

# HOMONATIONALISM AS ASSEMBLAGE: VIRAL TRAVELS, AFFECTIVE SEXUALITIES<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

In this article I aim to contextualise the rise of gay and lesbian movements within the purview of debates about rights discourses and the rights-based subject, arguably the most potent aphrodisiac of liberalism. I examine how sexuality has become a crucial formation in the articulation of proper citizens across registers like gender, class, and race, both nationally and transnationally. The essay clarifies homonationalism as an analytic category necessary for understanding and historicising why a nation's status as "gay-friendly" has become desirable in the first place. Like modernity, homonationalism can be resisted and resignified, but not opted out of: we are all conditioned by it and through it. The article proceeds in three sections. I begin with an overview of the project of Terrorist Assemblages, with specific attention to the circulation of the term 'homonationalism'. Second, I will elaborate on homonationalism in the context of Palestine/Israel to demonstrate the relevance of sexual rights discourses and the narrative of 'pinkwashing' to the occupation. I will conclude with some rumination about the potential of thinking sexuality not as an identity, but as assemblages of sensations, affects, and forces. This virality of sexuality productively destabilises humanist notions of the subjects of sexuality but also the political organising seeking to resist legal discourses that attempt to name and control these subjects of sexuality.

## KEYWORDS

Homonationalism; assemblage; virality; affective sexualities

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## INTRODUCTION

In this article I aim to contextualise the rise of gay and lesbian movements within the purview of debates about rights discourses and the rights-based subject, arguably the most potent aphrodisiac of liberalism.<sup>2</sup> The targets and success of gay and lesbian political organising have increasingly come to be defined and measured through the prism of legalisation, leading to a palpable romance with the decriminalisation of sodomy in many national contexts. While the discourse of law can serve, and serve well, to redress social injustices and subjects of legal discourse are savvy and capable of negotiating legal systems even as they are subject to their disciplinary forces, my interest here is to destabilize the measuring of social change and of 'progress' in terms of legalisation. 'The

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<sup>2</sup> The characterisation of human rights as liberalism's most potent aphrodisiac is drawn from the 'Human Rights Beyond the Law' workshop's call for papers, available at <http://www.h-net.org/announce/show.cgi?ID=182227>.

law' is limited in what it can convey and create; the limits with which we must concern ourselves are not legal instruments per se, but rather the law's reliance on performative language that produces that which it simply claims to regulate, including the ascription of a subject of that law.<sup>3</sup> While these limitations may not mean abandoning rights-based legal interventions, they do highlight the need to attend to the un-progressive consequences of progressive legislation as well as the modes of bodily comportment that defy identity parameters.

I begin with an overview of the project of *Terrorist Assemblages*, with specific attention to the circulation of the term 'homonationalism'. Second, I will elaborate on homonationalism in the context of Palestine/ Israel to demonstrate the relevance of sexual rights discourses and the narrative of 'pinkwashing' to the occupation. I will conclude with some rumination about the potential of thinking sexuality not as an identity, but as assemblages of sensations, affects, and forces. This virality of sexuality productively destabilises humanist notions of the subjects of sexuality but also the political organising seeking to resist legal discourses that attempt to name and control these subjects of sexuality.

## 1. HOMONATIONALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In my 2007 monograph *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*<sup>4</sup> (hereinafter *TA*), I develop the conceptual framework of 'homonationalism', by which I mean the use of 'acceptance' and 'tolerance' for gay and lesbian subjects as the barometer by which the legitimacy of, and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated. Beginning in the 1990s, I became increasingly concerned with the standard refrain of transnational feminist discourse as well as queer theories that vociferated that the nation is heteronormative and that the queer is inherently an outlaw to the nation-state.

While the project arose within the post-9/11 political era of the United States, my intent in *TA* was not only to demonstrate simply a relationality of the instrumentalisation of queer bodies by the U.S. state or only the embracing of nationalist and often xenophobic and imperialist interests of the U. S. by queer communities. Rather, building on the important work of Lisa Duggan on "homonormativity" — her theorisation of the imbrication of privatisation of neoliberal economies and the growth of domestic acceptance of queer communities<sup>5</sup> — homonationalism is fundamentally a critique of how lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to cultural and legal forms of citizenship at the expense of the partial and full expulsion from those rights of other populations.

Simply stated, homonationalism is the concomitant rise in the legal, consumer and representative recognition of LGBTQ subjects and the curtailing of welfare provisions, immigrant rights and the expansion of state power to engage in surveillance, detention and deportation. The narrative of progress for gay rights is thus built on the backs of

<sup>3</sup> Human rights discourses reiterate a "biopolitical anthropocentrism" that mandates a reproduction of human exceptionalism; Livingston, J. & Puar, J. (2011). Introduction: interspecies. *Social Text* 29 (1 106), 3-14.

<sup>4</sup> Jasbir K. Puar (2005). *Terrorist assemblages: homonationalism in queer times*.

<sup>5</sup> Duggan, L. (2002). *The twilight of equality: neoliberalism, cultural politics, and the attack on democracy*.

racialised and sexualised others, for whom such progress was either once achieved but is now backsliding or has yet to arrive. This process relies on the shoring up of the respectability of homosexual subjects in relation to the performative reiteration of the pathologised perverse (homo- and hetero-) sexuality of racial others, specifically Muslim others, upon whom Orientalist and neo-Orientalist projections are cast. Homonationalism is thus not simply a synonym for gay racism or another way to critique the ‘conservatisation’ of gay and lesbian identities, but instead an analytic for apprehending the consequences of the successes of LGBT liberal rights movements.

I will add here, and elaborate on this later, that I do not think of homonationalism as an identity nor a position — it is not another marker meant to cleave a ‘good’ (progressive/transgressive/politically left) queer from a ‘bad’ (sold out/ conservative/ politically bankrupt) queer. Rather, I have theorised homonationalism as an assemblage of de- and re-territorialising forces, affects, energies, and movements. Assemblages do not accrete in linear time or within discrete histories, fields, or discourses. In naming a movement in contemporary U.S. queer politics, homonationalism is only useful in how it offers a way to track historical shifts in the term of modernity, even as it has become mobilised within the very shifts it was produced to name. We can debate the pros and cons of instrumentalisation of sexual identity by human rights frames, but we cannot elide what I would argue is the crux of the problem: the insistence of or default to the notion of identity itself. Through Deleuzian assemblage — in French originally termed *agencement* which loosely means patterning of arrangements — homonationalism is re-articulated as a field of power rather than an activity or property of any one nation-state, organisation, or individual.<sup>6</sup>

Homonationalism is also a process, not an event or an attribute. It names a historical shift in the production of nation-states from the insistence on heteronormativity to the increasing inclusion of homonormativity. This process coheres not through 9/11 as a solitary temporal moment: ‘this’ did not begin with 9/11. I have concerns about how 9/11 seems to function as an originary trigger, fostering a dangerous historical reification (what is sometimes cynically referred to in the US as the ‘9/11 industry’).<sup>7</sup> Looking back from 9/11, my interest was in the 40-year span of the era of post civil rights that, through the politics of liberal inclusion, continues to produce the sexual other as white and the racial other as straight. And while forms of virulent explicit Islamophobia and the growing sense of the failure of President Obama’s ‘post-racial’ moment has given license to more explicit racist expression, nevertheless those conservative modalities can be directly challenged better than before. I remain more convinced than ever that addressing the insidious collusions between racism and liberalism are the core critique of homonationalism. This convergence of racism and progressive liberal instrumentalisation of once-outlawed sexual

<sup>6</sup> For further explication on assemblage theory, see Puar, J. (2012). I’d rather be a cyborg than a goddess. *PhiloSOPHIA*, 2 (1), 49-66.

<sup>7</sup> Of interest here are different periodisations of Islamophobia. Certainly we can point to rising forms of global Islamophobia that coincided with the era of decolonisation, the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution and the end of the Cold War. My own research (*Terrorist Assemblages*, chapter one) on the production of Terrorist Studies in the U.S. unearths a consolidation of the figure of the Muslim terrorist during the Cold War.

identities has led to commonsensical liberal positions, such as the following: Of course we oppose the war on terror, but what about the homophobia of Muslims? Of course we oppose the U.S. occupation of the Middle East, but the Iranians keep hanging innocent gay men. Of course we support the revolution in Egypt and the Arab Spring, but the sexual assaults of women proves that the Egyptians are beasts. These kinds of binary productions between enlightened liberal secularists and those Others, those racialised religious fanatics, are not only intellectually reductive and politically naive, they are simply unacceptable.<sup>8</sup>

I would argue that they have nevertheless been given increasing license in gay, lesbian, feminist and left circles in the United States and Europe.<sup>9</sup> The one liberal positioning that is enduring and to which I will return through my discussion of pinkwashing is: Of course we support the Palestinians in their quest for self-determination, but what about how sexist and homophobic they are? However, in *TA*, I look not only at the proliferation of queerness as a white, Christian, secular norm but also at the proliferation of homonationalism in Arab Muslim and South Asian queer communities<sup>10</sup> in the U.S., so this is not simply a critique of the racial exclusions and whiteness of mainstream LGBT communities.<sup>11</sup>

Two most recent examples of homonationalism in the U.S. are painfully illustrative of the uneven violences of rights discourses. The ban on homosexuals in the U.S. military — the ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’ policy — was repealed on December 18, 2010, the same day that the U.S. Senate put a halt to the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors), a piece of legislation that would have legalised millions of undocumented students and allowed them to pursue higher education and, ironically enough, military enlistment. In the fall of 2009, the Mathew Shepard James Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act – the first federal legislation criminalising hate crimes against gays, lesbians, and trans people – was passed, ironically, in large part because it was attached to a military appropriations bill.<sup>12</sup> So much for queer progress that does not support the war on terror.

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<sup>8</sup> I am also reminded by Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini that what passes as secularism in the ‘West’ is inherently informed by Christian ideological conditionings. That is, what is defined as secular is indebted to the absorption of Christian norms as the secular, starting from the way time is marked to the consumerist economy of holidays to the implicit theological underpinnings of sexual morality. What Jakobsen and Pellegrini insinuate, then, is that there is no pure secular position at least in the U.S., secularism is already contraindicated by the religious orientation it seeks to disavow. I would add to that, that the claims to such a pure position, at this particular political moment, seem most disturbingly applied in relation to public expressions of Islamic belief. Which should lead one to ask: is it secular, or is it racist? Where and when are the terms of secularism taken up and activated as a covert form of cultural racism? See Jakobsen, J. & Pellegrini, A. (2003). *Love the sin: sexual regulation and the limits of religious tolerance*.

<sup>9</sup> See Faderman L. & Rothstein, R. (2011). A new state for homophobia. *The advocate*, L. Oct. 12, available at <http://www.advocate.com/politics/commentary/2011/10/12/op-ed-new-state-homophobia>; Palestine: Lillian Faderman Responds to Alex Blaze, the bilerico Project (Oct. 12, 2011), available at [http://www.bilerico.com/2011/10/palestine\\_lillian\\_faderman\\_responds\\_to\\_alex\\_blaze.php](http://www.bilerico.com/2011/10/palestine_lillian_faderman_responds_to_alex_blaze.php).

<sup>10</sup> This is where Hindu secularism and Indian nationalism virulently converge.

<sup>11</sup> My interest in the biopolitical intertwining of queerness and nationalism started with my dissertation research in Trinidad in the 1990s where I examined the tensions between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians in the gay and lesbian movement and continued with my research on gay and lesbian tourism, understanding the production of the difference between ‘gay-friendly’ and ‘not gay-friendly’ nations as endemic to neoliberal integration of *queer* consumers.

<sup>12</sup> SRLP Sylvia Rivera Law Project. On hate crime laws. Available at <http://srlp.org/our-strategy/policy-advocacy/hate-crimes/> (last visited May 15, 2013) (“This particular bill was attached to a \$680-billion measure for the Pentagon’s budget, which includes \$130 billion for ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan”).

But even before it was known that the bill was being manipulated to reinforce militaristic ends, queer people-of-colour organisations such as the ‘Audre Lorde Project’ and several convivial cohort members such as ‘Queers for Economic Justice’ released a statement taking a stand against the purportedly ‘historic’ passage of the hate crimes bill, arguing that legal intervention would be so detrimental it would be better not to criminalise these specific hate crimes.<sup>13</sup> These organisations posited that the hate crime legislation would allocate greater resources for the ‘militarisation’ of police forces and the administrative surveillance and harassment of people-of-colour (especially youth of colour, a priori designated as more homophobic than their white counterparts), in particular Latinos and African Americans, whose disproportionate incarceration in the U.S. is a known fact.<sup>14</sup>

Historically in the U.S. these populations have not been able to depend on protection from the state and the police from violence, but have rather been the targets of violence from these purportedly protective services. Further, new populations cohere through the gathering of statistical, demographic, financial, and personal information to move those understood as targets of hate crimes into the purview of knowledge production to become the ‘objects’ of state surveillance under the purported guise of being the ‘subjects’ of state protection. These cautionary concerns about the limited efficacy of legal intervention were completely dismissed by mainstream national gay and lesbian organisations; nor did these organisations critique or comment upon the legislation regarding the severe compromises made in order to enable its passage.<sup>15</sup>

As *TA* was not intended as a corrective but rather an incitement to generative and constructive debate, it has been humbling and inspiring to see how ‘homonationalism’ as a concept has been deployed, adapted, re-articulated and critiqued in various national, activist, and academic contexts in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and India. A Paris-based group called ‘No to Homonationalism’ (*Non a l’homonationalisme*) is contesting the representational campaign proposed for Gay Pride in Paris using the national symbol of the white rooster.<sup>16</sup> A conference on Sexual Democracy in Rome took issue with the placement of World Pride in the most migrant area of the city and staked a claim to a secular queer politics that challenges the Vatican as well as the homonationalism of European organising entities.<sup>17</sup> In April 2013, a two-day international conference on ‘Homonationalism and Pinkwashing’ was hosted by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS) at the CUNY Graduate Center.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See a compilation of critiques on hate crimes legislation, blackandPink.org, available at <http://www.blackandpink.org/revolt/a-compilation-of-critiques-on-hate-crimes-legislation> (last visited Sept. 15, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> See Gilmore, R. (2007). *The golden gulag: prisons, surplus, crisis, and opposition in globalizing California*.

<sup>15</sup> For a full reading of the legislative negotiations made and the details of the bill, see Reddy, C. (2011). *Freedom with violence: race, sexuality and the US state*.

<sup>16</sup> *Liberation of Homosexual Muslims of France, Beyond Islamophobia and anti-Semitism*, Homonationalism, available at [http://www.homosexuels-musulmans.org/\\_HOMONATIONALISM\\_Liberation-of-homosexual-Muslims-of-France-beyond-Islamophobia-and-anti-Semitism.html](http://www.homosexuels-musulmans.org/_HOMONATIONALISM_Liberation-of-homosexual-Muslims-of-France-beyond-Islamophobia-and-anti-Semitism.html).

<sup>17</sup> *In and out of sexual democracies*, Facciamo Breccia, (March 23, 2011), available at <http://www.facciamobreccia.org/content/view/516/> (for details of the conference).

<sup>18</sup> Homonationalism and Pinkwashing Conference, The Centre for Lesbian and Gay Studies (April 10-11, 2013), available at <http://homonationalism.org/>

While I work predominantly on the U.S., in *TA* I did draw from examples in Britain and the Netherlands to demonstrate the work of liberal progress narratives, examples that reach beyond the right-wing gay anti-migration political figures that are gaining increasing currency in various European states. In Europe, these tensions between liberal rights discourses and organisations and queer groups of colour, anti-racist organisations, and queer scholars of colour continue to proliferate. In June 2010, Judith Butler refused the Civil Courage Award given to her by the Christopher Street Day Parade in Berlin because of the organisation's history of anti-migrant sentiment.<sup>19</sup> The controversial incident brought to light the inability of liberal queer organisations to challenge their practices of racial profiling and entrenched beliefs about the white secular norms of homosexuality. It also highlighted the widespread tendency to 'cite up', rather than 'cite down' or expansively, laterally, eclectically, as Butler's celebrity status was of more interest than the anti-racist queer groups that she highlighted in her public refusal and the scholars that supported her critique.<sup>20</sup> There have already been two (somewhat successful) attempts by Britain's self-proclaimed premier gay and lesbian human rights activist Peter Tatchell of the queer group 'OutRage!' to stifle legitimate criticism of his work and politics. The articles "Gay Imperialism" by Jin Haritaworn, Tamsila Tauqir and Esra Erdem<sup>21</sup> and "Unbearable Witness" by Scott Long,<sup>22</sup> formerly of Human Rights Watch, were withdrawn and retracted in response to implicit and explicit legal threats by Tatchell, who is unfortunately protected by Britain's archaic libel laws in which the accused is presumed guilty unless shown otherwise.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Puar, J. (2010,) Celebrating refusal: the complexities of saying no, bully bloggers, available at <http://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2010/06/23/celebrating-refusal-the-complexities-of-saying-no/#comments>

<sup>20</sup> See id. (I would also point to the 'No Homonationalisms' website ([nohomonationalism.org](http://nohomonationalism.org)) for more detailed explication of the appropriation and exploitation of scholars of colour in academic citational practices. I will add that Butler's decision to refuse the award was seemingly scorned by many who might otherwise have been thought of as 'natural allies'. In other words, mainstream queer organisations were dismissive of her critiques.)

<sup>21</sup> Haritaworn, J. et. al. (2008). Gay imperialism: gender and sexuality discourse in the 'War on Terror'. In Adi Kuntsman & Esperanza Miyake (Eds.), *Out Of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Raciality* (pp. 9-33). (the apology to Peter Tatchell can be accessed at <http://www.rawnervebooks.co.uk/outofplace.html>); See also Ahmed, S. (2011) Problematic proximities: or why critiques of gay imperialism matter. *Fem. Legal Studies*, 19 (2), 119-32.

<sup>22</sup> Long, S. (2009). Unbearable witness: how western activists (mis)recognize sexuality in Iran. *Contemp. Pol.*, 15 (1), 119-36.

<sup>23</sup> These practices of citational violence and of censoring dissenting or 'unpleasant' analyses are so incredibly damaging to the kinds of affirmative, life building, intellectual, social and political communities that we are all seeking to sustain. Not only do we risk reproducing a defensively white (queer) canon, but more proactively, citational practices can be a form of redistribution of resources that can challenge neoliberal logics of compartmentalisation and hierarchy, and disciplinarity because they redirect our attention elsewhere. But more violently, these practices continue to reiterate the uncomplicated binary of white secular — and again Christian secular — queers, feminist, and other liberals, who continue to act with impunity in regards to the liberal forms of racism they sanction, while at the same time demanding accountability from those racial and religious Others for the homophobia and sexism deemed rampant in their home communities. Binaries are thus never about a relationship between two equal players, one might remember. Should a 'citing down' (as a way to expose hierarchical realities) or even 'citing lateral,' i.e. citing expansively be practiced more fully in our work, one might realise that the work of addressing homophobia in religious and racial communities continues unabated. It would be really nice to get beyond this question to actually hear more about how this work is done, because otherwise we never move past a call and response mode. What happens is simply — as I witnessed at the 'Sexual Nationalisms' conference in Amsterdam — a recentering of white secular queernesses and their anxieties about Racial Others, most of whom were only there in absentia. This infinite self-referentiality of post-structuralist critique is what Rey Chow refers to as "post- structuralist signficatory incarceration." Chow, R. (2006). The age of the world target: self-referentiality in war, theory, and comparative work, p. 53.

Shortly before coming to India, I had the opportunity of seeing *I Am*, a beautiful documentary film set in New Delhi and making the rounds of the global gay and lesbian film festival circuit.<sup>24</sup> The organising concept of *I Am* is simultaneously deeply personal and political. Film-maker Sonali Gulati (from New Delhi, now residing in the U.S.) grieves the passing of her mother, to whom she never had the opportunity to ‘come out’ regarding her desire to ‘marry a woman’. The film ends with scenes from the celebrations in Delhi post-the-reading-down of Section 377. So already the film is bookended by the two most centralised issues of what is known in the U.S. as the ‘gay equality agenda’ — the decriminalisation of sodomy and gay marriage. The narrative drive animating the story is codified through the trope of ‘coming out’ which remains a stable and un-ironic desire, despite having been thoroughly critiqued for its western episteme by South Asian queer theorists and activists alike.<sup>25</sup> The film primarily foregrounds several lesbian women who are perceived as masculine, many of whom would constitute part of a ‘transnational activist class’ of labourers embedded in the struggle for gay and lesbian rights. Gulati documents the conflicts that arise in the search for familial acceptance. In the end, most Indian parents turn out to be good, liberal tolerant supporters of their homosexual children.

*I Am* is now being used by the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA) in New York to promote tolerance and acceptance of homosexual children by South Asian parents. No doubt, part of the uptake of *I Am* in the U.S. as a model for familial acceptance was spurred by the spate of ‘gay youth suicides’ that occurred in the fall of 2010.<sup>26</sup> But if we are to promote a truly non-national queer agenda, we must not only be critical of familial homophobia but also of the model of family itself — even queer family. The notion of queer family — “families we choose”<sup>27</sup> — may well invite new and validate different objects into the discourse of family, but the directionality of familial affect and psychic reproduction may well be the same. That is to say, the objects and subjects of family might alter, but the problems with heteronormative reproduction — and in these cases, homonormative reproduction — don’t simply dissipate with a switch in object choice, as we have seen time and again with the limits of gay equality agendas.

As with the U.S., is gay marriage next on the gay equality agenda in India? For whom does a gay rights equality agenda centring marriage benefit? Is there any relationship between the reading down of Sec. 377-signalling an increasingly visible middle-class LGBT movement in India — and the nature and visibility of sexual assaults on women, for example the recent gang-rape and murder that occurred in New Delhi in December 2012? Are women who transgress their scripted positions within the gender binary being punished through a backlash against the striving for sexual liberation?

<sup>24</sup> *I Am*, Sonali film, available at <http://www.sonalifilm.com/I-AM.html>.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Ratti, R. (Ed.) (1993) *A lotus of another color: an unfolding of the south asian gay and lesbian experience*; Shah, N. (1998). Sexuality, identity, and history. In David L. Eng & Alice Y. Hom (Eds.) *Q&A: Queer in Asian America*; Puar, J. (1998). Transnational sexualities: south asian (trans)nation(alism)s and queer diasporas. In David L. Eng & Alice Y. Hom (Eds.), *Q&A: Queer in Asian America* (on South Asian queer transnationalisms).

<sup>26</sup> See Puar, J. (2012). The cost of getting better: suicide, sensation, switchpoints. *GLQ: J. of Lesbian & Gay Studies*, 18 (1), 149-58.

<sup>27</sup> See Weston, K. (1997). *Families we choose: lesbians, gays, kinship*.

Regarding Sec. 377, Oishik Sircar writes:

The decriminalisation of same-sex relationships is clearly an outcome of the gradually increasing cultural acceptance of diverse sexualities that has taken place as a result of liberalisation and globalisation, as is evident from the court's constant allusions to international human rights law and case law, and precedents primarily from the United States. These references made apparent the cultural logic behind the court's judgment: India needs to live up to the progressive developments in other parts of the (Western) world by decriminalising sodomy. As Anjali Gopalan, founder of petitioner Naz Foundation, said after the judgment was delivered, "Oh my God, we've finally stepped into the 21st century." This exclamatory declaration seems to be a history-vanishing moment, where the ostensibly progressive present contributes to queer emancipation at the cost of blinding us to a historicised understanding of the cruelly liberal genealogies of present-day India.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than suggesting that these aspirations to join the 21st century, proclaimed by Gopalan,<sup>29</sup> are simply versions of homonationalism as applied to the Indian case, it seems more prudent to note the divergences and differences that create multiple kinds of homonationalisms. What is crucial to an/the on-going political struggle in multiple locations is not to critique a long-awaited community-oriented film or the efforts of gay and lesbian activists in any national location, but to insist on an awareness of homonationalism as an uneven and unpredictable process. How do the history of British colonialism, the specific periodisation of liberalisation in India, and the uptake of neoliberal class stratification that produces privileged transnational networks shape homonationalism as an assemblage?

## 2. ISRAELI 'PINKWASHING' IN AN INCREASINGLY HOMONATIONALIST WORLD

In keeping with the movement of homonationalism-as-assemblage in its questioning of periodisation and progress, this section discusses what has become known as pinkwashing, or the practice of covering over or distracting from a nation's policies of discrimination of some populations through a noisy touting of its gay rights for a limited few.<sup>30</sup> I focus on Palestine/Israel here for two reasons: one, because after the U.S., Israel is, in my estimation, the greatest benefactor of homonationalism, for reasons in part because

<sup>28</sup> Sircar, O. (2012). Spectacles of emancipation: reading rights differently in India's legal discourse. *Osgoode Hall I. J.*, 49 (3), 563.

<sup>29</sup> Flock, E- (2009, Dec. 26). The law breaker. *Forbes India*. Available at <http://business.in.com/printcontent/8082>.

<sup>30</sup> On 11 January 2011, Tel Aviv was voted the "world's best gay city" of the year by a *gaycities.com* survey, beating London, Toronto, and New York, among other cosmopolitan locales. That same day our LGBTIQ solidarity delegation to Palestine — the first ever of its kind — was meeting with several Israeli anti-Occupation activist organisations, including Boycott from Within, Anarchists Against the Wall, and Zocheot, a Nakba remembrance project. One of our speakers demonstrated the complexities of doing anti-Occupation and Boycott Divestment and Sanctions work in the belly of the beast that is Israel when he quipped: "So now Tel Aviv is the best gay city. It is also the least Arab city you might ever find. It is incredibly rare to hear Arabic spoken on the streets of Tel Aviv."

of its entwinement with the U.S., but not only; and two, because Israel has been accused of ‘pinkwashing’ in a manner that apparently no other nation-state does, and I have been unconvinced that pinkwashing is a practice singular to the Israeli state. Quite simply, pinkwashing has been defined as the Israeli state’s use of its stellar LGBT rights record to deflect attention from, and in some instances to justify or legitimate, its occupation of Palestine. Resonating within a receptive field of globalised Islamophobia significantly amplified since 9/11 and reliant on a civilisational narrative about the modernity of the Israelis juxtaposed with the backward homophobia of the Palestinians, pinkwashing has become a commonly used tag for the cynical promotion of LGBT bodies as representative of Israeli democracy. As such, it functions as a form of discursive pre-emptive securitisation.

Why is pinkwashing legible and persuasive as a political discourse? First of all, a neoliberal accommodationist economic structure engenders the niche marketing of various ethnic and minoritised groups and has normalised the production of a gay and lesbian tourism industry built on the discursive distinction between gay-friendly and not-gay-friendly destinations. Most nations that aspire to forms of western or European modernity now have gay and lesbian tourism marketing campaigns. In that sense, Israel is doing what other states do and what is solicited by the gay and lesbian tourism industry — promoting itself. We can of course notice that the effects of this promotion are deeply detrimental in the case of the occupation. But we might want to pose questions about the specifics of the ‘Brand Israel Campaign,’ which has been located as the well-spring of Israel’s pinkwashing. How does the Brand Israel Campaign differ from a conventional state-sponsored advertising campaign targeting gay and lesbian tourists?<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, in some senses Israel is a pioneer of homonationalism as its particular position at the crosshairs of settler colonialism, occupation, and neoliberalist accommodationism creates the perfect storm for the normalisation of homosexuality. The homonationalist history of Israel – the rise of LGBT rights in Israel and increased mobility for gays and lesbians – parallels the concomitant increased segregation and decreased mobility of Palestinian populations, especially post-Oslo.<sup>32</sup> I have detailed this point at greater length elsewhere, but to quickly summarise: the advent of gay rights in Israel begins around the same time as the first Intifada, with the 1990s known as Israel’s ‘gay decade’ brought on by the legalisation of homosexuality in the Israeli Defence Forces, workplace anti-discrimination provisions, and numerous other legislative changes.<sup>33</sup>

Pinkwashing operates through an erasure of the spatial logics of control of the Occupation and the intricate and even intimate system of apartheid replete with a dizzying array of locational obstacles to Palestinian mobility. That queer Palestinian activists in Ramallah cannot travel to Haifa, Jerusalem, or Gaza to meet fellow Palestinian activists seems to be one of the most obvious ways the Israeli occupation delimits — prohibits,

<sup>31</sup> See Schulman, S. A Documentary Guide to Pinkwashing, *PrettyQueer*, Available at <http://www.prettyqueer.com/2011/11/29/a-documentary-guide-to-pinkwashing-sarah-schulman-new-york-times-oped/> (for her detailing of Brand Israel).

<sup>32</sup> See Stein, R- (2010). Explosive: scenes from Israeli queer occupation. *GIQ: J. Lesbian & Gay Studies*, 16 (4), 517-536.

<sup>33</sup> See Puar, J. (2011). Citation and Censorship: The Politics of Talking About the Sexual Politics of Israel. *Fem. Legal stud*, 19 (2), 133-42.

in fact — the possibilities for the flourishing of queer communities and organising that Israelis have enjoyed without hassle.

Instead of understanding access to mobility and congregation as constitutive of queer identity and community, pinkwashing reinforces ideologies of the clash of cultures and the ‘cultural difference’ of Palestinian homophobia rather than recognising the constraining and suffocating spatial and economic effects of apartheid. Questions about the treatment of homosexuals in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip fail to take into account the constant and omnipresent restrictions on mobility, contact, and organising necessary to build any kind of queer presence and politics. What becomes clear is that the purported concern for the status of homosexuals in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is being used to shield the Occupation from direct culpability in suppressing, indeed endangering, those very homosexuals. Further, the LGBT rights project itself relies on the impossibility/ absence/ non-recognition of a proper Palestinian queer subject, except within the purview of the Israeli state itself. It presents the ‘gay haven’ of Tel Aviv<sup>34</sup> as representative of the entire country and unexamined in terms of its Arab cleansing, while also maintaining Jerusalem as the religious safeguard.

As its shorthand use proliferates in anti-occupation organising forums internationally, pinkwashing must be situated within its wider homonationalising geopolitical context. That is to say, if pinkwashing is effective, it is not because of some outstandingly egregious activity on the part of the Israeli government, but because both history and global international relations matter. So while it is crucial to challenge the Israeli state, it must be done in a manner which acknowledges that the assemblage of homonationalism going beyond the explicit activities of any one nation- state, even Israel. Building on theoretical points first articulated in *TA*, I contend that it is crucial to keep in mind that pinkwashing appears to be an effective strategy not necessarily because of any exceptional activities on the part of the Israeli state but because of the history of settler colonial violence, the international LGBT tourism industry, the gay and lesbian human rights industry, and finally, the role of the U.S.

Pinkwashing is only one more justification for imperial/racial/ national violence that has a long history preceding it. How has ‘the homosexual question’ come to supplement ‘the woman question’ of the colonial era to modulate arbitration between modernity and tradition, citizen and terrorist, homonational and queer? As elaborated by Partha Chatterjee, this question arose with some force in the decolonization movements in South Asia and elsewhere, whereby the capacity for an emerging postcolonial government to protect native women from oppressive patriarchal cultural practices, marked as tradition, became the barometer by which colonial rule arbitrated political concessions made to the colonised.<sup>35</sup> In other words, we rehearse here Gayatri Spivak’s famous dictum “white men saving brown women from brown men.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Hartman, B. (2011, nov 1). Tel Aviv named ‘world’s best gay city’ for 2011, *Jerusalem Post*, available at <http://www.jpost.com/LifeStyle/Article.aspx?id=253121>.

<sup>35</sup> Chatterjee, P. (1990). The nationalist resolution of the women’s question. In Kumkum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid (Eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (pp. 233-253).

<sup>36</sup> Spivak, G.C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak?. In Lawrence Gossberg & Cary Nelson (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271-313).

This particular triangulation has thus set the stage for an enduring drama between feminists protesting colonial and neocolonial regimes and nationalists who discount the presence and politics of these feminists in their own quests for decolonisation. We can also say that, while the woman question has hardly disappeared, it is now accompanied by what we could call the homosexual question, indeed yet another variant or operation of homonationalism. The terms of the woman question have been re-dictated, as feminist scholars have now become arbiters of other women's modernities, or the modernities of *The Other Woman*. To reinvoké Spivak for the 21st century: white queer (men) saving brown homosexuals from brown heterosexuals.

We can see how this moves from the woman question to the homosexual question, and it remains to be contextualised in the various locations as to which of these trajectories make more or less sense. First, the supplementing of homosexuality to women results from the merging of two processes: the post-colonial state shoring up respectability and legitimacy to prove its right to sovereignty to the colonial father<sup>37</sup> and the folding in or acknowledging of homosexual subjects into legal and consumer legitimacy via neoliberal economies, such that homosexuals once on the side of death (AIDS) are now on the side of life or are productive for nation-building. Second, the homosexual question is in fact a reiteration of the woman question, insofar as it reproduces a demand for gender exceptionalism and relies on the continual reproduction of the gender binary. The homosexuals seen as being treated properly by the nation-state are not 'gender queer'. They are rather the ones re-creating gendered norms through, rather than despite, homosexual identity. Obscured by pinkwashing is how trans and gender non-conforming queers are not welcome in this new version of the proper 'homonationalist' Israeli citizen.<sup>38</sup>

Also obscured by pinkwashing is the persistent downplaying of the woman question in relation to the homosexual question when it is attached to primarily first-world, white, male bodies, as it is in the case of Israel (for example, debates about gender segregation in ultra-Orthodox communities in Israel are still active). As another example of how the homosexual question forefends the woman question: On 11th January, 2011, the same day as Tel Aviv's dubious honour as the 'world's best gay city' was announced, an amendment to Israel's citizenship laws that prohibits the unification of West Bank Palestinians with their spouses in Israel was upheld by the High Court of Justice.<sup>39</sup> Add to this the passage of "social suitability" laws,<sup>40</sup> attempts at regulating sexual activities between foreign labourers

<sup>37</sup> See Alexander, M. (1994). Not just (any) body can be a citizen: the politics of law, sexuality and postcoloniality in trinidad and tobago and the Bahamas. *Fem. Rev.*, 48, 5-23.

<sup>38</sup> See Solomon, A. (2003). Viva la diva citizenship: post-zionism and gay rights. In Daniel Boyarin et. al. (Eds.). *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question* (pp. 149-65).

<sup>39</sup> Puar, J. (2012, jan. 30). The golden handcuffs of gay rights: how pinkwashing distorts both lgbt and anti-occupation activism, *Fem. Wire.*, available at <http://thefeministwire.com/2012/01/the-golden-handcuffs-of-gay-rights-how-pinkwashing-distorts-both-lgbtq-and-anti-occupation-activism/>; Ben Hartman, supra note 33; Izenberg, D. & Stoil, R.. High Court rejects petition against citizenship law. *Jerusalem Post*, <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/High-Court-rejects-petition-against-citizenship-law> (last updated Nov. 1, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Sanders, E. (2011, mar. 24). New israeli laws will increase discrimination against arabs, critics say. *L.A. Times*, available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/mar/24/world/la-fg-israel-arab-laws-20110324>; Social suitability' nears ok as israeli housing criterion. *Israel Religious Action Center*, Available at <http://www.irac.org/NewsDetails.aspx?ID=846> (last visited Sep. 15, 2013).

and Israeli Jews, vigilante groups and social organisations that monitor and agitate against sexual liaisons between Israeli Jewish women and Palestinian men, and it becomes patently clear that LGBT liberation also works to distract attention from intense forms of (hetero) sexual regulation, regulation that seeks to constrict the sexual, reproductive, and familial activities of all bodies not deemed suitable for the Israeli body politic. Pinkwashing thus works not only through an active portrayal of the Palestinian population as either homophobic or anti-homophobic, as the biopolitical target is arguably even more the control of heterosexual reproduction, especially between Palestinians and Israeli Jews.<sup>41</sup>

Palestinian queer organisers assert that it is irrelevant whether Palestinian society is homophobic or not and that the question of homophobia within Palestinian society has nothing to do with the fact that the Occupation must end. For the thriving political platform of the 'Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions' (hereafter PQBDS) and 'Al-Qaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society' (hereafter Al-Qaws) queer organising is anti-occupation organising; likewise, anti-occupation work is queer organising. Palestinian Queers for BDS is not a liberal project that is demanding acceptance, tolerance, or inclusion within a 'nationalist' movement. Rather, through foregrounding the occupation as its primary site of struggle, PQBDS is slowly, strategically and carefully insisting upon and creating systemic and thorough changes in the terms of Palestinian society itself. Al-Qaws claims that its primary work is about ending the occupation, not about reifying a homosexual identity that mirrors an 'Israeli' or 'Western' self-serving form of sexual freedom.<sup>42</sup>

This is an important tactic within the context of a gay and lesbian human rights industry that proliferates Euro-U.S. constructs of identity (not to mention the assumption of a universal attachment to sexual identity itself), that privilege identity politics, 'coming out', public visibility, legislative measures as the dominant barometers of social progress, and a flat invocation of 'homophobia' as an automatic, unifying, experiential frame. In this sense, while one may disagree with Joseph Massad's damning critique of the "Gay International," we would do well to ask exactly how the "Queer International" proposed by Sarah Schulman is an alternative or antidote to the Gay International.<sup>43</sup> Is it the case that simply by virtue of being articulated through 'queer' rather than 'gay', and through a global solidarity movement, that the pitfalls of the gay international are really avoided? How is such a positioning of queer, one that purports to be transgressive, morally and politically untainted, and outside of power?

Pinkwashing is thus what Michel Foucault called an "incitement to discourse,"<sup>44</sup> an impelling form of confessionality which inaugurates a call and response circuit that

<sup>41</sup> Puar, J. (forthcoming 2014). *Affective politics: states of debility and capacity* (this line of argumentation prefaces a chapter on sex, reproductive rights, and disability in Palestine/ Israel in my forthcoming monograph).

<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., <http://www.alqaws.org/q/en/content/signposts-al-qaws-decade-building-queer-palestinian-discourse>.

<sup>43</sup> Interview by Félix Boggio Éwanjé-Épée & Stella Magliani-Belkacem with Joseph Massad, Associate Professor, Columbia University, available at [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/10461/the-empire-of-sexuality\\_an-interview-with-joseph-schulman](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/10461/the-empire-of-sexuality_an-interview-with-joseph-schulman), S. (2012). *Israel/ Palestine and the queer international*.

<sup>44</sup> Foucault, M. (1998). *The will to knowledge: History of sexuality*, vol 1 (Robert Hurley trans.).

hails the very identity accused of being impossible. Refusing the liberal response to this incitement to discourse — a contemporary version of ‘We’re here, We’re queer, get used to it’ — suggests that one might not want to respond to pinkwashing as (primarily or only) queers, since such a response reinforces the single-axis identity logic of pinkwashing that isolates ‘queer’ from other identities. Nor is pinkwashing a queer issue per se or even one that uses queers specifically to further state ends. Pinkwashing is not about sexual identity at all in this regard but rather a powerful manifestation of the regulation of identity in an increasingly homonationalist world — a world that evaluates nationhood on the basis of the treatment of its homosexuals. The challenge, then, is to not allow the liberal or establishment gays in Euro-America (who are the primary targets of pinkwashing) to redirect the script of anti-pinkwashing activism away from the radical non-liberal approach of PQBDS and Al-Qaws. Failing this, as Maya Mikdashi has so brilliantly articulated, the re-writing of a radical Palestinian queer politics by a liberal Euro-American queer politics would indeed be a further entrenchment of homonationalism.<sup>45</sup> Organising against pinkwashing through a ‘queer international’ platform can potentially unwittingly produce an affirmation of the terms within which the discourse of pinkwashing articulates its claims, namely, that queer identity emboldened through rights is the predominant manner through which sexual subjectivities should be lived.

Ultimately, the financial, military, affective, and ideological entwinement of U.S. and Israeli settler colonialisms, and the role of the U.S. more generally, should not be forgotten when evaluating why pinkwashing appears to be an effective discursive strategy. The U.S. and Israel are, I would argue, the largest beneficiaries of homonationalism in the current global geopolitical order, as it produces exceptionalisms on the scalar registers of the internal, territorial, and the global. Moreover, pinkwashing is to a large extent directed towards the U.S. — Israel’s greatest financial supporter internationally — and more generally to Euro-U.S. gays who have the political capital and financial resources to invest in Israel. The claims of pinkwashing are often seen as plausible when rendered through an LGBT rights discourse that resonates within North America and Europe as a dominant measurement of teleological progress. It makes far less sense in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, for example, where there is a healthy scepticism about LGBT rights discourses and where knowledge of the complexities of sexualities in the region is far more nuanced. Thus pinkwashing’s appeal to U.S. gays is produced unconsciously through the erasure of U.S. settler colonialism enacted in the tacit endorsement of Israeli occupation of Palestine.

### 3. SEXUALITY, AFFECT, VIRALITY

This last section is tentative and speculative. In it I want to suggest the importance of moving away from the call-and-response process that continues to rely on opposing a ‘mainstream/global queer’ against a ‘queer-of-colour/ non-western queer’. So far I have

<sup>45</sup> Mikdashi, M. (2011, Dec. 16). *Gay rights as human rights: pinkwashing homonationalism*, jadaliyya, Available at [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3560/gay-rights-as-human-rights\\_pinkwashing-homonationalism](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3560/gay-rights-as-human-rights_pinkwashing-homonationalism).

discussed the travels of the concept of homonationalism and how it has been taken up as, and in some ways reduced to, an activist organising platform akin to a political critique of racism and nationalism in queer communities. I have also tried to lay out the stakes of understanding homonationalism-as-assemblage: as a structure of modernity, a convergence of geopolitical and historical forces, neoliberal interests in capitalist accumulation both cultural and material, biopolitical state practices of population control and affective investments in discourses of freedom, liberation, and rights. I have also attempted to provisionally sketch how homonationalism-as-assemblage creates a global field within which the discourse of pinkwashing as regards Israel/Palestine takes hold. The point is not merely to position Israel as a homonationalist state against which anti-pinkwashers must resist, but further to demonstrate the complex global and historical apparatus that creates the appearance of the activities of the Israeli state as legitimate and progressive. In this final section, I elaborate sexuality as affect, as sensation, and as part of an assemblage of biopolitical control that evades any neat application of homonationalism as a concept.

Sexuality as an affective network entails an axis of signification and an axis of forces that do not align with the so-called material configurations of the region, configurations that produce monoliths such as ‘The Israeli (and his/ her modernist sexuality)’ and ‘The Palestinian (and his/ her pathological sexuality)’ as supplements of a liberal and yet brutal humanism. Thinking of both homonationalism and sexuality through assemblages opens up a different trajectory or plane of territorialisation. Even as the staidness of the politics of recognition gets mobilised by Israel and global gay discourses through pinkwashing, the materiality of sexual practice and sexuality itself is so much more complex, mediated and contingent than the stagnating politics of control and resistance allow them to be.

This understanding of sexuality entails theorising not only specific disciplinary sites but also broader techniques of social control, given that ‘feminism’ and ‘queer’ and the deaths or lively potentials of their subjects have already been made to be productive for governance. The debate about discipline and control marks a shift in terms from the regulation of normativity (the internalisation of self/other subject formation) to what Foucault calls the regularisation of bodies. Many relations between discipline (exclusion and inclusion) and control (modulation, tweaking) have been proffered: as various overlapping yet progressive stages of market capitalism and governmentality; as co-existing models and exercises of power; as an effect of disciplinary apparatuses – control as the epitome of a disciplinary society par excellence (in that disciplinary forms of power exceed their sites to reproduce everywhere); and finally, discipline as a form of control and as a response to the proliferation of control.

In this oscillation between disciplinary societies and control societies, sexuality is not only contained within bodies but also dispersed across spaces. Sexuality as an affective modality is thus by definition non-representationalist, a distinct version of what Davide Panagia calls “the ways in which sensation interrupts common sense.”<sup>46</sup> Follow-

<sup>46</sup> Panagia, D. (2009). *The political life of sensation*, p. 2.

ing Michel Foucault's "security regimes" and Gilles Deleuze's "control society,"<sup>47</sup> the tensions have been mapped out as a shift from normal/ abnormal (homo-hetero binary) to variegation, modulation and tweaking (sexuality as sensation); from discrete sites of punishment (the prison, the mental hospital, the school, and in Palestine the checkpoints which rotate and appear randomly, and the 'security' wall which seems mostly to prevent Palestinians from getting to their villages, their farmland, and other Palestinians) to pre-emptive regimes of securitisation (we can see pinkwashing as one form of this pre-emptive securitisation); from inclusion/ exclusion to everyone is included, but how? (Contrary to claims that insist that the Israeli state project is solely about ethnic cleansing and dispossession of land, there are subtle yet insistent 'forms of folding in' and inclusion at work here: just as one example, there are at least 100 different types of ID cards that a Palestinian might have, each delineating micro-variation from each other, performing what Helga Tawil-Souri describes as "low-tech, visible, tactile means of power that simultaneously include and exclude Palestinians from the Israeli state."<sup>48</sup>); from self/ other subject/object construction to micro-states of differentiation; from the policing of profile to patrolling of affect.

This last point about affect is crucial because while discipline works at the level of identity, control works at the level of affective intensification. Here I am prompted by Amit Rai's reformulation of sexuality as 'ecologies of sensation' — as affective energies rather than identity — that transcends the humanist designations of straight and gay, queer and non-queer, modern and pathological. On this sexuality, Rai writes: master scripts that normalize but as self-organising modes that modulate and tinker.<sup>49</sup>

We can think of (sexual) identity, and our attachments to identity, as a process involving an intensification of habituation. That is to say, identity is the intensification of bodily habit, a 'returning forward' of the body's quotidian affective sensorial rhythms and vibrations to a disciplinary model of the subject, whereby sexuality is just one form of bodily capacity being harnessed by neoliberal capital. Similarly, the Brand Israel campaign now being inaccurately equated with pinkwashing is only one form of an array of 'washing' that composes this campaign. This habituation of affective intensity to the frame of identity — a relation of discipline to control, or in actuality, disciplining control — entails a certain stoppage of where the body once was to reconcile where the body must go. It is also a habituation that demands certain politics and forecloses an inhabitation of others.

Sensations are thus always under duress, to use Panagia's terms, to 'make sense' to submit to these master scripts either as a backformation responding to multiplicity or as a demand to subsume it to the master script and foreclose that multiplicity. These

<sup>47</sup> Foucault, M. (1977). *Security, territory, population: lectures at the collège de France-1978* (Graham Burchell trans., 2009); Deleuze, G. (1997). *Negotiations 1972-1990*.

<sup>48</sup> Tawil-Souri, H. (2011). Colored identity: the politics and materiality of id cards in palestine/ Israel. *Soc. Text*, 68-9 (Suri writes: "...the Israeli state is accused of trying to eradicate Palestinians, and yet the state institutes an impressive infrastructure of control based on Palestinians' continued presence in Palestine/Israel. Against the background of transfer, fragmentation, and erasure exists a bureaucratic system of keeping Palestinians where they are: subjects of sustained, if changing, forms of colonialism, occupation, and oppression...there may very well be a practice of fragmenting, isolating, transferring, and erasing Palestinians, but they need to be counted, documented, monitored, and controlled first.")

<sup>49</sup> Rai, A. (2009). *Untimely bollywood: Globalization and india's new media assemblage*, p. 9.

different modes of sexuality are reflected in two strands of queer theory. The first is deconstructive in emphasis and focused on the social construction of sexual difference for which language dominates the political realm through an insistence on the endless deferral of meaning.<sup>50</sup> The other way of understanding sexuality can loosely be defined as the multiplication and proliferation of difference, of making difference and proliferating creative differentiation: the becoming otherwise of difference. In this case, the 'place' of language itself is being re-signified; language not only has matter, it is matter.<sup>51</sup> Deconstructions of sexuality move to think against and through binaries in hopes of undermining and dissolving them, while the second, affirmative becomings, proposes to read and foster endless differentiation and multiplicity in hopes of overwhelming those binaries. The durational temporal capacities of each strategy are distinct and dispersed across different scales. The first might focus on making sense or making different sense of a representational format or forum; the second solicits sense, the creation of potentialities of emergence, less so a reinvestment of form. It is instead more attuned to the perpetual differentiation of variation to variation and the multiplicity of affirmative becomings.<sup>52</sup>

Taking up further this second strand of sexuality as assemblage and not identity, a strand invested in thinking about assemblages and viral replication rather than reproductive futurism, this strand might stress the import of moving away from the aforementioned call and response relay that continues to dominate the 'mainstream/ global queer' versus 'queer-of-colour/non-western queer' logic of argumentation, a relay that often fails to interrogate the complex social field within which 'queer' is being produced as a privileged signifier across these boundaries.

One reason for this import could indeed be found in the 'viral' travels of the concept of homonationalism as it has been taken up in North America, various European states, Palestine/Israel and India. In this reproductive application, homonationalism has often been reduced to an accusatory activist organising platform and as an applied analytic to assess the level or quality of the 'homonationalist' state, which then reifies the state as the dominating and often sole actant. To reiterate, instead of theorising homonationalism as an identity positioning or as an adjective that denounces a state or other entity, I have been thinking about homonationalism as an analytic to apprehend state formation as a structure of modernity. With this understanding of homonationalism-as-assemblage, what it means for homonationalism-as-concept to go viral, as it were, is quite distinct from its reproductive application. Following this second strand of queer theory, then, we might be interested in how homonationalism-as-concept has already become embedded in and part of the assemblage that is homonationalism, in so far as the discursive 'travels' of the concept virally replicate and thus mutate the assemblage.

Homonationalism as viral and as it is taken up into control society is no longer a mirror of itself, no longer a holistic concept that reproduces only itself. Virality most

<sup>50</sup> See Giffney, N. & Myra, J. (Eds.) (2008). *Queering the non/human* 1-12 ((for an explanation of these two strands).

<sup>51</sup> See Kirby, V. (2011). *Quantum anthropologies: life at large*; Chen, M. (2012). *Animacies: biopolitics, racial mattering, and queer affect*.

<sup>52</sup> See e.g., Claire Colebrook (2010). *Deleuze and the meaning Of life* (her work is emblematic of this second approach).

often is invoked in contemporary parlance to point to the intensified speed and reach of information transit, especially in relation to the internet. It also refers to indiscriminant exchanges, often linked with notions of bodily contamination, uncontainability, unwelcome transgression of border and boundaries while pointing more positively to the positivity, indeed the conviviality, of what has been treated as opposed.<sup>53</sup>

In closing, then, how could one think differently about the virality of homonationalism, given its intractability with modernity? What does it mean to say that homonationalism has truly gone viral — a virality of mutation and replication rather than the banal reproduction of its analytic frame across different national contexts, as has been the case with some of its identitarian usages? The beauty of virality, of course, is that it produces its own critique, mutating the call-and-response circuit of Foucault's incitement to discourse. But unlike this circuit, which is always about making an accusation that one takes up the position outside of, the critique of a viral form is already enfolded from its incipience. It makes it harder to place blame on the original purportedly offensive product, since it engendered its own criticism, and is thus altered through that encounter.

Viral reproduction is not about excess or supplements; it is instead a post-human capacity; what is reproduced is not the human subject, identity, or body, but affective tendencies, ecologies of sensation, and different ontologies that create new epistemologies of affect. When we say that something has gone viral, it's another way of acknowledging everything that is opposed to the virus, or the viral, can be circumnavigated. Viral theory, then, as a post humanist intervention, also begins before the species-like divide of the activism versus theory binary, an opposition that is foundational to the production within the fields of Women's Studies and Gay and Lesbian studies. Viral theory is immune to such divides and divisions. Virality indicates not so much the portability of a concept but a measure of its resonance. Thus virality might also be a way of differently thinking geopolitical transversality that is not insistently routed through or against the nation-state, providing an alternative to notions of transnationalism, and complicating the application of the concept of homonationalism to national contexts. Certainly homonationalism-as-assemblage is an alternative to the home- diaspora reactive-dialectic that informs the project of the movie *I Am* or endless call-and-response relay of 'the west and the rest' paradigm.

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<sup>53</sup> For discussions of the viral, see Clough, P. & Puar, J. (2012). *Introduction*. *Women's Studies*, 40 (1), 13-26.

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