Queer Settler Colonialism in Canada and Israel: Articulating Two-Spirit and Palestinian Queer Critiques

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This essay plies potential connections among Two-Spirit and Palestinian queer critiques to advance a comparative analysis of queer settler colonialism in Canada and Israel. A broad literature in indigenous studies and at its intersections with queer studies now centres the intellectual and political interventions of Indigenous LGBTQ/Two-Spirit people in North America. In turn, after years of organising among Palestinian LGBTQ people in Palestine, Israel, and the diaspora, a broad array of queer critiques of gender and sexuality in Israel/Palestine recently has appeared in social movements and scholarship. This essay compares Two-Spirit and Palestinian queer critiques so as to newly examine the sexualisation of settler colonialism in Canada and Israel. The essay cites an extensive literature on queer settler colonialism in the Americas, and its comparability with queer Palestinian critiques, to illuminate the specificity of queer settler colonialism in Israel. An extended analysis of Eytan Fox's 2006 film The Bubble *assists in diagnosing the complicities and investments in settler colonialism that characterise contemporary Israeli LGBTQ politics. The essay concludes by demonstrating how such comparisons deepen knowledge of the* relational *formation of settler colonialisms, and of their inherently gendered and sexualised formation.*

Conflicts over 'queer solidarity' meaningfully inflect contemporary settler colonialisms and their global interconnections. As the protection of sexual/gender diversity becomes a hallmark of liberal modernity, while homonationalism compels queer communities to act in concert with state authority, 'queer solidarity' becomes an axis around which settler colonialisms form, interconnect, and propagate in the worlds that queer activists cross. These effects proceed from settler colonialism acting as a primary condition of queer politics within settler states, as argued in the critical theories-from-activism of Two-Spirit people (Indigenous LGBTQ people in North America)

and queer Palestinians. Their work centers critiques of heteropatriarchy and homonationalism within colonised peoples' struggles for decolonisation, and calls all participants in settler societies, queer or otherwise, to respond.

This essay plies potential connections among Two-Spirit and Palestinian queer critiques to advance a comparative analysis of queer settler colonialism in Canada and Israel. My comparison is motivated by a current political situation that links these two states. Canadian queer politics recently have been focused on debating their relationship to racism and settler colonialism, in the wake of the formation of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA). QuAIA mobilises queer people in Canada – Jewish and Palestinian, people of colour and white people – to critique 'pinkwashing', or efforts to deflect criticism of Israel and its occupation of Palestine by calling for international queer solidarity with Israel as protector of gay rights in the Middle East (see Nada Elia, this volume). QuAIA argues that queers in Canada should form solidarity with queer Palestinians who challenge Israeli racism and settler-colonisation of the Palestinian people and their lands. Conflict over their critique within Canadian queer politics led to the ban, readmission, and withdrawal of QuAIA from the Toronto Pride celebration, with reverberations throughout Canada as provincial and federal representatives used this conflict to further their attempt to ban references to 'Israeli apartheid'.[1] This public conflict over queer complicity in racism or settler colonialism follows forty years of Indigenous LGBTQ and Two-Spirit people already having demanded that queer non-natives challenge their complicity in settler colonialism *in Canada*. Such efforts continue today, as in the defense of indigenous nations and work for indigenous decolonisation by the Toronto-based Native Youth Sexual Health Network and its founding director Jessica Danforth. Yet even their dynamic Two-Spirit activism has not raised the same degree of response in Canada as the question of queer complicity in settler colonialism 'elsewhere'.

Interrupting any disconnect among queer critiques of settler colonialism, this essay compares Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian critiques so as to newly examine the sexualisation of settler colonialism in Canada and Israel. The essay uses this comparison to ask how an extensive literature on queer settler colonialism in the

Americas might illuminate the specificity of this process in Palestine/Israel. On this basis, the essay concludes by asking how comparison may deepen knowledge of the *relational* formation of settler colonialisms – in this case, in Canada and Israel. The relative attention given to settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine vis-à-vis in Canada indicates one way that settler colonialism may function relationally to perpetuate its naturalisation. In turn, the application of a critique of queer settler colonialism from the North American context to both Canada and Israel denaturalises that power and the manner in which it may connect across multiple locations. My analysis proceeds from my having been called as a white and non-Jewish settler critic in Canada, long responsible to Two-Spirit people when interpreting queer settler colonialism, to confront how this process imbues current political linkages between Canada and Israel. In this context, I interpret how Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian critiques diagnose settler colonialism from the perspectives of peoples subjected to it. Therefore, while this essay arises in relation to alliance politics, its stakes are in tension with mythologies of 'queer solidarity'. Centering anticolonialism parochialises and displaces the global gestures of 'queer solidarity': whether bespoken by Israelis or by Canadians, in defense or in critique of the state of Israel. By contrast, my alliance politics engage the responsibility of queer settlers in Canada and Israel to the peoples whom those states occupy and displace: and, in a queer analysis, peoples who are collectively *queered* by the sexual civilisationalism that settlers assert and rule. The sexualisation of settler colonialism is denaturalised by the decolonising critiques of queer Palestinian and Two-Spirit people. Settlers must respond by applying these critiques to challenge the colonial conditions of their lives, societies, and politics and in that way open them to radical change.

TWO-SPIRIT CRITIQUES AND QUEER SETTLER COLONIALISM IN NORTH AMERICA

A broad literature in Indigenous studies and at its intersections with queer studies now centers the intellectual and political interventions of Indigenous LGBTQ people in Canada and the United States.[2] On first organising nearly forty years ago, LGBTQ people from

indigenous nations across these territories generated knowledge about their lives and their nations' traditions. In 1990, this led to reclaiming their belonging in indigenous traditions by complementing or displacing European gender and sexual categories with the indigenist identity 'Two-Spirit'. Within 'Two-Spirit critiques' (Qwo-Li Driskill's phrase), Indigenous LGBTQ people described the colonial inculcation among indigenous nations of binary sex/gender and heteronormativity, and their current assertions of gender and sexual diversity (as in the term 'Two-Spirit') as a resurgence of tradition and a catalyst for their nations' decolonisation.[3]

Inspired and affirmed by Indigenous feminist thought, Two-Spirit critiques explain settler colonialism *as* sexual colonisation. Indigenous feminists have argued that impositions of heteropatriarchy through the nuclear family, private property, and capitalist economics attempt to isolate, disperse, and eliminate indigenous modes of kinship and relationship to land.[4] This colonial process targeted for elimination persons whose gender or sexuality deviated from settler norms; but this was done to 'queer' indigenous *peoples* and to make the 'straightening out' of their nations and cultures (in Mark Rifkin's formulation) a hallmark of colonial rule.[5] In this context, when Indigenous LGBTQ people form Two-Spirit movements – as when the Native Youth Sexual Health Network organises in Canada and the US to promote gender/sexual diversity and sexual and reproductive choice – they pursue not a 'gender' or 'sexual' politics, alone, but a renewal of indigenous traditions of personhood and governance that can spark and lead collective work for decolonisation.

My scholarship answers the model of Two-Spirit organising – resisting colonial discipline; leading indigenous national resurgence – by examining how queer politics and 'queer solidarity' are conditioned, or indeed *produced* by settler colonialism.[6] In the multiracial spaces of white settler states that practice state multiculturalism, gender and sexual minority movements can pursue freedom by securing minority rights. As I explain in *Spaces between Us*, during the twentieth century multiracial queer politics in the US and Canada formed as normatively white, non-native, and settler-colonial by making the settler state their horizon of freedom, thereby failing to heed Two-Spirit activist calls for decolonising settler

society. This effect followed whether non-native queer politics entirely ignored Two-Spirit people – echoing the settler logic that indigeneity has 'disappeared' – or adopted Two-Spirit people into a 'queer solidarity' that centered shared gender/sexuality over national differences, while promising indigenous people 'freedom' if they align with settlers. Two-Spirit activists long argued what I reiterate: queer settler colonialism readily follows if queer politics in settler states propose that gender or sexuality bridge or supersede indigenous national differences, thereby making queer freedom compatible with perpetuating settler colonialism.

Increasingly, settler states appeal to gender and sexual diversity to secure their rule, in the era of state multiculturalism absorbing social differences so as to neutralise their capacity to disturb national unity. Queer politics ply multiculturalism by representing as a minority analogous to the racial or national groups the state domesticates through 'inclusion', just as professing their own diversity (such as, by 'including' Two-Spirit people) makes them representative of the very racial/national differences that the state seeks. Only a strong critique of multiculturalism *as* settler-colonialism will disrupt queer politics that remain normatively white and settler-colonial from securing protected inclusion in the settler state. I refer to all such processes as evidence of 'settler homonationalism', and all as disrupted by Two-Spirit activists who, by aligning with their own nations, hold queer non-natives to their *sustained national differences* on occupied indigenous lands. In answer, non-native queer critics of settler colonialism will trouble the legitimacy, integrity, and permanence of settler states, accountable not just to Two-Spirit people but to the resistant nations to which they belong.

While these characterisations of Two-Spirit critiques call for political responsibility from theorists and activists, my historical and cultural analyses specify *how* queer settler colonialism comes into being and *how* settler hegemonies persist and may be displaced. I take particular inspiration from scholarship in colonial and Indigenous studies on settler subjectivity as a liminal space between civilisational modernity and a primitivity it must supplant.[7] Settler subjects and societies are defined by the contradiction of seeking to disavow and transcend that which exists in perpetual relationship to

them: the landed memories and persistent survival of indigenous peoples, coded in colonial discourse as a primitive root of settlers' modern lives. Writing in the US context, Philip Deloria sourced settler citizenship to a seemingly contradictory demand to control primitive drives for civilised society, and to use Indian impersonation to express opposition to the terms of rule thereby reconciling settlers to settler society.[8] In like manner, *queer* settler colonialism forms by claiming a kind of kinship with indigenous gender and sexual diversity – including, its appearance of 'opposition' to settler norms – while adapting this kinship to secure non-native inclusion in the civilisational future of a settler nation.

For all subjects positioned as settlers, queer or otherwise, alignment with the progressive future of settler modernity naturalises and secures their emplacement on occupied indigenous lands, making their presence seem inevitable and incontestable. To critique settler subjectivity, then, is consonant with broader political critiques of settler-colonial governance, for all these must start by denaturalising the ruse of permanence that undergirds settler societies. Belief in the necessity of settler colonialism continuing unchallenged into a progressive future stands in the way of opening the existence of settler societies to radical critique and transformation. My scholarship indicates that if this critical recognition can follow from a structural analysis of political relationships, it also can follow from a studied analysis of the subject of settlement. For, ultimately, the subject's affective investments in emplacement are at stake, and only once the subject constructed as a settler is *unsettled* of its attachments to occupation will, I argue, any broader political transformation become possible.

Such calls often elicit a response that the entrenchment of settler states in the Americas prevents their fundamental transformation: in effect, the political decolonisation of indigenous nations seems impossible. Indigenous activists already recognise that decolonisation must take many routes, so that at times decolonising culture or intra-community relations will be centered. Yet actual political independence remains on the table, as when the Ka'Lahui Hawaii or the Owe Aku International Justice Project lobby the United Nations to honour international treaties guaranteeing independence to (respectively) the Kanaka Maoli and Lakota peoples.

Crucially, persons who defend traditions that today may be called Two-Spirit help lead such work, such as Hina Wong (Kanaka Maoli), who lives within the traditional Hawaiian role of *mahu* while organising for Hawaiian sovereignty, or Kent Lebsock (Lakota), co-director of Owe Aku and former leader of New York City's first Two-Spirit organisation WeWah and BarCheeAmpe.[9]

I submit that the seeming intractability of settler colonialism in the Americas and the Pacific buttresses defenders of Israel to propose that Israeli settlement in Palestine cannot be changed. Indeed, the normalisation of Israel as a Jewish settler state throughout the late twentieth century, despite UN recognition of Palestinians as a displaced people, demonstrates how readily settler colonialism can become naturalised. This also results if states defending Israel, such as Canada, frame Israel as permanent because to do so insulates their *own* past and present settler-colonial formation from question. To suggest that indigenous decolonisation in one settler state is impossible naturalises settler colonisation in other settler states, making the claim complicit in the occupation it names *and* in all others reinforced in its wake. As a result, how queer non-natives respond to Two-Spirit critiques in Canada will inform how they comprehend any instance of settler colonialism elsewhere, such as in Israel. Yet I submit that Israeli settler colonialism will be undone only if we are willing also to consider the undoing of Canadian settler colonialism; and, in turn, learning how to displace the Israeli settler subject may teach us how to more effectively displace Canadian settlers as well.

I therefore pursue a comparative reading of queer settler colonialism in Israel not only because it has been elicited by Canadian queer politics, but also in the hope that its comparison will be informative of queer settler colonialism in both locations. As indicated, a broad literature exists for readers to reference on Two-Spirit critiques and queer settler colonialism in North America, which I have reviewed to set up my presentation of more recent Palestinian queer critiques, and on that basis attempt (to my knowledge) one of the first accounts of the specificity of Israeli queer settler colonialism. Not having done research in Israel, I adapt knowledge produced in the Americas to comparatively (re)interpret narratives of

Israel and engage scholars of Israel/Palestine and of comparative settler colonialisms in new analysis.

PALESTINIAN QUEER CRITIQUES AND QUEER SETTLER COLONIALISM IN ISRAEL

After years of organising among Palestinian LGBTQ people in Palestine, Israel, and the diaspora, a broad array of queer critiques of gender and sexuality in Israel/Palestine has appeared in social movements and in queer studies. Al Qaws (founded 2001), Aswat: Palestinian Lesbian Women (founded 2003), and linked networks in 2010 responded to a homonationalist turn in Israeli politics by allying to form Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (PQBDS). The group's web presence and 2011 US tour raised the profile of Palestinian queer critics of the occupation, notably through their critique of pinkwashing and their calls to queers internationally to honour the BDS movement.[10]

Simultaneously, new work appeared in queer studies authored by Israeli and international scholars who are responding to Palestinian queer activist work.[11] Together, these works signal a new moment in which queer Palestinians are redefining life in Israel and Palestine while leading an international political response. Across the diversity of gender, class, citizenship/legal status, and residency evident in the membership of Al Qaws, Aswat, and other groups, their allied efforts have generated shared analyses that I refer to here as 'Palestinian queer critique'. Internationally, its most evident themes are the critique of pinkwashing and the call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions of Israel. Yet queer Palestinians also critique power within Israel/Palestine: in the sexualised racialisation of all Palestinians under Israeli rule; in the racism and settler colonialism structuring Israeli queer communities; and in the homonationalism of even Left/progressive Israeli queers who do not follow Palestinian critics in prioritising ending the occupation.

Broad recognition has accrued to the international scope of Palestinian queer critiques, which focus on disrupting Israeli state racism and settlement by critiquing pinkwashing. As Nada Elia explains, Palestinian queer critics argue that linking Israel to the

defense of LGBTQ human rights 'pinkwashes' Israel's violations of the human rights of Palestinians, while simultaneously attempting to align international queer communities with Israel rather than with queer Palestinians who critique the occupation as a condition of their oppression.[12] In turn, the impossibility of finding justice under Israeli law for Palestinians who live under occupation precludes any putative Israeli protection of queer Palestinians: for, as Aswat member Sami Shamali says, 'there is no magic pink door in the Apartheid Wall'.[13]

Palestinian Queers for BDS pursues this critique in its international tours and its web presence, which include video public service announcements calling for international solidarity. A key effect of such critiques has been the formation of international activist groups such as QuAIA that specifically target pinkwashing. The concept of pinkwashing has been compelling for solidarity work because it correctly names that promoting Israel as a gay-rights haven *already* invokes international solidarity, albeit to align queers worldwide with the Israeli state. When queers in other countries critique pinkwashing, they refuse to let their solidarity be distorted to sustain the oppression of queer Palestinians. QuAIA also allies with queer Israelis who join Palestinians in critiquing pinkwashing and in calling for an end to occupation, thereby seeking solutions whereby queers join across divisions in common cause. That said, any queer critiques of pinkwashing follow queer Palestinian demands, and all such critiques remain responsible to the defense of their lives in the racialised and sexualised spaces of occupied Palestine and the diaspora.

Less widely-known is the scope of critique by queer Palestinians and their allies in Israel: notably, of the sexualisation of racism and settler colonialism practiced by Israel, which illuminate how sexual, racial, and settler-colonial power operate in other contexts. Among such critiques, one with broad recognition in Israel names the racism in Israeli LGBTQ communities. Israeli and Palestinian LGBTQ organisations have recognised that Palestinians seeking access to Israeli groups face racism in the form of perceived threats, policing, or expulsion. Palestinians also argue that when participating in Israeli LGBTQ spaces, they face a racial/colonial fetishisation within Israeli sexual economies that projects mystery and sexual availability upon Palestinian bodies. Mark Ritchie notes

that the capacity of Israeli LGBTQ leaders to recognise that Palestinians face racial exclusions does not extend to asking what happens if Palestinians ever are *included*, given that some Israelis desire the integration of Palestinians into their racialised and exploitative sexual culture.[14] In turn, tracking racial exclusions may be amenable to liberal Israelis, given that it frames racism as situational rather than systemic, making their communities appear opposed to racism even if they fail to offer a structural analysis of why or how the Israeli state and society become racial and colonial in the first place.

Palestinian and allied critics also locate the marginalisation of queer Palestinians in a broader racialisation and sexualisation of Palestinians, all of which produces Israeli queers and the state as homonationalist. Israel's twentieth-century imagining as a Jewish state racialised its modernity as European and Western, and sexualised it by assuming modern heteronormativity. In both spatial and temporal terms, Israeli modernity then racialised and sexualised Palestinians as premodern by linking them to perversion and to a barbaric heteropatriarchy that the modern heteronormative Israeli society supersedes.[15] Israeli queer critics mark that a recent political moment shifted the heteronormativity of Israeli society to embrace LGBTQ people. Gil Hochberg explains that after years of challenging their marginalisation by the state, Israeli LGBTQ activists were surprised in the early 2000s to find conservative Israeli government representatives proposing to protect them as a testament to their enlightened rule.[16] In retrospect, this shift can be seen to coincide with the post-second *intifada* expansion of Israeli settlements and the stepping-up of pinkwashing campaigns, when Israel's 'brand' called for major overhaul.

In this context, if Israeli LGBTQ people accepted overtures of civic inclusion, achieving their long-sought goal affirmed conservative leadership and its entrenchment of the occupation. Marking this homonationalist convergence of queer aspirations and state designs is a hallmark of queer Palestinian critique, just as it resonates with international scholars of homonationalism who, following Jasbir Puar, argue that this mode of power produces queers 'as regulatory' over racialised sexual Others who are perceived to threaten the state that secures sexual rights.[17] Israeli homonationalism – whether

promoted by Israeli LGBTQ people or by the state – recapitulates accounts of Palestinians as a queered, racialised group that remains colonised due to its primitive endangerment of the sexual, racial, and national modernity that Israelis embody and enjoy. To the extent that this homonationalism arises to perpetuate the occupation and settlement of the Palestinian territories – not to mention the colonial processes that let Jewish settlers establish Israel in the first place – then it functions precisely as an Israeli form of settler homonationalism.

The queer Palestinian critiques examined here bear many potential resonances with Two-Spirit critiques. Palestinian critiques of European Jewish settlement as a project that proliferates colonial modernity link strongly to Two-Spirit critiques of colonial heteropatriarchy. Both affirm the Foucauldian insight that modern sexuality functions as biopower. Sexualisation enabled what Foucault called modern 'state racism' to racialise entire peoples as part of the life of the nation or as threats to be contained and eliminated: or, in Agamben's terms, to be placed in a state of exception, as 'bare life' perpetually subject to death.[18] Indigenous Americans and Palestinians appear conquered and displaced when sexualisation acts as an axis of colonial intervention. This implication is present in the critique of pinkwashing, which specifically challenges the idea that Israel represents 'modern' sexuality and sexual rights in the Middle East. Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian critiques also resonate in calling for decolonisation: by marking that Indigenous Americans and Palestinians are nations controlled by settler-colonial powers; and by asserting membership and leadership for Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian people in their nations, which by bridging divisions caused by heteropatriarchy forges stronger anticolonial resistance. In the process, queer Palestinian and Two-Spirit critiques expose queer settler colonialism in the societies that occupy them, and hold queer movements accountable across sustained national differences.

Recognising such resonances requires countering any sense of unbridgeable difference among Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian people. This perception could arise if claims by Two-Spirit people on a traditional acceptance of gender/sexual diversity seem incomparable to the relationship of queer Palestinians to tradition. Israeli critics of queer Palestinian activism already tell Orientalist

stories of heterosexist Arab societies riven by premodern and patriarchal sexual systems that bear no capacity to embrace queer people. Such narratives appear to justify portraying Israel as queer Palestinians' only protector. The critique of colonial discourse in queer Palestinian and Two-Spirit critiques offers a strong basis for suspicion of Israeli stories about Arab or Muslim sexual cultures, just as (amid ongoing debate) scholars in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies are tracing histories of gender/sexual diversity in Middle Eastern and Muslim societies that colonial accounts obscure.[19] Yet, as noted, this entire line of discussion is a distraction from the call by Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian critics to members of the settler societies that occupy them: to critique their colonial power and to reject the authority it grants them to dictate colonised people's lives. Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian activists clearly argue that they should achieve liberation *in* their nations, so that if anyone else were to attempt to liberate them – even in the name of queer/feminist 'solidarity' – this would extend the power of settler colonialism. Again, any perception of Palestinian queers as improbable subjects or as incomparable to Two-Spirit people tracks Orientalist and homonationalist stories that reinforce settler rule. In contrast, whenever Two-Spirit people or queer Palestinians frame sexual colonisation as conditional of the colonisation of their *peoples*, they become principled leaders of anticolonial critique; and in Palestine, critiques of pinkwashing as a locus of Israeli power make queer Palestinians crucial interlocutors in advancing the national struggle.

Finally, in the racial and settler colonial frames of both Canadian and Israeli society, a seeming contrast between the gender/sexual traditions of Palestine, or of Indigenous American nations also characterises the distinct ways in which queer settlers engage them. I agree that on settler-colonial terms, Indigenous Americans and Palestinians seem to be opposed along an axis (respectively) of traditional acceptance vs. traditional rejection of gender/sexual diversity. Yet, I argue, this apparent difference informs the specific kinds of queer settlers on their respective lands who enact queer settler colonialism by inheriting them as their history. In *Spaces between Us* I argue that queer non-natives in North America tell stories about traditional indigenous acceptance of gender/sexual diversity to satisfy their own desires to belong to stolen land and settler society. When queer non-natives consume

Two-Spirit histories as their settler patrimony, they exemplify Deloria's argument that settlers incorporate the 'primitivity' of those whom they believe they supplant as a history that they must possess and transcend to attain their own modernity.[20]

Taking inspiration from this reading, I am interested in the possibility that Israelis narrate an Orientalised Arab sexual history as that which they simultaneously desire and transcend when arguing their belonging to Israeli sexual modernity. In this progression, Israeli queer settlers realise their modernity by progressing past sexual limitations in Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim societies, while simultaneously imagining those societies' sexual cultures to be part of their own history and desires. I now pursue this analysis by considering the specificity of queer settler colonialism in Israel as portrayed by an especially nuanced representation: Eytan Fox's 2006 film *The Bubble*. In this visual text, and in its resonance with queer Palestinian critiques, I perceive the Israeli queer settler forming as a subject caught between a modern Jewish future it seeks and a primitive Palestinian history it inherits on 'its own' land, even while positioning that history in a past that does not displace the Israeli present. This subject traverses guilt and denial to ameliorate both by imagining non-colonising queer kinship with its Palestinian precursors; and, hence, a reconciliation of settlers to past *and* future settlement.

POPPING *THE BUBBLE*

The titular character of *The Bubble* is the LGBTQ and liberal Jewish community of Tel Aviv: a 'bubble', which Fox suggests has insulated the human characters' carefree middle-class-consumer lives from the Palestinian occupation, which remains largely out-of-sight.[21] In this respect, the film may be read as a critique of liberal Israeli complicity in sustaining state violence. Fox marks his intentions when the film opens not amid the languorous urban pleasures that will dominate its first half, but in a brief, gripping scene at a West Bank checkpoint. Nearing the end of his military service, the Jewish protagonist Noam (played by Ohad Knoller) assists in detaining a pregnant Palestinian woman, and then meets the film's Palestinian protagonist, Ashraf (played by Yousef Sweid) for the first time. The

scene's importance rests partly in its portrayal of the trauma of detention, which resolves as the Palestinian woman enters labour and symbolically gives birth to a healthy child with the collective aid of other detained Palestinians. The scene affirms Mark Ritchie's claim that the phobic surveillance of Palestinian queers in Israel is comparable not to the privatised Western metaphor of 'the closet' but to the public Israeli practice of 'the checkpoint': as when Ashraf answers soldiers' demands to show that he is not carrying weapons by provocatively lifting his shirt to expose his muscular chest to Noam's view in an exchange that is at once homoerotic and colonial.[22] Yet Fox ultimately frames this scene to establish Noam as a sympathetic character, in his assistance of the birth *and*, I would argue, his attraction to Ashraf: for the audience is invited to perceive Noam's desire to 'join' with a subject Palestinian man as a promise to ameliorate the violence that places them in a relationship.

The film's plot, which I must immediately spoil, follows Ashraf's tour to the Tel Aviv gay community, where he and Noam begin a sexual relationship until Ashraf suddenly returns to his family in Nablus after being identified as a Palestinian illegally residing in Israel. Noam's obsession after Ashraf's departure leads him to sneak in disguise into the West Bank and gain access to Ashraf's family home, where before returning to Israel he privately confronts Ashraf with his love only to be caught kissing him by Ashraf's older brother, Jihad. This discovery sets off a chain of events in which Ashraf's family members reject him. On the presumptive inadmissibility of Ashraf's sexuality, Jihad, a member of Hamas, coerces Ashraf to serve as a suicide bomber. The film ends with Ashraf traveling to the Tel Aviv neighborhood where he shared loving memories with Noam. Noam approaches him in the street and they share a longing look before the bomb Ashraf is carrying explodes, obliterating them both.

I narrate this plot quickly and unsympathetically not only because I read it as having set a series of traps for Ashraf, queer Palestinians, and the film's Israeli and international audiences, but also because it is framed by a second plot that, while appearing for only a few moments, suggests to me the actual core of the film. Fox presents three flashbacks that reimagine Noam and Ashraf as boys growing up as neighbors in post-1967 Jerusalem. Fox thus situates what at first appears to be a recent, chance romance within a deeply

historical narrative of lost and renewed ties. Significantly, Fox names the childhood that he ascribes to Noam as semi-autobiographical.[23] Thus, I interpret his film as communicating an Israeli queer relationship to settler colonialism, not only in that it portrays racism in Israeli queer culture (including by perversely scripting Ashraf as destroyer of his own future), but also by framing this as Fox's meditation on how a settler-colonial inheritance conditions his queerness and his capacity for relationship to queer Palestinian men today.

The invitation to relationship offered in the flashbacks is premised, of course, on the traps that the plot sets for characters and audience. Despite the seeming progressivism of telling a queer story within the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the film recapitulates narratives that serve Israeli defensiveness by framing Palestinians as a premodern threat to Israeli national, racial, and sexual modernity. Palestinian women and men appear irredeemably heteropatriarchal by only responding to a queer relative with violence – emotional exile or murder/suicide – while Ashraf's end-point as a human bomb simultaneously gives new life to the queer suicide script and empties Palestinian resistance of any conviction but hopelessness. Yet Fox muddles through these layers of stereotype to attempt a self-critique of Left/progressive Israel. Ashraf in Tel Aviv experiences anti-Palestinian racism, which later we find is a factor in his decision not to seek out life with Noam as an alternative to suicide. Fox also connects the protagonists to a queer Israeli anti-occupation movement, although this reads hollowly after its key action is a beach dance party. Thus despite the film's attempt to criticise Israeli racism and occupation, it ultimately affirms pinkwashing by concertedly siting queer community in Israel: however untrustworthy or self-deluded this community might be, it is the only game in town. This representation is possible only because both Tel Aviv and Palestine remain entirely empty of queer Palestinians, aside from Ashraf. Their nonexistence prevents them from being available to offer Ashraf, other characters, or the audience any alternative future for Ashraf's or Noam's life. *The Bubble* thus effectively agrees with Shamali that there is no 'magic pink door in the Apartheid Wall': but in the film, this is because nothing finally awaits on the Israeli side for queer Palestinians – or, for that matter, for the Israelis who love them – other than death.

I nevertheless find this film intriguing in that after laying out these problematic narratives, it tries to resolve them by turning to history: in a queer call to Israelis to confront their inheritance of settler colonialism. Having destroyed the primary relationship it portrayed, the film suggests in the end that Jews and Palestinians finally may coexist only once the former admit and embrace their historical kinship ties with the very Palestinians they wish to displace. Earlier in the film, the flashbacks to Ashraf's and Noam's childhood portray Palestinians as an absented presence in Israelis' lives. The context for the first flashback, recalled by Ashraf, is the young lovers' discovery that they grew up near one another in the post-1967 occupied territories of East Jerusalem – Noam atop French Hill, Ashraf in Al-Issawiya. Ashraf recalls his grandmother and parents building their home in Issawiya only to have it razed by the Israeli authority, after which his family quits Jerusalem to move to Nablus. In the second flashback, Noam recalls growing up near a playground that Jewish and Palestinian families shared, and that he suggests Ashraf may have visited. The flashback recounts Noam's father receiving an order to bar Palestinian children from the playground, a prospect rejected by Noam and his mother who then host a 'reconciliation party' for all the Palestinian and Jewish parents and children: but no one but they attend. Noam later observes his mother crying, and in recollection he asserts to Ashraf that this was the day he believes his mother's fatal illness first afflicted her, a sentiment that leads Ashraf to comfort him.

By mourning lost connections, and making this mourning multi-generational, this flashback builds on its counterpart earlier in the film to deepen Noam's and Ashraf's union in an implication that fulfills childhood and familial ties. Fox thus invokes history, first, to portray Ashraf and Noam's queer male love as redeeming the relational histories of Jews and Palestinians. These themes then are solidified in the briefest, final flashback, immediately after the death of both characters and as the film's last scene. The camera returns to the French Hill playground to portray Noam and Ashraf as boys playing together in the sandbox, while their mothers watching nearby stand side-by-side. Noam's voiceover asks, 'I wonder if we ever really had a chance'. Having destroyed all hope of reconciliation in the present, Fox suggests with this last image that potential still remains

in the redemption of an intimately familial and national history that Israeli Jews share with Palestinians.

Fox directs this call for reckoning to Israeli Jews by framing them as settlers. If Ashraf's and Noam's adult relationship appears to be destroyed by Palestinian heteronormativity and the effects of the occupation, the flashbacks affirm that their love was interrupted in the first instance by rampant Israeli settlement erasing an original relationality of Jews with Palestinians. In turn, in a sexualised and settler-colonial move, the fantasy answers stereotypes of Palestinian heteropatriarchy with an image of shared motherly affection for gay sons, thereby framing historical Palestinian culture as compatible with the roots of Israeli modernity. Fox appears to call Israelis to repent of the contemporary oppression of Palestinians and in its place admit broken ties. Here Fox fascinatingly portrays the Israeli state and Jewish settlers post-1967 as practitioners of conquest, containment, removal, and elimination: the hallmarks of settler colonialism within Patrick Wolfe's thesis of the 'logic of elimination'.[24] Yet, ironically, this attempt to admit settler-colonial complicity simultaneously normalises settler colonialism, in that portraying current circumstances in Jerusalem as a context in which bonds are broken implies that they once were not, and that Israeli Jews were not colonisers but kin. Fox's phantasmagorical nostalgia for harmony in the past fails to portray how settler-colonial violence enabled Jews to define Israeli sovereign capacities after 1948. Fox thus appears willing to critique Israeli settler colonialism in its seeming abuse, but not its fact; in its extensions, but not its inception. I emphasise that Fox's decision not to extend his critique to Israel's foundation is performed in the film precisely by the turn to kinship. In his tale, even the recognition by Israelis as settlers of the violence they inherit is resolved, affectively, if they elect to unite with the occupied rather than separate from them. Thus, this remains a settler-colonial story: guilt and responsibility for violence resolve when settlers *stay*, and, indeed, *naturalise* actually-colonising relationships by imagining the history of an original loving kinship.

Settler literatures retroactively narrate colonial relations as kin relations, in a way that at once assuages settler guilt/responsibility and grants settlers peace with themselves by implying that they bear a genealogical relationship to the peoples whose lands they never

leave.[25] In *The Bubble*, this kinship becomes queer – and, I argue, portrays *queer* settler colonialism – by centering on the figure of Ashraf. The possibility that revisiting Noam's childhood may grant redemption rests on Ashraf: without the existence of this original twin brother/lover, the queer Israeli settler (Noam? Fox? Fox's audience?) remains out of place, not yet truly at home. This message is reinforced in the final flashback when Noam's voiceover longs for the living depiction of Noam and Ashraf playing as children side-by-side, in sharp contrast to the prior scene portraying their destroyed bodies covered by sheets lying next to one another in a Tel Aviv street. In the final flashback, viewed from Noam's perspective, Noam recalls his queer Palestinian counterpart, or recalls him just long enough from beyond his spectacular death to join him in a final message of hope for Israeli-Palestinian union.

In *The National Uncanny* Renée Bergland examined the recurrence in US settler narratives of the 'Indian ghost', which appears at once as the memory of a lost past supplanted by the settler present, and as a voice of conscience demanding audience – albeit, as a ghost, only written into existence *within* the settler's narrative. In *Spaces between Us*, I examine how queer settlers argue for and gain their embrace in the settler state after first narrating a history of kinship and union with queer native counterparts, thereby gaining a sense of historical integrity when arguing for national belonging. Ending *The Bubble* in union with Ashraf – the queer Palestinian man who is, in fact, a figment of Fox's queer settler imagination – confers to this character the agency to recall, invoke, and compel a future of Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation. But in this future, of course, queer Israeli settlers still will be who they are and will live where they live: by having secured their belonging to Jerusalem, and Jerusalem's belonging to them, through a (queer) Palestinian memory of their own imagining. Here, Israeli queer settler colonialism links queer settlers to the desired colonial object that otherwise appears to have been eliminated by settler violence. Fulfilling that relationship convinces queer settlers that they may represent part of a healing future for a society founded on settler conquest, when doing so actually assuages settler guilt and lets them practice settlement in perpetuity.

LINKING CRITIQUES OF QUEER SETTLER COLONIALISM

Queer settlers must take responsibility for examining how their gendered and sexual existence is conditioned by settler colonialism. Both their marginality and its redress are structured by settler-colonial power, such that every articulation of their existence on stolen land sustains that inherent interrelationship. Whether read as an empirical or an ethical demand, to acknowledge this conditioning by settler colonialism is a necessary response to queer Palestinian and Two-Spirit critiques. Queer Palestinian and Two-Spirit liberation will not be found *within* queer politics that have been organised in the interests of settlers, no matter how much they profess their 'solidarity'. From commitments to national liberation, Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian critiques call for the formation of transnational ties across sustained national differences that will subject settler-colonial societies to radical challenge and transformation. Queer settlers cannot be part of such projects so long as they remain caught in webs of guilt and complicity that produce them – like all settlers – as subjects who know at once precisely what they are and construct elaborate fantasies justifying their past and future settler-colonial existence. My initial reading of queer settler colonialism in Israel joins my work on Canada and the United States in asking how we can unsettle affective ties to settlement among queer subjects, so that in being dislodged they become available to actively respond to anticolonial queer critiques.

My argument was enabled by comparison: articulating Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian critiques, and linking queer accounts of settler colonialism in the Americas to Israel. Yet those comparisons were sparked by an underlying political situation that links Canada and Israel today and calls me to respond. As such, my essay suggests to the field of settler colonial studies that pursuing the benefits of comparing settler colonialisms will confront more deeply the *relationality* of settler colonialisms. I conclude now by considering the implications of comparative and relational accounts of settler colonialism, and notably as they are sparked and answered by engaging sexual and gendered power.

Comparing settler colonial situations energises scholarship because doing so breaks a key tenet of settler colonialism: its naturalisation. Comparisons shatter the insular national frame asserted by the settler state, and mark all its iterations—even its critique of its own history—as entrenching settler rule until that frame is displaced. Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian critiques achieve this by displacing settler storytelling with the national differences of colonised peoples. My scholarship extends this effect by engaging their critiques in comparisons of different settler states. In Canada and (as I argued) potentially in Israel, settler colonialism conditions queer politics when settlers recall and embrace the sexual histories of colonised people as an affective amelioration of colonial violence. Their very desire for reconciliation between coloniser and colonised *is* queer settler colonialism, and never more so than if it posits that queer settlers perform 'solidarity' with queer Palestinians or Two-Spirit while folding them into the self-justifying history of a queer politics wedded to the settler state.

The imagined bridge of queer kinship or love across *two* nations lets queer settlers feel that they can turn their exile into membership in 'their own' nation: still a settler nation, but restored by having incorporated its queer members and their ties to indigeneity. My account of this process in North America was inspired by Two-Spirit critiques; but read alongside queer Palestinian critiques and engaged with queer Israeli storytelling, it also invites broader comparisons in Israel/Palestine and North America, as well as in other settler societies worldwide. My account marks 'queer solidarity' as a key arena through which settler colonial power acts within and among states in international relations today. It is based on Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian theorists having shown how settler colonialism is characterised by inherently gendered and sexualised power relationships, which will be displaced only by centering a critique of colonial heteropatriarchy, and an inquiry into settlers' specifically sexual and gendered complicities in conquest.

Yet these comparative insights arose secondarily to a prior admission that queer settler colonialism in Canada and Israel already exist in relationship. In the era of pinkwashing, from my location in Canada, queer Palestinians mark my queer politics *as* their settler-colonisation unless my politics refuses to be co-opted by Israeli

designs and calls them to account. My response then hinged on my awareness that Canadian queer politics *already enact the settler-colonisation of Two-Spirit people* and all Indigenous peoples on these still-occupied lands. This will remain so until LGBTQ non-natives in Canada target the settler state and all settler-colonial power for critique. Thus, I interpret relationality not just in that pinkwashing links queer politics across multiple states, but more deeply in the very formation of queer settlers within settler states. Canadian queer settler colonialism facilitated pinkwashing as an international political strategy before Israel ever promoted it abroad. Queer non-natives in Canada are primed by their own complicity in settler colonialism to welcome narratives like Israel's that wipe the colonial slate clean by appealing to gay rights; for this is the very logic along which they may think to redress a history of violence: by embracing Two Spirit people in 'diverse' movements or within a 'multicultural' state. The settler-colonial conditioning of queer politics will be perpetuated even if Canadians *agree* to critique the pinkwashing of Israel, if, that is, they do not first critique their own potential 'pinkwashing' of Canadian settler colonialism.

While my observations call for political responsibility, I make them to expose the relationality of multiple settler colonialisms. Comparison indicates to me that only by determining how one settler-colonial situation is imbricated in another will the power that sustains each one be displaced. For instance, my essay's case might lead to asking, how are settler-colonial power relations in Canada and Israel interdependent? This is not just to ask how the action of one state facilitates settler colonialism in another; but rather, how are the specific forms of settler colonialism in each state functionally interdependent, through simultaneous and relational activity? To return to my case, how does a question of relationship to settler colonialism 'elsewhere' expose marked or unmarked investments in settler colonialism 'here'? Canadian debates over pinkwashing and the category 'Israeli apartheid' show how non-native supporters of Israel – and, as Krebs and Olwan argue in this volume, native supporters of Israel – may naturalise settler colonialism in Canada and in Israel, effectively securing it in both states.

Yet it is troubling to consider, in turn, how non-native Canadians who challenge colonial power 'abroad' might do so

without mobilising against their own grounding within settler-colonial violence; or, if they do, by leaving this at the level of acknowledgement rather than committing what they do 'elsewhere' to undoing settler colonialism here. My argument, however, is more nuanced than merely suggesting that a critique of settler colonialism should be attached to every activist agenda. Rather, I am asking how the very impetus within solidarity politics to think that 'Canadians' must do something about Israel/Palestine – or, frankly, about anyone or anything 'elsewhere' – may already invest in the globalised economic and political power of a white settler state, indeed, within the field of power that preserves its settler-colonial structures. Not at the level of ideology, but of ontology, radical criticism in settler states will reproduce settler colonialism unless and until undermining that power becomes part of any action that it takes, 'at home' or 'abroad'.

The model I invoke is elicited already by the Canadian anti-pinkwashing campaigns of QuAIA, which have acted and continue to act in synergy with Defenders of the Land, a Canada-wide network of non-native allies to indigenous decolonisation struggles. Their collaborations mutually reference links between the Indigenous Americas and Palestine. The forging of such ties is a crucial complement to calls for Indigenous American-Palestinian solidarity; but to form effectively, such ties must be directly responsible *to* both Palestinians and Indigenous Americans. As ties formed primarily among settler allies, they must ensure that their efforts to challenge settler colonialism in one state do not reproduce settler colonialism in that state or another. My comparison of Two-Spirit and queer Palestinian critiques invokes their potential synergy. Writing as a white settler critic, the question of whether these movements can or should ally is not mine to answer; but my responsibility to them led me to interrogate queer settler colonialism in relation to both at once. To future dialogues about possibilities for alliance, I offer my comparative claim that Canadian and Israeli settler colonialisms are not only inherently gendered and sexualised, but relational. The more our theories and movements intersect, the better we will explain the power that we oppose, and the more effectively we will stop that power from being reproduced in our work.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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NOTES

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[21] I select this tale of love between Jewish and Palestinian men because, based on my account of the US and Canadian contexts, I understand that the masculinist nationalism that rejects queer settlers incites them to respond through masculinist appeals for reintegration. My reading engages Carol Pateman's regarding patriarchal citizenship, but it highlights that under settler colonialism, the sexualised and colonised male plays a specific role in facilitating queer male settler reunion with his nation. While in the US/Canada this was facilitated by the *berdache* as an object, in Israel the possibility exists that queered Palestinian manhood will do so. Without presuming that identical processes occur, I question how this film engages such themes even while presenting differences. See Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), Morgensen, *Spaces between Us*: 44-49.
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