Homonationalism *after* Homonationalism:
Queer Politics under US Exceptionalism

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ABSTRACT

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This theory-based thesis presents an in-depth study of Jasbir Puar's concept of homonationalism. This term illuminates how the selective inclusion of (some) queer subjects within the nationalist project happens at the expense of racialized populations. In positioning homonationalism within the alternate critical genealogies of queer of color critique and women of color feminism, I demonstrate that these theoretical contributions were essential to Puar's theorization of homonationalism through their early critiques of the appropriation of LGBTQIA+ rights for nationalist ends. I explore the origins and manifestations of homonationalism through the discourses of sexual exceptionalism and the semiotic construction of the "monster-terrorist-fag" in relation to normative national queer subjects. In an effort to theorize our present moment marked by the rise of fascism and authoritarianism, I investigate phenomena that signal the persistence of homonationalism in our present moment, despite new anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation, what I call homonationalism *after* homonationalism. Paying attention to the resonances between the present, the War on Terror, and Trump's first presidency, I attempt to identify the shifting figure of the "monster-terrorist-fag" defined through present-day processes of detention and deportation as well as through deployments of US sexual exceptionalism. Ultimately, this thesis is an effort to evaluate the salience of the concept of homonationalism in a shifting sociopolitical context.

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Introduction

How does one write a theory-based thesis project in a changing political context? How can we map the intellectual history of homonationalism when the forms of national liberal democracy are crumbling? These are the questions I have continuously had to reconsider throughout the writing of this thesis. When I applied for the Media Studies graduate program back in 2023, I had been concerned with the co-optation of LGBTQIA+ rights by national and corporate institutions and the overall racist and Islamophobic speech that my peers – white queers – could be inclined to share online. My interest in the concept of homonationalism initially arose during the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Although my interest in such sports events was minimal, I was consistently exposed to forms of online exceptionalist discourses that were supposed to critique sexual rights and politics in Qatar, and by extension, the Middle East during this period. Many white queers, alongside Western media outlets, were posting and widely disseminating views that Qatar, by its seemingly non-acceptance of LGBTQIA+ rights, was unworthy of hosting this major international event. While Qatar and the FIFA organizers were responsible for questionable decisions, such as banning the LGBTQIA+ flag from the event, the numerous critiques raised by Western media and LGBTQIA+ activist groups started to, over time, blend in with racist and Islamophobic rhetoric, ultimately reproducing a harmful imagined dichotomy that placed a "progressive" Western world in conflict with a "barbaric" Middle East.

Appalled by what I was witnessing online, I continued searching for an explanation, a critique, or even a history that could help me understand, or at least make sense of these events. This is when I stumbled upon Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* and her concept of

homonationalism in the list of readings for an elective Religions and Culture course entitled *"Queer Spiritualities"* in my bachelor's program. While we briefly glossed over Puar's introductory chapter to initiate a conversation on the biopolitical power of queerness and its antagonization of Islam and Muslim subjects, I grew increasingly fascinated with the critique that Puar had succeeded in articulating through the concept of homonationalism. The critique of homonationalism opened a door into not only grasping the historical context and oppressive structures of power and ideologies that articulated LGBTQIA+ rights and national acceptance of sexualities – how LGBTQIA+ rights are interwoven into the very violent structures of violence that liberalism condemns such as war, deportation, exclusions, etc. – but also into a journey of self-reflection as a young white European queer person.

For me, homonationalism articulated the inherent paradoxes of many discourses around homosexuality and queerness, somehow always intertwined with immigration, which I had witnessed while growing up in Belgium in the 2010s. During that time (and arguably still today), homosexuality and its acceptance by the state seemed to be articulated against an imminent threat posed by non-white, non-European immigrant communities. The dangers of homophobia were directly projected by the media, politicians, and queers onto these racialized communities and the neighborhood they predominantly inhabited. The wave of terrorism that struck Western Europe during that decade, such as the Charlie Hebdo attacks and the shooting at the Bataclan nightclub in Paris in 2015, or the 2016 bombings at Brussels' International Airport and the Maelbeek metro station, strengthened racial syllogisms similar to those of the 9/11 era in the US. These terrorist attacks came to justify and normalize an already entrenched Islamophobia in public discourses, while also identifying Muslim terrorists and, by extension, Arab populations as threats to national and European values, notably LGBTQIA+ rights. Puar's concept of

homonationalism offered explanations as to why queerness and Arabness had come to be framed as at odds, if not mutually destructive, in the Euro-American imaginary. The concept and its theoretical lineage of queer of color critique and postcolonial theory presented tools to make sense of the oppressive ideological and political structures defining our contemporary moment. Consequently, I decided that a critical exploration of homonationalism would be the central element of my master's thesis project, allowing me to fully immerse myself in its complexities and theoretical landscape.

When writing about homonationalism – a concept that ultimately critiques the violent paradoxes of liberal democracy, I believe that one must pay particular attention to its current geopolitical context. Since I initially started thinking about the shape of this project in September 2023, the liberal facade of many Western states has crumbled to give place to frightening versions of fascist and authoritarian powers. October 7th, 2023, marked the beginning of a new era, defined by the intensification of the unabashed and sadistic Israeli genocidal violence against Palestinians in Gaza. The continuous killing and maiming of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Gaza and the Occupied West Bank was shamelessly framed as "normal" and even "necessary" by the media, governments, and other institutions, such as universities.[1] While the ongoing genocidal war on Gaza has made us all witnesses to the everyday atrocities perpetrated by the settler colonial Israeli state and justified through Zionist ideology, this cruel and disproportionate violence has also exposed the complicities of our very governments and institutions with these genocidal powers, by actively funding this war and absolving Israel of accountability, responsibility, or consequence for its actions. In addition, these same national, educational, and

[1] According to *Al Jazeera*'s "Israel-Gaza war death toll" updated on July 6th, 2025, Israel has killed at least 57,418 people, including at least 17,400 children and injured at least 136,261 people since October 2023 (AJLabs).

cultural institutions have vigorously censored, fired, and cast away those who spoke out against Israel, Zionism, and the genocidal acts of violence that are carried out in its name.

The year 2023, which Rodrick Ferguson aptly described as "a spectacle in the history of repression" for the suppression of the voices rising against Israel and its allies and of Black studies programs throughout the US (Ferguson, "An Interruption of Our Cowardice"), marked the beginning of a pattern that has only intensified through 2024 and 2025. These years have further exposed the hypocrisy of academic institutions, which have continuously silenced their students and academic staff, brutalizing them and arresting them by resorting to campus security and police forces to suppress protests, encampments, and sit-ins, terminating staff and expelling students solely for their pro-Palestinian stance rather than protecting the critical political and intellectual spaces they claim to uphold. Simultaneously, it has highlighted the importance of academia as a radical site of political resistance that enacts tangible change, rather than an intellectual space that cowardly accepts and reproduces the configurations of oppressive powers. This paradoxical situation has greatly influenced the way I approached my research.

Writing a theory-based thesis in this academic and political context meant, for me, to try as hard as I could not to fall into the pitfalls of the neoliberal university and its cowardice. Therefore, my research has been informed by critical theoretical emergences that have historically been resistant to hegemonic and oppressive knowledge as well as theorizing outside of the worldviews, ideologies, and institutions that maintain and promote racial, colonial, sexual, gender, and class oppressions. I was able to write this thesis in a way that I could be proud of because of the amazing authors of these theoretical formations – such as queer/trans of color critique, women of color feminism, postcolonial studies, trans(*) theory, and Indigenous studies – that allow us to reimagine a world free of oppression through interconnected liberation. I

strongly consider that homonationalism, as a concept, a critique, and a theory, is one of the many testimonies of a version of academia that is deeply concerned with destabilizing global and local oppressive structures. Hence, it was crucial to approach the writing of this thesis interdisciplinarily and intersectionally, not only to recognize the significance of these alternative theoretical insurgencies in reimagining academia and political praxis but also to attempt to assemble a toolkit for engaging the ontological threats that characterize our present.

This thesis project has been significantly shaped by the numerous geopolitical ruptures and sociopolitical movements, whether repressive or insurgent, that have occurred over the past two years. Notably, Trump's re-election on November 5, 2024, and his return to office forced me to rethink the aim of my research. Many of us had expected – probably naively, overlooking the fascist ideological undercurrents that had long been bubbling beneath the surface – Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris to win the 2024 presidential election. With her, we would have most likely witnessed, for four more years, the hypocrisy of the Democratic party and their crushing neoliberal agenda hidden behind illusionary promises of inclusion and progress. I had anticipated that my research would examine an evolved yet relatively unchanged version of homonationalism from the one we had already known under the liberal politics of Biden and Obama – a version of homonationalism that would covertly justify war and genocide abroad and distract us from addressing the racial exclusions that LGBTQIA+ national inclusion and queer liberalism have harbored. However, as I explore in Chapter 2, this new era of US politics under Trump has made these structures of violence and oppression much more explicit, legitimizing and promoting hateful and exclusionary ideologies and practices. In the few months since Trump has taken office, we have witnessed escalating attacks on university programs in critical race theory and gender studies, the intensification of mass deportations and immigration raids, and the

introduction of new bills targeting the rights and freedoms of trans and gender-non-conforming people across the country. While many politically resistant movements have been mobilized – such as the Los Angeles protests against ICE raids, the university campus encampments for Palestine, or the marches for trans liberation – to counter unprecedented waves of repression against minorities, this global political shift has been nothing but unpredictable and frightening. What we are facing politically is the deployment of violence aimed at subjugating those who are most marginalized in our societies: people of color, immigrants, queer and trans subjects, women, etc. Rethinking the present manifestations of homonationalism as well as its salience in a sociopolitical context in which the state is no longer concerned with extending and upholding rights to normative gay and lesbian citizen-subjects has become necessary.

One of the most challenging aspects of writing this thesis has been pinpointing this historical conjuncture and making sense of it. How has this political shift transformed our tools against political oppression and fascism? What is the relevance of concepts, such as homonationalism, aimed at critiquing the wrongful promises of national inclusion and the violence of the liberal state, when fascism and authoritarianism are taking over? These are questions that I have been trying to answer without a definite conclusion. In attempting to describe our current political moment and break down its snares and ruses, I have been informed by both cultural studies and queer of color critique as theoretical formations that have emerged in response to national and global climates of social exclusions and repressions, while simultaneously seeking to theorize and contest those very conditions.

In this thesis, I deploy queer theory and its critiques of the field as dominant theoretical frameworks and research methods. Various concepts, such as homonationalism, exceptionalism, biopolitics, and the nation, which I explore throughout these chapters, represent foundational and

explanatory frameworks for my research. I deploy these terms in accordance with queer theory, and more importantly, queer of color studies, as epistemological interventions that seek to destabilize hegemonic narratives about knowledge. Queer of color critique is foundational to this project as it not only provided me with critical tools to critique the normative and identitarian pitfalls of queer theory, but also represented a method to examine cultural formations as spaces where race, political economy, gender, and sexuality intersect (Jaleel and Savcı 4). As I make explicit in Chapter 1, these alternate critical genealogies of queer studies, namely queer of color critique and women of color feminism, offer essential theoretical and epistemological devices for studying the relationship between race, gender, and sexuality, between queer subjects and the nation-state and the many planes of oppressions that racialized queers may experience. It would be impossible to write a project about homonationalism and its intellectual history without foregrounding it in the many foundational texts of these critical formations. These theories have not only shaped the theoretical framework of this thesis but have also informed my research methods in essential ways. In Chapter 1, I trace the intellectual history of homonationalism by placing Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* – where the term was first introduced – into conversation with foundational texts in queer of color critique and women of color feminism. Through this cross-reading, I explore how these intersecting critical formations have shaped and sharpened the theoretical contours of homonationalism as a framework for analyzing power, sexuality, race, and the nation.

In the midst of the current threats that academia is facing – especially in fields and disciplines that study and address systems of power, racial capitalism, colonialism, gender, and sexuality, bringing these theories to the forefront of our research becomes crucial. As concerted efforts to defund, silence, and suppress university programs and research centers of Black

studies, Queer and Gender studies, Critical Race Studies, and Postcolonial studies, I aim for this thesis to attest to the significance of these theories and research methods that actively seek to dismantle the systems that rising fascist and authoritarian forces seek to uphold. More than ever, we need to center and preserve these disciplines in our academic work. Writing about queer studies and its alternate critical formations in parallel to the endangering of these same academic and political interventions emphasized how much we need these theories and methods. They offer us the tools to find solutions to resist today's oppressive powers and frameworks for imagining futures rooted in insurgency, solidarity, and intersectionality.

In attempting to identify this political shift and its implications for the concept of homonationalism, I turned to cultural studies for their methods of theorizing the current moment and the emergent discourses and ideologies that stem from it. In Chapter 2, I examine the persistence of homonationalism in our present moment despite new anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation, which I call homonationalism *after* homonationalism. To achieve this, I conducted a discourse analysis by bringing together various types of texts, including academic chapters and articles, news articles, blog entries, official statements from the US government, social media posts, and speeches, in order to identify the diverse discourses of power that emerge in our sociopolitical environment. As discourse analysis is defined as "a careful analysis of texts to explore how ideas are developed and transmitted in society" (Stokes 145), I employed this method to draw out and piece together the similarities, contradictions, and points of tension that arise in this historical conjuncture and how they influence the different manifestations of homonationalism.

To perform this discourse analysis, I turned to the methodological frameworks developed by scholars of cultural studies – especially Stuart Hall's notion of "conjuncture" and Raymond Williams' concept of "structure of feeling". These concepts and methods appeared to be

particularly generative given that cultural studies emerged in response to historical moments marked by contradiction, political instability, and unresolved struggle, contexts in which the sociopolitical and cultural realm could not be clearly defined, and where even questions were difficult to formulate (Grossberg 39). As I attempted to make sense of the new discursive formations arising in an uncertain political climate, I found the methodological tools of cultural studies especially useful.

Concerned about finding ways to approach the rise of Thatcherism, new capitalist formations, and the rightward political turn of British society in the 1970s, Hall introduced the notion of "historical conjuncture" and the method of "conjunctural analysis" to describe the complex, uneven, and contingent articulation of political, economic, and cultural forces that shape a given moment without reduction. This analysis takes into account the very nature of a historical conjuncture as "those related but distinct contradictions, moving according to very different tempos, whose condensation, in any particular historical moment" (Hall 173). As I approached our present moment as a historical conjuncture throughout my research to make sense of this political shift with its lives and afterlives, I dwelt in uncertainty. I attempted to contribute, perhaps in a minor way, to a larger conversation without needing to come to firm and fixed conclusions. The case study I explore in Chapter 2 – the tragic and unlawful deportation from the US of Andry José Hernández Romero, a gay Venezuelan undocumented hairdresser, to a terrorist confinement center (CECOT) in El Salvador – arose as a singular event that allowed me to make connections and speculations about the biopolitics of the present and how they interact with the various manifestations of homonationalism. Framing the present as a conjuncture, understood as "the result of a complex and fragile set of articulations, which requires various labours attempting – and always partly failing – to maintain its ever-changing

shape and density" (Grossberg 58), enabled me to offer propositions on how the dynamics of power emerging from sexuality, gender, citizenship and race might be unfolding today, without relying on fixed or reductive assumptions.

Similarly, Williams' "structures of feeling" helped me frame my theorization of the present, not only as mere description of the present moment, but as "the specificity of present being, the inalienably physical, within which we may indeed discern and acknowledge institutions, formations, positions, but not always as fixed products, defining products' (Williams 128). A structure of feeling is an attempt at dealing with the emergent or the pre-emergent, a cultural hypothesis deployed in order to make sense of the affective experiences tied to a particular time, which must always be revisited with the material and cultural conditions from which they emerge (132-133). It is as a structure of feeling that I approached the assemblages of homonationalism – the intertwined lives and afterlives of nationalism, warfare, racial exclusions, queer liberalism, and exceptionalisms – in relation to the tragic events that come to define our epoch. Taking into account the affective layers of *how* we – (homonational) queers, deported detainees at CECOT, transgender and gender-non-conforming subjects, undocumented immigrants, Democrat and Republican US politicians, academics – live this present moment allows for an analysis that may contribute, alongside other efforts of theorization, to envision radical social, political, and cultural transformations. Throughout this thesis, I attempt to paint the portrait of two times – the post 9/11 era and today – and the galvanizing moments of racism and the new forms of assault and limitations of rights that are mobilized in the service of the homonationalist project.

Chapters' Overview

My first chapter, *An Intellectual History of Homonationalism: Genealogies, Definitions, and Critical Analysis*, represents an effort to construct an intellectual history of Puar's concept of homonationalism. In doing so, I present the geopolitical and academic context of the emergence of the critique of homonationalism. Rooting my intellectual history in the work of Jasbir Puar on post-9/11 America, the War on Terror, and the terms of LGBTQIA+ inclusion, I locate the concept within the theoretical genealogies of alternate critical formations such as queer of color critique and women of color feminism. Here, I explore the fundamental interventions that the fields have contributed to queer theory in foregrounding the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, and class, as well as their interactions with nationalist ideals and practices. I demonstrate that the contributions of queer of color critique were essential to Puar's theorization of homonationalism through their early critiques of the appropriation of LGBTQIA+ rights for nationalist ends, as well as the efforts of some gay and lesbian associations to engage with the state as a liberatory actor. I then offer an in-depth exploration of the concept of homonationalism as it was theorized by Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages* and framed by her Deleuzian-inspired theoretical framework of "queer assemblages." Here, I explore the origins and manifestations of homonationalism through the discourses of sexual exceptionalism and the semiotic construction of the "monster-terrorist-fag" in relation to normative national queer subjects. This exploration dives into the biopolitical manifestations of queerness as tools for state power, nationalism, and the ascendancy of whiteness in parallel to its implications for queer theory and politics. I go on to clarify the crucial differences between homonationalism and pinkwashing, two often-conflated terms, examining how each is taken up in both academic and activist contexts. In doing so, I

draw attention to critiques that frame homonationalism as a concept that risks flattening and totalizing complex dynamics, such as Israel's colonial occupation of Palestine and the efforts of LGBTQIA+ activists. A mind map that I created in the development of this chapter is also included as an appendix to visually represent the interconnections and flows between the various fields, concepts, and events engaged throughout.

Alongside Chapter 1, I compiled a compendium that traces the various theoretical re-articulations of homonationalism through five concepts that expand Puar's contribution beyond the *homo*: ablenationalism, femonationalism, homocapitalism, settler homonationalism, and settler *trans*nationalism. By examining the theoretical contribution of each term in relation to homonationalism, I trace how these emerging iterations across various fields expose and critique the insidious ways marginalized identities and discourses are weaponized to uphold a hegemonic settler, white, heteropatriarchal national order. These terms operate not only to expose the complicities of the most privileged members within marginalized groups but also to provide tools to counter the ruses of nationalism through a critique of national inclusion and rights-based approaches to social change, and drawing the assemblages where nationalism, settler colonialism, neoliberal and global capitalism, feminism, ableism, queerness, and transness intersect.

The central question of my second chapter, *Homonationalism After Homonationalism: Sexual Exceptionalisms in Trump Times 2.0*, can be summarized as follows: "What is the salience of the concept of homonationalism in our present moment characterized by the abandonment of LGBTQIA+ rights as a relevant national project for the current US nation-state?" To answer this question, I examine intertwining events and temporalities such as the mass deportation from the US of undocumented Venezuelans to CECOT, the sexual tortures at Abu

Ghraib, the War on Terror and the racist exclusions that ensued within the US, Trump's anti-immigration and anti-LGBTQIA+ legislations as well as the popular voices rising against them to reconfigure the terrorist assemblages of our present. In this chapter, I critically examine the unlawful deportation of Andry José Hernández Romero, a gay Venezuelan undocumented hairdresser, from the United States to a terrorist confinement center (CECOT) in El Salvador. This tragic event, marked by the terms of US exceptionalism, helps me frame the contours of the sets of phenomena that signal the persistence of homonationalism in our present moment, despite new anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation, what I call homonationalism *after* homonationalism. Paying attention to the resonances between the present, the War on Terror, and Trump's first presidency, I attempt to identify the shifting figure of the "monster-terrorist-fag" defined through present-day processes of detention and deportation as well as through deployments of US sexual exceptionalism. As I explore the discourses emerging from Hernández Romero's deportation, I examine how queerness reframes mass deportation, detention, and torture as outrageous, anti-American practices. The deployments of sexual exceptionalism do not just reshape citizenship alongside the terms of white supremacy, but also create new terrorist assemblages contingent on the rise of fascism and authoritarianism. By attempting to theorize the terms of homonationalism *after* homonationalism, I speculate that it has now fallen into the hands of civil society, and its patriotic, normative gay and lesbian subjects, to carry the project of homonationalism – now framed as a tool for the mainstream left to critique the authoritarianism of the Trump presidency – through intensified discourses of exceptionalism, nationalism, and militarization. I end by reflecting on the failures of liberal democracy and dominant forms of LGBTQIA+ politics based on national inclusion and visibility. In the face of the global rise of fascism in conjunction with

"anti-gender" movements, I highlight the kind of coalitional politics that are most needed, those centered around mutual aid, opacity, and nobodiness.

Chapter 1

An Intellectual History of Homonationalism: Genealogies, Definitions, and Critical Analysis

Homonationalism was first coined in 2007 by Jasbir K. Puar in her book *Terrorist Assemblages: homonationalism in queer times*. Referring to the inclusion of queer subjects within the nationalist project, homonationalism is a shortened version of "homonormative nationalism" (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 38). In coining this term, Puar draws on and builds upon Lisa Duggan's critique of homonormativity, a type of sexual politics that neither challenges nor disrupts the hegemonic heteronormative regime and institutions, but rather "upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 179). As a formation contingent on legal and representational ideals of homosexuality, homonormativity is tied directly to the inclusion and participation of gay and lesbian subjects in the nationalist project of US imperialism as neoliberal citizens through normative domesticity and consumption. Homonormativity becomes homonationalism, once the focus shifts from neoliberal queer politics to the promotion of sexual exceptionalism as a tool for racist imperialism, and the direct relationship between queer subjects and the state in creating a new dichotomy between the acceptable hetero- or homosexual (white) citizen and the racialized and perversely queered Other (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 39).

In this chapter, I investigate how the inclusion of queer subjects within the nation through rights and legislation reinvigorates nationalism while strengthening the systemic exclusion of racialized subjects of the state. I offer an in-depth exploration of the concept of homonationalism as it was theorized by Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages* and framed by her Deleuzian-inspired

theoretical framework of "queer assemblages." I examine how processes such as sexual exceptionalism, the biopolitical mandates of queerness, and the ascendancy of whiteness are central to the workings of homonationalism. These mechanisms construct racialized (Muslim) populations as perversely marked subjects and threats to the nation – which Puar names "monster-terrorist-fags" – in contrast to the acceptable, domesticated, white, (upper-)middle-class queer national subject. Beforehand, I offer a genealogy of the fields of queer of color critique and women of color feminism and their critique of mainstream queer theory. Here, I pay attention to their theoretical contributions to construct an intellectual history of homonationalism. Since the concept emerged from a critique of queer theory to move beyond an anti-identitarian critique and overcome the limitations of feminist and queer theories of intersectionality (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 204), I foreground the cosmology of theories and critiques that made the theorization of homonationalism, as a historical formation, possible beyond the geopolitical context of *Terrorist Assemblages*.

As I investigate the trajectory of queer of color critique as an alternate critical genealogy, I make apparent how this theoretical formation engages with and might challenge the concept of homonationalism while also critiquing neoliberal and statist formations of queer identity in different ways. While the concept of homonationalism introduced a new and crucial intervention in queer theory and queer activism, it is important to situate Puar's analysis within a broader genealogy of queer of color critique. Scholars and activists in this tradition had already critically tackled, for instance, the relationship between the nation and queer subjects, the inherent problematic of the globalization of gay and lesbian rights organizations, and the critiques of modernist linear narratives of sexual formations. I also explore the intertwined, yet distinct, definition and manifestations of pinkwashing in relation to homonationalism. By laying out the

crucial differences between these two terms (often used as synonyms), I explore how both concepts are taken up in academic and activist spaces, while presenting the various limitations of homonationalism as a possibly flattening and totalizing concept, thereby undermining activists' attempts to contest the instrumentalization of LGBTQIA+ rights by oppressive power structures.

The Academic and Geopolitical Context of Homonationalism

The concept of homonationalism emerged from a specific geopolitical and historical context of a post-9/11 America in which the status of queer subjects had transitioned from "outlaws" (due to the criminalization of homosexuality and discrimination regimes) or figures of death (as primary victims of the AIDS epidemic) to increasingly being folded into the nationalist political agendas of US imperialism through legislative status and a new class of "gay consumers." This transition from "outlaw" to productive citizen stemmed in part from LGBTQIA+ communities' drives to legalize in the early 2000s. Rooting the context of homonationalism in decisive moments in American sexual politics such as the decriminalization of sodomy through the *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas* ruling, Puar explores the negative effects of liberalist ideals of inclusion under the guise of deregulation, which ultimately heightens security regimes through the availability of new pools of knowledge to the state as well as a move of queer subjects to the private sphere (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 114). In other words, juridical moments of inclusion of queer subjects that have been painted as a liberatory move for the community at large by mainstream liberal politics, such as the decriminalization of sodomy, ultimately resulted in intensifying a state regulation of sexuality, exponentially targeting racialized queers and/or racialized queered subjects, rather than lessening the patrolling of queer subjects. At the time of publication, the growing legalization of same-sex marriage in many US

states and European countries signaled a broader shift toward the national inclusion of queers. Same-sex marriage, as Puar frames it, became a civilizational move to "codify an ideal of European values" and further justify the targeting of a perversely sexualized and racialized Muslim population through their imagined refusal to assimilate in contrast to queers who succeed in following kinship models of heteronormativity (20).

The strategy of Israel to host World Pride 2006 in Jerusalem, a year before the publication of Puar's book, to represent itself as an open-minded, welcoming state and conceal its countless human-rights violations, genocidal violence, and settler colonial occupation of Palestine also represents an important contextual event. Initiating a transnational queer-rights discourse, the announcement of World Pride taking place in Israel would showcase the success of Israeli propaganda as well as a parallel strategy with America in actively creating a dichotomy between national (homosexual) subjects vs. Muslim others (7–8). However, many LGBTQIA+ activist groups in North America and Europe lobbied and protested for the relocation or cancellation of World Pride in Israel, countering the attempts of Israel to portray Palestinians as threats to queers worldwide through the lens of Islamic fundamentalism (16–17). However, in *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar points to the conundrum generated by these Western activist groups who, by focusing on queerness as the sole vector of oppression of queer Palestinians, might feed into Israel's violent settler colonialism project by hindering Palestinians' struggle for self-determination and statehood (17).

Temporality plays an important role in homonationalism. Puar frames the geopolitical context of *Terrorist Assemblages* through a temporality of political urgency. September 11, 2001 and its aftermath, the decriminalization of sodomy in the United States, the War on Terror and the tortures at Abu Ghraib, the rise of racist crimes and aggressions against Muslims and Sikhs

populations, the incarceration and deportation of suspected terrorists, and post-9/11 activist and community organizing are all intertwining events and temporalities – Puar names them "snapshots" and "flashpoints" – that made homonationalism ever-so-visible (xxvi). Political urgency refers to "a temporality that problematically resuscitates state of exception discourses, [it] suggests a particular relationship to temporality and change (...)" that runs against the Western ideal of intellectual knowledge production that can only thrive in a constant and non-disruptive political climate (xxv). Rooting her research in these peculiar times without falling into the traps of historical exceptionalism, Puar provides, with homonationalism and its geopolitical context, not solely a historicization of the contemporary moment and the biopolitics of the present, but also tackles anticipatory futures beyond the temporalities of urgency.

Borrowing from Deleuzian theory, Puar introduces a framework of "queer assemblage", an extension of intersectionality that accounts for "forces that merge and dissipate time, space and body against linearity, coherency and permanency" (212). Assemblage as a framework addresses how conceptions of identity, which can be thought of as rigidly divided, instead might model a system or machine with many parts in movement and many kinds of relation among the parts (213). In fact, homonationalism is an assemblage as well as a process, not an event or an adjective. Homonationalism names a historical shift in how nation-states are produced, from a previous assertion of heteronormativity to increasingly including homonormativity in the nation-building process (Puar, *Homonationalism Keynote*). It is important to note that the geopolitical context of homonationalism does not limit it to the events and moments delineated by Jasbir Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages*. Still, these processes predate and extend beyond post-9/11 America and the move toward the legalization of queer subjects. For instance, Indigenous studies scholar

Scott Lauria Morgensen situates the origins of homonationalism in the early days of settler colonialism through the sexual colonization of Indigenous peoples (Morgensen 106).

Alongside this social context, homonationalism also emerged out of a specific academic context. The state of queer theory and queer of color critique in the 2000s, as well as Jasbir Puar's own research trajectory and her involvement in activist and community organizing, were defining for the birth of the concept. Emphasized throughout *Terrorist Assemblages* and Puar's numerous academic interventions following the release of her book is homonationalism's theoretical ability to problematize an important tenet of queer theory at the time: the identitarian postures of the field that posit queerness as inherently radical (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 22). Before unpacking the relevance of this critique of queer theory posed by Puar, it is crucial to grasp the emergent discourses of the time pertaining to queer studies and its alternate critical genealogies, namely queer of color critique and women of color feminism.

Queer of Color Critique and Women of Color Feminism

In the 2005 special issue "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" of *Social Text,* David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz wrote an important intervention to reassess the political utility of queer theory. Calling for a "renewed queer studies", Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz identified a crisis in the field arising from the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identity as a widely portrayed consumer lifestyle and a legally contested category (Eng et al. 1). The authors framed this moment within the broader historical context of queer liberalism. Queer liberalism names a distinct convergence of economic and political spheres that underpin the foundation of liberal inclusion, namely, queer subjects' growing claims to neoliberal citizenship through consumption and marriage laws (10). As *queer* was depicted to have lost

some of its intended potency, the authors highlighted the term's original significance rooted in the critique of the mechanisms of normalization of the state in the 1990s (ibid). Much of their concerns for queer studies, including the rise of queer liberalism, appeared to stem directly from a departure from *queer*, one not confined to a fixed subject or object (3). This concern also reflected the increasing pervasiveness of mechanisms of normativity and normalization within the field (ibid). Advocating for queer studies to embrace a subjectless critique – rejecting a fixed subject or object for *queer* to remain open and fluid, this "renewed queer studies" ought to center a queer epistemology in which *queer* exists as an engaged mode of critical inquiry against processes of normalization (ibid).

By setting the terms of this "new queer critique", the authors brought together many of the critiques and contributions that scholars of the queer of color field had already formed in the decade prior. This alignment with queer of color critique does not come as a surprise as the authors and contributors, such as José Esteban Muñoz, David L. Eng, and Rodrick A. Ferguson, are closely associated with this diverse and interdisciplinary field that not only pointed out essential flaws in queer theory but also attempted to resolve them directly. In a different article from the same issue, Jack Halberstam confidently posited that the future of queer studies is dependent on the radical critiques provided by feminism and queer of color critique to "move away from a white gay male identity politics" (Halberstam 220). Through these critiques of queer theory of the time, I seek to examine how they intersect with the interventions of queer of color critique to underscore the radical potential of this alternative critical formation from which homonationalism stems.

Born in the 1990s in response to a national climate in the United States in which people of color were increasingly being excluded and criminalized through policy-making, queer of

color critique represents an epistemological intervention and a "method for analyzing cultural formations as registries of the intersections of race, political economy, gender, and sexuality" (Ferguson, "Queer of Color Critique" 2). Through the cultural and activist responses to these retrenchments of civil rights, queer of color critique presented a critical formation based on an intersectional model that positioned race, sexuality, and gender as essential and interacting modes of differences to engage with social and subject formation (12). Mainstream queer theory and national LGBT organizations, in this period (and arguably onward), would generally avoid larger sociopolitical issues that did not explicitly deal with single-issue politics focused on a particular subject or constituency solely relating to sexuality (and sometimes gender) (Vaid 152; Eng et al. 2). Queer of color critique has actively pointed out how the field of queer studies has become increasingly distant from the study of race and disengaged from social concerns unrelated to the welfare of white gay and lesbian citizens (Ferguson, "Queer of Color Critique" 2).

In a foundational text of queer of color critique titled "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?", Cathy J. Cohen identifies the failings of queer theory and queer activism in their inability to account for an oppression model outside of simple dichotomies between everything queer and heteronormativity (Cohen 438). Arguing that "heteronormativity interacts with institutional racism, patriarchy, and class exploitation to define us in numerous ways as marginal and oppressed subjects", Cohen highlights the dangers of a queer theory that embraces a single oppression model and attaches the power and privileges of heteronormativity onto the body of all heterosexuals (446). In pointing out these harmful biases of queer theorists and activists, she reaffirms the inextricability of race and sexuality by making apparent that heteronormativity is deeply rooted in white supremacist ideology and exists as an

essential form of state power to decipher the terms of proper citizenship (453). Through a critique of queer studies and queer activism, Cohen sketches the stakes of queer of color critique as an analysis of the world and a strategy for political mobilization that views the roles of race, gender, sexuality, and class as crucial in shaping how individuals experience and relate to dominant and normalizing systems of power.

Similarly, José Esteban Muñoz, in his book *Disidentifications,* brings forward a critique of the overwhelming whiteness of queer theory as a field and its inability to account for race as an important vector of oppression. However, Muñoz does not solely expose the limitations of the field but, most importantly, introduces the theory and process of disidentification to understand the complex relationship of queers of color with identity formations – identifying with ethnos and/or queerness despite the presence of phobic attitudes in both spheres outside of dominant culture (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 30). Disidentification refers to the ways "to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (4). In other words, this theory offers alternative ways to tackle fixed identity formations and articulate queers of color's performances of resistance to hegemonic culture, not from an outside position but from within that very culture. Muñoz, through his theory of disidentification, also highlights how white normativity, for queers of color, represents as much an axis of oppression as heteronormativity (22). Similarly to Cohen, Muñoz argues against the single-issue model of queer theory that is unable to grasp the layers and complexities of identity formations that are not white gay men and lesbians, hence reproducing the very modes of normativization that *queer*, as a mode of inquiry, is supposed to critique.

While these arguments reverberated around a certain niche of queer scholars during the late 1990s, it was in 2005 that Roderick Ferguson coined a name for this formation: queer of color critique. In his book *Aberrations in Black*, Ferguson consolidates this emerging analysis by articulating its purpose: to offer "a study of racial formations that will not oblige heteropatriarchy, an analysis of sexuality not severed from race and material relations, an interrogation of African American culture that keeps company with other racial formations, and an American studies not beguiled by the United States" (Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black* 29). In defining queer of color critique, Ferguson emphasizes the inextricability of race with sexuality and with other racializations. While echoing some of Cohen and Muñoz's arguments I have brought forward, Ferguson also expands these views by tackling the normative assumptions of Marxism in its limitation of defining class as the only mode of inquiry. Noticing the inadequacies of traditional historical materialism to approach the realities of liberal capitalism and its social formations, Ferguson not only challenges mainstream queer theory for its limited engagement with racial and economic oppression but also critiques Marxism and cultural studies for often overlooking sexuality and gender as sites of struggle (4). Ferguson identifies canonical sociology as an active component in the oppression of Black populations in America, as sociology and cultural studies have often painted Black culture as fundamentally outside or incompatible with pillars of hegemonic culture, such as the patriarchal and heterosexist norms of the nation-state (Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black* 22). It is through the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, and class, their overlap with political economy, and their interactions with nationalist ideals and practices that queer of color critique would intervene in and complicate mainstream Euro-American queer theory, never as multiculturalist response to queer studies (Ferguson, "Queer of

Color Critique" 2; Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black* 149; Tompkins 174; Ferguson, "Authoritarianism and the Planetary Mission of Queer of Color Critique" 283).

Nonetheless, while queer of color critique did arise as a response to the limitations of queer theory, its scholars make apparent that the formation emerged from women of color feminism rather than a white Euro-American queer theory tradition (Hong and Ferguson 2; Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 22). Situating women of color feminism within the genealogy of queer of color critique, Jasbir Puar's research trajectory, and the concept of homonationalism is essential. Ferguson, Muñoz, and Cohen all have acknowledged and engaged with the importance of women of color feminist writings, such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's 1981 anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (Cohen 453; Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 21-22; Ferguson, "Queer of Color Critique" 17). In an essay written a decade after the publication of the anthology, contributor Norma Alarcón presented women of color feminism's legacy in disrupting Anglo-American feminist tradition, mirroring the later interventions of queer of color critique on queer theory. In "The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism", Alarcón identifies women of color feminism as a new discursive formation in which women recognize the displacement of their subjectivities over various discourses – racial, feminist/lesbian, socioeconomic, political, nationalist, etc. (Alarcón 356). While aware of the seemingly contradictory or impossible discourses at the junction of their positions, it is from this peculiar displacement that these feminist authors are compelled to understand themselves and their relations with the real (ibid). It is exactly in this tension between these multiple intercultural and intracultural discourses that they would position not only their subjectivities, but also from where they would confront the "many-headed demon of oppression" (ibid).

Furthermore, Alarcón demonstrates the importance of women of color feminism as she critiques Anglo-American feminism. The main constraint of mainstream feminism is not solely that the female subject is limited to the (upper-)middle-class white woman, but especially that Anglo-American feminists construct the female subject only through a counteridentification with the male subject (358). Through this ideology, feminists, similarly to queer theorists and activists a decade later, fail to recognize that all the psychic and material violence that gives shape to female subjects does not come solely from men (hence, heteropatriarchy), but also from other women (360). Here, Alarcón emphasizes that the female subject exists through a multiplicity of relational positions, not just against white men. In *Disidentifications*, Muñoz reminds us of the importance of this scholarship in breaking down a naive and limited view of gender and gender studies' embrace of a singular framework of difference (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 22). Building off Alarcón's argument of Euro-American feminism's inability to include women of color and lesbians and their identities in their theory, Muñoz affirms that "if queer discourse is to supersede the limits of feminism, it must be able to calculate multiple antagonisms the index issues of class, gender, and race, as well as sexuality" (ibid). What is at stake here is the importance of situating women of color feminism within the genealogy of queer of color critique to grasp the evolution of discourses that have shaped the way we approach the subject and object of feminist and queer theory – plural, intersectional, and heterogeneous to undo the Eurocentric presumptions of uniformity and linearity of identities.

Another essential inheritance from women of color feminism is the theorization of the relationship between the nation, sexualities, and gender, particularly examining how the nation-state uses these constructs for nation-building and shaping its citizens. In a study of the Bahamian state's deployment of heteropatriarchy as a tool of recolonization through tourism and

law-making, M. Jacqui Alexander formed an essential analysis of heteronormativity as an essential process within the state apparatus to constitute and imagine itself. For the state, sex and gender represent the bridge between disciplining bodies and controlling the population while also being constitutive of these practices (Alexander 65). It is within this logic that Alexander posited the fundamental assertion that the nation is heteronormative and that, by extension, “no nationalism can survive without heterosexuality” (83). Through the figure of the lesbian and the prostitute, she asserts that the nation has been conceived in heterosexuality since biology and reproduction are central processes of state power. These processes of heterosexuality, in turn, become the prerequisites of good (heterosexual) citizenship and establish its hierarchy. The nation is thus formed of a class of servile, loyal, reproducing, and heterosexual citizens in opposition to a group of subordinated marginalized non-citizens – gay men, lesbians, HIV-positive individuals, and sex workers – who through their non-adhesion to heterosexuality and their “perverse tendencies” are imagined to choose not to belong to the nation (69). Alexander exposes the many legal, discursive, and psychic strategies that the Bahamian state deploys to position heterosexuality as integral to national identity. These include the use of law to construct the nation as inherently heterosexual, the normalization of violent heterosexuality as a response to same-sex desire, and the cultivation of a homophobic discourse that pathologizes homosexuality (84). This discourse operates under the guise of quasi-scientific reasoning, claiming to reveal "truths" about the nature and origins of homoeroticism, its passions, and desires, despite its internal contradictions. Non-adherence to heterosexuality – and, by extension, to the nation – is framed as a deliberate choice made by homosexuals, who are imagined to willfully reject the norms of national belonging (ibid).

Additionally, the state invokes nostalgic imagery of an idyllic Bahamas, untainted by so-called "Western decadent incursions," to frame queerness as foreign and incompatible with national belonging, thereby excluding lesbians and gay men from the imagined community (85). Thus, Alexander argues that the requirement of national citizenship is to be heterosexual as "homosexuality forfeits citizenship, because within homosexuality inheres the power to dissolve the family, come out the foundation of the nation, and the nation itself" (Alexander 89). While this position has had a crucial role in theorizing sex, gender, and the nation in terms of governance and state power, it is interesting to consider the evolution of the relationship between queerness and the state, which Puar criticizes with the concept of homonationalism. Puar and her concept owe much to women of color feminism, which has inspired queer of color critique in its groundbreaking theorization of the nation as heterosexual. Once again, the direct lineage from women of color feminism to queer of color critique (rather than from queer studies) is essentially rooted in the practice of both formations to "(...) profoundly question nationalist and identitarian modes of political organization and craft alternative understandings of subjectivity, collectivity, and power" (Hong and Ferguson 2). Both scholarships emphasize frameworks that unmask the ruses of neoliberal statist forms of power and their deployment of violence on racialized and marginalized subjects through rhetorics of individual freedom, normativity, and responsibility.

Positing the nation as a site of struggle is crucial in the theorization of the lives and subjectivities of queers of color at large. In defining queer of color critique, Ferguson reminded us that the formation extends women of color feminism through its exploration of "how intersecting racial, gender, and sexual practices antagonize and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation-states and capital" (Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black* 5). In *Aberrations in Black*, Ferguson unpacks the contradictions of nation-state formations and their exclusionary

practices to study capitalist political economies. As the state, the nation, and its citizens are always articulated through illusions of racialized and sexual universality, Ferguson, building on women of color feminism, emphasizes that heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity helped constitute the state and the citizen's universality (12). Positioning US citizenship as universally white and normatively heterosexual, racialized group and their non-heteronormative particularities of race, gender, and sexuality exist as the backdrop of universal citizenship. As the state historically worked to regulate gender and sexual nonnormative outside of citizenship, Ferguson presents the paradox that capitalism, and its constant need to seek labor outside local and national borders, disturb the nation's universality and its illusions of racial and sexual homogeneity (14). Historically, the nation-state has coerced and relied on the labor of non-white populations by extending limited forms of citizenship – both legal status and social inclusion – as incentives, while simultaneously regulating these groups through strict enforcement of sexual and moral norms. It is exactly in capitalism's paradoxical violation of universal norms established by the nation-state and the creation of a "surplus population" that Ferguson roots his critique of capitalism and therefore of the nation-state (17). Queer of color critique, thus, "must see the gendered and eroticized elements of racial formations as offering ruptural (...) possibilities" since these racial formations, constituted nonnormatively by gender and sexual differences, overdetermine national identity, exposing contradictions in its promises of citizenship and property (ibid). It is exactly in this US terrain of racial, gender, and sexual exclusions through normativity that queer of color critique would critically approach the state, the nation, and citizenship.

While queer of color critique is often tied to a North American context, authors such as Gayatri Gopinath have embraced and introduced a postcolonial perspective to the field and

therefore rearticulated a queer and racial approach to the nation beyond the national borders of the United States and traditional understandings of citizenship. In her book *Impossible Desires*, Gopinath introduces a queer diasporic framework meant to complicate and denaturalize the relationship between heterosexuality and the nation as well as reimagining queerness in relation to race, colonialism, migration, and globalization. While conventional discourses of diaspora are rooted in a nostalgic yearning for "lost origins" and in heteronormative and patriarchal associations to national belongings, a queer diaspora framework centers queer desire as an analytic to repurpose nostalgia to make apparent how prior and ongoing histories of nationalism, colonialism, racism, and migration erupt into the present (Gopinath 4). As Gopinath asserts that "queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation," a queer diasporic framework effectively draws parallels between analogous relations between nation and diaspora on the one hand, and between heterosexuality and queerness on the other (11). Diaspora offers a constructive critique of both the nation and globalization. At the same time, the category of "queer" serves to redefine diaspora, challenging its traditional ties to national ideologies, closely linked to the agendas of transnational capitalism (10). Gopinath's queer diasporic framework allows for a coinciding critique of heterosexuality and the nation while shattering ubiquitous binary oppositions between heterosexuality and queerness, and between nation and diaspora.

The queer diaspora fits and originates from queer of color critique in the shared refusal of a splitting of queerness and feminism, in decentering whiteness from queer theory, and in challenging the Eurocentric models of theorizing sexuality both nationally and transnationally (Gopinath 6, 11). However, Gopinath argues that her framework diverges from some of the scholarship by making a queer female subject the starting point of the queer diaspora (16). Queer of color critique and Gopinath still work in tandem – and perhaps Gopinath helps further the

subjects and objects of inquiry of the formation – to critique the white homonormative working of queer studies and the globalization and homogenization of "gay" identities that reproduces colonial narratives of modernity and criticizes non-Western "othered" forms of sexual identities, practices, and communities. Ultimately, queer diasporas – a concept that Puar also adopts in her theorization of homonationalism – help reenvision the relationship between sexualities and the nation-state while reinvigorating new modes of inquiry that pull from not only queer of color critique but also from postcolonial and transnational feminism, which takes into consideration plural forms of state formations that exceed national borders.

To expand on the neocolonial undertones of the international Western gay and lesbian movement and get slightly closer to Puar's concept of homonationalism, it is worth considering Joseph Massad's critique of the "Gay International." As queers of color have identified the nation-state as a site of struggle rather than a site of solutions, critiques of the rights-based (or state-based) approach to social change have been central to the scholarship (Tompkins 177). Massad's analysis may not conventionally fall within the scope of queer of color critique, given its focus on the Arab world rather than a US context. However, his theorization of sexualities through a transnational, postcolonial lens and his critique of Western, homonormative, rights-based LGBTQIA+ activism offer substantial insights that align with and enrich this formation. In his influential article "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World", Massad forms a critique of the Orientalist discourse of "liberatory" and missionary international gay and lesbian rights organizations in their activities in the Middle East and North Africa, what he names the Gay International. As these NGOs seek to spread universalized "gay rights" – those modeled on the prevailing American discourses of human rights worldwide, the larger mission of these Western LGBTQIA+ organizations is "to liberate Arab and Muslim queers from the

oppression under which they allegedly live by transforming them from practitioners of same-sex contact into subjects who identify as homosexual and gay" (Massad 362). The discourses of the Gay International, by demanding the application of Western fixed sexual identities where they don't exist (as defined by the West), produce homosexual subjects and suppress same-sex practices and desires that reject assimilation into its sexual epistemology (363). In other words, homosexuals, gays, and lesbians are imagined as universal categories that exist all over the world, while sexualities in the Arab World are still perversely "queered" through orientalist and ahistorical biases (367). The Gay International disregards the presence of gay-identified Muslims in Arab societies but also conceals those engaging in same-sex erotics, even if not within the rubric of identity.

Massad shows how the Gay International has the opposite effect from liberation as it takes on the mission of advocating for these groups by demanding recognition and protection of their rights as "homosexuals" in contexts where such rights are denied or violated (363). Thus, the Gay International creates an oppressive axis of power in which nations are imagined as either supportive of gay rights or opposed to them: *with* queers or *against* queers. The Gay International becomes fundamental to ensure the deployment of US sexual exceptionalism – a process through which the American population believes in its own moral, political, and historical superiority and singularity in terms of issues concerning sexuality (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 5). Through these processes, the depiction of Islamic societies, symptomized by a vague, ahistorical generalized discussion about the taboo of homosexuality in Muslim communities, elevates the American acceptance of homosexuality — an imperative fiction for homonationalism (111). Although Massad's Gay International depicts transnational discursive flows that affect the Arab World, it not only reinforces the United States' imagined moral

superiorities over the rest of the world but also inevitably rearticulates sexual and gender formations within the national border.

US (sexual) exceptionalism operates on two levels. The United States presents itself as an exceptionally morally superior nation in the face of the rest of the world and, through legal and political maneuvers during times of state crisis, establishes a "state of exception" — the ability of the state to justify and deploy extreme measures (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 3). September 11 and the War on Terror, in the context of homonationalism, represented a tipping point in the deployment of exceptional*ism* within the temporality of political urgency. What this double play of exceptionalism and exception produces is, on the one hand, Muslim and Sikh "terrorist" corporealities and, on the other, a class of acceptable queer patriots. Before coining the concept of homonationalism, Puar had already been engaging with the omnipresence of sexuality and gender in the post-9/11 United States and the machinations of the War on Terror, and with it, the production of haunting figures: the docile national subject and the queered terrorist "monster".

In their 2002 article "Monster, Terrorist, Fag", Puar and Rai introduce a renewed critique of the heteronormative nation alongside its discourses of normativization and securitization in this historical moment through the figure of the "monster-terrorist-fag." To theorize the practices of sexual and racial othering enacted onto the terrorist, Puar and Rai frame this subject within the history of Western discourses of normality through Foucault's figure of the monster (Puar and Rai 118).[2] The terrorist, then, is read as belonging to the genealogy of Western modernity as a sexualized and racialized monster that must be quarantined and disciplined. Existing as a member of the West's "abnormals" whose figures have historically been perversely sexualized

[2] Interestingly, while much of the content of this article works as fundamental groundwork in *Terrorist Assemblages* (especially in Chapter 1, "The Sexuality of Terrorism"), the monster-terrorist-fag figure is employed, but it is not directly related to or framed within the Foucauldian historical analysis of the monster in the West.

and racialized, the monster-terrorist-fag becomes a figure that calls forth a form of juridical punishment for his violation of both natural and societal laws but also invites multiform apparatuses of discipline to fit into the social order (119). Through the racial and civilizational frameworks of counterterrorism, as well as media representation, the murderous deviancy of the terrorist is justified by attributing it to the symptoms of a "failed psyche" – a psyche opposed to the normative one rooted in the West's heterosexual fantasy of domesticity (123–24). This failure is thus framed as a kind of failed heterosexuality, a queerness.

Puar and Rai also examine the rhetoric used in the aftermath of September 11, describing the American nation as having experienced a humiliating "penetration" of its empire and its active retaliation promises to emasculate bin Laden and "turn him into a fag" through homophobic and racist imagery of sodomy (126). This queerness, existing as a sexual deviancy outside of the nation-state, is attached to the terrorist "as a way to otherize and quarantine subjects classified as 'terrorists', but also to normalize and discipline a population through these very monstrous figures" (ibid). It is in the perverse sexuality of the terrorist that Puar hints at with the concept of homonationalism by taking into account the simultaneous growing acceptance of "normative" queer subjectivities within the nation. While the discourses of counterterrorism are infused with an image of Afghanistan as an oppressive society towards women and queers, the nation affirms that, within a national and transnational structure, "some queers are better than others" (127).

What is brought to the forefront, then, is the deployment of heteronormative patriotism by way of the simultaneous quarantining of the terrorist-monster-fag through the bodies and practices of queered others and the assimilation of certain elements of queer subjectivity into the identity of the normalized nation. The construction of the terrorist as a "monster-terrorist-fag"

critiques the intersections of racial and sexual othering that underpin the heteronormative nation's claims to security and order while pointing to the creation of patriotic national subjects. These monstrous figures, whose psyche and behaviors deviate from societal expectations, paradoxically serve as examples that reinforce patriotism's processes of normalization (135–36). However, the national family space also emerges, populated by subjects who find their identity within the heterosexual framework of the nation and are defined and brought into being by the very existence of the monster figure (ibid). Puar and Rai offer a new theorization of the nation and sexuality, in which the nation is still heteronormative, but also appropriates queerness with some queer figures to quarantine and others to protect.

Queer of color critique has thoroughly examined the relationship between queers and the nation-state and the strategies of survival, resistance, and disidentification of queers of color. It has also importantly critiqued the appropriation of LGBTQIA+ rights for nationalist ends as well as the efforts of some gay and lesbian associations to engage with the state as a platform "from which to leverage limited and problematic forms of political power, including, for instance, marriage rights and the right to serve in the military" (Tompkins 178). These critiques, to which Jasbir Puar has been a great contributor, have become even more crucial and pertinent in the years following September 11th and the reinvention of the US war machine with the War on Terror. The simultaneous growing anti-Muslim and anti-Sikh sentiment in both the United States and Europe with a strengthened national acceptance of LGBTQIA+ rights have been central to questioning the complicity of queers in the national and imperialist project of the United States. In *Terrorist Assemblage,* Puar states explicitly that her theorization of homonationalism stemmed from a critique of queer theory's belief in the inherent transgressive power of queerness, its assumed intrinsic position as radical. Homonationalism is, therefore, an attempt to challenge the

ubiquitous assumption in those fields in the 1990s that the nation was always and only heteronormative, hence queers are innately outlaws to the nation-state (Puar, "Rethinking Homonationalism" 336).

Homonationalism: Definition and Critical Exploration through *Terrorist Assemblages*

Although queers have not often been associated with national belonging and involvement in the nation's military project, gay and lesbian rights in the United States have been legally tied to state violence. In his book *Freedom with Violence*, Reddy makes this connection apparent by examining the federal enactment of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act in 2009. This bill, which added "crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability" to the list of hate crimes under federal law, was highly celebrated by liberals and Democrats as well as depicted in the media as a major victory for the queer community in the United States (Reddy 3). However, what had been overlooked by LGBTQIA+ rights organizations in positing this moment as a historical milestone for the community and democracy was the context of the act's passage. In fact, this federal LGBTQIA+ hate-crimes legislation was passed in conjunction with that year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which allotted the Department of Defense its highest military budget increase in US history, a budget nearly as important as all other countries' defense budgets combined (2–5). This paradoxical move in US politics to fight the struggles against hate and violence within the nation's borders while facilitating the deployment of US imperialism and global violence abroad informs us not only of the bio- and necropolitics of the state – the selective valuation of certain forms of life (via the protection of LGBTIAQ+

rights) and the facilitation of death (via military extension and global violence)[3] – but also of the complicity of queers in the violent national project. As queers and LGBTQIA+ rights organizations celebrated this amendment and overlooked its co-constituent or framed it as a necessary evil, Reddy argues that these positions figure the liberal state "as the ultimate embodiment of the values that enable and guarantee equality (...) and (...) as the final outcome of struggles for equality" (9). In other words, the state is positioned as the only actor able to grant rights and liberties to queer subjects. Thus, all movements and claims for equality are imagined as necessarily mediated through the frame of the legal order of the nation-state. This double move of the US nation-state as both the guarantor of its citizens' individual freedoms and as the international agent of their human rights model through war and imperialism explicitly showcases another aspect of US exceptionalism (12). Reddy's analysis of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act introduced a new paradox in the relationship between the nation-state and queers: the entanglement of queer rights and protections with the US imperial war machine.

In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar makes evident that American warfare abroad is never disconnected from the matters within the nation, especially the rise of gay and lesbian rights in the early 2000s. She identifies this era of a new form of nationalism (that would now include queer subjects in its project) as "queer times" characterized through "temporal assemblages hooked into an array of enduring modernist paradigms (civilizing teleologies, Orientalisms, xenophobia, militarization, border anxieties) and postmodernist eruptions (suicide bombers, biometric surveillance strategies, emergent corporealities, counterterrorism in overdrive)" (Puar,

[3] In *Freedom with Violence*, Reddy reminds us that the 2010 NDAA was passed while the US was actively engaged in two overseas wars, one in the Middle East and the other in South Asia. The act provided funding to sustain US drone strikes and bombings in nations such as Pakistan, where no formal war had been declared, undermining their sovereignty and resulting in civilian deaths (Reddy 4).

Terrorist Assemblages 204). When considering whose life is valued by the nation and whose lives are ready to be discarded in these "queer times" – the neoimperialist, homonormative contemporary, homonationalism offers us an insightful approach to the biopolitical mechanisms of queerness that this form of nationalism builds upon. The biopolitics of queerness do not simply limit to which queers live and which queers die, but also *how* queers live and die. Indeed, as queers have been increasingly tied to notions of life and productivity (through gay marriage and adoption) instead of their former association with death (through the HIV/AIDS epidemic), there have been numerous entries for queer subjects into "the biopolitical optimization of life and productivity" of the nation (xx). Puar argues that the emergence of these nonnormative subjects into the nation happens at the expense of racialized populations that come into being through an assignment of (a perverse non-national) queerness, a queerness disavowed by the homonormative queer subjects folded into the biopolitical promotion and regulation of life (xxi). Essentially asserting that Western modernity creates "queerness as the optic through which perverse populations are called into nominalization for control," Puar frames the biopolitical manifestations of queer times and the production of both terrorist and citizen bodies through three different areas: sexual exceptionalism, queerness as regulatory, and the ascendency of whiteness (ibid).

First, (US) sexual exceptionalism, which I have discussed in previous sections of this chapter, characterizes how US national heteronormativity has incorporated (some) previously excluded gay and lesbian subjects and politics into American national life – "an exceptional form of national heteronormativity is now joined by an exceptional form of national homonormativity, in other words, homonationalism" (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 2). This inclusion, Puar argues, is a necessary tool for the US nation-state to further its narratives of exception in the War on

Terror. In this context, the nation must suspend its hegemonic heteronormative imaginary to reinforce national sentiment through the recognition and embrace of some homosexual subjects (4). Queer homonational subjects, as they become increasingly incorporated into nationalism (what Puar calls "circuits of homosexual nationalism"), are complicit with heteronormative nationalist formations rather than being intrinsically outside or opposed to them (ibid). Homonationalism exists, then, as a form of sexual exceptionalism in which the national inclusion of queer subjects becomes dependent on the exclusion of racialized subjects.

As I have explored through the work of Massad, Reddy, and Rai & Puar, sexual exceptionalism expands beyond the subjectivation of national subjects into transnational political agendas of US imperialism through Orientalist constructions of "Muslim sexuality." Sexual othering, thus, becomes a crucial process through which the US national queer can exist vis-à-vis a sexually perverse/repressed Muslim other.[4] As I explored through Puar and Rai's monster-terrorist-fag figure, sexual exceptionalism is tied to villainizing and perverting Muslim others to render US sexual culture as exceptionally important – making these US sexual discourses (and narrow frames of sexual identities and expressions) so vital to US practices of empire. By analyzing the manifestations of US sexual exceptionalism, we may understand not only how some homonational queers align themselves with the state, an alignment shaped by exclusionary factors such as race, religion, class, etc. This analysis also points us toward diverse processes of racialization and un-nationalization of sexual others – most queers, whether subject or population – that create the regimes of violence and death enacted onto these non-national queers. Transnationally, this sexual exceptionalism, as a co-existing element of homonationalism, works to assign nation-states with the status of "gay friendly" versus "homophobic" as a new modern

[4] It is important to consider homonationalism itself as one facet of Massad's "gay international".

world order dichotomy between the Global North and the rest of the world. In her 2013 keynote at GLAGS's "Homonationalism and Pinkwashing" conference, Puar offered an interesting exemplification of the homonational paradox of US sexual exceptionalism in adapting Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak's famous "woman question" ("White men are saving brown women from brown men") (Spivak 296) into "white (queer) men saving brown homosexual men from brown heterosexuals" (Puar, *Homonationalism Keynote*).

Second, "queer as regulatory" highlights how LGBTQIA+ advocates and academics often frame queerness as inherently transgressive, as a symbol of liberal agency, autonomy, and resistance. Yet, this positioning ultimately conforms to normalizing biopolitical frameworks. Central to this position of transgression and resistance is queer secularism, queerness is imagined as the other side of religion, in particular Islam, in an irreconcilable binary (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 13). As queer secularity requires a deliberate transgression of religious norms, which are seen as uniquely restricting and binding, the queer agential subject is imagined only in opposition to these religious normative constraints. The queer liberal imaginary envisions Islam as "(...) [a] mark of subjugated and repressed sexuality void of agency" and as a primary concern to queer secularity as it is imagined as less amenable to homosexuality in comparison to Christianity and Judaism (ibid). In this imaginary infused by Western human rights framings, state repression in Muslim countries is conflated with solely Islamic sexual repression, essentially ignoring the impact of colonially inherited juridical structures (14). However, Western traditions of Orientalist fabrications have also painted Muslim populations as an "always already homosexualized population" in which male homosociality is associated with sexual excess and pedophilia, while female homosociality is unimaginable (ibid). Thus, the identity of the queer Muslim subject is made impossible while the terrorist figure is perversely

queered: on the one hand, the discourse around the presumed Islamic sexual repression deployed by Western human rights frames and queer and feminist liberalism; on the other, the Orientalist fantasies of "lascivious excesses of pedophilia, sodomy, and perverse sexuality" (ibid). Queer secularity is constituted by and constitutive of the autonomous queer liberal subject. This identity is defined in opposition to, and built upon, the stigmatized and irrational sexualities often linked to the sexually perverse/repressed queer Muslim subject (15). What is particularly interesting in thinking about queer secularity through homonationalism is the tendency of LGBTQIA+ activist groups to transform the already existing Muslim or gay binary into an "Islam versus homosexuality" discursive dichotomy. In painting fundamentalist Islam and terrorism as targeting Western homosexual subjects, these activist groups reiterate the War on Terror through a "queers versus Muslims" rhetoric – implicitly reproducing neo-imperial modernist framings of "civilization versus barbarism" (20). Through the propagation of homonormative Islamophobia in the Global North and the collective vilification of Muslims, Puar establishes that the "acceptable" disciplined homosexual subject exists in their opposition and their refusal to be associated with the sexually pathological Muslim terrorist figure.

The regulatory potential of queerness also emerges from its theorization as an inherently transgressive and anti-normative identity. Through Sarah Ahmed's work, Puar critiques queerness's "exceptional desires" as the obligatory emancipation from norms, creating a *right* way of being queer based on the exclusion of others (22). Homonationalism critiques paradoxical positions within the gay liberation movement that create problematic scripts around the preeminent homophobia of immigrant non-Western communities, their stricter family values, and particular ideals and regulations of coming out (22). These constructions work to eclipse a more pressing need to examine queerness as a biopolitical framework that both parallels and

intersects with culture, the dominance and influence of whiteness (what Puar calls "ascendency of whiteness," a term borrowed from Rey Chow), and its entanglement with liberationist paradigms. In defining "queer life" as a challenge to heteronorms or a life "that *ideally* (...) will maintain a discomfort with the scripts of heteronormative existence" (Ahmed 151; emphasis added), Ahmed points out the problematic reliance on the idealization of this existence – to live a queer life is to act in some ways rather than others. If queer theory characterizes queerness as a liberatory and even transgressive identity, and as "freedom from norms", we must consider its limitations. This includes accounting for those whose cultural attachments differ from a hegemonic normative (white, upper-middle-class, male) queer population and those who may not have access to the cultural and economic capital that is required to support the "risk" of centering anti-normativity in their lives (152). Ahmed and Puar both argue that queer theory, in its idealization of transgression, turns the movement into a fetish that inevitably depends on the exclusion of others who are not "free in the same way" (Ahmed 152; Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 22). Ultimately, individual freedoms become the primary barometer measure by which queerness is evaluated and regulated. Queerness as transgression depends on a normative understanding of deviance, which is defined against normativity. Paradoxically, this deviance, despite its claims to freedom, is shaped by the very regulatory systems it seeks to oppose (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 23). In other words, the insistence of queer theory on the (supposedly inherent) transgressive nature of queerness feeds into a regulatory frame of biopolitics that normativizes queer identity in terms of access to cultural, social, and economic capital while excluding those who cannot afford to stray from heteronorms.

Another layer to the regulatory power of queerness is its insistence on whiteness. Puar echoes the arguments of queer of color critique thinkers, such as Cohen, Ferguson, and Muñoz,

as they critiqued queer theory and queer activism's biases in considering heteronormativity as the sole oppressive axis for queers. By pointing out the omission of race, gender, and class in the theorization of queerness, queer theory not only fails to account for the lived experiences of queers of color but also reinforces whiteness as the norm for queers (Cohen 453; Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 22; Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black* 12; Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 24). Any singular-axis identity analysis of queerness will recreate the most normative versions of that identity, those that center on privileged white gay men (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 93). In sum, queerness as a regulatory frame, defined by an automatic transgression, reveals its entanglement with biopolitical mechanisms of control, positioning celebratory queer subjects against populations marked as deviant and expendable (24). This framework often serves as an alibi for complicity with other identity norms, such as race, nation, class, and gender, subtly reinforcing hegemonic structures. However, instead of simply critiquing the failure of queerness's radical potential, Puar posits that these complicities can be constructive if viewed as an enabling acknowledgment that considers the larger webs of resistance and complicities (ibid).

The final area of the biopolitical manifestations of queer times is the "ascendancy of whiteness" – a term Puar adopts from Rey Chow's *The Protestant Ethnic* and refines through Susan Koshy's notion of "class fractioning". The ascendancy of whiteness uncovers the insidious biopolitical workings of queer liberalism to reinforce white hegemony, which occurs not through the exclusion of the "ethnic" or racialized subject but through discourses of inclusion and multiculturalism (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 25-31). Within the framework of US nationalism, especially through neoliberal logics of inclusion and exclusion, Puar argues that whiteness gains ascendancy in aligning itself with modernity, progress, and nationalism, which are defined through their contrast with the racialized, queered, terrorist Other. While the nation-state seems

to offer the positive inclusion of racialized populations into the folds of nationalism through efforts of multicultural acceptance, this inclusion is mediated by an important realm of exclusions (25). This limited inclusion often requires the alignment of "the ethnic" with heteropatriarchy and cultural and material capital: the racialized subject, to benefit from liberal multicultural inclusion, must be straight, male, and have the financial resources to be a proper consumer (ibid). In other words, multiculturalism, as a simulacrum of inclusiveness, offers limited acceptance for certain fitting non-white national subjects defined against the perversely queered/homophobic racialized "Other."

Multiculturalism also serves as a biopolitical mechanism for managing differences in ways that ultimately maintain white supremacy and privilege, and "(...) render appropriate multicultural ethnic bodies with this ascendency [of whiteness]" (ibid). In *The Protestant Ethnic*, Chow argues that the national discourses of tolerance and acceptance work to hinder the past and present racial and colonial violence of the Western nation-state while upholding a class and racial hierarchy, an "us" versus "them" logic (Chow 14–15). The biopolitical manifestations of racial difference no longer oppose claims of emancipation but rather appropriate them by "accepting" and "tolerating" some racialized subjects and not others. Through the illusion of the benevolence of the state in accepting marginalized others, the nation-state can preserve its homophobic and xenophobic stances and attitudes while capitalizing on a facade of acceptance, diversity, and inclusion (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 26). While some racialized subjects are complicit and benefit from the ascendancy of whiteness, white queer subjects also profit from it. To argue that the ascendancy of whiteness is not exclusive to white people, just as heteronormativity is not limited to heterosexuals, Puar contends that a class of wealthy white gay men, through their privileged access to the market, are integrated into and reproduce life,

aligning with heteronormative biopolitical mandates (30-31). Indeed, "the homonormative aids the project of heteronormativity through the fractioning away of queer alliances in favor of adherence to the reproduction of class, gender, and racial norm" (32). In other words, queer subjects assist and benefit from the projects of whiteness and heteronormativity by engaging in the same systems of identity-based and economic dominance as their heterosexual counterparts. Hence, the ascendency of whiteness is an insidious project that folds in some racialized and queer subjects into the valorization of national life and reaffirms the discursive assumption that "the homosexual other is white, the racial other is straight" (ibid). Homonationalism is both a manifestation and a factor of the biopolitical manifestations of queerness, by being strategically included or excluded in the national project, which is deployed in ways that justify racial, gendered, and colonial hierarchies, making it a complex and ambivalent power axis within biopolitical governance.

As queerness serves as a biopolitical tool for state power and nationalism, homonationalism is an essential concept in thinking through the creation of modern citizens. As I have explored throughout this chapter, the homonational nation offers an entrance for (some) queers into the nation while setting limitations on citizenship for ethnic/racial subjects. The proliferation of progressive and liberal discourses of LGBTQIA+ identity itself operates as "directives regarding suitable and acceptable kinship, affiliative, and consumption patterns, consolidating a deracialized queer liberal constituency that makes it less easy to draw delineations between assimilated gay and lesbian identities and ever-so-vigilant and -resistant queer identities" (46). This dual process of incorporation and exclusion is central to homonationalism: US patriotism temporarily validates certain queernesses, but only after they have been sanitized along racial, gendered, and class lines to contrast sharply with racialized

"others," such as the figure of the "monster-terrorist-fag (ibid). In tandem, queer subjects who adopt the us-versus-them logic of nationalism align themselves with the very racist and homophobic systems that perpetuate these exclusions. Hence, in our homonationalist modernity, queerness becomes both a means of inclusion and a mechanism for marginalization, reflecting the intricate articulation of race, sexuality, and nation that shapes modern citizenship. Homonationalism is upheld not only through privileged access to capital but also via preserving a simulated idealized racial harmony and gender normativity (67).

Through the concept of homonationalism, Puar offered essential contributions to queer studies and queer of color critique. In theorizing how queers actively participate and benefit from the nationalist project, she provided a new way to envision the relationship between queerness and the state that differed from a theoretical lineage of considering queers as systematically outside of the nation. Indeed, homonationalism strengthens the nation through multiple deployments that intertwine queerness with state power. First, it reiterates heterosexuality as the normative ideal, incorporating queerness only when it emulates heterosexual norms such as monogamy, domesticity, and productivity (51). Second, it fosters nationalist homosexual positionalities indebted to liberalism, which then act as disciplinary forces, policing nonnormative sexualities and reinforcing the boundaries of acceptable queerness (ibid). Third, it enables a transnational discourse of US sexual exceptionalism, contrasting the perceived progressiveness of American LGBTQIA+ rights with the racialized "perversions" and “backwardness” of other nations (ibid). This narrative serves to justify US cultural and political dominance while masking the systemic exclusions within its own borders. Together, these manifestations of homonationalism exemplify the simultaneous processes of incorporation and

marginalization, reinforcing racial, gendered, and national hierarchies in the name of modernity and progress.

Furthermore, Jasbir Puar, through *Terrorist Assemblages* and the concept of homonationalism, initiated a significant move in academia to displace queerness as solely a (non/)identity or a modality into an assemblage that exceeds identity politics. Queer assemblages (Puar's repurposing of Deleuze's assemblage theory) become an approach that accounts for various phenomena such as sexuality, race, and nationality not singularly, but actively points "to the imperceptible play of forces that bring them into contact, fusion, and fission" (xiii). As Puar alludes to "queer praxes of futurity" – a shift toward futurity that insists on affective analyses that may tackle queernesses as "unknown or not cogently knowable" rather than representational investigations of visibility politics that foster narratives of sexual exceptionalism, assemblages become useful to incorporate movement and temporality in approaching queerness as an emergence (something "in the midst of becoming") that lays beyond identity (204). Assemblage is not only an extension of intersectionality that accounts for "forces that merge and dissipate time, space and body against linearity, coherency and permanency," but also a framework that allows scholars to address the limitation of intersectionality and its identitarian foundations (212). While intersectionality has been a foundational framework of queer of color critique as well as queer and gender studies, its weakness might lay in its focus on the components of identity (race, gender, sexuality, class, etc.) as separable, static analytics that can be picked apart and individually analyzed as well as in the structuralist lens through which systems of oppression are understood.[5] Puar argues that queer theory's reliance on a stable subject often limits its

[5] The adoption of Crenshaw's model of intersectionality by queer and gender theory has been one of the main propositions initiated by queer of color critique scholars. For instance, Ferguson defines queer of color critique as a critical formation based on an *intersectional model* that positioned race, sexuality, and gender as essential and

scope, as even intersectional frameworks can presume the centrality of identity and subjecthood. Despite queer theory's critique of fixed identities, the queer subject still emerges as an object requiring excavation or elaboration, often framed as transgressive rather than liberatory (206). Hence, this model risks reinforcing the automatic primacy of the subject and its identity, ultimately constraining the analysis of queerness. While intersectionality presupposes identity and disavows futurity by fixing a permanence to what may emerge, assemblage offers a vital alternative (216). Drawing on ontology, assemblages embrace what cannot yet be known, seen, or heard, allowing for a mode of becoming beyond or without being. This openness resists stabilization and positions queerness as something in flux, continually emerging and exceeding the confines of identity (ibid). Assemblages address how conceptions of identity cannot be rigidly divided or stabilized across space and time, as in an intersectional framework. Instead, it offers a model of a system or machine with many parts in motion and many kinds of relations among the parts (213).

Although intersectionality's structuralization of "differences" might be co-opted as a tool of liberal multiculturalism and conspire with the state's disciplinary apparatus, Puar does not completely reject this model but rather holds assemblages and intersectionality in tension. In pointing toward queer futurity, Puar reminds us that "intersectionality privileges naming, visuality, epistemology, representation, and meaning, while assemblage underscores feeling, tactility, ontology, affect, and information (215). Thus, assemblages – by accounting for "movements, intensities, emotions, energies, affectivities, and textures as they inhabit events, spatiality, and corporealities" (ibid) – become indispensable tools against the bio- and necropolitical mechanisms of Western modernity. They disrupt the fixity of race and sexuality

interacting modes of differences to engage with social and subject formation (Ferguson, "Queer of Color Critique" 12)

that state surveillance relies on to support the violent "us versus them" rhetoric of US sexual exceptionalism, homonationalism, and the War on Terror.

This queer praxis of assemblage is coded into Puar's research in *Terrorist Assemblage* as she connects seemingly unrelated events such as the tortures at Abu Ghraib and the *Lawrence-Garner* ruling to account for the many axes of power, normativization, and control of the US empire as well as the biopolitics of the contemporary moment. The sexual torture at Abu Ghraib and the representation of foreign prisoners' abuse contributed to the construction of the perversely sexualized queer 'Other," a terrorist body that must be disciplined through gay sex in the Orientalist belief of Muslim sexual repression, in contrast to a sexually exceptional American citizen that must be protected (86). The *Lawrence-Garner* ruling, as an actualization of American national queer liberalism, regulates queerness through federal legislation as the state is allowed to "patrol the boundaries between queer subjects who are invited into life and queer populations who come into being through their perverse sexual-racial attributes and histories" (165). Puar, however, cross-reads or *reads sideways* these two (and many other) events to build an assemblage that situates Abu Ghraib and *Lawrence-Garner* as co-constitutive occurrences in the context of an array of American exceptionalisms and homonationalisms generated by counterterrorism and liberal discourses. By connecting many moving, evolving, and coexisting elements into assemblages that account for anticipatory temporalities, Puar also reveals the biopolitical and necropolitical nature of homonationalism. For instance, by binding Abu Ghraib with *Lawrence-Garner*, homonationalism is placed at the interstice of life and death – the tension between biopolitics and necropolitics[6] – where we find, on the one hand, the homonational queer

[6] This tension between biopolitics and necropolitics is a recurring theme in Puar's research trajectory. In her 2017 book *The Right to Maim,* she introduces "maiming" as a new vector that complicates and extends Foucault's biopolitics (make live and let die) and Mbembe's necropolitics (make die and let live). Maiming emphasizes the deliberate withholding of death (will not let die) to produce states of debility, particularly in the context of Israel's

subject folded back into life and, on the other, the racialized queernesses that emerge through the naming of populations that are targeted for death (35).

Homonationalism is an important contribution to queer theory as it complicates the centrality of biopolitical reproductive biologism by expanding the scope of who reproduces and what is reproduced, disrupting the always presumed heterosexual frame. It interrogates how identity categories such as gay, lesbian, and even queer operate not only as sites of resistance but also in the service of managing, reproducing, and regenerating life (35). Rather than being primarily understood as populations targeted for death, these categories are shown to participate in broader biopolitical projects, revealing the tension between inclusion into life and exclusion through death within the interplay of homonationalism and the biopolitics of the state (36). Puar's theorization of this tension of bio- and necropolitics in the figuration of queer(ed) subjects (those who are left to die and those that reproduce life) will also significantly contribute to an emerging interest of queer studies in necropolitics. Queer necropolitics represent a scholarly interest in utilizing the necropolitical "as a tool to make sense of the symbiotic co-presence of life and death, manifested ever more clearly in the cleavages between rich and poor, citizens and non-citizens; the culturally, morally, economically valuable and the pathological; queer subjects invited into life and queerly abjected populations marked for death." (Haritaworn et al. 2). Thus, the concept of homonationalism has initiated (or contributed) new ways of tackling queerness in terms of bio- and necropolitics, racialization, and complicity among other relations.

genocidal strategies on Palestinians. Puar situates maiming within broader frameworks of settler colonialism, highlighting how debilitation serves as a tool of governance and exploitation (Puar, *The Right to Maim* 140–44).

Homonationalism, (Anti-)Pinkwashing and Pinkwatching

While Puar's concept of homonationalism has significantly impacted academia in many ways, it has also transpired into diverse fields of (queer) activism. The growing awareness of homonationalism among different political publics and activist organizing platforms has become important for its utility in critiquing how the state co-opts LGBTQIA+ rights to advance imperial colonial and nationalist projects. Since Puar coined the concept, it has mostly been associated with pinkwashing, which names the process by which nation-states, especially the Israeli state, mobilize sexuality and LGBTQIA+ rights in an attempt to conceal the ongoing violent settler colonialism of Palestine and draw international attention away from the violation of Palestinian human rights (Puar and Mikdashi; Kouri-Towe 188). Popularized among North American and European scholars and activists since 2011, pinkwashing has been gaining traction within activist movements such as Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA), Al Qaws, and Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (PQ-BDS) that have used the term as a way to describe the complex apparatuses put in place to depict the state of Israel as a progressive and tolerant nation in opposition to a representation of Palestine as a site of backwardness, homophobia and religious extremism (Lahiri 58 & 62). To fight narratives of pinkwashing, activist groups have initiated "pinkwatching" as a form of political activism that critiques Zionist pinkwashing by exposing its racial, ethnic, and sexual violence, reclaiming queer Palestinian visibility, and linking Palestinian liberation to global queer solidarity (Schotten and Maikey). Anti-pinkwashing activism and pinkwatching have increasingly been the most explicit ways through which homonationalist formations – especially Israel's homonationalism – have been tackled and criticized. However, homonationalism and pinkwashing seem to have converged in their popular uses, often seen as synonyms or parallel phenomena.

In response to the growing usage and reductive application of homonationalism in activist organizing platforms, Puar offered clarifications and precision on her initial intent with the concept. As opposed to how some scholars and activists have come to apprehend it, Puar reminds us that homonationalism should not be understood as an accusation, an identity, or a form of bad politics. It is not merely a synonym for gay racism or a way to highlight how conservative political frameworks have co-opted gay and lesbian identities. It is not another version of identity politics, a tool to separate "good" queers from "bad" queers, an accusation, or a fixed position (Puar, “Rethinking Homonationalism” 337). Rather, homonationalism represents “a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states, a constitutive and fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state, capitalism, and sexuality” (ibid). It exists as an analytic category used to examine and contextualize how and why a nation's acceptance of queer folks has come to define a country’s claim to transnational recognition (336). In reframing homonationalism as a ubiquitous force similar to modernity, Puar points out that, while we might critique it and resist it, we cannot escape from it (ibid). Ultimately, it shapes and conditions us all. This is why the conflation of homonationalism with pinkwashing becomes problematic and, while probably unintentionally, reproduces forms of sexual exceptionalism. Indeed, unlike pinkwashing, which is a distinct manifestation of and a practice enabled and shaped by homonationalism, homonationalism is not one state practice that can be identified. Instead, Puar corrects it as “the historical convergence of state practices, transnational circuits of queer commodity culture and human rights paradigms and broader global phenomena such as the increasing entrenchment of Islamophobia” (337).

Notably, Puar did not solely criticize the misleading conflation between homonationalism and pinkwashing; she also pinpointed flaws in the activist discourse on pinkwashing and their efforts to "pinkwatch." In a 2012 article published in *Jadaliyya*, she, alongside Maya Mikdashi, offers notes to the movement to think more critically about the discourses produced through both words and actions (Puar and Mikdashi).[7] These critiques later resonated and were reiterated by other scholars who also named some shortcomings in anti-pinkwashing activism. Central to Puar and Mikdashi's critiques is the importance of maintaining homonationalism as the overarching structuring force of neoliberalism, without which pinkwashing would be impossible and intelligible. One of the fallouts of some anti-pinkwashing activism in reproducing homonationalism is its tendency to rely heavily on the common logic of "gay rights" or assuming an "international queer camaraderie" in which queers should be in solidarity with one another solely based on their sexual identity (Puar and Mikdashi; Darwich and Maikey 282). These tropes imagine the project of pinkwashing as a single-axis struggle based on one's sexual identity and ignoring both interconnected identity categories, such as race, class, religion, gender, etc., and oppressive discourses such as Islamophobia and Arabophobia (ibid). In this way, the Palestinian liberation struggle and Israeli settler colonialism might become reduced to a narrow and reductive framework of LGBTQIA+ rights, ignoring other historical, discursive, and oppressive structures that construct the reality of Palestinians. Other scholars such as Jason Ritchie have argued that, by reducing the colonization of Palestine into queer terms, pinkwashing efforts in the United States ultimately do not have much to do with the realities of queerness in Israel and Palestine, but more to do with how pinkwashing is leveraged to assert claims to queer

[7] As members of the Anti-pinkwashing/Pinkwatching movement, the authors acknowledge that academic and activist spheres may come at odds in terms of strategies and concerns due to their disciplinary differences (Puar and Mikdashi).

space within the neoliberal city (Ritchie 619). Also, in reading "queer Palestinian subjects" and homophobia in terms of Israeli/Western/global identity markers reproduces the identity politics of the Gay International, itself a facet of homonationalism (Puar and Mikdashi; Darwich and Maikey 283). While pinkwatching advocates for the Palestinian cause, the movement must consider whether this solidarity is enacted only for the Palestinian queernesses that are identifiable by global/Western queer identity formations. Pinkwashing must be situated in the larger structures of the colonial Zionist project, which inevitably means challenging aspects of mainstream gay politics as well as working towards dismantling colonialism and Zionism in all of their manifestations (Darwich and Maikey 284).

Another trap of homonationalism that is reiterated in American pinkwatching activism is its disregard for how gay rights discourses and queer bodies have been deployed to legitimize American colonialism and military ambitions, such as in Iraq (Puar and Mikdashi). Indeed, if homonationalism represents an analytic in which nations' right to, or quality of sovereignty, is defined by how well they treat their queer constituents, these shortcomings from anti-pinkwashing activists reiterate central tenets of homonationalism and reproduce gay rights as a criterion by which a state can be considered "liberal" and progressive (ibid). Puar and Mikdashi also denounce Western anti-pinkwatching activists' omission of US settler colonialism in their praxis. As a whole, Puar and Mikdashi highlight the main shortcomings of anti-pinkwashing activism: "Pinkwashing ignores the settler-colonialism of Israel and pinkwatching ignores the settler-colonialism of the United States and its own entrenchment in homonationalism" (ibid). Although the queer solidarity movement that includes pinkwatching activists is one of our most powerful tools against homonational discourses that co-opt sexual rights to reinforce the nation-state and for disrupting the discursive strategies modern states use to legitimize violence, it is a

complex terrain to navigate. Activist energies may be easily redirected into projects that strengthen injustices and reproduce homonationalism (Kouri-Towe 197).

Critiques of Homonationalism as a Concept

Although the concept of homonationalism has gained currency in academic and activist fields, it has also been criticized as an inaccurate or incompatible critique with either scholarly critical work or political action. Critiques of the concept often center around the generality and intangibility of the concept, partially due to Puar's multiple revisions and clarifications on what homonationalism represents over time, but also around the supposed denigration of queer rights activist movements. After Puar explicitly stated that Israel, alongside the United States, exists "as a pioneer of homonationalism" and that both states represent the "largest benefactors of homonationalism in the current geopolitical configuration" (Puar, "Rethinking Homonationalism" 338), scholars have begun to argue that homonationalism is an inadequate framework to describe the realities of Palestinians under Israeli colonial occupation.

As Puar has continued to map the global circulation of homonationalism and refine the concept, some have found discrepancies in the evolution of the term provided by Puar and, eventually, Maya Mikdashi. In a 2016 article, Heike Schotten delineates these semantic transformations of homonationalism. Schotten maps out this evolution from "*homonationalism 1*" developed by Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages,* to "*homonationalism 1.5*" through Mikdashi's critical work on the concept, finally to "*homonationalism 2*" as the most recent constitution of the term by both Puar and Mikdashi in their critique of some practices of anti-pinkwashing activism. In this analysis, "*homonationalism 1*" (the initial version of the concept) exists as a form of state behavior – both sanctioning and normalizing queerness into patriotism and

neoliberal consumerism – but also as a practice of queer subjects, who align and identify themselves with the nation and nationalist projects (Schotten 356). On the other hand, "*homonationalism 1.5*", the updated version by Mikdashi, frames the concept as a version of neoliberalism that is influenced by Western identity politics focused on individual rights (358). In this definition, homonational subjects do not and cannot play a complicit role in nationalist and capitalist endeavors as "they navigate a neoliberal terrain consisting of repressive and productive practices of subjectification" (360). Finally, "*homonationalism 2*" exists as an inescapable feature of Western modernity, ultimately claiming that sexual liberation can be co-opted for harmful and non-liberating political agendas, thereby implicating gay and women's rights in imperialist projects (361). Schotten criticizes the evolution of the term as it loses its tangibility and becomes inapplicable by completely removing it from the individual. Therefore, for Schotten, "*homonationalism 2*" erases the ability to productively tackle the problems that are inherently homonational on the individual and collective scale, as well as forbids us from forming a critique of politics or a critical evaluation of activist movements. Here, the worries at hand lie in homonationalism's all-encompassing status as it merges with notions of empire and settler colonialism (366). Schotten argues that the semantic collapsing of these different political formations together might erase their historical specificities and blur their defining features, resulting in undermining our resistance to them (ibid).

While the evolution and popularization of the concept seem to be the origin of many critiques, Puar and Mikdashi's commentaries on anti-pinkwashing activism in *Jadaliyya* also represent a site of divergences on homonationalism. Responses from their stance have emphasized that these critiques, which highlighted the importance of maintaining homonationalism central to critiques of pinkwashing discourses and pinkwatching efforts, might

not be helpful for activism as they offer no other solutions for concrete activist work besides academic analysis and judgment (Schotten and Maikey). Jason Ritchie, in an article about the conceits of the theory of homonationalism, also describes Puar and Mikdashi's statements on anti-pinkwashing activism as dismissing the work of these activists. He clarifies that the problem did not arise from queer activists' inability to understand and critically engage with homonationalism as a concept, but precisely "in the conceptual limits of the theory, which they have taken up enthusiastically and which now means so many things that it no longer means much of anything" (Ritchie 620). Similarly to Schotten, Ritchie argues that the elevation of homonationalism as "a kind of grand master narrative that explains all things in all place" has displaced the theory from its original sociopolitical context – the parallel conditional incorporation of some queers into the neoliberal nation and the targeted exclusion of some queerly raced bodies in a post-9/11 America – and turned it into an empty signifier and totalizing framework that can be ideologically repurposed in any direction (ibid). It is due to this oversimplification of homonationalism that Ritchie explains its popularity as a theory and a concept.

As homonationalism became increasingly associated with pinkwashing and the queer Palestine solidarity movement, Ritchie also argues that it is an inadequate frame to approach the everyday realities of queernesses in Palestine due to its lack of tangible elements. While Puar and Mikdashi condemned the tendency of pinkwatchers to reproduce discourses of the gay international, critics of homonationalism might oversimplify the experiences of non-Western queers by framing queers as either "victims or victors" (Ritchie 632). Drawing on ethnography as a possible alternative to the theory of homonationalism, Ritchie provides an example of his own research that centers on the intersecting structures that captures realistic aspects of queer

Palestinian lives, such as checkpoints, as instruments of Israeli sovereignty on Palestinians, and other tangible manifestations of power (ibid). In this critique, Ritchie calls for more nuanced frameworks and a shift in queer politics to prioritize coalition-building rather than relying on totalizing frameworks.

At the other end of the spectrum, we find scholars who denounce how the concept of homonationalism may hinder positive and important efforts of LGBTQIA+ rights discourse and activism. In these critiques, the concept of homonationalism is said to flatten the contested demands and accomplishments of LGBTQIA+ rights movements while failing to capture the benefits of hard-won rights that contribute to queers' quality of life and empowerment. The main concerns emerging from this type of critique lie in a tendency to use homonationalism, not as an analytical category, but as an explanatory tool that may hinder important specific discourses. In his critique of the concept, Zanghellini argues that the overuse of homonationalism might be a detriment to Muslim and other racialized (queer or heterosexual) communities in deflecting attention from ideological and tangible manifestations of racism and Islamophobia (Zanghellini 358).

Another discourse that might also be overshadowed by homonationalism is homophobia. While Puar, in *Terrorist Assemblages*, draws on critiques and debates from within queer theory and activism, critics such as Smith point out the lack of a critique of "the political and Christian Right opponents" of LGBTQIA+ rights (Smith 461). From this perspective, homonationalism fails to represent the mightiness of heterosexual activism against LGBTQIA+ rights and folks as a nation and global movement that also garners racist, xenophobic, and religious ideologies in their modus operandi (465-467). In other words, while homonationalism represents a crucial framework for grasping the national and transnational power dynamics that transpire from

LGBTQIA+ rights, it is not the only one. Hence, critics point out the totalizing potential of the concept that might hinder other discursive and political formations that affect racialized and/or queer subjects. However, the elements that these critiques might omit are the extensive research on the positive elements of LGBTQIA+ rights and homophobia within queer theory, and the humanities and social sciences at large. Homonationalism, as a concept, complicates these formations beyond binary thinking of "pride" versus "hate" and brings nuances to ideas of progress and modernity.

Ultimately, the main problems of the concept of homonationalism rest in its "viral" propagation and its conflation with other terms and ideas that might not be adequate. By overusing the term in unfit contexts, homonationalism might not only lose its initial meaning and analytic power but also obscure other power dynamics and discursive formations. Although Puar has allowed the term to be critiqued and taken up by different fields and groups while relentlessly clarifying its aims and limitations, we may ask ourselves whether homonationalism is still useful as a concept outside of its intended context and academia. As the concept has evolved to become an inescapable facet of modernity, is homonationalism too encompassing to still be beneficial to queer scholars and activists? As the concepts of homonationalism and pinkwashing have simultaneously gained currency, their applications might hinder other theories and depict them as inadequate, what Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silva Posocco describe as "a worrying tendency to dismiss queer and trans of colour critiques in particular as identitarian, pre-theoretical and inferior" (Haritaworn et al. 4)**.**

Compendium to Chapter 1

Homonationalism and its Contextual Articulations

Since its introduction in Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages*, homonationalism has become a pivotal theoretical formation in queer theory and queer of color critique. Throughout the years, scholars across disciplines have explored the potency of this concept in critiquing the seemingly positive and liberatory process of (limited) inclusion of marginalized groups into the life of the nation. From disability studies to trans studies and Indigenous studies, the theoretical operation that Puar has assembled through homonationalism has initiated a broader shift in academia. These new iterations of homonationalism serve to expose and critique the insidious contributions to a hegemonic settler white heteropatriarchal national order through the weaponizing of identities and discourses and the – occasionally involuntary – complicities of the most privileged members of minority groups. Given that "any openings neoliberalism creates for acceptance of formerly excluded populations comes at a cost" (Mitchell 11), these theoretical operations, emanating from homonationalism, attempt to make sense of the co-optation of social movements by the state and neoliberal capitalism. In other words, they break down neoliberal myths of national inclusivity and diversity to shed light on the normative and oppressive requirements of national citizenship. These formations provide tools to counter the ruses of nationalism through a critique of national inclusion and rights-based (or state-based) approaches to social change, and drawing the assemblages where nationalism, settler colonialism, neoliberal and global capitalism, feminism, ableism, queerness, and transness intersect.

This compendium defines and explores five contextual articulations of homonationalism that reappropriate Puar's theoretical framework and expand her term beyond the *homo*-.

Ablenationalism reveals the ableist contours of the neoliberal state, the limitations of national inclusion for "appropriate" and "manageable" disabled subjects, and the bodily requirements of national citizenship. Femonationalism provides a critique of the weaponization of feminist discourses by both statist and feminist agents for xenophobic and nationalist endeavors. Homocapitalism names the key role of LGBTQIA+ rights in global capitalism as an incentive aimed at strengthening Western financial and cultural hegemony transnationally. Settler homonationalism highlights the crucial importance of settler colonialism in the creation of modern sexualities, including queer sexualities, and how nationally recognized queerness may erase Indigenous queer subjectivities and normalize settlement. Settler *trans*nationalism intertwines settler homonationalism with transgender national inclusion to critique how processes of limited inclusion of white settler trans folks and transnormativity, which render the manifestations of trans identity narrow and "sanitized", are tightly interwoven with the US colonial empire. Overall, these re-articulations of homonationalism not only emphasize the importance of Puar's theoretical operation but also point to the multifold articulations of nationalism, colonialism, and neoliberal capitalism.

Ablenationalism

Inspired by the work of Jasbir Puar and the concept of homonationalism, disability studies theorists Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell coined the term *ablenationalism* to refer to "the degree to which treating people with disabilities as an exception valorizes able-bodied norms of inclusion as the naturalized qualification of citizenship" (Snyder and Mitchell 113). Similarly to homonationalism, ablenationalism brings forward a critique of the (limited) neoliberal inclusion of some "acceptable" and "tolerable" forms of disability into the life of the

nation. Snyder and Mitchell name this proper disabled body – one who gains limited entrance into late capitalist cultures and is afforded some benefits of national citizenship – the "abled-disabled" (118). The able-disabled subject is simultaneously characterized by their ability to exceed their disability limitations through forms of "administrative creaming" or "hyper-prostheticization" and their disidentification against other non-normative disabled people whose differences are considered less easy to accommodate (Mitchell 12).

Emerging from a framing of disability rooted in mid-twentieth-century neoliberal charity networks of the state, which was preceded by violent and dehumanizing eugenic policies, and reconceived as a discreet sociological identity, ablenationalism constructs "inclusive" lifestyles that enable narratives of national exceptionalism, framing a new era of humane treatment for people with disabilities (Snyder and Mitchell 119; Mitchell 11). While disabled people became politicized as eugenic practices shifted to charity-based models, their material conditions remained defined by marginalization, pity, and donor-class beneficence, relegating them to "special class options" rather than being excluded from national citizenship (Snyder and Mitchell 114–116).

Borrowing from Puar's assemblage model, ablenationalism critiques the ableist contours of national inclusion and market participation, highlighting their dynamic entanglements with disability, neoliberalism, nationalism, and biopolitics (115). As the ideal national body is required to display normative characteristics of race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability, ablenationalism "involves the implicit assumption that minimum levels of corporeal, intellectual, and sensory capacity, in conjunction with subjective aspects of aesthetic appearance, are required of citizens seeking to access the "full benefits" of citizenship" (124). Thus, this inclusion into the

neoliberal market and the nation demands that disability does not require significant changes to rigid institutions, environments, or dominant norms of belonging.

Like homonationalism, ablenationalism feeds into discourses of US exceptionalism as a "new formation of tolerance being advertised globally as an exceptional constituent property of extra-national diversity narrated as prematurely accomplished in neoliberal post-industrial nations" (Mitchell 12). National declarations of moral responsibility for the displaced, marginalized, and differently embodied become apparent as a strategic tool of the neoliberal state to reinforce US interests, aiming to uphold its withering global leadership in the multinational marketplace (17). These phenomena echo the transnational discourse of US sexual exceptionalism facilitated through homonationalism, one that contrasts the perceived progressiveness of American LGBTQIA+ rights with the racialized "perversions" and "backwardness" of other (non-Western) nations (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 51). In this way, homonationalism and ablenationalism both "theorize the degree to which treating crip/queer people as an exception valorizes norms of inclusion" (Mitchell 13).[8] These strict norms of inclusion are not only contingent on normative aspects of characteristics of race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability, but also lead to further ostracization, exclusion, and dehumanization for those who do not conform to those narrow norms of tolerance and acceptability.

Femonationalism

In reaction to the rise of nationalist far-right parties throughout Europe in the late 2010s and their paradoxical rhetorical use of gender equality, Sara R. Farris introduced

[8] The designation crip/queer acknowledges that "all bodies identified as excessively deviant are "queer" in the sense that they represent discordant functionalities and outlaw sexualities" (Mitchell 3). This term bridges queerness and disability by highlighting their shared experiences of marginalization, non-normativity, and resistance to dominant structures of power.

femonationalism in her 2017 book *In the Name of Women's Rights.* Short for "feminist and femocratic nationalism," femonationalism points to "the attempts of Western European right-wing parties and neoliberals to advance xenophobic and racist politics through the touting of gender equality *while* capturing the involvement of various well-known and quite visible feminists and femocrats in the current framing of Islam as a quintessentially misogynistic religion and culture" (Farris 4, emphasis added). In other words, femonationalism describes the twofold process of the appropriation of feminist rhetorics and themes of gender equality by nationalists and neoliberals in anti-Islam and anti-migration campaigns, and the involvement of feminists and femocrats in the vilification of Muslim men as perceived enemies of the movement for gender equality (ibid). Similarly to Puar's theorization of homonationalism as an assemblage and a facet of modernity, Farris presents her concept of femonationalism not solely as a theoretical framework to analyze how various political actors invoke women's rights, but also as an ideology emerging from the intersection of different political agendas, shaped by and reinforcing a specific economic logic (5).

While homonationalism brought forward a critique of the instrumentalization of LGBTQIA+ national inclusion by the state to further exclude racialized "others", femonationalism points to a xenophobic mobilization of gender equality by often-opposed actors such as feminists, right-wing politicians, and neoliberal policymakers to intensify xenophobic and racist politics for concrete socioeconomic gain. As an ideological formation rooted in neoliberal political economy, femonationalism is not solely a rhetorical strategy but is embedded within the structures and policies of the neoliberal state (14). Hence, it becomes a tool for reorganizing labor and social roles, particularly in ways that manage and control migrant and racialized populations, under the guise of progressive and emancipatory movements. This

process of femonationalism – especially the elevation of some women in capitalist leadership at the expense of racialized and immigrant women – manifests through the integration of non-Western migrant women, particularly Muslim women, into care and domestic labor, regarded as a means of liberating them from their so-called oppressive cultures (15). Yet, this process primarily manages the social reproduction crisis by filling labor gaps in these sectors, ultimately enabling 'native-born' European women to participate in the workforce outside the home (ibid).

Femonationalism may also be referred to as a form of "European saviorism" as it is essentially built on a victim and oppressor binary. This opposition is embodied in the portrayal of the non-Western man as the oppressor of the non-Western woman, the victim herself, who is perceived as lacking agency and autonomy because she belongs to a non-Western culture that is seen as denying women's rights and equality (Sifaki et al. 21). Ultimately, like homonationalism, femonationalism offers a new articulation of Spivak's famous woman's question: "white women saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 296).

Homocapitalism

Through the incorporation of certain forms of queerness (defined against a racialized queered "other") into the nation and the exclusion of those exceeding the strict conditions of the state's acceptance, homonationalism has been crucial in upholding Western hegemony. Transnationally, national acceptance of LGBTQIA+ rights has become a marker of a "civilized world". However, the civilizationist logic of homonationalism has not (yet?) been successful in reaching certain nations, those labeled with the marker of barbarism, into its project, and may even tend to elicit anti-imperialist sentiment (Rao 151). In his 2020 book *Out of Time*, Rahul Rao introduces homocapitalism as a concept close to Puar's homonationalism, which works in

different, less explicitly coercive ways.[9] In national contexts in which homosexuality is outlawed, homocapitalism draws from hegemonic neoliberal logic to promise that the embrace of LGBTQIA+ subjects into the nation will lead to a national future characterized by productivity and capital growth (12). Thus, Rao suggests that the increasing tendency of international financial institutions (such as the World Bank) and multinational corporations to denounce 'homophobia' in the global South points to "the emergence of a global homocapitalism that operates through the stick of capital withdrawal as punishment for homophobia, and the carrot of economic growth promised by the business case for LGBT rights" (163).

To grasp the extent of this concept, Rao's analysis of the relationship between Uganda and the World Bank during the passage of Uganda's 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) offers a clear illustration of how homocapitalism operates. Three days after the enactment of Uganda's criminalization of homosexuality, the World Bank stated that it would be postponing a $90 million loan to Uganda, which was intended to support maternal and infant healthcare, as well as family planning (136). This multimillion-dollar loan never reached Uganda, and the country experienced market instability and pressure on its currency due to its prejudice against its queer constituents. What this event showcased was a new trend in global capitalism: international financial institutions and multinational corporations making "business cases" for LGBTQIA+ acceptance and inclusion (138). Therefore, homocapitalism names the ways through which "the figure of the queer has come to be recognised as a potential 'stakeholder' by the global development industry and in the strategic thinking of global businesses" (139).

[9] Although Rao defines and critically engages with the concept of homocapitalism, he asserts that the term is not his and that it has "been in circulation for some time, largely on social media, where it tends to be deployed to criticise gay rapprochement with the market in the United States and Western Europe" (Rao 163)

Similarly to homonationalism, the embrace of queer subjects by global financial institutions – and capitalism, largely – is limited and draws a clear line between "productive" and "unproductive" queers (139). In the project of homocapitalism, LGBTQIA+ rights and inclusion become means for economic growth and competitive positioning in the global market, ultimately framing queer subjectivities solely through a desire to be "upwardly mobile capitalist subjects" (147). As Rao states: "where homonationalism coerces through its discourses of civilisational superiority, homocapitalism elicits consent with its promise of a rosy future of growth and productivity" (151). Thus, homocapitalism manifests not only in global capitalists' instrumentalization of LGBTQIA+ as a coercive tactic to uphold their hegemonic position in global markets by promising that liberal inclusion leads to a financially prosperous national future. It also constructs an ideal productive queer subject within the terms of neoliberal capitalism while excluding all those deemed unproductive. Ultimately, homocapitalism seeks to render impossible the alliance between queer liberation and the critique of anti-capitalism that aspires to formulate freedom as a way out of our collective struggles.

Settler Homonationalism

Initiated as a critique of queer studies at large, *settler homonationalism* is a crucial extension of Puar's concept that rewrites homonationalism's origins and temporality beyond the War on Terror and within the early days of the settler (sexual) colonization of Native peoples in the United States. In his 2010 *GLQ* article "Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities", Indigenous studies scholar Scott Lauria Morgensen analyzes homonationalism as "an effect of US queer modernities forming amid the conquest of Native peoples and the settling of Native land" (Morgensen 105). Settler homonationalism does

not solely center settler colonialism in the formation of US modern queer subjects and queer politics, but also intertwines the biopolitics of modern sexualities with the terrorizing sexual colonization of Native peoples (105-107).

Drawing a parallel between the antagonistic figure of the "savage" in the settler colonization of the Americas with Puar's "terrorist" figure of the War on Terror, Morgensen argues that the attachment of perverse sexuality to Native peoples – marking them as queer to colonial regimes – was a key element to both the annihilating logic of settler colonialism and the formation of a "settler sexuality" through the colonial biopolitics of modern sexuality (107). The ascriptions of savagery and sexual and gender transgressions as efforts to mark Native peoples as sexually deviant populations served as an original justification for the colonization of Native peoples and their land (110-112). Over time, this terrorizing sexual colonization of Native populations produced "a colonial necropolitics that framed Native peoples as queer populations marked for death" (106). While demonstrating that the European colonization of the Americas was, in essence, a sexual colonization, Morgensen also highlights that the formation of "settler sexualities" – "a white national heteronormativity that regulates Indigenous sexuality and gender by supplanting them with the sexual modernity of settler subjects" (ibid) – and, by extension, the modern queer subject was an essential method of settler colonialism and not a product of it.

What is at stake in the theorization of settler homonationalism is tracing back queer complicities with the US imperial biopolitical project to the early days of settler colonization. Morgensen argues that the modern inclusion of non-Native queer subjects into the life of the nation functions "by joining a colonial biopolitics of modern sexuality that functions to produce modern queers as settler subjects in relation to Native people" (121). As modern sexualities, including queer sexualities, are formed *against* the imagined perverse sexuality of the Native

subject, queer people and their politics ultimately naturalize settlement and participate in circuits of homonormativity and settler homonationalism in their strive for national inclusion. Through this concept, Morgensen also brings forward a critique of queer studies and its omission of settler colonialism in the study of sexuality and gender. As settler colonialism conditioned every aspect of the history of sexuality in the United States, queer studies risk perpetuating the violent legacies of settler colonialism if it overlooks these histories, allowing them to remain hidden behind normative white and nationalist desires for settler belonging (124).

In this rearticulation of homonationalism, Morgensen, by identifying settler colonialism as a prerequisite for the formation of the national queer subject, brings forward a critique of how US queers' efforts to achieve national belonging reinforce settler colonialism and contribute to reshaping its logic within contemporary imperial endeavors (ibid). Settler homonationalism also highlights how queer studies scholars, such as Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages*, must also engage with Native studies and foreground settler colonialism and indigeneity when examining how racial and national formations shape sexual modernity.

Settler *Trans*nationalism

Building on Puar's critique of homonationalism and Morgensen's expansion of the term through settler homonationalism, Jamey Jesperson intertwines Queer Indigenous Studies and a trans reading of homonationalism to investigate how some (white) trans bodies "pass" into the hegemonic US body politic, not only through gender conformity but also through their affiliation with national belonging (Jesperson 23).[10] This analytic, which Jesperson names "settler

[10] In *The Right to Maim*, Puar briefly points to a possible variant of homonationalism – "trans(homo)nationalism" – in reference to the intelligibility of transgender identity within national discourses and legal frames of recognition and the formation of a "transnormative citizenship"(Puar, *The Right to Maim* 34). Puar suggests that the limited

*trans*nationalism", aims to provide a critique of white trans settler assimilationist movements that feed into the US imperialist project and further antagonize Indigenous peoples that the United States has violently displaced and continues to oppress (ibid). Expanding trans theory's concept of "passing" beyond the visual and extending Morgensen's notion of settler sexuality into settler gender, settler *trans*nationalism reveals how passing as a trans settler often requires adopting specific political convictions, gestures, and actions that are tied to the ongoing elimination of Indigenous people. Jesperson explores how passing is mediated by racialized and nationalist gender norms and aligns with "settler gender" -- a term that follows the logic of Morgensen's settler sexuality and refers to a manifestation of gender that was formed "to regulate 'unruly' trans indigeneities in the early settler colony" (ibid). Settler *trans*homonationalism sheds light not only on the greater freedom of gender nonconformity afforded to white trans settlers in comparison to non-white settlers and Indigenous trans subjects but also exposes how the very boundaries of passing in the United States have been shaped through violent histories of settler colonialism, particularly gendercide (39).

In her article "Settler *Trans*Nationalism: The Colonial Politics of White Trans Passing on Stolen Land," Jesperson theorizes settler *trans*nationalism as an assemblage by pointing to "a collection of points at which trans politics converge with the nation" and uncovering the possible complicity of white trans people in the normalization of settler colonialism in the United States (36). For her, settler *trans*nationalism manifests in three different intersecting phenomena. First, the tendency of queer and trans studies to lean on queer Indigenous histories as a defense for non-Native life and sexual/gender identity ultimately exploits queer indigeneity and disregards the ongoing struggles of queer Indigenous peoples in the present and their resistance (36).

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inclusion of these new figures of citizenship is likely to produce biopolitical failures embodied by trans people of color.

Another way settler *trans*nationalism manifests is through the 2014 "Transgender Tipping Point" and the exceptional media representation of *some* trans folks in mainstream media.[11] Jesperson argues that this explosion of transgender media representation bred a new form of "transnormativity". This entails that the notion of transgender identity as a "new" and "exceptional" phenomenon not only erases the histories of trans Indigenous peoples, but also enforces a sanitized version of trans identity that increases regulation over those who either cannot or choose not to conform to settler society's expectations of passing (37). Lastly, Jesperson argues that settler *trans*nationalism takes shape through assimilationist trans politics and their efforts for state-sanctioned rights and recognition (38). This nation-based approach to trans liberation contradicts queer indigeneity itself and the efforts of trans and Two-Spirit Indigenous folks who are "going after colonial nation-states and challenging the racist and heterosexist foundation of theft and genocide they support and reproduce" (ibid). Hence, settler *trans*nationalist politics tend to propel the trans movement away from its anti-assimilationist foundations, legitimizing the settler state's claims to Indigenous land, and ultimately undermining the fundamental relationship between trans liberation and decolonization.

[11] "The Transgender Tipping Point" refers to the cover of *Times* in 2014 featuring Black transgender actress and model Laverne Cox of the same name (Jesperson 37). This phrase served to describe a presumed moment in which "public interest in transgender people, transgender representation, and transgender power is progressive and has reached an apotheosis in our current time" (Ellison 12). However, this celebration of the rise of transgender media representation and visibility has been contested since, in parallel, the violence against trans people (namely QTBIPOC folks, and especially Black trans women) had reached new extremes.

Chapter 2

Homonationalism *After* Homonationalism: Sexual Exceptionalisms in Trump Times 2.0

Since the beginning of Trump's second presidential term, each day has been marked by state violence and repression. One day, his administration targets trans healthcare access through sweeping federal rollbacks; the next, it cuts 90% of USAID foreign aid contracts, effectively freezing the Global HIV Program. Then, it revokes the student visas of international students who have taken a pro-Palestine stance. Mass deportations and raids on immigrants multiply; the government increasingly targets critical race studies and gender theory programs at universities across the United States; and new bills threatening the freedom of trans and gender-non-conforming individuals are being passed. These daily violations of rights point to a shift toward authoritarianism and fascism, seeking to control populations through the disenfranchisement of all those who exceed its white supremacist and heteropatriarchal nationalist project. Although within the liberal logics of homonationalism, LGBTQIA+ rights and forms of queer citizenship have served the state in its national imperial project of modernity, fascist figures now identify trans, gender-non-conforming, and racialized subjects as significant threats to the national order, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy. Our present, a seemingly exceptional and unprecedented moment of political urgency, appears to point toward an abandonment of homonationalism as a relevant national project for the current US nation-state. Yet, we can witness the ever-changing force of homonationalism taking place beyond the statist frame, relocating into civil society, and aligning with particular conjunctures, such as the War on Terror, and Trump's first presidential mandate in 2016. Homonationalism, while still upheld by civil society, has become a mode of

left-liberal critique of the Trump administration's authoritarianism, even as it simultaneously serves as an instrument for the mainstream left's own complicity with US exceptionalism.

Today, it becomes clearer than ever that homonationalism has never been about the inclusion or safety of (some) queers into the nation. The state's celebration of LGBTQIA+ rights was always conditional, deployed solely to serve the interests of the nation and discarded as soon as it had served its purpose, revealing that the same operations of power remain firmly in place. Following Puar's theorization of homonationalism, I aim to examine intertwining events and temporalities such as the mass deportation from the US of undocumented Venezuelans to CECOT, the sexual tortures at Abu Ghraib, the war on terror and the racist exclusions that ensued within the US, Trump's anti-immigration and anti-LGBTQIA+ legislations as well as the popular voices rising against them – what Puar names "snapshots" and "flashpoints" (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* xxvi) – to reconfigure the terrorist assemblages of our present. I call these phenomena "homonationalism *after* homonationalism" to signal the persistence of homonationalism in our present moment despite new anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation.

In this chapter, I critically examine the unlawful deportation of Andry José Hernández Romero, a gay Venezuelan undocumented hairdresser, from the United States to a terrorist confinement center (CECOT) in El Salvador. When cross-read with other historical incidents such as the sexual torture at Abu Ghraib, this recent political event in US politics, following Trump's return to the Oval Office, destabilizes and puts in perspective the initial framework of homonationalism. Through this tragic event marked by the terms of US exceptionalism, I attempt to trace the contours of our contemporary terrorist assemblages. Paying attention to the resonances with the racial and sexual logics of the state deployed domestically and transnationally during the War on Terror and Trump's first presidency, I seek to identify the

shifting figure of the "monster-terrorist-fag" defined through present-day processes of detention and deportation as well as through deployments of US sexual exceptionalism. How can Hernández Romero's deportation, its context, and its aftermath – being only an instance of the regime of state violence and policing deployed by the Trump administration – help us define the current terms of homonationalism, as well as the bio- and necropolitics of the present?

Looking at the resonances between our present and the context of previous writings of Puar on homonationalism, I am interested in the processes of exceptionalism that create a perversely queered terrorist/criminal figure, but also aim to contain and discipline it through detention, deportation, and torture. As I explore the discourses emerging from Hernández Romero's deportation, within which his homosexuality appears to signify the excesses of state violence while remaining distinct from the perverse queerness attributed to the terrorist, I examine how queerness reframes mass deportation, detention, and torture as outrageous, anti-American practices. Under discourses of exception, I argue that homophobia is projected onto other spaces – the carceral space, the foreign land, and the immigrant family – while still positioning the US as morally and sexually exceptional despite the rise of anti-LGBTQIA+ policies deployed by the Trump administration. By attempting to theorize the terms of homonationalism *after* homonationalism, I speculate that it has now fallen into the hands of a left-leaning civil society which sees Trump's policy as unrepresentative of American ideals, and its patriotic, normative gay and lesbian subjects, to carry the project of homonationalism through intensified discourses of exceptionalism, nationalism, and militarization waged against the administration.

Thinking about the current state of homonationalism requires a consideration of the transnational and transhistorical linkages that resonate, influence, and frame the fascist

tendencies of our global political moment. While our current sociopolitical context may seem exceptional, the many resonances with the initial context of *Terrorist Assemblages* and Puar's coining of homonationalism – the post-9/11 era and the War on Terror – can enhance our understanding of the present. Homonationalism – as a concept, a historical shift, and a facet of modernity – alongside Puar's theorization of queer and terrorist assemblages exist as tools that help us de-exceptionalize (while not underestimating) the urgency of the "here and now."[12] Rising fascist powers around the world seek to sever our connection to historical context, yet they operate through the same recurring mechanisms of exceptionalism.

A 2017 afterword, written by Puar for the tenth anniversary expanded edition of *Terrorist Assemblages*, offers a crucial recontextualization and examination of homonationalism in "Trump times", referring to Trump's first presidential term. This US political era was marked by "discursive and resonances with the war on terror" and "a rehearsal of 9/11 racial syllogisms," such as the heightening of Islamophobia and racial policing through the implementation of the Muslim-ban — an executive order forbidding citizens from selected predominantly Muslim countries from entering and immigrating to the US territory – and a relatively unchanged terrorist script antagonizing immigrants and racialized Americans (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 224). Simultaneously, for queers, this moment was characterized by the imminent threat of rolling back hard-won rights, most notably the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015. Although many of these recent legal victories were proof of the disproportionate and constitutive violence of civil rights discourse and the instrumentalization of queer bodies by the US state (such as the 2009 Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention and its attachment to the

[12] Here, I deploy the term "here and now" as "the notion of nothing existing outside the sphere of the current moment, a version of reality that naturalizes cultural logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity" (Muñoz, *Cruisng Utopia* 12).

expansion of the American military budget that I explore in Chapter 1), there was a sense that Trump – who strategically positioned himself as an ally of the LGBTQIA+ community when it suited his political agenda – would come "for queers" after Muslims (223, 228).

Although LGBTQIA+ tolerance and acceptance were not a state priority under Trump's first presidency, Puar still confirms that homonationalism was different, less forgiving, and less dependent on tolerance from the state, but definitely "alive and well" (224-225). Puar reminds us that homonationalism does not require the state to safeguard LGBTQIA+ rights and protect its queer constituents to exist (and thrive); rather homonationalism "is about use of such rights within modes of global governmentality as a marker of civilized status, and as a frame for understanding why and how 'homophobia' and its liberal counterpart, tolerance, are used to laud populations with certain attributes at some moments and then vilify other (racialized) populations for these same attributes" (204). Whether Trump and any nation-state supports or rescinds LGBTQIA+ rights does not mean homonationalism will not manifest or is not mobilized in our present. What is critical, here, is that the assemblage of homonationalism offers an already existing set of tools for Trump and the nation-state to continue the powerful twofold process of inclusion and exclusion (even without liberalism): LGBTQIA+ protections and rights are threatened one day, and the next day they will be celebrated to antagonize the racial Other and other nations (230).

As we have recently entered "Trump times" 2.0 with Trump's reelection to office, the political climate seems heavier, less predictable, and tainted with overt fascist currents. While Trump's *modus operandi* and rhetoric look relatively unchanged from his first presidency, we have noticed over the last few months his insistence on eliminating and deporting those he identifies as enemies of the nation and scapegoats for the ills of the state, such as racialized

populations, immigrants, trans and gender-non-conforming folks, etc. As Alberto Toscano reminds us in his book *Late Fascism*, fascism is not a static event, but a structure and a process that is "profoundly affected by its political and economic contexts and conjunctures" (Toscano 33). Hence, investigating homonationalism under Trump's fascist and populist presidency means paying attention to the socio-economic-political resonances from the past, such as homonationalism and its assemblage during the War on Terror and "Trump times." Today, homonationalism is even less tolerant and forgiving – as rights for trans and gender-non-conforming people are being denied and a wedge is driven between trans folk, and lesbian and gay subjects, and as transnational homonationalism through international development programs is being abandoned – while revealing the fragility of liberal democracy under neoliberalism and the failure of rights-based approaches to political liberation. Henceforth, we must engage with homonationalism as an ever-changing and contradictory force and, above all, as the structural precondition of national and transnational politics.

Amidst the mechanisms of exceptionalism and the temporality of political urgency that define our present, we must also pay attention to the construction of terrorist figures (such as the "monster-terrorist-fag") that antagonize the racial Other and mobilize masses against common enemies of the nation. As I have explored in Chapter 1 through Puar's work, September 11 and the War on Terror were significant moments in a new deployment of exceptional*ism* within the temporality of political urgency. US sexual exceptionalism helped Puar think through the creation of two haunting figures of the post-9/11 era: the Muslim monster-terrorist-fag and the docile queer patriot. Today, under Trump's presidency, US exceptionalism manifests in its aggressive trade policies, imposition of tariffs, and portrayal of the United States as morally

superior to other nations, but also through exceptional legal and political manoeuvres employed during times of state crisis, establishing what can be understood as a "state of exception."

The Deportation of Andry José Hernández Romero

On March 14th, 2025, Donald Trump signed an order declaring that his administration would begin using exceptional presidential power under the Alien Enemies Act – a law created in 1798 that has only been used three times during the War of 1812, World War I, and World War II (Blitzer). This act allows the president to detain and deport any immigrant living legally in the United States if they are believed to be part of a group or come from a country that is considered an "enemy" to the government. This time, the Alien Enemies identified by the Trump administration are the members of the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua, said to be acting alongside Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro, who are accused of "having unlawfully infiltrated the United States and are conducting irregular warfare and undertaking hostile actions against the United States" (Trump, "Invocation of the Alien Enemies Act"). Under this exceptional act that legalizes the deportation and incarceration of any Venezuelan citizen over the age of 14 suspected of being members of Tren de Aragua, Trump deported 238 alleged members in March alone to the Centre for the Confinement of Terrorism (Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo, also known as CECOT) – a maximum-security prison in El Salvador, said to be the largest prison in the world with a capacity of 40,000 ("Can Trump Legally Deport US Citizens to El Salvador Prisons?").

Among the disappearances of Venezuelan men accused of "narco-terrorism" by the US government, one story seems to have galvanized Western media attention through its incommensurability: the deportation of Andry José Hernández Romero, a 31-year-old

Venezuelan gay hair and makeup artist. After attempting to seek asylum in the United States to flee persecution deriving from his homosexuality and political views, Hernández Romero was arrested and detained in a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) detention center before being sent to CECOT without any notice to either his families or his lawyer (Phillips and Rangel). As the media and the public cried out their outrage at the absurdity of a gay makeup artist being mistaken for a terrorist, it was revealed that the reason invoked by ICE and US authorities for his arrest were two tattoos of crowns labelled “mom” and “dad” on Hernández Romero’s wrists – a sign claimed to be an identifier of Tren de Aragua members. While the US immigration officers ruled the crowns to be “determining factors to conclude reasonable suspicion,” these tattoos innocently pay homage to a long tradition of commemorating the Three Kings Day celebrations that Hernández Romero’s Venezuelan hometown, Capacho, is known for (Phillips and Rangel; Blitzer).

After being transferred from an ICE detention center in Texas to CECOT in El Salvador as part of Trump’s mass deportation campaign, many media outlets examined the story as another aberration of Trump's political agenda. Even unlikely public figures, such as Joe Rogan, a die-hard Trump supporter and alt-right podcaster who had previously applauded Trump’s mass offensive on Venezuelan “terrorists”, expressed his indignation on his podcast by stating: “That’s horrific. (...) That's bad for the cause. The cause is: let’s get the gang members out. (...) But let’s not [let] innocent gay hairdressers get lumped up with the gangs", before asking “how long before that guy can get out?” describing Hernández Romero’s deportation as a “horrible mistake” committed by the US authorities (Rogan). The designation of Hernández Romero’s deportation and incarceration as an aberration of state power and the impossibility of his position

as a gay hairdresser and “terrorist” or “gang member” reverberates the ambiguity of Puar’s figures of homonational queer and queered racialized terrorist monster.

The backdrop of the mass deportation of the alleged members of the Tren de Aragua gang – Venezuelan immigrants, asylum seekers and even American passport holders – is El Salvador's president Bukele’s high-security prison CECOT, in which the Trump administration has agreed to pay the country $6 million to detain these “criminals” for a year (“Can Trump Legally Deport US Citizens to El Salvador Prisons?”). The mega-prison has been central to Bukele’s promise to eradicate crime in his country. Since Bukele declared a state of exception in March 2022, the carceral institution has been filling up beyond its 40,000-detainee capacity (Singh). This state of exception has suspended constitutional due process, enabling mass arbitrary arrests by the military and police of anyone even slightly suspected of gang membership or affiliation (Gellman and Bishop). As El Salvador now holds the highest incarceration rate in the world, CECOT and other Salvadoran prisons have been reported by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to be rife with human rights violations. In addition to the inhumane conditions caused by extreme overcrowding, such as the lack of food or healthcare, detainees at CECOT are subjected to a “communication blackout” in which they are denied any communication with their lawyers and their families (Goebertus). Torture, beatings, and humiliations are reported to be routine practices within the anti-terrorism facility, where the Salvadoran government has declared that detainees “will never get out” (ibid). Propaganda photographs and videos shared on social media created by pro-government journalists, social media influencers, and government officials from El Salvador have been some of the only access to CECOT provided to the public. These horrific images depict dozens to hundreds of men with shaved heads and uniforms in different states of undress, squeezed in overcrowded cells or

seated and lined up in open areas where their bodies are pressed against each other, handcuffed. This mass of detained bodies contrasts with the heavily armed guards, either hooded or wearing a helmet and every possible bodily protection there is.

Since the first transfer of US deportees from Venezuela, a handful of US representatives have been received to tour the facility and post pictures and videos with messages on their official social media accounts to supposedly reassure the US population of "President Trump's efforts to secure the homeland" and threaten "criminal illegal aliens." While these posts often convey the same aesthetics and rhetoric, US Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem and US Congressman Riley Moore showcase the unfettered violence of the current Trump administration and the US imperial project at large. On her official *Instagram* account, Noem shared a video of herself addressing the camera in front of stripped-down inmates in an overcrowded cell, thanking El Salvador and President Bukele for handling what she called America's "terrorists" and issuing a warning to those intending to enter the United States illegally.[13] Moore similarly posted a series of photographs on his official *X* account, including one of himself posing with a smile and two thumbs up in front of a similar background of detainees packed into a cell.[14] These images carry an uncanny resemblance to those of US military officers at Abu Ghraib, posing and smiling in front of inmates being tortured and physically and sexually abused. The images of CECOT, exposed to the world through social media, exist in what David Nichols calls "a historical and contemporary repertoire of sexualized humiliation, degradation, mortification, and the naked representation of institutional violence

[13] See Secretary Kristi Noem (@sec_noem), *Instagram*, 27 March 2025, https://www.instagram.com/sec_noem/?hl=en.
[14] See Rep. Riley M. Moore (@RepRileyMoore), *X*, 16 April 2025, https://x.com/RepRileyMoore/status/1912289444863828144.

enacted through sexualized violation," alongside the extreme violence captured in the photographs of Abu Ghraib (Nichols 3).

In his 2024 article "Affect, Repetition, and Eroticized State Violence in El Salvador's Prisons", Nichols examines images captured in Salvadoran prisons and broadcasted by the Bukele administration (before the US started deporting alleged "terrorists" to El Salvador) for its representation of sexualized carceral violence and the eroticization of structural and personal violence under El Salvador's State of Exception. I am interested in the resonances between Nichols' analysis of the photographs of CECOT and Puar's examination on how the violence of sexual torture at Abu Ghraib and state of exception discourses during the war on terror consolidate a form of homonationalism that works biopolitically to "redirect the devitalizing incident of torture toward a population targeted for death into a revitalizing life-optimizing event for the American citizenry for whom it purports to securitize" (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 81). As Puar argues, the sexualized violence at Abu Ghraib prison is not an *exceptional* event of the US military, but a manifestation of US nationalism, racialization, and sexual regulation as part of a broader assemblage of necropolitics that produces, on the one hand, a perversely queered terrorist population, and, on the other, homonormative national subjects (120-121).

While the contexts of these horrific instances of sexualized carceral violence are distinct, creating a conversation between Nichols' research on CECOT and Puar's analysis of the Abu Ghraib scandal is relevant to map out the current structures of homonationalism that enable these manifestations of violence of the US empire. Nichols argues that the images of the sexualized and violated detained bodies at CECOT – a manufactured representation of the criminalized gang member, and by extension, the domestic terrorist – function not as depictions of individual subjects, but as portrayals of what he terms "a sexualized, borderless mass, more reminiscent of a

horror film or pornography than a crime procedural" (10). These dehumanized visual representations of the terrorist-criminal participate in larger affective and political economies of revenge in which carceral and sexualized violence becomes not solely justified, but most importantly a promise for a better, more secure life that the audience at home – either in El Salvador, outside of the prison, or in the United States – can believe in. Nichols, by characterizing the images through "the erotics of the enactment of pain in carceral settings" – a form of eroticization, racialization and fetishization of incarcerated bodies that could also be identified in the photographs of the sexual torture at Abu Ghraib, identifies the camera and media as crucial mechanisms for the "biospectacle" of racialized and incarcerated bodies to manage collective anxieties, such as transnational panics around migration for US audiences (4, 5 & 13). These images, just as those of Abu Ghraib, must be read alongside state of exception discourses of the United States and El Salvador that define the terrorist figure that must be contained and disciplined, and by extension, justify torture and carceral violence as a civilizing mission of modernity.

Following Giorgio Agamben, Puar presents the state of exception discourses surrounding these three interconnected sites, which can also be applied to the events at CECOT and Trump's *exceptional* use of the Alien Enemies Act. The first is the abnormality of this specific form of violence: the temporality of emergency appears extreme compared to what is considered normal (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 81). Second, the sanctity of the "sexual" and the body: sexual violence is seen as the ultimate violation, especially extreme when read against the emphasis on rights of bodily privacy and individual ownership within liberalism (ibid). Third, the abuse is completely transparent and unmistakably excessive, framed as pure overkill in comparison to other wartime violence and as disrupting the normative standards of humanity under human

rights discourses (ibid). These three logics help perpetuate a moral narrative that certain forms of state violence are exceptional events justified by a temporality of urgency rather than a continuation of existing arrangements. In the case of CECOT, the mass incarceration, brutalization, and torture of deported alleged "terrorists" is justified as an extraordinary resort to criminal threats that have, according to the US government, "invaded the United States and continue to invade, attempt to invade, and threaten to invade the country; perpetrated irregular warfare within the country; and used drug trafficking as a weapon against [US] citizens" (Trump, "Invocation of the Alien Enemies Act").[15] The exceptionality of these violent deportations and physical abuses of these alleged terrorists also manifests through the invocation of the Alien Enemies Act, a special wartime bill, as a singular event, rather than a historical lineage of racialized exclusions and punitive practices directed towards antagonized figures, such as the terrorist or the illegal immigrant.

While these violent deportations and inhumane conditions of incarceration are framed as an exceptional means to an extraordinary threat, the very same apparatuses of US sexual exceptionalism that Puar exposes in *Terrorist Assemblages* are at hand. The sexualization and eroticization of the enemy is not a side effect or minor aspect of conquest, but a fundamental part of the process (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 81). While Puar argues that the sexual torture directed at the "supposed Muslim terrorist" at Abu Ghraib was not an excess to the US imperial project, but a productive force by constituting him as both sexually modest and homophobic, yet also perverse, deviant, and potentially homosexual, aligning him with "normativizing knowledges of modernity" (86). The eroticization of the Latino detainee-criminal-terrorist at

[15] For El Salvador, mass incarceration and carceral violence is also justified as an exceptional measure under Bukele's anti-criminality project, rather than a continuation of the long-standing carceral and authoritarian practices in the country (Nichols 23).

CECOT seems to follow a similar pattern. Nichols argues that "the structural violence of overpopulation and lack of clothing, and the implication of so many bodies pressed together and dominated" becomes a scene of sexualized domination, crucial in the dehumanization of the terrorist enemy (Nichols 22). The Bukele and the Trump administrations mobilize an eroticized spectacle of the potential violence that these men might commit, portraying them as hyper-violent threats and as weak and debilitated under carceral violence (21-22). In these images, both states also eroticize their own violence, framing it as fair and necessary, thereby legitimizing it (ibid). The sexualization and eroticization of CECOT is one of total state control, which arises from the subject disappearing into a mass, where the individual enters a "state of nonbeing or nonhuman," a process of complete dehumanization (13). Nichols summarizes this process as "the sexualized and violated bodies, through carceral spectacle and social policy, become a mass of land or sickness that must be tamed and made manageable through forms of physical and structural violence, observation, and consumption" (23). Through these images of staged nonconsensual performances of domination and dehumanization, the state and carceral violence are not only justified, but they also expand outside of CECOT.

When writing about the wide circulation of the photographs of the sexual torture at Abu Ghraib, Puar writes, "these images not only represent these acts, and allude to the procedural vectors of ever expansive audiences, but also reproduce and multiply the power dynamics that made these acts possible in the first place" (107). The acts of violence witnessed at Abu Ghraib and CECOT are not contained in these carceral locations, but transpire into the very fabric of our society. These acts are not exceptional or excesses, but rather structural of modernity and liberal democracy, even in times of rising fascism. We must consider how these images and their widespread distribution intertwine with networks of surveillance, policing, and securitization

outside and within the nation into terrorist assemblages. However, a distinctive aspect of the distribution of the images of CECOT is its direct broadcast into the digital world. Whereas the photographs of Abu Ghraib were leaked as visual proof of the "secret" atrocities committed by the US government abroad, there is nothing confidential about the violence inside CECOT. The members of the Trump administration, by posing in front of overcrowded cells and blatantly boasting about the efficacy of these horrific carceral measures, turn the photographs into what Nichols names "a fascist spectacle of necessary violence" (Nichols 20). While the usual mechanisms of exceptionalism are at work in the representation of the violence of CECOT, the US seems to have lost interest in upholding a facade of moral superiority and a liberal investment in "human rights" protection. In the face of these observations, I wonder: Did the extreme violence of Abu Ghraib enable the unrestrained display of carceral violence against the figure of the terrorist? And, have the violent structures of homonationalism, now having shed their liberal pretense, helped normalize the sexualized and violent dehumanization of the racialized other as terrorist?

The processes of homonationalism that, as Puar identifies in the post-9/11 era, produce, contain, and discipline the figure of "the monster-terrorist-fag" – a perversely queered and racialized enemy of the nation – can also be observed today in the US government's deportation, incarceration, and torture of the 284 alleged Venezuelan terrorists. In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar cross-reads the *Lawrence-Garner* ruling and the sexual tortures at Abu Ghraib as co-constitutive occurrences under homonationalism that produce, on the one hand, the homonational queer subject integrated into the life of the nation, while on the other, the racialized queernesses that emerge through the naming of populations that are targeted for death (35). Through this conjunction, Puar argues that "darkened and queered monstrosities of terrorist populations" are

constructed *through and against* "queer and homonational rights-bearing subjects" (142). As the normative (white) homosexual and lesbian subject is folded into the nationalist project, the racialized terrorist, both as a subject and as a population, functions as the monstrous excess of the nation-state (99). In the context of Abu Ghraib, Puar affirms that the practices of torture work as an integral part of the American patriotic project to not only differentiate normative-national sexualities from antinational ones, but also reinforce racial and gender hierarchies in accord with nationalist fantasies (100). The role of torture within the US imperial project lies in "feminizing" and "faggotizing" the racialized male body, not only by stripping its masculinity, but especially through "the regendering of multiple genders into the oppressive binary scripts of masculine and feminine, and the interplay of it all within and through racial, imperial, and economic matrices of power" (ibid). Hence, torture becomes a way to police sexuality, both inside the violent carceral space and inside the borders of the nation, through the display and broadcast of this disciplining violence. The pictures of CECOT, in which undressed detainees are shackled and pressed against each other, also play into this restructuring of gender and sexuality: the detained terrorist body is simultaneously presented as hyper-masculine and dangerous, and as weak and perverse in a dehumanizing and fetishizing mise-en-scène. These scenes of domination and abuse from CECOT, which Nichols describes as "reminiscent of a horror film or pornography", reinforce American heteronormativity by casting a perverse and unacceptable sexuality and performance of gender onto the criminalized and racialized Other (10).

Alongside torture, deportation and indefinite detention are essential practices, cast as exceptional forms of state control, that not only define the terms of national citizenship, but also shape the mandate of sexual and gender policing. In her book *Abolitionist Intimacies*, Eithne Luibhéid argues that migration controls, including deportation and detention, are essential tools

of the state for citizenship regulations, upholding systemic inequalities, and legitimizing and normalizing settler colonialism (Luibhéid 9). By defining deportation as "the linchpin that keeps this interlocking system of inequalities in place," Luibhéid emphasizes that migration control practices exist as the physical manifestation of oppressive legislations that determine citizenship according to narrow spectrum of state-enforced requirements, therefore reinforcing, perpetuating, and legitimizing existing inequalities among the citizenry through racial, economic, gender and sexual norms (10). By examining the wave of deportations of Muslim men after September 11, Puar reveals how national security discourses rely on racial and sexual practices of othering to antagonize the racialized terrorist body and, against it, reinforce the normative mandates of American citizenship. As testimonies of deportation nostalgically produce the United States as a deeply missed homeland (and overall valorize American ways of life), yet, despite their unreciprocated love for America, these once-tolerated racial and ethnic minorities are now cast as having betrayed the nation and hence are no longer welcome (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 145). These sentiments resonate with the current mass deportations led by the new Trump administration and "domestic terrorist" narratives, both for the Venezuelan men and international students who have participated in pro-Palestine protests. What Puar gathers from these tragic deportation stories of Muslim men who suddenly disappeared, arrested in their own homes, separated from their families, is a repetition and a bolstering of the heteronormative parameters of American citizenship through the forced displacement and cutting of kinship relations of immigrant families (146). Within the oppressive networks of the US migration-control system, family became an essential intimacy through which noncitizens were able to claim rights to entry and settlement (Luibhéid 21). However, the intimate space of the family was understood and mandated by the US state as one that nailed in the "white, settled, respectable, propertied,

conventionally gendered and sexualized family household" as the prototype for nation-building (ibid). In these contexts, the sacrality of the traditional American nuclear family, a main tenet in Trump's political agenda, becomes a selective value of the nation-state, made unattainable to immigrant families.

As Puar argues, "the intimate is a protected space of citizenship, unavailable to members of Muslim families whose separation merits no consideration" (145). The same tragic narratives can be observed today in the unlawful deportation of husband and father, Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia (dubbed by the press "Maryland dad"), to CECOT alongside Andry José Hernández Romero, who had been granted protection from deportation by an immigration judge in 2019 (Park). Although the US government recognized the deportation to be an "administrative mistake," they have now returned Abrego Garcia to the United States to face federal criminal charges, despite a judge's order for his release (Park; Feuer and Kim). The Maryland dad and the gay hairdresser became the prominent faces of this unlawful mass deportation under Trump's presidency. While the calls to "bring them back" have been insistent among US citizens and media, emphasizing his rightful place in the country through marriage and fatherhood, the US government has doubled down on Abrego Garcia's criminal status, focusing on his alleged gang membership and domestic abuse allegations. In a press release following his deportation, the Department of Homeland Security revealed that Abrego Garcia's wife, Jennifer Vasquez Sura, had filed two petitions for domestic violence in 2020 and 2021. However, Vasquez Sura insisted that her husband was neither a gang member nor a criminal, but "a loving parent and partner" and that she had not gone through with the court process at the time, and that they, as a family, had been able to work through this crisis privately (Sardarizadeh et al.). As the Department of Homeland Security portrays the Maryland dad as "a violent illegal alien who abuses women and

children" who "had no business being in our country," the state's desire to paint him as *solely* a domestic abuser, an enemy of the US nation, becomes explicit (Department of Homeland Security).

In *Terrorist Assemblages*, Puar claims that immigration laws that facilitate deportation and indefinite detention establish new spatial-temporal configurations that reshape racial, religious, diasporic, and national identities, while also regulating how kinship relations are formed and maintained (146). The disregard and dismissal of the intimate kinship relations of immigrant families targeted by these anti-immigration policies "destabilize any inhabitation of heteronormativity for these populations" (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 146). Heteronormativity (or even homonormativity), a mandate of American citizenship, becomes inaccessible for these families, prohibited by these state policies, leading to a reconfiguration of heterosexuality in a way that detaches it from its normative status. The state erases while simultaneously demanding heteronormative citizenship, thus contributing to the "perverse homosexual othering" in the construction of the terrorist detainee figure (ibid). The practices of detention and deportation enforce heterosexuality as a requirement for American citizenship, even as it renders conforming to heteronormativity unattainable. The biopolitical mandates of neoliberal citizenship can thus be observed in these hurdles blocking the way to heteronormativity, emphasizing the racialized differentiation between heterosexuality and heteronormativity (147).

Beyond requiring a form of unattainable heteronormativity, the US state further infiltrates the intimate sphere of the immigrant family to destabilize the supposedly fixed category of legal membership. In her book *Returned*, Deborah Boehm argues that practices of the US migration-control system, such as deportation and the construction of members of the nation as "aliens," are not only aimed at undocumented migrants or deportees but also at their family members

(Boehm 47). Indeed, through the deportation of a parent or a spouse, the citizenship status of many US citizens, especially US citizen children of undocumented migrants, can easily be compromised, from members of the nation to being "de facto deportees" (100). Through "de facto deportation", or the undocumented and informal removal of US citizens from the national territory, US citizens find themselves similarly "deported" alongside their undocumented parent(s), thus embodying a compromised form of citizenship (47). Boehm argues that "deportation also results in a kind of unjust equalizing, through which the status of all family members may be reduced to that of noncitizen or deportee, with an accompanying denial of the full rights of U.S. citizenship" (110). What these undocumented deportations of US citizens point to is the very definition of citizenship, emphasizing that full membership in the nation is never fully available for some citizens. Family, therefore, becomes an intimacy that can be used as a tool for the deportation state and its white supremacist foundations. These attacks on birthright citizenship and practices of deportation become important factors in determining a racialized citizen subject, whose national membership might always be partial or conditional.
Torture, detention, and deportation become processes through which the state infiltrates the intimate relations of family to police sexuality and citizenship norms.

Moreover, these practices that the terrorist detainee is subjected to by the state make them exceptional entities, Puar argues (143). Trapped at the interstices of bio- and necropolitics, the terrorist detainees become illegible as legal subjects and, through normative identity registers, "un-human" figures (158). The terrorist detainee is not left to die, but actively mandated to live. The particulars of human materiality, normally recognized as inherent to humanity, such as identity markers, are denied (ibid). Identity becomes a key mechanism for managing populations through state racism and the categorization of bodies. Simultaneously, individual identity

markers such as Venezuelan, Salvadoran, Iraqi, and Palestinian are erased, all collapsed into the generalized label of "terrorist detainees," the antithesis of the normative American citizen. As Golash-Boza emphasizes, "instead of detaining and deporting fathers, brothers, and community members, the United States is detaining and deporting criminals, terrorists, and illegal aliens" (261). Therefore, the dehumanization of people of color and the attachment of undesired attributes are not incidental, but a constitutive element for these repressive practices of deportation and incarceration.

Nonetheless, the public outrage at the deportation of gay makeup artist Andry José Hernández Romero to CECOT in El Salvador unearths new paradoxes of today's manifestations of homonationalism. What arises from the media is the impossibility of Hernández Romero's identity: how could a gay hair and makeup artist also be an alleged terrorist? From this apparent dichotomy, Hernández Romero emerges as an exceptional subject within the global assemblages of homonationalism, blurring the lines between normative homosexual national subject and perversely queered terrorist. His deportation in particular has elicited strong reactions, even coming from public figures, such as Joe Rogan, who have supported Trump's anti-immigration politics, showing the imminent shift of homonationalism from the state to civil society. Hernández Romero's queerness, emerging as the excesses of state violence while remaining distinct from the perverse queerness attributed to the terrorist, reframes mass deportation, detention, and torture as outrageous, anti-American practices. Within discourses of exceptionalism, this framing reveals how homophobia is projected onto spaces like CECOT and Venezuela, even as the United States maintains a narrative of sexual exceptionalism despite the rise of anti-LGBTQIA+ policies under the Trump administration. The case of Hernández Romero demonstrates that LGBTQIA+ inclusion has consistently been contingent upon an

alignment with white supremacy, particularly as articulated through the hegemonic ideal of the "family" as a foundational trope of American cultural and political life. The outrage that particular (some even unlikely) figures of civil society have expressed seems to be premised on Hernández Romero, as a violently deported and detained racialized queer subject, and his ability to expose the conditionality of the inclusive politics of homonationalism and the racism that it entails.

In a *Time Magazine* article titled "What the Venezuelans Deported to El Salvador Experienced," American photojournalist Phillip Holsinger documents, through both texts and explicit photographs, the arrival of the alleged terrorist Venezuelan men deported to El Salvador and their subsequent transfer to CECOT on March 15th, 2025. In his retelling of the events, Holsinger describes not only the violence inflicted on the Venezuelan men but also the general demeanors of these alleged "terrorists" as they emerge from the plane to their arrival at CECOT. He initially portrays almost all of the inmates to be feisty, violent, and defiant, until faced with the prison guards' violence and brutality: beaten, forcibly shaved, stripped naked, and shackled. When recounting the men's reactions to this abuse, Holsinger identifies an unusual character – later revealed to be Andry José Hernández Romero by CBS's *60 Minutes* (Croxton) – among the crowd of alleged criminals: "One young man sobbed when a guard pushed him to the floor. He said, 'I'm not a gang member. I'm gay. I'm a barber.' I believed him. But maybe it's only because he didn't look like what I had expected—*he wasn't a tattooed monster*" (Holsinger, emphasis mine). In this description, Hernández Romero is depicted against the other (assumed heterosexual) "tattooed monsters." Although the reason for his deportation was his tattoos, which ICE believed to be substantial proof of an alleged membership in the Tren de Aragua gang, in the Terrorist Confinement Center, Hernández Romero seems not to conform to a threatening terrorist

visuality. In the article, the gay hairdresser is the only detainee who is individually described, standing out as a distinct subject among the anonymous mass. His demeanor – crying, praying, begging, and asking for his mother – contrasts sharply with the "angry, defiant faces" of the other deportees (Holsinger). Because of his homosexuality and his unthreatening appearance and behavior, Hernández Romero exceeds what Puar calls the "darkened and queered monstrosities of terrorist populations" to emerge as a homosexual subject worthy of protection (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 142).

Furthermore, Puar argues that the racially and sexually perverse figures of terrorists "labor in the service of disciplining and normalizing subjects worthy of rehabilitation away from these bodies" (38). It is the deviancy of the racialized monstrous population that dictates and reinforces the terms of national citizenship. Hernández Romero appears as a normative subject through his disidentification with the other detainees, whose tragic fates are read as earned. This also reverberates to the perpetual splitting of race and sexuality "in the race of the (nonnational or alien, presumptively sexually repressed, perverse, or both) terrorist and the sexuality of the (national, presumptively white, gender-normative, male) gay subject" (141). Although Hernández Romero is a Latino undocumented immigrant who never even managed to enter the United States (except through ICE detention centers), the processes of racialization and unnationalization of the terrorist Other position him within a normative and disciplinary framework. These processes of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion are central to homonationalism. In the public reception of his deportation, the same rhetoric that separates Hernández Romero as an exceptional homosexual subject emerges.

In his newsletter *The Weekly Dish*, Andrew Sullivan – a British-American political commentator who would be best described as a "gay conservative" and whose political writing

has been used as a case study by Lisa Duggan in the elaboration of her concept of homonormativity (Duggan 184) – reiterates an "us" versus "them" rhetoric, a central tenet of homonationalism, in his outcry against the wrongful deportation of Hernández Romero. After exposing the tragic situation and condemning the Trump administration's actions, Sullivan writes, "the Trump administration appears utterly unmoved by *an innocent gay man now probably being raped and beaten in a foreign jail*" (Sullivan, emphasis mine). While it should not be ignored that the violence faced by queer/trans subjects in prison is not incidental, but constitutive of the prison-industrial complex's operations thus making it a tragic reality for queer and trans inmates (Stanley 103), Sullivan's wording places the ultimate acts of violence and bodily violation onto the other inmates, the monstrous mass, rather than onto the state itself. Although the Trump administration is blamed for its "mistake", we can witness a process of further antagonization of the terrorist population of CECOT through US sexual exceptionalist discourses perpetuated by various members of civil society. Here, the dangers that Hernández Romero faces are discursively constructed as originating from El Salvador and the other inmates, rather than from the United States.

In the restructured context of the state of exception, where executive power dominates, the space of homonationalism shifts to other "public" arenas where citizenship is continuously contested and negotiated. There is a sense that, as the state is now unwilling to continue carrying out the homonationalist project, it has now fallen into the hands of civil society to keep it alive and mobilize it against Trump's politics in order to perpetuate the status quo in which some (white) queers may maintain their privileges of neoliberal citizenship. Similarly to the response to the sexual torture at Abu Ghraib perpetrated by the US military, the homophobia of the US is projected outside of the borders of the nation – the Arab world in the case of Abu Ghraib, but

CECOT and Venezuela in this situation – and disavowed at "home" (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 95). Although having unlawfully deported an innocent gay man to CECOT, the US nation-state still emerges as sexually exceptional. As outraged Americans demand to "bring him back", the same discursive structures of exceptionalism are at hand to paint the US as more progressive and safer for queer subjects than Venezuela and El Salvador. The blatant homophobia of the US state is, then, discursively displaced onto racialized populations, namely the Venezuelan and Salvadoran gang members-terrorists. Although the United States ultimately released Hernández Romero from CECOT as part of a prisoner exchange after 125 days of no-contact detention, he was still deported back to Venezuela, the country he had fled to protect himself from persecution (Wiggins). Under these discourses of exceptionalism, the US state's violence is constructed as an aberration that contradicts a presumed national ethos, allowing the United States and its citizens to remain morally, culturally, and politically exceptional by producing its victims as repressed, barbaric, uncivilized, and even homophobic (113). As homosexuality exists as the primary demarcation between the salvageable undocumented immigrant and the violent terrorist, it is important to place sexuality as "an integrated diaphragmatic vector of power" and uncover the ruses of sexual exceptionalist discourses (112). Sexuality exists as a crucial force that shapes the US and transnational politics, and queerness, although under attack from fascist powers, still exists as a biopolitical framework of normalization and disciplining. Therefore, the structures of homonationalism, although transformed, still exist and shape our present.

Nevertheless, the "bring him back" discourses associated with "Maryland dad" Abrego Garcia diverge significantly from those linked to Hernández Romero. Demanding his repatriation to the US, his wife and the general public have stressed his virtues as a good, hard-working

father and husband to emphasize the injustice of his unlawful deportation. Regardless of the testimonies shared to position Abrego Garcia as an essential constituent of a typical American family and construct him, by extension, as a proper, deserving member of the nation, the US government has insisted on his alleged gang membership and the now-withdrawn domestic abuse petitions that were filed against him. The state's desire to paint Abrego Garcia as a domestic abuser and a gang member reproduces not only the discourses of exceptionalism in which the violence of the state is necessary to protect women from their abusers, represented as violent racialized "alien" threat to the nation, but also selectively disallows the intimate space of the "American family" for racialized subjects. Within the logic of American nationalism, the family unit would appear to be a direct conduit into the body politic through structures such as family reunification and belonging to the national family space.

However, family remains a critical intimacy through which the state enacts its violent migration-control system practices, namely deportation. As the state becomes actively involved in determining the very definition of the family through the dissolution of immigrant homes, Abrego Garcia and his family become targets of the US nationalist project. The contrast within the "bring him back" discourses between Abrego Garcia and Hernández Romero indicates the importance of the concept of homonationalism. Homosexuality becomes a desired attribute of national citizenship only when it is depicted *against* the (undesired) racial Other. The queer, trans, and racial erasures of homonationalism are working at the state and discursive level to ensure national inclusivity and the guarantee of rights exist to promote the ideal white nuclear family, as a representation of the paternalistic state. As the proper homosexual subject is invited (or tolerated) into the life of the nation (or now, perhaps only into civil society), as long as they reproduce a normative family model, the same values are used against immigrant subjects and

their families, and facilitate their expulsion from the borders of the nation. Homonationalism becomes a useful term to decipher the discursive tools that simultaneously integrate subjects into the national fabric and exile others, all in the name of the same professed values.

Homonationalism *after* Homonationalism

The deportation of Hernández Romero affirms the persistence of homonationalism even under anti-LGBTQIA+ politics, a set of phenomena I have called homonationalism *after* homonationalism. As anti-queer hate intensifies, which the state has supported through legislation or official discourse, the fundamental vulnerability of LGBTQIA+ rights is being increasingly explicit. The normative gay and lesbian subjects that the structure of homonationalism has been promoting for years are now experiencing the backlash of a queer inclusion that has always been intimately intertwined with white supremacy and gender normativity. What Hernández Romero exposes through his deportation is that the promise of inclusion was never a safeguard for rights. That siding with white supremacy would ultimately not protect any queer subjects, even the homonationalist citizens. His deportation proves the inherent conditionality of the inclusive politics of homonationalism, which has always excluded racialized, trans, poor, or undocumented queer subjects. Racialized subjects like Hernández Romero and Abrego Garcia are especially mobilized in these times of political urgencies, as they reveal not only the vulnerability of all minority subjects, but most importantly, the intrinsic racism of LGBTQIA+ inclusion into the nation. As the threat of state exclusion is growing even for patriotic white gay and lesbian citizen-subjects, I believe that we can begin to observe the emergence of homonationalism *after* homonationalism. In the public outcries for Hernández Romero's liberation, such as Andrew Sullivan's blog post that reiterates the discourses of US

exceptionalism, a moral panic appears to be emerging among white, normative gay and lesbian subjects in reaction to the increasingly restrictive terms of national inclusion and the discursive construction of their identities as security threats.

As the menace of the homonational subject being collapsed into the category of monster-terrorist-fag becomes imminent, we can notice these citizen-subjects' efforts to harbour an even stronger nationalist discourse. At an official appearance at a town hall in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in May 2025, Pete Buttigieg, an openly gay Democrat politician and former Secretary of Transportation, demonstrated the increased deployment of US nationalism and exceptionalism from proper gay and lesbian subjects, what I believe proves the efforts to maintain the double bind of sexual inclusion and racial exclusion that defines homonationalism. During his opening message, Buttigieg addressed the crowd by condemning the actions of the Trump administration, describing the national political climate as a test proving "(...) whether the United States of America is in fact the freedom-loving that we [Americans] believe ourselves to be" (Buttigieg) His speech, predominantly centered on his position as a father and a US Army veteran, criticizes the current government through discourses of national security and exceptionalism. By asserting that "democracy is the most important thing about our country, and our country is the most important democracy in the world" (ibid), Buttigieg conveys an essential tenet of homonationalism and US exceptionalism as part of the racist imperialist project of the US empire. Maintaining a normative homosexual profile, Buttigieg's homosexuality is solely attached to his position as a husband, a father, and a patriot, and is never mentioned politically. In his speech, the dangers that LGBTQIA+ subjects are being exposed to are only alluded to within the military context, conveying the message that love for one's country does not require a

specific sexual orientation or gender identity.[16] In the homonational politics of Buttigieg, militarized violence is implied to be necessary for the preservation of freedoms and rights of all Americans, inscribing LGBTQIA+ inclusion within the structures of the US war machine. The efforts to maintain the equilibrium of homonationalism, which Puar describes as "the invitation into queer and homonormative folds of American patriotism to participate in and reproduce narratives of US queer exceptionalism" (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 169), in tandem with racialized exclusions, can be witnessed in Buttigieg's rhetoric. Homonationalism *after* homonationalism seems to create a greater pressure on homonationalist subjects to become even more nationalist and patriotic to resist the assimilation with the "Other" (racialized, trans, detained, and/or deported) queers whom the state is actively policing and disenfranchising.

Through this case study, I aimed to construct the bio- and necropolitical mandates of the present through Puar's framework of terrorist assemblages. Terrorist assemblages represent the constellations of many moving, evolving, and coexisting bodies, affects, and practices that account for anticipatory temporalities (215). They work against narratives of US exceptionalism that secure the empire by reclaiming contagion and the nonexceptional (the terrorist, the detainee, the deportee, the "tattooed monster") within the gaze of national security (222). This framework allows for a de-centering of queerness from fixed sexual identity, "to signal instead temporal, spatial, and corporeal schisms, queerness is a prerequisite for the body to function symbolically, pedagogically, and affectively as it does" (221). By reclaiming the nonexceptional, we blur the lines between queer monstrosities and queer modernity, sabotaging the state's efforts to impose this "us" versus "them" dichotomy between the disciplinary subjects and the

[16] At this event, Buttigieg declared that "if you wear the uniform, you're ready to put your life on the line for this country, we will honor and your service based on your performance, not your gender identity" and that "we will be more secure when we honor those who serve no matter who they are, who they love or how they identity" (Buttigieg).

populations for control (222). Terrorist assemblages, by casting away visibility politics as a primary concern for queer social movements, reveal how queer affective economies shape, mark, and circulate through certain racialized, gendered, and queered bodies while accounting for the ambiguous networks of resistance, complicity, and normativity (ibid). Today, the proliferation of bodies marked by the label of "terrorist" – Latinx communities and other racialized immigrant populations, international students protesting for a Free Palestine, trans and gender-non-conforming folks – that are legally cast away from the nation must be accounted for. The antagonization of these particular bodies is not accidental. The same operations from the War on Terror are still in action: "the nation assimilates the effusive discomfort of the unknowability of these bodies, thus affectively producing new normativities and exceptionalisms through the cataloguing of unknowables" (ibid). In other words, it is through the anxieties and uncertainties attached to these bodies that the state normalizes and exceptionalizes for control.

As we enter an era of rising global and domestic fascist regimes, we might begin to question the relevance of these theoretical formations that were elaborated to critique the inclusionary practices of the liberal state. At a roundtable titled "Queer of Color Critique in a Moment of Danger", Gayatri Gopinath acknowledges the resonances between our current political climate and the post-9/11 era. She argues that "we're in this very contradictory time (...) where queerness is once again being framed as antinational, as outside the boundaries of national belonging, even as it's being recruited into nationalist projects" (Ferguson et al. 324). The simultaneous rejection and co-optation of queerness, no longer from the state, but from the civil society in service of the nation, is, I believe, homonationalism *after* homonationalism.

Still present, however, are the very defining processes of homonationalism: the twofold process of (stricter) national inclusion and (wider) exclusion, the attribution of an antinational

queerness to racialized and marginalized populations, the intricate articulation of race, sexuality, and nation that shapes modern citizenship, etc. These mechanisms of exceptionalism and marginalization can be observed in the deportation of gay Venezuelan Andry José Hernández Romero to CECOT. These events are still rooted in the scripts of homonationalism and modernity, even if they are less obvious. As Puar argues in *Terrorist Assemblages*, "homonationalism is a temporal and spatial illusion, a facile construction that is easily revoked, dooming the exceptional queers to insistent replays and restagings of their exceptionalisms" (78). The gain of neoliberal citizenship rights by LGBTQIA+ individuals must be placed within the context of the disproportionate, constitutive, and racist violence of LGBTQIA+ rights discourse and the instrumentalization of queer bodies by the US state. Homonationalism must be understood as a way to track historical shifts in the terms of modernity in which the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by the nation-state became a tool to justify the expansion of the US empire and the violence of the racist state. Even though the state no longer elevates the acceptance of its queer subjects as a pillar of its national doctrine, the previous historical scripts of homonationalism may offer us the tools to unmask the ruses of fascist and populist politics. Considering the shifted locus of homonationalism from the state to a left-leaning civil society, it is imperative to remain vigilant not only of the many manifestations of state violence and the narrowing of citizenship norms, but also of the entrenchment of nationalism and queer liberalism within the sphere of queer politics – especially when homonationalism is mobilized as a tool to criticize the Trump's politics.

Conclusion

On February 13th, 2025, the National Park Service (NPS) erased the word "transgender" from the Stonewall National Monument webpage, following government directives banning terms such as "trans" and "gender identity" for all federal agencies (Riedel). As the agency removed the letters "T" and "Q" from its mentions of the LGBTQ+ acronym, "LGB" is now found on the website commemorating the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in New York City, commonly referred to as the catalyst event for the US gay liberation movement. The censorship of the words "transgender" and "queer" (as well as those implied under "+") not only distorts history – as trans women of color and trans of color politics were central to the liberation movement – but also represents a direct attack on the very people who paved the way for the LGBTQIA+ community. This action is part of Trump's political and ideological battle against what he and his partisans call "radical gender ideology," as anything diverging from a strict cisnormative understanding of "biological sex" and considered to be threatening the heteropatriarchal order of the family.

Since the beginning of his second presidential term, Trump has waged a war against trans and gender-non-conforming people. While state violence targeted toward trans people has a long history, the enactment of this violence and the erasure of transness in the United States appear to now be priorities for the new Trump administration. The proposal and enactment of shocking and violent executive orders – including the removal of "all statements, policies, regulations, forms, communications, or other internal and external messages that promote or otherwise inculcate gender ideology", such as the terms "transgender", "queer", "intersex" among many – are praised for "defending women from gender ideology extremism and restoring biological truth

to the federal government" (Trump, "Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism"). Co-opting a feminist rhetoric that falsely claims to protect women and girls from fictitious threats, these new state measures aim at legalizing and normalizing practices of institutional and administrative violence "that sentence intersex, trans, and non-binary people to political and social death" (Preciado). This move towards a necropolitical regime that targets trans and gender-non-conforming folks can also be witnessed in the data purge on information about HIV, COVID-19, and other infectious diseases from government official websites such as the CDC, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) (Haelle).

The erasure of the terms "transgender" and "queer" from the Stonewall National Monument Website points to a new form of transformed homonationalism. Although we are witnessing a return to a form of modern nationalism that is less concerned with its queer constituents, the dual and simultaneous process of incorporation and exclusion is central to homonationalism. In the eradication of everything "woke", we might wonder why the Trump administration decided to still preserve the words "lesbian", "gay", and "bisexual." Such policies and erasures are designed to drive a wedge between transgender folks and gay and lesbian subjects. Within the terms of homonationalism, US patriotism temporarily validates certain queernesses, but only after they have been sanitized along racial, gendered, and class lines to contrast sharply with threatening "others," such as the figure of the "terrorist" (or in this case: the transgender subject and the "gender radical") (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* 46). In the homonational process of splitting the proper homosexual citizen from the perversely queered figure, we can witness the ways through which trans and gender-non-conforming folks are

discursively constructed as scapegoats (or even "terrorist" figures) who threaten the order of the nation and the well-being of the white heteropatriarchal nuclear American family.

This antagonization of trans and gender-non-conforming subjects is especially explicit in the ubiquitous position of the "anti-gender ideology" movement in domestic and transnational politics. In their 2024 book *Who is Afraid of Gender?*, Judith Butler explores how "gender," constructed as a critical threat to families, the nation, and society with destructive powers, has become a political tool for authoritarian powers and fascist formations. Within these ideological movements, gender is constructed as "a phantasm with destructive powers, one way of collecting and escalating multitudes of modern panics" (Butler 6). Through the use of an inflammatory syntax, "gender" assumes a phantasmatic form that completely eclipses its academic and ordinary usage to harvest the anxieties and fears of the populations about "permeability, precarity, displacement, and replacement; loss of patriarchal power in both family and state; and loss of white supremacy and national purity" for authoritarian ends (13).[17] In this logic, partisans of anti-gender movements promise a return to an imagined idealized time of the nation "before gender" that will reinstate a national order based on patriarchal authority, a "patriarchal-dream-order" (14-15).

In an attempt to reclaim a form of nationalism rooted in a fictional patriarchal past, imagined as free from the hardships of modernity, the state justifies the instauration of state policies that deny people the right to live according to identities they have rightfully claimed, such as Trump's anti-trans bills. These bills culminate in forms of disenfranchisement in which trans and gender-non-conforming individuals are deprived of their access to health care and

[17] Butler also argues that, in some instances, these associations of "gender" with destructive forms are "just wrongheaded or pre-political responses to neoliberalism, the power of global financial institutions, the continuing legacies of colonial power" (70).

educational material through the censorship of education and information (94). By removing access to healthcare and education, such as the erasure of the word "transgender" and other life-saving information for the LGBTQIA+ community from official government websites, the state not only expands its power by restricting bodily autonomy and fundamental rights, but also reinstates heteronormativity, cisness and normative gender ideology as a mandate of citizenship, enforced by the law, establishing the boundaries of what can be thought, imagined, or lived (106). In the global rise of fascism, Butler argues that the phantasm of "gender" has been central to authoritarian powers in "stoking fear and redirecting it as hatred, moralizing sadism, and figuring their own forms of destruction as promises of redemption" (132). Heightening fears of gender as cultural "invasion" and "terrorism" becomes, then, central to the new forms of nationalism that are emerging globally.

Although the basic workings of homonationalism can be witnessed, such as the antagonization of a marginalized group, there seems to be no granted inclusion to any subject outside of a white patriarchal construct of the nation. However, it is important to think about the new dichotomies that are constructed in the erasure of "transgender" from the acronym LGBTQIA+. The United States and other nations around the world may have dispensed with their liberal ideological facade and are now rejecting anything or anyone deemed "progressive" in favor of "traditional" values of heteropatriarchy. There is, nonetheless, still a clear demarcation, inherited from homonationalism, between the tolerated (no longer invited) homosexual subject and the antagonized queer threat. As Jasbir Puar argues, in the face of the rise of anti-gender ideology, queer and trans bodies have become "the glue for an international version of fascism that is otherwise carried by nation-state governance" (Puar, "17th FTW"). The rise of this phantasmatic form of gender as a solidifying force in the global rise of fascism does

not seem coincidental when faced with the genealogy of homonationalism. Indeed, decades of neoliberal, national inclusion of gay and lesbian subjects, marked by milestones such as same-sex marriage and gays in the military, served to bolster normative gender identities and posit a proper form of homosexuality within the acceptable patriarchal national order, or the cistem. Through these efforts to become legible by the state, homosexuality became tied to not only whiteness, but also gender normativity as preconditions for inclusion. Sexuality, therefore, does not threaten the national patriarchal status quo in the same way that "gender" does. As queer and trans identities challenge the norms of state legibility defined by the structure of homonationalism, they cannot align with the national order to the extent that their gay and lesbian counterparts can.

The erasure of "queer" and "transgender" from the Stonewall National Monument webpage points not solely to the rise of fascism in conjunction with "anti-gender" movements, but also to the failures that the acronym of LGBTQIA+ embodies. In his book *Atmospheres of Violence*, Eric A. Stanley narrates the exclusion of the legendary figure of the Stonewall riots, Puerto Rican trans activist Sylvia Rivera, from mainstream gay and lesbian activism in the early days of the US Gay Liberation Movement. This antagonization was made clear at the 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day when Sylvia Rivera, who had, just four years prior, been a central figure in the Stonewall riots, was booed and hissed at by the crowd (Stanley 2). In that moment, already experiencing the betrayal of the assimilatory turn of the LGBT movement, Rivera had reminded the crowd of her activist work as a cofounder of STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) alongside Marsha P. Johnson. STAR was a mutual aid survival project that took action directly on the street to support the community's most marginalized folks and resisted the adherence to mainstream lesbian and gay political and activist groups (ibid). In

response to the crowd's disgust, she criticized the movement and called to action with these words: "I have been thrown in jail. I have lost my job. I have lost my apartment for gay liberation, and you all treat me this way? What the fuck's wrong with you all? (...) The people are trying to do something for all of us, and not men and women who belong to a white middle-class white club. And that's what y'all belong to! Revolution Now! Gay Power!" (Stanley 3).

Through the narration of this event, Stanley underscores how her ill-treatment by her gay and lesbian counterparts reflected the perpetual abuse that heteronormativity and gender normativity had thrust upon her, two things that, in theory, both parties were fighting to abolish. In confronting these enduring and historical cleavages, such as the overwhelming whiteness and gender normativity of the queer political work, Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, and their work at STAR have reemerged as leading figures of a trans of color politics from the Stonewall riots to today. However, Stanley reminds us that the nature of this form of resistance enacted by Rivera and many others lies in refusing legibility by the liberal state (ibid). Imposing a stable identity on these "subjects of history" not only deradicalizes their political work by failing to center difference, but also gives in to "the neoliberalization of identity as modernity's sedimentation" (ibid). In juxtaposing the lesbian and gay crowd's booing of Rivera in 1973 and today's erasure of the "T" and "Q" from the Stonewall National Monument webpage, we may notice how the recursive exclusion of racial and gender-non-conforming Others appears as a constant in the realm of mainstream gay and lesbian politics. The simultaneous processes of inclusion and exclusion underscore the efforts to posit queerness as a stable, legible identity while obscuring its role as a biopolitical framework. As Puar's theorization of homonationalism has shown, the alignments of LGBTQIA+ identities and politics with nationalist, imperial, and racist ideologies are constitutive of the normative queer liberal rights movement, and not an anomaly (Eng and

Puar 3). LGBTQIA+ as an all-encompassing acronym frames queerness as a stable identity by flattening and erasing particular queer subjects and subjectivities as well as their material realities, therefore situating queerness within the political, economic, and cultural imperatives of the nation-state, where the liberal individual is positioned as the model citizen-subject.

One of the central concerns of my thesis has been the current salience of homonationalism – or what I call, homonationalism *after* homonationalism – in our present moment marked by the rise of anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation. While the locus of homonationalism seems to have shifted from the state to civil society, it has become the role of the normative, homonational gay and lesbian subjects to purport its legacy. Enabled by the broader Democratic left, this position allows them to be complicit in other forms of repression, including crimes such as genocide and imperialist warfare. We are coming into an era in which it has become impossible to ignore the racist and transphobic exclusionary politics of LGBTQIA+ inclusion. With the global and national rise of anti-LGBTQIA+ hate, even the most normative and patriotic gay and lesbian subjects find their privileges of neoliberal citizenship under threat. Although the state is no longer an actor in extending rights to proper gay and lesbian citizen-subjects, it has now fallen into the hands of civil society, and especially homonationalist subjects, to, at the risk of exclusion and attachment to the monster-terrorist-fag figure, harbour a more assertive form of nationalism and patriotism. Here, queerness is conveyed as intimately intertwined with the racist and violent terms of US exceptionalism. What homonationalism can show us today is not only the critique of gay and lesbian normativity and the semiotic production of the perversely queered other, but more importantly, the reality that LGBTQIA+ inclusion was always conditional and temporary for the interests of the state to utilize and discard. We are now experiencing the

backlash of complying with the state's terms of white supremacy, gender normativity, and imperial violence for a form of national citizenship unavailable to most.

In our present moment, defined by the escalating and extraordinary use of police and military power against marginalized populations, it is important to not only consider the failures of liberal democracy and dominant forms of LGBTQIA+ politics based on national inclusion and visibility, but also the kind of coalitional politics that are most needed. The fields of queer of color critique and trans studies have been crucial in formulating critiques to these liberal and fascist formations as well as imagining and enacting alternative and radical political work. While in this thesis, I have been especially concerned with the intellectual history and the contemporary manifestations of homonationalism, I resonate with trans and queer of color's assertion that by dwelling within queer studies and the idea of identity, we cannot fully grapple with the realities of the world we exist in. Three decades ago, Cathy Cohen, Roderick Ferguson, and José Esteban Muñoz were already warning us of the dangers of separating sexuality from race, gender, and class, issuing a critique of the tendency of queer studies and LGBTQIA+ politics to identify heteronormativity as the sole vector of oppression for the community. Dean Spade, more recently, has also critiqued the institutionalization of queer political organizing, moving away from participatory forms of organizing such as grassroots organizations to neoliberal, state-run organizations led by privileged white people (Spade, "Trans Law and Politics" 321). Issues that were central to earlier movements of lesbian and gay activism, such as policing, prison abolition, militarism, and wealth distribution, were replaced by an overt focus "on formal legal equality that could produce gains only for people already served by existing social and economic arrangements" (ibid). Considering the capture of queer political movements by neoliberalism, Spade argues that mainstream lesbian and gay organizations have been "creating and maintaining

disappointing and dangerous political agendas that fail to support meaningful, widespread resistance to violent institutions in the United States—and sometimes even bolstering them" (324). In other words, neoliberalism leads non-profits to address social issues in a way that is disconnected from the larger struggle for social justice, as the "good work" that they are set to do ultimately sustains and reproduces racialized and gendered inequalities in the maldistribution of life chances (ibid). Spade reminds us that it was the crucial work of women of color feminists who urged us all to acknowledge our constant participation in exclusions and harms, and who challenged us to walk away from the idea of a pure political space or of anyone being a pure political subject (Spade, "When We Win We Lose" 287).

As an alternative to mainstream queer activism and its focus on reforms that provide no material relief and the very systems that target our communities, Spade guides us toward the adoption of mutual aid work as political survival work (278, 287). This work puts those who are struggling the most at the center of our analysis and our framework of action. Finding and providing housing, health care, and education for each other is the basis of mutual aid. As Spade argues, "mutual aid work is deeply concerned with *nobodies*" (288, emphasis mine). He associates the notion of "nobody" with trans of color author and activist Tourmaline, who after comparing life under capitalism to a system that separates people into those who are recognized as "somebodies" and those who are dismissed as "nobodies" in a speech on trans life in 2016, quoted Denise Ferreira da Silva and asked, "Do we want to be somebody under the state or nobody against it?" (Aizura 608; Tourmaline et al.). Trans of color critics argue that, under the institutions that shape our subjectivities (such as democracy, nation, property, labor, prison, and colonialism), trans and gender-non-conforming people of color are *nobodies*. However, this position might be preferred over being a "somebody under the state" as "being a somebody

means visibility: becoming a population, becoming a demographic, becoming (part of) a class, becoming clockable" (609). As a refusal (or even, an impossibility) to be absorbed by the liberal state – an inclusion (often through limited, neoliberal visibility) that often breeds violence and contempt, nobodiness emphasizes the networks of care and communality. In these times of rising fascism and authoritarianism in which racialized populations and trans and gender-non-conforming folks have been relentlessly attacked, mutual aid work and notions of "nobodiness" may help us care for those who are unhoused, incarcerated, deported, and even killed.

Many thinkers from trans (of color) theory, queer of color critique, women of color feminism, and the Black radical tradition have explored coalitional politics that resist the violence of the state through concepts of nobodiness, unrecognizability, opacity, imperceptibility, or fugitivity. Borrowing from Édouard Glissant, Stanley explores the concept of opacity as a form of resistance against the violence of the state inherent in visibility. He introduces opacity as a survival technique or a tactic of sabotage against the surveillance of the state (Stanley 87). Different from invisibility, as one can still be seen yet not read, opacity involves becoming so many things at once that the state can no longer track, categorize, or contain the subject (88). For Glissant, opacity also underlines a form of solidarity, through not being fully known or legible, people and communities allow for nondialectical difference or coming together as a collective by maintaining their radical singularity (ibid). Opacity becomes especially interesting when imagining the forms of coalitional politics we need today. As the state deploys its violence through the removal of healthcare and education for trans and gender-non-conforming people, and the ICE raids and mass deportation of immigrants, opacity may become useful to protect those most vulnerable to escape from the state's grasp and allow for

what Puar, citing Fred Moten, describes as "solidarity across difference rather than sameness" (Puar, "17th FTW").

Confronted with the unabashed violence of our contemporary moment, we might question the usefulness of concepts such as homonationalism that initially aimed at critiquing the racist, colonial, and heteropatriarchal nationalist project of the liberal state through movements of inclusion, acceptance, and visibility. Why do we need the concept of homonationalism in the face of genocide and total annihilation in Gaza, in the rise of fascism and authoritarianism internationally, and the further marginalization of those most vulnerable? In *Late Fascism*, Toscano quotes Stuart Hall to explore the erasure of theories amid fascist movements. Hall argues that the rise of fascism on the political stage appears to offer the Left a clear explanation or resolution for all its struggles (Toscano 42). Hence, the critical formations that had been essential to uncover the violence of the liberal state become "time-wasting theoretical speculation" in the face of fascism (ibid). The censoring of queer theory and critical race studies, as well as the disciplining against saying or supporting Palestine, are only mere examples of the current breakdown on academia. The concept of homonationalism (and its transformed manifestations) is still a crucial critical intervention that helps us debunk the ruses and snares of the state and international institutions. Homonationalism helps us deconstruct the ideas of "unholy alliances" and "strange bedfellows" – queers for genocide, queers for Trump, etc. (Puar, "17th FTW"). As Puar argues, the discourses framing these alliances as impossible assume that the problem lies in the misuse of an otherwise pure, stable, and authentic identity, rather than questioning the very illusion of that pure identity, which sustains these supposed contradictions (ibid).

The instrumentalization of queerness is essential to the violence of both the liberal and the fascist state; therefore, homonationalism should not be discarded as an obsolete critique but should be re-examined alongside different sociopolitical contexts and deployed to resist the acceptance of some and the exclusion of many. As Mitchell argues, "any openings neoliberalism creates for acceptance of formerly excluded populations comes at a cost" (11). The cost of limited LGBTQIA+ inclusion was submitting to the oppressive dictates of white supremacy and gender normativity, which queers, even the most normative and patriotic ones, are now facing head-on. The critical intervention that homonationalism represents is a testimony to the lineage of thinkers and activists who have come together to challenge the multi-headed monster of oppression that modernity represents. Homonationalism as an ever-changing facet of modernity provides the framework for fascist and authoritarian leaders, such as Trump and Netanyahu, to carry out the excessive and unmitigated violence of their states, and thus, must be taken into account in our resistance.

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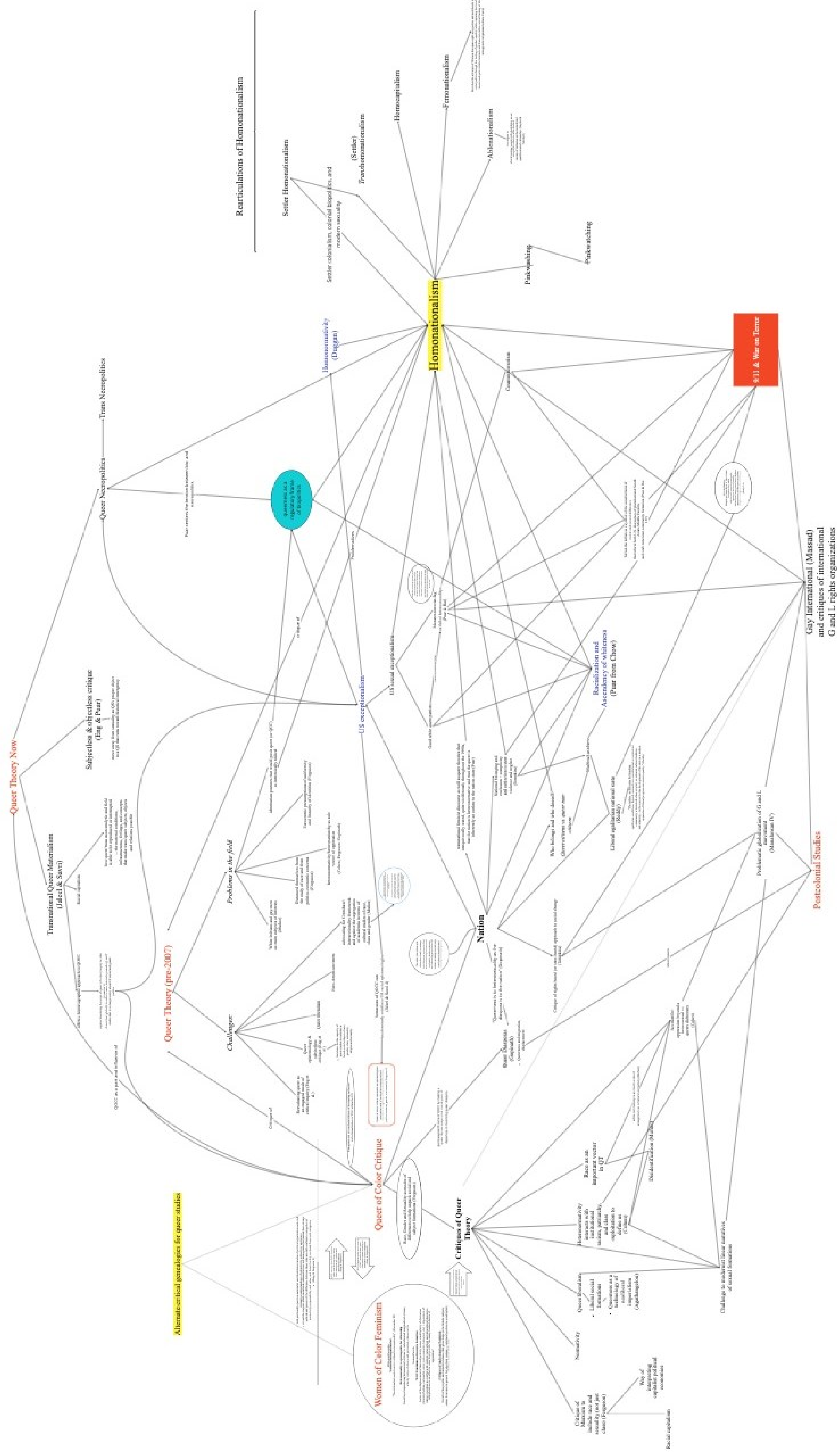
Appendices

Appendix A - Mind Map of the Intellectual History of Homonationalism

Access link:

https://miro.com/app/live-embed/uXjVJfLyPic=/?embedMode=view_only_without_ui&moveToViewport=-9372%2C-5821%2C18868%2C11345&embedId=106304711852


Rearticulations of Homonationalism
Settler Homonationalism
Settler colonialism, colonial biopolitics, and modern sexuality
(Settler) Transhomonationalism
Homocapitalism
Femonationalism
Ablenationalism
Pinkwatching
Pinkwashing
Homonationalism
Homonormativity (Duggan)
9/11 & War on Terror
Trans Necropolitics
Queer Necropolitics
Gay International (Massad) and critiques of international G and L rights organizations
Racialization and Ascendancy of whiteness (Puar from Chow)
US exceptionalism
Queer Theory Now
Transnational Queer Materialism
Subjectless & objectless critique (Eng & Puar)
Queer Theory (pre-2007)
Problems in the field
Challenges
Nation
Postcolonial Studies
Queer of Color Critique
Women of Color Feminism
Critiques of Queer Theory
Alternate critical genealogies for queer studies
Normativity
Queer liberalism
Racial capitalism