postscript:

homonationalism in trump times

February 4, 2017: Today there was an LGBTQ rally held at Stonewall Inn in New York City. While the spiraling crowd around Christopher Street in Greenwich Village made it difficult to assess how large the turnout was, there was no doubt judging by the noise levels, the density of the crowd, the distance of the main podium, and echoing speakers that it was massive, easily thousands and perhaps more than ten. In contrast to several other rallies I had attended in the past week, the signage at this one was rather tepid. Many referenced LGBT rights; human rights frameworks dominated the speeches of the speakers, which included numerous NYC council members and other elected officials. There were very few signs denouncing white supremacy and what had come to be called "the Muslim ban," an otherwise prolific facet of protests since the Trump administration began. The crowd also seemed noticeably whiter than other crowds I had joined recently, though perhaps the more incisive statement is that there were remarkably few visibly black and brown bodies there. One speaker proclaimed: "We welcome Muslim LGBTQ people fleeing persecution from their home countries!," thus recasting the same logic that Trump evinced after the Orlando massacre, when he stated that LGBTQ communities needed to be protected from Muslim terrorists. While Trump had not yet repealed Obama's executive order (EO) prohibiting workplace discrimination against LGBTQ folks, nor rolled out the Religious Freedoms EO that he had been threatening all week, there was a sense that Trump was coming for "us" next. Any reprieve was temporary if not delusional. Any safeguards from homo- and transphobia afforded by the administration's current deployment of Islamophobic rhetoric and policy would soon crumble. There was a distinct "not in my backyard" demeanor to it all. Commentators on social media pointed out that safeguarding LGBTQ rights while going after immigrants does not a liberal state make, as did folks watching live feed of the demonstration on

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Facebook repeatedly mocked queer protestors for supporting countries that they deemed would rape, hang, and kill LGBTQ people. It was a quick-and-dirty rehearsal of post–9/11 racial syllogisms. Homonationalism was alive and well, most certainly as it pivoted both the logic of and the retorts to the Muslim ban.

On this day, the terrorist script feels largely unchanged from the post–9/11 moment. There's no need to exceptionalize the trauma of the current political scene, of which Trump is a symptom, not the cause. Debates about rupture and continuity forego more incisive analyses about scale, intensification, affect, speed, contractions, expansions, and tactics. The jolt of Trump is not that he revealed something heretofore unknown, but that he has accelerated and vastly expanded the scale of disregard, extending precarity to, yes, your back yard: it's in your backyard. Amidst constant refrains about the horror of our contemporary political scenario, I am continually struck by the discursive and material resonances with the war on terror.

Since Trump has taken office, many folks have asked what I think homonationalism is or could be like under the Trump administration. Hardly a prosaic question, yet I am skeptical that it is the salient one. Of course the usual seesawing mechanisms of exceptionalism are at work: Trump signs an executive order banning funding to countries that discriminate on the basis of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Days later there is threat of an executive order that will elevate the freedom of religious practice as a mode of discrimination against LGBTQ employees and service seekers. Trump rescinds Obama's executive order decreeing the right to use one's choice of bathroom. Every so often he threatens to disappear marriage equality. The terrain of homonationalism has always been contradictory and in-flux, and never focalizing whether a nation has or does not have rights protections for LGBTQ populations. Rather, it 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. Unlike after 9/11, however, the use of Islamophobia as a cover for homophobia, or the use of an anticipatory homophobia in the face of a manipulable Islamophobia, seems to be a discourse that many are now truly aware of, much more so than ten years ago. It seems more possible to loosen the braiding of these two discourses. Greater now is the cognizance of Islamophobia as a specific form of racism, one that draws its logic in part from the figure of the Muslim terrorist as an especial threat to LGBTQ communities. Further, connections between activists organizing against Islamophobia

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and against anti-black racism are vibrant, significantly expanding the scope of anti-racist resistance. With Trump in office, the terrain of homonationalism is less forgiving than it once was, less yielding of tolerance from the state, thus emphasizing the contingent, precarious, and tenuous working of homonationalism. The threat of rolling back hard-won victories, however problematic teleological frames of progress are, feel nonetheless — for some — like losing ground. Oh, the irony of worrying about the repeal of same-sex marriage. And yet for others, so many others, it is ground that had never been fully ceded. The Obama administration finessed homegrown LGBTQ civil rights victories while extending the scope of American military actions in the Middle East and further knitting U.S. international funding to homonationalist expectations.

I wrote *Terrorist Assemblages* during the aftermath of September 11, 2001. This time period tremendously redefined the quality and scope of queer of color, queer immigrant, and Sikh community organizing in New York City and its surrounding environs, consistently demanding attention to the urgency of the "here and now" while the temporal frames of past/present/future no longer seemed to make much (common) sense. The South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association and the Audre Lorde Project, both in New York City, were the main spaces where I learned about the convergence of sexual and racial justice. These conversations reverberated with numerous academic-activist collaborative forums in the United States in the 1990s that interrogated the relations of sexuality to nationalism. (I'm thinking of the Black Nations / Queer Nations conference and also the 1998 CLAGS Conference on Local Homosexualities / Global Queer.) I was organizing in the Bay Area from 1994–2000 with Asian domestic abuse and anti-violence groups, specifically with Narika, a domestic violence helpline for South Asian women, the Asian Women's Network, and also Trikone, the first-ever-established South Asian queer organization. Many debated how and why circuits of queer activism and queer theory might reproduce neocolonial frameworks of identity, sometimes unwittingly, in attempting to challenge nationalist formations. During this time, I became increasingly concerned with the standard refrain of transnational feminist discourse as well as queer theories that vociferated that the nation is heteronormative and that the queer is inherently an outlaw to the nation-state. The phrase "heteronormative nationalism" was a stock descriptor in my graduate school days, part of queer and transnational feminist framings. My dissertation research on gay and lesbian organizing in Trinidad and Indo and Afro-Trinidadian racial and sexual alliances, building on the work of M. Jacqui Alexander, started illuminating to me that even in a state that

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"outlawed homosexuality," the racial hierarchies that congeal normative and non-normative heterosexuality also inform the constructions of perceived or anticipated homosexualities. While Afro-Trinidadians were constituted as the modern subjects of Trinidad and Tobago, Indo-Trinidadians were seen not only as illegitimate claimants of Trinidad, but they also occupied the referents of the primitive, the backward, the savage sexualities. Afro-Trinidadians were thus projected as modern enough to be not only heteronormative but also homonormative, while Indo-Trinidadians were constructed as heterosexually inappropriate and homosexually perverse and lascivious. I did not know it at the time, but my perception that national belonging sutured, rather than denied, a particular version of homosexuality in Trinidad was the progenitor of the concept of homonationalism.

Ironically enough, the prescient concerns of these forums, that lesbian, gay, and queer might become a hegemonic, neo-imperialist marker of Euro-American dominance within global circuits (even as these markers contested nationalist forms) at times so assumed its own dissident praxis that, in my opinion, we examined less the unreconstructed U.S. nationalism within our own ranks. That is to say, while attentive to the globalizing effects of the lexicon of queerness, and the prescription of U.S. national norms elsewhere, the nationalizing effects of queerness in the United States were left underinterrogated, further mistaking the critique of heteronormative nationalism as proof that nationalism itself was not present in any form in queerness. Likewise there was scant attention to the relationship of queer theory to empire, and to queer theory as embedded in an imperial knowledge production project. Further, queer theoretical production and archives from global south locations were often lauded as the particular evidence of elsewhere, as the raw data of the "local." Often denoted as sexuality studies (when in other contexts it would simply be embraced as queer theory) these archives were read as challenging and modifying the "global" instead of counting as queer theory proper (a queer theory both transcendent and yet particular to the United States). On this score, queer theory, at that time and arguably even today, functions most convincingly as an area studies, indeed as American studies. The split between queer theory-as-American studies and sexuality studies is both geopolitical, produced through the international division of labor, and it is also a persistent disciplinary divide, insofar as queer theory most often hails the humanities while sexuality studies occurs in anthropology and sociology.

Looking to untangle some of these issues, I challenged the hegemonic "queer outlaw" through the concept of "homonationalism," which named the use of "acceptance" and "tolerance" for gay and lesbian subjects as the

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barometer by which the legitimacy of and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated. Homonationalism also leverages the relations between racialized communities within national spaces and cohers those communities as racialized through homonationalist expectations. Although I intended *Terrorist Assemblages* more as an incitement to debate than as a corrective, it seemed to me that the queer outlaw to the nation model reinforced a perniciously non-intersectional version of queerness that reproduced its own privilege through a claim to vulnerability. The 2005 special issue of *Social Text* titled "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now" expressed similar concerns in the introduction penned by David Eng, Jack Halberstam, and the late José Esteban Muñoz. With a sense of urgency about the state of the field, they wrote: "A renewed queer studies, moreover, insists on a broadened consideration of the late-twentieth-century global crises that have configured historical relations among political economies, the geopolitics of war and terror, and national manifestations of sexual, racial, and gendered hierarchies." Recently, Maya Mikdashi and I followed up on this directive with a short provocation, "Queer Theory and Permanent War," where we argued both for a writing of queer theory that is accountable to its indebtedness to U.S. settler colonialism and relations of empire and also for a provincializing of the United States in relation to the legibility of circuits of queer theorizing from those formerly called the "local."[1]

We are at a similar juncture of revaluation. It would follow that homonationalism in Trump times demands a rethinking of the tactics and strategies of queer theorizing, still and again. Queer has now been made to be productive for biopolitical governance. As an increasingly desirable attribute of modernity it is mobilized as a positive rhetorical function in the struggle over civilizational superiority, integrated into global solidarity movements reflecting in the hailing of the "queer international" in Palestinian liberation organizing, a mode of interpellation in gay and lesbian human rights discourses, a niche market in neo-liberal economies . . . we can continue to name the multitude of ways that queer, and also by extension queer theory, now functions in the service of the reproduction of biopolitical population racism. It seems to me, and this is the primary argument of *Terrorist Assemblages*, that we must contend with the successes of queer, which includes its disciplining and deployment in the service of very problematic ends. I therefore think the project of theorizing the U.S. as a site of permanent war — as the generator of permanent war, of the global war on terror, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen — as the fecund ground of the majority of queer theoretical production is more urgent than ever, given the current political climate, one which I

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do not want to exceptionalize but I also do not want to underestimate. What does queer theory offer now, in the way of political sustenance, anti-racist anti-imperialist anti-occupation organizing, modes of addressing disintegrating public spheres of speech, and challenges to the fake news industry, post-structuralism gone haywire and a post-fact world where concentration camps become concentration centers: How can queer theory help us?

Since the publication of *Terrorist Assemblages* ten years ago, there have been numerous distressing and painfully illustrative instances of the *uneven* and constitutive violences of rights discourses. The dismantling of the Defense of Marriage Act on the same day that key enforcement provisions of the Voting Rights Act were repealed, opening the door to race- and class-based disenfranchisement, continues to push at and bring nuance to the relevance of homonationalism.[2] The ban on homosexuals in the U.S. military — the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy — was repealed on December 18, 2010, the same day that the U.S. Senate put a (temporary) halt to the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, a piece of legislation that would legalize millions of undocumented students and allow them to pursue higher education and, ironically enough, military enlistment. In fall 2009, the Mathew Sheppard James Byrd Jr. Hate Crime Prevention Act — the first federal legislation criminalizing hate crimes against gays, lesbians, and trans — was passed, ironically, in large part because it was attached to a military appropriations bill. So much for queer progress that does not support the war on terror.[3] The legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 in the shadow of the 2008 financial crisis and massive disenfranchisement of African American and Latino homeowners exploited by the subprime mortgage rate fiasco literalized the relationship of (gay) gentrification to the securitization of the home and homeland, whether it be a heterosexual or homosexual home.

My intention in *Terrorist Assemblages* was not only to demonstrate simply a relationality of the instrumentalization of queer bodies by the U.S. state, or only the embracing of nationalist, and often xenophobic and imperialist interests of the United States by queer communities. Homonationalism fundamentally highlights a critique of how lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to cultural and legal forms of citizenship at the expense of the partial and full expulsion from those rights of other populations. Simply stated, homonationalism is the concomitant rise in the legal, consumer, and representative recognition of LGBTQ subjects and the curtailing of welfare provisions, immigrant rights, and the expansion of state power to surveil, detain, and deport. This process relies on the shoring up of the respectability of

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homosexual subjects in relation to the performative reiteration of the pathologized perverse (homo- and hetero-) sexuality of racial others, in specific, Muslim others upon whom Orientalist and neo-Orientalist projections are cast. However, in *Terrorist Assemblages* I looked not only at the proliferation of queerness as a white Christian secular norm, but also at the proliferation of homonationalism in South Asian queer communities in the United States, where forms of Hindu secularism and Indian nationalism often converge. Homonationalism, therefore, is not a synonym for gay racism, a critique of the racial exclusions and whiteness of mainstream LGBT communities, or another way to mark how gay and lesbian identities became available to conservative political imaginaries.

The concept of homonationalism has been adapted and redeployed to suit different needs, different strategies, different politics. It has created synergy across and through various political movements and struggles and has generated capacious theoretical paradigms as well as important debates about the fraught relationships between academia and activists, theory and praxis.[4] The text and its conceptual apparatus have moved across different disciplinary and geopolitical terrains, crossing the activist-academic species divide many times over and resonating with organizing underway in Northern Europe, the Middle East, India, and the United States. A robust debate about homonationalism is happening in France, where funnily enough the book has been, in some circles, denounced for its queer intersectional thrust. Some interlocutors have interrogated the relation of homonationalism to Israeli pinkwashing. Others take up the theorization of intersectionality and assemblage, noting, correctly, that I do not properly honor the history or precarity of black feminist theories in relation to the institutional centrality of white male canonicity. This is an error and an elision that I attempt to redress in a later article. As someone who has been drawing on the formative work of black feminists and also insisting on and producing intersectional scholarship for two decades now, my interest in rethinking intersectionality was never about a fidelity to assemblage theory, rather a commitment to what Mel Chen calls "feral methodologies."

I myself do not think of homonationalism as an identity, a position, or an accusation—it is not another marker meant to cleave a "good" (progressive / transgressive / politically Left) queer from a "bad" (sold-out / conservative / politically bankrupt) queer. I feel it is especially unhelpful as an accusation, as if some of us are magically exempt from homonationalism (by virtue, most often, through claiming the position of "queer" as one of the political avant-garde or as politically pure, transcendent, or inherently immune to critique) and others of us are intrinsically predisposed to it. The accusation

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of homonationalism works to disavow our own inevitable and complex complicities with "queer" and with "nation."[5] As an analytic (rather than a descriptor, stance, or position) it most forcefully attends to apprehending the consequences of the successes of LGBT liberal rights movements, deployed to understand and historicize how and why a nation's status as "gay-friendly" has become desirable in the first place. Like modernity, homonationalism can be resisted and resignified, but not exactly opted out of: we are all produced as subjects through it, even if we are against it. It is not something that one is either inside of / included or against / outside of — rather, it is a structuring force of neoliberal subject formation. As Maya Mikdashi helpfully expounds, "Homonationalism is not the end goal of a conspiratorial 'gay international,' rather, it is only one aspect of the reworking of the world according to neoliberal logics that maintains not only the balance of power between states, but also within them."[6] The call-and-response process that continues to rely on opposing a "mainstream/global queer" against a "queer of color / non-Western queer" often fails to interrogate the complex social field within which "queer" is being produced as a privileged signifier *across* these boundaries, with effects within multiple national, regional, and local areas. While Joseph Massad's work is not inaccurate about the history of sexuality and the travels of the Master Sign of "sexuality" through colonial administrative institutions, his rendering of the "gay international," privileging the figure of the native subaltern sexual subject untainted by these transnational circuits, reifies the distinctions between the West and the rest that he insists should be undermined and challenged

Homonationalism is thus a structuring facet of modernity (rather than an aberration or "liberalism gone bad") 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. This historical moment can be called homonational to the extent that one must engage homonationalism in the first place as the condition of possibility for national and transnational politics. And herein lies the ugliness of homonationalism, its bifocal capacity in one instance to attach and entrench bodies even more deeply to the disciplinary force of sexuality through its offerings (hear Foucault, reminding us it is not freedom of sexuality we want but freedom from sexuality) and yet still enact a convincing yet brutal liberalism against Others in the very name of this attachment. Trump will do no less than what is already suspected: yank like a yo-yo, threatening the withdrawal of protection in one moment, lauding these very protections to vilify other countries, religions, and races in another. The

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assemblage of homonationalism provides Trump, and nation-states in general, an impressive arsenal of tools: a structure of modernity (connected to another enduring structure of modernity, the nation-state); a convergence of geopolitical and historical forces; neoliberal interests in capitalist accumulation through "multicultural difference" both cultural and material (queer as consumer emerges in line with other niche markets, most notably ethnic ones); biopolitical state practices of population control; and affective investments in discourses of freedom, liberation, and rights (most notably invested in gay and lesbian and sexual human rights discourses but also as an affective assemblage, in that it is a reading of attachments; attachment to the nation-state arises as legitimate claim or right).

Rearticulated as a field of power rather than an activity or property of any one nation-state, organization, or individual, homonationalism is only useful in how it offers a way to track historical shifts in the terms of modernity, even as it has become mobilized within the very shifts it was produced to name. What this also means, I am proposing, is that we are all subjects produced through, not despite or against, homonationalism. And this leaves us with complex questions about agency and accountability, which are no longer discrete or located in singular human bodies or concrete entities, but rather dispersed across numerous entities. So the question becomes, for me, not so much who can or cannot be called homonationalist, or which organizing projects are or are not homonationalist, but rather how the structural expectations for homonationalism — expectations that are becoming hegemonic — are negotiated by groups who may well want to resist such interpellation but need to articulate that resistance through the same logics of homonationalism. How is homonationalism working or being strategically manipulated differently in different national/geopolitical contexts, and are there homonationalisms that become productively intrinsic to national liberation projects rather than national imperialist/expansionist projects?[7]

Homonationalism thus names a historical shift in the production of nation-states from the insistence on heteronormativity to the increasing inclusion of homonormativity. The process of homonationalist inclusions-exclusions coheres not through 9/11 as a solitary temporal moment. September 11 sometimes seems to function as an originary trigger, fostering a dangerous historical reification (what is sometimes cynically referred to in the U.S. as the "9/11 industry."). Looking back now, through the moment of 9/11, my interest in *Terrorist Assemblages* has been in the forty-year span of the era of post–civil rights that, through the politics of liberal inclusion, continued to produce the Sexual Other as white and the Racial Other as straight. Certainly

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September 11 revealed and drew to the surface forms of Islamophobia that, as Edward Said had argued, were already tremors in the "era of decolonization."[8] In the case of the United States, we can point to the work of Nayan Shah, Eithne Luibheid, and Siobhan Somerville, who all elaborate on this binary production from earlier periods, highlighting the forms of racial disaggregation at work in immigration legislation, the criminalization of sexual activity, and border patrolling.

This historical scholarship begs the question: What was homonationalism before we started calling it homonationalism? How would one historicize homonationalism as an assemblage that long predates the advent of the term and its emergence post–September 11? What are the historical convergences necessary for homonationalism to take hold, and what kinds of lines of flight might deviate from this taking hold? If something is named within the terms of homonationalism, is it also then yoked to the confines of the United States, of Islamophobia, of the "war on terror" periodization — of a time during which, as Joseph Massad notes, Islam is the Other and Islam is used to Other?[9] What prior histories — and what assumptions about sexuality, about nation, about modernity — might this periodization obfuscate?[10] And how do these namings loop back in to produce discursive sedimentation of the very forces of power we are attempting to challenge?[11]

If a longer durée of homonationalism elucidates processes of nationalism as much as of the homosexual identities that nationalism takes up, then one of the most powerful turns that the study of homonationalism has taken addresses the *structuring* violences of the U.S. nation-state. Settler colonial studies scholar Scott Morgensen notes that homonationalism produces not only the "homo" in a certain relation to nation-states, but it also reifies a version of nationalism and the nation as one that naturalizes the nation as a settler colonial nation and normalizes its subjects as unreconstructed settlers. Settlement conditions the formation of modern queer subjects. Modern queer subjects are by in large, settlers, not incidentally or by accident, but as a structuring facet of settler colonialism. Homonationalism is thus also a process of naturalizing settler colonialism, and as a heuristic can work to reorganize its own critical force by thinking in time with settler colonial studies. Morgensen's work also articulates the problems with invoking an alliance with activists challenging settler colonialism as a citational praxis of recognition.[12] Nishant Upadhyay and Michael Connors Jackman elaborate, in the Canadian context, a basic facet of this citational praxis: anti-pinkwashing organizations located in North America in solidarity with Palestine can unwittingly "pinkwash" the global North by naturalizing both the gay-friendly status and the settler

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colonialism of the United States and Canada.[13] Homonationalism needs to address the foundational narratives of nation building in order not only to situate black enslavement and settler colonialism as forms of biopolitical power in the United States, but also to situate settler colonialism as a *current* condition and to challenge settler amnesia that continually reorganizes settler colonialism as part of an irreversible past. If, as Morgensen's work suggests, the settler colonial subject is a homonationalist subject, then "we" are "all" complicit with homonationalism. Following Mark Rifkin's work, if settlement conditions notions of nation, queer critiques of nation and state reinvest in the naturalization of categories such a citizenship and nation. Thus, queer theory needs to be accountable for its unmarked settler subjectivity.[14] And, returning to the questions about queer theory as unmarked American studies, queer theory must contend with its own settler proclivities.

Linked to the project of settler colonialism is the establishment of Christianity as part of settler subjectivity. Scholars in religious studies such as Brock Perry, Maia Koistros, Melissa Wilcox, and Joseph Marshall have deepened the theorization of queer secularism in *Terrorist Assemblages*.[15] Secularism in U.S. culture is a fantasy. It is a "Christian secularism," meaning there is no epistemologically pure secular position. In (neo)liberal politics, the imagined separation of "church and state" is often used to compare Western culture and state forms as inherently superior to some Muslim and Arab countries, labeling these countries and governments as "theocratic" and opposed to the modernity of the West. To actively think of secularism and the secular as inherently religious, or as forming (either historically or imaginatively) out of religious thought and history, religious studies begins to "religionize" secularism.

Savior narratives and missionary impulses are Christian imperial-theological concepts that fuel forms of exceptionalism. The working of exception in the war on terror in relation to Muslim sexualities already in an oblique way understood the subterranean discourses of Christian secularism animating theories of exception. The Christian attributes of state of exception discourses, where the miracle transmutes into the exception, and of queer secular discourses, whereby a Christian rendering of secularism informs antireligious hubris particularly with regards to Muslim queers, animates the Christian secularism that underpins homonationalism. Religiosity then is fully exhibited and inhabited by the racial Other, who is driven by irrational fundamentalism and a repressed sexuality.

A normative frame of "religion versus sexuality" starts getting broken down here, a frame that has dominated a certain strand of queer theory on religion. Much of the incisive work interrogating this binary opposition — that religion

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is a priori opposed to homosexuality, banishes it, and acts as a regulatory institution that sanctions reproductive sexuality in the name of pathologizing all other sexuality as sinning—comes from the foundational work of Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, especially in their wonderful book *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*. I am reminded of their concise phrasing of the tension: "Of course 'they' (those who are religious) hate 'us,' 'we' are queer." The articulation of the struggle as such is indeed generally reflective of theological discourses across numerous religious traditions, state resistance to sexual rights that is coded as secular but as we know is actually implicitly underpinned (and often explicitly overlaid) with Christian worldviews, and right-wing religious extremist movements. Jakobsen and Pellegrini's taut provocation is experienced most forcefully in the context of (largely secular?) queer theory audiences who have little or less engagement with religious communities and might nod their heads in vigorous agreement with the proposition that religion is inherently and intrinsically at the forefront of antiqueer world-making.

From the vantage point of thinking about the historical interplay of religion and race, this binary is rendered a bit more complex; some religious traditions have been or are pathologized as queer. The deconstruction of the binary between religion and (homo)sexuality emerges dangerously close to forms of Christian exceptionalism that undergird if not drive homonationalist tendencies toward consolidating narratives of racial and civilizational exceptionalism. As such, I often think the inverse of Jakobsen and Pellegrini's formulation is relevant as well: Of course "they" (those who are queer) hate "us"; "we" are religious. Here I just want to note the implications of this binary not only being inverted, but also deconstructed, as religious queers, or those who are queerly religious, are mandated by the intersectional fray to aspire to forms of exceptionalism, of homonationalist exceptionalism.

In short: the sexual exceptionalism that fuels homonationalism is deeply wedded to forms of Christian exceptionalism. And thus I cannot fathom a more precise diagnosis of why it might be the case that Muslim queers are more called out to qualify their religiosity—and their relation to what is understood as the intractable opposition between religion and homosexuality—than Jewish or Christian queers. It is not just that the forms of queer exceptionalism that some progressive religious communities may now exhibit, such as the Metropolitan Community Churches, perhaps rearticulate a version of racial or civilizational superiority. Perry suggests that it is less the case that Muslims are less amenable to homosexuality—that is, more homophobic—as would usually be presumed within the purview of homonationalist logic.

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Instead, he points out, this binaried discourse is ferocious for Muslim queers in part because Christian precepts already inform the terms of exception, thus allowing homonationalism and its attendant identitarian formations easier conviviality within Christian traditions.[16] Indeed, in volume 1 of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault notes that the belief in repression (of sex) is the organizing mechanism for the confessional, for a "better, brighter future," a preaching, leading to salvation.[17] Rey Chow writes that the repressive hypothesis amounts to a kind of liberation theology.[18] Coming out as a normative queer (secular) practice is thus scripted as religious confession, which accrues the force of what Foucault terms "the speaker's benefit"—those who can speak about sex are thus seen as free, having transgressed its (religious) confinement. Three things are of note: one, Christian attributes fuel state of exception discourses, where the miracle transmutes into the exception; two, queer secular discourses that rely on a submerged, and specifically Christian, version of secularism subtends antireligious hubris particularly with regards to Muslim queers; three, Christian secularism underpins not just homonationalism, but queerness itself.

Queer secularism, then, not only inhabits a space of refusal in relation to religiosity and the opportunities religious affiliations and attachments might allow; it also submerges its own relation to the Christian basis upon which such a queer secular position relies and which it foments. Within the field of homonationalism, the sustained racialization and sexualization of antagonized religions hence are a key element of the politics of queer secularity. While this uncovers the selective nature of an ostensibly secularist discourse, it also shows how this discourse gestures toward normative secularism. Thus, queer secularity still engages in classic secularist conflicts, policing religion that does not privatize itself and retreat from politics and the public sphere. Queer positions that refuse the binary of religion as an opposition to sexuality challenge the secular as the only space of queer world-making. However, what is needed is to interrogate the religious underpinning and precepts not only of the secular, but also of queerness itself. Without this dual approach, secular queerness may well reassert the racial and civilizational discourses of superiority that it means to redress in its critique of the secular.

Trump-era style homonationalism is masterfully elastic, sustaining the production of feared racial others and religious others on behalf of, but never directly benefiting (Christian secular), queers. Having seen, in March 2017, a picture of talk-show host and lesbian-identified Ellen DeGeneres hugging former president and war criminal George W. Bush on *The Ellen Show*, I see that homonationalism works not only to justify a religious Muslim ban in

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(queer) secular terms, but also to enact an affective normalization of 9/11 and its architects — the war-mongering of Bush and the sanitized neoliberal civility of Obama. This normalization of our prior state of exception continues recklessly in a Trump era of unbridled sadism. Lately I have been hearing that *Terrorist Assemblages* is "even more relevant now than ever." However sad this statement about our current political situation might be, it gives me hope that *Terrorist Assemblages* will be useful in combatting the amnesia about 9/11 that pervades panicked discourse, thus reorganizing, once again, our relation to U.S. exceptionalism. And it is, in fact, this very U.S. exceptionalism that continues not only to provincialize queer theory as American Studies, but more problematically, to suture queer theory to the reproduction of the circuits of U.S. imperial reach.

Notes

1. We continued our piece by arguing the following: "We would call for a politics in queer theory that works to displace the United States as the prehensive force for everyone else's future — the arrival point on a transnational journey of progress. That is to ask, why is the critique of the production of U.S. nationalism within queer theory itself not central, rather than incidental, to queer theorizing, given that the privileged site of the United States shapes what queer is, what it can do, and how it forms a field of knowledge that can affect the rendering of queer bodies elsewhere? Is queer theory in the United States indeed homonationalist, indebted to an uninterrogated nationalism in order to further its capacitation, its (imperial) reach?"

   "We also queried what the legible figures of the subjects of queer theory are, and how queer theory could emerge and converse with the mass corporeal losses and debilities of war. Does queer theory (still) require a sexual or gendered body or a sexual or gendered injury — particularly if the project of homonationalism is to produce and stabilize transnational, imperial, and settler colonial forms of sexual and gendered injury? Perhaps, thinking from a location where war and colonization are quotidian contexts of life, we posited, we might need to rethink what sexual injury is and the economic political and military work that designations of sexual or gendered injury and violence does in the first place."

   At the time of writing we had decided to use the term *permanent war* because we had enumerated the Middle East as a site of perpetual strife, death, and debilitation, one beset by the imperial incursions of the United States. It only belatedly occurred to me that of course we were also referring to the United States as a site of permanent war as well. This afterthought about the United States as a site of permanent war seemed indeed symptomatic of the very thing we were seeking to disrupt, the centrality of the U.S. settler colonial occupier within which queer theory establishes, at least in its global

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parameters, a hegemonic hold. See Mikdashi and Puar, "Queer Theory and Permanent War."

2. See Reddy, *Freedom with Violence*; Mascaro and Muskal, "Senate Moves to End 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'"; Greenhouse, "Current Conditions."
3. Even before it was known that the bill was being manipulated to reinforce militaristic ends, the Audre Lorde Project, Queers for Economic Justice, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, FIERCE!, and INCITE jointly released a statement taking a stand against the purportedly "historic" passage of the hate crimes bill, arguing that legal intervention would be so detrimental it would be better not to criminalize these specific hate crimes. These organizations posited that the hate crime legislation would allocate greater resources for the "militarization" of police forces and the administrative surveillance and harassment of people of color (especially youth of color, a priori profiled as more homophobic than their white counterparts), in particular Latinos and African Americans, whose disproportionate incarceration in the United States is a known fact. Historically in the United States, these populations have not been able to depend on protection from the state and the police from violence, but have rather been the targets of violence from these purportedly protective services. Further, new populations cohere through the gathering of statistical, demographic, financial, and personal information to move those understood as targets of hate crimes into the purview of knowledge production to become the "objects" of state surveillance under the purported guise of being the "subjects" of state protection. These cautions about the limited efficacy of legal intervention were dismissed by mainstream national gay and lesbian organizations; nor did these organizations comment upon the severe and unfair effects of the compromises made in order to enable its passage.
4. In Europe the term is used heavily, particularly in France (where there is a group called "No to Homonationalism"), in the Netherlands (where civilizational discourses between national identity and migrant Others continue to take hold through barometers of sexual tolerance), and in Germany (where migrant tests that demand allegiance to homosexual norms have been promoted). My recent work on Palestine/Israel suggests that the convergence of settler-colonialism and neoliberal accommodations of difference positions the Israeli state as a pioneer of homonationalism. In India, the (brief) stay on the criminalization of sodomy gave license to the country's most prominent gay and lesbian organizers to proclaim the entrance of India into the twenty-first century.
5. Massad, "The Empire of Sexuality."
6. Mikdashi, "Gay Rights as Human Rights."
7. The following brief discussion of homonationalism in relation to pinkwashing and Palestine may help demonstrate the complex ways I see homonationalism as neither identity nor political position. Homonationalism and pinkwashing should not be seen as parallel phenomena. Rather, pinkwashing is one manifestation and practice made possible within and because of homonationalism. Unlike pinkwashing, homonationalism is not a state practice per se. It is instead the historical convergence of state practices,

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transnational circuits of queer commodity culture and human rights paradigms, and broader global phenomena such as the increasing entrenchment of Islamophobia. These are just some of the circumstances through which nation-states are now vested with the status of "gay-friendly" versus "homophobic." The conflation of homonationalism and pinkwashing can result in well-intentioned critiques or political stances that end up reproducing the queer exceptionalism of homonationalism in various ways. It is thus important to map out the relations between pinkwashing and homonationalism, or, more precisely, the global conditions of homonationalism that make a practice such as Israeli pinkwashing possible and legible in the first place. In connecting Israeli pinkwashing to a broader global system of power networks, I am foregrounding the myriad of actors that converge to engender such a practice. Pinkwashing works because both history and global international relations matter. Historically speaking, settler colonialism has a long history of articulating its violence through the protection of serviceable figures such as women and children, and now the homosexual. Pinkwashing is only one more justification for imperial/racial/national violence within this long tradition of intimate rhetoric around "victim" populations. Pinkwashing works in part by tapping into the discursive and structural circuits produced by U.S. and European crusades against the spectral threat of "radical Islam" or "Islamo-fascism." Further, the neoliberal accommodationist economic structure engenders niche marketing of various ethnic and minoritized groups, normalizing the production of, for example, a gay and lesbian tourism industry built on the discursive distinction between gay-friendly and not-gay-friendly destinations. The gay and lesbian human rights industry continues to proliferate Euro-American constructs of identity (not to mention the notion of a sexual identity itself) that privilege identity politics, "coming out," public visibility, and legislative measures as the dominant barometers of social progress.

8. Said, *Covering Islam*.
9. Joseph Massad, Keynote, Asian Sexualities conference, Oberlin College, October 2009.
10. If in the post-9/11 period, "securitization" becomes a prime discourse through which deviant bodies are preemptively controlled, manifesting the figure of the "Muslim terrorist," which precarious bodies are susceptible to this dynamic prior to 9/11? Might we want to address an older discourse of securitization, what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls "the security turn," encouraged through moral panics around race and crime in the 1960s that further embolden the Prison Industrial Complex and lead to our current rates of hyperincarceration of African and Latino Americans? And, in the post, post-9/11 period, how would we situate (gay) gentrification as the literal homonationalist benefit from the victims of the subprime mortgage scam, that is, as directly connected to black and Latino disenfranchisement?
11. Is there something exceptional about how nation-states have come to understand homosexuality as a rubric through which biopolitical control can be leveraged? Is there something exceptional about homosexuality that produces this leverage? The answer, I think, from the historical vantage of colonialism, is no. As I have argued elsewhere, "The Homosexual Question" comes to supplement "The Woman Question" of the

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"decolonialization movement era" (this era has obviously not come to pass in terms of many regimes of settler colonialism) to modulate arbitration between modernity and tradition. As elaborated by Partha Chatterjee, this question arose with some force in the decolonization movements in South Asia and elsewhere, whereby the capacity for an emerging postcolonial government to protect native women from oppressive patriarchal cultural practices, marked as tradition, became the barometer by which colonial rule arbitrated political concessions made to the colonized. In other words, we rehearse here Gayatri Spivak's famous dictum "white men saving brown women from brown men." We can also say that while the woman question has hardly disappeared, the homosexual question produces the fantasy that the unequal status of women has been resolved (and this is the unfortunate fallout of liberal feminisms and also, unfortunately, the institutionalization of women's studies in the United States and Europe). The terms of the women question have been redictated, as feminist scholars have now become (and have been) the arbiter of other women's modernity, or the modernity of the Other Woman — to reinvoke Spivak for the twenty-first century: white women saving brown women from brown men. Or, in terms of the homosexual question, white queers (men?) saving brown homosexuals from brown heterosexuals. So at its most basic level, homonationalism is an analytic to apprehend the historical emergence of the relevance of the question: How well do you treat your homosexuals? This civilizational barometer question keeps on morphing, keeps on producing and inciting new questions, and new figures that are drawn in to function for the alibis of liberal democracy's transgression. But it is notable which figures are *not* suitable for this alibi function. It is also notable that a mere thirty years ago, how well do you treat your homosexuals would not have even remotely been a question that structures ideological relations between nations, not to mention become the rationale for withholding financial resources and so on.

12. Scott Morgensen "Settler Colonialism and Alliance: Comparative Challenges to Pinkwashing and Homonationalism," http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/11016/settler-colonialism-and-alliance_comparative-chall (accessed March 30, 2013).
13. Jackman and Upadhyay, "Whose Occupation Does Pinkwashing Obscure?"
14. Recent debates on marriage equality debates in the United States reminded me that in 1993, Hawai'i was on the verge of becoming the first state to legalize gay marriage. The *Baeher v. Lewin* case was the first successful challenge to the denial of same-sex marriage in any state supreme court in the United States and was also unique because the case was made on the basis of equal protection under the law regardless of sex, rather than sexual orientation, heeding to the prohibition of sex discrimination in the Hawai'i Constitution, which at the time contained more elaborate and specific stipulations than did the federal Constitution. Further progressive interpretations of same-sex marriage included its detachment from homosexuality. As one justice wrote, homosexual and same-sex marriages are not synonymous, a heterosexual same-sex marriage is not, in theory, oxymoronic. "Parties to a union between a man and a woman may or not be homosexuals. Parties to a same-sex marriage could theoretically be either homosexuals

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or heterosexuals." Other factors make Hawai'i a unique case: a tradition of liberalism indebted to complex heterogeneity of populations and discourses of tolerance; recourse to "prediscovery culture" and colonial histories of Hawai'i whereby homosexual relations have a cultural alibi; very recent state ratification, in 1959; activist movements that claim illegal U.S. occupation and agitate for sovereignty rights. Also significant were the forms of anti same-sex marriage organizing that took shape in response to its potential legalization. The LGBTQ section of The American Friends Service Committee stood in solidarity with sovereignty rights activists to argue that the legalization of same-sex marriage would further entrench a tourist industry that has been seen as increasingly antagonistic to sovereignty claims. The passage of DOMA in 1996 was in part a response to the Hawai'i marriage case. These early critiques of same-sex marriage campaigns have been lost, and it strikes me that if this early history of same-sex marriage had animated recent marriage equality debates, we might be thinking about different notions of equality, sovereignty, homonationalism, and sexual rights. Why does the Hawai'i case keep getting lost in the history of gay marriage agenda in the United States? Is it the relentless focus on mainland history and a history that needs to fastidiously avoid complicity with settler colonialism, impossible given what Hawai'i represents? These seem like especially important questions given that the mainland history of gay marriage equality begins with some of the whitest states in the country, for example, Vermont. Further, all of these discontinuities from mainland United States are materially represented in Hawai'i's location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

15. For a collection of these authors' incisive reworking of homonationalism, see Perry, Koistros, Wilcox, and Marshall "Terrorist Assemblages Meets the Study of Religion." *Culture and Religion* 15, no. 2 (2014).
16. This conviviality has resulted, as Maia Kotrosits notes, in the tendency within the queer turn in Early Christian Studies toward a "distinctively transgressive quality to early Christian literature, subjects, or social formations." Approaching the relation of the theological to the exceptional from this other vantage, the vantage of the study of the Bible, it is not just that emergent forms of non-secular queernesses are rooted in unacknowledged debts to Christian precepts, but that queernesses already manifesting within the fold of early Christianity are imbued with exceptionalist tendencies both in their contextual historical utterances and in the mobilization of these utterances within the contemporary field formation of Early Christian Studies.
17. See Foucault's discussion of the repressive hypothesis in *The History of Sexuality*, vol 1.
18. Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

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