

QUEERING GENOCIDE: Israel's Pinkwashing Campaign and the Ineptness of International Law in Gaza

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ABSTRACT

Immediately after the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, as the escalation grew into a war, then the war into a genocide, Israel and its Zionist allies invoked queer Palestinians to vindicate the genocide in Gaza using a largescale pinkwashing campaign. Being an Israeli colonial practice that queer Palestinians have constantly reframed in service of the wider Palestinian struggle against occupation and apartheid, pinkwashing pre- and post-October 7 has been largely akin. Considering the severity of the Zionist colonial violence since October 7, however, the queer Palestinian response to Israeli pinkwashing reemerged with the added merit of challenging the failures of genocide discourse in both international law and academia.

This article presents a media analysis of (1) Israel's actions to pinkwash genocide; (2) the pro-Palestine anti-pinkwashing (pinkwatching) organizing that emerged from the anti-genocide transnational movement, and finally; (3) I contextualize the two to argue that, besides the irremovable link between Palestinian queer liberation and collective Palestinian decolonization, it is beneficial for international law and genocide studies to integrate queer perspectives/analyses in documenting, analyzing, and explaining the failures to prevent Israel's genocide and protect the Palestinians.

Keywords: pinkwashing, genocide, Gaza, Palestine, internation law, ICJ, Israel.

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which defined genocide as any of five acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group (Kreb 2007; Kabatsi 2005; Ambos 2009). The acts are killing members of the protected group, causing them serious bodily or mental harm, imposing living conditions intended to destroy the group, preventing births, and forcibly transferring children out of the protected group. Victims must be targeted because of their real or perceived membership of a protected national, ethnic, racial or religious group (Kabatsi 2005; Kreb 2006). Reflecting this legal and scholarly definition, immediately after Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, Israeli genocidal intent and actions far surpassed the occupation and apartheid Palestinians experienced in the past 76 years.

Soon after, genocide and international law scholars recognized the international community's failure to protect Gazans from genocide, the weak humanitarian intervention, the lack of scrutiny over Israel, the

broader inconsistencies in the application of the terminology of genocide, and the selective enforcement of international law due to the political considerations of powerful states undermining its moral objectives (Segal and Luigi 2024; El-Affendi 2024; Moses 2024). They recognized that the insufficient response to this genocide confirms the well-documented history of international law always failing Palestinians as Israel has always violated it with impunity (Buttu 2020; Boyle 2010). As evident in the case of Palestine, in part, that has been possible because international law is not inherently just or neutral but can be wielded for enabling suppression of groups over others (Erakat 2020).

Consequently, citing the growing global awareness of Palestinian suffering following the genocide in Gaza, genocide and international law scholars such as Raz Segal and Daniele Luigi (2024), Abdelwahab El-Affendi (2024), and Jeremy Moses (2024) called for an unprecedented change in how academia and the international community engage with Palestine, advocating for a more critical and inclusive understanding of the historical and ongoing injustices Palestinians face. They also warned that as academic and political frameworks analyze genocide but often fail to intervene or hold powerful actors accountable, these failures undermine the credibility of genocide studies. They stipulated a reassessment of the field's goals and methodologies, arguing that without deeper political engagement and action, genocide studies risk becoming futile and unable to effect real-world change in the face of ongoing atrocities (Segal and Luigi 2024; El-Affendi 2024; Moses 2024).

As the bloodshed continued uninterrupted with no substantial international response to protect or prevent killing 43,000 people¹ in a year—as demonstrated in South Africa's case against Israel at the International

1 Other sources estimated the death toll to be at 186,000 or higher (Khatib, McKee, and Yusuf 2024).

Court of Justice (ICJ), discussed later—Israel and its Zionist allies swiftly employed queer Palestinians to vindicate the genocide in Gaza (AJLabs 2023; Al Jazeera 2023). Being an Israeli colonial practice that queer Palestinians have constantly reframed in service of the wider Palestinian struggle against occupation and apartheid, pinkwashing pre- (Atshan 2020; Schulman 2012; Maikey and Stelder 2015; Kouri-Towe 2015) and post-October 7 has been largely akin. Considering the severity of the Zionist colonial violence since October 7, however, while still centering collective Palestinian liberation, the queer Palestinian response to Israeli pinkwashing reemerged with the added merit of challenging the failures of genocide discourses in both international law and academia.

Queer studies has recently started engaging with genocide studies as the latter grew into a robust category of scholarly inquiry (Rosenberg 2013). Due to the gap in literature on how heteronormative and homonormative logics and violence get employed in genocide discourse (Vernon 2021), Israeli pinkwashing and Palestinian pinkwatching contribute to this new interdisciplinary relationship. Using pinkwashing and pinkwatching to queer genocide studies, I re-center the Palestinian struggle, for queers and non-queers alike, in a process that also enables genocide studies to move from “multidisciplinary to interdisciplinary research to avoid fragmentation” and achieve justice objectives (Rosenberg 2013, 16).

Positioning Israel's framing of queer Palestinians as an idiosyncratic group in genocide studies emphasizes the need to “develop efficacious means of prevention and intervention” (Totten 2011, 212). Israeli pinkwashing narratives have been expended in what scholars synthesize into the “inexorable” stages of genocide, which include classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, polarization, identification, extermination, and denial (Stanton 1998). Israel's exploitation of queerness within its genocide against Palestinians illustrates the significance of

queerness in both the study of genocide and the Palestinian liberation processes (Nellans 2020; Vernon 2021).

After presenting an overview of pinkwashing as an ideology and practice prior to October 7, I present a media analysis² of (1) Israel's actions to pinkwash genocide; (2) the pro-Palestine anti-pinkwashing (pinkwatching) organizing that emerged from the anti-genocide transnational movement, and finally; (3) I contextualize the two to argue that, besides the irremovable link between Palestinian queer liberation and collective Palestinian decolonization, it is beneficial for international law and genocide studies to integrate queer perspectives/analyses in documenting, analyzing, and explaining the failures to prevent Israel's genocide and protect the Palestinians.

Why Pinkwash?

To pinkwash, Israel exploits queer rights to project a progressive queer friendly image of itself while concealing its occupation and apartheid of Palestinians. For decades, Israel has been colonizing Palestinians, queer and non-queer alike (Khalidi 2020; Pappé 2006). Yet, via pinkwashing, Israel strategically diverts attention from this colonization to present a façade of progressiveness, perpetuating the orientalist narrative that Palestinians are more deserving of militaristic occupation - and genocide since October 7 - than liberation (Stelder 2018; Said 1978).

Not only are occupation, apartheid, and genocide antithetical to democracy, a status Israel exceptionally claims in the region, but Israel's pinkwashing also contradicts its avowal of being a beacon of queer rights culturally and legislatively. This is evident in the areas of same-sex marriage,

conservative and religious rightwing political leadership, and same-sex surrogate and adoption parenting (Gubbala, Poushter, and Huang 2023; Peleg 2023). Israel also continues to coerce West Bank queers to become informants in its intelligence forces, or it threatens to deport and out them to their families (O'Connor 2013). Israel, additionally, only grants temporary asylum status to a few queer Palestinians under financial and housing constraints until they get permanently relocated into a third country (Schulman 2012; Atshan 2020).

Israel's Pinkwashing frames Palestinians as unworthy of sovereignty and self-determination using Western queer acceptance measures (Stelder 2018; Duggan 2002). Pinkwashing, then, iterates Western anti-Arab and anti-Muslim classic orientalist rhetoric, including the pretext of the war on terror (Said 1978) and the protection of Western values meant for capitalizing on conflicts in Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) and the appropriation of their resources (Khalidi 2020). Israel's allyship with the West, sustained around neo-imperialist and geopolitical economic goals, relies on classic human-rights based discourses aimed at dividing core nations from backwards peripheries in service of the state politics of Israel (Ritchie 2015; Khalidi 2020). Most recently, opinion columnist Thomas L. Friedman's "Understanding the Middle East Through the Animal Kingdom" was published in the New York Times and dangerously presented a racist colonial analogy trying to argue that SWANA will despondently remain conflict ridden with Israel a victim in its midst (2024).

To understand pinkwashing in this context of orientalism, it must be noted that in its early days, the Zionist movement's views on masculinity and homosexuality were part of the definition of the 'new Jew'. (Plapp 2005). Homosexuality was seen as an oriental vice which Zionists had to separate themselves; the diaspora was considered feminine due to its assumed weakness, while the 'new Jew' (i.e. the Zionists in Palestine) had to be its

² All media items referenced in the article appear in the Appendix.

opposite (Ilany 2017). When the Jew ‘contracted’ sodomy, it was a severe symptom of ideological weakness and the “destructive influence” of the Arab environment. Mirroring Israel’s use of militant hypermasculinity and homonormativity in Gaza since October 7, but also in the decades prior to justify the ethnic segregation under a colonial apartheid system, this history unveils how pinkwashing functions under the same orientalist separationism in the present day.

Hence, pinkwatching reemerged to combat Israeli queer-based rationalization of genocide by (1) exposing Israel’s homonormative nationalism (Duggan 2002) showcasing illusory queer rights despite Israeli homophobia and transphobia; (2) refuting claims of intrinsic racialized and Orientalized Palestinian queer experiences; and (3) emphasizing the agency and voice of queer Palestinians as inseparable of the overall Palestinians struggle (Alqaisiya 2018). Against this pinkwatching, as an arbiter to Western political imperial economic interests, Israel must repeatedly pinkwash its actions against Palestinians as they undergo genocide, effectively negating their collective right to life, while erasing the existence of queer Arabs all together (Schotten 2018). In this pattern, pinkwashing becomes a disciplining instrument of Israel’s subjects within its genocidal project, which solidifies through exploitation of queer Palestinians for constructing the abjection of Palestinians collectively as the ‘other’ (Ritchie 2015).

As a genocidal tactic, pinkwashing is an ethnoracist formation tool instrumentalizing discourses and affects of Israeli exceptionalism, which extends beyond Israel’s falsified stellar queer rights record. This exceptionalism – the idea that Israel is unique and should be judged by different standards – has increasingly come under scrutiny, particularly within the field of genocide studies following the shifting discourse around Israel’s treatment of Palestinians since October 7 (Segal and Luigi 2024).

Gaza’s genocide and the growing global awareness of Palestinian suffering have led to a reevaluation of Israel’s actions through the lens of human rights, genocide, and colonialism (El-Affendi 2024). This scrutiny brought back into focus challenges to the use of the Holocaust, which has long been used to frame Israel’s security policies and actions in exceptionalist terms (Finkelstein 2003). As genocide studies is at a turning point, where scholars must move beyond exceptionalism to consider the wider implications of Israel’s policies toward Palestinians in the context of global histories of violence and oppression, pinkwashing persisted since October 7. It is in this turning point that I frame queerness – as manifested in the acts of pinkwashing and pinkwatching - in genocide studies in the service of Palestinian liberation.

Pinkwashing Genocide

Pinkwashing reemerged exuberantly after October 7. On November 13, 2023, two images of Israeli soldier Yoav Atzmoni holding rainbow flags, taken in the northern Gaza area of Al-Atatra, were posted on X by screenwriter Lee Kern and captioned “the first ever pride flag raised in Gaza” (Masarwa 2023). In the first photo, behind the soldier lays an apocalyptic landscape of ravaged urban life destroyed by Israel’s military campaign while he is holding a pride flag with the handwritten words “In the Name of Love” in Arabic, Hebrew, and English. Atzmoni told the Israeli media that he chose these words in response to seeing “Bismillah” – a popular and revered word meaning “in the name of God” on Palestinian houses. In the second photo, he poses in front of a tank holding a rainbow-edged Israeli flag.

According to Atzmoni, the message the first flag’s message was “global solidarity” hoping “to plant the first pride flag in Gaza as a call for peace

and as a message of freedom”. The second flag’s message was that “despite the pain of war – the IDF is the only army in the Middle East that defends democratic values. It is the only army that allows gay people the freedom to be who we are”. With nearly 17 million views in one week, the post was enthusiastically picked up on by multiple official social media accounts, including the state of Israel on X, and some Israeli embassies. Noa Tishby, Israeli actress turned activist-diplomat, reposted the images in a shared post adding, “the hidden Palestinian LGBTQ+ community can be hopeful as soon they will live and love free of Hamas” (Tishby and Jews of NY 2023). Atzmoni told the newspaper *Insider* that his own rights as a gay man would be threatened if Israel does not defeat Hamas; “I won’t let them bring me back into the closet” (Masarwa 2023).

Yet, based in Israel’s illusive militaristic higher moral ground, Atzmoni’s post is repugnantly oblivious. It attempts to resuscitate morality amidst a genocide when there is no freedom for the dead, queer or not, making Israel’s exploitation of the rainbow flag, under a cloak of queer rights, one of the most blatant displays of genocidal justification, even as the undiscerning death project obliterating all life in Gaza cannot possibly liberate anyone. Responding to the flag’s manipulation, some scholars such as Scott Long publicly denounced its entire existence (2023). As someone who came out in the era of Silence = Death of the pink triangle³, he said,

Intuitively I mistrusted an all-purpose emblem that meant everything to everyone. Instinctively I find it ominous to proclaim Love and Inclusion before they actually exist. The horrible spectacle of the smirking soldier planting the flag like a gravestone, half hiding and half prettifying the wasteland of devastation his guns have caused,

3 In 1986, with the increasing crisis of AIDS, activists inverted the Holocaust pink triangle in a design for a wheatpasted poster, which included the iconic phrase “Silence = Death.”

affirming that all the murder was done in the name of love, only confirms to me how unbearable the flag has become... symbols are substitutes for discourse.

Palestinian activists, such as Ghadir Shafie, argued that despite Israel’s manufactured impression that homosexuality is punishable by death in Gaza, all queer Palestinians that have been killed recently were actually slain by Israeli forces (Masarwa 2023). Rejecting the weaponization of Israeli queer rights against Palestinians and arguing that rainbow flags had no place in genocide, activists also highlighted that such images dangerously reinforce homophobia amongst some Palestinians who may see homosexuality as something exclusive only to Israel (Masarwa 2023). Similarly, within the transnational queer solidarity movement, and inspired by the pro-Palestine Jewish non-Israelis who launched the “Not in Our Name” campaign against the genocide (Elassar 2023), many queers adopted the same slogan in response to Atzmoni’s images. Josh Kadish, a U.S. Jewish activist, wrote on X, “As a gay Jew, nothing has ever made me more sad, ashamed, angry, and disgusted all at once” (2023). These activists, Palestinian and others, have repeatedly rejected the cynical use of queer rights to frame the death machine targeting all Palestinians as a liberatory or rights-based concept.

Another Israeli pinkwashing act is the sketch titled “Welcome to Columbia Untisemity” made in Israel’s version of *Saturday Night Live* (*Eretz Nehderet* – ‘A Wonderful Country’ in Hebrew) (Lyons 2023). Playing with antisemitism tropes that Israel often deploys to sustain its righteousness as a state and justify colonizing the Palestinians, the sketch adds the word university to produce “Untisemity” aimed at U.S. college campus protests that have been repeatedly yet falsely accused of antisemitism. With millions of views, lampooning pro-Palestinian students as politically clueless looked upon with contempt, the video stages two conventionally

queer looking students with Palestinian flags. It starts with student Keley, co-host of the fictitious news program saying, "Everyone is welcome right now — LGBTQH." Fellow student and co-host, Wordle, inquires "H?" and Keley responds, " Hamas". The keffiyeh wearing Wordle declared "Yeah, I totally simp Hamas, it's so trending right now," before they both break out into a chant of "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" and begin denouncing "Zionist liars" for spreading "toxic" propaganda about the hostages Hamas holds. Wordle then declares, "I major in queer post-colonial astrology."

The two students can then be seen tearing down posters of hostage Israelis, with one declaring "Jews make the world dirty," but quickly noting "I'm not antisemitic, I'm racist fluid." The two proceed to interview a conjured Hamas spokesperson but fail to notice that the spokesperson is leveling homophobic slurs at them. When asked if he is safe, the spokesperson responds, "I am safe. I am under the Gaza hospital," and when asked about his need of humanitarian aid, he responds, "I have everything. I am only hungry for rockets." The spokesperson then tells Wordle that he can come to Gaza anytime, adding, "we will throw you from the roof, you homosexual dirt" to which Wordle responds, "Did you hear? They want to throw me a rooftop party!" again staging the two as oblivious of a deadly queer life being the only one imaginable in Gaza.

The show's executive producer, Muli Segev, said that he wrote the sketch after seeing social media footage of U.S. students tearing down posters of Israeli hostages (Lyons 2023). He made the sketch in English to reach U.S. audience and start a "more nuanced" conversation online because, "it's not this, you know, Israel is evil and Palestinians are victims. It's much more complicated than that" adding "I am not saying Israel hasn't done anything wrong, but the one-sided way (many on U.S. college campuses) perceive this conflict is amazing" (Lyons 2023). The video, however, is

illustrative of the prevalent rhetoric since the genocide began. Israel and its allies deem queer solidarity with Palestinians as contradictory and naïve as they deceptively perceive Israel as the sole upholder of queer rights in the SWANA region.

Furthermore, this sketch exposes the despise Western imperialism has for queerness; a sentiment that has fallen under the surface of Israeli-Zionist propaganda (Mitchell 2024a). Since transnational queerness has historically aimed to destabilize the longstanding heteronormative, Christian, white supremacist, colonial nature of the West, pinkwashing incriminates queers as terrorists for opposing a genocide. To do so, pinkwashing adopts an orientalist imperialist narrative rising from the war on terror discourse, which under a fictional extinction panic, frames anyone seeking to destabilize Western imperialism and Israel's genocidal ethnonationalism a terrorist (Schotten 2022). Rallying the derisive image of dull-witted queer theory and unhinged college progressives, this sketch and other Israeli propaganda is an ideological duplicate of transphobia amongst the U.S. rightwing (Mitchell 2024a). Under a similar fictional extinction panic against the spirit of U.S. ethnonationalism, such a shared lexicon poses transgender lives as a domestic threat to the same racist, Christian, cis-heteronormative imperialist values that get deployed to justify a Western genocide abroad.

In another pinkwashing case, on December 11, 2023, the official X account of the State of Israel run by its foreign ministry, shared an image of two gay men engaging in a marriage proposal (Israel 2023). The post stated that,

Shmuel drove to the border to see his partner Dennis, a combat soldier and company commander. He then got down on one knee and proposed to him [in military uniform, carrying a weapon]. Shmuel proposed with a ring from the "Adir's Diamond" project, in memory of Adir Messika who was murdered at the Nova music

festival after saving seven people. Adir's father decided to honor his son's memory, by sanctifying life, through couples who will build their own families.

This post does more than attempting to erroneously spread that same-sex marriage is legal in Israel. Although Israel traditionally fostered queer rights to trademark itself as the most forbearing state of in SWANA, taking advantage of the region's reservations in this regard during a genocide has been an attempt for Israel to 'humanize' itself against what the world has been perceiving as dehumanization of Gazans. As Israel relies on pretentious acceptance of queer families to legitimize its genocide, in a stark contrast, since October 7 it has wiped out 902 Palestinian families in the Gaza Strip and erased them from the civil registry (Middle East Monitor 2024).

An online cluster of videos and posts has disdainfully compared expressions of solidarity like "queers for Palestine" to "chickens for KFC" (Spaulding 2023). A combined image of an old protest banner saying "Queers for Palestine," decorated with pride and Palestinian flags held by four protesters, and another of a similar photoshopped banner saying "Chicks for Kentucky Fried Chicken" with four chickens behind it became viral on social media. Mockingly emphasizing an alleged contrast between Queers for Palestine versus Queer in Palestine, in another example, queer U.S. activist Peter Kalisch posted a video explaining the danger of pinkwashing and the need for queer people to support the Palestinian cause on social media. In response, the X page *Libs of TikTok* wrote the caption "Queer for Palestine v. Queer in Palestine" and reshared Kalisch's video next to a news story and image of queer 25-year-old Palestinian Ahmad Abu Marhia,⁴ who was killed in Hebron in the West Bank on October 6, 2022,

4 It is unclear how Abu Marhia ended up in the city, but a video of the murder scene in Hebron has spread widely on social media raising speculation about the

after spending two years in Israel waiting on an asylum claim to relocate abroad and receiving death threats within his community (Martin 2024).

Using such a gruesome crime against Kalisch shows the denial of pinkwashers who persist, amidst genocide, on limiting the queer Palestinian lived experience to a strict, deadly framing despite it being unrepresentative of the diversity of queer Palestinian experiences (Atshan 2020; Alqaisiya 2018). Due to the occasional news stories covering anti-queer deadly violence in Palestinian society, which Western media romanticizes, pinkwashers cannot imagine queer Palestinians having "mediocre" experiences with homophobia that are less dramatic, and, often milder or at least comparable with those in the West. The contrasting of 'queers for Palestine' and an assumed queer-friendly Israel in an austere benevolent-malevolent divide also feeds into the notion of a "beleaguerment narrative" where Israel casts itself as the perpetual victim against what it deceitfully claims to be anti-queer "innately threatening, evil, or 'savage'" dogmatic rival deserving of a genocidal campaign (Schotten 2022; Mitchell 2024a).

Eurovision, the European Broadcasting Union's (EBU) annual international song contest that took place in the Swedish city of Malmö on May 7-11, 2024, is another Israeli genocide pinkwashing moment. Eurovision is known as the biggest international pop cultural music event with a vast queer audience. Israel's entry, initially called "October Rain", is a ballad sung by female soloist Eden Golan. When the lyrics of "October Rain" were leaked in February, it looked as if the EBU might ban Israel's participation, after the contest organizers broke Eurovision's rules on political neutrality by scrutinizing the lyrics and finding it to be too political in reference to Hamas' October 7 attack (Fink 2024). The standoff was resolved only when

motive. Israeli media quoted friends of the victim as saying he was kidnapped to the West Bank. His family, however, said he regularly visited Hebron to see them and to work, describing the claims about the motive as rumors.

Israel's president Isaac Herzog intervened to work with Israeli broadcaster KAN on changing the lyrics three times to suit Eurovision's criteria (Shihab-Eldin 2024). Though Eurovision bills itself as a non-political event and can disqualify contestants deemed to have breached that rule, the 150 million people who tune into it annually make Israel take its pinkwashing efforts through the pan-continental event seriously.

Exposing Israel's anxiously needing Eurovision's pinkwashing opportunity, Israeli Culture Minister Miki Zohar said in a post on X that any decision to disqualify Israel's participation would be "scandalous" (AFP 2024a). He denied that the song is political, saying it "gives voice to the feelings of the people and the country nowadays." Settling for altering the lyrics and not banning Israel from participation starkly contrasts the ban of Belarus in 2021 over its government's crackdown on dissent, or that of Russia after its invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Muir 2024; Shihab-Eldin 2024). The EBU then argued that Russia's participation would bring the competition into disrepute. More so, the EBU banned Palestinian flag and symbols. In protest, Swedish singer Eric Saade, whose father is Palestinian, wore a keffiyeh on his wrist despite the ban and Eurovision said his action was "regrettable" (Muir 2024).

Palestinians, rights groups, and over a thousand musicians in Europe and the host country Sweden have demanded to bar Israel from the contest (Fox 2024). Over 60 queer groups have called for a boycott of Eurovision over Israel's inclusion (Monteil 2024). On May 10th, 2024, an estimate of 12,000 protesters gathered in Malmo before a march through the city close to Eurovision's venue (Jawless 2024). Protesters also organized 'FalastinVision – The Genocide-Free Song Contest' which took place at the same time of the Eurovision finale in the same format to give boycotters an alternative (FalastinVision 2024). While Eurovision is one of the biggest nights of the year for many queer venues across Europe, the 2024 event

saw several high-profile screenings of the finale cancelled in across the UK and Europe in protest of Israel's participation (Addley 2024). When Golan performed her song in the finale, she faced loud boos and attendees screaming "Free Palestine" (Whisnant 2024).

For months, the EBU was under increasing pressure to ban Israel from competing. Yet Israel's participation unveils the EBU's barefaced hypocrisy and double standards around its definition of "political". Including Israel under such circumstances trivializes its well-documented genocidal crimes against Palestinians (Shihab-Eldin 2024). Israel's participation in Eurovision has always been part of its national branding public relations campaign called "Brand Israel", which BDS activists rebranded "Brand Apartheid" in 2017 during a disruptive silent protest at a conference for the campaign at New York University (Mondoweiss 2017). In its culture wars, Israel uses this campaign and Eurovision to deploy culture for state propaganda. That is why Israel's president Herzog said in February, "it is important that Israel appears in Eurovision" because its participation is "a statement" and "a matter of political and explanatory significance and that should be taken into account" (Jerusalem Post Staff 2024). Israel last hosted Eurovision in 2019. Then, too, over a hundred queer groups demanded a boycott that over the killing of over 200 Palestinians during the "Great March of Return" protests in Gaza (PACBI 2019). During the Eurovision 2019 finale, Iceland's Hatari showed Palestinian-flag scarves, and RUV, Iceland's national broadcaster was fined €5,000 as a result (Fontaine 2019).

Israel does not direct its pinkwashing efforts globally only. To sustain its regional exceptionalism domestically, Israel constantly reminds its citizenry that it is a - misleadingly - queer paradise in the SWANA region. In January, the Israeli channel *News13* aired a Hebrew ten-minute prime-time story of Maayan Gross, a transgender reservist who returns to Gaza

“as a woman” after two decades since her active duty, in a feel-good story about the uniqueness of the spirit of Israel’s unified people against their speciously perceived ‘ferocious’ enemy (Shehada 2024). Gross proudly talked in the video about the fact that her fellow soldiers from the Orev Givati anti-tank elite unit designated for the destruction of armored enemy vehicles know her as Maayan, not Natan (her dead name), denoting an alleged inclusion of her transgender-ness.

Talking about her experience upon her return from a month of fighting in Gaza, she said, “even beyond just being a transgender, this is a precedent. A woman militant in a combat unit of men” who is no different than other combatants with motivation to fight. When asked how fighting was, she responds, “just like active duty, it feels like home.” Gross’ task according to the video was to scan tunnel shafts in Gaza and go from home to home in two neighborhoods and identify weaponry. This task switched eventually to taking control over Gaza’s Supreme Court Building. Such local news stories showcase queer and transgender soldiers as normalized contributors in Israel’s domestic homonormative national branding amidst a genocide. They sway the Israeli public opinion and conscience to indisputably support a genocide as though any level of queer inclusion could ever rationalize one.

As of February 6, 2024, in a reverse to a decades-long policy, the Tel Aviv Court for Administrative Affairs ruled that queer Palestinians can request asylum in Israel (Jordan 2024). The ruling came after a 29-year-old Palestinian man from the West Bank appealed his rejection by the Population and Immigration Authority for extended residency in Israel on grounds of his sexual orientation. The approved appeal occurred despite the Population Authority’s view that not all Palestinians are subject to the UN Refugee Convention, which has historically meant Israel is not required to grant asylum to Palestinians. Prauding the ruling, Hen Mazzig, writer

and founder of the Tel Aviv Institute said, “the notion of pinkwashing, which means that anything positive that Israel does towards LGBTQ+ people must be a sinister attempt to divert public opinion, is rooted in antisemitism” (Jordan 2024). On his X account, sharing the news of the ruling, he said that “‘Queers for Palestine’ had nothing to do with it” (Mazzig 2024). He told *The Jewish Chronicle*,

While Israel is not perfect, it’s still a safe country for LGBTQ+ people. It’s not like the Israeli government gave us those rights, we had to fight for them, and while we still can’t get married inside Israel – you can’t have a civil union in Israel – there was legislation passed last year that allows surrogacy for same-sex couples, that allows for adoption, and LGBTQ+ people have been protected by law for decades. The way to achieve full equality is by promoting those sorts of achievements.

Not only do these “achievements” reveal the limits of the Israeli assimilationist queer liberation discourse that has historically completely disregarded Israel’s occupation of Palestinians but defending them also reiterates the tropes equating any critique of Israel to antisemitism, the same discourse Israel and Zionism have historically deployed to colonize Palestinians with impunity. Besides, the verdict has also not been universally welcomed in Israel; interior Minister Moshe Arbel, a member of the Orthodox Shas party, announced that he would file an appeal against the court’s decision.

In the same month, an investigation by Shomrim, an independent investigative journalism and news organization, revealed that Israel Police collects information about the sexual orientation of people they arrest (Dolev 2024). The information is fed into a police database known as “Rimon”. Shomrim has obtained a printout from this system, relating to Israeli author Orna Coussin who was arrested on February 10, 2024, at a

rally calling for the release of Israeli hostages in Gaza. Under the “Detainee characteristics” section of the form, the “abnormal sexuality” category still appeared. In this case, the officer wrote “LGBTQ community.” Coussin wrote on her website that amongst the questions she was asked, one was “Is my sexuality ‘abnormal’” and she asked the officer what is considered abnormal sexuality, and he said, “You know, sex with your own gender.” The police claimed that this information is required to protect detainees from mistreatment and is not stored in the system. Such homophobic and anti-democratic Israeli tactics against its own queer citizens to hide a genocide are not surprising seeing there is a well-documented history of similar practices against queer Palestinians which Israel pinkwashed long before October 7 (O’Connor 2013).

Pinkwatching Genocide

Within transnational efforts calling for ending the genocide in Gaza have been queer and trans people rejecting any attempted framing of queer Palestinians to justify the genocide (Arria 2023; Chapin 2023). In key queer solidarity moments, queer journalists resigned from the New York Times (Monteil 2023a) over the paper’s coverage of Gaza, and queer celebrities like Kehlani, Jonathan Van Ness, Angelina Jolie, Susan Sarandon, Dua Lipa, and Indya Moore publicly took pro-Palestine stances (Factora 2023). Online, the anonymous group *Queers in Palestine* collected nearly 35 thousand followers on Instagram since November 2024 and kept a running list of queer organizations around the world that have signed onto its *No Pride in Genocide* statement in 19 languages (*Queers in Palestine* 2024 A and B. n.d.; Tamarkin 2023). Their message, currently listing than 567 signatories, says:

In the name of revolutionary love, a love which fuels our struggle for liberation and yearning for freedom, rooted in our love for

our communities and our land; we tell you, there is no pride with genocide, and there is no pride in settler-colonialism. Our pride can only come through true liberation for all, for us and for all the peoples fighting worldwide.

On the ground, over 40 queer groups across nine cities around the world came together for the Queer Cinema for Palestine *No Pride in Genocide* event (Queer Cinema for Palestine n.d.). Queer and trans people in London, New York, and Washington, D.C. and other major cities have formed “blocs,” marching together at protests and staging their own direct actions (No Pride in Genocide n.d). Online, the group *Queers for Liberation* gathered 30,000 signatures on a petition asking national queer advocacy organizations to publicly use their influence to demand ending the genocide, and to pressure officials to end U.S. aid to Israel (2023).

On February 14, over a hundred people led by *No Pride in Genocide*, a coalition of queer Muslim and Jewish, Palestinian, and SWANA people protested in Washington, D.C. outside the national headquarters of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest queer organization in the U.S., calling them to “break their silence” and denounce the use of any rhetoric involving queerness to justify the genocide (Rummler 2024). This demonstration followed a similar protest earlier on February 3 outside the HRC’s annual gala in New York City, which organizers with *No Pride in Genocide* said was not orchestrated by their group (Factora 2024).

Indya Moore, star of the award-winning queer television show *Pose*, joined the New York protest, saying that queer and trans Palestinians deserve a human rights campaign on their behalf. Moore said, “the Human Rights Campaign is mobilizing our community and our allies to support their initiatives because they believe their initiatives are in our best interest. However, these initiatives that are meant to benefit us, are being funded by a weapons manufacturer,” referring to Northrop Grumman,

a major defense contractor, adding “not cute, not queer. You cannot aid liberation by taking someone else’s.” Demonstrators also called for the HRC and for other major queer groups like the Trevor Project, a queer youth crisis organization, and GLAAD, the U.S.’ largest queer media advocacy group to denounce the use of pinkwashing to warrant attacks on Gaza.

Since the first protest for *No Pride in Genocide* on February 14 in Washington, the group organized queer protests in Detroit, Reno, and Los Angeles (No Pride in Genocide n.d.). The group also spread awareness of demonstrations by groups like ACT UP New York, the HIV/AIDS movement that originated in the 1980s (ACT UP n.d.). ACT UP has also demanded that the HRC stop accepting philanthropy from Northrop Grumman. Posing in front of Lincoln Center in NYC, ACT UP activists held a sign that read “Fund Healthcare Not Warfare” (ACT UP n.d.).

Pinkwashing mobilizing was also evident in *Queering the Map*, a community-generated counter mapping platform for digitally archiving queer experiences in relation to physical space, launched in 2017 by Lucas LaRochelle (O’Neal 2023). The platform has been adding submissions by queer Palestinians within its mission of creating a global digital archive of queer memory that allows users to pin stories and memories of their queer and trans experiences (Queering the Map 2024). Without falling for Western visibility politics imposing on queer Palestinians modes of queer resistance—coming out and pride—as universally desirable, (Ritchie 2015), the platform combated pinkwashing’s implying that queer Palestinians must flee to a more liberal society to live truly and safely. As *Queering the Map* shows, queer Palestinians have often constructed their own modes of being in their communities whom they refuse to abandon under a genocide erratically targeting all Palestinians.

As journalists have been under attack and a blockade on civil infrastructure has severely limited the ability of Gazans to get their message out (CPJ 2024), *Queering the Map* became an essential tool for queer Palestinians whose stories could have disappeared beneath the rubble of genocide altogether. The entries are equal parts romantic, wistful, and heartbreaking—the testimony of people trying to find love and beauty in a world that wants to erase them from existence. *Queering the Map* is a digital memory-keeping for queer people as they and their loved ones are killed and the end of their own life feels imminent, granting them a liberatory tool under a genocide when other channels such as international law and Western powers failed to grant them such an ability to resist (O’Neal 2023).

Beyond the shocking horror of seeing their bodies mutilated by Israeli missiles, the memories of queer Palestinians in Gaza on *Queering the Map* become a connective tissue for people who have also had first crushes, been in love, and had to hide it for a myriad of reasons, which in turn humanizes Palestinians against a genocidal narrative that has been dehumanizing all Palestinians. Since its inception, users have contributed more than 500,000 posts in 23 languages to the platform. The submissions queer Palestinians contributed to the platform were printed on signs and brought to protests. In another case, queer UK activists hacked London Transit ads to support queer Gazans using these submissions (Monteil 2023b). Inspired by *The Dyke Project*, an autonomous group of NYC artists also replaced subway ads with designs from *Queering the Map* (Writers Against the War on Gaza 2024).

To pinkwatch Israel’s genocide, Arab queer organizations and people in the SWANA region published a joint statement on October 23, 2023 (Atyaf 2023). This statement emphasized that the collective queer Arab vision for a liberated Palestine is to “relentlessly pursue justice and equality for all”

while recognizing that the true realization of this liberation is “unthinkable unless we actively work to demolish the mechanisms and practices that perpetuate state-supported violence and oppression.” The statement was signed by 40 queer and feminist Arab organizations, 14 non-Arab ally organizations, 100 individuals with public names, and 62 anonymous individuals stating,

True liberation and inclusion for all, especially LGBT individuals in the region will be a distant dream if the shadows of economic devastation, rampant religious extremism, unrestrained military endeavors, and continued support for occupations, illegal settlements and impunity persist.

The political agency reflected in this statement conceives queer Palestinians as part of a transnational community engaging in regional liberatory processes. Rejecting the entire neo-imperialist regional status quo beyond just queerness, such reactions to Israel’s genocide dismantle typical orientalist and Islamophobic representations of queer Palestinian and Arab experiences in media and politics as nonexistent and/or often strictly deemed to violence and death in a region that the West deviously framed as inherently anti-democratic and anti-queer.

Queer Palestinians living in Palestine are not excluded or absent in this movement, even if it may appear otherwise in this section. Since most local queer Palestinian organizing often jointly encompasses Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), under Israel’s intensified crackdowns on freedom of expression that have targeted primarily its Palestinian citizens (not Jewish Israelis) since October 7, queer Palestinian organizing was forced into more “clandestine channels” (alQaws 2024; Lynfield 2024). Queer Palestinians had to reinvent their organizing strategies to both ensure safety and security to their networks and guarantee that their political work remains sustainable

in providing mutual aid, community care, as well as housing to people affected by the genocide, in and out of Gaza (alQaws 2024). Pinkwashers attempted taking this absence as proof of the nonexistence of queer Palestinians, when in reality, Israel is the primary cause of their repression and silence.

A Liberated Palestine – Queerness, Genocide, and International Law

In the colossal scope of the annihilation of Palestinians since October 7, queerness is not a mere addendum when positioned in the scholarship and legality of genocide. As Palestinians contested Western discourses of international law and genocide for their liberation, queer Palestinians in parallel challenged Western discourses of queerness – pinkwashing – that have been employed as genocidal tools against all Palestinians. Within the larger Palestinian decolonization struggle, a queer analysis reveals additional shortcomings of the current genocide scholarship and legal frameworks that are use useful for Palestinian resistance yet might otherwise remain hidden.

Pinkwashing genocide emerged boisterously from within Israel’s toolbox against an increasing diplomatic and legal global isolating pressure (Gale 2024). This pressure entailed a string of legal and humanitarian actions such as UN Security Council votes for Palestinian statehood and membership (Morrison et al. 2024; Nicholas 2024); UN Human Rights Council resolutions of crimes against humanity; ambassador recalls and severance of diplomatic relations with many countries; states’ recognition of Palestine; state-calls on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate war crimes against civilians; and state-requests for a court opinion on whether Israel’s occupation violates international law (Madry 2024). Pinkwatching aims at strengthening this pressure that Israel

has been diligently countering via pinkwashing, among other schemes. Consequently, pinkwashing and pinkwatching —while contradictory — transpire as instructive of the pretense of Western hypocritical dichotomies as tied to human rights, international law, and preventing/ending genocide insofar Palestinian liberation.

While seemingly unrelated at first, South Africa's case against Israel—brought before the ICJ on December 29, 2023—regarding Israel's conduct in Gaza, and arguably the greatest legal/diplomatic action to isolate Israel, can be positioned in this queer analysis (Al Jazeera 2023). South Africa claimed that Israel has been committing a genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, contravening the Genocide Convention, including 75-year apartheid, 56-year occupation, and 16-year blockade on Gaza pre-October 7 (Al Jazeera 2023; Berg 2024). In Gaza specifically, South Africa has accused Israel of eight “genocidal acts”; killing Palestinians; causing serious bodily and mental harm; mass expulsions and displacement; deprivation of food and water; deprivation of shelter, clothes, hygiene and sanitation; deprivation of medical assistance; destruction of Palestinian life; and imposing measures intended to prevent birth (Berg 2024).

Two days of public hearings were held on January 11 and 12, 2024 at the Peace Palace in The Hague regarding South Africa's request for provisional measures of protection. The Court issued an order regarding this request on January 26, 2024, in which it ordered Israel to take all measures to prevent any acts that could be considered genocidal according to the 1948 Genocide Convention (Simon 1996). The court said that at least some of the acts South Africa claims appear to fall under the provisions of the Genocide Convention. The Court did not order Israel to suspend its military campaign in Gaza, which South Africa had requested. Yet both South African and Israeli officials welcomed the decision, with each considering it a victory.

While ICJ rulings are legally binding, they have no enforcement power, and Israel has not been complying. South Africa's foreign minister Naledi Pandor said that it is impossible for Israel to comply with the ICJ without a ceasefire. On February 26, Human Rights Watch asserted that Israel had failed to comply with the ICJ's provisional measures and “continued to obstruct the provision of basic services and the entry and distribution within Gaza of fuel and lifesaving aid” (HRC 2024). On the same day, Amnesty International said Israel was “defying” the ICJ ruling (Amnesty International 2024). On March 28, 2024, following a second request for additional measures, the ICJ ordered new emergency measures, given the deterioration since the initial ruling; ordering Israel to ensure basic food supplies, without delay, as Gazans face famine and starvation. On May 24, the court ordered an immediate halt to Israel's offensive in Rafah, a position rejected by Israel (Corder 2024).

Because both Israel and south Africa are parties to the Genocide Convention, jurisdiction can be established. South Africa asserts that as a state party to the convention, it has a duty to prevent genocide and is therefore obligated to take all necessary measures to do so. Since genocide encompasses more than just mass killings, the Genocide Convention is designed to prevent it from occurring, not merely to punish it afterward (Totten 2011; Kabatsi 2005). South Africa's petition highlighted these aspects with the aim of fulfilling the convention's purpose. Despite the low likelihood, and the historic pattern of international law failing Palestinians (Buttu 2020; Boyle 2010; Erakat 2020), there was hope that the ICJ not only would rule in favor of South Africa but also effectively halt Israel's genocidal campaign.

Pinkwatching efforts are driven by a similar hope for collective Palestinian liberation, despite the low likelihood that Israel will end its pinkwashing campaign. South Africa's case and pinkwatching efforts align with

Palestinian decolonization in similar ways, making pinkwashing a powerful tool available for Palestinian liberation, despite its marginal size on the international legal/political stage in the grand scheme of the genocide. The fight against pinkwashing mirrors South Africa's case in that, while it may not result in an immediate, definitive victory, it serves as another tool to potentially advance the Palestinian cause. Using different tools, both efforts contribute to the broader campaign aimed at globally isolating Israel and its allies. In this context, pinkwashing aligns with Erakat's (2020) analysis that law can only be part of the solution for Palestine, when combined with political strategies for liberation.

Pinkwashing, much like South Africa's case, highlights the divide between law and morality on the legal/diplomatic international stage. The Western response to both overlooks the moral dimension, which in turn prevents the potential for an accountability-driven, decolonial breakthrough (Ajplus and Aljazeera English 2024). As a legal tactic, the ICJ case is necessary to stop the genocide, but not only has stopping it on a legal ground failed, it has also been insufficient for the mandatory spiritual moral transformation in the Western psychic to ensure that it in fact effectually stops and never happens again. Combating genocide solely through legal means reveals an ineffective measure against which Israeli society's immoral belief—that it has a right to commit a genocide—persists. Guided by this Israeli immoral position, pinkwashers claim a false moral high ground to justify their actions alongside the same fumbling morality in Western international justice systems, which South Africa has been challenging. Understanding that not all focus should be placed on legal tribunals or legal experts, pinkwashing organizers have long recognized the flaws in these frameworks—flaws that the queer approach to the genocide in Gaza has once again revealed (Ritchie 2015; Alqaisiya 2018; Atshan 2020). As a result, they organize outside such structures and deliberately distance themselves from Western queer discourse, recognizing that a queer-

informed Palestinian liberation cannot depend on Western notions of rights or law alone.

Developed in international law, the responsibility to prevent genocide, and protect if it occurs, often ended with “realpolitik, the lack of political will, and economic interests all played a part in the lack of timely and effective action” (Totten 2011, 217). Historically, most reactions to genocide have been “inconsequential. Nothing that will rock or threaten a [genocidal] government or nation's well-being. Nothing punitive” (Totten 2011, 218). Indeed, Israel characterized South Africa's charges as “baseless”, describing the country as “functioning as the legal arm” of Hamas and arguing that it was conducting a war of self-defense in accordance with international law, all statements that remained mostly unchallenged (Berg 2024).

In a vivid example of the realpolitik beyond the complete dismissal of scholarly and legal frameworks of genocide, the U.S., Germany, and France—all countries that are complicit in past genocides—backed Israel at the ICJ. France said that accusing Israel of genocide “is to cross a moral threshold” (AFP 2024b). Germany agreed to defend Israel at the ICJ for what it presents as obvious reasons being the Nazi Holocaust against European Jews (Talmon 2024; Murphy 2024). The U.S. has called the ICJ case a distraction from “peace and security” (Mitchell 2024b). Exceeding the realpolitik and lack of political preventative will, South Africa's case poses failure to prevent a genocide in Palestine as a goal actively pursued in service of Western interests⁵ (Moses 2024). Consequently, the West's

5 Some signs include the May 6th threatening letter by 12 U.S. republican senators, led by Sen. Tom Cotton, to the ICC chief prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan with sanctions and banning ICC “employees and associates” from entering the U.S. over possible warrants against Israel, saying explicitly, “target Israel and we will target you” (Hasan 2024). South Africa's Pandor received the same letter. On May 20th, Khan applied for arrest warrants for Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Atlantic Council Experts 2024).

dismissal of its own self-made ‘justice’ institutions, such as international law and the U.N., frames it as a partner⁶ and facilitator of the genocidal campaign, not only complicit in it. The justifications these countries use to actively sustain the genocide closely mirror the narratives of pinkwashing campaigns, which weaponize queerness to serve the same Western interests. These campaigns are masked under a facade of progressive liberal values, but they show no regard for Palestinian lives—queer or otherwise.

A queer perspective on the Gaza genocide highlights the “danger of classifications” in prevention efforts. The exploitation of queer Palestinians demonstrates that genocide “must be understood as an unfolding process, considered in light of historical, political, and social factors” and seen as a complex social phenomenon rather than a definition (Rosenberg 2013, 17). The formation of genocide as a legal definition “against which unfolding events are to be measured” centers “legalism [and] subjects each genocide to a rigid test in order to maintain the integrity of the term and determine criminal culpability” (Rosenberg 2013, 17). Viewing genocide in Palestine as fluid, not as a static term, then, is what allows for pinkwashing and pinkwatching to emerge as units of analysis in genocide studies. Palestinian queerness dissolves the field’s inability to move on from old debates over definitions. Queerness underscores the importance of genocide scholars’ advocacy for “early warning systems [that] seek to collect, analyze, and communicate information” about escalating situations that could potentially lead to genocide (Rosenberg 2013, 20). In the genocidal Palestinian queer experience, and beyond centering legalism, such early warning systems could include the voices of pinkwatching organizers as part of the development of such systems in the future. The decades-long orientalist imperialist dehumanization of

6 The U.S. and Germany, Israel’s top arms suppliers, saw their weapon manufacturer corporates directly profit from the genocide as their share prices have exponentially risen since October 7 (Light 2024).

Palestinians, which utilizes tropes of homophobia, could have served as a small but significant early warning if queer Palestinian experiences had been regarded with gravity.

Beyond South Africa, a queer analysis of Gaza’s genocide points to the critique seeking to destabilize understandings of groups in genocidal contexts (Nellans 2020, 48). Noting the failure of the Genocide Convention to consider groups based on gender and sexuality (Vernon 2021, 257), Waites argues that including sexual orientation and gender identity in the understandings of protected groups allows describing violence against queer people in Nazi Germany, Uganda, and the Gambia as genocidal. Although Israel’s genocide indiscriminately targets both queer and non-queer Palestinians, pinkwashing’s exploitation of queerness to manufacture genocidal consent creates an opportunity to challenge and refocus attention on ‘Queers’ as a group often manipulated in genocidal narratives. Due to the nature of pinkwashing, this manipulation of queerness in Gaza appears distinct from how queerness has been manipulated in previous genocides.

In the early legal definitions of genocide, the Convention drafters assumed that the purpose of protection was for groups already existing as “permanent, stable, and intractable,” and recognizable by all (Simon 1996). Since queer Palestinians have not historically adhered to Western queer visibility politics—focused on demands for recognition, citizenship, and coming out (Ritchie 2015)—they cannot emerge as a new protected group in the context of the genocide based on this framework of protected groups. Yet, while according to these drafters the existence of a group is a necessary prerequisite for other rights (Simon 1996; Kabatsi 2005), for pinkwashers, queer Palestinians as a group come into existence but only through an alleged savior gaze that becomes the condition for granting them any rights or protection.

By forcefully singling out queer Palestinians from the rest of Palestinian society, this group-oriented framing ultimately legitimizes the genocide, which in reality targets all Palestinians indiscriminately. This becomes possible when the “group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator” (Kabatsi 2005, 394). Through the pinkwashing process, Israel manipulates the definition of the collective Palestinian group by using its queer members. It frames these queer individuals as exceptions to the broader Palestinian population, categorizing them as a distinct group. This allows Israel to justify its actions against the entire population, queers included, while fraudulently portraying itself as a protector of queer rights.

Considering pinkwashing and pinkwatching, the employment of queers for rationalizing the genocidal campaign highlights a notable distinction between modern/contemporary and past genocides. (Melson 2011). Even though the killing of queers happened in prior genocides (Nellans 2020), it is different in Gaza due to the weaponization of the (irrelevant and inaccurately deployed) heteronormative logics of Palestinians and the homonormative logics of Israel claiming to supposedly ‘save’ queer Palestinians as part of an ‘othering’ process against all Palestinians (Vernon 2021). This makes both heteronormativity and homonormativity “relevant to genocidal violence against non-queer people as well as violence against queer people” (Vernon 2021, 258). As this happens, genocide becomes a behavior, meaning that it is never consistent across all cases. In the Palestinian case, in what is called the “comportment of genocide” that can be used to define or divert genocide, pinkwashing can be a new defining behavior that helps justify (define) yet divert from genocide in the genocidal narrative construction against the Palestinians (Kabatsi 2005). Such comportment through pinkwashing in genocide may in fact be the first case documented.

Queering the genocide in Palestine fluidly beyond legal measures, additionally, confirms that in genocidal contexts “testimonies of victims

and survivors must be taken into account in order to better understand the motives of the perpetrators and bystanders” and give victims and survivors a voice in the narrative of destruction (Melson 2011). Testimonies of Palestinian queers, and the overall pinkwashing effort, have been less visible not only because they are killed in the genocide like all Palestinians, but also because pinkwashing itself evolves around framing queer Palestinians as nonexistent or as strictly experiencing societal death in their communities and could not possibly have their own evidentiary testimonies. This is especially noteworthy as the ICJ ordered Israel to avoid destroying any evidence of genocide in Gaza and to comply with all UN investigations going forward, but it has gone out of its way to suppress, and kill off, any evidence of its genocide. Israel has blocked journalists from entering Gaza and systematically killed them and blocked the entry way of UN workers to document on the ground (CPJ 2024).

Israel’s use of pinkwashing to evade accountability for genocide carries broader implications beyond the mass destruction of Palestinian life. Israel has been signaling to other states that they, too, can exploit queer communities in the pursuit of their ethnonationalist goals, knowing there will be little to no consequences for pinkwashing and other repressive sexual and gender-based practices. Condemning Israel and the West’s blatant disregard for international law, and highlighting the broader dangers this silence poses beyond Palestine, Irish Member of the European Parliament Clare Daly remarked that “the rules-based order is in roaring form.” (2024). Besides encouraging the undervaluing of international law, Israeli exceptionalism affirms that the West has always had one international law for its allies, and another for everybody else. After months of throwing international law on the bonfire in Gaza, however, the evidence that something is broken is too undeniable. The genocide in Gaza is precipitating the collapse of the post-WWII system established by the US and Europe, a system that has, for decades, crushed those who

defied its global dominance. Palestinians, including queer Palestinians and ally pinkwashing organizers, remain amongst the permanent rebellious against this destructive order.

Conclusion

Pinkwashing and pinkwatching underscore the necessity for genocide studies and international law to integrate queer perspectives/analyses in documenting, analyzing, and explaining the failures to prevent Israel's genocide and to protect the Palestinians. Following the leadership of pinkwashing activists, genocide, international law, and queer scholars must place greater emphasis on the heteronormative and homonormative frameworks of Zionism, nationalism, colonialism, orientalism, and imperialism in relation to the genocidal violence in Gaza and beyond. As this scholarship evolves, it is crucial to acknowledge queerness as a vital potential contributor to Palestinian liberation alongside other political strategies. In a context where these strategies must be integrated with law—a tool that has often proven inadequate in advancing Palestinian decolonization—recognizing queerness at this intersection remains essential.

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