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The Formation of an Israeli Gay 'Counterpublic': Challenging Heteronormative Modes of Masculinity in a 'Nation in Arms'

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This chapter argues that normative ideas about "appropriate" modes of masculinity are deeply embedded in the Israeli national imaginary; the inclusion of gay men is particularly challenging for the militarized Israeli government whose nationalism seeks to reify hegemonic and heteronormative forms of masculinity as part of the nation building process (Melamed 2004; Sasson-Levi 2006). This chapter provides a case study that demonstrates the struggles gay men have faced in obtaining recognition and legitimacy from both the Israeli government and Israeli society. Using archival material, I explore media coverage of a controversy related to gay men's right to public space; specifically, I will look at Tel Aviv's Independence Park. I maintain that this historical struggle, which lasted through the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century, as well as the media coverage of it (in both the mainstream and gay and lesbian press), helped to strengthen LGBT activism in Israel and has

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J. Mulholland et al. (eds.), *Gendering Nationalism*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76699-7_5

extended some of the rights afforded to gay men (and the LGBT[1] public more widely).[2]

While much of the literature on gay men in Israel employs the commonly used term "gay community", I suggest that Michael Warner's term "counterpublic" (Warner 2002) is more appropriate, as this definition extends beyond communal ties and explores how gay people organize themselves independently of state institutions, law, or formal frameworks of citizenship. Further, "counterpublics" are formed through a conflictual relation to dominant discourses, and counterpublics are able to use different dispositions and maintaining conscious or unconscious awareness of its subordinate status (*ibid*) . In my media analysis, the case of Israeli gay men fits this meaning, as the consumption of gay media played the central role in their emergence as a social and political force. In order to discuss the process of forming a gay men's counterpublic in Israel's heteronormative modes of masculinity, I will first explore the sources of the states' national and gender characteristics.

The Israeli Nation and Masculinity

Israel was established in 1948 on dominant masculine values, such as physical and emotional strength and sexual potency, which were cultivated within Zionism (the major Israeli national ideology, originating in the nineteenth century) as the antithesis to the image of the feminine, passive, and physically weak Jew in exile (Boyarin 1997; Gilman 1993; Weininge 1906). Like many other national movements, Zionism preserved traditional family values and norms concerning fertility, sexuality, and gender roles (Mosse 1985; Nagel 1998). For instance, Maxwell (2005) shows how in the Habsburg Empire female sexuality was associated with cultural concepts of nationality, while male sexuality reflected statehood and political nationalism. Massad (1995) argues that although

[1] Due to the limitations of this chapter, I have chosen not to discuss Israeli society's and government's relation to lesbians, which is subtle and complex and deserves a separate discussion.

[2] However, the complexity of Israeli nationalism means that the underlying issues here about "appropriate" modes of masculinity are still problematic, as is the meaningful inclusion of gay men as citizens of Israel (e.g., recent legislation that forbids LGBT couples to adopt.

masculinity was always the identitarian pole of European nationalist thought, Palestinian nationalism endorsed Western and colonial gendered narratives, which included the metaphor of the nation as a mother- or fatherland. It also included the practice of defending and administering these narratives with homosocial institutions like the military and the bureaucracy, as well as gendered strategies of reproducing. Norms around sexual decency were also inherited in part from the Jewish pioneers' European past, as most of them were brought up in religious families, which sanctified conservative Jewish values. An ethos of asceticism was thus cultivated, including practices that limited sexual contact and highly rigid, normative rules that governed expressions of sexuality in heterosexual courtship (Almog 1998) (and concurrently further disenfranchised LGBT people as well).

The role of military service in Israel, and for young men in particular, was a result of hegemonically masculine nation building, which fits sociologists' (Lissak 2007; Sasson-Levi 2006) references to the state as a "nation in arms". This characteristic means that the army has a central role in the formation process of Israeli society's national identity. Moreover, the army functions as a melting pot for Jewish immigrants, who come from all over the globe to the Jewish state, as well as being an entrance ticket into Israeli civil society. According to the 5709-1949 Defense Service Law, Israeli military service is mandatory for every citizen, so that every 18-year-old boy is drafted for three years of service and every girl for two years.[3] As every Israeli citizen has to pass through the army, Levy (2003) and other sociologists (c.f. Kimmerling 1993) see it as an organization standing apart from Israeli society's other divisions (political, class, ethnicity), and as such it is considered an objective product of a universal sorting system, under the influence of no particular social or political group. Consequently, military service has become a significant criterion for evaluating a social, personal, or group activity, even in the civilian sphere. Militarism has also penetrated the education system and created a socialization mechanism, which cultivated a martial culture.

[3] It is important to note that Israel is one of the few nations in the world in which women are conscripted to the army. This fact makes the issue of how "appropriate" femininities fit into the national imaginary more complex; however, this is beyond the scope of this chapter. For useful reading on this issue, see Brownfield-Stein 2012, Izraeli 1999, and Sasson-Levi 2006.

The Israeli government in the nation's first decades cultivated heteronormative modes of masculinity by enhancing the importance of heteronormative family values and birth rate. Motivated by the demographic race against Israel's Arab citizens (Melamed 2004), this policy strengthened the state's endorsement of heteronormative values, which implicitly resent homosexuality.[4] Religion is also vital to the discussion of homosexuality in Israeli society, as Orthodox Jews held, and hold, central positions in Israel's parliament and government offices. They have always resented any liberal approach toward homosexuality, maintaining that the Bible explicitly forbids homosexuality (according to Leviticus 18:22). As a result, it was almost impossible for a long period to effect any change concerning gay men's issues either in Israeli law or in public opinion.

Gay Legislation in Israel

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, it adopted some of the legislation enacted by the British Mandate, which had ruled the country prior to independence. One of these laws was Section 152 of the criminal law, which included a sub-section prohibiting sodomy. One can interpret this act as a product of the long colonialist regime in the land of Israel (or Palestine). Consequently, the European Jewish settlers, while rising up against the British authority, still saw themselves as superior to the native Arabs, and this orientalist perspective (Said 1978) was maintained by the Zionist government. Thus, the Zionist rulers saw themselves as successors to the British, who had to restrain the natives' uninhibited sexuality (which alludes to orientalist myths such as Sodom and Gomorrah). The sodomy legislation therefore appears to have been formed as part of a colonial discourse, which was in turn based on an orientalist knowledge of cultural and racial differences between Western Jewish citizens and Eastern Arab ones (Bhabha 1996).

[4] This policy was ultimately changed in response to the high birth rate in the ultra-Orthodox population, whose children are exempted from military service for the sake of learning in the Torah "yeshivot". However, this is an issue in its own right, which again is beyond the scope of this chapter.

The punishment for breaking the sodomy law was a ten-year prison sentence. However, in 1953, the legal advisor to the Israeli government instructed the Director of Public Prosecutions to avoid filing charges for violating this law; he also instructed the police in 1956 not to investigate suspects of this felony, as to do so was immoral in his opinion (Yonay and Spivak 1999). This policy shows the diversity of Israel's society and legislation, which combines liberal (democratic) with conservative (religious) elements. Israeli sociologists explain this diversity via the contradictory self-definition of the state in its Declaration of Independence (1948) as the land of the Jewish people while sanctifying democratic values such as equal rights, justice, and liberty for citizens of all religions.[5] This duality was also manifested in the failure of a number of attempts to repeal homophobic legislation in the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, it was not until 1988 that this section of the sodomy law was abolished, thanks to liberal members of parliament who promoted this change in the face of opposition from the religious and conservative parties.

However, this change in the law was also part of the wider changing social and political atmosphere in Israeli society during the 1980s, which brought civil rights discourse to the public sphere, including LGBT rights. From a political perspective, the outbreak of the first Lebanon war (1982–1985) provoked an unprecedented public debate about the necessity of the war and its consequences for Arab and Jewish citizens. This controversy shook Israeli hegemony and undermined the consensual national loyalty among Jewish citizens. Thus, Israeli society became more divided between citizens who supported a conservative national military agenda and those who were concerned about the state's civic and democratic foundations, which were jeopardized by the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories (Shafir and Peled 2002). This discourse became even more radical when the first Intifada started in 1987 (it ended in 1993 with the Oslo Accords), when Palestinians rose up against Israeli military rule in the West Bank (Hechter 2014).

I argue that by this time, as the Israeli government was dealing with the implications of the Palestinian occupation, it became easier for the internal discussion concerning LGBT rights to proceed. As the left-wing

[5] For further reading about this duality, see Neuberger 1997, Smooha 2002, and Ram 2000.

protest movement against the occupation grew in the 1990s, gay activists began to recruit these activists for their struggle too. Thus, gradually, the legal system and Israeli society were becoming increasingly tolerant of LGBT rights—at the expense of the continued denial of those rights of the Palestinians in the occupied territories (c.f. Puar 2013). Homophobic policies and attitudes forced Israeli gay men to socialize outside the prying eyes of the public, and Tel Aviv's Independence Park provided an important public space for these men. The following analysis charts the transformation of the park's image in the media, and considers how this particular example can reveal the social and political dynamics that attempt to regulate normative modes of sexuality.

Methodology

Analyzing a range of media texts about Independence Park, and the appropriation of this space by gay men using critical discourse analysis (CDA) (c.f. Wodak and Meyer 2001), this chapter examines both the diachronic dimensions and the socio-political context in which these texts were produced and distributed. CDA is a practical tool to deconstruct and interpret media representations and constructions of reality, and to identify how these relate to broader societal debates (Nickels et al. 2012). The research corpus is based on an extensive survey of the documents concerning Tel Aviv's Independence Park, originated in the city council's archives. The search included references to the park from 1952 to 2004 in the main daily newspapers *Haaretz*, *Maariv*, *Yediot Ahronoth*, *Al HaMishmar*, and *Davar*; the local newspaper *Yedioth Iriat Tel Aviv*; and the gay and lesbian magazines *Hazman Havarod* and *Magaim*.

The Symbolic Significance of Independence Park and Its Uses by Gay Men

Independence Park was established as part of the "green urbanism agenda" (Olmsted 2003; Schultz 1989). This agenda originated in the nineteenth century "American Park movement", which defined the parks' main goal

as serving as a safe public space for middle-class women, whose daily life was limited to the private sphere as it was deemed unsafe for them to walk the city's streets (Evelev 2014). Thus, public parks' design as neutral calm spaces refuted the commercialized, overcrowded, male-dominated inner-city streets. Furthermore, public parks' original aim was to be a gathering place for relaxation and enjoyment of the working- and middle-class family (Olmsted 2003). However, the liminal nature of urban parks often enabled their visitors to deviate from their intended social and sexual public behavior (Hirsch 1999). In the era before gay bars or clubs, "cruising" became popular in many urban spaces (Chauncey 1994; Delph 1978; Higgs 1999; Warren 1999) and gave gay men the opportunity to meet in public spaces to arrange and negotiate sexual and social encounters.

Tel Aviv's Independence Park is particularly interesting to consider, given its national symbolic meaning: the park was planned, and planting after the War of Independence (1948) and its opening included a military ceremony followed by the erection of a monument to pilots killed in combat. Thus, the sexual and social uses of the park by gay men, excluded from other public places, subverted the park's nationalistic, heteronormative order. In order to demonstrate these changes in the park's symbolic public image, I first examine the media coverage of gay men's activity in Independence Park as represented in both mainstream and gay print media. In my analysis, firstly, I will show how the gay press transformed the image of the public park from a degrading symbol of gay men into a symbol of social power. Secondly, I will demonstrate how this social power formed a politically active LGBT counterpublic, in turn strengthening the status of LGBT people within Israeli society.

Independence Park's National Symbolic Transformation

Independence Park's establishment by Tel Aviv city council marked it as a national symbol for Israel's independence, as well as a relaxation place for the heteronormative family (Mozes 2002). On the park's opening day (2.11.1952), the chairman of the city's "planting committee" stated in the local newspaper that planting public parks in the city was part of a

national goal to turn the wasteland into a blossoming area, and to reinforce the Jewish people's grip of its land (Shoshani 1952). Building the park on the remains of a Muslim cemetery—part of an Arab settlement which had been destroyed during the British Mandate period and Israel's War of Independence—reinforced its national meaning. The park's establishment was therefore part of the process of erasing the city's Arab history (Rotbard 1978) under the guise of the "green agenda". On the park's launch day, the city council distributed a pamphlet explaining the park's planning and history. Above the picture of the planting area was the headline *Park = Independence*, which enhanced the symbolic analogy between the park's planting and the independence of the Jewish people.[6]

However, this national image changed, as an article in the Ministry of Environment's magazine indicates: the park used to be a center of social and cultural activities, but nearly 30 years later, "its glow has been dimmed" (Yahav 1981). This was due to its transformation from a leisure spot designated for families in the honeymoon years of the birth of the Israeli state in the 1950s, to a more insidious location in the 1980s, when the park became a space that attracted "deviant visitors (partly criminal), who made it impossible for 'normal' men, women, and children to have a routine walk in the park" (ibid.). This description signifies a warning for both the heteronormative citizens and the city council about the deteriorating national image of the park and its invasion by deviant visitors. Although Yahav did not name the "deviant visitors", it was clear to his readers, who were familiar with the mainstream media coverage, that he was mainly referring to gay visitors to the park.

The mainstream media did not begin to focus on the "deviant activity" taking place in the park until the end of the 1970s, but when they did, news articles consistently represented gay men's presence in the park as either immoral and deviant or criminal. The media frequently conflated being gay with criminality and prostitution, and the park was increasingly seen as space of deviance. The coverage of this "problematic" activity in mainstream new outlets perpetuated the image of the park as dangerous (particularly for women and children) (c.f. Azulay 1979; Bashan 1983).

[6] On the pamphlet it says that the area of the park is 70 dunams, but it would subsequently be expanded to 110 dunams when the Muslim cemetery was removed and incorporated into the park.

The AIDS crisis that erupted globally in the 1990s meant that this already deviant space was relabeled as "AIDS Park" (Gilboa 1990), in an attempt to create a script that painted gay men and gay spaces as dangerous. Global media coverage focused on the promiscuity of gays as the main cause of the spread of the virus (Albert 1986), and despite having very few cases of AIDS in Israel, national media coverage incorporated the same discourses. Labeling the park in such a way allows gay men to be constructed as a dangerous Other. One reporter describes the atmosphere in the park:

> It's 2.00am … Here, life has just begun … I look around terrified of seeing a familiar face. Maybe my neighbor will see me and think that I am one of those…You see everything, beatings, even with knives. Occasionally, the police come and everyone runs like mad to hide. (Gilboa 1990)

The reporter feared being seen and identified as one of the "promiscuous visitors", endangering his heterosexual masculinity. He justified his fears by describing the park as a battlefield and mentioning police persecution of the visitors for their unacceptable use of public space (police were constantly present in the park at this time). Therefore, although homosexuality was not a criminal offense anymore in Israel, when the article was published, gay men were still persecuted by the police, in their role as guardians of the national image of masculinity.

As Independence Park became a dominant gay symbol in Israeli mainstream media and society, the gay and lesbian press used it as a trope for the LGBT social struggle with the Israeli heteronormative national apparatus, by reporting extensively on incidents in the park. However, while the mainstream press tried to represent the park's gay image as menacing, the LGBT press embraced its alternative image, presenting it as a crucial site for gay men, which should be fought for and preserved for the sake of its visitors. My analysis of these alternative texts shows writers' intention to evoke readers' social and political consciousness, to stand up for their rights for social and sexual expression.

For instance, one issue of Israel's main gay magazine, *Hazman Havarod* (Pink Times), dedicated its cover story to the reconstruction work in the Park area, featuring the headline "Independence Park's extermination".

The term *extermination* presented an irreversible, drastic action and meant to invoke its readers to take action against the city council's oppression of the visitors. This term resonates with the Jewish national imaginary and collective memory of the Holocaust, in which Jews were "exterminated", as well as to the gay social identity of the readers, since the Nazis also sent homosexuals to their deaths. Therefore, this headline has a double meaning, which enhances on one hand the common national destiny of Jewish gay men with their nation and on the other their inferior social and citizenship status. In other words, the magazine editor insinuates that the Tel Aviv city council was acting like the Nazis, in persecuting their own people.

Two years later, however, Tel Aviv city council did in fact recognize the park's significance to gay men by inviting representatives of the LGBT Association to the city council's conference concerning a construction project near the park. This was the first official step of recognition and toward normalizing the link between a national symbol and gay men, thereby acknowledging them as citizens who had the right to have their social needs taken into consideration in urban planning. The LGBT Association's representatives' point of view was cited thus in the gay press coverage of the deliberation:

> One half of the park has already been plundered by the Hilton Hotel, the other half by the Hyatt…if no organized group cares about the flora…there won't be a park…Gays are its main users. The city council should deal with the residents' rights. For many men the park is all they have…Now, finally, we can speak for them. (Kesler 2000: 9)

These representatives defended the subversive use of the park for sexual encounters. Even though it is a public space owned by the city council and designated for all residents' use, the LGBT Association's representatives claimed to have priority and therefore interpreted building a hotel as an invasion of their territory. Gay men's struggle became political as the visitors—who were previously defenseless—had someone (albeit not appointed by them) who represented their needs. By covering the debate, the LGBT magazine's editorial board showed its readers that their subversive use of the park had an impact on the city council's strategic actions.

Therefore, gay men's presence in the park despite police harassment had actually a performative effect (Butler 1993), which helped change gay men's citizenship status.

Another piece of evidence demonstrating the rising social and political power of gay men and the symbolic transformation of Independence Park was manifested by the collaboration between gay representatives and the municipal establishment in organizing LGBT events in the park. One of these events was Wigstock, a 1998 AIDS benefit event, which ended in clashes after the police closed it down as it overran into Friday night, the Jewish Sabbath. This case demonstrates the collision between a principal signifier of the Jewish nation and gay men's desire for public sexual expression. It was also interpreted as a threat to Jewish Israeli masculinity by the policemen who were familiar with "the gay scene of the crime". The police wore rubber gloves during the evacuation of participants. This act enraged the participants, who responded with a spontaneous march in the streets of Tel Aviv protesting against such degrading treatment.

The protest was the first significant, large-scale, expression of social and political power by the LGBT counterpublic, and constituted a provocation to heteronormative modes of Israeli sexuality and gender, since it was led by drag queens confronting the macho aggression of police officers. The change of atmosphere at the following year's event was reported in *Hazman Havarod* magazine:

> A group of policemen stands [guarding the event] in Independence Park…a year after the battle…Blood and tears will not be shed here…Dozens of volunteers are hanging huge Aids ribbons, decorating the trees with safe sex advice…. (Ohana 1999: 16)

The writer's use of war terminology ("battle", "bloodshed") presents the park as a battlefield, in which people fought for their lives and their freedom. His focus on the police officers guarding the event highlights their acceptance of the park's norm breaking and shows they were actually protecting it. Thus, by sponsoring an AIDS event in Independence Park, both the municipal establishment and the police force acknowledged the park's non-normative nature, and accepted gay men's civic right to express their sexual and social identity in the public space, alongside heteronormative families.

While the Wigstock riots were a significant step in the LGBT counter-public's social and political struggle for recognition of their civil right to self-expression in public spaces, police officers continued to harass the gay "cruisers" in the park at night. The LGBT press therefore kept intensifying the signification of the public struggle over Independence Park by its consistent coverage of police interactions with the park's gay visitors. However, as opposed to the mainstream press coverage of the police actions as protecting "normative visitors", the gay and lesbian press focused on the police's deliberately violent treatment of the visitors to the park:

> For months Tel Aviv's "Blues" have been leaving blue marks on our friends at the park…none of the complaints about gay abuse have ended with prosecution, or any meaningful action against the cops involved. The cases were closed…due to lack of interest to the public. (Horowitz 2003: 8)

The writer argues that the police abused visitors intentionally as part of a mission to oppress their rights of movement and expression. Consequently, it did not investigate gay men's cases of abuse, although they occurred on a daily basis, as testified by the Gay and Lesbian Association Chairman in another article (Bogayski 2003a, b: 10). This appears to represent a deliberate policy of the police to ignore these cases for homophobic reasons.

Furthermore, *Hazman Havarod* magazine covered the abused victims' testimonies in addition to the response of the LGBT Association[7] Chairman, Alon Stricovsky: "We see a declaration of war by the police, so we are fighting back" (Ibid.). He announced the formation of a team of volunteers to defend visitors from police violence. This performative act of protest demonstrates the social and political ability of the gay counter-public to stand up to the agents of the state who were assigned to patrol the heteronormative boundaries of the public space. The use of war and

[7] The LGBT Association was established in 1975 under the undercover name: "The Association of Individual Rights" by a group of 12 gay men and one lesbian. For the first ten years they acted secretly from a member's home and only after the sodomy law was abolished (1988) did they start to take public action promoting LGBT rights, changing their name officially only at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

army terminology in Stricovsky's response resonates with the dominant masculine and martial nature of Israeli social discourse (Sasson-Levi 2006), deliberately aiming to break the stereotype of gays as effeminate and victimized. Consequently, this coverage entreated gay readers to fight against their own oppression by proving their masculinity.

This coverage of the alternative gay press helped to transform the park's image from a deviant forbidden space into a site of physical, political, and existential struggle for the gay counterpublic against the national hetero-normative surveillance establishment. The gay visitors' representatives felt betrayed by the police, who, instead of looking out for their safety, chose to harm them. In response, they organized an autonomous unit to defend themselves. These actions signified a declaration of war over the national public space, on behalf of gay citizens' freedom to use it. The gay magazine emphasized the struggle's success in legitimizing the non-normative use of the public park through its reporting of a meeting between the LGBT Association representatives and police leaders, in which they discussed the severity of the situation, and reached an agreement to address it (Bogayski 2003a, b). This meeting was unprecedented, as gay men finally stood equally before a police force representing a national hetero-normative establishment, and in doing so, asserting their official status as citizens entitled to police protection as they freely and safely use public space for their needs.

Implications of Independence Park: On Israeli Nationalism, Masculinity, and Gay Men

This analysis of the social and political struggle over Tel Aviv's Independence Park reveals a complex discourse, conducted on three distinct levels: the physical level, concerned with the friction between gay "cruisers" and the police; the political level, focusing on the negotiations between LGBT representatives and the municipal and surveillance authorities; and the public discourse level, relating to the mainstream and gay press's function in the production of this discourse, which assisted in the formation of a gay counterpublic through the medium of coverage of

the park. Through this layered discourse, which involves ideologies, norms, and values, one can learn about the abundance of meanings that are produced in the process of negotiations among different social groups concerning civil rights, citizenship, sexuality, and masculinity in the nation of Israel. This discourse also invoked national meanings, concerning Israel's image, history, and relations with its own varied groups of citizens as well as with its international enemies and allies.

I argue that these subversive performative actions, along with the 1998 Wigstock clashes, had a broad and immediate effect on gay men and the LGBT struggle toward obtaining recognition and legitimacy from both Israeli government and Israeli society. In the same year as the Wigstock troubles, openly gay and lesbian activists were elected for the first time to public positions such as membership of Tel Aviv city council (Michal Eden in 1998) and even membership of the Israeli parliament (Uzi Even in 2002).

However, this recognition would not have happened without the coverage of Independence Park controversy in both the mainstream and gay press, which produced various representations of both the park and gay men. This symbolic reality (Adoni and Mane 1984) produced a battle over the heteronormative national image of the park, as the mainstream press portrayed gay men as the park's dangerous enemy. Consequently, not only did heteronormative park visitors abstain, this representation also burnished the symbolic meaning of the park as "the gay men's park". The gay press adopted this ascription, adopting it as a banner in the LGBT fight for equal rights. Accordingly, it consistently covered the park's incidents, as well as published opinion and personal columns (Gaby 1999; Onger 2002), enhancing the park's centrality in readers' consciousness as well as reinforcing their emotional and political attachment to it.

This coverage played a major role in forming a strong infrastructure for a powerful and conscious gay counterpublic that could walk the streets and public parks of Tel Aviv as well as other cities in Israel more confidently and express their social and sexual identity more freely. This is evident, as ever since the successful negotiations between the LGBT Association representatives and police leaders concerning Independence Park, the cases of police and other harassments of gay men became

numerous. Moreover, LGBT cooperation with the city council can be seen in the latter's enabling and support of the gay pride parade's overt presence in the public heteronormative space, which has taken over the streets of Tel Aviv annually since 1998. Every year the number of participants increases. For example, this year (2017) approximately 200,000 people participated in the event, as the city council promoted it around the world as a tourist attraction, and organized various gay events that same month (June). The gay-friendly concept, which started in Tel Aviv, has reached a national level, as the Ministry of Tourism and even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have used the gay-friendly image in their international campaigns for promoting Israel's liberal spirit. While some researchers (Puar 2013; Hochberg 2010) have interpreted this move as "pinkwashing",[8] it also demonstrates the merging of the gay counterpublic with the dominant social and political national discourse while broadening the boundaries of the deeply rooted martial and macho Israeli masculinity.

Thus, one cannot ascribe the recognition and social status of the LGBT counterpublic in the Israeli nation to "Homonationalism" alone (Puar 2013), since this counterpublic stands strongly against conservative and regressive forces as well as against militaristic heteronormative modes of masculinity which still exist in national public affairs and even dominate large segments of Israeli government and formal institutions.

In conclusion, although the social reality of LGBT people in Israel has undergone a major transformation over the last 30 years, their struggle is far from over, given the conservative and regressive forces that still prevail among the Israeli public and institutions. However, through their struggle, gay men have made Israeli heteronormative society face its deepest fear of homosexuality, firmly established as it has been both in Jewish family values and in the image of Zionist national masculinity still cultivated by the Israeli government. Consequently, a struggle for free sexual expression in public spaces served to open a door to more fluid concepts of sexuality and gender.

[8] "Pinkwashing" is defined as a national discourse strategy which is meant to present Israel as a liberal state and society, using its tolerant policy toward its LGBT citizens. This discourse is aimed at gaining the liberal Western world's support in the Israel-Palestinian conflict vis-à-vis the homophobic policy of the Palestinian authorities (Puar, "Introduction", 32–35).

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