of God over my interlocutors (Ibid.). YouTuber Ahmad Ray spoke in a video about how God's presence was constantly uttered into being by Palestinian parents; a God that was anti-queer, whose presence always hung over their nascent queer experiences ("Queer Arab Messages" 2022, 4:00; 5:10). As they grew conscious, many of my interlocutors ultimately rethought rather than directly challenged this divine sovereignty, a binary interplay that Brock Perry says hinders the *queer* rethinking of God, nationalism, and various forms of oppression (2014, 185-6). In doing so, Perry encourages us to heed Schneider's "divine ontology of multiplicity" (Ibid.). I argue that it helps us challenge prevailing ideas of queer Palestinians relegating the divine to an interior concern (Edres 2020, 232). Instead, God is re-written as a collective call to loving resilience.

My interlocutors described their upbringings as redeployments of religion, entrenched in ideas that divine sovereignty is both for national resilience as well as social control. Kareem says that his Palestinian religious education imparted to him and other queer Palestinians a strong

ethic of loving God and the land.[26] He says, "Religion makes them [Palestinians] stronger," but in the same colonial context in which religion also functioned to entrench gender and sexual norms. While God makes people resilient, God also entrenches queerness as taboo. But, Kareem described Islamic education to me as being deeply formative for him and his queer friends. On the other hand, Izzy, a Palestinian-American trans man, spoke in an oral history interview of his *conservative* family, who rely on Islam to endure life under occupation, living simply, while also seeing him as a normal Arab-Muslim man eligible for marriage (Mustafa 2017, 3:51). As such, the divine and religion are inextricably tied to the Palestinian national cause and its ties to family, further forcing my interlocutors to re-write their relationship to Palestinianness. It also meant a love for the people, and hence finding strength in a divine faith in Palestinian resistance.

This religion-as-resilience is replaced with a strength of "striving" by my interlocutors. Naveeda Khan studies Islam in Pakistan. Rather than social control, Islam had an "open future and a tendency toward experimentation" (2012, 7). This experimentation constantly narrates Pakistani Muslim "pasts and futures" (Ibid., 1), authorizing forms of "striving" and "becoming" in Islam (Ibid., 7). Experimentation also foregrounds the repetition of scholastic practices as well as a Pakistani "aspiration to the state" (Ibid., 8). Khan says, for her grandfather (Ibid., 15), Islam was about striving for a deep relation with the divine. I build on Khan to say that most of my interlocutors are interested in projects of social "self-making" (Ibid., 7) and navigating a fraught relationship to the state. Many of my interlocutors approach their past and current relationship to the divine in terms of this constant becoming, striving, and experimentation, whether as queerly religious or resisting religious subjectivities. Khan situates *becoming* within two of many temporal frames: paths that, before *and* after the fact, can be predicted; other paths that rupture the presupposed linear (Ibid., 6-7). I use this banal idea only to suggest that my interlocutors

narrate the divine's constant specter as both following and subverting pinkwashing temporal narratives leading to severance from society.

These temporal plot twists came out in Souraya's story of experimentation in *Waqfet Banat,* which helps us rethink sovereignty as a single, rigid God. For example, the religious aspects of Souraya's story are primarily relevant to her own intimate life, but her example reaches a public in circulating her story. She is and was a "tomboy," and described coming into her queerness, living between Lebanon and Saudi Arabia (2011, 136-45). After confessing her queerness to her minister at her university, she took a respite from God and concluded that she must reject belief entirely (Ibid., 140-41). She navigated a relationship with her sister, self-medicated with queer nightlife, and was legible to the Lebanese police as a "typical dyke" (Ibid., 142). Later, she articulates John 3:16 to conclude a "simple truth: as long as I believe in Him I have eternal life, because God loves the whole world" (Ibid., 144), an oft-quoted re-appropriation of a scriptural norm. But, she adds, "I did not have to look for Him in people, or places, or things; He was, and still is, with me" (Ibid.). Queering God from a sovereign into a lateral force for human diversity helped her understand the structures she navigated, including family and religious norms, and the police state. Similarly, her narrative is one of constantly becoming, and its divine teleological constant comes to color her whole life trajectory. In describing this new conception of God, she ironically takes up an empowering oneness in service of her resilience, in productive tension with a divine multiplicity. This dualism accords with Schneider's framing of Oneness and divine "incarnation" as possibly co-existing (2007, 4-5).[27]

While Souraya's story is one of subverting a queer divine of oneness and multiplicity, Izat El Amoor helps us rethink a God of conservatism and control. He thus engages Khan's Islam of "open futures." He is a Palstinian future sociology professor who recently got his PhD from

NYU.[28] Izat is a queer man from a Bedouin community in southern Israel. He wrote a book

chapter which is an ethnographic account of his time teaching teenage girls in the Naqab Desert,

where Bedouin Palestinians have been forcibly sedentarized, and their villages demolished. In it,

he facilitated a discussion with students, specifically about the role of patriarchy and honor

killings in Bedouin culture and religion (2019, 44), but outside the specific context of Israel's

dispossession of them. He deliberately concealed his sexual identity and his personal rejection of

God and religion (Ibid., 48). His students debated the role of Islam versus culture in justifying

the gender violence they perceive around them, such as honor killings (Ibid., 46-7). Others said,

provocatively, that on a moral plane, both culture and religion could not be separately blamed,

and that honor killings must end (Ibid., 47). Further, of all of the power structures for the

students to find the bravery to speak out against, religion was the hardest, specifically because of

a punitive divine sovereignty (Ibid., 48). Yet they continued to probe the intimate issue, defiantly

refusing to be silenced by divine "punishments" (Ibid.). El Amoor reads his pedagogical

intervention as "queering" the structural power of those who perform and justify sexual violence

(Ibid., 49). Momentarily, he curates a space where religion was not naturalized by a sovereign

God, but became an object for development and resilience, consistent with a cognitive striving to

become stronger in the face of one aspect of their local context.

While Izat's *becoming* also re-appropriates the divine, the subjects of one of YouTuber

Ahmad Ray's public videos wrestle with God imagined as beginning growth and development.

Ray's stories sometimes took the form of a parent telling them that they must set it right with

God in order to cure their queerness; other individuals grappled with levels of self-love ("Queer

Arab Messages" 2022; 2:34). In the video, God is invoked linguistically to reinforce a temporal

experience of constant forbidden-ness, including what Yamen describes as constant prayer and

yearning to be straight. The video features coverage of recurring annual public queer protests in Haifa. Therefore, God alters their experience of community with family, encouraging the resilience of building of chosen families (Ibid., 2:24-29). For Ahmad, re-writing religiosity means having to think for themselves and slowly reject a God, and religion, whose spectral sovereignty compounds their striving as queer Palestinians.

So far, Ahmad and Souraya's stories of becoming conform to a kind of teleology whose end goal is progressing from God-fearing to rejecting religion, confirming my own revised version of Drew Paul's (2021, 552) temporality from "closeted to out" from my Literature Review. Its purpose is to shuck off a controlling God, begin a process of trauma healing, and then come into a new religiosity or a new secularity. But these three phases do not move linearly towards an Israeli-friendly queerness as secular or religious Palestinians rejecting their society. As we will see, their trajectories are fraught with possibility and experimentation of beliefs and practices that subvert pinkwashing narratives (Ibid., 558); as these interlocutors developed, they started to follow non-linear paths of striving, rejecting the role of religion in their lives, temporarily "bracketing" it out temporarily (Nakassis 2016, 19), to depart from *or* rediscover it. The interesting trajectories of my interlocutors' stories reject these narrative templates on Khan's premise that unforeseen strivings can co-exist with the predictable.

Further, Kareem's queer Islam is also a complex re-writing of Paul's temporal template. After leaving his family entirely and finding queer people online, Kareem started to develop an affinity for learning about religious and cultural topics that honored the many different interpretations of scripture that were "hidden from me" as a child. Childhood was a time when he was praying for God to make him straight, and he was not fully self-accepting. Simultaneously, he grappled with a divine of social control beyond which he said people are afraid to reach.

When learning with people digitally, he said that participants in the Arab world would join by VPN and with alias profiles. He told me how shocking it was to learn more about an Islam where scripture about queerness was debated and interpreted, and about queer and trans people in Islamic history. Lately, he sometimes helps people online disentangle God and religion's taboo on homosexuality, usually saying to people that God loves everyone. But he also tells me that he and other colleagues quickly change minds, make impacts, and un-think homophobia in these spaces as kinds of queered Khan's *open futures* for Islam, where re-writing a punishing God can actually be intuitive. At this stage these conversations sometimes seem banal and boring to him. However, he still feels an obligation to conform to an accepted religious standard. He described a need to "fully finish understanding the religion" before he can say he is a queer Muslim. As such, he sits with a temporal state of always learning, but still oriented to a pre-ordained telos of full understanding. Thus, Kareem re-narrates a sovereign God in terms resilience and queer presence, adding to God's pro-Palestine function.

In self-representing a queer next step to my interlocutors' divine growing pains, YouTuber Ahmad Ray posited a scene in which they rejected religiosity, having broken queerly from the sovereignty of God. They subvert the religiosity whose divine mandates of homophobia and resilience they have re-figured. While doing their skincare, they *publicly* responded to a commenter who rejected Palestinian participation in global pride marches as shameful, specifically as an insult to God ("Q & A Again" 2021). Ahmad, conversely, argued that anything intersectional is ultimately good for the Palestinians (Ibid., 6:30-7:40). In an expert rhetorical move, Ahmad infantilized the commenter by asking, "You think about it [gay sex] too much babe. Do you wanna try it? You can try it gay people are screwing all the time they don't care about you, your mom, your dad, no one" (Ibid., 9:12). Here, Ahmad was narrating their self-

development, beyond God and religion, through breaking with family and discovering and self-developing in the vast queer worlds they continue to encounter, as having already outgrown beyond a homophobic divine. The video is both a kind of loving nudge to religious Palestinians to see what is out there, as well as a call-out to the commenter that they have stayed close to home. Here, Ahmad is strategically situating themself within Khan's and Paul's teleological self-development narratives whose purpose is to be*come* from the family and the closet as a resilient, out queer individual.

Tarek Abuata's poetry is a real gift: it helps us think through these divine sovereignties that hinge on resilience and development, and the deep *re-writing* of the divine specter. Abuata is a queer Palestinian Christian anti-occupation activist and former director of an anti-Zionist Christian organization. In 2019, Abuata disrupted a Christian Zionist conference, yelling, "People of God, wake up, Zionism is racism" (Friends of Sabeel – North America 2019). His descriptions of the divine are deeply expanssive. Abuata's poem (n.d.)[29] describes his re-writing of God's sovereignty. He describes coming into the world, teeming with possibility, quickly disciplined *into* a "unitary" conception of the divine (Schneider 2007, 190). In this poem, Abuata writes,

> When I was just a Queer Palestinian child, I didn't know any better;
> God was multicolor.
> Feeling Their facets and hugging their multitudes of love,
> All was just being, nothing made of.

Abuata challenges the oneness of the divine, taking a page from theologian Schneider's "divine multiplicity" (2007). Abuata's challenges the temporality that Schneider calls "a single goal or telos toward which the rich manyness of the embodied cosmos must 'process'" (Ibid., 2). Instead, he narrates an intuitive time of multiplicity before he knew God supposedly held and was declared a "unitary" sovereignty, before his *becoming* was stifled by punishment. He inflects

God's presence beyond the queer *and* the straight: the "Their." He represents multiplicity as an intuitive idea that is written over by divine oneness. He did em*body* a kind of queer "incarnation," or a corporeal "thereness" of the most diverse God possible (Ibid., 5). Abuata's prophetic verse continues,

> To such as I did the kindom [sic] belong,
> And I in love joyfully played along.
> I was loved, this I knew,
> No one had to tell me so.
> Blossomed, envied were my petals, and beneath the foot of the pedestal they buried my heart, … … …
> Feel it, right there in the coldness of 'sinful' doing.

Abuata describes a way in which the inclusive divine kingdom that he advocates in his religious Palestine-solidarity work was replaced by a kin-dom, a family structure which both inhibited and encouraged his, and my interlocutors', reach for liberatory love and growth. Those who, like God, constantly told him he was sinful, were actually envious of his *becoming* a resilient person, enough to blossom under the weight of a constant temporal divine sovereignty that portends his alienation. The people around him were unprepared to embrace the challenge of Schneider's "incarnation" (Ibid., 5), while Abuata embodies a kind of divinity as he grows. He continues,

> In glory filled pain I churned…and the years murmured:
> "Oh what a hollow shell of a man have you become,
> Remember my child the dog eating from the master's table all the crumb"…
> Blessed was he, for he knew where he came from… … …
> Its facets and multitudes of love felt me,
> And my soul understood 'to such as these' still within, where nothing is made of.
> "Home"…the little one whispered is beyond struggles and accolades, just simple and deep, … … …
> I heard Home's humming for those 20 years,
> "I am who I am, and in Me you always were".

Here Abuata reaches new publics. He describes how Palestinian roots were gate-kept by those who set the terms of how men and women were supposed to be, challenged through notions of a constant divine temporality in his life that demanded prayer. There is a sense in which

throughout his socialization, Abuata reaches a Palestinian identity that is not place-bound, a condition that hinged on the ability to pray into belonging. But he is able to easily summon a temporal specter of divine multiplicity, in order to restore his intuitive belonging. Abuata's representation here challenges the idea that religion is necessarily homophobic (Puar 2014, 205), and charts out a way to be resilient, religious, and Palestinian, resisting narratives of moving towards "manyness."

Abuata alludes to the tension between queer Palestinian religiosity and Palestinian publics, as I have treated above. My interlocutors actually preserve such a connection. Schneider's "divine multiplicity"[30] together with Abuata's "multitudes" reminds me of the "multitudes" that filmmaker Nadia Awad invokes (2018, 65): ordinary people struggling in the context of *the masses* in the Marxist and Fanonian traditions, as well as "the poor" of the Christian prophetic Poor People's Campaign of the 1960s, along with countless social movements. In this light, Abuata's framework helps my interlocutors *become* Palestinians using religion as resilience and his new queer possibilities. My interlocutors navigate queer religious Palestinian identities that bring them into tension with ordinary[31] Palestinians. Below, I discuss the relation between the universal and the Palestinian specific in the narrations of my interlocutors, taking political sovereignties in Palestine into re-writings of religion that take unexpected temporal turns.

2. Reconfiguring Religion and Palestinianness

Not only do my interlocutors subvert, queer, and re-write a wide array of divine sovereignties, they also engage Palestinian identity in the fraught context of the interplay between the universal and the particular, terms that I have come to through my empirical, ethnographic research. In this section, I aim to show how my interlocutor Yamen develops a

both/and framework to "re-write" religion that subverts universalities and particularities together that are connected to both colonial violence and pinkwashing narratives. He heals his religious traumas by articulating a new subjectivity. Yamen also problematizes the terms upon which the universal and Palestinian politics are themselves "intelligible" and "audible" (Stelder 2018, 46).[32] Linking queer Palestinian struggle with his *articulation* of religion requires imagining new futures (Alqaisiya 2020; Massad 2015; Perry 2014; Puar 2007; 2014) via what Yamen refers to as "actually talking," a form of discourse that is both specific *and* universal.

Like Yamen, Palestinian queer singer Bashar Murad refuses to articulate a legible queer, Palestinian, and religious subjectivity. His music video "Antenne" begins with a press conference. Bashar is dressed in a tuxedo and black sombrero hanging with white felt fraying (Murad 2021, 0:00-1:00). A reporter sees him as a victim, saying, "Basher [sic], you are *so* brave." Another says, "It must be so hard living in Pakistan [sic]." He is periodically bombarded with images representing, clearly and at times fuzzily, Palestinian "customs and traditions" (Ibid.) hijab, tatreez embroidery, Muslim skullcaps. He sits with a watermelon wearing a kefiyyeh, implying the ridiculousness of a global discourse about culture and religion when he faces brutal daily occupation in East Jerusalem. The song's refrain says: "I don't know where I came from, and I don't know what's next, but tonight I just wanna unplug"[33] (Ibid.). The song imagines religion as an alienation from belonging and roots (Abdelhadi 2021), so he responds by invoking his feeling of rootlessness, which C Heike Schotten says is actually very inconvenient for Israeli power structures (2018, 15). Bashar's vaguely religious iconography evokes a Palestinian queer identity that refuses to be obligated to cogently explain to the world the specifically queer Palestinian experiences of occupation and homophobia; he subversively wishes he could just go away (Ibid., 15-16). Bashar's video expresses deliberately not knowing

how to articulate the pinkwashing discourses expected of him. As such, he refuses to coherently self-represent under the weight of occupation and homophobia that hangs over the song.

Yamen, on the other hand, deliberately creates one of what Mikki Stelder calls "scenes of speaking" (2018, 46), *articulating* and making "audible" his queer Palestinian Catholic experience through the performance of his queerly religious art (Ibid.). When we met, he told me about how his high school and college art projects subverted religious themes, beyond the sexual and gender norms he was punished for transgressing. For example, he remade da Vinci's *Last Supper* and Michelangelo's *Pieta.* The former is of Yamen as Mary, dressed in a necktie, and his friend as Jesus. The latter is very skinny and dressed in a tattered American flag, naked with heels, with a ribbon in his hair. It involves a trans-feminine, non-monogamous, critical of US empire, and sex-positive erotic queer rebirth; the latter a series of drag queens who had a bona fide part in Christian ritual-making. His fashion thesis project included attractive queer men wearing crosses and partly bare chests, posing together in fully white-painted rooms with white neck-ties. He told me that the collection subverted church mosaics and alter boy garments. In the process, he narrated his religious trauma for Israeli and Palestinian public audiences.[34] When asked about religion's role in his life, he expressed often that there is something *inarticulable*, that he still "feels," which he cannot verbalize. When we spoke, his room was accessorized in a queerly religious way with both rosaries and fedoras, and he frequently pulled back mid-sentence. He said,

> I was always attracted to Renaissance art, and the way that Christian art was created. There is something so [pause] holy about it. And when I used to take it and turn it into 'gay,'… in my emotions it used to be some sort of like fuck you to religion. And at the same time, it used to give me a freedom to, actually, do whatever the fuck I want… It's some sort of way to cleanse myself and to like find like a different way, because religion is really hardcore about being gay… In a weird way, today, I'm more open to be myself and to like really bring myself to the front, than it used to be once before. Through my art, it was a sort of therapy to heal from my religious trauma.

In his "scene of speaking," Yamen queerly articulates his religious identity. Yamen's sense of the sovereignty of religion over him is part of a process of integrating the *feeling* and *articulation* of his identity. He also describes his freedom to become and to retool and to self-narrate, to queer religion, in a way that allowed him to develop a sexual and gender subjectivity. He starts from a point of visceral identification with the feelings imbued within Christian aesthetics, both positive and negative. He then channels that affect into the (homo)erotic in order to voice and articulate unapologetic confrontation past religious trauma. He reclaims his ability to *articulate* his story. The choice to *become* an artist and do religious art allowed him to basically depart from religion, just as he also instrumentalizes and sexualizes it. He *becomes* secular and queer through an interpretation of religion that reconciles with the scriptural impasse that purports that Christianity is fundamentally anti-queer.[35] He tells me that it was a "constant battle" to continually *become* queer and to survive as queer, conforming to my aforementioned temporality of completely rejecting religion. Consequently, he becomes comfortable making his stories transgressing religious norms public.

Despite his art's lack of geographic contextual specificity, Yamen is a queer person with a very tense relationship to the *articulation* of his queerness *and* his Palestinianness. Indeed, his queerly religious distancing from religiosity could have occurred in any Christian context. For Yamen, growing up in central Israel, his upbringing and his formative art making years did not involve a Palestinian identity, and his BA project does not really engage it either. Aswat argues that this is a form of minoritization inside Israel that *Waqfet Banat*'s writers address at length: an erasure of Palestinianness that colors the "self-definition" of members as Arab versus Palestinian (2011, 154-6).[36] For Alqaisiya, the issue of "minoritization," where religion serves to fragment Palestinian communities, helps Israel justify Israeli control by making peoplehood religious

rather than Palestinian (2020, 106-7). These classifications function to erase the specificities of indigenous identity. As such, Yamen's experience grappling with his queer religiosity should be read as him being up against an anti-Palestinian colonial violence. It reduces sexual diversity in Palestinian society to non-specific ideas like that of family, gender, and religious communities. As he grew up, Palestinian identity was "a non-spoken issue, it just…never came up." It was naturalized, even without having to *articulate* it. Yamen says, "My whole life was so full of issues and problems… that, politics never took really place [sic]."[37] The intimate politics of religion led Yamen to publicly narrate his Palestinian family as my interlocutor Kareem describes his: as any other religious family in a religious society with a queer child. Yamen thus re-writes his religion within a kind of in-between space among the universal and the particular.

Despite minoritization, Yamen lovingly brags about being a "big name" in the massive Israeli drag scene. However, it would be wrong to say that Yamen is simply re-writing his religion and coming into a queer, secular fashion career in Israel, subversively rejecting his own society. He is more than just a hip, subversive queer Palestinian Christian, who purportedly belongs in Israel after a subversive journey resisting religious fixity, toward a secular queer fluidity. In the interests of *articulating* his religious subjectivity, Yamen sees in himself this kind of queer emergence from a nominally non-Palestinian environment. He says he can "blend in" well, and his fashion collection was well-received by his Israeli professors. Yamen describes designing for a prominent drag show in Tel Aviv. He is subversive, but still largely has the privilege to be "audible" (Stelder 2018).

Conversely, my Israeli interlocutor Faisal suggests that typically, religiously oriented queer Palestinians have to perform a more covert type of code switching and in-betweenness in order to live the contradictions of queer and religious Palestinian identities. Faisal brilliantly

articulates a kind of Palestinian queer specificity that is very distinct from Yamen's vision. I

spoke with Faisal over Zoom. He was clean cut, had a slight, short undercut fade and a full well-

trimmed beard and aviator glasses. He wore an unbuttoned, mustard-colored blazer and a white

turtleneck, and behind him was a cubist painting and white walls. I asked him naively if he knew

any Palestinian queers who, departing from Yamen's hate for organized religion, were proudly

religious. His response problematized whether queer Palestinians are "audible" in their

articulation of queerness and religiosity (Stelder 2018).

> I don't know many people like this… In my circle, definitely not… [He doesn't quite
> know] whether they are believers or not, but they give a big weight for religion... in their
> thinking about their sexual identity. Most of these people comes from villages… some
> more…. conservative places…, not like places like Tel Aviv or Haifa or big cities, more
> like villages that the religion and the traditional is very … everywhere around
> you… [B]ut you also live your sexual identity… You go out with other guys, you have
> sex, you have relationships, but you still in the closet… They are gay but they marry with
> girls and they live by the straight book. [They] do all the things that society expects from
> them. But still have their sexual gay life in secret… So, we grow inside us some hate of
> religion and some distance from it… So it's hard for me to see people that are proud of
> being both gay and also religious… It's very hard to be 'proud' here.

In his response, Faisal imagines a complex geographical dynamic, of power structures and

navigations, themselves giving a voice for a more nuanced view of Palestinian particularity.

Within the "conservative places" where these people live, belief in God is actually contrasted

with a kind of hushed and precarious, yet social *articulation* of queerness in the context of also

formally practicing religion. My interlocutors exist in an in-between space beyond Faisal's

binary between anti-religious secular queer Palestinians and those queer people also grappling

with both a faith identity and the sovereignty of God. For example, the youth from YouTuber

Ahmad Ray's videos who heard homophobic messages about God from their parents do not

always grow up, distance from religion, and become secularly queer. For example, Atshan

illuminates some of the religious queer experience that involves: grappling with "marriages of

convenience;" trying to unlearn the idea that the way they have sex is sinful; struggling to accept their queer attraction in religious terms; fully disengaging from religiosity; or any number of multiple "journeys" (Atshan 2020, 35). But because I asked about publicly "proud" individuals, Faisal is privileging a certain life trajectory: those who identify as queer, and have a hateful and traumatic relationship with religion, and ultimately decided to drive themselves away from it. Ultimately, being openly queer and religious carries dangerous risks of ostracization, as my American interlocutor Nour told me; one must navigate more covertly. The individuals that Faisal describes are waging struggles to self-narrate and be audible while straddling both queer and religious spheres, which is a different "audibility" than Yamen's above. These navigations of family, partners, and tradition are themselves forms of *articulation*. By showing this diversity, Faisal is *also* challenging the pinkwashing logic that the proper way to be queer and Palestinian is to distance from oppressive religion and become secular, and live in a big city.

The terms on which Palestinian queerly religious people are audible is not merely mired in the grappling with religious norms and expectations, but also the refusal to articulate that religion as the main problem. I naively asked Yamen in passing about what he feels is wrong with progress narratives. Yamen responds with a subversive progress narrative that subverts pinkwashing logics that universalize Israeli trajectories of pro-LGBTQ progress. In his response, Yamen challenges our conception of the relationship between the universal and the particular. In doing so, Yamen's vision of progress is both global and Palestinian, playing on both dynamically. He told me that recently Ghadir Shafie, the director of the Palestinian organization Aswat, gave a voice to the diversity of sexuality and gender formations existing on the ground. Yamen describes the way in which the host interviewing her keeps obsessively bringing the conversation

back to religion. Yamen recounts this, with his head in his hands, a look of cringe and agony on

his face, and starts to sound frustrated.

> And the way he reacted to it, the way he talked about it. He couldn't stop talking about religion. [Pause.] And it's not about fucking religion. It's not about fucking being Palestinian, it's about being allowed to *choose* what he wants without society *re-writing* what he is. So, I think the progress starts with people like me, people like Ghadir [of Aswat], people like alQaws, with people that are *actually talking* about these matters.

Here, Yamen refuses to legibly articulate Palestinian religious specificity, and says that

among the most important parts of queer Palestinian activism is actually to steer the conversation

away from religion. Yamen takes a page from alQaws activist Ghaith Hilal, who deliberately tells

western activists that religion is not the "main enemy" of queer Palestinians, but simply an

intersecting identity (2013). Yamen's use of the terms "re-writing" and "actually talking" quickly

force us to rethink and complicate that which is articulable in the context of Palestinian queer

identities. "Actually talking," for Yamen, *is* a refusal to address what is expected (Schotten

2018): a conversation about Palestinians oppressed by religion and Palestinian culture. As such,

"actually talking" means articulating one's experience on one's own terms, and being

subsequently listened to, as Mikki Stelder puts it (2018, 48). By including alQaws and Aswat in

this conversation about progress, "actually talking" authorizes the unpredictable outcomes of a

specifically Palestinian progress in alQaws' small "interior spaces" that I mentioned in the

Literature Review. Yamen's articulation of social forces "re-writing" over one's identity is highly

complex, and also subsumes agency of religious queer Palestinians under the banner of a

simultaneous bottom-up "re-writing." Palestinians can re-write themselves in diaspora, in Israel,

and on the ground, and can reject the norms with which their subjectivities are constantly re-

written. So, in his artistic re-writings, Yamen is effectively positing that both bottom-up and top-

down versions of "re-writing" are both dynamic, re-iterative processes. Affectively, Yamen's

"actually talking" requires bearing the emotional pain of those who just do not yet understand, and both a reticence and willingness to spell things out. With regard to *choice*, Yamen's "actually talking" invites *queer religious and secular subjectivities* to be defined as queer or as any other signifier, and to have discourse on same-sex attraction in Palestine, in public or among comrades.

In engaging this both/and, Yamen's *articulations* subvert pinkwashing ways of thinking that establish binaries between discrete religious Christian and Israeli Jewish communities. Both sides form his *becoming*, and a re-writing of his belonging. In reality, Yamen is always oscillating between Christian and Jewish communities, religious and secular communities. In a TV series, he talks with his Christian father on the porch about his BA art collection, *striving* to get his dad to feel a kind of investment in his engagement with Christian themes. For example, Yamen tells his father that the neckties featured in the collection, were conceived out of his memory of his father's "obsession" with neckties (Makan 2021a, 7:45-8:25). Another day, he speaks to his father on the phone, on a patio at a cafe. Yamen's father had read a recent Israeli fashion article that tells traumatic stories his father had not yet heard; Yamen speaks of it as a "personal story… from the heart" (Ibid., 16:14-18:30). His father laments that Yamen's religious trauma had been concealed from his family. The fashion article lauds his family for choosing to praise Yamen's art, first framed as an impasse between him and his (Christian) society (Fashion Israel 2020). The article narrates that his priest told him that his life did not matter, on grounds that society is right to reject his subversive gender presentation (Ibid.). As the article praises, he speaks in English, Hebrew, and Arabic with designers (Makan 2021a, 14:00-16:00). He switches between registers, between different communities and societies. As such, Yamen's story re-writes and articulates his Christian identity, beyond a temporality rooted in the perceived fixity of religious homophobia.

In the spirit of Yamen's in-betweenness, my Canadian interlocutor Kareem's education work grapples with similar human universals; Kareem articulates universality when it *is* about religion. Kareem occasionally talks about homosexuality and Islam with other Arab and Middle Eastern users on audio rooms on social media platforms, while in Canada. The participants are often straight people who simply want to learn more. He says that their questions emerge from Palestinian, Arab, and Middle Eastern contexts, but are clearly deeply universal in scope, enough to be boring. He describes them as "their little homophobic questions." At the same time, Kareem tells me that some of his friends get people from the Middle East to come out anti-homophobic, often over the course of three rooms. The ordinariness of their questions confirms for Kareem that the collaborative re-writing of religious homophobia is a form of "actually talking" that critiques religion not as a top-down structure but a form of constant temporal becoming.

While my interlocutors reach non-traditional publics and challenge religious and sexual norms, Faisal proposes public, communal conversations around sexuality, religion, and Palestinian identity. He describes how Israeli Jews "can be also *proud* of being Jewish and pray… and also being gay… I mean they like *re-write* their religion." At the same time, Faisal's *vision for the future* is exactly that: Palestinians re-writing and re-representing religion. I ask him what this might look like. He says that they must teach kids that being gay is acceptable in religion and in reference to God; second, they must upend literalist interpretations of religion, beyond the idea that "religion is like a law that you must follow it." So, while Faisal is deeply distant from religion, he is still invested in a collective societal discourse on sexual and gender identity and religion. This conversation would be similar to what Palestinian activist Halah Abdelhadi proposes: a discourse between queer religious Palestinians and their "spiritual and

religious leaders" (2021). The discourse is similar to what Nijmi Edres calls a needed debate on "the relationship between non-normative sexuality and religious normativity" (2020, 227).

While Faisal imagines a public "re-writing" of Palestinian queer religion, public critiques of Palestinian religious norms *are* being articulated. For example, the three queer male stars of the documentary *Oriented* produce a music video for a Yasmine Hamdan song with three queer female friends. When they conceived the idea for the video, they wanted to make a "criticism of religious *society*, not religion itself" (2016, 23:47). The video takes us into a white room with all six friends and one woman veiled in a full black niqab. The video shows the religious woman already constantly re-writing to queer Palestinians what is acceptable: standing over a marriage of convenience between one male star and one queer female friend (Qambuta Productions 2013, 1:16); silently and solemnly hugging one of the men, who wears a kefiyyeh around his lapel (Ibid., 2:30). Once alone, the veiled woman proceeds to undress and chain smoke under her face covering (Ibid., 3:28). The video highlights that the religious exclusion of queer people belies the shades of ambiguity surrounding what mandates of religion are actually followed in religious communities. Norms and expectations become fragile. This video is public artifacts that have been circulated at film festivals and "global audiences" (Atshan 2020, 171).

All of the above narratives are themselves useful on their own terms, and help us engage the universal and the specific. Their universalization can ultimately upend pinkwashing logics that tell us that the only possible path for a queer Palestinian is to either escape their religion or fight for space to constantly re-write their faith traditions. My interlocutors do not speak in those terms, strategically refuse talking about the particular. Yamen creates a framework that provides space for queer Palestinians to: chart the nuance of their futures; articulate their identities to publics; and self-represent in ways that speak of religion as possibilities rather than as alienation.

In what follows, I turn to my interlocutors' experience articulating decolonial critiques of the religious models they inherited through their families, as diasporic subjects.

3. Decolonial Religious Perspectives

While above I discuss the divine as a spectral sovereignty, and then the particularity of Palestinian queer religious identity, I lay out below how my interlocutors navigate a different specter: the "biopolitical" sovereignty of the "modern" nation-states in which they live, which religious studies scholar Brock Perry argues is a secularization of the sovereignty of an "omnipotent" God (2014, 180). All of my interlocutors' develop more self-reflexive, political religious Palestinian identities as adults. They negotiate religion alongside their positions of relative rights under Israel, Canada, and the US, with complex legal statuses in tension with their decolonial pro-Palestine politics. As such, I argue that my interlocutors' identities can be both decolonial and religious, and are re-written across a divide between individual and community. I am not interested in rehashing the theories of decolonial queerness, but to showcase how my interlocutors' speak to them as part of their re-writing of religion.

My interlocutor Kareem reminds me that in the Arab world, throughout colonization, religion became a facet of life that Palestinians grasped for, coveted, and came to identify with. Because of the imposition of colonial values and its cultural regression and erasure, Palestinians inherited conservative, sometimes heteronormative notions of religion. Nijmi Edres recounts how the two religious minorities in Palestine had little legal autonomy over realms over than those of *family* law (2020, 224). These institutions, as "the 'last bastion of Palestinian identity' in Israel," came to adhere to strict gender and sexuality conventions, in tension with an "Israeli civil law" (Ibid.). This discourse is part of the ideological work and conditions of possibility that make it easy for straight Palestinians to surmise their queer counterparts as imposters because of their

transgression of norms (Ibid., 225). My American interlocutor Nour speaks of robust traditions of queer-friendliness in and around Palestine before colonialism. There was a larger-scale heteronormative re-writing of religion that took place in historic Palestine.

The question of colonialism and Palestinian queer religion is thus implicated in questions of community and law (Stelder 2018, 52-6).[38] Indeed, pinkwashing is based on *using* the gay-rights successes of Israeli queer rights (Puar 2011, 139), many of which affect individuals. Puar's concept of homonationalism critiques "the focus on rights-bearing subjects [as they] are currently being complemented with thinking on affect and on population formation," (2007, 205) a process that hinders strong community-making.[39] Despite their complex statuses, my interlocutors Kareem and Nour are what Saba Mahmood call "individual rights-bearing subjects" (2013, 55) in Canada and the US;[40] Faisal and Yamen hold citizenship status in Israel. As such, re-writing queer Palestinian religiosity involves playing into debates of collectivity versus individuality. Mikki Stelder uses a common example as one of her "scenes of speaking" (2018, 53): during the global 2005 "Danish cartoon controversy," the western public discourse obsessed over "liberal discourses of legal redress" like "free speech laws," rather than the pain of many Muslim polities over the problematic portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad (Ibid., 53-4). Drawing on my critique in the previous section of what is (in)articulable, my interlocutors are navigating this space between community collectivity and legal individual frames in ways that subvert the divide. Stelder quotes Mahmood as saying that this divide is actually not "unbridgeable" at all (2018, 53). This rethinking helps my interlocutors *become* queer Palestinian Muslims and Christians in a diasporic context, and re-write their queer religiosities in Western sovereignties.

First, I turn to one of the most highly circulated and reported pinkwashing narratives of a *religious* queer Palestinian, that deeply severs the protagonist from his family, religion, and

community of origin (Atshan 2020, 146-7). It is the striking story of John Calvin, a gay male

Palestinian and formerly Muslim youth who sought asylum in Canada. His uncles are reported to

be top Hamas leaders, and he ran away as a teenager when he knew he was gay. After years of

struggle, Calvin was granted some amount of complex, liminal protection by the US (emetonline

2016, 18:50). As a young adult, Calvin converted to Christianity, describing the religion as

having "made sense, both logically and spiritually to me" (i24News English 2015, ~3:30). On

CNN Business, we see him being led through a Western chapel by an elder pastor (2015, 2:08).

Calvin's relationship to Israel, Canada, and the US almost appears as a spectacle of sovereignty,

of queer support for these states, globally spectated, and a rejection of the sovereignty of Islam.

At points, the coverage reads as though fabricated and the specificities elided, not unlike the

narratives that Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) critiques. Calvin comes into the US as a rights-bearing

subject, while in his asylum claim, distancing himself from his family (CNN Business 2015,

2:35) whose Hamas activity is represented in fuzzy keffiyeh-clad faces (Ibid., 0:50). As the

ultimate reconfiguration, he sees Christianity as bringing him into a self-reflexive worldview,

where he is authorized to *become* much more easily with a new legal status.

Calvin's story of his reconfiguration of his religiosity deploys Laurel Schneider's "logic

of the one" in order to cast Islam as static, and Christianity as fluid and free (2007). Brock Perry

argues that we might critique intersectionality using Schneider's idea of divinity as a visible

"*ontos* always becoming" (2014, 183; 2007, 135), where intersecting identities inform queers'

recognition under the state (Ibid.). In Cavin's story, religion is articulated as the most extreme of

identity factors. In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar analyzes a 1999 report on the motivations behind

terrorism, by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress. In it, she argues,

"Religious belief is thus cast… as the overflow, the final excess that impels monstrosity" (2007,

55). Taking a page from this insight, Calvin tells CNN Business that "Islam [and] Hamas …was not *part* of my family's identity. It was *the* identity we had" (Segall 2015). Thus, Calvin indexes that the Islamic divine is rigid and lacks the capacity for the intersectionality that Christianity allows. Calvin also tells press, "I want to live in a place where I can be free to be Christian, gay, and Palestinian, and a hundred and one other things" (Lieber 2016). There is a kind of way in which Calvin sees Christianity as intersectional, diverse, queer-friendly, and community-friendly, and Islam whose collectivity is dysfunctional and fixated on violence.

In a much more decolonial and liberatory way, my Jordanian-American interlocutor Nour's life experience hops between collective queer Palestinian and individual US subjectivities. Nour, who greeted me on Zoom, is a busy and educated person, who organizes tirelessly for a queer Islam in diaspora, and holds an MA from a top US university. During our interview, Nour spoke with uncertainty. They laughed when speaking about difficult-to-articulate aspects of being a queer Muslim sharing religious institutions with straight people. They wore a thin, hot pink tank top with long pink nails and straight combed back hair. Generally, they identify as non-binary and queer "reluctantly," asking instead to be referred to as "sexually expansive." This way, they take up a positionality that honors "the [Muslim, Arab] *tradition* of sexual and gender expansiveness." They thus situate themselves within a decolonial religiously-inflected collective. They refer to themselves with Western categories when they need to be "palatable to an [Western] audience," articulating their identity beyond Joseph Massad's identity-practice binary (2015). They introduce themselves as a "second-generation Palestinian refugee." Right off the bat, Nour's subjectivity is linked to a queer community. Their sexual subjectivity inflects expanded possibility, especially in their activist work.

Aside from this queer Muslim history, there are some temporal factors that hang over Nour as they develop their *striving* to be a queer Muslim. In their asylum application, Nour must self-represent as an "asylum-seeking victim of homophobic Palestinian culture" (Schotten 2018, 23). They told me that they had to lean into a certain "racist, Islamophobic, xenophobic" stereotype. The wide purchase of this stereotype made it comparatively easy for queer Palestinians to acquire asylum. Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to hear about this narrative from them directly. But based on the stereotypes invoked by Calvin, I have an educated guess: queer Palestinians should present themselves as individuals fully estranged from family, religious community, and Palestinian community, who are purportedly violently homophobic. Nour recalls, "I found myself trying to strike a balance… I was answering questions of like, hey, this is shitty, but at the same time my community is beautiful." But in the end, the stereotype could not accommodate their complexity.

Paradoxically, in re-writing their belonging to Palestinian and Muslim communities, Nour completely over-writes the same stereotype that gave them relative legal status, in almost everything they pursue. It is a temporal path that is pre-determined by community, but takes inevitable twists and turns. In their queer Muslim organizing, Nour practices their Islam in partly digital and online notions of queer community, developing what Brock Perry calls a participatory "queer theology" (2014, 186). Nour's queer communities are online and otherwise precarious despite empire's "biopolitical control" of queer bodies (Ibid.).I share a few themes they told me about: Nour's Islam involves re-writing what they call the "carceral" Islam in Jordan, which they say is based on ideas of punishment. Their Islam is based in a divine queer community rooted in the activist concept of abolition, committed to ending "[e]verything that abolitionists will say is wrong," like militaries, prisons, and even governments! Their Islam involves political and social

accountability that prioritizes the agency and problem-solving capacity of tight-knit communities over resorting to the fragmentary logics of law. Nour thus believes in a divine multiplicity rooted in what theologian Laurel Schneider calls "incarnation:" the collaborative, bodily process of making "God-among-us" that is rooted in "thereness" and physical "bodies" (2007, 5). They describe a way of *becoming* into community and a new form of the divine beyond colonial legacies. Nour's Islam challenges the sovereignty of the US nation-state.

Further, Ahmad Ray's experiences also engage the decolonial in their engagements with the sovereignties of divine power over individuals. Ahmad was living in Canada with their mother and an uncle, described as a religious patriarchal figure who continually extorted their paycheck to remit to their mother ("My Story" 2021, ~3:30). When Ahmad refused, their uncle proceeded to make threats, implying that as a queer person, they belongs to neither Palestinian nor Canadian collectives. In his voicemail, recorded in the video, their uncle quickly says a pious "es-Salaamu 3alaikum," but proceeds into a long tirade of homophobic threats. He tells Ahmad, "All of this sluttiness, go and do it in Palestine with …[those] you call friends, not here" (Ibid.). Ahmad introduces themself on social media as having their rights protected by the Canadian state, and as a Palestinian from a religious family (Ibid.). Their uncle's simple utterances above call up centuries of exclusion by colonialism and religion, as an individual who is excluded from, and at the margins of, multiple communities.

Ahmad uses this relative Canadian freedom in order to include their YouTube audience into queer activities. They then allow queer Palestinian audiences to participate in a decolonial belonging to a queer secular community. Ahmad Ray is unequivocally critical of Israel, Zionism, and pinkwashing, yet they openly engage with Canada just as a normal queer citizen, just as a queer non-binary femme living in a normal neighborhood in Canada. Ahmad presents themself

as having fully left their family, and adopted a secular community. They thus paradoxically self-narrate a new, publicly spectated, imaginary for Palestinian viewers to think of *becoming* better queer people between individual and community. This is evidenced by Ahmad's plethora of videos, well-captioned and well-spoken in Palestinian Arabic. They depict Ahmad going out with their friends to thrift shops, getting their nails done, walking their neighborhood in dresses, playing dress-up, twerking with friends, giving tours of their bedroom, going to Palestine-solidarity events in Canada, and eating fast food while stuck in COVID lock-down.[41] These are partly meant to support Palestinian and other Arab viewers. Ahmad's videos provide a sovereign global stage for queer Palestinians to imagine Palestinian queerness differently, as they experience Ahmad's joyful affective energies and their well-curated comment section, full of queer messages of love. Ahmad's videos represent queer Palestinians, as community oriented, in the most simply humanizing way.

Differently from Ahmad's imagining of decolonial communities, Nour's Palestinian identity is related to their religious identity particularly in its separateness, and the "ethnographic refusal" to articulate to me a coherent decolonial politic (Simpson 2014, 95-114). Nour's sense of belonging is more deeply tied to a tension between their Palestinianness and Muslimness, having less to do with legal categories; rather, with an affective belonging to Palestine. Nour tells me that the Palestinian national struggle might have an "Islamic dimension," but that at its core is one of an indigenous population that "happens" to include Muslims. They speak of an "emotional" dimension: "I still crave to pray at al-Aqsa [Mosque in Jerusalem, and] to experience the Islamic dimensions of Palestine" due to their historic and national significance. Though more complexly, Nour feels deeply that Palestine is an indigenous struggle much of whose ties to "history and legend and story," partly inherited to Palestinian culture through

Islam. Nour's connection between Islam and Palestine is one of affect, emotionally tying themself to collectivity.

Many queer Palestinians with Israeli citizenship have a similar affective tie to Palestine, while their religious belonging is conditioned by centuries of history that is out of their control. The major star of the documentary *Oriented*, Khader, articulates a religiously-inflected decolonial perspective that helps him re-write their Palestinian identity. The film follows the daily lives of three queer Palestinian male friends living in Tel Aviv. The documentary resonates with Kareem's observations from Section 1: that "religion makes [Palestinians] stronger" and that Palestinian Islamic education teaches youth to love God and the land. Khader's alienation from Palestinian society is long, and his temporal exclusion actually gives him the power to re-write his identity. Accordingly, Khader recounts, "My grandmother was very young in 1948… She fought for the land they lived on… And many times they had to face Jewish soldiers. … Because I live in Tel Aviv, she doesn't speak to me. She claims that I'm Jewish" (2016, 36:00). For Khader's grandmother, he purportedly supports the colonizer. Khader is pushed away from the same family members that condition the possibility of his Palestinianness and religiosity. Khader's ability to identify with Palestinianness and with Islam are in deep tension, and his proximity to the Israeli nation-state and society conditions his options for finding community as a rights-bearing subject. He is rendered undeserving of Palestinian specificity, having to live the contradictions of anti-Palestinian traumas with homophobic traumas.

However, living this tension, Khader proceeds to subvert this tense belonging and, in turn, re-imagine Palestine in response to the homophobic Muslim religious publics that he hopes the documentary will reach. As we saw above, the religious elements of the film are examples of Nijmi Edres's concept of public religious debates, as they create a global conversation that

reaches the established "religious sphere." This is similar to what queer theorist Elizabeth Povinelli calls (and Maya Mikdashi uses), "self-authorizing" and "genealogical" subjectivities (Mikdashi 2014, 287). Khader speaks about colonialism as a constant temporal rupture in his belonging to Palestine. When he wants to speak to Muslim publics, he momentarily identifies as Muslim. Khader speaks in a press interview that Sa'ed Atshan quotes, saying that his sense of community, as well as his belief, does not revolve around religion (2020, 175). But, his contribution to the documentary is in part a critique of the homophobic Islamic establishment. For him, "it's super important to *say* I'm Muslim…to show the world, the sheikhs, the Muslim fanatics… that we have LGBTs and gays inside our community" (Ibid.). While "fanatics" is a strong term, Khader wants to be part of a public anti-pinkwashing global conversation that invests in a radical presence of queers challenging religious homophobia (Ibid.). Khader self-authorizes as Muslim precisely in order to gain access to the same genealogy that severs him from his Palestinian past. He is excluded by the Muslim community, but also a sovereign colonial specter of history that inhibits his belonging. Khader re-writes the Islam, which through his grandmother's temporality, excluded him from Islam! As such, he starts a public conversation about the tension between Muslim clerics' religious norms and the experiences of queer Muslim Palestinians.

In the face of life in settler nation-states, my queer Palestinian interlocutors re-write their religious subjectivities in ways that help us upend the dilemma between community and the individual. John Calvin shows us a spectacular pinkwashing narrative of leaving a Palestinian Muslim family and finding refuge in western Christianity. Contrastingly, Nour unpacks their deep connection to queer Muslim community as a moral heuristic for indigenous Palestinian struggle. They also develop an Islam in which community accountability is a striving to which

they aspire. On a smaller scale, Ahmad transforms his religious trauma from their Muslim family into a canvas to re-write possibilities for queer Palestinians grappling on the ground. They essentially divest from a decolonial framework in order to bring stories to international spectators. Lastly, Khader experiments with his own religious identity, starting a public-facing debate that forces established Palestinian religious communities to reckon with queer presence. He does so in a context in which he is excluded from the same religiosity. Through these narratives, we see yet another way that queer Palestinian religious identity is both like a canvas as well as a regime of power and authority.

Conclusion

I have shown how my interlocutors re-write their religious identities, especially the divine and their relationship to Palestinianness, legal statuses, and the religious elements of colonization. They fashion themselves both within and beyond the logics of pinkwashing.

First, I address the many different relationships of my interlocutors to the divine, which they subvert, unlearn, and "queer" into more empowering concepts. Some of my interlocutors reproduce pinkwashing narratives, and reject God as a part of a form of religious social control of Palestinian society that both negatively intervened in and buttressed their development. As such, my interlocutors think of their emergence from their religious backgrounds as beginning a kind of "becoming," embracing Naveeda Khan's concept of "open futures." Tarek portrays God as full of expansive revolutionary love and potential, continuing to feel it through religious, sexual, and gender norms that severed him from belonging. My research shows this re-writing of the "divine" and its accordance with and departure from Israeli logics. I contribute to research that unlearns and rethinks the sovereignty of God. This analysis helps us understand the crucial

role of queer religious interventions into Palestine and elsewhere, in the context of the development of consciousness.

Second, I attend to the issue of the universal and the particular, to make sense of my interlocutors' lives as queer Palestinians re-writing their religious backgrounds, productively refusing to be fully legible to their sovereign audiences. My interlocutor Yamen's artistic endeavors to re-write his religiosity were a refusal to articulate, except on his own terms. This re-writing involves an unsettling of universality *and* particularity that are both best engaged with an expansive concept of dialogue. Yamen subverts the religious aspects of pinkwashing stereotypes with a long-term engagement with both secularity *and* Israeli Jewish society. Faisal helps us get at the particularities of navigating intersecting identities of religion and queerness. These insights come to bear on the relationship between queerness and religion, as well as the legibility of several simultaneous identities.

Lastly, I ask what kind of decolonial approaches to religious-adjacent Palestinian queer identity my interlocutors use to complicate their relationship to law and the (settler) nation-state, and the power of identity and community. Their identity formations are engagements with temporalities that are inherited through a Palestinian past, recent religious trauma, and Palestinian "feeling citizenship," each which means re-writing religion in a way that highlights their agency. They are often engaging with these temporalities just by speaking and acting simply about queer love, existence, and belonging, but also by engaging intersectionality (El Amoor 2021). Others are engaging religious analytic tools to stage belonging, in explicit tension with logics of pinkwashing and homonationalism tying them to Israel, the US, and Canada. These interventions help future scholarship delve into the power differentials between Christian and Muslim queer Palestinian identities, and the intricacies between life in diaspora and in Israel.

For future research, I want to highlight a vignette from YouTube. Queer Palestinian Adam speaks to a virtual audience at Oxford's Wolfson College (2021). At the very end of the Q&A, one participant inquires into the ways in which members of established religious power structures see queer Palestinian activism. Adam confirms that the religious establishment is poignantly homophobic, and is often a chosen vehicle for overtly anti-queer discourse. However, his queer femme friend's father is a sheikh, who interestingly holds a "spiritual" religious worldview that betrays claims to Palestinian religious homophobia. He believes that God created every soul in His divine image, and embraces her queerness. Adam says, "She is very thirsty for a discourse that integrates religion and sexuality together." He says this discourse usually take shape in "big cosmopolitan cities," and is nascent on the ground in Palestine. Further research, following Nijmi Edres (2020), ultimately involves speaking to queer Palestinians about their experiences on the ground building this discourse, yearning for it, or surviving without it. Ironically, these discussions must be rooted in a methodology deeply attuned to Palestinian geographical specificity.

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Notes:

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1 See, also, Ghaith Hilal's article, on *alQaws* website, under the sub-heading, "3. How do you deal with your main enemy, Islam?" (2013).

2 For one such instance, see: Nina Metz, "Documentary 'Oriented' Captures Lives of Gay Palestinian Men in Israel," chicagotribune.com (Chicago Tribune, April 28, 2016), https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/movies/ct-oriented-documentary-palestine-movie-0429-20160428-column.html. In this article, the author says, "Religion itself is never discussed." In reality there are a few places where religion is discussed.

3 The work of Sarah Schulman is key to my project. She is an instrumental queer New York activist in organizing the first US queer delegation to historic Palestine (Atshan 2020, *xii*). In email communication, Edres suggested to me to read Schulman's book, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International* (2012), for its religious themes. I am struck by her assessment that Judaism is inherently "dialogic" and argues about whether Israel is wrong, and that "emotionally" (but "unarticulated") Jewish people have a great power to criticize Zionist nationalism (2012, 14).

4 See Jason Ritchie's "Pinkwashing, Homonationalism, and Israel-Palestine: The Conceits of Queer Theory and The Politics of the Ordinary" (2015) and Maya Mikdashi and Jasbir Puar's article: Jasbir Puar and Maya Mikdashi, "Pinkwatching and Pinkwashing: Interpenetration and Its Discontents," Jadaliyya (Jadaliyya, August 9, 2012), https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/26818/Pinkwatching-And-Pinkwashing-Interpenetration-and-its-Discontents. Both concepts, homonationalism and pinkwashing, became the framing of a 2013 conference, where activists and academics deployed both concepts in the service of queer liberation, from Israel to other nation-states.

5 This is a long debate that I cannot rehash here.

6 Former alQaws director Haneen Maikey and Palestinian academic Walaa Alqaisiya speak in a 2021 webinar about the fact that Palestinian culture is not static, but deliberately re-iterating itself over and over, a dynamic process (Decolonizing Sexualities Network 2021).

7 I am grounding this claim in experiences I have had in the Palestine solidarity movement where people were often claiming that Palestinians are the most resilient people on Earth.

8 Indeed, Gayatri Spivak's 2008 article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is heavily cited in these conversations.

9 What comes to mind is the literature of Fatimah Mernissi, Assia Djebar, and Zohra Drif, even all the way back to the early 20th Century Lebanese feminist, Anbara Salām Khālidī. Some of these, I would argue, are canonized in area studies.

10 The Palestinian hip-hop group DAM was chastised in 2012 by Abu-Lughod and her close colleague Maya Mikdashi for presenting in a music video the desire of a young woman to escape a Palestinian honor killing against her without situating it within the context of the politics of Israeli settler colonialism. The group rejoined that the video was for Arab Palestinians, by Arab Palestinians, a discussion of their local gendered and familial context, contextualized sufficiently for the community that was the audience of the video.

   See: Tamer Nafar, Suhell Nafar, and Mahmood Jrery, "DAM Responds: On Tradition and the Anti-Politics of the Machine," Jadaliyya (Jadaliyya, July 10, 2017), https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/27683.

   And: Lila Abu-Lughod and Maya Mikdashi, "Tradition and the Anti-Politics Machine: DAM Seduced by the 'Honor Crime,'" Jadaliyya (Jadaliyya, November 23, 2012), https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/27467.

   DAM's video was used as a pedagogical tool in Izat El Amoor's (2019) discussions with his students. See section 1.

11 Others, like Jason Ritchie, have illuminated the way in which "Israeli sovereignty penetrates even the most seemingly intimate spaces of everyday life" (2015, 623). He also says that Israeli sovereignty helps us see how sovereignty shapes the ways in which "Israeli space" is navigated by queer Palestinians (Ibid., 622).

12 Edres's chapter is one of the first to take up Palestinian queer identity and what she calls "religious normativity," in line with Atshan's recommendation for the study of Palestinian Muslim and Christian identities (2020, 215).

13 Accordingly, Halah Abdelhadi (2021), a queer and feminist "south Tel Aviv" Palestinian activist with long black hair, dark lipstick, and round glasses, forecasts that these conversations are on the horizon (2021). Abdelhadi describes three consecutive public protests in Haifa, since 2019, relevantly catalyzed partly by a *family-oriented* hate crime (Ibid.). In the context of these changes, she advocates that queer Palestinians "should build a mediating lexicon that will allow us to have a conversation with spiritual and religious leaders" (Ibid.). In fact, my interlocutor Faisal tells me that inside Israel, open conversation about homosexuality may catalyze this, even if most voices are currently homophobic.

14 I argued this previously, in a paper called "How to Pick and Choose: Embodied Ease and Feeling Citizenship in Historic Palestine" (Feldman 2022).

15 I want to put Edres's work in dialogue with the kind of digital publics that I discuss above. I argue that while there is a space coming for direct conversations between religious leaders and queer Muslims and Christians (Abdelhadi 2021), the more common model is for individuals to start these conversations by putting their stories into digital or otherwise interior and small "publics" (Warner 2002). Edres poses an interesting question that interfaces with my project: why is religion such a taboo subject to integrate with sexuality, even for Palestinian queer organizers and activists? The digital-ness of these conversations linking "religious normativity" and homosexuality (2020, 223) are *becoming* public and uniquely, reaching religious leaders. Michael Warner's "publics" are concerned with private notions of queerness and

family becoming public and political (2002, 34). Interestingly, see also Mahmood (2013).

16 Sa'ed Atshan regards Massad's framework as reifying the East and West oppositions and binaries (2020, *xii*).

17 The literature of queer Palestine studies is vast. There were two very important moments in the scholarship on queer Palestine (Atshan 2020, 14-15). First, a 2010 special issue in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* called, "Queer Politics and the Question of Palestine/Israel." Second, a 2018 special issue in the *Journal for Palestine Studies* called "Queering Palestine."

      Alqaisiya (2020) articulates what is the most important takeaway of the 2010 special issue: "The major contribution of those studies lies in how they scrutinize queer Israeli practices in a critical manner, identifying the growing impact of international movements against Israeli pinkwashing, as a form of homonationalism.[20] They nevertheless remain grounded in frames that do not fully account for Palestinian native queerness. Hence, they obscure the specificity of settler-colonialism in Palestine. One significant limitation entails the adoption of a comparative lens of 'Israel/Palestine,' which allows the juxtaposition of 'queer Palestinians' vis-a-vis 'queer Israelis' in the realm of an on-going conflict and/or homos for the nation.[21] Hochberg's themed issue identifies queerness as premised on the promotion of a "politics of coexistence beyond ethnonational and religious borders."[22] Her argument appears to stem from the idea of an on-going conflict between Israel/Palestine, which reduces the power relations in Palestine to the presence of two equally powerful parties with conflicting 'ethno-nationalist/religious' aspirations" (2020, 90).

18 Like Alqaisiya (2020), Ritchie also takes up the "taxonomy" of religion in Israel (2015, 624). Ritchie explores many Israeli queers on dating apps in order to classify queer Palestinians' "proximity to Israeliness" (2015, 625). As my interlocutors told me, and as Rhoda Kanaaneh writes, there is a category, of decreasing level of importance: Druze, Bedouin, Christian, Muslim (Ibid.), in relation to Israeli Jewishness. Ritchie similarly discusses how politics, in rendering all Palestinians political, creates similar hierarchies (Ibid., 626).

19 For example, take the writings of Atshan (2020), Ritchie (2010; 2015), Alqaisiya (2018), Schotten (2018), Stelder (2018), Hochberg (2010), Gold (2010), Solomon (2003). Schotten defines pinkwashing thus: "Refurbishing the tired trope of Israel as 'the only democracy in the Middle East,' Brand Israel presents the Jewish state as a shining oasis of tolerance amid a sea of hostile and homophobic Arab and Muslim barbarism, with Tel Aviv a 'gay mecca' vacation destination for international travelers" (20).

20 Ghassan Moussawi (2020) explores how in Lebanon, queers navigate their political and familial situations. Moussawi's work has developed considerably beyond Sofian Merabet's seminal work, *Queer Beirut* (2014). Additionally, Moussawi writes about the "erasures" that make it possible for the world to see Beirut as a "tolerant" oasis in a hostile middle east, such as those based on religion, ethnicity, race, class, and gender (2020, 36).

21 Education is a central aspect of being Palestinian and queer and gender non-conforming (Aswat 2011, 158). Education has persisted as a social remedy to homophobic violence for quite some time.

22 This teleology is also reworked by Ghassan Moussawi (2020, 80).

23 My interlocutors' departure from religion is consistent with Nakassis' idea of "bracketing" (2016, 19).

24 Nina Metz (2016) writes, falsely, that the documentary does not engage religion. See: Nina Metz, "Documentary 'Oriented' Captures Lives of Gay Palestinian Men in Israel," chicagotribune.com (Chicago Tribune, April 28, 2016), https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/movies/ct-oriented-documentary-palestine-movie-0429-20160428-column.html.

25 Nijmi Edres argues that her queer Palestinian interlocutors "address religious debates while maintaining their affective bounds to Palestine by focusing on their private relation with God" (2020, 224). I rethink the privateness of this God, while showing that my interlocutors are engaged in re-imagining the divine.

26 Kareem told me that this subject in school was called "at-tarbiyyeh al-islamiyyeh" in Palestinian Arabic, meaning "Islamic education." He describes taking a course like this throughout his grade school education.

27 This particular 2019 Facebook post commemorated the translation of *Waqfet Banat* into English, and future translations into Spanish, Italian, and Arabic: Aswat. 2019. "Dear Friends." Facebook, July 15, 2019. https://www.facebook.com/aswat.voices/posts/dear-freinds-now-you-can-read-waqfet-banat-in-english-online-enjoy-it-stay-tuned/2348656925182232/.

28 El Amoor also helped me tremendously with the interlocutor recruitment process.

29 See Works Cited.

30 Puar (2014, 208-9) suggests her own meditation on the concept of "divine ontology of multiplicity" (Schneider 2007) albeit different from mine. She describes, "What I get when I read the phrase 'divine ontology of multiplicity' is a sense of the deep need to break down the secular/religious divide on an ontological and affective plane." Similarly, the movements I invoke in this paragraph are both secular and religious.

31 I deliberately use "ordinary" to stand in for the "politics of the ordinary" that Ritchie (2015) deploys.

32 Indeed, queer theory itself sometimes becomes ironically imagined as universal, which has been addressed by queer of color critique (Mikdashi 2018, 66).

33 I feel that this translation of the third clause is more useful than the captions on the online video.
34 The story of the making of Yamen's art collection that became his BA project is available in print in Hebrew on *Fashion Israel*, and is the subject of a Hebrew/Arabic web series on YouTube called *Qurbeh Ghurbeh*.
35 This impasse refers to the oft-quoted Christian scripture that in Yamen's words says, "a man who should not lie with another man, and that's it."
36 Aswat writes that Palestinian identity was stripped from Palestinians living in 1948 Palestine, or "Israel proper" (2011, 154).
37 The "personal is political" from Michael Warner (2002, 33).
38 I have also made this argument in a term paper in Fall 2021, for a class called "Secularism." In it, I cited: Aeyal Gross (2017), Noura Erakat (2019), and Darryl Li (2019), who all write about law in the Palestine and middle east regions.
39 I want to acknowledge the influence of Puar upon my work, including *Terrorist Assemblages* (TA) and the many readings into homonationalism she has done since 2007, between Israel and the United States. Her 2014 article, "Reading Religion Back into *Terrorist Assemblages:* Author's Response" reads responses in religious studies to TA, and has helped me understand theories about people who are both queer and religious.
40 Mahmood (2013, 55) writes about women becoming "individual rights-bearing subjects," as is so much of the basis of secular legal systems for most groups.
41 YouTube Channel: Ahmad Ray.