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Good Queer, Bad Queer: Pinkwashing as LGBTQ+ Citizen-Subjectification

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Abstract: Since October 7, 2023, familiar heroes and villains in the long, bloody story of Palestinian struggle have reemerged in Western media narratives. Even as recycled frames once again take shape, the queer/LGBTQ+ community as a distinctive political constituency is a new(er) character in the over 75-year relationship between the United States and Israel. In this article, I argue that *The New York Times*, a prominent voice in this violent history, utilizes pinkwashing as a process of permission structuring to rhetorically call forth a Good Queer citizen-subjectivity that requires the juxtaposition and erasure of the Bad Queer citizen: the queer Palestinian.

Keywords: Pinkwashing, Subjectification, Permission structures, Palestine, Israel

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On November 13, 2023, the state of Israel posted an image of an IDF soldier holding a pride flag with “In The Name of Love” written in English, Arabic, and Hebrew on it while standing in the rubble in Gaza (Israel, 2023). This post also included an image of this soldier standing in front of a tank with another flag that appears to blend the Israeli flag and a pride flag. The text of the post reads, “The first ever pride flag raised in Gaza 🏳️‍🌈 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” (Israel, 2023). Indeed, this image sends a powerful message about which queers (do not) belong in Israel, showing its proverbial hand in the rhetorical erasure of queerness before Western intervention. Atzmoni serves as an exemplar of what I call the *Good Queer* subject upon which Israel’s story is ostensibly centered. I conceptualize the Good Queer not to represent one specific person or identity, but rather as a contemporary imperial subjectivity that brings respectable aspects of LGBTQ+ existence into the fold of Western citizenship rhetorics that, crucially, do not threaten the interests of the settler colonial project as pursued by the United States and Israel.

Exemplars of Good Queer subjectivity like Atzmoni in Israel’s post function as rhetorical bastions of contemporary liberal homonormativity. Since October 7, familiar rhetorical subjects (heroes and villains, good guys and bad guys) have reemerged in the long, bloody history of Israel’s occupation of Palestine: Hamas as the terrorist overlords; Palestinians as uncivilized yet helpless bystanders; and Israelis as the victims suffering from what Steven Erlanger described in *The New York Times* on October 7 as the “psychological impact on Israelis... [comparable] to the shock of Sept. 11 in America” (Erlanger, 2023). Even this brief indication that Israelis on October 7 were equivalent to U.S. Americans on September 11 (with no mention of Palestinians or Iraqis, respectively) reveals the connective tissue between how both countries envision citizenship and, therefore, who belongs (and does not belong) in the stories of September 11 and October 7. Good Queers like Yoav Atzmoni now have a place in Israel’s narrative.

One key difference in the stories of September 11 and October 7 is in media and political actors’ pursuit of LGBTQ+ support for U.S.-backed Israel. The queer/LGBTQ+ community as a distinctive political constituency worth winning is a relatively new development in the broader historical context of the United States. Israel’s claim about Atzmoni holding the “first ever pride flag raised in Gaza” shows its proverbial hand in the rhetorical erasure of queerness prior to its supposed intervention (Israel, 2023). Additionally, historic polling of Americans about their views on LGBTQ+ shows that public opinion has drastically shifted in the last two decades, with 71% of Americans stating that same-sex marriage should be legal in 2023 as compared to only 27% of Americans holding that belief in 1996 (Gallup, 2023). To be sure, support for same-sex marriage is a limited metric with which to measure the diverse and complex experiences of LGBTQ+ people in the United States, but the United States Supreme Court’s legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 marks an important point in the emergence of the relationship between LGBTQ+ people as an electorate and public policy regarding LGBTQ+ rights. On this subject, *The Times of Israel*’s Ron Kampeas (2015) writes that “Thirteen Jewish groups... were among the 25 joining the amicus brief the ADL filed in Obergefell v. Hodges [*sic*]... In recent decades, much of the Jewish establishment has embraced gay marriage as a right equivalent to the others it has advocated, including racial equality, religious freedoms and rights for women,” rhetorically, if indirectly, claiming Jewish pro-LGBTQ+ activist efforts in the U.S. for Israel,

too.[1] With this historical context in mind, I consider the ways Western LGBTQ+ people are called forth as a contemporary political constituency and invited to support Israel's genocide of Palestinians in Gaza as Good Queers.

In this article, I identify pinkwashing as a rhetorical strategy to invoke Western LGBTQ+ subjectivity. Luibhéid (2018) describes the strategy to frame Israel as a pro-LGBTQ+ paradise as *pinkwashing*, a "processes whereby states congratulate and promote themselves on the global stage as champions of human rights because they have granted select rights to LGBT people, while continuing to engage in... systemic violence" (p. 405). *Pinkwashing* is derived from the term "greenwashing," which refers to a marketing strategy in which a company uses color schemes, icons, and keywords or phrases that rhetorically frame their product and/or message as environmentally friendly (Schulman, 2011; United Nations, n.d.). Since approximately 2011, activists have used *pinkwashing* to describe the rhetorical tactics of pro-Israel, Zionist politicians who "mobilize a discourse about gay rights to obfuscate the ongoing occupation of Palestine" (Puar & Mikdashi, 2012). As pinkwashing reappears in political messaging about Israel and Palestine, the need to further investigate its rhetorical function becomes apparent. Specifically, pinkwashing rhetorics, though not new, have become increasingly salient as existing settler colonial logics (Homer, 2023) and permission structures (Bohan & Holland, 2021) surrounding the acceptability of Western LGBTQ+ identities and politics are coopted by neoliberal pundits to extend the U.S. imperial project into respectable queer imaginaries. In this article, I position pinkwashing as a form of permission structuring, which refers to rhetorical processes that synthesize reality into theories of the world that require past assumptions of truth (i.e. the status quo) to imagine desirable futures.

The existing literature on pinkwashing emerges from political science, Middle East studies, and gender and sexuality studies and is often linked to broader scholarly discourses about homonationalism (Luibhéid, 2018). I contribute to this conversation by demonstrating how pinkwashing functions as a strategic rhetoric of subjectification. Specifically, I argue that *The New York Times*, a prominent voice in the coverage of Israel's activities, utilizes pinkwashing as a subjectification strategy to rhetorically craft Good Queer citizens for the advancement and justification of the ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, with at least 45,515 Palestinians dead at the time of this writing (AJLabs, 2024). This subjectification process relies on existing permission structures (Bohan & Holland, 2021) surrounding pro-LGBTQ+ liberal politics through the specific rhetorical frames of the right to travel, the right to reproduce, and the right to life via cultural death. In this analysis, I focus on how pinkwashing calls forth a Zionist, liberal, Good Queer citizen-subjectivity. First, I engage with literature on rhetorical citizenship and homonationalism, subjectification, and pinkwashing. Then, I analyze selected articles from *The New York Times* related to LGBTQ+ people and Israel. Finally, I offer key insights from my analysis as they inform future directions for research and political activism. I begin by engaging literature on rhetorical citizenship, constitutive rhetorics, and homonationalism.

Building the Good Queer Citizen-Subject: Rhetorical Citizenship and the Queer Subject

[1] A reference to the ADL amicus brief that Kampeas (2015) mentions can be found on the Supreme Court's online docket for *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015) at https://www.supremecourt.gov/search.aspx?filename=/docket/docketfiles/html/public/14-556.html.

With the notion that citizenship is a rhetorical process, I zero in on the ways citizenship rhetorics function to forward particular political goals. Scholars conceptualize rhetorical citizenship in a variety of ways, including as discursive (Asen, 2004), cultural (Enck-Wanzer, 2011), and performative (McKinnon, 2009). Citizenship has less to do with what passport one carries (or whether one even has a passport at all) and more to do with who belongs and does not belong in a particular place. Marked bodies carry borders much farther than the geographical locations where countries are divided, and, as Ono (2012) suggests, a border "acts... as a signifier of inclusion and exclusion, and as a way of determining one's worthiness as a living being" (p. 22). It follows that these border rhetorics carry over into the politics of citizenship and that citizenship rhetorics can be exported to other countries besides the one from which it originates.

One way this concept is actualized in rhetorical scholarship is through the theory of constitutive rhetoric. Although scholars have theorized about similar concepts, such as interpellation (Althusser, 1971) and subjectification (Hanchey & Jensen, 2022), Charland's (1987) research builds upon Burke's (1969) notion of identification as a key component of rhetorical processes that distinguishes constitutive rhetoric from similar theories. Greene (2013) describes constitutive rhetoric as "a form of social control made possible by how language 'positions' a subject" (p. 544). In other words, constitutive rhetorics go beyond persuading audiences to accept a particular argument; constitutive rhetorics create the audiences within which people see themselves. Constitutive rhetorics are therefore powerful in their engagement of citizenship, of who belongs and who does not. In her article about the exclusion of Black women for the constituency of white women as particular kinds of citizens to gain suffrage in 1919, Palczewski (2016) argues that the "constitutive moment of citizenship necessarily involves a negative identification" (p. 126). Put simply, the creation of citizens through constitutive rhetoric necessarily involves the exclusion of others as non-citizens.

For decades if not centuries, queer people have been constitutively crafted as noncitizens. Cisheteronormative citizenship specifically relies on queerness and queer people as "the mirror reflecting the heterosexual[s']...fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 18). Although cisheteronormative conceptions of citizenship reign in the United States, the aforementioned rise of LGBTQ+ people as a political constituency in recent decades has generated rhetorics of homonationalism. Puar (2017) defines *homonationalism* in the U.S. American context as a "brand of homosexuality [which] operates as a regulatory script... of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality... of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects... [and] a commitment to the global dominant ascendancy of whiteness" (p. 2). Said differently, homonationalism involves the stretching of normativity to include certain iterations of queerness that do not threaten the structural integrity of cisheteronormativity. Homonationalist politics bring (certain) queers into the fold to advance a particular vision of U.S. American neoliberal imperialism. For instance, Dreher (2017) describes policies of sexual citizenship like same-sex marriage in the West as "closely associated with hegemonic heterosexual and gendered norms of sexual behaviour" (p. 178). If rhetorics of citizenship necessitate the carving out of a "constitutive outside" (Palczewski, 2016), it follows that some queers fall on the outside of homonationalist politics (perhaps queer Palestinians) even as those same politics claim progress for LGBTQ+ people (perhaps LGBTQ+ Israelis). Put differently, the creation of the heroes in the story of LGBTQ+ "progress" is built upon the bodies of those deemed as outsiders, villains, and victims.

Additionally, rhetorics of citizenship are always already emergent from the logics, interests, and impacts of settler colonialism. However, settler colonialism is not inevitable, and it exists firmly within historical and political contexts that maintain it through cooption and repetition. Stewart and Vaughan (2024) warn that "White settler colonial studies' accounts of the settler/Indigenous binary, logic of elimination, and settler sovereignty present settlers as transhistorical subjects by taking the logics of race and White possessive sovereignty as given" (p. 14). A critique of white settler colonial rhetorics would be incomplete without acknowledging the ways that well-meaning critical scholarship reaffirms settler futurity if it fails to meaningfully disrupt and threaten new manifestations of whiteness as an orientation and organizing principle that protects capital (Baldwin, 2012; Ahmed, 2004). I offer this case study of *The New York Times* as a way to demystify the most recent iterations of citizenship and belonging proffered by Israel and the United States with the explicit purpose of inviting fellow Westerners like myself to reject the safety and privileges of Good Queerness to imagine futures otherwise that require Palestinian liberation and are grounded in what Tuck and McKenzie (2014) call "Indigenous futurity," which is "concerned with how what we do now makes possible evermore futures, not with recollecting a static and one dimensional past" (p. 147).

Subjectification as Constitutive Rhetorical Process

One way that theories of rhetorical citizenship, constitutive rhetorics, and homonationalism are accomplished is through the process of subjectification, which has similar, yet distinct, roots as constitutive rhetoric. *Subjectification* refers to "the process by which a subject is brought into being through shifting contexts, relations, and imbrication in forces of power" (Hanchey & Jensen, 2022, 3). Subjectification emerges in part from Althusser's (1971) theory of interpellation, and Bunch (2013) explains the connection between interpellation theory and subjectification by returning to Althusser's original scenario: "a person on the street is hailed by a police officer... and... turns toward this agent... This hailing/recognition process... denotes the importance of linguistic practices in subject formation" (p. 42). In this example, not only is the person on the street answering the call of the police officer and engaging in the creation of their own subjectivity, but the police officer is reinforcing their own subjectivity by embodying and performing the prescribed role of police officer (Butler, 1997). This subjectification process also benefits the police officer more than the person on the street because the police officer is instilled with power in a way that perhaps follows that officer even after they remove their uniform and sign off at the end of their shift.

That said, subjectification is a value-laden process—the roles created, reinforced, and imbued upon people exist in an interlocking social hierarchy that demands certain subjectivities be created upon the "constitutive outside" of society (Palczewski, 2016). Furthermore, Murib (2018) explains that "subject positions are... shaped by political and social factors, such as through interactions with institutions, the law, and activism" (p. 657). In essence, when institutions support particular subjectivities, such as the homonationalist political position shaped by the passing of same-sex marriage, those institutions also imbue rhetorics of citizenship that draw upon intersecting matrices of domination, which include race, class, religion, and other systems of oppression, that uplift the role of the Good Queer citizen (Collins, 1990). Necessarily, within the context of contemporary politics and power structures, the "progress" in some queers being welcomed into the fold of citizenship expels those queers that do not fall in line.

For many queer folks, the consequences of rhetorical expulsion are dire if not deadly. Identifying the subjectification processes that result in the material and symbolic exile of anyone designated as outside Good Queer subjectivity is an important step toward elucidating the ways LGBTQ+ politics of belonging are shifting and being coopted by hegemonic forces in real time. In the United States, a country whose politics feel more divided and contentious each day according to those living in it (Wike & Dimock, 2024), it might be tempting to welcome any politics of inclusion. It might be easy for Good Queers, some of whom have fought long and hard for that inclusion, to settle into their subjectivities. However, Olsen and Worsham (2004) warn that "the subject is born into a network of language and uses language *but is also used by it*" (p. 332, emphasis added). In essence, hegemony uses the position of the Good Queer to justify its violence against the Bad Queer. In this way, subjectification is an incredibly salient yet elusive rhetorical process that takes up one's very sense of self as its conduit for reinforcing systems of oppression and violence. Indeed, subjectification as a rhetoric through which hierarchical social systems shape *all* positions in the matrix of domination is worthy of continued attention (Collins, 1990). Next, I elucidate how a particular subjectification citizenship process is actualized through the rhetoric of pinkwashing in the context of contemporary LGBTQ+ liberal politics.

Pinkwashing as Homonationalism

Despite recent efforts in the media's framing of Israel's genocide of Palestinians, neither the violence in Gaza nor pinkwashing are new. Bohrer (2014), a founding member of Jews for Justice in Palestine, writes, "as the latest round of Israeli fire reigns down on Gaza, a problematic discourse has resurfaced in the West [which]... seeks to convince white Americans and Europeans that supporting Israel is an imperative for women, LGBTQ-identified individuals and their allies." This statement eerily echoes the present conditions in Gaza, even as the story ostensibly begins with Hamas on October 7, 2023 — nearly a decade after early criticisms of pinkwashing emerged. In the decade since this period, the conversation about the concept of pinkwashing and its utility have sparked intense debate among scholars. Puar and Mikdashi (2012) drew attention to the ways pinkwashing is actualized in Israel and offered a distinct term, *pinkwatching*, which describes the ways in which anti-pinkwashing efforts reinforce homonationalist narratives in the West. Puar and Mikdashi (2012) explain, "In Israel, pinkwashing works to mobilize a discourse about gay rights to obfuscate the ongoing occupation of Palestine. In the United States, pinkwatching is so focused on... legitimating queer solidarity frames that it speaks almost exclusively to an American queer audience." In other words, their argument suggests that the idea that Western queers should support Israel to protect Israeli LGBTQ+ people and the idea that Western queers should support Palestine to protect Palestinian LGBTQ+ people both stand on the same framework of totalizing homonationalism.

However, some scholars disagree that pinkwashing and pinkwatching are cut from the same homonationalist cloth. Ritchie (2015) responds to Puar and Mikdashi by writing, "the state entices privileged white queers with the illusion of equality as it relegates queers of color to a space of death and dying so complete... that even their critiques (lodged under the banner of pinkwatching, for example) are unintelligible" (p. 621). Ritchie's argument here does not necessarily dismiss critiques of anti-pinkwashing efforts in the United States so much as draws attention to the fact that political iterations of queerness and LGBTQ+ activism are at times idiosyncratic to those constructed outside the West. Perhaps the Western notion of universal

queerness as the reason to protect Palestinian queers from genocide is grounded in the exportation of specific parameters surrounding LGBTQ+ politics. Perhaps in the pinkwatching view, "homophobic" Palestinians are not as worthy of life as Palestinian queers. Certainly, there could be dire consequences if Palestinian queers turn out to "not be queer enough" for the Western LGBTQ+ subject. However, I tend to agree with Ritchie that critics of both pinkwatching and pinkwashing "might consider resisting the impulse to homogenize this or that queer as the victim or the victor and work instead to develop a nuanced framework for building coalitions" (p. 632).

With this in mind, my analysis contributes to the conversation about pinkwashing not through supporting a particular side on the debate about the merits and limits of homonationalism and pinkwatching, but rather through examining how rhetorical processes of subjectification invite a particular Good Queer citizenship politic that endorses the continued support of Israel's genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. I enter this conversation from a rhetorical perspective: that subjectification processes invite a particular performance of citizenship — not that any one activist or theorist accepts the call in their efforts, however imperfect they may be, to call attention to the genocide of both queer and non-queer Palestinians in Gaza. I build my analysis on these theoretical foundations and turn to *The New York Times* to examine contemporary subjectification processes that construct an ideal liberal Good Queer citizen, namely through permission structuring.

The rhetorical mechanism that drives this subjectification process is a term that reporters Caren Bohan and Steve Holland (2021) in the *Chicago Tribune* attribute to former Obama senior adviser Dan Pfeiffer: a "permission structure." In Pfeiffer's view, permission structures refer to a marketing strategy to push "'the proper buttons that need to be pushed' to get people to purchase a product they otherwise would shun" In politics, Bohan and Holland describe the example of "former Representative Dan Rostenkowski, [who] was said to have gotten re-elected amid a scandal by winning the endorsements of respectable allies, thus giving voters a 'permission structure' that enabled them to vote for him." Resonant terms that may parallel the concept of a permission structure include what Campbell (1973) calls a "reality structure" and what Homer (2023) calls a "colonial logic."

However, I understand permission structuring as an ongoing rhetorical process, rather than a static theoretical tool like a frame, of shaping reality that both enables and constrains theories about the world that determine what is imaginable, possible, and good. For instance, if a liberal standpoint is that supporting gay rights is generally a social good, it becomes easier to rhetorically employ that permission structuring to extend the argument to favor ostensibly pro-LGBTQ+ political positions. Another layer to this contemporary permission structuring in the context of Palestine and Israel is the Western colonial logic that Arabs and Muslims are inherently backward and homophobic, making a pro-Israel position affectively acceptable, even in the face of evidence to the contrary; in essence, it might feel like it makes sense to support Israel because liberal propaganda plays on the generally positive feeling that liberals express toward pro-LGBTQ+ messaging. The problem, of course, is that this logic enables the continuation of Israel's genocide of Palestinians, including those who are queer, in Gaza among a significant portion of the American electorate and political elite class.

Framing the Good Queer Citizen-Subject

As a newspaper of record in the United States, *The New York Times* is a prominent voice in U.S. American media, particularly among liberal political elites. Although *The New York Times* is certainly not representative of all media in the United States, nearly 80% of U.S. Americans view *The New York Times* as part of the mainstream media, with *ABC News*, *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *Fox News*, and the *Wall Street Journal* holding similar influence in the minds of the U.S. American public (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). I also consider *The New York Times* to be a dominant rhetorical technology in the contemporary U.S. political consciousness, meaning that it not only has a significant online audience with nearly 2 billion readers in 2022 alone (*The New York Times* Advertising), but that it also is itself one of many influential "potential speakers of meanings assigned to race and gender" (Koerber, 2000, p. 66). My analysis is guided in part by some of the questions that Scott, Longo, and Wills (2007) invite critical scholars to ask of technical discourse, namely "'Whose values does technical communication privilege?' 'Who is included and who is excluded by these practices and how?'" (p. 14).

To get a sense of how *The New York Times* tells the story of Good Queer citizenship through pinkwashing, I conducted a Boolean search of the terms "(Israel or Israeli or Palestine or Palestinian) and (LGBT or LGBTQ or gay or queer or homosexual or same sex)" on its website. This search yielded 51 articles with dates ranging from October 17, 1996, to August 22, 2024, at the time of this writing. I also conducted a Boolean search of the terms "(Israel or Tel Aviv or Jerusalem) and (Pride or parade) and (LGBT or LGBTQ or gay or queer or homosexual)," which yielded 18 articles with dates ranging from June 8, 2002, to June 1, 2023. These searches yielded a total of 69 articles that comprised my dataset for this analysis. When appropriate, I also investigated some of the sources that these articles cited to understand how *The New York Times* placed its pieces in conversation with other media outlets. From my analysis of selected articles, I argue that pinkwashing serves as a subjectification strategy by which *The New York Times* uses existing liberal permission structuring to rhetorically craft Good Queer citizens to invite respectable Western support for the ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. This process is actualized through the specific rhetorical mechanisms of the right to travel, the right to reproduce, and the right to life via cultural death. I first illuminate the right to travel as a rhetorical frame through which the Good Queer subject is synthesized via permission structuring.

The Right to Travel

The first rhetorical mechanism I observe in the creation of a Good Queer citizen-subject through pinkwashing is the right to travel and move while queer. One *New York Times* article I analyze here is aptly titled "Being Gay Is Illegal in Many Countries. L.G.B.T.Q. Travelers Are Going Anyway." Journalist Ainara Tiefenthäler (2023) provides an overview of countries with various anti-gay legislation in place where LGBTQ+ travelers in the United States want to go but tend to avoid due to fear of being discriminated against or harmed in those locations for being queer. Tiefenthäler quotes Darren Burn, the founder of inclusive travel agency Out of Office, as saying, "'I'm gay and I want to visit these places...And if I want to visit these places, then there are other gay people who do, too. So if we can enable them to do it in a fun, exciting and safe way, then that's exactly what we're here for.'" Tiefenthäler goes on to conduct a roll call of sorts by naming "parts of Asia, more than half of African countries, and practically the entire Middle

East—with the exceptions of Israel and Jordan" as "off-limits." Tiefenthäler paints Israel as an exception to the "entire Middle East" on the safety of LGBTQ+ (Western) travelers, rhetorically collapsing the rest of the region into an ostensibly homophobic monolith.

Another salient example of the right-to-travel frame in *The New York Times* is the coverage of Tel Aviv-Jaffa's annual Gay Pride Parade. Debra Kamin (2015) reports that "the parade is the culmination of Gay Pride Week, a string of events expected to draw at least 25,000 tourists... [celebrating] the broad acceptance of gays and lesbians in Israel." Additionally, the parade in Tel Aviv reportedly "attracts up to 250,000 people" and "over a hundred Pride events were scheduled across Israel" over the month of June 2023 (Kershner, 2023). The imagery of massive crowds waving rainbow flags and dressed in colorful attire at these parades complements the vision of LGBTQ+ travel not only as a mere possibility, but as a lifestyle that (some) queer people deserve. I notice the similarities between the streets of Tel Aviv during Gay Pride and the oases depicted by Out of Office (n.d.) as destinations (white homonormative) LGBTQ+ people deserve to experience and belong in.

While CBS (2024) is not entirely wrong that "Pride's hallmark rainbow-laden parades and festivals celebrate the progress the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement has made," Pride parades still function within the bounds of Western political respectability. For instance, the disciplining of pro-Palestinian demonstrations at New York City's recent Pride celebration exposes the limits of visible LGBTQ+ activism–a far cry from the violent confrontations between demonstrators and police at Stonewall. Lola Fadulu and Gaya Gupta's June 30, 2024, article published in *The New York Times* titled "A Wave of Pride Lights Up New York City" curiously includes the following subheading: "The New York City Pride March... attracted tens of thousands in Manhattan. It was interrupted by pro-Palestinian demonstrators." The affective interruption in the subheading positions the supposed disruption of New York Pride by pro-Palestinian demonstrators encapsulates *The New York Times*' recurring rhetorical severing of Good Queer subjects from their unruly Bad Queer counterparts who, as observed pointedly by Fadulu and Gupta, do not belong. Amidst a colorful, joyful description of New York Pride, much like the coverage of Tel Aviv Pride, Fadulu and Gupta write that "pro-Palestinian demonstrators sat down in front of a float and prevented it from moving for about a half-hour as a large crowd chanted." Despite the support from the crowd, "police took the protesters, their wrists bound with zip ties, into custody." The framing of these demonstrators' presence as disruption in this *The New York Times* article along with their arrest at the parade serves as a microcosmic representation of the rhetorical purging of pro-Palestine queers to the "constitutive outside" (Palczewski, 2016) of Pride festivities, whether they be in New York City or Tel Aviv. Said differently, Good Queers do not politicize Pride, even as Fadulu & Gupta (2024), still framing the demonstration as disruption, cite parade attendees' support of the protest, one saying "the interruption only added to the spirit of the march."

This rhetorical framing of Good Queer citizens as deserving access to move easily through Pride parades and travel around the world serves as a noteworthy counterexample to Flores' (2020) theory of stoppage and the rhetorics of racial mobility. Flores describes stoppage as "the forced immobility of bodies—literal and figurative" and "a rhetorical mode of racialization" (p. 248). The bodies that move, or the bodies that travel, are not the same as those who are "monitor[ed], surveil[led] and discipline[d]" (p. 247). Those queers whose bodies are racialized as white are

free, and in fact encouraged by *The New York Times*, to move across borders—Good Queer subjectivity is the citizenship that travels to "celebrat[e] tolerance and diversity" (Greenberg, 2002). The protections of the state move with citizens and carry them to luxurious destinations while the borders between countries burden those racialized queer bodies deemed "noncitizen." The contrast is stark when considering the Israeli military checkpoints that contained (queer) Palestinian bodies long before October 7, 2023 (Activestills Collective, 2018).

The New York Times' framing of Israel as a desirable, LGBTQ+-friendly travel destination as well as the notion that Good Queers deserve uninterrupted Pride parades bolsters the permission structuring of the Good Queer citizen as one who deserves to travel and move freely. Underwriting this subjectivity is the idea that Good Queer (settler-colonial) citizens have the right to move and be visible anywhere in the world. Good Queers love traveling to Israel, the queer oasis in the Middle East — a beacon of LGBTQ+ hope and prosperity. This right-to-travel rhetoric in *The New York Times* supports the logics of pinkwashing by which the ideal mobile Good Queer citizen-subject is crafted in opposition to the immobile queer noncitizen. In sum, the Good Queer citizen is a borderless being, rhetorically rewarded for performing Western homonormative subjectivity around the world, while illegible queer subjects carry borders with them, marked by Otherness and always already worthy of suspicion and surveillance, not belonging (Ono, 2012). Next, I articulate the ways the right to reproduce also bolsters Good Queer subjectivity.

The Right to Reproduce

Another mechanism in *The New York Times*' rhetorical framing of the Good Queer is the right to reproduce. Contemporary same-sex reproductive rights discourse in the West often reaffirms the nuclear family unit as foundational in homonormative belonging (Garwood, 2016). Certainly, the right to healthcare, including reproductive healthcare, should be protected in an equitable society. However, the right-to-reproduce frame serves a distinct purpose in structuring the Good Queer subject via pinkwashing. The rhetorical right to specific forms of healthcare, such as fertility care, for homonormative Western LGBTQ+ people in both Israel and the United States obscures the reality that healthcare inequity harms vast populations of people in both countries, including queer women and People of Color (Asi et al., 2024; Casanova-Perez et al., 2022). Put simply, by positioning themselves as progressive bastions of reproductive care (mostly for homonormative gay men), Israel and the United States engage in pinkwashing rhetoric that erases the fact that both countries regularly withhold basic healthcare, such as COVID-19 vaccinations (Howard & Schneider, 2022), from the most vulnerable people within their (occupied) borders. I expose this dynamic by examining the right-to-reproduce frame in fertility equality rhetoric and by highlighting the stark contrast in the ways *The New York Times* relegates Palestinians and Arab Israelis to the "constitutive outside" (Palczewski , 2016) of health and reproductive discourse.

Fertility equality rhetoric in Israel and the United States exposes how pinkwashing narratives bolster hegemonic LGBTQ+ subjectivity and reify homonormative belonging in the Western imaginary. Specifically, David Kaufman's July 22, 2020, article in *The New York Times* titled "The Fight for Fertility Equality," begins by examining the status of surrogacy and fertility coverage in the United States. Kaufman explains: "Fertility equality activists are asking... for

insurance companies to cover reproductive procedures like sperm retrieval, egg donation and embryo creation for all prospective parents, including gay couples who use surrogates." The complexities surrounding gay men enlisting a person as a surrogate for their biological child are notably absent from Kaufman's article, which I could certainly explore in another article. Instead, I highlight the language of "fertility equality" as something that gay men are entitled to via their insurance coverage. By invoking the language of activism, Kaufman paints a picture of gay man as lacking necessary healthcare, which in this case is framed as the right to fertility or, in my words, the right to reproduce. In short, the Good Queer citizen-subject participates in homonormative nuclear family structures through biological reproduction, as is required for legibility in Western society (Garwood, 2016).

Interestingly, Kaufman (2020) also echoes the right-to-travel frame while asserting gay men's right to reproduce through fertility equality in a section of the article titled "Fertility Equality Overseas." Elsewhere, Kaufman (2018) explores the fertility-rights movement in Israel, citing his own coverage in *Quartz* of the 2018 strikes and protests that took place after a new law was passed excluding "LGBT couples from state-supported surrogate pregnancies." Kaufman (2020) then offers a remedy taken up by both Israeli and American businesses in response to legislative restrictions on surrogacy, writing: "Multinational corporations like Facebook and Microsoft... now offer grants to Israeli L.G.B.T.Q. employees to help defray surrogacy costs. Fertility benefits have also become common in the United States... Unilever and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation... provide some of the most generous fertility benefits in the private sector." In a country where people owe more than $200 billion in medical debt (Rakshit et al., 2024), nearly half of its states ban gender-affirming care for transgender youth (Movement Advancement Project, 2024), and federal protections of abortion care no longer exist (Totenberg & McCammon, 2022), whose fertility "equality" matters becomes clear. Corporations distribute "fertility benefits" for Good Queers while refusing to provide paid family leave to over 76% of private sector workers in the United States (Williamson, 2023). In short, the right-to-reproduce rhetoric in Kaufman's article travels easily across international borders between Israel and the United States to reify a particular form of Western LGBTQ+ subjectivity through pinkwashing narratives that connect fertility equality to homonormative belonging.

On the contrary, the right-to-reproduce permission structuring obscures how pinkwashing rhetoric requires the relegation of Palestinians and Arab Israelis to the "constitutive outside" (Palczewski , 2016) of health and reproductive care discourse. Fertility equality rhetoric functions as pinkwashing by diminishing the material realities of basic healthcare disparities, let alone discrepancies in reproductive care, that (queer) Palestinians regularly face. On January 1, 2021, just a few short months after Kaufman's article on fertility equality was published, The *New York Times* published an article by Isabel Kershner (2021) titled "How Israel Became a World Leader in Vaccinating Against Covid-19." To be sure, vaccinating people against COVID-19 is good for public health. Yet, it begs the question of how things were for Palestinians while their occupier vaccinated "about 150,000 Israelis... per day" (Kershner, 2021). Kershner continues, "the government's inoculation campaign has not extended to Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, who have not had access to any vaccinations yet, and the Palestinian Authority does not appear to have publicly requested them" and reports that "the government's first obligation was to its own citizens, but it was in Israel's interest to help suppress the infection among the Palestinians."

This framing, imbued with racist undertones about "suppressing infection" among Palestinians while simultaneously "protecting" Israelis with vaccines, invokes a rhetorical frame of infestation via powerful linguistic imagery. Kershner (2021) frames Palestinians as hordes of uncivilized beings that are definitely not the Good Queers that get vaccinated. The Palestinians are seemingly blamed for the lack of protection they had against the initial waves of the COVID-19 pandemic as Israel prioritized its "citizens." Palestinians failed to "suppress infections" due to some inherent ineptitude of the Palestinian Authority, or perhaps due to their own backwards, skittish, anti-West thinking (and not, in this framing, because Israel withheld vaccines from people trapped in its occupied territories). Accordingly, Kershner notes, "Arab citizens... have been more hesitant than others to get the vaccine." Although Arab Israeli citizens and Palestinians are labeled differently in this article, the parallels between the two groups are rhetorically implied.

The right to reproduce both through fertility equality and through preventive healthcare via access to COVID-19 vaccines are privileges afforded to citizen-subjects. Although Kershner's (2021) article did not explicitly mention LGBTQ+ people, the juxtaposition between the racialized logics depicting all Palestinians as invading, infected hordes in need of control by civilized (Israeli) society with the right of (Western) gay men to seek fertility equality exposes what Hsu (2024) calls "master frames" at play in these rhetorics. The constituency created by the Good Queer citizen-subject who deserves fertility care and vaccines simultaneously relegates Bad Queers to lives full of suffering and death, because that is what they supposedly deserve in this frame. Additionally, the rhetorics of infestation and invasion are undoubtedly racialized and historicized by familiar narratives in the West that have connected homosexuality with "contagion" during the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Bishop et al., 1991) as well as (white) settler-colonial fears of being "overrun" by (Black and Brown) people (Kanstroom, 1996). Not only is the right to reproduce frame bolstered by rhetoric surrounding various kinds of healthcare for Israelis, but also by the right to life via cultural (and at times literal) death for Palestinians. In this vein, I turn to queer necropolitics to further explore the rhetorical processes at play in *The New York Times*' creating and maintaining the ideal Good Queer citizen-subject at the direct expense of Palestinians.

The Right to Life via Cultural Death

The final instrument in the maintenance of the Good Queer citizen-subject in *New York Times* messaging is the right to life via cultural death, or another queer necropolitics, which Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco (2014) describe as "regimes of attribution of liveliness and deadliness of subjects, bodies, communities and populations and their instantiation through performatives of gender, sexuality and kinship, as well as through processes of confinement, removal and exhaustion" (p. 4). On this subject, Ritchie (2014) succinctly argues that "queer Israelis proudly enter into the space of national belonging and, under the guise of a compassionate liberal humanitarianism, relegate their queer Palestinian others to a discursive space where the possibilities of being... are limited to... suffering, victimization and death" (p. 114). While Western media narratives center queer Israelis as pioneers of liberal progress in the Middle East, queer Palestinians (more specifically, their suffering and death) serve as political leverage to paint Arab cultures as uniformly homophobic, barbaric, and violent. Furthermore, Narayan (1997) examines how dowry-murders cross borders and take on a particular form in the

United States as an exoticized, detached cultural phenomenon. When put into contrast with death by domestic violence in the United States, dowry-murders symbolize a "death by culture" in Narayan's (1997) view. As Narayan explains, "'women are burned to death everyday in India, victims of their culture' appears to Western audiences as simple, solid, incontrovertible information, whereby the real *factual weight* of Indian women being murdered for dowry operates to eclipse critical attention to the ways the border-crossing information on the issue is *framed*" (p. 103). Drawing on Narayan's theorizing of "death by culture," I extend Ritchie's (2014) argument by examining how Israel's necropolitics drive pinkwashing rhetorics of homonormative belonging in *The New York Times* via liberal permission structuring.

Through an extended example of *The New York Times* coverage of the death of a queer Palestinian, I elucidate pinkwashing narratives that juxtapose homophobia in the "Arab world" against critiques of Israel. Ahmad Abu Murkhiyeh was a 25-year-old gay Palestinian who was "found decapitated in the West Bank city of Hebron" on October 6, 2022 (Debre, 2022). Bret Stephens (2022) of *The New York Times*, and formerly of the *Jerusalem Post* (Shalev, 2021), describes Murkhiyeh as "one of scores of gay Palestinians finding refuge in Israel." Stephens goes on to connect Murkhiyeh's murder to the Palestinian Authority's banning of a gathering planned by Palestinian LGBTQ+ group Al-Qaws. Stephens writes, "In 2019, the Palestinian Authority banned organized L.G.B.T.Q. activities... The ban was later rescinded, but it says something that the Al-Qaws Foundation, which campaigns for gay rights for Palestinians, has its offices in Jerusalem and Haifa." The beheading of Murkhiyeh paints a violent picture for being a queer Palestinian which is ostensibly soothed by Stephens' juxtaposing of Israel as a haven for LGBTQ+ people. The spectacle serves as a therapeutic rhetoric (Cloud, 1998), starting with the initial shock of death by beheading and resolving with the collective outrage by the "civilized"—at least *we* do not treat *our* queers like that, according to this rhetoric.

The spectacle of Murkhiyeh's beheading echoes the framing of dowry-murders in India in the Western imagination. In other words, violence against women in India in the Western view as rooted in the uncivilized, backwards, primitive culture of Indians while violence against women in the United States is understood as a problem caused by individual perpetrators with no citation of culture for their motivation. Similarly, Murkhiyeh's queer Palestinian death by beheading serves as a spectacle of the Oriental (Said, 2003) that the Good Queer citizen-subject requires to fashion itself as civil, rational, and nonviolent — despite mountains of evidence to the contrary in some cases (namely recent upticks in anti-LGBTQ+ violence and legislation in the United States).

Further implicated in the spectacle of Murkhiyeh's murder is the framing of queer Palestinians exclusively in the context of "suffering, victimization and death" (Ritchie, 2014, p. 114). The imagery of Murkhiyeh's violent death starkly contrasts the relative sterility and innocence of queers traveling to Tel Aviv for the annual Gay Pride parade. I argue that this framing is not accidental. The queer necropolitics and death by culture rhetorics at play situate queer Palestinians as victims of their own violent, backwards culture and perfectly positions Israel as a morally superior, liberal, cosmopolitan paradise. The *BBC* (2022) bolsters this narrative in an article cited by Stephens which states, "some 90 Palestinians who identify as LGBT currently live as asylum seekers in Israel... after suffering discrimination" — 90 being the number that Stephens (2022) described as "scores of Palestinians," painting queer Palestinians as swarming,

invasive, and to be feared. The (white) Good Queer citizen-subject, seeing itself as rational, civil, and progressive in its permission structuring, *must* support Israel's ongoing occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, if for no other reason than to punish Palestinians for forcing alleged "scores" of their queers into Israel to seek asylum. Palestinian queers *need* Western democracy and civility to tame their culture's violent urges and fundamentalist beliefs about LGBTQ+ people. In short, Israeli queers (and Western queers by proxy) must save queer Palestinians from themselves in this framing.

Another article in *The New York Times* by Liam Stack (2024) titled "The Gaza War is Dividing the L.G.B.T.Q. Community" bolsters the right to life only by cultural death in describing a supposed sticking point in political conversations about Israel's violent occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. Stack provides an overview of some public clashes among the LGBTQ+ community regarding the genocide in Gaza, writing that:

> Supporters of Israel, including some vocal L.G.B.T.Q. people, often argue that the community should support the country because... it is more tolerant than other places in the Middle East. In Gaza, like in many places in the Arab world, homosexuality remains taboo and gay life happens largely behind closed doors (paras. 11-12).

Stack condenses "the Arab world" into a flattened, monolithic, dangerous, mysterious society in which Palestinian queerness is confined to the (Western notion of the) closet, drawing on well-established orientalist narratives of the region while positioning Israel as a proverbial city upon a hill for LGBTQ+ people (Said, 2003). Also, Stack's mention of the killing of a Hamas commander allegedly for "embezzlement and homosexuality" also contributes to the Western imagination of Arab cultures as violent, backwards, and inherently homophobic.

This orientalist framing of the "Arab world" as intolerant and violent in *The New York Times* contributes to broader cultural narratives that shape Good Queer subjectivity as necessarily oppositional to Palestinian liberation. Sally Tamarkin (2023) writes for *Them* that
Queer and trans people have been met with... arguments that LGBTQ+ people supporting Gazans are like "chickens for KFC" or "minks for fur." The rhetoric has become so common that... an Israeli sketch comedy show aired a skit... satirizing queer pro-Palestinian activists, portraying them as empty-headed clowns who celebrate the "LGBTQH" (the H is for Hamas—get it?) community (para. 3).

The rhetorical maintenance of the Good Queer subject relies on the strawman of Palestinian queerness as tethered to "violent" Arab cultures and the obscurity of the anti-LGBTQ+ harassment and violence experienced every day by queers in Western contexts. In short, the imagined difference between homophobia in the West and homophobia in the Orient is Arab culture, which, in this permission structuring, Palestinian queers must concede to Israel's ethnic cleansing to truly be free. Cultural (or literal in over 40,000 instances) death is ostensibly the price for queer Palestinian liberation.

These rhetorical requirements for freedom mirror similar permission structuring in the U.S. Metronormative narratives pervade the Western queer imaginary: that if only one goes to college or moves to the big city or abandons their faith, *then* perhaps one can reap the rewards of

LGBTQ+ citizenship (Conner & Okamura, 2022). By this logic, queer Palestinians must do the same and give in to Israel's violent occupation if only to be welcomed into the fold of global LGBTQ+ liberation. Surely queers cannot experience joy or liberation or community while living in those backwards places like Gaza or [insert conservative rural U.S. state here]. In this frame, queer necropolitics manifests for the Good Queer citizen-subject as life via death by, or death of, culture. The Palestinian queer must kill their homophobic Muslim Arab culture to be welcomed into the fold of Good Queer citizen-subjectivity. Not only do queer necropolitics dictate the lives and deaths of queer Palestinians in the material and corporeal sense, but the Good Queer citizen-subject only offers life on the nonnegotiable condition of cultural death. The image of the Good Queer that *The New York Times* invokes rhetorically eradicates culture for queer Palestinians, as its very construction as a desirable subjectivity is necessarily built upon the exclusion of Bad Queers who do not measure up to Western ideals for LGBTQ+ citizenship and belonging (Palczewski, 2016).

Bad Queers, Bad Citizens

The story of Israel's occupation of Palestine and genocide of Palestinians began decades, if not over a century (Haddad and Chughtai, 2023), before October 7, 2023, but its main characters continue to evolve even as they maintain homonationalist structuring of Good Queer citizen-subjectivities. The image of Yoav Atzmoni holding a pride flag over a decimated Gaza is a haunting reminder of who the heroes and villains are in the story of queers in Israel and Palestine (Israel, 2023). Through my examination of the rhetorical frames of the right to travel, the right to reproduce, and the queer necropolitics of the right to life via cultural death in a selection of *New York Times* articles, I illuminate a reading of pinkwashing as a subjectification strategy to rhetorically craft Good Queer citizens for the advancement and justification of the ongoing genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. In other words, the Good Queer is emerging as a main character in the story of Israel and Palestine who moves freely around the world, reproduces homonormative family structures, and denounces "homophobic" cultures.

This analysis contributes to the broader conversation about pinkwashing and its effects on how not only Western queers see themselves, but also how they see Palestinians and Israelis, and how those framings from prominent media voices like *The New York Times* create and maintain each other. Upon the LGBTQ+ community's emergence as a Western political coalition, neoliberalism jumps at the opportunity to consume its rhetorics of citizenship and belonging for the advancement of the U.S. imperial project under its guise of what Duggan (2015) refers to as "'optimistic cruelty' as the barely suppressed violence beneath the surface of neoliberal rationality" (p. 286), which includes Israel's genocide of Palestinians with the help of U.S. tax dollars at the behest of Good Queers (Zengerle, 2024).

This analysis also helps us better understand the ways that neoliberal pundits and settler colonial technologies like *The New York Times* weaponize existing political permission structuring processes to coopt ostensibly progressive rhetorics for the advancement of American capitalist empire (Bohan & Holland, 2021; Homer, 2023). Further studies should interrogate permission structures' affective and symbolic components, perhaps through the lens of Dana Cloud's (2018) theory of rhetorical realism. Especially in an era when the United States always seems to approach but never reach the "South Bank of the Rubicon" (Innuendo Studios, 2025),

determining and disrupting the ways that political actors and technologies use permission structuring to convince everyday Americans that they supposedly do not live in a fascist country (Bokat-Lindell, 2020) or that they do but the opposition party cannot do anything about it (Lerer & Epstein, 2025) is imperative for our survival.

Certainly, one limitation of this analysis is its centering of the Western queer at the expense of queer Palestinians who deserve to be heard. However, my situated knowledge as a white, educated, Western queer informs my convictions to critically analyze the ways that systems of oppression and violence fade into obscurity by rhetorically extending the boundaries of citizenship to people like me (and to clean house, so to speak). I also use this space to point readers to works in this scholarly conversation, several of which I have cited in this article, that center Palestinian voices and perspectives, such as Chávez's (2019) *Palestine on the Air* and Khalidi's (2020) *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*. As my analysis shows, Good Queer citizenship in the eyes of the West via one technical conduit, *The New York Times*, is always predicated upon stratification. Thus, any conception of exclusion in rhetorical citizenship must also attend to inclusion — who is left out while some are brought in? Empires are built upon zero-sum games of dominance to maintain their ideological grip on society, so analyzing the ways that they bring Good Queers into the fold by coopting rhetorics of resistance is just as necessary as the study of the subjectivity of the bad queer. I look forward to engaging with future scholarship that addresses the gaps and weaknesses in my evaluation of Good and Bad Queers to further demystify, dismantle, and displace rhetorics of LGBTQ+ citizenship that are built upon violence against Palestinians and countless others who are deemed unworthy of belonging. I also look forward to engaging with future scholarship that analyzes other prominent media voices beyond *The New York Times*.

Finally, this article serves in part as a warning to fellow queers: do not get comfortable. Comfort is a sign of complacency, normativity, and consensus — all tools used by agents of oppression to placate resistance efforts and obscure the state's power over us and how we see ourselves in our own permission structuring processes. We must always tug at the threads of stability and wonder at the benefits that states like the U.S. and Israel obtain from our subjectivities, from our very senses of self. In the zero-sum game of imperialism, comfort *always* comes at a cost, and there is *always* someone below us, in this case anyone who is a Bad Queer citizen, who must pay the fee, often with their lives. I agree with Said (2003) that we are all "perfectly capable of freeing [ourselves] from... ideological straitjacket[s]" (p. 326), which necessarily includes criticism of our own positions in rhetorics of belonging, citizenship, and subjectivity. With this charge in mind, I invite fellow scholars and organizers alike to always interrogate each new iteration of Western belonging with a critical eye and consider how even the most radical politics of LGBTQ+ liberation today might be coopted by the neoliberal imperial apparatus tomorrow, especially when those politics exclude Bad Queers that do not fit into normative conceptions of citizenship. I suspect that the possibilities for liberation and true belonging lie in the hands of Bad Queers and bad citizens, so we therefore must challenge and shed the comforts, material and symbolic, of the Good Queer life to affect change and resist annihilation. The first step is to work tirelessly and ruthlessly toward justice and liberation for Palestinians.[2]

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