

## **PALESTINE: LGBTQI+**

### **PALESTINIAN ORGANISATIONS**

#### **Al Qaws**

'alQaws for Sexual & Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society, a civil society organization founded in grassroots activism'.

(ENG) <http://alqaws.org/siteEn/index> (ARABIC) <http://www.alqaws.org/site/index/language/ar>

Listening and Information Line: <http://alqaws.org/listening-and-information-line> (ENG)

Phone Support: 072-2220202 (Palestine)

Chat Support: [www.alkhat.org](http://www.alkhat.org) (ARABIC)

Psychotherapy /Counselling through a network of LGBTQ friendly therapists across Palestine:  
<http://alqaws.org/our-projects/Support-Counseling>

Bhebek Aamin (Arabic for "I Want You Safe") is a safer sex healthcare initiative.

(For further information about Bhebek Aamin email AlQaws at: [b7ebk.2amn@alqaws.org](mailto:b7ebk.2amn@alqaws.org))

(ENG) <http://www.alqaws.org/health-initiative>

(ARABIC) <http://www.alqaws.org/%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%A8%D9%83-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86>

(ENG) <http://www.alqaws.org/singing-sexuality> Singing Sexuality is a Palestinian youth music project, which aims to open new discussions about sexuality and gender diversity in Palestinian society through music. <http://www.ghanni.net/> (ARABIC)

**Al Qadita** (ARABIC) <https://www.qadita.net/category/archive/queers/>

#### **Aswat - Palestinian Feminist Center for Gender and Sexual Freedoms**

Aswat <https://www.aswatgroup.org/>

A grassroots, intersectional feminist, queer movement to increase visibility for different sexuality and gender expressions in Palestinian society.

On 'pinkwashing' (ENG) <https://bdsmovement.net/pinkwashing>

Palestinian Queers for BDS (ENG) <https://pqbds.wordpress.com/about/>

### **TALKS AND ARTICLES**

*Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique* Dr. Sa'ed Atshan (2020) Stanford University Press.  
(ENG)

Special Issue: Queering Palestine: Introduction

Leila Farsakh, Rhoda Kanaanah, Sherene Seikaly

Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (Spring 2018), p. 7

PDF TEXT (ENG)

To Exist is to Resist: Palestine and the Question of Queer Theory

Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (Spring 2018), p. 13

PDF TEXT (ENG)

Psychic Refuge [psychicrefuge.com](http://psychicrefuge.com)

Decolonial Queering: The Politics of Being Queer in Palestine Walaa AlQaisiya  
Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (Spring 2018), p. 29 PDF TEXT (ENG)

Other Scenes of Speaking: Listening to Palestinian Anti-Colonial Critique  
Mikki Stelder  
Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (Spring 2018), p. 45 PDF TEXT (ENG)

Roundtable on Palestinian Studies and Queer Theory  
Nadine Naber, Sa'ed Atshan, Nadia Awad, Maya Mikdashi, Sofian Merabet, Dorgham Abusalim,  
Nada Elia  
Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (Spring 2018), p. 62  
PDF TEXT (ENG)

"Israel/Palestine and the Queer International"  
Sarah Schulman and Karma R. Chávez  
Source: Journal of Civil and Human Rights , Vol. 5, Palestine on the Air (2019), pp. 139- 157  
PDF TEXT (ENG)

Rarely Intersectional: Experiences of Queer Palestinians in Israel  
Alissa Fromkin and Dan Ward (2016)  
PDF TEXT (ENG)

Queering the occupation: From zionist sexual politics to Palestinian decolonial-queer imaginaries  
Stelder, M.L. (2018)  
PDF TEXT (ENG)

Solidarity at Risk: The Politics of Attachment in Transnational Queer Palestine Solidarity and Anti-  
Pinkwashing Activism  
Natalie Kouri-Towe (2015) (PhD thesis)  
PDF TEXT (ENG)

Queer Checkpoints: Sexuality, Survival, and the Paradoxes of Sovereignty in Israel-Palestine  
Jason Todd Ritchie (2010) (PhD thesis)  
PDF TEXT (ENG)

Aswat Publications  
[LINK: https://www.aswatgroup.org/publications](https://www.aswatgroup.org/publications)  
PDF Publications TEXT (ARABIC) (ENG)

Leil-Zahra Mortada (2015) '*Israel kills people like me, Israel exploits queers like me*' [LINK: https://www.leilzahra.com/index.html?p=997](https://www.leilzahra.com/index.html?p=997)) (ENG)

*Gay Rights as Human Rights: Pink-washing Homonationalism*  
Maya Mikdashi, for Jadaliyya  
[LINK: https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/24855/Gay-Rights-as-Human-Rights-Pinkwashing-Homonationalism](https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/24855/Gay-Rights-as-Human-Rights-Pinkwashing-Homonationalism)

Psychic Refuge [psychicrefuge.com](http://psychicrefuge.com)

'The Burden of Queer Palestine' (2013) Nayrouz A.H.

<http://distanceimplications.blogspot.com/2013/07/the-burden-of-queer-palestine.html> (ENG)

*Beyond Propaganda: Reorienting Anti-Pinkwashing Organizing* (2020)

A Community Conversation w/ alQaws & Adalah Justice Project

Speakers: Sumaya Awad, Adalah Justice Project

Haneen Maikey, alQaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society

Moderated by Nasreen Abd Elal, alQaws 2020 Summer Fellow

LINK TO TALK: <https://www.adalahjusticeproject.org/equalityreport/2020/10/27/beyond-propaganda-reorienting-anti-pinkwashing-organizing>

Walaa AlQaisiya 'Decolonial Queering: The Politics of Being Queer in Palestine'

Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (Spring 2018), pp. 29-44

Sarah Lamble (2013) 'Queer Necropolitics and the Expanding Carceral State: Interrogating Sexual Investments in Punishment' (2013) Law and Critique Vol. 24, pp. 229–253 (2013).

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10978-013-9125-1>

Haritaworn (2015), in Nayrouz Abu Hatoum and Ghaida Moussa (2018) 'Queering Urban Justice: Queer of Colour Formations in Toronto'. Edited by Jin Haritaworn, Ghaida Moussa, and Syrus Marcus Ware, with Río Rodríguez. University of Toronto Press

## **FILMS**

*In Between* (2016) by Palestinian director Maysaloun Hamoud about three Palestinian women living in Tel Aviv, and includes explorations of gender and sexuality. There was some criticism around re-enforcing some stereotyped views of Palestinian gender relations, however this film is also based on her lived experiences. Some reactions from extremely conservative state and religious groups in Palestine and Israel suggest that these critical conversations still need to be had to change mainstream perceptions.

*Chic Point: Fashion for Israeli Checkpoints* (2003) by artist Sharif Waked is an absurd take on the brutal reality of checkpoints and security checks enforced on Palestinians when crossing the apartheid wall. It takes stereotypes of mainstream and superficial elements of LGBTQI+ culture, that for example may be marketed in Israel e.g. Tel Aviv, combined with the brutal reality of military occupation.

A comparatively better representation in film is *Oriented* (2015, Dir. Jake Witzenfeld, with Khader Abu Seif, Fadi Daeem, Naeem Jiryas), a documentary in which LGBTQI+ Palestinian are speaking for themselves especially around stereotypes of being 'victims' needing to be 'saved'.

However due to disparities in film funding and cultural infrastructures, a non-Palestinian making the film is more likely to have access to the resources to make and distribute it. Al Qaws wrote a response, about not needing more representations by non-Palestinians, and how the film still (unintentionally) perpetuates reductive stereotypes, and about taking control of their own self-representation (LINK: [http://www.alqaws.org/news/alQaws-Opinion-Piece-about-the-Documentary-Oriented-?category\\_id=19](http://www.alqaws.org/news/alQaws-Opinion-Piece-about-the-Documentary-Oriented-?category_id=19))

## **LGBTQI+ Politics and mental health (Psychic Refuge/Sophie Hoyle)**

LGBTQI+ people are a demographic(s) disproportionately affected by mental health issues, globally as well as in Palestine. There are complex intersections of identity and lived realities for different LGBTQI+ Palestinians (e.g. class, age, cultural or religious beliefs) and I don't want to perpetuate reductive stereotypes of Palestinian LGBTQI+ people; however it's important to acknowledge that there are social, familial and legal pressures to conform to heteronormative expectations of marriage and family, in addition to the daily life of occupation and violence, and so like everyone in Palestine they form multiple ways to survive and resist.

In discussing LGBTQI+ in Palestine, there are binary oppositions positioning Queerness as inherently 'Western', and therefore associated with 'imperialism', 'collaborationism, and thus the (dis)honor of the nation' (AlQaisiya (2018: 37), as opposed to a heteronormativity aligned with Palestinian struggle for independence by leading political groups. However, this overlooks the significance of social movements and activists in Palestine and the diaspora that intersect queerness, feminism and radical anti-colonial resistance, both historically and currently. There are ongoing tensions between Palestinian LGBTQI+ groups being able to access the resources to be able to sustain themselves and their communities, and the fact that these are external sources of funding from international aid and NGOs, as there is no LGBTQI+ funding from the Palestinian Authority (PA). The formalisation and institutionalisation of LGBTQI+ rights within international human rights discourse, has tended to follow a specific template and narrative of LGBTQI+ 'visibility' (e.g., 'coming out' 'pride' and public visibility) that originates from LGBTQI+ groups in a Western cultural context. This template is then imposed onto a different cultural context, without engaging with, responding and adapting to the local needs of these LGBTQI+ communities.

Since the early 1990s and the 'Oslo peace process', 'international' and Israeli organisations have worked collaboratively with Palestinian groups; however, this often meant adopting an 'apolitical' approach that wasn't explicitly anti-occupation<sup>1</sup>, and could often end up becoming neo-colonial. Western and Israeli organisations can instrumentalise a specific narrative of 'oppression' that legitimise external intervention on organisational, governmental and military levels, to 'save' LGBTQI+ groups through a specific form of 'democratic' intervention<sup>2</sup>. There are grassroots, bottom-up community-led Queer movements (e.g., Al Qaws), that are inherently anti-occupation, and which aim to resist the normalisation of the language and ideology of international aid or NGOs in understanding Palestinian Queerness<sup>3</sup>. However, in even utilising queer theory that stems from a Euro-Anglo context, 'to some degree' enacts 'the epistemic violence it seeks to

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<sup>1</sup> Walaa AlQaisiya (2018) Decolonial Queering: The Politics of Being Queer in Palestine Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (Spring 2018), pp. 29-44.

<sup>2</sup> Saleem Haddad (2007) 'The Myth of the Queer Arab'. Haddad has noted how there is a 'dual struggle: we are battling oppressive forces within our own communities, and we are also resisting the global narrative that tries to use our "oppression" for broader military or political goals.' In this article they use the term 'Queer Arabs', however, this text cannot speak for a broad variety of different communities in the MENA, by ethnicity, class, age, religion etc. and their different experiences and perspectives.

<sup>3</sup> Walaa AlQaisiya (2018) Decolonial Queering: The Politics of Being Queer in Palestine Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (Spring 2018), pp. 29-44.

counter.’ (Lamble, 2013)<sup>4</sup>. Grassroots groups aim to frame LGBTQI+ existence in their own terms, and demonstrate that changes can be slow, cumulative and not necessarily visible in a specific way<sup>5</sup> that may be comparable to other contexts. Many people have noted the fact that some repressive social norms are partly due to a history of Western intervention, invasion and tactical political alliances in the MENA region<sup>6</sup>.

Pinkwashing is ‘is an Israeli government propaganda strategy that cynically exploits LGBTQIA+ rights to project a progressive image while concealing Israel’s occupation and apartheid policies oppressing Palestinians<sup>7</sup>. Israel is marketed globally for international gay tourism (e.g. Tel Aviv), with self-promotion as ‘the only democracy in the Middle East’, while also actively representing Palestine as inherently homophobic, transphobic and oppressive to LGBTQI+ minorities. Israeli homonationalism (Puar, 2017) following wider trend now that LGBTQI+ groups have been assimilated into the mainstream with marriage rights and revoking bans from the military.

In Palestine there are social, familial and legal pressures to conform to expectations of marriage and family, and homophobia as there is in any society, due to a number of different reasons (cultural or religious belief, economic, family legacy), and the risk of LGBTQ+ minorities being exposed or persecuted can be based on social differences e.g. class, that may be able to afford you the privilege of privacy and safety; for example, in Palestinian context, extended families may all live together for cultural reasons and/or out of poverty. The Israeli State uses this situation to blackmail LGBTQI+ Palestinians into being ‘informers’, by threatening to inform their family if they don’t comply. There are further inequalities in the treatment of LGBTQI+ Palestinians living within Israel compared to non-Palestinians.

International alliances with LGBTQI+ Palestinians have their own ethical considerations, in how to form a solidarity that is more than performative, and that doesn’t instrumentalise Queer Palestinians for their own associations of radical queerness as a social currency and as a kind of

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Lamble (2013) Queer Necropolitics and the Expanding Carceral State: Interrogating Sexual Investments in Punishment (2013) Law and Critique Vol. 24, pp. 229–253 (2013).  
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10978-013-9125-1>

<sup>5</sup> As writer Zizi notes in their article ‘On the Possibility of Being a Queer Arab’ (2016) there is ‘the problem of recognising incremental change’, and there ‘can be no denying that, within a larger context of the battle for rights and freedoms, LGBT communities have achieved progress on this issue of visibility and rights. Not as much as we would like, and not on the scope and scale we aspire to, but this incremental and accumulative process has had an undeniable effect.’ Zizi (2016) <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/05/01/opinion/society/on-the-possibility-of-being-a-queer-arab/>

<sup>6</sup> Some have commented that the supposed ‘intolerance’ towards LGBTQI+ people was imported by the West, with a blog post by Afdhere Jama, (2014) noting the incidence of Islamic countries *without* anti-homosexual laws were also those never colonised by the British. This is not to say that there wasn’t any prejudice or homophobia (as it is now known), as there have historically been, and continue to be, broad social and religious codes for decency and anti-debauchery, but that the social construction of homosexuality as a separate category is a Western import that didn’t have historical precedence before imperialist intervention. However, this is not to over-romanticise versions of pre-colonial Palestine, but acknowledge the sociohistorical and imperialist construction of homophobia.

<sup>7</sup> Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS): Pinkwashing <https://bdsmovement.net/pinkwashing>

nostalgia for previous forms of queer organising in North America and Europe (Abu Hatoum, Moussa, 2018)<sup>8</sup>.

While 'pinkwashing' Maikey (2013)— a term for North American/European queer activism that aims to increase awareness of Israeli pinkwashing— can be essential and useful, the framing of the conversation often doesn't allow a more in-depth exploration of the ideology of Israeli settler-colonialism<sup>9</sup>. AlQaisiya (2018) notes that Puar and Mikdashi (2012) wrote about activism around Israeli pinkwashing is speaking a similar language of homonationalism, but in reverse through Palestinian homo-nationalism. However, as AlQaisiya (2018: 36) notes, this 'overlooks the centrality of nationalist struggles to anti-colonial resistance from the standpoint of native people', whereby nationalism has a very different resonance for an occupied people. It is still important to explore how to form Queer communities and spaces beyond the nation-state, and to 'disidentify with the dominant gendered paradigms enshrined in Palestinian nationalist thought' (AlQaisiya, 2018:38).

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<sup>8</sup> Haritaworn (2015), in Nayrouz Abu Hatoum and Ghaida Moussa (2018) 'Queering Urban Justice: Queer of Colour Formations in Toronto'. Edited by Jin Haritaworn, Ghaida Moussa, and Syrus Marcus Ware, with Ríó Rodríguez. University of Toronto Press.

<sup>9</sup> A more in-depth exploration of the role of pinkwashing in settler-colonialism beyond being just a marketing tool: *Beyond Propaganda: Reorienting Anti-Pinkwashing Organizing* <https://www.adalahjusticeproject.org/equalityreport/2020/10/27/beyond-propaganda-reorienting-anti-pinkwashing-organizing>