Rainbow-Washing the Occupation: A Critical Examination of Israeli Claims to Feminist and Gay-Friendly Modernity

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Rainbow-Washing the Occupation: A Critical Examination of Israeli Claims to Feminist and Gay-Friendly Modernity

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Submitted to Scripps College in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in American Studies

April 19th, 2024

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Acknowledgements

To begin, I would like to thank Professor Deeb for her continued kindness, guidance, and wisdom. From my sophomore year until today, she has facilitated my learning and conveyed the importance of acting in alignment with our studies. Thank you to Professor Seitz for his generous and detailed feedback and gracious understanding. Thank you to Professor Decker for her thoughtful engagement and continued encouragement. None of this would be possible without you all, so thank you.

Thank you to my Mom, Dad, Stepmom, Sister, and Grandma for all of the love and support that you offer. Special thanks to my mom for the hours spent listening to me on the phone as I talked through my ideas and figured out how to articulate them. Your belief in me sparked my belief in myself.

Thank you to my friends for everything. You all mean the world to me and I wouldn’t have been able to complete this thesis without your humor, love, and companionship at the library.

Thank you to the organizers of the Pomona Divest from Apartheid (PDfA) campaign for your vision, leadership, and moral clarity. Special thank you to the 19 other arrested students—especially the Pomona 7—for your comradery and courage. You all show me what it means to be principled and brave and I am honored to fight for divestment alongside you all. As the steadfastness of Palestinians has taught us: we will win. Liberation is inevitable and Palestine will be free.
Introduction

When I was 11 years old, I went on a 5-day trip to Israel. Or, at the time, that’s where I thought I was. Much of the trip felt like an overheated blur; I remember the sweltering August climate, the startling presence of weaponry at every turn, and a vague, omnipresent feeling that “we” were somehow in danger. Even though I enjoyed visiting family, the aforementioned combination of dynamics made for an unpleasant trip. I stayed inside most days, comforted by the air conditioning and the steady shrinkage of days between us and our return to the airport.

It wasn’t until I was in high school that I began to reflect on my trip with mixed feelings of curiosity and disillusion. I regularly saw disturbing headlines and images of brutality taking place in the city I had visited. I began to question the version of history I had been told while sitting around my aunt’s dining room table in Jerusalem many years before.

As soon as I began seeking out information about Palestine, I felt alarmed and disturbed. If Israeli settlements were one appendage of a larger project of settler colonialism and dispossession, what did it mean that I had cousins living on one? That I had been there?

I quickly saw how my and my extended family’s presence in Historic Palestine was anything but neutral. The supposed “birthright” of European-descended Jews to settle in Palestine—whether for a week, month, or a lifetime—is a direct cause of genocide being carried out against Palestinians, the Indigenous peoples of the land.

When I got to college, I began to explore elements of my personal and political identity in the context of academia. American Studies functioned as the perfect discipline to consider how I could relate to queerness and feminism not just as individual identities but points of connection to larger
struggles for liberation. As I deepened my understanding of colonialism and carcerality, my questions got bigger and my previously held assumptions felt increasingly unstable.

Through class and personal readings, I learned how theories emerging from the Black radical tradition, feminist, and queer movements connect to transnational liberation struggles—including what is taking place in Palestine. I was left wondering how queer theory might be used as an analytical framework to better understand Israeli propaganda tools such as pink- and purplewashing, claims to gay and feminist-friendliness, respectively, which weaponize the language of social justice to justify their project of settler colonization.

In this thesis, I consider how specific Israeli state propaganda projects, such as pink- and purplewashing, rely on racist and Orientalist conceptions of Palestinian “barbarism” to justify their ongoing dispossession and occupation. I recognize greenwashing and redwashing as other forms of co-optation which function similarly to pink- and purplewashing but remain outside the scope of this project. I analyze how discussions of alleged “weaponized rape” during the events of October 7th were made possible by long-standing colonial characterizations of Indigenous men and conditions of femonalism. I examine the relationships between pink- and purplewashing and homo- and femonalism, respectively, and articulate the connections between these phenomena and settler colonialism. I illustrate the specific racialized gendering that pink- and purplewashing rely on and analyze Zionism as a project of whiteness. Finally, I argue that a connected reading of both pink- and purplewashing exposes the shared precarity of these formations, illuminating sites for potential resistance and refusal.
Methodology

I employ the method of critical discourse analysis to discuss how pink- and purplewashing rhetoric is disseminated in the media. I examine a long-form *New York Times* article and Tweets shared on the Israeli state Twitter account to examine how state and non-state media disseminate pink- and purplewashing rhetoric. I utilize historical sources to contextualize these current pieces of media within larger histories of racist demonization of Palestinian men, infantilization of Palestinian women, and co-optation of the language of justice by colonial entities.

I center the voices of Palestinian, Arab, and SWANA scholars and organizers when conducting my analysis. More specifically, I center the voices of Palestinians, be they academics or not, given that Palestinians are the ones who have the authority to tell their own stories (El-Kurd, 2023). Amahl Bishara (2013) develops the concept of “balanced objectivity,” highlighting how the media apparatus marginalizes Palestinian voices while framing Israelis as the holders of authoritative and “neutral” information. Any non-Palestinians—but specifically Israelis and Americans—are typically given significant journalistic authority to report on Palestine due to their assumed “objectivity” regardless of their actual stake in the matter (2013, 43). Bishara traces discourse about a *New York Times* Jerusalem correspondent, Ethan Bronner, who retained his position even after his son joined the Israeli Occupation Forces (2013, 45). Despite with this significant change, *Times* Editors maintained he had “critical detachment” from the “conflict,” exemplifying a journalistic precedent that renders alignment with the Israeli occupation “neutral,” while characterizing any hint of Palestinian-ness as “biased” and subsequently untrustworthy (2013, 46). Bishara contextualizes the silencing of Palestinian voices by arguing that Palestinians are treated as “epistemic others . . . presumed to have a different and lesser
relationship to knowledge than Euro-Americans” (2013, 51). She highlights the constitutive parts of their epistemic othering, including their status as [largely] stateless people and racist characterizations of Arab and Muslim people as irrational and threatening (2013, 51). These dynamics converge to form a media landscape that is deeply embroiled in anti-Palestinian racism and exclusion. While I cannot change that reality on a large scale, I aim to combat it within this work by acknowledging the persistent silencing of Palestinian voices and intentionally centering Palestinian knowledge.

Similarly, foregrounding Indigenous voices ensures that continued life and resilience is centered, not just the struggle. Failing to do so results in unintentional reinforcement of Indigenous erasure, thus bolstering the aims of settler colonialism. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (2016) highlights the importance of Native American Indigenous Studies (NAIS) in addition to Settler Colonial studies and frames the prioritization of Settler Colonial Studies over NAIS as an unintentional furthering of the erasure that Indigenous peoples experience (2016, 5). Kauanui’s analysis highlights the importance of centering the continued life, strength, and joys of Indigenous people, not just their oppression. Centering Indigenous voices is one way to move towards this goal. It is crucial that we counteract the harmful myth that Indigenous societies exist solely in the past by highlighting their continued autonomy, knowledge production, and fight for liberation.

I situate my argument within this current moment of genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza strip and escalated colonial violence throughout Historic Palestine. As of March 27th, 2024, at least 32,490 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli Occupation, with more than 8,000 people missing and at least 74,889 injured (AJLabs, 2024). The scale and horror of this unfolding genocide is impossible to comprehend, but it is our moral duty to try to do so.
None of the concepts addressed in this thesis are abstract; the racist ideologies and propaganda tactics I discuss directly contribute to the escalated ethnic-cleansing of an Indigenous people from their homeland. I utilize contemporary sources to respond to the present unfolding atrocities while also contextualizing the current material reality within the longer, hundred-years history of anti-colonial struggle in Palestine. I employ these methods in the hopes that this work feels timely and responsive during a period of escalated crisis.

In order to conduct my analysis, I incorporate sources primarily aligned with the disciplines of Gender Studies, Queer Studies, American Studies, and Middle Eastern Studies. I put these theories in conversation with one another and on-the-ground work done by Palestinian organizers and organizations. I rely on both academic and non-academic sources with the understanding that many academic journals and other publications often exclude Indigenous and anti-colonial epistemologies and ontologies (i.e. epistemic othering). Given this reality, I take organizing work and anti-colonial praxis as sites of knowledge production that warrant the same—if not more—rigor and exploration as journal articles and books published by an academic press.

I employ these methods to uncover the implicit and explicit ideological work of pinkwashing, purplewashing, the relationship between the two, and their material impacts.

**Positionality Statement**

My positionality as a white American woman studying at a liberal arts college significantly informs how I approach this topic, especially given that the U.S. is the primary funder of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Here at the Claremont colleges, I am a settler on Tongva-Gabrieleno lands, and grew up as a
settler on Ohlone land in the Bay Area. I have family who are currently settlers in Historic Palestine, including one cousin who lives on an illegal settlement with her family in the West Bank. I visited Historic Palestine once to see family, as I described at the beginning of this thesis. During that trip, I was granted all of the privileges enjoyed by American Jewish occupiers of Palestinian lands.

It is crucial that I remain accountable for my positionality, especially because it is an extremely privileged one. As an American, my tax dollars are currently being used to fund genocide in Gaza and have been used for years to prop up a systems of apartheid and ethnic cleansing. My familial relationship to people who are currently settlers in Historic Palestine and Jewish identity require me to speak out against a genocide being committed in the name of Israeli and Jewish safety. I aim to deprioritize and de-center settler comfort—including my own—in order to open up possibilities for accountability, repair, and material justice for those most harmed (Palestinians).

I reckon with the fact that my privilege as a Jewish American allows me to make statements that would likely result in anything from heightened criticism to doxxing or physical danger if presented by the Arab, Muslim, or Palestinian person who originated that knowledge. I firmly believe that voices such as mine are mainly needed to amplify others’ knowledge and engage in necessary disruptions—both ideological and physical—as students of the struggle. Scholarship is useful insofar as it is used to guide direct action.

**Key Terms**

*Settler colonialism:* Patrick Wolfe (2006) defines settler colonialism as “an inclusive, land-centred project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan centre to the
frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies” (2006, 393). Wolfe discusses the ongoing structure of settler colonialism, which facilitates the “[elimination] of Indigenous societies” and the construction of settler societies in their place (2006, 388). One such example of this phenomena is the Palestinian Nakba. The Nakba (Arabic for “catastrophe”) exemplifies the ongoing violent structure of settler colonialism. Rishad Khalidi explains that the creation of Israel “was the result of two processes: the systematic ethnic cleansing of the Arab-inhabited areas of the country seized during the war; and the theft of Palestinian land and property left behind by the refugees as well as much of that owned by those Arabs who remained in Israel” (2021, 75-76). The demographic majority that the Zionist state sought to achieve was only made possible through a process of continued murder, displacement, and theft (Khalidi 2021, 76).

Palestinian poet, journalist, and organizer Mohammed El-Kurd explains that “the Nakba wasn’t a sudden disaster, nor is it a tragic relic from the past. It didn’t begin or end in 1948. Rather, it is a planned, organized, and, most important, an ongoing process of ethnic cleansing” (El-Kurd 2023). Palestinians recognize the Nakba as a persistent structure that they are subject to every day, rather than a singular historical event. Kauanui (2016) puts the Palestinian Nakba in conversation with the continuous dispossession that Indigenous Americans face, thus drawing a parallel between the structures of settler colonialism that aim to disappear Indigenous societies across the globe. Settlers are often quick to dismiss colonialism as a relic of the past in order to dismiss the ways that it presently operates to grant them power and privilege.
**Orientalism:** Scholar Edward Said coined the term “Orientalism,” referring to it as a “field of learned study” emerging in Europe as early as the 14th Century. The field included studies of literature and culture emerging from Southwest Asia and Northern Africa (1977, 162). The field was always already politicized; Said explains that “the study of the Orient developed especially well in countries that had a large imperial stake in the Orient” (1979, 15). This field of scholarship was produced and productive of the following ideology; “the ‘Orient’ represented a kind of indiscriminate generality for Europe associated not only with difference and otherness but with the vast spaces, the undifferentiated masses of mostly colored people, and the romance, exotic locales, mystery of ‘the Marvels of the East’” (1979, 7). The study of the “Orient” was imbued with European projections about sexual frivolity, indulgence, and barbarity, and sought to create the West as the modern, superior space. Given this reality, Orientalism is now commonly understood as a colonial ideology used to justify Western intervention into Southwest Asia and North Africa. Chibber (2016) explains that “the causal arrow runs from imperial domination to the discourse it created—simply put, colonialism created Orientalism” (Chibber 2016). Chibber argues that the field of “Orientalism” and the ideology it produced functioned to justify colonial expansion and domination. When I use the word “Orientalism/Orientalist” throughout my thesis, this is the ideology I am referencing.

**Zionism:** Zionism is the political ideology supportive of establishing an ethno-state for Jewish people in Historic Palestine. Theodor Herzl, a crucial advocate for political Zionism, spoke plainly about the colonial nature of the project. He claimed that Israel could “form a part of a wall of defense for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism” (Khalidi 2021, 10). Similarly, in 1923, Zionist
leader Ze’ev Jabotinsky touted Zionism’s colonial nature when he wrote: “‘Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonised. That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing...’” (Khalidi 2021, 12). These are just two of many examples of early Zionists proudly proclaiming their colonial aspirations.

Zionism was (and continues to be) based on the incorrect idea that “Palestine was in need of cultivation, civilization, reconstitution; that Zionism would finally bring enlightenment and progress where at present there was neither” (Said 1979, 22). The colonial project is predicated on the colonial logics of Orientalism which imagine Historic Palestine and the people who inhabit it to be either a) nonexistent or b) in need of “civilization.” Zionism imagines that Historic Palestine was barren and in need of “cultivation” by Zionists, completely ignoring the many Indigenous lifeways and practices Palestinians employed as the stewards of the land for thousands of years.

Said highlights the imperial interests underpinning the U.S.’ investment in Zionist hegemony; “a conjuncture of powerful interests—the press, the liberal intelligentsia, military-industrial complex, the academic community, labor unions—for whom uncritical support of Israel and Zionism enhances their domestic as well as international standing (1979, 12). Zionism, predicated on Orientalist myth, exists to serve the interests of “high capitalism,” (1979, 21) rather than the Jewish people, which is why it is supported by most factions of the American political landscape, from conservatives to liberals.

Anti-Zionism and antisemitism are two completely different things (1979, 14); anti-Zionism is opposition to a colonial political ideology while antisemitism is hatred for and discrimination against Jewish people. In fact, much of early Zionism was motivated by European antisemitism (Khalidi 2021, 25). The Israeli state and Zionists at large have significant investments in obscuring this reality and
conflating anti-Zionism and antisemitism (Butler 2019). The conflation of these two terms are bad-faith arguments that diminish the true danger of antisemitism while aiming to support a colonial ideology.

**Hasbara:** Hasbara is an institutionalized mechanism of Israeli propaganda. It is a Hebrew word which roughly translates to “explaining” in English and operates to bolster Israel’s public image globally. In a 2011 article, Israeli journalist Noam Sheizaf writes that “Hasbara targets political elites, opinion makers and the public simultaneously; it includes traditional advocacy efforts as well as more general appeals made through mass media, and it is carried out by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, lobbying groups, private citizens, students, journalists and bloggers” (2011). On the governmental side, The Israeli Minister of Foreign affairs has an official “Media and Hasbara” department and Prime Minister Netanyahu founded a “Hasbara Ministry” equipped with a situation room and robust media team (Sheizaf 2011). Similarly, many non-governmental actors contribute to the project of hasbara through various individual and collective efforts to bolster Israeli narratives of valor and victimhood while demonizing Palestinians. The forms of Israeli propaganda I address within this thesis must be contextualized as components of a much larger propaganda apparatus.

**Queer:** Siobhan B. Somerville (2020) highlights that the term “queer” has meaning beyond the literal description of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT+) identities. More broadly, the term can be applied to facilitate an analysis of (non)normativity. Somerville writes that;
“queer” is a critique of the tendency to organize political or theoretical questions around sexual orientation per se. To ‘queer’ becomes a way to denaturalize categories such as “lesbian” and “gay” (not to mention “straight” and “heterosexual”), revealing them as socially and historically constructed identities that have often worked to establish and police the line between the “normal” and the “abnormal” (2020, 198).

Somerville’s definition is instructive given its concern with the organization of (often policed) political identities. Within this framework of queerness, it becomes plausible that certain gay identities could be integrated within homogenous national formations while others are “queered,” regardless of sexual orientation. Within my thesis, I utilize queerness as an analytical tool rather than an identitarian descriptor, as I will further explain later in this section.

**Femino- & homonationalism:** Homonationalism is a term coined by theorist Jasbir Puar (2007), which aims to describe “the alignment of normative homosexuality, or homonormativity, with the values of patriotism, nationalism, and empire” (Elia 2023, 140). Lisa Duggan defines homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2002, 179).

Homonormativity lays the ground for homonationalism; it requires a de-politicized gay subject that can be incorporated into the national image with the purpose of excluding—often racialized—others. In a review of Puar’s book *Terrorist Assemblages*, Liz Philipose (2009) explains that

> ... homonationalism refers to the dual and interdependent movements that simultaneously incorporate some homosexual bodies and quarantine others through the articulation of race/nation and manifestations of sexual exceptionalism, in which queer is regulatory, whiteness is ascendant, and terrorist and citizen bodies are produced in oppositional relation to each other (2009, 253).
At its most basic, homonationalism must be understood as a “critique” of the commodification and co-optation of queer optics for colonial and imperial purposes.

Similarly, femonalism, a term coined by Sara R. Farris, describes the employment of feminist rhetoric for the purposes of exclusion of racialized others. Farris’ analysis focuses primarily on Western European femonal formations, but it is easily applicable to other locations. Femo- and homonationalism are complex formations that will be the subject of much further discussion in the following sections.

**Pink- & purplewashing:** Pinkwashing, predicated on the conditions of homonationalism (Puar 2013, 338), is a propaganda tool that Israel uses to portray itself as a queer safe-haven while characterizing Palestinian communities as homophobic and subsequently barbaric. Similarly, purplewashing involves the co-optation of feminist language and rhetoric to improve the optics of occupation.

**Final notes on terminology:** I use the term “Historic Palestine” to refer to the entirety of historical Palestine, the piece of land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. I will use the term “Israel” when referring to specific aspects of the Zionist state apparatus, such as Israeli media production or the Israeli occupation. Furthermore, I will refer to the Israeli military as the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) given their primary role in maintaining the illegal occupation of Palestine. The Israeli military brands itself as the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), which incorrectly implies that they are a defensive rather than offensive body. Finally, I will call all military/militant actors “fighters.”
Often, IOF members are referred to as “soldiers” while Palestinians who engage in armed resistance are called “fighters,” reinforcing the idea that Israeli violence is “legitimate” while Palestinian resistance is not. Elia (2023) includes a similar note on terminology in her 2023 book that inspired this one.

Language can either reinforce or challenge dominant structures of power, depending on how it is used. For this reason, I try to be aware of the implicit assumptions underlying common terms and challenge them when necessary.

Why a Queer Analytic?

Queer SWANA scholar-activists Lynn Darwich and Haneen Maikey (2014) address this matter explicitly when they question “… how queer analysis is also responsible for resisting Israel’s Zionist project and its manifestations, from ethnic cleansing and occupation to apartheid and colonialism” (2014, 283). Darwich and Maikey highlight the importance of taking serious subject matters that may not, at first glance, seem relevant to the discipline of queer studies, such as occupation and settler colonialism. In fact, in Scott Morgensen (2015) argues that “queer studies is ready to confront the coloniality of modernity that conditions the queerness that we know: the field should be primed to answer calls for responsibility to a transnational politics of decolonization” (2015, 314). Morgensen, Darwich, and Maikey all discuss the responsibility of a queer studies—and the queer analytic that accompanies it—to untangle the connections between topics that are explicitly queer and those that are not. This includes an exploration of how, in the case of pinkwashing and purplewashing, purported “gay/woman-friendliness” is used as a justification for occupation and colonialism.
A queer analytic is necessary to inform our understanding and responses to the oppressive structures that create the conditions for pink- and purplewashing. For example, Puar’s analysis of “ascendancy to whiteness” exemplifies how queer theorizing can be instrumental in illuminating other relations of power. Furthermore, Darwich and Maikey consider “how we, those in solidarity with this struggle, can understand and navigate through our inevitable complicity with neoliberal constructs of gender and sexuality, and with the Israeli occupation” (2014, 283). While they don’t explicitly state this, I believe that Darwich and Maikey posit that queer analysis may be an important tool to utilize as we “navigate through inevitable complicity” with the hegemonic structures of gender and sexuality and oppressive systems such as settler colonialism and racial capitalism.

**Literature Review**

Schulman and Chávez (2019) trace the transformation of the radical queer-liberation movement of the 1960s - 80s into an unthreatening gay-rights movement easily co-opted by corporations and other entities for their own benefit (2019, 144). They explain how the hypervisibility created by the AIDS crisis led to a de-politicized gay population perceived as a group of consumers with buying power that, if marketed correctly, could lead to increased corporate profits. They explain how these shifting perceptions of gay and queer people led to the phenomenon we understand as homonationalism and pinkwashing. These Israeli projects aim to brand the country as progressive, modern, and inclusive despite the genocide and ethnic cleansing that they are committing against Indigenous peoples.

Schulman and Chávez reference the queer Palestinian organization alQaws, which distinguishes between gayness and queerness by explaining that queerness is inherently political and
stands against all forms of oppression and domination. With this understanding, Palestine is a queer issue not just because of the queer Palestinians that are harmed by the occupation, but because oppression and domination should galvanize queer solidarity no matter what. Schulman’s historical and theoretical analysis is crucial to the argument I develop throughout my thesis.

In their article “The Road from Antipinkwashing Activism to the Decolonization of Palestine,” (2014) scholar-activists Lynn Darwich and Haneen Maikey explain and contextualize movements that resist Israel’s self-branding as a “haven” for gay rights. They explain that “pinkwashing in itself relies heavily on the logic of ‘gay rights’ as it is commonly understood and practiced—a single-issue struggle based on one’s sexual identity to the exclusion of a range of interconnected categories of identification . . .” (2014, 282-213). Anti-pinkwashing movements, they argue, must challenge the racist single-issue nature of pinkwashing by embracing a transformational queer politic that resists settler colonial ideologies. Their queer methodological approach, which rejects binaries and takes seriously the complex and multi-dimensional manifestations of power, is crucial to the argument that I build in this project.

The text “A Politics Not Yet Known: Imagining Relationality within Solidarity” by Scott L. Morgensen puts queerness and Palestine in conversation with each other within the context of American Studies. He addresses how queer theory provides an essential perspective when considering Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) and other actions relevant to the American Studies Association. This article is of particular relevance to me given that this thesis is being completed in the discipline of American Studies.
Scholars Jasbir Puar and Amir Rai’s groundbreaking queer theoretical text “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots” is instrumental to my analysis. They discuss how the realms sexuality, nationalism, and the racialized “other” are combined to justify war and empire, explaining that “[a] very common way of trying to psychologize the monster-terrorist is by positing a kind of failed heterosexuality” (2002, 124). They poignantly articulate the contradictions of the U.S.’ self-purported inclusion of palatable gayness and simultaneous racialized homophobia and queerphobia. A similar statement can be made of Israel. They claim that “what we see in the deployment of heteronormative patriotism is, on the one hand, the quarantining of the terrorist-monster-fag using the bodies and practices of a queered other, and on the other, the incorporation of aspects of queer subjectivity into the body of the normalized nation” (Puar and Rai 2002, 126-127). These theorists illustrate how the gendering and sexualizing of the racialized other is often overlooked.

Scholar Nada Elia presents crucial scholarship on the topics on gender justice, pink- and purplewashing, and anti-colonial movement building. In her book Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts: Feminism, Inter/Nationalism, and Palestine (2023), she argues that the Palestinian struggle is intrinsically a feminist one. Because Zionist occupation necessitates gendered and sexualized violence, the struggle against Zionism is by nature a feminist struggle. She outlines the connections between the Palestinian struggle and other movements for liberation, such as Indigenous struggles in North America, Black Lives Matter, and queer movements. Cumulatively, she illustrates that any discussion of Palestine is incomplete without a particular attention given to how the occupation impacts the most marginalized.
Similarly, Rabab Abdulhadi’s article “Israeli Settler Colonialism in Context: Celebrating (Palestinian) Death and Normalizing Gender and Sexual Violence” (2019) highlights the specific gendered and sexual violences intrinsic to the Israeli occupation. She outlines the systematic culture of misogynistic violence and domination within the IOF and explains how that impacts Palestinian women. She addresses Israel’s contradictory claims to progressivism paired with the outwardly misogynistic and racist rhetoric, illuminating how the occupation will employ any tool to dominate, even if they are seemingly contradictory. Her analysis is instrumental to the arguments I make about Hamas’ alleged weaponized rape and purplewashing.

Within my thesis I call upon these queer and anti-colonial theories—among others—to expose the racist and misogynistic ideologies underpinning pink- and purplewashing propaganda. I understand pink- and purplewashing propaganda tactics to be symptoms of larger homo- and femonationalist formations. By connecting the rhetorical violence of pink and purplewashing to the material violence occurring in this genocide, I aim to address ideological roots of racialized and gendered settler colonial violence. When analyzed co-constitutively and contextually, the hypocrisy and fragility of these propaganda tools are illuminated, exposing sites of possible transformative coalitional struggle.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1 traces the past and present prominence of Israeli pinkwashing and contextualizes it as a product of an orchestrated, U.S.-based “Brand Israel” hasbara campaign. The chapter defines homonationalism and positions pinkwashing as one of its many byproducts. It highlights the racialized and racist ideologies underlying homonationalism and pinkwashing, arguing that the phenomena
operate co-constitutively to reinforce settler colonialism. Settler colonial institutions subsequently bolster homonationalism and pinkwashing given their colonial aims. Chapter 1 concludes by discussing the transformative possibility for anti-pinkwashing organizing to function as a locus for anti-colonial politicization and action transnationally.

Chapter 2 addresses the pattern of settler nations co-opting the language of feminism in order to demonize Indigenous men by portraying them as threats to white womanhood. This phenomenon is called “purplewashing” and is made possible by the white aspirations of the Zionist project. I analyze a 2023 *New York Times* article to illustrate this point and contextualize the article within a larger media landscape deeply invested in Palestinian dehumanization. Mainstream media accusations of weaponized rape on October 7th rely on notions of protected white Israeli womanhood and Palestinian male barbarity. I highlight how the racialized and gendered configuration of the “imperiled Israeli woman” and “dangerous Palestinian man” completely erase the layered oppression faced by Palestinian women, who are subject to the highest levels of gendered violence at the hands of their occupiers.

Chapter 3 builds on previous discussions of homonationalism and pinkwashing by putting them in conversation with femonationalism and purplewashing. It addresses the pattern of Western co-optation of “progressive” causes and language in the service of racist nationalist projects, from Western Europe to Israel. With this in mind, the chapter outlines the co-constitutive relationship between homo- and femonationalism and highlights the danger of an isolated analysis of either one. It argues that a paired analysis exposes the precarity and hypocrisy of Israeli claims to modernity, subsequently illuminating sites for coalitional resistance to colonialism.
Chapter 1: Homonationalism and Pinkwashing: A New Frontier of Israeli Settler Colonialism

On November 12th, 2023, 36 days after the Israeli Occupation began its campaign of escalated violence in the besieged Gaza strip, the official account of Israel made a post on Twitter that included images of Israeli Occupation fighters holding rainbow flags amidst a background of rubble in Gaza. The caption claimed that the pictured fighter held “The first ever pride flag [to be] raised in Gaza 🏳️‍🌈,” (@Israel, November 12th, 2023) followed by a message that “Yoav Atzmoni who is a member of the LGBTQ+ community wanted to send a message of hope to the people of Gaza living under Hamas brutality.” It concluded by stating that “[The IOF fighter’s] intention was to raise the first pride flag in Gaza as a call for peace and freedom.” This post encapsulates a sentiment that has been central to Israel’s PR strategy for quite some time now; branding their violent occupation of Palestine as somehow “gay-friendly.” One of the accompanying images included a gay flag with text that read: “In the name of love,” (@Israel, November 12th, 2023) implying that the IOF’s genocidal campaign is motivated by a quest for love instead of one for land and power. In this moment, as Israel’s decades-long occupation and genocide escalates, the Israeli state uses its self-proclaimed “queer-friendliness” as an ideological weapon to justify mass-slaughter.

Section A: Pinkwashing

Israel’s choice to frame itself as gay-friendly is strategic, and it has a name: pinkwashing. Palestinian scholar and organizer Nada Elia explains that “Pinkwashing is a propaganda tactic used by Israel to falsely portray the country as progressive while presenting Palestinian, Arab and Muslim societies as
backwards and intolerant” (Elia 2018). Elia highlights that pinkwashing exists to bolster Israeli political aims and protect their status as authoritative narrators. On this matter, scholar Rabab Abdulhadi (2019) writes that “Israel has prioritized its public image as a ‘civilized,’ modern, feminist-friendly, and LGBTQI+ safe haven, accommodating the growth of the queer justice movement as a matter of national security” (2019, 570). The State adopts queer-friendly rhetoric (as well as feminist rhetoric), in order to lay claims to modernity and progressivism while enacting gendered and sexualized violence onto Palestinians. Their claims to modernity inherently imply a “backwards” or “immodern” Other: Palestinians. This constructed dichotomy is facilitated by pervasive Orientalism which aims to construct a “modern West” through the domination of a “backwards East.” Israel’s self-branding—rather than being superficial—builds upon Orientalist principles with the goal of bolstering its own legitimacy.

The stakes of these tactics are high; homonationalism and pinkwashing stem from and further reinforce settler colonialism. In addition to improving Israel’s image, the strategy aims to shift blame for the violence of the continued Nakba onto the victims of it. Pinkwashing can best be understood through employing a queer analytic to address the conditions that create and sustain its capacity.

Pinkwashing rhetoric is far-reaching and is believed by many who see themselves as social-justice oriented. That makes sense given that self-proclaimed progressives are the exact target for this form of propaganda. Sarah Schulman (2012) writes about her own process of believing and then questioning pinkwashing rhetoric, explaining that “[She] had not yet understood that by financially supporting Tel Aviv’s LGBT community, the Israeli government was investing in something other than equality” (2012, 24). Pinkwashing propaganda is explicitly aimed towards people who identify as
liberal or progressive. The tactic emerged as part of an orchestrated effort to reach (particularly American) audiences who were questioning the Israeli occupation and therefore endangering Zionist hegemony.

Despite its lack of merit, pinkwashing rhetoric is far-reaching and powerful, especially among U.S. based audiences. Schulman gives us insight into her perspective as a queer Jewish person on a journey discovering the nature of pinkwashing and being politicized into anti-colonial, pro-Palestine politics. Of her own process, she explains that “[she] didn’t know much about queer life in Israel beyond the most common generalities: queer people serve in the military, Tel Aviv has a thriving gay community, and the religious domination of Jerusalem made gay Pride events there shaky, fraught, and obstructed” (2012, 23-24) Schulman’s previous perceptions of gayness in Israel reflect the extensive influence of pinkwashing; many people, including those who are well-intentioned and may consider themselves social justice-oriented, are indoctrinated by false narratives bolstering Israel’s “safety and inclusivity” of LGBTQ+ people. As was illustrated by the aforementioned Tweet, Israel meticulously crafts and disseminates their false narrative through multiple avenues (Sheizaf 2011). It is no coincidence that Schulman believed these things, and these beliefs have material consequences.

A key politicizing moment for Schulman was when she was invited to give the keynote address for the Israeli Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference at Tel Aviv University (2012, 25) and chose to turn down the invitation. Schulman’s experience of being invited to participate in a gay event in Israel is not unique; many LGBTQ+ conferences and events are hosted in Tel Aviv regularly, including the Tel Aviv LGBT Film Festival (2012, 23). Similarly, Israel moved to host World Pride in Jerusalem in 2006 (Puar 2007, 16). The parade—which antipinkwashing organizers ultimately got canceled—was an attempt to
pinkwash the occupation and bolster Israeli propaganda (2007, 16). These events aim to strengthen Israel’s claim as a “queer safe-haven” by bringing highly visible gay people from around the world to the country while producing media that disseminates this imagery.

An instrumental element of the rise of pinkwashing was the orchestrated creation of “Brand Israel.” The campaign was developed by American PR experts and officially launched in 2005. The strategy had the explicit goal of influencing American liberals and young people between the ages of 16-30 (Elia 2023, 89). Schulman argues that the campaign “…promotes Israel as a modern, liberal society with open values while whitewashing its human rights violations and dual citizenship systems” (2012, 24). Schulman highlights how Israel appeals to gay consumers in an effort to mask the State’s violent occupation and dispossession of Palestinians. Similarly, Elia argues that the campaign “aims to distract from Israel’s horrific record of human rights abuses and violations of international law by shining a bright light on the country’s cultural accomplishments and its cosmopolitan culture” (2023, 90). Israel often sends gay ambassadors to represent the country at international events, aiming to present the state as a “queer haven” within a homophobic region (2023, 90).

Ironically, Israel isn’t very queer friendly at all. Tel Aviv is the only pocket of “gay progressivism” within Israel, and even there, white gay Jewish Israeli men are the primary ones with the privilege to express themselves openly (Maikey 2010, 608). At the yearly Pride Parade in Jerusalem, there are more counter-protesters than protesters, exposing the blatant lies underlying the “Brand-Israel” campaign (Elia Speech, March 21st, 2024). The lie of Israel’s inclusivity and “progressiveness” is one that the state is greatly invested in given that it connects to many of the larger
myths underpinning Zionist ideology; namely, that Israel is a beacon of modernity that possesses the right to destroy any “abject” human life that stands in its way.

Section B: Homonationalism

In order to understand pinkwashing theoretically and in practice, I address “homonationalism,” a dynamic that Jasbir Puar believes creates the conditions for pinkwashing. Puar writes that

... homonationalism is fundamentally a deep critique of lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses and how those rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to citizenship—cultural and legal—at the expense of the delimitation and expulsion of other populations. The narrative of progress for gay rights is thus built on the back of racialized others, for whom such progress was once achieved, but is now backsliding or has yet to arrive (2013, 337).

Puar’s analysis is concerned with this very delineation of which bodies are deemed valuable and which are deemed disposable. Through her analysis of homonationalism, she explores situations where gay and queer bodies are welcomed—literally and rhetorically—by the settler state to advance their own material interests. If the goal of settler-colonialism is to “[eliminate] Indigenous societies” (2006, 393) as scholar Patrick Wolfe writes, it may be in the interest of some settler colonial nations to include gay people—and gay-friendly rhetoric—as part of their colonial project. In other words, by embracing homonormativity, settler states can integrate “non-threatening” queer bodies into their nation to appear progressive without sacrificing their settler aspirations. As was illustrated by the aforementioned tweet by the official Israeli account, the state benefits from images which visibly place gay bodies on the front lines of occupation to represent the state. This tweet, while not a literal form of homonationalism, was made possible by the delineation of valuable and invaluable bodies that
homonationalism allows for. This phenomenon manifests in all sectors of society, within and beyond the military. Homonationalism creates the conditions for gay people to be the ideological (if not literal) foot-soldiers of colonialism.

Pinkwashing is made possible by “global conditions of homonationalism,” (Puar 2013, 338) and conflating the two terms can be harmful and dangerous. Puar explains that “Homonationalism and pinkwashing should not be seen as parallel phenomena. Rather, pinkwashing is one manifestation and practice made possible within and because of homonationalism” (2013, 337). Puar reminds readers that homonationalism, unlike pinkwashing, is not explicitly carried out by the state. Rather, homonationalism is constituted by “the historical convergence of state practices, transnational circuits of queer commodity culture and human rights paradigms, and broader global phenomena such as the increasing entrenchment of Islamophobia” (2013, 337). Her analysis highlights the multiple political dynamics that create a reality where the degree of state’s embrace of “gay-rights” becomes a measure of their ethicality (2013, 337). Falsely conflating homonationalism and pinkwashing can ultimately reproduce oppressive structures by failing to name settler colonialism as the force that underlies these phenomena.

Israel is a “pioneer of homonationalism” (2013, 338) because they are a pioneer of settler colonialism in Historic Palestine. Darwich and Maikey (2014) remark that “Pinkwashing is not isolated from the larger colonial Zionist project, and we cannot fight pinkwashing without challenging its hidden notion of mainstream gay politics and reframing it as a struggle against colonialism and Zionism and its different manifestations” (2014, 284). They utilize a queer analysis to contextualize the pinkwashing, highlighting that it emerges from a system of settler colonialism for the purpose of
furthering settler colonialism. By connecting pinkwashing to the conditions of colonialism that enable and are supported by it, they demystify the rhetoric and expose its true aims. Through this process, they strip the propaganda of its power and legitimacy, illuminating possibilities of refusal.

The tokenization of certain marginalized bodies to justify settler colonialism is nothing new. In fact, Puar contextualizes her argument by explaining that

Historically speaking, settler colonialism has a long history of articulating its violence through the protection of serviceable figures such as women and children, and now the homosexual. Pinkwashing is only one more justification for imperial/racial/national violence within this long tradition of intimate rhetorics around "victim" populations (2013, 338).

Which “vulnerable” bodies settler states claim to protect has changed over time, but the tokenization and weaponization of marginalized bodies has remained consistent. Puar highlights that settler colonial projects have always weaponized the vulnerability of different oppressed groups through false promises of “safety.” This logic is a different manifestation of the racist colonial trope of “white men going to save brown women from brown men” (Spivak 1988, 92)(Elia 2023, 74). It is not new for colonial states to claim to “save” their most marginalized victims. Through her critique of homonormative modernity, Puar exposes how white supremacy, Orientalism and Islamophobia co-create an environment where gay bodies and gay-friendly rhetoric are wielded by settler colonial states to advance their goal of “eliminating Indigenous societies.”

Homonationalism is a function of colonialism that creates the conditions for—and can illuminate the effects of—pinkwashing. The investment of imperial and colonial countries around the globe in Israeli pinkwashing illustrates the power—and danger—of this phenomenon. For example, the US-embassy in Israel hosts a yearly Pride event to celebrate queer Israelis (Shafie 2016, 39). They
have collaborated with racist anti-Palestinian organizations such as the “Jewish Federation of North America LGBT Mission for Israel,” (2016, 39) as they carry out these events. Under the conditions of homonationalism, it is viewed as reasonable for organizations to champion LGBTQ+ rights while simultaneously advocating for the occupation and dispossession of the Palestinian people.

Section C: Homonationalism, Pinkwashing, and the Palestinian “Other”

Pinkwashing does implicit and explicit ideological work to justify settler colonialism by positioning Israel as the “savior” and Palestinian as “backwards” or “barbaric.” Abdulhadi (2019) explains how “This discourse constructs a norm where Palestinians are imagined to be inferior, backward, and exceptionally misogynist and homophobic, especially in comparison to Israel’s self-representation as queer and feminist-friendly haven” (2019, 571). In reality, Israel is responsible for the oppression and suffering of the Palestinian people, including that of queer Palestinians (Elia 2023, 27). Because of the occupation and apartheid system, all Palestinians living in the West Bank or Gaza Strip—including queer ones—could not return to ‘48 lands if they wished to do so, thus dispelling the false claim that Israel “saves” queer Palestinians. The primary oppression faced by all Palestinians, including women and queers, is that of the occupation. Of Israeli pinkwashing propaganda, Samira Saraya explains that “One or two stories circulating in the news about the Palestinian gay guys Israel ‘saves’ does not turn Israel into a LGBTQ Palestinian liberator” (Hochberg 2010, 609). Similarly, Elia points out that, as queer Palestinians often remind us, there “is no ‘pink door’ in the apartheid wall” (2023, 27). Israel is invested in being framed as a “liberator” because that serves as a justification for them to expand their territory and occupy more land.
Implicitly, pinkwashing seeks to justify dispossession, occupation, and genocide. By characterizing Palestinians as “backwards” and “barbaric,” the Israeli regime implies that Palestinians don’t deserve land, autonomy, and life. Abdulhadi writes that “While bolstering Israel’s image of modern inclusivity, Israeli discourse portrays Palestinians as exceptionally homophobic and sexist, thus implicitly justifying gendered and sexual violence” (2019, 561). Israel’s claim that Palestinians are sexist and homophobic is mobilized as a form violence against them, including forms of misogynistic and homophobic violence. For example, it is commonplace for the Israeli intelligence to blackmail queer Palestinians (Weiss 2014) and force them to be informants by threatening to out them to their communities if they do not comply.

Israel’s claims of Palestinian “barbarity” seek to justify their colonial project while shirking accountability for the violence that accompanies it. For example, after Palestinian child Mohammed Abu Khdeir was kidnapped and burned alive by Israelis in 2014, Israeli media claimed that his family killed him because of the “dishonor” that he brought to them, implying that he was gay (Abdulhadi 2019, 567). The danger of Israel’s pinkwashing is on full display, as Israelis kill a child and immediately blame his death on the “barbarity” of his family. Israel weaponized racist, islamophobic, and orientalist tropes depicting Palestinians as homophobic and inhumane in order to hide, cover-up, and shift blame for a murder committed by Israelis. Abdulhadi explains that “Such constructions of Palestinians and Palestinian society are placed in opposition to the construction of Israel as an ‘enlightened’ and exceptionally gay-friendly state, which presumably offers a haven of sexual liberation amid the misogyny and homophobia of Arab and Muslim communities.” (2019, 569) Abu Khdeir’s murder cannot be separated from the conditions that preceded it; structures of Israeli occupation and
apartheid led to his murder and pinkwashing was invoked to cover it up. Israeli media shifted blame towards his own family to absolve their own citizens of responsibility for the murder, illustrating one of the many material impacts of homonationalism and pinkwashing.

Israel’s simultaneous pinkwashing and far-right rhetoric, while seemingly contradictory, both aim to reinforce and legitimize Israeli settler colonialism. A queer analysis of Israeli pinkwashing helps to illuminate Israel’s inconsistent branding of itself; for example, the coexistence of both pinkwashing and explicit racialized and genocidal rhetoric is seemingly peculiar. It is crucial to contextualize this analysis within this current moment of escalated violence carried out by the occupation against Palestinians, where Israeli state leaders are openly calling for a mass-slaughter (Lederer 2023). Given that Israel hasn’t crushed Palestinian resistance or BDS, they have resorted to more explicit genocidal language to justify their offensive operations and occupation (Abdulhadi 2019, 547). Homonationalism creates the conditions for Israel to be perceived as having “moral high ground” while “Palestinians are cast as uncivilized, misogynistic, and homophobic and thereby guilty of forcing Israel to abandon its feminist and queer-friendly principles” (2019, 550). Both pinkwashing and far-right rhetoric portray Israel as a positive force that aims to either “liberate” or annihilate the “enemy.” Both frameworks position Palestinians as sub-human and in need of Israeli intervention. The coexistence of these seemingly contradictory narratives further highlight the colonial logic that underlies pinkwashing.

Amidst this moment of increased rhetoric surrounding “terrorists,” Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai’s analysis that the term “terrorist” is always-already racialized, gendered, and sexualized is extremely relevant. Puar and Rai address the construction of the terrorist, among other things, in their
groundbreaking work of queer theory “Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots” (2002). They remark that “The monsters that haunt the prose of contemporary counterterrorism emerge out of figures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that have always been racialized, classed, and sexualized” (2002, 124). They draw attention to the fact that characterization of so-called terrorists is anything but neutral. Similarly, this characterization of the “queer terrorist” replaces any possibility of queer Palestinians within the imperial imaginary. “The proper modern gay or lesbian Muslim is foreclosed, while the terrorist is forever queer, improperly sexual, embedded in an ‘always already homosexualized population’” (Puar 2007, 14). Within this framework, queerness is used to demarcate the “other” and is entirely separate from sexual orientation. Any body that stands in opposition to the colonial state’s interests is queered and subsequently characterized as invaluable.

This analysis is particularly relevant to this moment of genocide, when Israel is characterizing anything it doesn’t like as a terrorist organization, including non-profit organizations that advocate for Palestinian rights (Hearst 2023). Palestinian schools, hospitals, mosques, and churches all face the same characterization of aiding, abetting, or hiding “terrorists” to justify Israel’s destruction of Gaza’s infrastructure and institutions. The same is said of any and all individuals in Gaza—be they healthcare workers, journalists, educators, civilians, or resistance fighters—they all face the same characterization. The choice to refer to Gazans and Gazan organizations as terrorist is intentional and seeks to evoke the dehumanization and ostracization that Puar and Rai trace. As Abdulhadi puts it, “The concepts of Islamophobia, racism, and Orientalism, while distinct and historically specific forms [of] racialization, feed into each other and are co-constitutive in the makeup of Israeli (and US) settler colonialism”
(2019, 546). These forces, when combined, provide fertile ground for pinkwashing to construct itself in opposition to the “barbaric” queerness of the “terrorist Palestinians.”

The characterization of terrorists as those who embody “a kind of failed heterosexuality” (Puar and Rai 2002, 124) harnesses homophobia as a tool to discipline settler populations into compliance with the aims of the state. In their article, Puar and Rai analyze media that characterized bin Laden as a “fag,” and implied the same of anybody who supported him (2002, 126). Given that bin Laden is one of the most visible examples of a “terrorist” in the U.S. public imagination, it is significant that he was portrayed in this manner. They explain that “queerness as sexual deviancy is tied to the monstrous figure of the terrorist as a way to otherize and quarantine subjects classified as ‘terrorists,’ but also to normalize and discipline a population through these very monstrous figures” (2002, 126). They highlight that this characterization contributes to a climate of increased violence and vitriol directed towards queer people, especially queers of color (2002, 126). Positioning terrorists as those who embody a form of “failed sexuality” allows for not only the further demonization and killing of those individuals, but the construction of a national identity in opposition to that failure. This national identity celebrates the nuclear family and heterosexual reproduction that functions to grow the settler population. However, homonationalism complicates this construction of a heterosexual national identity by calling attention to the queer bodies that are incorporated into the national imaginary.

Under the conditions of homonationalism, the barbaric queerness of so-called terrorists is paired with the integration of “good” gay bodies within the settler nation. As Patrick Wolfe traces, the project of settler colonialism involves both “negative and positive” (2006, 338) dimensions, meaning that, in addition to “eliminating the native,” settler colonial nations seek to build a literal and
ideological nation to occupy the land that they have acquired. This national identity is constructed in opposition to what it is not—for example “terrorist queer”—in which case, the “good gay” becomes vital to a nation’s identity throughout the process of colonialism. Puar points out that “The terms of degeneracy have shifted such that homosexuality is no longer a priori excluded from national formations” (2007, 2). Instead, homosexuality can be weaponized as a tool in the construction of a homogenous racialized (and in Israel’s case, Jewish-Supremacist) state.

Furthermore, if a settler fails to fit into that role, they are often portrayed as the monster/terrorist/fag that the settler-nation seeks to eliminate. Puar and Rai articulate this phenomenon by explaining that “…what we see in the deployment of heteronormative patriotism is, on the one hand, the quarantining of the terrorist-monster-fag using the bodies and practices of a queered other, and on the other, the incorporation of aspects of queer subjectivity into the body of the normalized nation” (2002, 126-127). This “dual process of incorporating and quarantining” (2002, 127) is at the core of homonationalism, given that it signifies the delineation between which queer bodies are “good” and which should be eliminated. Ultimately, that distinction is based on which bodies reinforce the state’s claim to legitimacy and which threaten its legitimacy. Under homonationalism, queerness becomes malleable; instead of having a stagnant status in the eyes of the state, it is manipulated to reinforce ideological and material goals of the settler nation.

Section D: Resistance to Pinkwashing and Homonationalism

Pinkwashing and all other tools used to simultaneously obscure and reinforce the true aims of settler colonialism are met with resistance from Palestinians and those in solidarity with the Palestinian fight
for liberation. There are many Palestinian organizations in Palestine—such as alQaws and Aswat—and in the U.S.—such as The Palestinian Feminist Collective and the Adalah Justice Project—that denounce pinkwashing and resist the settler colonialism that it seeks to justify. Haneen Maikey, who I have quoted extensively within this paper, remarks directly about how her organization alQaws rejects pinkwashing: “Israel exploits tales of terror about oppressed gay Palestinians. We at alQaws refuse to be a part of this campaign” (2010, 608). Other Palestinian organizations such as Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions (BDS), while not explicitly focused on queer struggles, mobilize solidarity and decisive action worldwide through their politics of collective liberation. Co-founder of BDS Omar Barghouti (2021) writes that: “the struggle for Palestinian liberation has always been conditioned upon decolonizing Palestinian minds from deeply seated powerlessness and hopelessness and embarking on a praxis, as Paulo Freire would say, a radical process of hopeful, globalized resistance, transformation, and emancipation” (2021, 5). The principles of BDS remind all of us to act from a position of ideological integrity and material solidarity. The transformative work done by these—and countless other—Palestinian organizations highlights the potential for antipinkwashing and other forms of activism to function as “emancipatory practice,” so long as they remain fiercely rooted in their anti-colonial politics.

Antipinkwashing organizing has the potential to be a powerful site of counter-hegemonic struggle. Antonio Gramsci’s theorization of hegemony, while not explicitly relevant, includes many transferable concepts that illuminate the radical potential of antipinkwashing organizing and advocacy. Of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, Harmony Goldberg (2017) writes that “Crude repression might inspire rebellion, but repression with the consent of the majority is likely to be accepted and even
celebrated” (2017, 10). Israel utilizes pinkwashing as a key strategic tool to manufacture consent for occupation and genocide while marginalizing dissenting voices. Pinkwashings aims to counterbalance much of the explicitly genocidal, far-right rhetoric espoused by Israel with its claims to modernity and progressivism. As has been previously established, pinkwashing is anything but innocuous given that it reinforces the same political goals as the far-right rhetoric. Given pinkwashing’s role in maintaining Israeli hegemony, antipinkwashing has the potential to be a threat to current structures of Israeli domination. Goldberg writes that “a successful revolutionary movement would first have to engage in a long-term effort to undermine that consent” (2017, 14). Antipinkwashing organizing does just that; it seeks to undermine consent for Israeli pinkwashing by exposing and resisting its colonial aims.

Antipinkwashing is a frontier of queer and anti-colonial struggle. Darwich and Maikey remark that: “Antipinkwashing activism has rapidly become a striking and tense embodiment of all the questions that could emerge (or rather erupt) from the nexus of sexualized, gendered, and racialized politics within a modern gay transnational solidarity movement” (2014, 282). Many Palestinians and others resisting colonialism have discussed antipinkwashing advocacy as a locus for resistance to hegemonic structures and site of transformative possibility. Furthermore, Israel’s contradictory narratives are becoming increasingly unstable, especially as their war crimes are being exposed to the world. Now is the time for all people—queer or not—to come together and unilaterally embrace an anti-colonial, anti-imperial, anti-racist queer politics. More importantly, it is time to act in accordance with those politics as we loudly proclaim our solidarity.
Chapter 2: Colonial Gendered Racialization, Purplewashing, and Media Representation

Feminist-washing—like pinkwashing—is another tool utilized by settler-states to bolster their claims to legitimacy and justify occupation and dispossession of Indigenous people. Most recently, the Occupation’s feminist-washing (or purplewashing) has taken the form of unsubstantiated claims of sexual violence committed by Hamas—a tactic that aims to justify the ongoing genocide in Gaza and obscure the sexual violence endemic to the Israeli occupation and masculinist militarism. Mainstream media outlets widely circulate these unsubstantiated claims; this chapter focuses on a primary example published by the New York Times. The tactic of purplewashing reinforces orientalist and racist tropes by portraying Palestinian men as barbaric, erasing the oppression of Palestinian women, and positioning the masculinist Israeli military as the proper “protector” of (white) Israeli Jewish womanhood.

While different from pinkwashing on the surface, purplewashing shares many of the implicit and explicit ideological functions. For example, it assumes Palestine to be backwards, sexist, and homophobic while presenting Israel as a symbol of modernity and inclusivity. Purplewashing must be understood within a longer context of colonial claims to modernity; “[colonizers] always claim that they will leave the native population better off as a result of their rule; the ‘civilizing’ and ‘progressive’ nature of their colonial projects serves to justify whatever enormities are perpetrated against the indigenous people to fulfill their objectives” (Khalidi 2021, 10). Within this chapter, I analyze purplewashing as one such tactic within a larger history of so-called colonial progressivism.

Israeli purplewashing aims to justify colonial intervention and domination while obscuring racialized gendered violence endemic to it. The weaponization of purplewashing typically plays out in
(at least) one of three ways. The first, and possibly most common, is the rhetoric of [white] women as imperiled victims of racialized men. This trope is illustrated within the *Times “Screams Without Words”* article that I will discuss shortly. The article relies on tropes of white female victimhood regardless of the actual race of the alleged victims. Secondly, purplewashing manifests in the narrative that colonized men harm colonized women, thus proving their barbarity. Hence Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s (1988) analysis of the trope of “White men saving brown women from brown men” (1988, 92)(Elia 2023, 74). Finally, colonizing entities adopt purplewashing to present themselves as the allegedly liberatory state which gives women the power to dominate brown men, subsequently positioning themselves as a progressive force. All of these forms of feminist co-optation rely on the demonization of Indigenous, in this case Palestinian, men. They simultaneously reinforce patriarchal constructions of womanhood as helpless devoid of agency, therefore requiring state protection and empowerment. Importantly, these tropes are fictions; they are narratives created to justify colonial violence without any basis in fact. It follows that colonizing entities will often utilize these tropes inconsistently and in a contradictory manner—the justifications need not be rational so long as they point to the same end.

Mainstream media outlets bolstered Israeli purplewashing when they publicized unsubstantiated claims of sexual violence committed by Hamas members following their October 7th breakout from besieged Gaza. After multiple rounds of sensationalist media claims regarding “beheaded babies” and “mass rape,” later proven to be fabricated, the *New York Times* published an long-form article titled “‘Screams Without Words’: How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on Oct. 7” (Gettleman 2023). The article, which was the subject of much public debate, claimed to provide
definitive proof of “a pattern of rape, mutilation, and extreme brutality against women” (2023) on October 7th. The article was published during a time when Israeli attacks on Gaza were beginning to receive large-scale criticism from populations in the Global North, challenging Israel’s “right” to destroy Palestinian life with impunity (Scahill 2024). The timing of the article was anything but random; in fact, critics regarded it as “… an emotionally manipulative fraud aimed at justifying or distracting from Israel’s genocide in Gaza” (Abunimah 2024).

I address the New York Times article as an example of purplewashing not for its uniqueness but for its mundanity. The article is both a product of—and perpetrator within—a much larger project that aims to demonize Palestinian men and erase Palestinian women with the ultimate goal of justifying Israeli settler colonialism and the sexual violence endemic to it.

While unexceptional in its extreme anti-Palestine bias, the article is exceptional in its complete disregard for even the most standard principles of journalistic integrity (Scahill 2024). From the damning bias and nepotism among two of the principle reporters (North 2024) to the unusual choice of withholding the accompanying New York Times “Daily” podcast episode (Boguslaw 2024), the article’s reporting solicited particularly intense scrutiny, including from within the Times organization itself. This is likely because the evidence presented within the article does not substantiate its claims. The article states that “the attacks against women were not isolated events but part of a broader pattern of gender-based violence on Oct. 7” (Gettleman 2023). However, the article fails to present any forensic evidence or victim testimony proving that point, instead relying solely on unreliable and inconsistent eyewitness accounts (Scahill 2024). Even the title of the article misleads readers; the quote “screams without words” was taken from an eyewitness who described an alleged attack perpetrated by
individuals wearing normal clothes, indicating their status as civilians rather than members of Hamas (Scahill 2024). Given the article’s focus on Hamas’ alleged “weaponization of rape,” the actions of civilians would not qualify as relevant to the argument. This slippage illuminates a much more insidious throughline within the article; rather than focusing the alleged behavior of Hamas members, it scraps together any evidence of male Palestinian barbarity, exposing the true ethos that underlies the article.

Given the *Times’* status as the paper of record in the U.S., it is unsurprising that the “Screams Without Words” created serious shock waves, including the publication of similar sentiments in other major U.S. newspapers. The Guardian, for example, published a similar article shortly after titled “Evidence Points to Systematic Use of Rape and Sexual Violence by Hamas in 7 October Attacks” (McKernan 2024). The Guardian article relied on some of the debunked claims presented within the *Times* article, therefore extending the reach of the inflammatory and unsubstantiated claims presented in the *Times* article (Oct. 7 Fact Check, 2024). A month after the publication of the original story, the *Times* chose to “respond” to the extensive criticism the article received by doubling-down on their original claims of weaponized rape (Gettleman 2024). But why go to such lengths to claim “systemic” and “weaponized” rape when there is no evidence of such occurrences? What are the rhetorical and political stakes of this argument?

The *Times* article, made possible by normalized purplewashing, relies on and reproduces orientalist tropes that depict Palestinian men as extraordinarily violent and barbaric. Through its rhetoric, it implicitly justifies the genocide being carried out by Israel against the Palestinian people in Gaza and throughout Historic Palestine. The *Times* article—while egregious—must be understood as
a small symptom of a much larger project of gendered racist demonization of Palestinians. I utilize the method of critical discourse analysis later in this chapter to further address a few of the many pitfalls and counter-factualities within the *Times* article, but will first focus on the distinct political conditions that allowed for the article’s publication and wide reception in the first place.

Claims of rape perpetrated by Palestinians conveniently positions Israel as the “benevolent” feminist state, tasked with the responsibility of protecting Jewish Israeli women from “barbaric” men. Subsequently, violence committed by the Israeli state is portrayed as legitimate—even necessary—to use Max Weber’s theory on the state’s “monopoly on violence” (Elia 2023, 25) regardless of its actual aims of impact. Abdulhadi (2019) highlights that Israeli feminist-washing necessitates a specific gendering and control of Palestinian men (2019, 556). The demonization of Palestinian men contributes to a structure where sexual violence perpetrated by the Israeli state against Palestinian men is rendered “impossible” while sexual violence against women is viewed as “justified” or “necessary” for the Israeli domination. Israel weaponizes sexual violence against Palestinian woman as a gendered tool of occupation, which I will elaborate on later in this chapter.

Within the Zionist framework, Palestinians are relegated to the status of permanent perpetrators given that any and all forms of their resistance are understood as “illegitimate” by Zionist forces and the Western powers that support them. Nada Elia argues that the mainstream media contributes to the delegitimization and demonization of Palestinian resistance by publishing accounts that lack all context and power analysis, (Elia 2023, 26) as is true for the *Times* article in question. In order to understand the racialization of Indigenous men facing settler colonialism, I will first discuss the racialized gendering of male subjects in franchise colonial/imperialist contexts.
Section A: Gendered Racialization in Imperial/Franchise Colonial Contexts

Historically, logics of colonialism have suggested that the colonizer’s and/or imperialist “enlightened” gender politics justify their projects of land theft and/or domination. This is particularly true in franchise colonial contexts, which Wolfe defines as “a situation where Whites oversaw a system in which natives worked for them” (Smallwood 2019, 408). Franchise colonial and imperialist powers claim that Indigenous men harm and brutalize women within their community, subsequently portraying Indigenous women as vulnerable and in need of saving. This act of “saving” conveniently provides justification for intervention on the part of the colonizer. Lila Abu-Lughod explores the connection between the Western (feminist) savior-complex and projects of imperialism within her book Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? (2013) The book challenges western conceptions of the “disempowered” Muslim women through ethnographic study that centers the lived experiences and voices of Muslim women. Through this project, the book finds that structural power dynamics—many of which, ironically, were instituted with the justification of “saving” them—are the root of many of the challenges women face.

Abu-Lughod notes the resurgence of mainstream feminism within the U.S. in the 1990s was accompanied by a shift from concern with local to global issues (2013, 7). Mainstream feminist movements faced conservative backlash in the 1970s for questioning the misogynistic status quo within the U.S. (2013, 8). Subsequently, the feminist movement pivoted to focus on “global issues,” positioning the U.S. as a “beacon of humanitarianism” (2013, 8) within a “backwards” world. Conveniently, this new iteration of U.S.-exceptionalism-toting feminism was just gaining popularity when 9/11 occurred, providing an ample opportunity to apply its newfound ideological basis.
Abu-Lughod cites post-9/11 wars as a key example of imperialist projects thinly veiled in weaponized western “concern” for Muslim women. She explains that “after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the images of oppressed Muslim women became connected to a mission to rescue them from their cultures” (2013, 6-7). She goes on to claim that the ideology of these so-called missions “rationalize American and European international adventures across the Middle East and South Asia” (2013, 7). The U.S. war machine weaponized feminist rhetoric after 9/11 to obscure the U.S.’ true imperialist aims.

Abu-Lughod confirms that women’s conditions are largely determined by socio-political power structures established at national and international levels which are experienced interpersonally (2013, 24). U.S. mainstream media bolstered the “victimized Afghani woman” narrative to justify the U.S. involvement in the region while simultaneously disregarding the (gendered) harm caused by the war. This is only one example of a much larger pattern of imperial weaponization of feminism. Abu-Lughod writes that “Because troops have been on the ground in Afghanistan since 2001, U.S. newspapers have regularly featured the problems that women in Afghanistan face. The focus has tended to be on ‘cultural practices’ rather than war injuries or other consequences of militarization or the dislocations of war . . .” (2013, 13). Unsurprisingly, mainstream media focuses on the “barbaric” practices of individual men of color rather than on the large-scale impact of war and occupation; we see a similar dynamic play out in mainstream media coverage of Palestine.

The neoliberal framing of “women’s rights” aims to obscure human rights violations by centering individual practices over structural forces. The framing is neoliberal because it conceals how individual experiences are largely mediated by systematic oppression, therefore aiming to foreclose
radical collective action. The framing intentionally minimizes the harms of imperialism and occupation that create the conditions for racialized and gendered oppression. This rhetorical configuration is just as dangerous as it is familiar. Rhetoric that aims to overshadow structural problems with sensationalized accounts of Indigenous male “barbarity” have existed far before the U.S. war in Afghanistan. While each iteration of this trope has been distinct and imbued with varying colonial fantasies, be they orientalist or otherwise, they all demonize Indigenous men. Abu-Lughod writes that “the [problems] were simplified to fit a narrative of progress in which downtrodden Muslim women were given new lives by enlightened ‘saviors’ who rescued them from ‘savages’” (2013, 14). Her work clearly outlines the connection between militarism and weaponization of concern for women’s rights and therefore is foundational to the analysis developed within this chapter.

This same logic was utilized as justification for British colonization of India. Spivak explains that English men positioned themselves as would-be protectors of Indian women; the white heroes “saving brown women from brown men” (1988, 92) (Elia 2023, 74). Within this framework the colonizer is a liberator of women (2023, 74) and their presence is not only justified but viewed as necessary. Be they Muslim or not, colonized women have borne the brunt of gender discrimination, colonial violence, and the co-optation of the former to bolster the latter.

The configuration of the helpless brown women in need of saving does not represent all characterizations of colonized women. In fact, the examples cited above are relations of franchise colonialism and imperialism, where colonizers aim to exploit rather than eliminate Indigenous communities. Settler colonialism and its eliminatory goals lead to different gendered characterizations of Indigenous people.
Section B: Settler Colonial Gendered Racialization of Palestinian Men and Zionism as Project of Whiteness

The racialized gendering of Palestinians by Israel is both similar and distinct from the racialized gendering described above. As was previously established, feminist co-optation need not—and often is not—consistent nor logical. Systems of Israeli settler colonialism and Orientalism combine to produce specific gendered characterizations of Palestinians. Palestinian men—much like the Afghani and Indian men discussed above—are racialized as “barbaric others.” Their alleged misogyny is weaponized as a justification for their occupation and intended elimination by colonizers.

Purplewashing renders sexual violence against Palestinian men illegible. The supposed “impossibility” of male Palestinian victimhood completely erases the targeted sexual violence that they are subject to. Currently, the IOF is forcibly stripping and detaining Palestinian men in Gaza (Elia 2024). “Eye on Palestine” (@eye.on.palestine), an Instagram account that publishes images and videos documenting the realities on the ground in Palestine, has made multiple posts documenting sexual violence committed by the Occupation against Palestinian men. They have shared images of groups of stripped and blindfolded Palestinian men lined up outside, transported in vehicles, and captive inside buildings, all forced into humiliating and often torturous positions (@eye.on.palestine, March 7 & 18, 2024). Similarly, they have shared images of naked men subject to torture by IOF fighters, proudly published by the fighters themselves (@eye.on.palestine, February 5th, 2024) The illegibility of male Palestinian victimhood has dangerous—often mortal—consequences. Israel’s cries of weaponized sexual violence are actually projections of their own cruel tactics of occupation and domination.
In addition to being framed as impossible victims, Palestinian men are racialized as threatening and dangerous to Israeli women specifically. This is not to say that the state wouldn’t accuse them of harming Palestinian women if it served their aims, but that is not their principle accusation. Instead, Palestinian men are primarily racialized as threats to Israeli settler safety, particularly that of female settlers. While imperialist ideology claims that the men they subjugate must be “rehabilitated” for allegedly harming women within their communities, Palestinian men are racialized as threatening to settler women, therefore deemed unfit for “rehabilitation” and subsequently deserving of displacement and/or murder. Their alleged violence against their occupiers is taken as reason for their own elimination. This is a principal example of how settler and franchise colonialism racialize men differently depending on their goals.

The project of Jewish supremacy within Israel is racialized; Jewish identity represents symbolic and material proximity to whiteness regardless of one’s race. One must understand Zionism as a project of whiteness to make sense of the settler colonial configuration which positions Palestinian men as threats to Israeli womanhood. More specifically, Jewish Israeli women, regardless of race and ethnicity, are racialized into whiteness through Zionist ideology. Zionism as a settler colonial project of Jewish supremacy just as the U.S. is a settler colonial project of white supremacy; “Simply, just as the USA would not have come into existence without white supremacy, Israel is the reification of Jewish supremacy over Palestinians” (Elia 2023, 51). Elia highlights that supremacist ideologies are incompatible with feminism, and therefore any Zionist co-optation of feminism must be understood as such (2023, 73).
Noura Erakat (2015) has generated crucial scholarship analyzing Zionism as a project of whiteness. She expands upon Cheryl Harris’ conceptualization of “whiteness as property” (1993) to explain the distinct ways that whiteness functions as property in Israel. Erakat explains that far before 1948, Zionists developed the ideal of a “new and universal” Jewish person that aligned with the European standards of respectability (2015, 2). This imagined “acceptable white” Jewish person relied upon Enlightenment philosophies that regarded the “perfect human” knowable, quantifiable, and reformable (2015, 3). Zionists adopted Enlightenment philosophies even though they knew that they had bolstered antisemitism in Europe (2015, 5) and contributed to antisemitic efforts to “rehabilitate” or “fix” Jewish Europeans “through a process of social engineering” (2015, 3). Rather than rejecting the racist and antisemitic system created by Enlightenment thinkers, Zionists chose to reproduce this structure in Israel, this time positioning Jewish people at the top of the “human hierarchy”:

Zionism reproduced the polarized binaries of the superior, enlightened West and the inferior, primitive East. It claimed that Jews as a national entity belonged to the superior, enlightened West despite their geographical origins in the East and sought to enlighten (read: colonize) its primitive peoples (2015, 10).

Early Zionists aimed to establish their own supremacy by adopting a way of thinking that resulted in their own violent subjugation (2015, 5).

Enlightenment-inspired Zionist ideology positioned the Southwest Asian Jew as capable of “rehabilitation” into whiteness while the Palestinian remained firmly outside the category. Erakat explains that, “Unlike the Middle Eastern Jew, however, the Palestinian native was ineligible to become European, or approximate Whiteness, because law narrowly defined who was a Jewish national” (2015, 2). The Israeli regime passed multiple laws, including the “Law of Return” (1950) and “Citizenship
Law” (1952) to separate Jewish nationality and Israeli citizenship (2015, 15). Within this configuration, Jewish nationals have legal supremacy over non-Jewish Israeli Citizens and non-Israeli Citizens subject to Israeli military rule. By legally separating nationality and citizenship, “Israel both achieved the supremacy of Jewish nationality as refracted through a lens of European white supremacy and facilitated the dispossession, displacement, and containment of Palestinian natives” (2015, 3).

Within Israel, possession of Jewish nationality comes with symbolic and material proximity to whiteness. It follows that Palestinians, a group barred from privileged Jewish national status, are “ineligible for Whiteness” (2015, 14).

Whiteness requires a racialized “other” relegated to the status of not-white. Whiteness cannot exist without its opposite; in order to have value, it must contrast something that is perceived as value-less (2015, 4). In the U.S., that foil to whiteness is Blackness and in Israel the foil to whiteness is Palestinian-ness. Just as Jewish nationality signals proximity to whiteness, power, and privilege, “proximity to Palestinian-ness thus signals social death” (2015, 28). The violent bifurcation of human life into categories of “valuable” / “invaluable,” “human” / “less-than-human,” and “deserving” / “undeserving” all signal a system of whiteness at work. Furthermore, Zionism can be understood as a project of whiteness in the literal sense, given that the dispossession and killing of Palestinians was orchestrated and funded by European colonial powers (2015, 15). White nations made the creation of Israel possible.

Israel, the manifestation of Zionist ideology, aims to establish a Jewish-supremacist nation based on the principles of whiteness despite its multi-racial demographic makeup. Because of this, it makes sense to understand allegations of Palestinian male violence towards Israelis as a product of the
trope of “dangerous racialized man” harming “white women.” The “protection” of white women from racialized men has been utilized throughout history to garner support for white-supremacist violence. For example, the murder of Emmett Till and attempted incarceration of the Central Park 5 and Scottsboro boys are key examples of times men of color were subject to racist violence that were “justified” with allegations that they were sexually violent towards white women—allegations that were proven to be completely false (Elia, 2024). Elia provided the following context for this phenomenon:

Depicting one’s perceived enemy as a sexual predator is an age-old strategy to distract from, or justify, one’s own violence. This is all the more so across racial lines, where the oversexualized ‘predator’ is viewed as violating both sexual and racial lines, rendering the alleged crime even more heinous, and necessitating a collective response from the violated community (Elia 2024).

In this same vein, the film Birth of a Nation garnered national attention by depicting the supposed rape of a white woman by an actor in blackface. The film, adapted from a book called “The Clansman,” aimed to justify the KKK’s practice of lynching of Black men for their alleged assaults on white female sexuality. While Birth of a Nation is an American film, it exemplifies the rhetoric of white womanhood that needs to be protected from a racialized other. Given that we have established Zionism as a system of whiteness, it follows that the American media concerned with the “protection” of white womanhood is relevant despite the geographic and temporal differences.

Section C: Protected Israeli “Victimhood” and Palestinian Dehumanization within Mainstream Media

Now that we have established that Israel is a project of whiteness and the history of white-supremacist societies using the alleged “sexual perversion” of racialized men to justify their subjugation, let us turn
our attention back to the allegations of Hamas weaponizing sexual violence presented in the “Screams Without Words” (2023) *Times* article.

To begin, the article perpetuates racist and orientalist framings of Palestinians. The reporters quote Mirit Ben Mayor, an Israeli police chief who claimed that “the brutality against women was a combination of two ferocious forces, ‘the hatred for Jews and the hatred for women.’” (Gettleman, 2024). Mayor describes Palestinian men as “ferocious,” a racialized word intended to dehumanize them and spark fear in readers. Secondly, Mayor states that the actions of Hamas were motivated by “hatred of both Jewish people and women,” clearly drawing on Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes that depict Arab men as inherently misogynistic and antisemitic. Her remark completely erases the possibilities that Hamas’ actions on October 7th could have been motivated 1) by a desire to break free from an open-air prison or 2) that instances of sexual violence could be understood as wartime violence rather than specifically antisemitic or barbaric violence. It has been well documented that sexual violence increases during wartime, primarily targeting the most vulnerable within communities (Elia 2024). Rather than acknowledging these realities, Mayor frames Hamas fighters as horribly misogynistic people motivated by hate and cruelty, despite having no proof to substantiate these claims.

In addition to relying on racist and Orientalist tropes, the article lacks factual backing. In fact, the family of the principal subject of the article, Gal Abdush, denies that she was assaulted before she was killed (The Short String, 2024). Multiple members of Abdush’s family have come forward claiming that they had no idea about the alleged assault and that the published *Times*’ article was the first time they had heard about it (The Short String, 2024). Abdush’s brother in law went so far as to
claim that “the media invented” the story of her assault, with other family members stating that reporters had tricked the family into speaking with them (Scahill, 2024). In addition to the manipulation of her family, the Times reporters misrepresented and coerced other sources that they cite in the story. The Times claimed that a video of Abdush went viral in Israel despite there being no trace of the allegedly viral video (The Short String, 2024). The person who took the original video of Abdush’s body was pressured into handing it over to the Times for propaganda purposes; “The woman who filmed Abdush on October 7 told the Israeli site YNet that Schwartz and Sella had pressured her into giving the paper access to her photos and videos for the purposes of serving Israeli propaganda” (Scahill 2024). The lack of forensic evidence combined with the manipulation of sources led many to conclude that the Times made extreme claims with no substantive evidence to support the Israeli genocide in Gaza and attain their own journalistic goals; “it appears that the New York Times manipulated a working-class Mizrahi family in the service of Israeli hasbara in order to score a journalistic achievement, which in reality is nothing more than a repetition of fake news and government propaganda” (The Short String, 2024).

Unfortunately, the manipulation of sources and misrepresentations of evidence were only two of many elements of journalistic integrity that the Times and their reporters violated in the process of publishing the story. The Times hired Anat Schwartz to report on the story despite her non-existent journalistic experience, status as a former member of Israeli intelligence, and active support for genocide as indicated by her social media activity (North, 2024). Furthermore, the third reporter, Adam Stella, is Schwartz’ nephew (North, 2024). Why hire biased and inexperienced journalists to
publish a story that lacks evidence? Because the *Times* wanted to disseminate a certain kind of rhetoric, no-matter the cost.

Schwartz herself said that editors at the *Times* had to convince her to get on board: “*The New York Times* said, ‘Let’s do an investigation into sexual violence’ — it was more a case of them having to convince me,’ she said. Her host cut her off: ‘It was a proposal of *The New York Times*, the entire thing?’ ‘Unequivocally. Unequivocally. Obviously. Of course,’” (Scahill, 2024). While the details of Schwartz’ bias are concerning, more concerning is that the paper of record in the U.S. went to the lengths of convincing a biased reporter to take on a case with the explicit goal of bolstering Israeli purplewashing propaganda.

It is crucial to understand the landscape of anti-Palestinian bias within mainstream media to address how dangerous and inaccurate articles such as “‘Screams Without Words’” were published in the first place. Currently, mainstream media functions as a mouthpiece for the Israeli state; crucially, there is not a single western reporter on the ground in Gaza at this time. The *Times*’ and other mainstream media companies’ commitment to distributing Israeli propaganda has developed as a result of multiple converging factors, including coercion from Zionist lobbying groups and the presence of Zionist leaders within many large media organizations. Pro-Israeli organizations such as CAMERA (The Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis) have successfully petitioned the *Times* to amplify Zionist talking points and demonize Palestinians since the 80s (Boguslaw and Grim 2024). CAMERA is just one of many organizations dedicated to bolstering Zionists narratives within mainstream media through lobbying and maintaining connections with reporters and editors inside.
Zionist lobbying is one piece within a larger landscape of mainstream media’s demonization and dehumanization of Palestinians. An anonymous quantitative researcher going by the name “Otto” conducted a statistical analysis of the specific language used by mainstream media to refer to Israelis and Palestinians between October 7th and November 7th (Otto 2023). His findings, focused on FOX, MSNBC, and CNN coverage, were as egregious as they were unsurprising. Otto found that, in the month following October 7th, IOF spokesperson Peter Lerner was interviewed 19 out of 30 days on mainstream news channels and was provided ample time to spread Israeli propaganda without any significant pushback (Otto 2023). Furthermore, the statistical analysis found that from October 7th to October 24th, “Israelis” were named 95,468 times while “Palestinians” were named only 18,982 times (Otto 2023). MSNBC, CNN, and Fox all contributed to the centering of Israelis in almost equal measure (Otto 2023), illuminating the media consensus on erasing Palestinian voices and experiences. These are just two of many potential quantitative measures that illuminate the degree to which Israeli life and ideology is centered within mainstream news media.

Otto also analyzed the use of specifically charged words and employment passive/active voice when addressing Israelis and Palestinians. During the period of study, the media used the word “massacre” to refer to violence committed against Israelis 1,655 times and only 78 times when referring to violence committed against Palestinians, despite the fact that significantly more Palestinas have been killed than Israelis (Otto 2023). He found that the media described Israeli children being “assaulted in barbaric ways” while Palestinian children were “left to die” (Otto 2023). Mainstream media uses the passive voice when referring to the murder of Palestinians by Israel to obscure the actor responsible for their killing. Finally, he found that, when referring to Palestinian children, the 3 news channels used
heavily-emotive words such as “horrific,” “slaughter,” and “innocent” only 86 times when referring to Palestinian children and a dramatic 336 times when referring to Israeli children. Again, this double standard must be read with the understanding that far more Palestinian than Israeli children have been killed since October 7th (and the years of occupation preceding it).

The result of this extreme media bias is a landscape where Palestinian deaths are viewed as inevitable tragedies at best and deserved consequences at worst, while Israeli deaths are all viewed as tragic results of barbarity. Within this framework, all Israelis—including IOF soldiers—are innocent and all Palestinians—including children—are all always already “guilty.” The extreme dehumanization of Palestinians contributes to a landscape where racist and counterfactual narratives such as “Screams without Words” are perceived as perfectly “normal” and “legitimate” sources of information. The media demonization of Palestinians is just one of many results of the structure of whiteness previously discussed in the chapter. Regardless of actual race, Jewish Israelis are given all of the privileges of whiteness (humanization, empathy, care) while mainstream media regards Palestinians as the racialized “others” that zionist ideology has constructed them to be.

Section D: Settler Colonial Gendering and of Erasure Palestinian Women

The media obsession with Israeli death and injury—particularly female Israeli death and injury at the hands of Palestinian men—obscures the violence endured by arguably the most marginalized group of all; Palestinian women. An article critically analyzing the “Screams without Words” piece ends by poignantly questioning whether or not the Times will publish a long-form story about Palestinian victims of sexual violence perpetrated by Israelis (Scahill, 2024). The rhetorical question is powerful
because it highlights arguably the most damning reality of all; the lives and experiences of Palestinian women have been so far marginalized that mainstream media publishing a longform story about their suffering is almost unimaginable. Even if we were to ignore the factual inaccuracies within the piece (which we must not), the scope and topic of the piece perhaps tells readers the most; Israeli female lives are read as valuable and under threat while violence against Palestinian women has been so normalized that it doesn’t even warrant discussion.

Let us focus momentarily on the specific settler colonial gendered racialization of Palestinian women. Palestinian women—unlike Afghani and Indian women, who were subjects of franchise colonialism/imperialism—are rarely, if ever, portrayed as in need of “saving.” Due to its settler colonial nature, Zionism is particularly concerned with the elimination of Indigenous women given that they have the capacity to populate the nation that colonizers aim to eliminate. Of this matter, Elia explains the following: “Zionism . . . has never exoticized us, never purported to ‘save,’ ‘modernize,’ or ‘liberate,’ us. It has always wanted us dead” (2023, 75). Rather giving birth to potentially exploitable bodies—as is understood with female subjects of franchise colonialism/imperialism—Palestinian women, should they have children, reproduce a people that Israelis aim to wipe out. While we know that the rhetorical “saving” of female subjects of imperialism in no way protects them from the violences of the imperial war machine, it does manifest differently from the targeted elimination efforts experienced by all subjects of settler colonialism and Palestinian women in particular. Due to their positionality as occupied peoples who experience misogyny, Palestinian women are subject to extremely violent, often deadly gendered violence at the hands of their occupiers.
Given their positionality, Palestinian women are subject to extremely heightened sexual and gendered violence rooted in the violence of the occupation. Elia (2023) explains that Israeli colonialism “[increases] Palestinian women’s vulnerability, as it creates an overarching structure of oppression that is compounded as it trickles down to the most vulnerable members of the colonized society” (Elia 85). Whether gender-based violence is perpetrated by an IOF soldier or family member, the occupation creates the conditions of heightened violence that women bear the brunt of. Racist Orientalist narratives often aim to situate Palestinian men as threats to women’s safety, but Elia reminds readers that Israel is the primary perpetrator of violence against Palestinian women (2023, 83). Elia goes on to explain that, under occupation, “Women’s bodies become the battlegrounds of power, either as proof of conquest, or as prime targets of the settler’s desire to ‘eliminate the native.’ In addition to the violence of sexual assault, gendered violence takes specific forms depending on the political, social, and cultural context of the colonial assault” (2023, 74). The objectification and violation of Palestinian women’s bodies manifests in particularly horrifying and egregious ways.

In this current moment of genocide in Gaza, Palestinian women are forced to give birth in unsafe conditions, denied menstrual products, and endangered by IOF soldiers invading Gaza (Elia 2024), in addition to the horrific bombing and starvation that all Palestinians in Gaza are forced to endure. As the IOF ground invasion in Gaza continues, many soldiers have published photos of themselves raiding Palestinian women’s closets and displaying their undergarments (@lilearthquakess, March 20th, 2024). One photo portrays an IOF soldier mockingly wearing a displaced woman’s bra, with another soldier grabbing onto the makeshift breast. These arrogant displays of theft and objectification plainly illustrate the gendered violence endemic to the occupation.
Recent images coming out of Gaza are a few examples of a much longer, well-documented system of gendered violence carried out by the Israeli regime against Palestinians. Abdulhadi (2019) documents the deeply-rooted culture of sexual violence within the IOF, citing military unit t-shirts that mock the rape of Palestinians and encourage the killing of pregnant Palestinian women (2019, 565). Abdulhadi explains that “Shirts with highly misogynist and sexualized images are not uncommon, as Israeli soldiers engage in this misogynist and racist rite of passage into adulthood. One infantry sniper shirt sports an image of a dead Palestinian baby and its crying mother with the caption “Better use Durex,” a brand of condoms” (2019, 565). The disgusting rhetoric and language portrayed by Israeli social media posts and battalion t-shirts provides a glimpse into the culture of normalized sexual violence within the masculinist military occupation.

The sexual violence extends beyond the rhetorical realm and into material reality through the form of routine sexual violence against Palestinian women (UN News, 2024). Many leaders within Israeli society, from military commanders to university professors, justify or even advocate for sexual violence to be used as a tool of occupation and subjugation. Elia highlights a few of the many tactics that the IOF has normalized; “These include . . . sexual torture in prison, and the widely documented denial of access to hospitals during labor. They also include, for example, a military advisor, Mordechai Kedar, suggesting that Israeli soldiers should rape the mothers and sisters of militant Palestinian men, and a justice minister, Ayelet Shaked, calling for the murder of Palestinian women because they ‘raise little snakes’” (2023, 7). This quote illustrates that this violence is not exceptional; rather, it is highly encouraged by those in power. Some Zionists advocate for sexual violence as a way to deter Palestinian resistance, implying that Palestinians deserve such treatment should they choose to resist (2023, 76).
Finally, Elia highlights that the occupation weaponizes sexual violence in an attempt to separate Palestinian women from their land (2023:84). When read together, it becomes clear that sexual violence is intrinsic to the Israeli occupation, exposing that any purported “feminism” or concern for women’s rights that the state claims must be read as a strategic and insidious form of co-optation.

Purplewashing seeks to present the settler nation—and at times, the settler military specifically—as the savior of oppressed women. In the case of Israel, one such example of this was seen in released images of IOF officer Eden Abergil playfully posing next to blindfolded and detained Palestinian prisoners (Abdulhadi 2019, 552). In these images, Israel positions themselves as the liberator of Jewish women—in this case, a Mizrahi Jewish woman—by giving her the military power to harm and dominate Palestinian men. Of this phenomenon, Abdulhadi explains that “In the contexts of both the US and Israel, the hegemonic image of an emancipated woman who has been liberated by the army is used to imply that colonial militarism can make women free” (Abdulhadi 2019, 561). Feminist-washing seeks to bolster “military as savior” rhetoric which positions the military as the liberator of oppressed populations.

Feminist-washing, like pinkwashing, relies on conditions of respectability that deem some marginalized bodies valuable at the expense of others. Importantly, feminist-washing completely erases the layered oppression faced by Palestinian women, who are forced to endure the related violences of misogyny and occupation. For example, the state of Israel Twitter account posted a video on November 24th of (presumably Israeli) women holding a sign that said “#Believe Israeli Women” while saying the phrase in a variety of languages. The video ended with a black screen displaying the hashtag that read #Believe Israeli Women” in white font (@Israel, November 24th, 2023). This video is explicit
in its rhetoric regarding which women deserve to be believed, and subsequently, which forms of alleged sexual violence are condoned and which are to be condemned. Notably, the post did not say “Believe women,” which would have been a very different message. The framing incorrectly positions Israelis—and Israeli women—as the primary victims of sexual violence, thus erasing Palestinian women while vilifying Palestinian men. Furthermore, the feminist-washing seeks to obscure the reality that carceral colonial states—in this case, Israel—are the primary perpetrators of sexual violence (Abdulhadi 2019, 554) against people of all genders. The occurrence of feminist-washing highlights that Israel will co-opt any body—be it queer, female, of color, or any combination—so long as that body is willing to carry out the leg-work of occupation and settler colonialism.

Even with these arrogant displays of racialized misogyny, Zionists claim to be champions of women’s rights. Their clear double standards prove that Zionists view Palestinians as subhuman and therefore deserving of unimaginable cruelty. Given the previous analysis of Zionism as a project of whiteness, it is unsurprising that Zionists are comfortable advocating for horrific treatment of the racialized “Other,” and specifically the “Other” woman. With this being said, Zionism will attempt to co-opt and weaponize any social movement—including feminism—if they believe it could aid and legitimize their settler colonial project. Elia poignantly explains that “Israel’s exploitation of gendered violence in this instance does not stem from a genuine concern for the vulnerable communities, but rather, uses the alleged crimes to justify its own atrocities” (Elia 2024). As feminists, it is our duty to identify and reject the insidious co-optation of a worthy cause to further a project of racist and misogynistic violence.
Chapter 3: Relationships Between Pink/Purplewashing & Femo/Homonationalism

Pink- and purplewashing must be analyzed alongside one another; an isolated analysis of just one of these dynamics is inadequate because it forecloses possibilities of coalitional resistance. When read alongside one another, however, it becomes clear that the phenomena are two manifestations of a larger project of Israeli hasbara. A paired analysis illuminates potential to coalitional resistance to hasbara that could otherwise be ignored without the combined feminist and queer lenses.

Purplewashing is often under-analyzed within these discussions; I aim to address this problem by highlighting the connected nature of the two within this chapter. While pinkwashing and purplewashing often employ different rhetoric and manifest in unique ways, they share many of the same ideological and material goals. Both co-opt the language of social justice in the service of settler colonialism. They both rely upon and perpetrate racist and Orientalist views of Palestinians while glorifying the Israeli Occupation as a beacon of modernity and progressivism. Given this reality, one cannot make either argument responsibly or completely without an analysis of the specific ways the dynamics reinforce one another.

The Palestinian struggle for liberation aims to deconstruct the connected web of domination responsible for Palestinian subjugation. Israel invokes pink- and purplewashing as responses to the liberatory politics informing the Palestinian struggle. Many of the intra-communal challenges facing the Palestinian community result from racialized and gendered oppression they face; Elia explains that issues such as femicide occur largely due to conditions of settler colonialism and state sanctioned violence (2023, 9). Subsequently, she suggests that the Palestinian movement for liberation “be understood as a feminist struggle, and an intersectional abolitionist struggle” (2023, 9). Once we
understand the Palestinian struggle to be intersectional and abolitionist, as Elia puts it, it becomes clear that the occupier’s co-optation of feminist and queer struggles are not random but part of a larger, more strategic effort to sabotage the power of the movement through co-optation of its own language. The co-optation of this language aims to appeal to Western liberals who are drawn to the idea of gender and queer justice but do not care for their radical dimensions.

When exploring these dynamics of encounter and co-optation, the following cycle becomes clear; Israel employs tactics of connected yet distinct domination to achieve their settler-colonial goals; Palestinians adopt a politics of collective liberation to deconstruct that oppression; Israel co-opts the language of liberation with the aim of further bolstering their colonial project (Tuck and Yang 2012, 9). As Farris (2017) points out, ideological underpinnings of this formation are as fragile (2017, 10) as their material consequences are significant. By outlining the relationship between pink- and purplewashing, this chapter aims to illuminate the fragility and instability inherent to co-optation. Once their colonial motivations are exposed, these precarious and counter-factual campaigns will be understood as the illegitimate and dangerous projects that they are.

Section A: The Relationship Between Pink- and Purplewashing

Pinkwashing, purplewashing, and other forms of co-optation are invoked in similar moments—and interchangeably—to justify Zionist brutality. The fact that these tactics are referenced interchangeably proves Zionist apathy towards the specific causes themselves. Instead, they are employed as forms of hasbara; discrete rhetorical moves which all bolster the myths of Palestinian barbarity and Israeli progressivism. When questioned about Israel’s occupation and the brutality inherent to it, Elia notes
that Zionists will often argue that Israel is being “singled-out” and then shift to blaming Hamas and pinkwashing and purplewashing rhetoric (2023, 65). All of these justifications are often uttered in the same breath, illustrating their fundamental similarities. Each excuse, from their supposedly modern gender and sexuality politics to the invocation of Hamas, aims to characterize Palestinians as violent and unreasonable, subsequently requiring Israeli domination. Israelis lay claim to innocence by creating a mirage of Palestinian incivility (Tuck and Yang 2012, 9). By decontextualizing and misrepresenting power dynamics, Israel claims that they have been “forced” to disregard their modern gender and sexuality ideals while simultaneously enacting racialized gender and sexual violence onto colonized subjects (Abdulhadi 2019, 550). The blatant hypocrisy of their claims warrants further investigation and analysis.

In order to meaningfully reject pinkwashing, one must expose the web of ideology that it stems from so that it is not replaced with a different but equally-insidious rhetorical strategy. Invocations of Israel’s “gay-friendliness” and “feminist” status are often accompanied by other forms of co-optation such as redwashing and greenwashing, to name a few. Redwashing refers to Zionist claims to indigeneity, whereas greenwashing alludes to Israel’s claims to environmental friendliness. All of these propaganda tactics aim to increase Israel’s legitimacy by adopting the language of social justice while simultaneously dispossessing Palestinians from their ancestral lands and destroying native ecologies.

Israel has dropped thousands of pounds of bombs on Gaza since October 7th; they emitted at least 281,000 metric tonnes of carbon in the first two months of their escalated onslaught (Lakhani, 2024). Their murderous campaign against the people and landscape of Gaza will have devastating environmental impacts for many years to come.
Elia references Hen Mazzig, an openly-gay IOF commander who employed the language of redwashing as soon as his pinkwashing rhetoric was exposed as the propaganda tool that it is (2023, 39). When challenged, Mazzig abandoned the pinkwashing tactic completely and opted for another one with the same ideological underpinnings. Anti-pinkwashing activists come together to exclaim that “a bomb is just as lethal when dropped on a family home by a straight or gay pilot,” (2023, 39). A similar statement could be made about female or so-called “environmentalist” IOF soldiers; no identity changes the material impacts of dispossession and occupation. While redwashing and greenwashing are not the focus of this chapter, they must be understood as a few of the many strategies employed to bolster Israel’s “right” to occupy.

Pink and purplewashing strategies adopt social-justice language to obscure the gendered and homophobic violence that Israel perpetuates. Elia highlights that “… queer Palestinians have not been spared in the supposedly ‘gay-friendly’ Jewish state, where homonationalism means openly gay Israelis can serve in the occupation army, but where, as Palestinian queers have repeatedly noted, there is ‘no pink door in the apartheid wall’” (2023, 27). Israel claims to be feminist and queer-friendly while enacting misogynistic and homophobic violence. They invoke the language of justice to advance their unjust cause. Similarly, Elia highlights that Israel is the biggest threat to Palestinian women’s lives and safety (2023, 83). Elia exposes the impossibility of a feminist, anti-racist, or queer-friendly settler state; “there is no such thing as kinder, gentler colonialism; colonialism is violence” (2023, 99). Any attempt to depict Zionism as feminist or queer-friendly ignores the struggles of Palestinian women and queers. Israel’s “progressive” rhetoric ignores Palestinian life, prompting anti-pinkwashing activists to reject “inclusion that can only ever come at the cost of the exclusion of others” (2023, 143). In fact, it is
common practice for the occupation to target the vulnerability of queer Palestinians by coercing them to be informants for the IOF.

The Israeli state seizes any opportunity to estrange Palestinians from their community and exploit their connections in the service of the occupation. I addressed this tactic previously in Chapter 1, but elaborate on it here as one element within a larger structure of sexualized colonial violence. Elia explains that “the Mossad extorts closeted Palestinian queers, some of whom end up becoming collaborators for fear of being outed to their communities—a development that further stigmatizes queers and endangers their lives” (2023, 80). The occupation targets already-vulnerable community members in a practice so common that it has a term “isqat siyasi” which translates to “political character assassination” or “political defamation” (2023, 89,165). Even if they give into these coercive tactics, Palestinians continue to be “racialized as outsiders” (139) and are treated as such within their homeland.

The practice of Israeli racism towards Palestinian queers also occurs in other less explicit ways as well; Haneen Maikey (2010) describes the racism Palestinians regularly experience at the hands of their “progressive” queer Israelis in Tel Aviv, who often suggest that Palestinians change their name to something that sounds more Israeli (2010, 608). Within the queer community of Tel Aviv—a space touted for its supposed progressivism and inclusivity—Palestinian-ness is still ostracized, erased, and excluded. In the same conversation with Mikey, Rima remarks that queer Israelis “. . . are maybe happy to have us participate in their events as ‘Arabs’ but not as ‘Palestinians.’ This is, of course, not something we have any desire to engage in” (2010, 603). Most significantly, queer Israelis aim to erase and eliminate Palestinian-ness from the queer community, proving that the espoused “inclusive
queerness” in Tel Aviv is thinly veiled supremacist nationalism. Structures of homophobia and occupation converge to create a particularly hostile environment for Palestinian queers who endure racialized homophobic targeting at the hands of a supposedly “queer-friendly” occupier.

Israel enacts homophobic and misogynistic violence as methods to eliminate Indigenous peoples. The Occupation aims to erase the lived experience of (queer) Palestinians materially and ideologically. Elia poignantly highlights that “Pinkwashing . . . [seeks] to eradicate [Palestinian queers] from their homeland, both physically and symbolically” (2023, 94). Similarly, the occupation uses sexual violence as tool to eliminate women (2023, 75) and separate them from their land (2023, 84). Israel attempts to strip Palestinian feminist and queer liberation movements of their radicalism and communal significance by harnessing them as weapons against Palestinians. Through their mockery of feminist and queer politics, the occupation inadvertently illuminates the underlying connection between these causes; the struggle for decolonization and collective liberation.

All structures of oppression—including anti-Palestinian racism, misogyny, and homophobia—operate co-constitutively within Israel. In fact, these forms of oppression are often reinforced through the same state practices and policies. This means that the same logics—and even the same laws—reify Palestinian dispossession, racism against Mizrahi Jews, and homophobia all at the same time. For example, in 2011 the Israeli Knesset amended the “Admissions committee law” to legalize discrimination within Israeli housing communities (Erakat 2015, 24). These discriminatory practices often target marginalized members of Israeli society and enforce Palestinian exclusion by definition. Erakat notes that, in addition to excluding Palestinians, “Admissions Committees have also excluded other marginalized groups within Israel including Middle Eastern Jews and gays” (Erakat
Apparatuses of exclusion built to keep Palestinians off of their ancestral lands facilitate the marginalization and exclusion of other groups within Israel. Through this example, it becomes clear that the connections between anti-Palestinian racism and homophobia are material and explicit, rather than solely ideological and implied.

**Section B: Femonationalism**

As previously discussed, homonationalism—a result of homonormativity—creates the conditions for pinkwashing (Puar 2013, 338)(Elia 2023, 140). Similarly, femonationalism, as theorized by Sara R. Farris (2017), creates the conditions for purplewashing. Femonationalism is shorthand for “feminist and femocratic nationalism,” which Farris defines as “the exploitation of feminist themes by nationalists and neoliberals in anti-Islam . . . campaigns and to the participation of certain feminists and femocrats in the stigmatization of Muslim men under the banner of gender equality” (2017, 4). She proceeds to specify how femonationalism refers to the co-optation of feminist language to further xenophobic policies alongside a characterization of Islam and muslim men as fundamentally misogynistic and backwards, (2017, 4) rendering them “irreconcilable” with supposedly modern European gender politics. While Farris’ book focuses on Western European countries specifically, the framework she develops is designed to be applicable across Europe and the Global North (2017, 17).

Given Israel’s status as a settler nation founded on principles of European colonialism, I believe that Farris’ framework is highly relevant and applicable. Farris’ book foregrounds “the strategic calculations, gains and losses, and benefits and costs for nationalists and feminists, in particular when endorsing a politics they had not previously supported” (2017, 8). Farris is particularly concerned with the factors
that motivate state actors to align themselves with social-justice causes that they previously rejected in order to achieve a project of exclusion that they prioritize even more. Within this paradigm, the rhetoric of gender equality is stripped of its political significance and is instead used as a pawn to enact xenophobic, anti-Muslim policies.

Both femo- and homonationalism involve the co-optation of progressive causes such as feminist and queer rights in the service of Western national exclusion and domination of Muslims. More specifically, both terms rely on racist and Orientalist characterizations of Muslims and the religion of Islam as inherently backwards and “pre-modern,” subsequently incompatible with the supposedly “modern” politics of the West. The entities invoking this language of justice do so for strategic purposes, not out of genuine concern for the causes. In fact, the very bodies espousing feminist and queer-friendly rhetoric—Israel and far-right European political parties—are actually responsible for a great deal of gendered and homophobic violence.

A combined analysis of femo- and homonationalism exposes a landscape where conservative state actors are willing to concede their public homophobic and misogynistic stances in the service of a larger, more prized goal: homogenous nationalism. The aforementioned policymakers aim to diminish the political radicalism of queer and feminist struggles as they co-opt them in the service of maintaining a hegemonic national order. Farris explains that,

In a historical conjuncture in which the theme of gender equality ... has become the common currency in the name of which new racist and imperialist configurations of power become hegemonic, a vague, mainstream idea of gender equality can quite easily be used opportunistically by these parties to contribute to the consolidation of the nationalist project (2017, 8).
Farris traces the process through which radical political movements are “used opportunistically” by conservative actors who adopt progressive rhetoric while continuing to enact violence on women and queer people. Similarly, the rhetoric is invoked for the purposes of racist and xenophobic exclusion, creating a layered hypocrisy. Farris maintains that the hypocrisy underlying femonalism is what makes it as precarious as it is dangerous (2017, 9).

The incongruity of femo- and homonalist rhetoric is made logical through analyzing the material goal(s) that they are employed in the service of. Within Western European contexts, Farris argues that state actors employ femonalism in the service of a “political-economic agenda” (2017, 5) of exclusion and exploitation. She argues neoliberalism isn’t context for but constitutive of femonalism (2017, 14). In addition to bolstering xenophobic exclusion, femonalism seeks to impose the liberal idea of “labor as liberation,” onto immigrant women, subsequently funnelling them into the racialized sectors of care work of domestic labor (2017, 16). Femocrats espouse liberal feminist rhetoric to advance their material goals of amassing a population of easily-exploitable female laborers that the neoliberal market requires. Conversely, the political-economic agenda underscoring femonalism in Palestine is one of complete elimination rather than exploitation of women of color. In both cases, femonalism emerges in the service of a larger project of exclusion and/or exploitation. A critical analysis of these topics requires that we remain attuned to the material stakes motivating feminist co-optation.

Femonationalism and homonalism reproduce structures of inclusion and exclusion predicated on the logics of capitalist whiteness. Farris outlines how the characterization of immigrant men as “dangerous [Others]” and women as “victims to be rescued” within Western Europe “follows a
political-economic logic” (2017, 20). Female immigrants are characterized as “redeemable subjects” 
(2017, 21) because they provide labor that can be easily exploited and fill a gap in the market that 
benefits the ruling class. Capitalist interests determine how racialized people are gendered, as was 
established in Chapter 2 with discussions of franchise versus settler colonial gendering. Logics of 
whiteness necessitate the existence of an “irredeemable” other in order to ensure value for other groups; 
within Western Europe, immigrant women are characterized as the “redeemable Other” while 
immigrant men are characterized as the “irredeemable Other” (2017, 21).

The primary Israeli goal of settler colonialism results in terms of inclusion and exclusion that 
are different from those in Western Europe. In Palestine, Mizrahi Jewish people are characterized as the 
“redeemable other” who provide easily exploitable labor for the capitalist system while all Palestinians 
are characterized as “irredeemable,” subsequently deserving of dispossession and elimination. In 
contrast to “redeemable” characterization of immigrant women in Europe, Palestinian women are 
particularly threatened by Israeli femonationalist formations due to roles that they play in the social 
and biological reproduction of an Indigenous nation. The differing examples illustrate the connected 
economic and political goals that structure the inclusion inherent to femonationalism.

Section C: Co-constitutive Homo/Femonationalist Formations

Homonationalism, similar to femonationalism, aims to protect neoliberal capitalist interests. The 
terms of exclusion and exclusion within these femo- and homonationalist formations in Israel are 
driven by connected settler colonial and neoliberal goals. Farris explains that “sexual nationalism are 
consistent with neoliberal strategies of market segmentation and the promotion of chauvinist politics”
Homonationalism emerges in a landscape where the optics of queerness can be harnessed by colonial states for profit and military gain; it operates as both a project and producer of normative political-economic formations. Both femo- and homonalionalisms inherently operate in the service of imperial and/or capitalist and/or settler colonial interests.

Puar theorizes homonalionalism by breaking it down into 3 categories: “sexual exceptionalism,” “queer as regulatory,” and the “ascendency to whiteness,” which co-constitutively produce discrete “terrorist” and “citizen” bodies (2007, 2). When analyzed alongside femonalionalism, each of these subsections illuminate points of convergence and co-creation between the two formations.

To begin, Puar analyzes “sexual exceptionalism” as a core pillar of homonalionalism. She clarifies that she uses the term “exceptional” for its dual meaning; it can be invoked to refer to a state of “specialness,” (2017, 5) and also alludes to “[states] of exception” as theorized by Giorio Agamben, that are employed to “justify the extreme measures of the state” (2007, 3). Of the former, she elaborates that “Exceptionalism gestures to narratives of excellence, excellent nationalism, a process whereby a national population comes to believe in its own superiority and its own singularity” (2007, 5). She describes this as a process that occurs both in the U.S. and Israel—as well as other places—where narratives of exceptionalism are employed to justify the high levels of violence that the states enact with impunity. For example, she explains that “the Israeli nation-state finds itself continuously embroiled in a cycle of perceived exceptional threats of violence that demand exceptional use of force against the Palestinians population . . .” (2007, 8). The Israeli propaganda machine aims to justify their past and present genocidal behavior through their claims to exceptionality. “Exceptional threat” warrants
“exceptional violence.” Israel’s supposed exceptionalism leads to a reality where all of Palestine, and Gaza specifically, becomes a “space of exception” where the most egregious brutality and violent deaths are normalized.

Inherent to supposed Israeli exceptionalism is a dynamic of othering and exclusion; a supposedly “exceptional” body is constituted as such only in comparison to the supposedly “unexceptional,” abject body. Homo- and femonationalism aim to integrate the bodies of (white) women and queers into the “exceptional” nation in the service of further exclusion. Puar refers to “Forms of U.S. gender and (hetero)sexual exceptionalism from purportedly progressive spaces have surfaced through feminist constructions of ‘other’ women, especially via the composite of the ‘third world woman’” (2007, 5). Even though this specific quote focuses on the U.S., Puar’s analysis highlights how gendered manifestations of exceptionalism can result in phenomena such as purplewashing. Within the Israeli imaginary, Jewish Israeli women are positioned as “exceptional” and deserving of protection while Palestinian women are “unexceptional,” and therefore unworthy of safety and life. Colonial nations operate from the logics of exceptionalism when they hypocritically claim feminist status while enacting gendered and sexual violence onto colonized subjects. I would expand on Puar’s analysis of sexual-exceptionalism to assert that the gendered and sexual violences committed by “exceptional” bodies onto “unexceptional” bodies within “spaces of exception” exposes the linked apparatuses of homo- and femonationalism.

Puar presents “queer as regulatory” as the second pillar of homonationalism. She remarks that we live during a time when the rhetoric of queerness can be adopted by (particularly European) nations to codify the exclusion of immigrants. European countries pass gay marriage laws for the
xenophobic purposes; they do this to confirm “European values” rather than out of genuine concern for gay rights (Puar, 20). Similarly, Elia cites European “kiss tests,” (2023, 143) where potential immigrants are shown images of a queer couple kissing to gauge their reaction and determine whether or not they are permitted to enter the country. The assumed homophobia of Muslims is used as an excuse to further exclude them from national formations in the Global North (2023, 142-143). The framework of “queerness as regulatory” highlights how nations harness queerness as a “marker in the distance between barbarism and civilization” (2007, 20). When developing this theorization, Puar critiques “queer liberal binaries” (2007, 24) and acknowledges how queerness can—but does not inherently—operate alongside forms of disciplining and control (2007, 24). This is not to say that queerness has been wholly co-opted and no-longer holds any radical power; instead, a queer radical analysis is precisely the tool that can expose these liberal and colonial co-optations of queerness for what they truly are. These examples of queerness as regulatory in Europe directly mirror many of the European femonationalist formations discussed previously within this chapter. Right wing political leaders adopt a strategy of “feminism as regulatory,” to enact xenophobic policies based on the assumed “backwards” gender politics of Muslim men (2007,4). The “regulatory” framing illuminates many of the shared ideological underpinnings of homo- and femonationalism that manifest in Europe and elsewhere.

Finally, Puar outlines “ascendancy of whiteness” as the final pillar of homonationalism. Puar argues that “. . . the project of whiteness is assisted and benefited by homosexual populations that participate in the same identititarian and economic hegemonies as those hetero subjects complicit with this ascendancy” (2007, 31). She goes on to argue that homonormativity buttresses heteronormativity
by dissembling queer alliances “in favor of adherence to the reproduction of class, gender, and racial norms” (2007, 32). Both homo- and femonationalism emerge from white-supremacist logics. For example, gay IOF soldiers disregard any potential queer alliance with queer Palestinians or anti-colonial queer politics writ-large in favor of the Jewish-supermacist ethnostate aspiring towards whiteness. They likely make this distinction based on the idea that the power granted to them by the Zionist state is more important than collective liberation. When this choice is made, queerness is relegated to the liberal identitarian form and harnessed as a tool for racist imperial domination over the racialized other. Homonationalism facilitates the de-politicization of queerness in the service of white national projects.

Section D: Precarious Formations and Coalitional Possibilities

Now that I have outlined how the constitutive elements of homonationalism connect to femonationalism, I will turn to the precarity of these two formations. Within her analysis, Puar emphasizes the instability of homonationalism and phenomena like it; she describes them as “partial, fragmentary, [and] uneven formations” that may change or disappear as quickly as they emerged (2007, 10). Homonationalism requires the normalization and integration of a previously ostracized group into the mainstream in the service of exclusionary nationalism; should the interests of the state change such that queer co-optation no longer benefits them, homonationalism would quickly dissolve and be replaced with something else. The state’s loyalty to their goal of homogenous nationalism, not the causes that they superficially adopt for the purposes of racialized exclusion. Similarly, the tension that emerges from the hypocrisy of femonationalism makes it “...a fragile convergence that may be weakened when its contradictory components are critically confronted” (2017, 10). Farris’
characterization of femonationalism as a “fragile convergence” illuminates the possibility of impactful resistance. The shared “fragility” of homo- and femonationalism may be the most significant of all of their similarities; when “critically confronted,” they could easily crumble under the weight of their own hypocrisy.

The principal reason why homo- and femonationalism must be analyzed together is because this paired analysis illuminates the necessity of coalitional resistance. When analyzed independently, each phenomenon could be understood as a peculiar form of colonial co-optation; however, when analyzed together, the formations are exposed to be the precarious moves towards liberal identitarian co-optation relying on racist myth. These myths are strengthened when we perceive them as completely discrete; conversely, a co-constitutive reading threatens their power. Comparative reading must be paired with coalitional action, as asserted by Elia; “I have tried to delineate the many ways our communities’ paths have joined to form a web, a network of liberatory praxis, trusting that the dispossessed have the knowledge it takes to create a more just society where people are not only surviving, but where they are truly free” (2023, 146). Connected analysis is useful insofar as it informs connected and coalitional struggle.

Within this current moment of escalated violence and genocide, it is more important than ever that we reject the myths that pink- and purplewashing aim to sell to us. And by “us,” I am referring to the American audiences that these propaganda tactics are designed to reach. Discrete analysis and isolated movements only serve the interests of the oppressor. Queer studies is instructive through its attention to relationalities and coalitional possibilities. Elia cites the queer Palestinian organization alQaws when addressing the necessity of a politics of collective liberation; “Queer liberation is
fundamentally tied to the dreams of Palestinian liberation: self-determination, dignity, and the end to all systems of oppression. . . The fight against patriarchy and sexual oppression is intertwined with the fight against settler colonialism and capitalism” (2023, 92). The legibility of pink- and purplewashing relies upon individualist identitarian politics. Elia poignantly remarks that “. . . our response to pinkwashing is to say that liberation is indivisible . . .” (2023, 92). The same can be said for purplewashing; these individualist tactics ought to be read as reminders of the necessity of a politics of collective liberation.
Conclusion

Zionist co-optation of feminist and queer-friendly language is motivated by their own desperate desire for support among Western liberals. The Zionist regime is invested in Western liberals' opinions because they are a large base with the power to seriously threaten Israeli hegemony, if they chose to do so. For this reason, the state manufactures hasbara directed towards Western liberal audiences in order to placate them. These rhetorical strategies employ racist and Orientalist characterizations of Indigenous peoples which imagine them to be inherently incompatible with “social progressivism.” Within the paradigm, alleged “social progressivism” is constructed to make human rights non-universal; it becomes logical that there may be different human rights for different people. More specifically, any population deemed “socially conservative” is characterized as undeserving of human rights. Pink- and purplewashing tactics aim to harness the power of feminist and queer movements in the service of imperial justification. As critics of pink- and purple washing, we must use the liberatory politics of true feminist and queer struggles as guiding frameworks as we reject these dangerous forms of co-optation.

The co-optation of feminist and queer language by the Occupation aims to achieve a few key goals:

1) Present the occupation as a beacon of modernity and progressivism.

2) Exploit conditions of homo- and femonationalism to incorporate the bodies of “good queers” and “good women” into the settler-nation while simultaneously enacting gendered sexual violence against Palestinians—this is largely achieved through the racialized “queering” of Palestinians regardless of sexual orientation.
3) Characterize Palestinians as misogynistic, homophobic, “backwards” and “barbaric.”

4) Harness the constructed binaries between “modern”/“immodern” and “civilized”/“uncivilized” to justify the occupation, dispossession, and genocide against the Palestinian people.

All of these key elements work towards the larger aim of reinforcing settler colonialism ideologically and materially. The landscape of homo- and femonationalism creates the conditions for pink- and purplewashing rhetoric, which seeks to justify and bolster the project of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism further reinforces conditions of homo- and femonationalism, thus introducing a cyclical relationship between these phenomena. Given that the dynamics operate in a mutually-reinforcing manner; rejecting any one of them constitutes a rejection to all of them. For example, a protest of Jerusalem’s attempt to host “World Pride” rejects the portrayal of Israel as a queer-friendly state. On a deeper level, it rejects the idea that any level of queer-friendliness (whether truthful or not) could justify Israel’s brutal occupation and genocide against Palestinians. On the deepest level, this organizing work can challenge Israel’s claims to Occupied Jerusalem in the first place. Given this reality, anti-pinkwashing and anti-purplewashing organizing can function as powerful entry points into the larger anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggle.

Speaking of anti-colonial struggle, it would be impossible to conclude this thesis without firmly situating it within this moment of escalated genocide and acute crisis in Palestine and Gaza specifically. The people of Gaza continue to embody “sumud,” or “steadfastness” (Meari 2014, 549) even under the most cruel and inhumane conditions. Sumud, described as a “relational
political-psycho-affective subjectivity,” (2014, 549) is an embodiment of refusal and method of anti-colonial praxis. While it is often practiced by Palestinian political detainees and prisoners faced with Israeli interrogation, it can occur in many contexts. For Palestinians, simply remaining anywhere in Historic Palestine can be a powerful rejection of the Zionist project of elimination, therefore constituting an act of sumud.

The people in Gaza embody sumud through their steadfast and principled refusal of Zionist ethnic cleansing, even as it comes at an incomprehensible cost. As witnesses of this genocide, one need not look farther than their social media feed to see that imperial greed fuels the U.S.-backed Israeli war-machine. Claims to the contrary—such as rhetorical gestures towards progressivism and so-called inclusivity—are ill-informed, self-serving, and/or poor-faith arguments. In the face of unimaginable cruelty, Palestinians in Gaza continue to assert their rights to dignity and self-determination. By insisting on their right to reside in their ancestral homelands, Palestinians in Gaza refuse and disrupt the hegemony of imperialism. Their individual and collective steadfastness constitute sites of transformative possibility (2014, 573).

Palestinian poet Rafeef Ziadah insists: “we teach life, sir” when confronted with a journalist’s racist question asking why Palestinians teach their children to hate (Ziadah, 2011). This seemingly benign question, like many of the examples analyzed within this thesis, hint at a much larger pattern of racialized victim-blaming. Western political actors and media personnel continue to characterize Indigenous people as “the problem” for rejecting the logics of settler colonialism. The phrase “we teach life, sir” punctuates Ziadah’s poem as she affirms the Palestinian commitment to life and transformation. This statement couldn’t be more applicable; during a time of unimaginable suffering
and cruelty, Palestinians in Gaza continue to teach life. Through their struggle, they teach the world what it means to fight for life. Now, more than ever, it is our responsibility to embrace and act upon their teachings.
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