**‘I’m a PROUD Israeli’: Homonationalism, Belonging and the Insecurity of the Jewish-Israeli Body (National)**

Abstract

The section ‘gay rights in Israel’, part of the ‘gaytlvguide.com’ website promoting gay life and culture in Israel, narrates Israel as ‘… one of the world’s most progressive countries in terms of equality for sexual minorities… by far the most tolerant Middle Eastern country towards homosexuals.’ The ways in which Israel has been positioning its spatio-cultural exceptionality and the rise in LGBT discourses of national inclusion in Israel and beyond has already been identified by Jasbir Puar as ‘homonationalism’. This paper, however, asks how? Namely, how do homonational discourses come to produce and hail queer populations into their political project? I suggest that to understand better the hailing power of homonational discourses, in Israel and beyond, we ought to reassess theories of national-civilizational belonging, affect and interpellation and interrogate how insecurity is at the heart of the national-civilizational edifice. To do so the paper draws on Lacanian psychoanalytical tools as I look into the IDF’s (Israel Defense Forces) approach towards LGBT recruits as well as the rise in LGBT campaigning within the political right.

**Key Words**: Homonationalism, Israel/Palestine, Fantasy, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Belonging, Interpellation, LGBT

# Introduction

The section ‘gay rights in Israel’, part of the ‘gaytlvguide.com’ website promoting gay life and culture in Israel, narrates Israel as ‘… one of the world's most progressive countries in terms of equality for sexual minorities… by far the most tolerant Middle Eastern country towards homosexuals’.[[1]](#endnote-1) The narrative further positions Israel as a Western country and gay-friendly in which ‘gay and lesbian community has moved into the mainstream. Gay issues are represented in television, film, theatre and literature’. At the center of the webpage is a picture in which two men, presumably taken during Manhattan’s Pride March in 2010, are holding a banner stating ‘I’m a PROUD Israeli’, presenting both the Israeli and the Rainbow flags.[[2]](#endnote-2) It is therefore no longer a contradiction in Israeli socio-political life to be gay and a loyal Zionist, and as the previous chairperson of Pride in the Likud (the LGBT caucus in the right-wing Likud party) commented a few years ago: ‘the majority of the gay community, just like the rest of Israeli society, are proud nationalist Zionists’.[[3]](#endnote-3)

The ways in which Israel has been positioning its spatio-cultural exceptionality and indeed the rise in LGBT discourses of national inclusion in Israel and beyond has already been identified by Jasbir Puar as ‘homonationalism’/ ‘homonationalism-as-assemblage’ (Puar 2007; 2013ab; see also Gross 2013 and Hochberg 2010). Offering a critique of contemporary queer liberal discourses and state technologies of ‘bio-necro’ politics (Puar 2007: 35; see also Haritaworn et al. 2013), especially within the War on Terror discourse, Puar argues that the inclusion of the gay within has come to serve as a ‘… barometer by which the legitimacy of, and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated’ (Puar 2013a: 24). Homonationalism is thus a form of nation-building and sovereign legitimation designed to demarcate between populations – between the liberal (queer) subject of life and the terrorist– and legitimate a narrative of Western/civilizational exceptionality vis-à-vis the Muslim/Arab Other. In short, the gay within is included in the national-civilizational imaginary while the other is racially queered (Puar 2007: 37-78; Puar and Rai 2004). This can also be linked to what Morgensen (2010) defines as ‘settler homonationalism’, by which he refers to the queering of native peoples (as sexually perverse) and thus ‘marked for death’, and how this ‘… conditioned the formation of modern sexuality in the United States, including modern queer subjects and politics’ (106; see also Smith 2010).

But how do such homonational assemblages/settler homonationalism come to produce and hail queer populations into their political project? How is it that dominant Zionist LGBT discourses in Israel have come to constitute important parts of contemporary Jewish-Israeli national identity?

This paper suggests that to understand better the hailing power of homonational discourses we ought to reassess theories of national-civilizational belonging, affect and interpellation and interrogate how insecurity is at the heart of the national-civilizational edifice. Drawing on discursive and Lacanian psychoanalytical tools I argue that national-civilizational narratives are able to produce and interpellate queer populations due to the affective investment they entail and since national-civilizational narratives are ambiguous, incomplete and always include their inner-failure, the Other (Berlant 1991; Glynos and Howarth 2007; Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2006; Žižek 2008). In other words, the national-civilizational edifice entails powerful emotive power precisely because of its fantasmatic nature, the impossible-possibility of a future in which desire is satisfied and the national body is whole (Berlant 1991; Edelman 1998, 2004; Edkins 2003). Jouissance/enjoyment is key here as the national-civilizational fantasy promises the always-already lost enjoyment of wholeness and security, which being an impossibility is then shunted onto the Other (Mandelbaum 2016).

More specifically, I maintain that the current Zionist narrative of being a ‘PROUD Israeli’ is able to interpellate queer populations in Israel through a process of double and ambiguous identification, that is, through a process of introjection and projection (Freud 1922; see also Dolar 1993: 80-81). Taken together, introjection and projection can help us understand how queer populations within Jewish-Israeli society come to identify with Israel’s national chain-of-significations and how Israel, through this homonational self-legitimation, subject positions itself in tandem with the ‘liberal’ West and in contra-distinction to the ‘homophobic anti-liberal’ Middle-East. The latter is where projection comes into play, namely how Israel projects, and thus ‘washes’, its own exclusionary practices onto the Other, the Arab/Muslim Middle-East. The insecurity of the Jewish-Israeli body national and indeed the insecurity of the queer body is rendered discursively secured, although only partially, through the projection of insecurity onto the illiberal Arab/Muslim. This paper, therefore, seeks to further strengthen our understanding of the role queer inclusivity/ ‘tolerance’ plays in nation-building and state-legitimation (Britt 2015; Hochberg 2010; Kunstman 2008; Puar 2007), how such queer inclusions work through ‘intimate investment’ (Agathangelou et al 2008) and how they may lead to ‘murderous inclusions’ (Ritchie 2010; Elia 2012; Haritaworn et al. 2013).

The paper has two main parts following Puar’s suggestion to take homonationalism as ‘viral’ (Puar 2013b). In the first part, I review key poststructuralist theories of nationalism/national belonging, focusing on gendered readings of nation-building and Paur’s homonationalism analytic. Drawing on those poststructuralist readings I then put forth the Lacanian psychoanalytical framework and delineate the categories of fantasy, desire and jouissance/enjoyment as well as introjection and projection, thus explaining the affective power of national-civilizational narratives. My key argument in this part is that the impossible-possibility of the national project, its ambiguous and fantasmatic character, entails affective investment and comes to produce and interpellate its national populations. In this I hope to show that while the European national project in modernity may have come to function around heterosexuality (Alexander 1994), allowing homosociality through the banning of homosexuality (Parker et al. 1991; Cohn 1998; Peterson 1999), heterosexuality as such is not necessary to the project of nationalism. In effect, what nationalism requires is the ability to continuously include its failures and attributing them to some ‘foreign’ element. One could thus say that queering is key to the national project, but not the exclusion of homosexuality. In the second part I interrogate how the fantasmatic belonging in Israeli society interpellates queer populations through the double and ambiguous process of belonging and identification. I do this by analyzing how the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) has been reforming its policies with respect to LGBT soldiers and specifically articulating its progressive approach towards transgender recruits. I also interrogate the ways in which the political right in Israel is attempting to establish a ‘proud Zionist’ subjectivity, mostly within the ruling Likud party. I focus on the IDF as it is a key institution in Israeli society and since its ethos is inseparable from the Zionist fantasy. The analysis of the Likud party and right-wing politics is key here since it is the Likud party which has been in power since 2009 under the premiership of Benjamin Netanyahu and because it is exemplary of contemporary Zionist-nationalistic discourses in Israel.

# The National-Civilizational Edifice as Fantasmatic Belonging

National belonging can be described as the effect of social practices, of habitual and performative bodily enactments by which the nation and belonging to it are rendered real. To paraphrase Butler (2008: 185-193), the various national symbols, annual memorials and celebrations – ‘invented tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012) and/or a nation’s ‘world of signification’ (Castoriadis 1987: 359) – are acts and gestures performed on the outer surface of the body – the bodies of the national members and that of the national edifice. These acts and gestures are then given internal and ontological status as if they were arising from the nation’s being in the world. The performativity of national belonging and narratives can also be located in the various discursive practices by which signifier and signified are fixed, albeit only temporally (Laclau 1996: 57–58; Howarth 2000: 1-15), or how ‘words and feelings’ stick to one another (Ahmed 2012). Drawing on Berlant’s *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* we could further point to the various practices and assumptions within a given national narrative that are shared by the national members and thus appeal and tap into people’s sense of belonging.

The socio-historical making of nations and our sense of belonging, moreover, cannot be divorced from gender and sexuality. As Peterson (2013: 63) explains:

…the hierarchical binaries of embodied male-female sex difference and cultural masculine- feminine gender differentiation were constitutive of early state-making, and taken for granted in modern (nationalist) state-making and its colonizing projects.

Gender differentiation, therefore, contributed to perpetuating and increasing inequalities at the intersection of race, ethnicity and class. To Peterson (1999, 2013) this is a ‘heterosexist’ or ‘heteropatriarchal’ system (see also Berlant and Warner 1998). The nation consequently emerges as a gendered and sexualized edifice rendered ‘real’ through, for instance, the production of women as mothers of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997; although see Åhäll 2012 and Gentry 2009) and/or the military-nation as a hyper-masculinized site of nation-building (Kaplan 2006; Nagel 1998). The gendered and sexualized national edifice has thus been able to constitute and interpellate populations through the continuous reproduction of patriarchal power relations and a complicated relationship of sexual prohibition and permissibility. A major example of this is the disallowance of homosexuality by which male-to-male bonding is permissible (Alexander 1994; Cohn 1988; Peterson 1999: 52), especially in typically male and masculine sites.

**Homonationalism: Sovereign Legitimation and National Inclusion**

To Puar (2007), however, contemporary national discourses, especially after 9/11, no longer excludes the gay from the national body. In effect, Puar and Mikdashi (2012) demonstrate how the ‘quality of sovereignty is now evaluated by how a nation treats its homosexuals’ and ‘how sexuality has become a crucial formation in the articulation of proper U.S. citizens across other registers like gender, class, and race, both nationally and transnationally’ (Puar 2013a: 366). Puar names this ‘homonationalism’ as she demonstrates how queer populations in post 9/11 America and the west have become ‘subjects of life’ (Morgensen 2010: 105) to be protected by the state, while the terrorist is rendered queer and *othered*. This is where the bio-political and queer necro-political frameworks become most relevant, that is, accounting for the ways in which homonationalism produces ‘… terrorist and citizen bodies’ (Puar 2007: 2, 32-36) and how queer bodies become the subject/object of ‘technologies of life’. To Lind and Keating (2013: 512), analyzing queer inclusion and homophobic rhetoric in Ecuador, states may indeed pursue ‘homoprotectionist’ policies since they ‘serve to consolidate national identity and legitimate the centralization of authority’. Queer inclusion therefore works to strengthen state power and legitimate violence. In homonational and settler-colonial societies, as is the case in Israel/Palestine, this is further accentuated through the every-day practices of oppression, surveillance and bodily control (Elia 2012; Ritchie 2010).

To explain the rise and appeal of homonationalism Puar (2007: 1-32) identifies three main apparatuses: ‘sexual exceptionalism’, ‘queer as regulatory’, and the ‘ascendancy of whiteness’. By ‘sexual exceptionalism’ Puar points to the ways in which the USA (and other countries like Israel) projects and narrates its national excellence and superiority and how it co-opts homosexual bodies and indeed homonormativity in a global war on terror. This convergence of patriotic sentiments of uniqueness with gayness and liberal-progressive politics of gender and sexuality, more broadly, have come to render American and western societies exceptional to Arab and Muslim societies, which in turn are rendered sexually pervasive and ‘dangerously premodern’ (Puar 2013a: 336). ‘Queer as regulatory’ refers to the ways in which an ‘ideal queer’ subjectivity, mainly white and secular and thus western, has emerged in the post 9/11 atmosphere. In this, Muslim equals Islam equals Arab and in a ‘race war’ against homosexuality, or perhaps a western imaginary of modernity and sexuality. The result is that the queer modality ‘operates as an alibi for complicity with all sorts of other identity norms, such as nation, race, class, and gender, unwittingly lured onto the ascent of whiteness’ (Puar 2007: 24). The latter, the ‘ascendancy of whiteness’, manifests how homonationalism produces a queer subject that is ‘fit for capitalism’, a subject that is within the consumerist framework of western life and that embraces the ‘American dream’ (Koshy in Puar 2007: 26) and is thus a demobilized, depoliticized and privatized subject (Duggan 2002). As such, the state’s alleged benevolence is able to include the homosexual by appealing to existing socio-cultural discursive materials such as family, the nation, citizen and so on. The result of this and indeed of homonationalism is by allowing and even embracing queer normativity, but only through the frameworks of nationalism, American-Western exceptionality and thus a normative-consumerist citizen worthy of life vis-à-vis the ‘monster-terrorist-fag’ (Puar and Rai 2002).

**A Lacanian Reading of National-Civilizational Narratives**

This paper seeks to add to these manifestations and apparatuses of queer inclusion by directly interrogating the affective power of national-civilizational narratives. I suggest doing so by deploying tools from Lacanian psychoanalysis and Lacanian readings of nationalism and national belonging (Berlant 1991; Edkins 2003; Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2008; Žižek 2008: 78-79). Below I delineate the Lacanian framework as I explain the following concepts: ‘fantasy’, ‘desire’ and ‘jouissance/enjoyment’, as well as the interpellating mechanisms of ‘introjection’ and ‘projection’. Taken together, these concepts can further elucidate why and how the national-civilizational narrative and in this case the Zionist narrative has been able to hail queer populations in Israeli society and beyond in recent decades.

Let us begin by stipulating the psychoanalytic category of fantasy and, consequently, how national fantasies entail radical libidinal investment. Fantasy arises out of a need to cover for lack, the hole in one’s sense of identity and indeed in the imaginary wholeness of society. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, this is well captured in the Mirror Stage, the moment in a child’s early development in which the child recognizes him/herself in the mirror and in which human subjectivity is rendered both meaningful and incomplete. The Mirror Stage is thus an alienating phase (Nobus 1998: 117) because what the child sees in the mirror is both more ‘real’ and less ‘real’ to what the child (and the adult person) can identify and identify with. The imago thus offers an ‘Ideal-I, i.e. as an I that can never be realized’ (117; Lacan 2006: 76; Edkins 2003: 88-89). This is how and why the Mirror Stage helps us understand the logic of fantasy, a support of sorts for the incompleteness of social reality that is more and less real to that of society, the nation, the state or any form of imagined collectivity, and that precisely because of this must continuously aspire to recapture its being/becoming in the world (Mandelbaum 2016).

Fantasy or fantasmatic projects, constantly aspire to account for the unpredictability, indeed, the contingent nature of social life by providing an ideal and reassuring blueprint for a fixed and structured world, a certain necessary utopia (Stavrakakis 1999: 99-121; see also Levitas 2007), that is, the future promise of fulfilment in which fantasy is realized and enjoyment is attained, although a realization that can never be attained as I explain below. The national-civilizational fantasy, nonetheless, should not be read as the antonym of ‘reality’; rather, it is that which constructs and renders ‘reality’ possible – a reality that is contingent and in which society, the nation, ‘we’ is anything but a homogeneous symbolism (Žižek 2001, 17). This is because ‘fantasy is basically a scenario filling out the empty space of a fundamental impossibility, a screen masking a void’ (Žižek 1989: 126). To Edelman (1998: 19-20) it is only through fantasy that reality is rendered meaningful since fantasy operates as

an order, an organization, assuring the stability of our identities as subjects and the consistency of the cultural structures through which those identities are reflected back to us in recognizable form (19).

Indeed, elsewhere Edelman (2004: 33-34) argues that fantasy is the ‘central prop and underlying agency of futurism’ because fantasy not only attempts to stabilize the contingent, but ‘… compel us to identify ourselves with what’s to come by way of haven or defense against ego’s certain end.’ As such, fantasies and here national-civilizational narratives always include their own failure, the explanation why the fantasmatic futurity has not yet been attained. As Glynos and Howarth (2007: 147) put it:

Fantasy operates so as to conceal or close off the radical contingency of social relations. It does this through a fantasmatic narrative or logic that promises a fullness-to-come once a named or implied obstacle is overcome ... or which foretells of disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable.

Fantasies, moreover, are embroiled with jouissance, a libidinal and affective investment entailing bodily enjoyment that produces and interpellates populations (Laclau 2006). As in the child’s Mirror Stage, the fantasmatic national narrative always entails a plot in which enjoyment was lost, stolen and destroyed. These are the stories of national and civilizational golden-ages, heroic pasts or major defeats and catastrophes narrating ‘our’ lost grandeur. The promised jouissance is thus ‘always-already lost’ (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008: 261) and is reinvigorated in the national utopia by the promise to recapture it, to reinstate it through the establishment of national sovereignty and by controlling (a specific) territory. The national-civilization fantasy is thus an impossible-possibility that is nonetheless envisioned and as such is capable to hail populations precisely through its promise and the partial collective enjoyment it offers to its members. As Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras (2008: 153) put it:

the lost golden era of absolute enjoyment and the possibility of a return to this era is a chimera. However, the existence of this fantasy fosters the solidarity of the community, consolidates national identity, and animates national desire.

The promise of jouissance, however, is ambiguous and fantasmatic in the sense that it only offers partial experiences of belonging. This is vital to understanding the emotive hailing power of national-civilizational narratives as they strive to eradicate the gap, the lack in the nation’s subjectivity, by offering partial modes of belonging, of limited identification with the Lacanian *objet petit a* as the object-cause of desire (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008: 262-263; Žižek 2008; but see Laclau 2005, 112, 114-115).

The national edifice offers various such moments of partial enjoyment and satisfaction such as in the event of a crisis, war and/or national celebrations, parades and memorial days. The national edifice is able thus to produce and hail its national populations through this partial experience of ‘we-ness’. But this is limited for any such moment of affective belonging ends with frustration, with a cry that this is not quite it, enjoyment was experienced but very quickly lost again. Belonging was bodily performed but only to be shortly removed from the libidinal economy (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008: 262). The impossibility of the national fantasy and the jouissance that keeps the fantasy going, indeed animating it (Žižek 2008: xxiv), is directly linked to lack and the gap in the national existence, but this admission in ‘our’ lack is not recognized by the national edifice for that would mean anxiety and paralysis. What the national edifice thus offers is a certain libidinal ‘bribe’ and trade-off. Through the constitution of the national body and bodies, the national edifice interpellates populations – that is to say the national population introjects the symbolic order through myriad practices and performativities (e.g. national symbols, the flag, national holidays and commemoration, military service and so on) – whereas the lack and inability to fulfil the fantasy and obtain authentic and lasting enjoyment is projected onto the Other. This Other now stands for difference, for ‘our’ lack, and its existence is both a hindrance and a necessary explanation for why ‘we’ have not yet managed to secure and obtain our national fantasy (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 147). This demonstrates how national fantasies both promise us the satisfaction of desire, the obtainment of jouissance, security and fulfilment of ‘our’ national aspirations, and at the same time making sure this promise is kept at bay, unrealized. The reason is that identification can never be fully achieved, full belonging is impossible (Laclau 1996: 36-46). It cannot realize its national desire and instead it transposes it onto the future-to-come, while maintaining the Other as the obstacle, the explanation for why we are not yet there:

This way enjoyment is kept at a “healthy” distance, not too far but not too close either; close enough to support the appeal of an object of identification but far enough from letting us entertain the vision of full satisfaction as an imminent possibility, something that would kill desire, induce anxiety and put identification processes in danger (Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2008: 150).

Reading national and civilizational narratives through the psychoanalytical categories of fantasy and jouissance might thus demonstrate how the inclusion of the queer in Israel and beyond operates not only as a mask, as ‘pink-washing’ (Britt 2014; Elia 2012), but as part and parcel of the national Zionist edifice that ‘bribes’ queer populations into its ‘world of significations’ by promising a better, secure and free life, but how at the same time such fulfilment is impossible due to the threat posed by the Other, the Arab/Palestinian/Muslim. This does not mean dismissing the forms of resistance to ‘pink-washing’, the effects Israeli homonationalism has on queer Palestinians (Ritchie 2014), or indeed ignoring voices of dissent within Israeli (queer) society and beyond who resist the Zionist interpellation.[[4]](#endnote-4) Indeed, we should critique Israel’s own discourse of being inclusive towards its (Jewish) queer population while at the same time cutting funding for the LGBT community and halting gay rights promotion in the Israeli Knesset.[[5]](#endnote-5) Rather, my point here is to identify the ways in which the Zionist narrative is able to appeal to queer populations through a discourse of national and civilizational exceptionality that goes beyond the standard binary production of ‘us versus them’ (Zehfuss 2007). What I mean is that the process of national identification and belonging is complex and ambiguous as the introjection of the national edifice into the ego/subjectivity of queer populations is established through the ‘…perception of a common quality’ (Freud 2001: 108), namely the insecurity of the Jewish-Zionist national body and its national bodies per se. This is why projection is intertwined with this mode of introjection as the insecurity of the Zionist body is deployed both as a way of interpellation, of queer populations, and as a way to condition the possibility for the re-imagination of the Zionist fantasy. Homonationalism thus functions here as a form of organization of the libidinal economy of the Zionist fantasy. To further develop and demonstrate this the next part interrogates the affective operations of homonationalism in Israeli society and within the broader context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

# Gay Zionism

**Pride in the Israeli Defense Forces**

One way to interrogate the operations of introjection in Israel is to analyze the inclusion of LGBT in Israel’s major institutions such as the IDF. It is an excellent example not because of how the inclusion of LGBT soldiers is used to ‘wash’ IDF’s daily oppression of Palestinians, but because the IDF operates in Israeli society and national discourse as a socializing site, a major part of Israeli-Zionist ideology and thus a necessity for belonging to the Israeli-Zionist edifice, the body of proper citizenry (Ben-Eliezer 1995; but see Levy 2008). Indeed, as Kimmerling (1993) demonstrated there is no separation between the military, on the one hand, and the socio-cultural and political spheres on the other hand. The IDF and ‘Israeli militarism tend[s] to serve as one of the central organizational principles of the society’ (Kimmerling 1993: 199). As I demonstrate below, this is how we should read the opening of the IDF and Israeli socio-political arena, more generally, to LGBT in recent decades, that is, not only as a strategy of ‘washing’ or ‘branding’ but as a continuous part of reimagining the national fantasy of Zionism in Israel and thus understanding better how the national edifice is capable to hail queer subjectivity.

The IDF is one of Israel’s key socializing institutions, embedded in the national myth of heroism, fraternity (re’ut) and death (Kaplan 2006; Levy 2009; Zertal 2002), and part and parcel of the national every-day. Service in the IDF is mandatory for all citizens and permanent residents of Israel aged 18 years of old (with various exemptions) and is still very much in the national mainstream discourse. The IDF has already gone through various reforms as to the inclusion of LGBT soldiers in recent decades, especially during the 1990s and the so-called ‘constitutional reform’ in Israel (Gross 2013; Sapir 2009). It is in recent years, however, that the IDF has proactively started reforming its policies and raising awareness among its units as to the inclusion of LGBT soldiers that further demonstrates how the IDF as a socializing site in Israeli society is reinvigorating the national fantasy through the inclusion of the Jewish-Israeli queer and by projecting the perceived threat from the queer body onto the body of the Palestinian-Other while marking those who critique Israeli practices from within as traitors (Mandelbaum 2012).

The recent case of a transgender officer in the IDF is illustrative of how the IDF is attempting to interpellate queer populations through the promise of belonging and mainstreaming. The case is that of Lieutenant Shahar, the first openly transgender officer in the IDF. From his own account, we learn about the process he went through first as a soldier, later during his cadet course and finally as an IDF officer, and how this experience has also affected IDF policy and approach towards transgenders serving in the military. As he has commented recently in an interview:

It is only a few soldiers every year, but transgenders are a special part in society worth fighting for. Today there are orders from above, good instincts on the ground and good will to integrate us. It may look complicated, but it is not – it is a moral choice the IDF had already taken the moment it defined itself the ‘people’s army’ (IDF 2015a).

Indeed, the old ideal of the IDF as a national institution and key to equal and proper citizenship is re-inscribed in the military’s policy of inclusion and integration of LGBT soldiers. As the Women’s Affairs advisor to the IDF Chief of Staff (Brigadier-General Rachel Tevet-Weisel) has commented: ‘the policy of the army is tolerance. Military commanders must accept everybody as they are’ (IDF 2015a). As such, what both Lieutenant Shahar and Brigadier-General Tevet-Weisel articulate and tap into is precisely the ideal of the IDF, and indeed part of its constituting identity as the ‘people’s army’ (Zva Ha’am). The IDF is historically a major socializing phase in every Israeli’s (mostly Jewish) life, taken in mainstream Israeli discourse as the defender of the nation and part of the old ‘melting pot’ notion by which a new Jew was produced (Almog 2000). Opening its ranks publicly to the queer soldier reveals again the affective power of the national narrative to appeal emotively and bodily to its members. This example demonstrates, moreover, how ‘already available cultural and linguistic resources’ (Weldes 1996: 281), namely the idea and myth of the ‘people’s army’ in Israeli-Zionist narrative, promises a sense of collective enjoyment and thus belonging to the proper body of Israeli citizenry.

A recent policy issued by the IDF with respect to same-sex couples with children serving in the reserve army further illustrates how the fantasy of belonging is promised to the queer subject through the IDF as a socializing site. According to the new policy same-sex couples with children will not be called for reserve duty at the same time. As Major (reserve) Etai Pinkas put it: ‘This new regulation means that in case of a national emergency – I know that my daughters won’t be left at home without a parent. As a father, this is very reassuring (IDF 2015b).’ This new policy demonstrates how the queer body is rendered viable to the national-Zionist edifice precisely through the fantasmatic belonging the IDF enables as both a socializing and in this case liberalizing site vis-à-vis Israeli enemies. The post on the IDF Spokesperson’s website also shows a picture with Major (reserve) Etai Pinkas and his partner, Major (reserve) Yoav Arad-Pinkas, in uniform with their three children, which further taps into the notion of the family unit as key part of the national edifice, but one that is now constructed not around women as ‘mothers of the nation’ or the heteronormative family (McClintock 1993; Yuval-Davis 1997), but through the homonormative family and gay fatherhood that is essential to the maintenance of the body-national.

**Producing a ‘Proud’ Zionist Subject**

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Israeli left is no longer the sole representative of LGBT rights in Israel and how awareness of, and political campaigning for, LGBT rights has risen in the Israeli right. Consider, for instance, the activities of the so-called Liberals in the Likud (a section of the ruling Likud party) as well as recent expressions by several Likud ministers and MKs (Members of the Knesset) articulating a strong right-wing and nationalist stance and at the same time deploying the liberal vocabulary of individualism and liberty.[[6]](#endnote-6) One case in particular is that of the previous Minister of Defense, Moshe (Bogie) Ya’alon, also the former IDF Chief of Staff. A clear supporter of the settlement movement in the West Bank who had objected to the unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005[[7]](#endnote-7), he recently stated his position in favor of full legal equality for the LGBT community in Israel, including, among other things, same-sex marriage:

‘I also think it is the duty of the State of Israel to assist members of the LGBT community to raise a family, have children, live according to their way, make a living, flourish and contribute’[[8]](#endnote-8)

What Ya’alon articulates here is the ability of introjection and the normalization, indeed the nationalization, of queer subjectivity. Speaking as Israel’s minister of defense, a former IDF Chief of Staff and a high-ranking member of the right-wing governing party (Likud), he offers a road to full societal incorporation precisely through the Zionist-national edifice. Moreover, the national-security image that Ya’alon’s Facebook post projects, in which he is surrounded by military-security personnel climbing a hill, and indeed his own military record together with his strong support of the settlement movement is intertwined with full equality for and legal recognition of queer populations thus enabling the Jewish-Israeli queer to ‘flourish and contribute’. Similar to changes taking place in the IDF, the above example further shows how it is the promise of national enjoyment that is key here, namely how the security-orientated image that Ya’alon represents is now associated with and supports a national-civilizational narrative that promises belonging and enjoyment. A partial experience of becoming a proud and proper Israeli.

Pride in the Likud, the LGBT caucus in the right-wing Likud party, further illustrates this homonational shift in recent years, and how the national fantasy has come to interpellate Jewish-Israeli queer populations. It is no longer a contradiction or a tension to pride oneself as Zionist and nationalist while promoting gay rights. This is not the production of a homonational Israeli state or society, but a mainstreaming and ‘normalization’ of the queer subject as a loyal patriot and proud Israeli.

Evan-Gary Cohen, the previous chairperson of Pride in the Likud, has clearly attempted to break the perceived tension between right-wing nationalist sentiments and homosexuality. In a blog from 2012 Cohen asserted that many Israeli gays do not identify anymore with the Israeli left, the traditional representative of the gay community in Israel, as the Jewish-Israeli gay identifies with and wishes to be a full and equal member in the Zionist national narrative. In his blog entitled ‘Meretz no longer represents the gay community in Israel’, Cohen (2012) states:

… the LGBT community is not different in its support of the state than the absolute majority of straight citizens. And so, as a community and as individuals, it is time we stop apologizing to our enemy, foreign and domestic, to proudly declare – in its double meaning – our support for our state, for being Zionists and to fight for equality for the LGBT community as Zionists.

It is in the articulation of national pride, militarization and typical Israeli security discourse of the current chairperson of Pride in the Likud (Amir Ohanah), by now a member of the Israeli parliament, that we clearly see the homonational-Zionist subjectivity. Talking in an interview to Haaretz in 2014, Ohanah displays the typical hyper masculine security-orientated image, while also celebrating and promoting LGBT agenda and raising awareness within the ranks of the Likud party (Haaretz 2014). Talking about his military service as an officer in the IDF and later in the Israeli security services he comments that ‘I cannot expand, it was about preventing attacks and it was hardcore’ but ‘they didn’t make a thing out of it, nor did they discriminate against me, it also didn’t prevent me from being promoted despite the macho image of the security services’. The hyper-masculinized image associated with Ohanah as a previous agent of the security service does not emerge in this interview as a contradiction to homosexuality. Actually, what Ohanah is trying to establish and tap into is the typical Israeli security ‘tough guy’ image and thus demonstrating that homosexuality is not foreign to the national-Zionist narrative and in fact can further strengthen it by promoting a liberal agenda in right-wing Israeli politics. Indeed, when it comes to the Middle-East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Ohanah clearly articulates a civilizational and racial worldview asserting that ‘the world is moving towards a clash of civilizations… like in the case of ISIS’, as he further legitimates the Zionist territorial aspiration over the entirety of Mandatory Palestine in clear ethnic/primordial terms:

There are 23 states for one people and 1 state for a second people. I don’t care whether there will be a Palestinian state, or two. But not in our territory, maybe in Jordan or somewhere else… Judea and Samaria are for me the Land of Israel more than Tel-Aviv and Herzliya. This is the cradle of our culture, language, history… I cannot see a possibility to give away Judea and Samaria (Haaretz 2014)

The legitimation of the nation, of the Zionist territorial and civilizational claim, is not merely a form of self-rationalization, a claim for grandeur vis-à-vis the Arabs and Palestinians, nor is it an attempt to divert attention from Israeli actions toward the Palestinians. In fact, what Pride in the Likud illustrates is precisely how a so-called progressive-liberal agenda with regards to sexuality and gender is embroiled with the national and civilizational myth and in contradistinction to the Palestinian/Arab/Muslim Other. It is therefore not merely a ‘homoprotectionist’ rhetoric that entails the protection of individuals based on their ‘sexual orientation and gender identity’ (Lind and Keating 2013: 516) that we see in Ohanah’s worldview, or in Israel’s queer inclusion policies; rather, it is a clear trade-off in which the state asserts its role as protector of queer populations in exchange for full support of the Zionist edifice. This is exactly where we see the national fantasy re-inscribing the obstacle as part of its own continuous reinvention. As I have explained above, national fantasmatic projects are ambiguous in the sense that in their inner logic they must always queer, render a certain element and/or subjectivity foreign, and often a threat or at the very least the reason for why fantasy cannot be fulfilled: ‘the identity of the evil ‘Other’ who prevents the nation from recouping the enjoyment it has lost’ (Glynos and Stavrakakis 2008: 262), or ‘the obstacle which always perturbs the realization of our goals’ (Žižek 2008: xx). The national jouissance is re-ignited, although now it shifts from a focus on the ‘foreign’ sexuality of the national members, the disallowance of homosexuality, to the ‘foreignness’ of the Palestinian body, which is rendered a civilizational threat and thus disabling the realization of the Zionist fantasy. There is an affective move, as the examples above illustrate, in the production and hailing of queer populations precisely through the fantasmatic function of the national plot. The declaration of national loyalty while fully participating in the militarized and securitized sites the IDF and the security services offer as well as the legitimation of territorial and political claims as the case of Ohanah demonstrates, includes its own failure and impossibility. The proud Zionist homonational subjectivity produced through the mainstream(ing) of the IDF and Pride in the Likud thus entail an impossible-possibility of national purity and dominance because of the civilizational threat the Palestinian/Arab/Muslim poses to the imaginary of liberal Zionism Pride in the Likud seeks to promote. But this obstacle, this projection, functions also as a way to re-invoke and animate national desire and jouissance: ‘bringing people together’ through the fantasy of Zionist-national unity and by transposing the threat of the Other from the internal (‘perverse’) sexualized body to the racially queered Enemy-Other. What the inclusion of the Jewish-Israeli queer obtains, therefore, is the ability for the national narrative to reproduce the libidinal performativity around its symbolic institutions (proudly voting Likud, serving in the military and so on). The obstacle thus becomes not so much that by which the Zionist fantasy is constituted, the known ‘self-other’ dichotomy; rather, the Palestinian as the civilizational obstacle is actually the condition of possibility for the recouping of enjoyment, albeit partial, of the ability to partially and temporally *enjoy* Zionist unity. The cooptation of LGBT in the service of the nation/state, moreover, has strengthened an ‘internal’ othering within Jewish-Israeli society by which critiques of Israeli practices and policies are branded as traitors and extremists (Mandelbaum 2012).

The Zionist fantasmatic project, therefore, has an affective quality in the sense that it covers the lack and the split in Jewish-Israeli society and by promising future closure and security, but at the same time ensuring such realization is never attained precisely because any attempt at satisfying the lack in the Zionist body-national will reveal the split itself, the void behind the fantasmatic mask of the Zionist plot (Žižek 1989: 126).

# Conclusions

This paper has engaged with Puar’s analytic of homonationalism through the Israel/Palestine case and whilst demonstrating how a psychoanalytical reading of homonationalism can further elucidate *how* the national-civilizational narrative is able to appeal and hail its (queer) populations and thus how it further complements the Foucauldian framework of ‘biopolitics’ and Deleuzian ‘assemblage’ that Puar (2007) deploys. Focusing on changes in the IDF’s approach to LGBT soldiers and officers and by looking into the rise of LGBT awareness among the Israeli political right I have suggested that homonationalism entails an affective power of interpellation, a radical libidinal investment (Laclau 2006). By drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis and discourse analysis I argued that national and civilizational narratives are powerful forms of affective belonging since they offer an ambiguous, endless and failure-based utopian future (Edelman 1998; 2004). In other words, they are fantasmatic (Edkins 2003; Glynos and Howarth 2007; Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras 2006; Žižek 2008). Therefore, fantasies always already include within their discursive coordinates their own failure, their explanation for why national congruency, fullness and security has not yet arrived. This is manifested in the obstacle, the Other ‘blamed for the blocked identity’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 125; Glynos and Howarth 2007: 147).

In current homonational narratives in Israeli society the Other has shifted. The state and the Zionist national edifice is offering today to Israeli Jews the ability to be ‘Proud’, that is, to openly live one’s life as gay *and* as a loyal nationalist. To celebrate gay culture and gay rights within and through the national prism and thus become part of the collective practices of enjoyment (e.g. serving in the IDF as a gay soldier/officer, supporting the right-wing ideology of settlement building). The threat, indeed the Enemy-Other, is no longer the state or society’s symbolic order ‘disallowing homosexuality’, but that who/which wishes to hurt and destroy the State of Israel: the Palestinian/Arab/Muslim enemy. This is where we see introjection in action, the invocation of the insecurity and shared fate, what Freud (2001: 108) defined as ‘common quality’, Jewish-Israelis face. This is an interesting move since it further illustrates how national fantasies require a certain ‘foreign’ element not by which it produces its own identity – the known ‘us vs. them’ dichotomy – but by conditioning the possibility for the partial enjoyment of the national-civilizational edifice through the queering of the Other.

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1. [www.gaytlvguide.com](http://www.gaytlvguide.com) [accessed 29/07/2015] [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3911573,00.html> [accessed 17/01/2017] [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <http://megafon-news.co.il/asys/archives/69906> (Hebrew)[accessed 03/06/2016] [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Examples of anti- pinkwashing include <http://www.pinkwatchingisrael.com/> [accessed 13/05/2016]; <https://electronicintifada.net/content/eight-questions-palestinian-queers-are-tired-hearing/12951> [accessed 13/05/2016]. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/1.660861> ; <http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politi/.premium-1.2862421> (Hebrew)[accessed 17/01/2017] [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See, for instance, Miri Regev’s (Likud MK and currently the Minister of Culture and Sport) participation in the 2015 Pride Events in Tel-Aviv and her Facebook post on the relationship between Zionism, nationalism and ‘gay friends’ as she puts it. <https://www.facebook.com/118410851589072/posts/441005825996238> accessed 09/10/2015 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/ya-alon-calls-on-state-to-drop-illegal-qualifier-from-outposts-1.282169> [ accessed 25/08/2015] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/08/19/idUSLJ180639> [accessed 25/08/2015] [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. (<http://www.mako.co.il/pride-news/local/Article-485a189c7cfda41006.htm> (Hebrew) [accessed 25/08/2015] [↑](#endnote-ref-8)