
QUEER ANTIRACIST VIGILANCE: PINKWATCHING ‘QUEER INVESTMENTS’¹ IN STATE RACIST VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article critically investigates the ways in which racialized queers (and their politics) are naturalized as abandonable and disposable vis-à-vis (predominantly white) queers who are regenerated as vital citizen-subjects (worthy of state protection) by focusing on the vigilant radical critiques of racialized queers to state violence. Specifically focusing on images from Toronto’s LGBTQ Pride parade, the author places a critical spotlight on the homo-nationalist politics of inclusion of LGBTQ into state formations of citizenship through antiracist queer protests against state racism and racism within the LGBTQ community. In so doing, the essay attends to a broader questioning of which non-normative subjects and populations are constructed as ‘too queer’ to matter within Western frameworks of gender and sexual intelligibility.

KEYWORDS

pinkwashing, homonationalism, pinkwatching, racism, Pride, Toronto

BIO

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¹ The term has been developed by Lamble (2013).

Introduction

This essay critically investigates the ways in which racialized queers (and their politics) are naturalized as abandonable and disposable vis-à-vis (predominantly white) queers who are regenerated as vital citizen-subjects worthy of state protection by focusing on the vigilant radical critiques of racialized queers to state violence (including the pivotal role of homonationalists in supporting such violence). In doing so, I attend to a broader questioning of which non-normative subjects and populations are constructed as ‘too queer’ to matter within Western frameworks of gender and sexual intelligibility. I specifically focus on homonationalism and pinkwashing in Toronto’s Pride Parade between 2010 and 2018, a period of accelerated political and critical vigilance by radical queers of colour (coinciding with a period of heightened state over-policing and neglect of racialized queer communities), challenging Pride as a vehicle for state-sponsored homonationalism. My investigation is in part anchored in an institutional ethnographic approach, focusing critically not only on the involvement of established state institutions within the Pride Parade (e.g. legal, police, military, business, media, etc.), but Pride itself as a quasi-state participant in nationalist projects of governance (through racist violence). I also focus on three moments of racialized queer protest – within the Pride Parade – by Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA), by Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLM-TO) and by the campaign ‘Until We’re Safe’ to deconstruct the performance of vigilance against murderous racist colonial violence. In addition to deconstructing the images of assimilation and protest, I also combine my own field notes of remembering, as a spectator-participant in the Pride Parades over the last two decades, as a way of noticing how the crowd of spectators have affectively responded to critiques of Pride (as a homonationalist project), through racialized queer protests within the Parade. This combination of institutional and spectator ethnography helps to unmap the affective economies of homonationalism and critical refusals of such to restage Pride as a space of political contestation.

On Pride as Homonationalism

The exceptionality of Canadian sovereignty is marked by its championing of sexual-gender liberation, especially as a ‘gay-friendly’ nation state i.e. a discourse of national exceptionalism which Schulman (2011) and others have termed pinkwashing. Puar defines pinkwashing as “the [state] practice of covering over or distracting from a nation’s policies of discrimination of some populations through a noisy touting of its gay rights for a limited few,” (2013: 33). The concept is integrally connected to Puar’s own concept of homonationalism, which as a neoliberal phenomenon, reflects the increasing assimilation of the LGBTQ community into citizenship through rights-based institutional reforms (e.g. rights to gay marriage, adoption rights, serving in the military, domesticity and consumption), in exchange for their depoliticization and silencing of critiques of state violence – especially state racism. Homonationalism is therefore a biopolitical process which brings some queers into national civic life through their collusion with the state’s investment in necropolitical projects which targets non-compliant queer others as disposable.

Moreover, under homonationalism, especially the mainstream white gay cis-male and lesbian sections of the LGBTQ community have pledged allegiance – as the ‘good gays’ – to the very state which once criminalized them, through their invested support for the punishment of other precariously-positioned queer and trans communities (e.g. racialized, undocumented, poor, sex working, etc.), marked as ‘bad queers’. In fact, Lamble (2013: 230-231) finds that “LGBT communities now partly measure their citizenship status on whether the state is willing to imprison other people on their behalf,” which “normalize [queer] punitive practices and naturalise the neoliberal carceral state,” specifically pivoted on the punishment of racialized queers (see also Dryden and Lenon, 2015). As such, sexual exceptionalism is a deeply racialized project which redraws the boundaries of exclusion, thereby re-signifying ‘good gays’ as emergent citizens (i.e. homonationalists) by constructing and fixing ‘bad queers’ the proper targets of punishment. In turn, vigilant critiques of the ways in which both the state and the mainstream LGBTQ community co-invest in discourses of sexual exceptionalism is termed pinkwashing (see Jackman and Upadhyay, 2014).

As a vehicle for state-sponsored homonationalism, there are five key co-constitutive components which assemble the homonationalist politics of Toronto’s Pride Parade, and which secure the Canadian state’s logic of ‘freedom with violence’ (Reddy, 2011): (1) corporate pride, (2) carceral pride (Russell, 2018), (3) global human rights pride, (4) multiculturalized pride, and (5) the masking of racialized

violence. All five manifestations of Pride, while they procure the fiction of sexual liberation, depend on ‘queer investments’ (Lamble, 2013) and complicities in punitive state violence. This is evident in the queer antiracist analysis of homonationalism as not only a biopolitical expansion of the state, but key to enhancing the state’s necropower as a defining modality of governance. Bassichis, Lee and Spade’s call for penal abolition (not reform) is based on their critique of homonationalism as expanding the policing powers of the state through increasing support, within the LGBTQ community, for “pro-police, pro-prisons, and pro-war” which has led to ‘police-enhancing legislation,’ (2011, 16). Similarly, Lamble’s (2013) rich and complex analysis of queer necropolitics as enlivening the carceral state, demonstrates the increased decriminalization and rights-based inclusion of LGBT communities, which coalesces with the strengthened criminalization of especially racialized queer populations who are targeted as undeserving of protection on account of their constructed radical alterity as ‘too queer’. Thus, for Lamble, punishment has become – under neoliberalism – the prioritized response to social problems, which are increasingly projected as racial problems. While punitive strategies involve the direct infliction of pain (e.g. through colonial occupation and murderous policing), Lamble also suggests that they also take the form of ‘socially-sanctioned deprivation’ – for example, the denial of police attention, the denial of formal citizenship status (as border control) and the denial of belonging even within the LGBTQ community to those deemed undeserving of protection, security and community. If homonationalism is deeply reinforcing of the carceral state’s punitive logic, then those ‘bad queers’ who either fall outside the state’s biopolitical prescriptions of normativity or refuse to comply with the strangulating conditions of docile citizenship (with requires allegiance to the expansion of state violence as freedom-making), are marked with a ‘death penalty’ or confined to what Lamble (2013: 244) terms a ‘caged life,’ which involves ‘biological, social, political and civil death.’

On Vigilance

The series of images from Toronto’s Pride parade demonstrate an emerging repoliticization of Pride through the rise of antiracist queer and trans politics that has helped to restage and undo the fiction of sexual citizenship through what Walcott (2017) terms as a ‘queer civil war.’ Focusing on protests – within the Pride parade - by Queers Against Israeli Apartheid against neocolonial and racist occupation, by Black Lives Matter Toronto against anti-Black policing and by the ‘Until We’re Safe’ campaign against the abandonment of racialized queer communities, I argue that these three protests represent a vigilant pinkwashing of homonationalism and its normalization of racialized punishment and violence. Their participation in and protest performances in the parade are refusals to be silenced and to be co-opted into the silencing forces of Pride, which itself “began in 1981 in response to a military-style raid on gay bathhouses by the Toronto Police Service,” (Greey, 2018: 2).

One of the earliest critiques of pinkwashing in the Pride parade was staged in 2008 by the Toronto activist group, Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA), which critiqued “Israel’s use of gay rights to divert international attention away from the state’s violation of Palestinian human rights,” (QuAIA website). In advocating for solidarity with Palestine, the group raised critical attention to anti-colonial, anti-occupation and transnational queer politics, which entailed their refusal to support discourses of sexual exceptionalism that are being increasingly deployed to naturalize colonial occupation. As a participant group in Toronto’s Pride parade, QuAIA came under intense attack by state-supporting institutions, including threats by city politicians to defund Pride if QuAIA continued to march in the parade. In 2010, this led to the decision by Pride Toronto (the institutional entity responsible for organizing the parade) to ban the term ‘Israeli Apartheid’ on the basis of what it felt to be anti-Semitic language, though this still led to the punitive loss of financial sponsorship for the event. According to Kouri-Towe (2017: 188): “The temporary ban of the term ‘Israeli apartheid’ at Toronto Pride reveals a key function of homonationalism, whereby belonging is predicated on the coordination of sexual citizenship and nationalism.” QuAIA still marched in the parade, despite Pride Toronto’s censorship, and chanted slogans such as “Corporate Pride has got to go!” and “censorship has got to go,” (Spurr, 2015). Following the parade, the City of Toronto threatened to defund Pride Toronto, leading the then executive director to blame QuAIA for her resignation (as a result of the organization’s financial deficit). Following a brief absence in the parade in 2011, QuAIA returned as a marching group in 2012, although the Toronto City Council voted to fund Pride in conjunction with a motion condemning the term ‘Israeli

Apartheid,' (Spurr, 2015). While the group continued to march in the parade, it self-disbanded in 2015, claiming that it had managed to incite public scrutiny about the corporate pinkwashing of Toronto's Pride (in addition to pinkwatching Israeli homonationalism). Yet, Kouri-Towe claims that "QuAIA Toronto's success came at a cost: in order to defend the group's right to march, QuAIA Toronto's message shifted from opposing apartheid to demanding belonging," (2017: 189). This deflection of QuAIA's politics and the group's response to such are deeply reflective of the punitive costs of pinkwatching state-sponsored homonationalism.

The second instance of pinkwatching concerns the radical activism of the group Black Lives Matter Toronto (BLM-TO), which was founded by Janaya Khan and Yusra Ali in 2014 in response to the shooting of Jermaine Carby by Peel Regional Police, and the escalating violent policing of Black life i.e. anti-Black racism in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In 2015 the group "crashed the police board meeting and shut down the streets" of Toronto (BLM-TO website) when Sudanese-Canadian, Andrew Loku was gunned down by Toronto Police Services. Later that year the group also participated in Toronto's Take Back the Night event (protesting sexual violence), where "hundreds rallied against police brutality and in solidarity with marginalized black lives, with particular attention to the lives of black individuals who are cis women, trans, queer, on the gender spectrum, with disabilities, and are sex workers," (Donato, 2015). As one of the honoured guests at the 2016 Toronto Pride Parade, BLM-TO staged a sit-in protest along the Yonge St. parade route, not only bringing a halt to the parade (which also included the Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, interestingly just after the Canadian "Parliament's collective condemnation of the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) movement against Israel and the occupation of Palestine," [Presnail, 2016]), but re-politicizing the parade as a space for speaking out against the anti-Black racism (especially police brutality) of both the state and the mainstream LGBTQ community. BLM-TO protested against the state's anti-Black policing, as well as anti-Black racism within Pride Toronto. The group said that Pride Toronto "has shown little honour to black queer/trans communities, and other marginalized communities. Over the years, Pride has threatened the existence of black spaces at Pride that have existed for years," (BLM-TO in Fatah, 2016). In so doing, Pride has helped to "divorce blackness from queerness," (Cole, 2016).

One of the most radical demands of the group was that uniformed and armed members of the police services not be allowed to participate in future Pride parades. Uniformed and armed police officers have been a celebrated staple of the Pride parade for years and among them are "police chiefs who have defended carding, the police practice of street checks that criminalizes many young Black men, and chiefs who have failed to take seriously training and other measures to ensure that people experiencing mental health crises, many of whom are also Black, are not killed," (Mukherjee, 2016). Yet the mainstream media and queer media subsequently responded to the sit-in protest by redeploying anti-Black racism through the discursive construction of BLM-TO as "aggressors, outsiders and terrorists," (Greedy, 2016). Furthermore, Toronto Mayor John Tory, reiterated calls for police inclusion in the parade, interestingly at an Eid al-Fitr celebration, stating that: "We've come so far in relations between the police and the LGBTQ2S community, and the police have embraced Pride, Pride have embraced the police. I think to go backwards from there would be a backwards step for the whole community and for Pride," (Tory in Ward, 2016). This moment has continued to open up debates around police inclusion in the Pride parade and a wider vigilant pinkwatching of state-sponsored anti-Black homonationalism.

The third moment of pinkwatching surrounds the response by queers of colour, under the banner of 'Until We're safe' in Toronto's 2018 Pride Parade, to the murders of predominantly racialized queer men by a white male serial killer in Toronto. Whereas the BLM-TO protest politicized the state's racist over-policing of Black communities, this case focuses on a different angle of queer necropolitics where racialized queer – mainly 'brown' immigrant – bodies were left to die as a result of the neglect and social and political banishment by state institutions (police and immigration), which queers of colour have also advocated that the mainstream LGBTQ community must also be held to account for. Between 2010 and 2012, three brown men-Skandaraj Navaratnam (Sri Lankan, aged 40), Majeed Kayhan (Afghan, aged 58), and Abdulbasir Faizi (Afghan, aged 42)-went missing in the Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village, otherwise known as the gay village. The police investigative task force, named Project Houston, was not able to trace their disappearance. The three men were spectacularized in the mainstream media as being "all middle-aged, of similar-skin colour and immigration status", "active in the Church Wellesley area," (Syed, 2018) and "frequent users of gay cruising apps, such as Grindr, Scruff, and

Hornet,” (Dubro, 2018). A Toronto crime journalist wrote that “The suggestion of a serial killer has not been ruled out by police, however it remains extremely unlikely,” (Dubro, 2018), which probably led to their designation by police as cold cases. The further disappearance of Soroush Mahmudi, Selim Esen, Dean Lisowick, and Andrew Kinsman (who was white) in the gay village, was subsequently investigated by the police under a different but parallel investigation, Project Prism (2017) –only after the lone white gay victim (Kinsman) went missing. In February 2018, a white gay man – Bruce McArthur – was charged with the murder of all the missing men, their bodies found buried in planters which the accused, a landscaper by profession, had installed. Kirushnakumar Kanagaratnam (37) was also confirmed as one of the victims in April 2018.

The mainstream and queer media constructed Kinsman as a respectable gay citizen (undeserving of this violence), while the brown queer men were constructed as burdened by their transnational kinships and living ‘double lives,’ mobilizing a discourse of racialized homophobia (which further facilitates racist multicultural discourses premised on the notions of ‘terror by culture.’). Toronto-based writer JP Larocque (2018) claims that “the double marginalized status of these men in Toronto’s Gay Village made them both the targets of a killer and lower priorities in the eyes of the law”. Larocque further explains that while the gay village is seen as a place of safety for mostly white queers, it double signals as a zone of fear for racialized queers. He argues that the gay village represents a “system that elevates white men while isolating men of colour, desensitizing them to forms of abuse, and leaving them vulnerable to attack.” In the critiques leveled against Toronto Police by the mainstream LGBTQ community, the primary narrative has been about the police disregard for queer death, pointing to the almost 10-year period it has taken to investigate these disappearances and the systemic denial that brown queer men could be targets of serial killings. Yet, this object of queer rage has itself deflected attention from the pivotal force of race in structuring these deaths and the City’s investigative rubric, also pointed out by Larocque. Moreover, the invisibility of race as informing the murderous possibilities for brown queer lives is shored up by the construction of McArthur as a lone psychopathic serial killer whose whiteness is disconnected from the public politicization of this case. It is this refusal to see the deathly force of racism in structuring the vulnerability and killability of brown queer bodies that I critically respond to in this photo essay.

On Witnessing: A Photo Politics

Section A

The Parade: Homonationalist Pride

Showcasing Corporate Pride (Figure 1): This image represents the corporatization of Toronto Pride, whereby financial institutions, beer companies, Google, queer dating sites, retail giants, etc. not only help to brand the queer consumer as legible within the nation-state, but in doing so, brand themselves as responsible corporate citizens who support inclusivity of and the extension of employment benefits to their queer identified employees. Building on Lisa Duggan’s concept of homonormativity, Toronto’s urban homocapitalism (i.e. the anchoring and extension of homonationalism through neoliberal capitalism) helps us understand how corporations are now cashing in on the ‘pink dollar’ as a neoliberal currency that is necessary for accessing respectable citizenship and has thus become a regulative force within the LGBTQ community. This is ironic given the impact of property inflation and gentrification on the Church-Wellesley Village, which has resulted in an accelerated erasure of gay clubs, bathhouses, community outdoor spaces, and coffee houses, being replaced by high-rise condos and upscale establishments (run and regulated by the Church-Wellesley Business Improvement Area - a municipal entity). The dissolution of the ‘gaybourhood’ has resulted in the expulsion of homeless queers, the structured eviction of queer seniors and pensioners, queer people with disabilities, the reinforcement of privacy and domesticity, and the selective management of racialized queers in relation to discourses of production and consumption. In fact, in 2010, “then-TD vice-president Scott Mullin wrote that while TD supports Pride Toronto, it had become harder to do so after Pride reversed its (short-lived and controversial) decision to screen all parade signs, a policy implemented in response to criticism over QuAIA’s 2009 contingent and its signs challenging Israeli policy towards Palestinians,” (Rose, 2017). Yet another example of the corporate regulation of Pride concerns the threats by the City of Toronto and

the Toronto Police Union to defund Pride - a state punitive measure - for critiques of homonationalism, predominantly by racialized queers, (constructed as non-compliant and thus undeserving subjects). Following BLM-TO's sit-in protest in 2016, one blog carrying the headline: "Pride Toronto lost \$1.3 million last year amid controversy," (Power, 2017) laid the blame for defunding on the BLM-TO protest. One Tweet also stated: "@PrideToronto suffers biggest financial hit since 2010 when group calling itself #QueersAgainstIsraeliApartheid was allowed to parade," (JaneBrown, 2017). This was also evident in the 2018 Pride parade, which was not as much a capitalist-sponsored pageant as in previous years, as punishment for BLM-TO's critique of uniformed-armed-police inclusion in the parade and demands for the removal of police floats. The message this sends is not only that racialized queer politics is 'bad business,' but racialized queers are projected as liabilities who threaten the very homocapitalist freedom enabled by Pride.



FIGURE 1

Carceral Pride: Throughout my participation in the Pride parade as a spectator over the past two decades, queer-identified members of the Toronto Police force have opened the parade, leading the procession on their rainbow adorned motorbikes and police cruisers (Figure 2). Russel (2018: 332) claims that "this new police image attempts to re-brand police as protectors and defenders of gay liberties and homonormative life," which they refer to as 'carceral pride.' I have noticed the consistent celebratory cheers of the spectating crowd to police inclusion in the parade. This is ironic given that the Pride parade emerged in response to police brutality and homophobia during the Toronto's bathhouse raids (dubbed 'Operation Soap') in 1981 and the police raid of The Pussy Palace – a bathhouse event for queer women - in 2000. Interestingly, a couple months after BLM-TO's sit-in protest, the police launched its Project Marie operation i.e. the police crackdown on cruising and 'consensual queer sex' (Kinsman, 2016) at Marie Curtis Park on the western edges of the City in 2016 using various forms of entrapment. According to Kinsman (2016): "this police campaign also provides another reason why Police Departments should not be marching inside our Pride parades and promoting themselves within the festival at Toronto Pride." Hence, the criminalization of queer life continues, despite the inclusion of 'gay-friendly' police in the Pride community. Yet Russel (2018) finds that the rebranding of the police as pro-gay is happening in a moment of intensifying public scrutiny of escalating police violence. BLM-TO's protest against the continued criminalization of Black queer and trans communities (e.g. through carding, racial profiling, racialized methods of detainment, etc.) points to Pride as enhancing the capacity of the state to police especially racialized communities. For Russell (2018: 335-36) this signals increasing "sexual investments in punitiveness" that seek to establish "social order through an always present threat of lawful violence."



FIGURE 2

Global Gay Human Rights Pride: According to Spade (2013: 98), “Gay [human] rights is operating to ‘pinkwash’ the *terrifying* expansion of racist violence, colonial occupation, and warfare...” In 2014 Toronto hosted World Pride, a global tourist event usually hosted by ‘gay friendly’ cities to promote LGBTQ travel, which has very little connection to queer politics. Yet, the event involved a clean-up campaign which aimed to remove ‘unwanted’ queer bodies (e.g. sex workers, homeless, poor people of colour, etc.) from Toronto’s downtown core with the aid of Toronto police (Chisolm, 2015) ironically at the same time it hosted a World Pride Human Rights Conference. For Chisolm (2015:17) this reflects a “model offered by the LGBT tourist industry that promotes an image of mobile cosmopolitan queer subjects whose travel destination choices are linked to human rights.” As part of global gay human rights advocacy, adverts of an ILGA world map depicting Western ‘gay friendly’ versus (predominantly) racialized ‘homophobic’ nation-states of the Global South were placed within the 2013 Pride event area, ‘locating homophobia’ (Rao, 2014) through an imperialist lens. This map – as public pedagogy - replicates a colonial civilizational discourse that paves the way for intervention and invasion. Such imperialist logic sanctions the homonationalist militarization of Pride, as seen in Figure 3 which conjures up the hypermasculine and coupled-figure of queer lovers, who now have the right to participate in the military operations as ‘citizen-soldiers’ and thus to wage violence, war and occupation in the name of LGBT human rights and sexual/gender freedom. As an image of the ‘white (gay) man’s burden’ i.e. “white western LGBT soldiers sacrificing their lives to save queer people of colour from their ultra-homophobic/intolerant nations,” the celebrated hypermasculine gay citizen-soldier depends on constructing the ‘backwardness’ and irredeemable homophobic primitivity of the Global South (Rahman, 2011) i.e. racialized homophobia. If white queer citizen soldiers help to pinkwash military violence within the West’s ‘War on Terror,’ it is the figure of the LGBT refugee who is deployed (many times as the Pride Parade’s Grand Marshal) as the ultimate end-goal of queer investments in the racist projects of war and occupation, projected as ‘necessary violence.’ Figure 4 also depicts the alliance of British (and European) with Canadian pinkwashing, as defining the exceptionalism of the allied Global North as a basis for underwriting and manufacturing mass consent for its ‘War on Terror’ - in the name of saving queers of colour in the Global South. Images such as these help to procure the image of Canada as ‘gay friendly’ (especially when in 2012, the then Conservative Government of Canada sent a mass email to members of the gay and lesbian community, positioning itself as the protector of LGBT Iranian refugees! [Kenny, 2012]), while they are not evidently critical of Canada’s increasingly surveillant and hostile immigration and refugee system, which continues to illegalize, detain and deport queer refugee claimants within Canada.



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4

Multiculturalized Pride: The multiculturalization of Pride is aligned with Canada's official multiculturalism, which contains and erases racial difference through a nationalist discourse of culture. The legal-discursive formality of this state project helps to produce Canada as post-race and thus representative of an exceptional whiteness which has the capacity to tolerate racial difference (coded as culture). The multiculturalization of Pride – evident in the self-affirmative performances by ethnic groups in the parade – thus reinforce the notion that sexuality is increasingly a domain through which to deprioritize and neutralize antiracist politics, which aids the denial of racist violence by the nation-state. Racialized queer subjects become bioavailable through this discourse i.e. as assimilated into queer liberalism, yet who risk being politically and socially abandoned (left to die) if they spoil the multicultural fantasy by vigilantly speaking out against the racist impacts of (homo)nationalist multicultural governance. Homonationalism's collusion with official state multiculturalism therefore operates as a strategy of racialized containment i.e. celebrating racialized queer visibility on the condition that this visibility does not threaten the white settler supremacy of the Canadian nation state. Pride has thus facilitated this nationalist project of quarantining, containing and silencing (especially radical) racialized politics while it institutionalizes – through the discourse of diversity – a liberal politics of cultural

difference. This traces back not only to claims about state tolerance, but the citizen-capacity of white queers who can demonstrate their tolerance of racialized queers. Multiculturalized Pride therefore sets the limits of what forms of antiracist queer vigilance become legible and legitimate as Pride politic. Figure 5 demonstrates the inclusion of racialized queer groups – as unproblematically domesticatable into and compliant with the homonation – i.e. celebrating their cultural difference, while silencing critiques of a deeply racist imagination of queer community. Moreover, multiculturalized Pride activates discourses of racialized homophobia, whereby racialized immigrant and diasporic Canadian communities are projected as steeped in their ‘ultra-heteropatriarchal/homophobic cultures’ (which are supposedly at odds with secular Canadian values of inclusion and tolerance). The presence of racialized queers in the Pride parade thus serves to affirm the image of an LGBTQ community as having the capacity to police cultural parochialism and to discipline racialized queers into Canada’s compulsory secular life through assimilation. The banner (Figure 6) of the Salaam Canada’s – an NGO supporting people who identify as “both Muslim and queer and trans” (Salaam website, no date) – is instructive in this regard. While the group politics aims to resist homonationalism through its insistence that the categories ‘queer/trans,’ and ‘Muslim’ are not incompatible, its message of ‘Celebrating Culture, Liberating Tradition’ still reproduces Canada’s multiculturalized homonational discourse which depends on projecting queer and trans Muslims as burdened and terrorized by their (religious) culture, who come out and into secular citizenship by embracing the politics of Pride.



FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6

Section B

The March: on Radical Melancholia

QuAIA: ‘Can’t Pinkwash Apartheid’

QuAIA’s banner during the 2012 (Figure 7) and 2014 (Figure 8) Pride parades impose a collective melancholia as a critical killjoy (Ahmed, 2010) response to (happy) Pride. Whereas homonationalism facilitates the bioavailable figure of the happy queer who is folded into citizen life, pinkwashing – as a killjoy politic – aims to hold queer citizens to account for their participation in and consent to state racist violence within and outside of Canada. QuAIA’s 2012 banner – “Nothing Comes Clean with Pinkwashing” – aimed to incite public consciousness about the connections between pinkwashing, occupation and colonialism. The banner was very long (much longer than the banners of other participating groups), requiring many participants to hold it up. It was oriented to face the crowd, as a direct conversation with spectators and which made it difficult for spectators to look away. Most interesting was the grey melancholic colour of the banner – with Arabic and Hebrew writing – in deep contrast to the colourful and glittery banners of most other participant groups. I remember the loud silence that inflamed the spectating crowd when QuAIA approached, almost as if the parade presentation mirrored the anti-pinkwashing politic that was blamed (in mainstream mass and LGBT media) for spoiling Pride. I observed a similar crowd reaction to QuAIA’s 2014 (World Pride) Pride parade banner ‘Can’t Pinkwash This’ (using some of the same bannering display tactics as 2012), which shows the dramatic disappearance of Palestine under Israeli occupation (from 1946 to the present). The Toronto Transit Commission refused to place this map as a paid ad on its buses (i.e. a form of state censorship), signaling the Canadian state’s refusal to acknowledge its own role in licensing the occupation of Palestine (through an insistence that critiques against the Israeli state are inherently anti-Semitic) (see Abunimah, 2013). However, embedded within QuAIA’s politics was a demand for recognizing the human rights of queer Palestinians who also live under occupation and a pinkwashing of the Israeli state’s “using the rights that it once opposed as part of its propaganda efforts to deflect attention away from its abysmal human rights record toward Palestinians,” (QuAIA, no date). In addition to the media critiques of QuAIA (and the debates about permission for QuAIA’s participation in the lead-up to World Pride), the Toronto Jewish group, Kulanu, responded by promoting Israel “as a beacon for LGBT rights in the Middle East” (Hudes, 2014), thus reinforcing the pinkwashing rhetoric, which was received by loud cheers and applaud during the parade.



FIGURE 7



FIGURE 8

BLM-TO – ‘No Pride in Racism’

In 2016 BLM-TO marched in the Pride parade and like QuAIA, performed their queer anti-racist politics through a defiant melancholic register. Wearing all black (in contrast to other participants who dressed colourfully), group members held replicas of four coffins, mourning the (queer) Black lives (such as Carby and Loku) lost to racist police violence (and perhaps victims such as Sumaya Dalmar, neglected by Police investigation [see Ratchford, 2015]). The adornment of the coffins with flowers served to insist on the dignity of victims as a counter to the state’s racist criminalization and dehumanization of Black communities in Canada. Like the response to QuAIA’s participation, there was a resounding ‘hush’ from the crowd, suggesting the un-consumable and un-digestible reception of the group’s defiant anti-racism, anti-violence politic. As the group approached one of the main intersections along the parade route, it staged a sit-in protest where members spoke out against the City of Toronto’s anti-Black policing and the homonationalist collusion of Pride Toronto with this racist project (especially regarding the inclusion of uniformed-armed-police in the parade). Co-founder, Alexandra Williams, claimed: “We are not taking any space away from any folks. When we talk about homophobia, transphobia, we go through that too ... It should be a cohesive unit, not one against the other. Anti-blackness needs to be addressed and they can be addressed at the same time, in the same spaces...we made space for ourselves in a place where we have been erased,” (Williams, in Fatah, 2016).

While I was not standing near the site of the protest, it brought the rest of the parade to a halt. I remember the seething frustration and brewing anger of spectators around me as news of the protest spread – as a backlash reaction to critical killjoy politics. The moment reminded me of earlier parades when other groups - including the police and military - had slowed down the parade flow, giving spectators more opportunity to cheerfully indulge in their voyeuristic fetish of the state’s forces. The affective response of the crowd to the halted parade was not as much about the interrupted flow of visual consumption as it was about having to confront racism and feel the impacts of anti-racist critiques of homonationalism i.e. having to ‘see’ race (not culture). This vigilant prying open of homonationalist politics was met with widespread backlash from the mainstream mass and LGBT media, constructing BLM-TO as ‘hijacking Pride’ (Litwin, 2017), which mobilized already circulating discourses (of criminality) about Blackness as terror (in this case, terrorizing the (homo)nationalist fantasy of inclusion). BLM-TO’s activism not only placed critical spotlight on carceral homonationalist investments, but also inspired a wider critique of the white settler Canadian state’s right to exclude through ‘lawful violence,’ (Russell, 2018). This growing critique of state policing and the queer community’s investment in such, is evident in Figures 9 to 11 from the 2018 Pride Parade. Interestingly, the police (with the support of the City and the mainstream queer community) have constructed themselves as victims of intolerance, which secures a platform for defunding Pride (Loriggio, 2017) and more terrifyingly, for the re-normalization of institutionalized racist violence.



FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10



FIGURE 11

Until We're Safe – 'Defiant Hauntings'

Toronto was sent into psychic shock in early 2018, when the disintegrating bodies of eight predominantly 'brown' missing 'queer' men were dug up from landscape planters on the eastern outskirts of the city. Serial killer Bruce McArthur was arrested in January 2018, followed by an escalating public media scandal around the neglect of the Toronto Police to investigate the cases of the missing men as a serial murder case between 2010 and 2018. This included antiracist critiques of the police force's policing practices, whereby the investigation seemed to only be taken seriously when one of the victims happened to be a white gay man. The other victims were 'brown' and identified by the media as 'queer' or 'gay'. They were also immigrants, some with highly precarious citizenship status (e.g. their asylum claim had been denied by the Canadian Government). This particular case not only demonstrates the ways in which brown queers are made invisible within the LGBTQ community, but it forces critical scrutiny on the brutalizing effects of state immigration and asylum discourses on producing vulnerability and thus killability of brown queer subjects - marked as abandonable figures on 'death row' vis-à-vis respectable white LGBTQ subjects who are deemed worthy of state protection from the state's own violent drive to dispose of queer liabilities.

Following McArthur's arrest, Pride Toronto decided that the 2018 Parade would begin with a minute of silence (Figure 12) and designated Haran Vijayanathan (Director of the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention, one of the most vociferous critical advocates in the McArthur case) as the Pride Grand Marshal – itself a form of 'brownwashing' to cover up the racism *within* the queer community that structured the deaths of these brown men at the hands of a white gay man! Pride Toronto also announced that the parade would end with a campaign - 'Until We're Safe' (Figures 13 & 14) - "to mourn victims of alleged serial killer Bruce McArthur," (Nanowski, 2018). Campaigners walked quietly down the parade route holding up placards of the names of McArthur's victims to the beat of a silent crowd. It is interesting to note that what is loudly absent about 'Until We're Safe' is the prefacing phrase, 'None of Us are Safe'; and it is this dialogical response that the protest hoped to provoke in the minds of spectators. Furthermore, the campaign served to de-vitalize (i.e. a critical shutting down/stalling of biopolitical homonationalism and spectators' bioavailability) and drain Pride for its systematic forgetting of the state's criminalization and abandonment or racialized queers (which white respectable queers are now supposedly protected from). 'Until We're Safe' therefore represents a mode of haunting that refuses to consent to the expansion of state violence as a model of freedom-making.



FIGURE 12

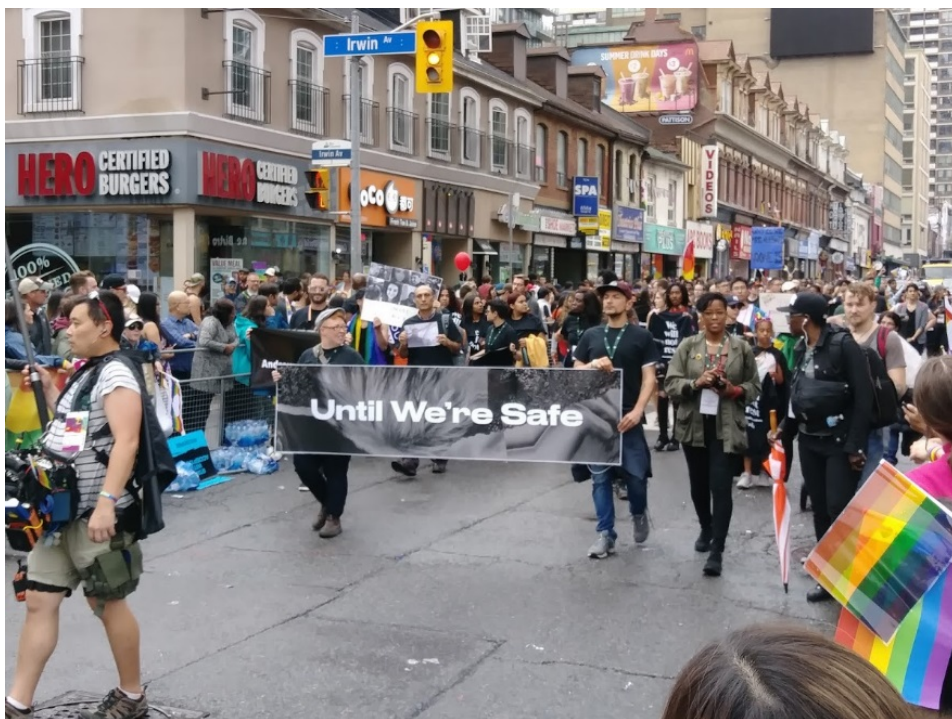


FIGURE 13



FIGURE 14

In contrast to the vibrant audio-scape (loud cheers) that characterized most of the parade, the crowd's response to this campaign was sheer silence. I see such (punishing) silence as affective investments in the refusal to hear and bear witness to state racism and violence and the cooperation of the mainstream LGBTQ community in such projects i.e. as a disavowal of simultaneously consuming and refusing the pain of others. The silence of the crowds cannot be misrecognized as empathy/sympathy (thus indicating the capacity of such subjects to feel such emotions for racialized queers who are cast as affect aliens (Ahmed, 2010)), but as a punitive response to the disruption/wounding of white Pride. Racialized queer protests, such as the 2018 campaign, are thus further 'criminalized' for imposing 'social hurt' onto proud citizen-spectators, who are no longer expected to bear this burden. Thus, I read this silence as an investment in the continued criminalization of racialized queers (and a refusal to see race), which stands in contrast to the cheerful celebration of the state's capacity for violence (e.g. police, military, coast guard, etc.). Thus, while the campaign aimed to politicize the deeply racialized construction of the McArthur case, the silent response of the crowd helped, in part, to restore carceral homonationalism (which naturalizes the killability of racialized queers).

This is not to say that the entire crowd consented to this re-making of violence as a mode of racialized control. In fact, one spectator (just opposite to where I stood) was holding a placard aimed toward the parade, which asked: "Where were the Toronto Police for Soroush Mahmudi, Dean Lisowick, Selim Esen, Andrew Kinsman, Skandaraj Navaratnam, Abdulbasir Faizi, Majeed Kayhan? #JusticeforLGBTQ." If 'Until We're Safe' was a defiant mourning of those who are rendered killable by (homo)nationalist politics, this placard brought critical scrutiny to police neglect and abandonment – as reflective of state necropolitics. In Figure 15, the spectator with this placard comes face to face with a parade participant wearing a gown made out of police tape, on which is repeatedly written "Police Line. Do Not Cross," and what looks like a police cap. The attired participant seemed to suggest that the categories 'queer' and 'police' are not incompatible, at the same time reinforcing the right to police (i.e. institutional backlash). This is especially interesting given that the police subsequently blamed the queer community for "not coming forward with more information," (James, 2018) to aid their investigation of the McArthur case.



FIGURE 15

On Reckoning

In the future of queer politics, how do we reconcile this space between queer anti-racist defiance/vigilance and homonationalist backlash? While it may be tempting to think that the problem of homonationalist Pride is its lack of intersectionality politics, we need to return to Cathy Cohen's (1997) notion of radical politics (often misrecognized as simply a call for intersectional analysis) which centralizes race as the primary entry point for thinking intersectionally. This is especially important when prioritized analyses of intersectionality (which might reify racial violence) re-anchor whiteness as the common denominator of legibility. We therefore need to understand the efficacy of homonationalism as not only rooted in a contained domain of sexuality *per se*, but as centrally premised on the unseeing of race.

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