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## Book Review

### Review of Walaa Alqaisiya. *Decolonial Queering in Palestine*. London: Routledge, 2023.

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*Decolonial Queering in Palestine* by Walaa Alqaisiya offers an in-depth study of the conquest of Palestine with respect to the variegated power structures of settler colonialism and underscores the political significance of a reformulated mode of decolonization. It argues for the need to interweave queer into the native Palestinian positionality termed as 'decolonial queering', so as to challenge the (hetero) sexualizing and gendered discourses embedded within both the Israeli/Zionist settler colonial regime and the Palestinian Nationalist visions of liberation. By the 'ethnographic' engagement with the works of Palestinian artists and activists from one of the prominent queer groups, alQaws, the book foregrounds voices, strategies, and imaginings of a decolonial future that is primarily rooted in socio-political history and localized, embodied experiences of the Palestinian queers. In particular, it reinforces the standpoint of the native/queer in shaping the struggle for freedom to resist the systematic structural elimination of Palestine.

Written in the form of a typical research work, the introductory chapter presents the schema of the study. In Chapter 2, Alqaisiya provides a historical grounding to the book's central arguments. She begins by discussing the need to situate the present narratives of 'sexual modernity' in Palestine's colonial past and anchor 'decolonial queering' in the context of 'hetero-conquest.' The term 'hetero-conquest' refers to the heteronormative scope of the colonizing structures or the specific systems of gender and racial codes traced through three historical junctures. She examines how the Zionist settlers used the politics of time, space and desire to justify their forceful occupation, and territorial fragmentation of Palestine and generated a powerful binary of the potent, masculinized Jewish conquerors against the Othering of impotent, feminized, present-absent status of Arab/Palestinian. She identifies similar patterns of gendered processes in Palestinian Nationalism through its penchant for family lineage and paternal relations, which solely authenticates the masculinized agent in the task of liberation, and exiles queers as Israeli. Lastly, she outlines the heteronormalizing nature of the modernist discourses under the Oslo Accord; and how it effaces the voice of the indigene by promoting an urban, elitist, and capitalist vision of 'liberation' oriented towards state-building, economic development, and the ideal of a Palestinian happy family. By citing these interlinkages, this chapter justifies the 'national question' as an inseparable component of the Palestinian queer struggle.

The rest of the chapters are thematically grouped under two broad sections titled as "Unsettling" and "Imagining Otherwise". In these chapters, the author explores the role of alQaws' activism in shaping the ideological contours of the double-edged framework of decolonization and queering. She analyzes the

ethnographical sources retrieved from the group to elaborate on the various modes of resistance like ‘the will to refuse,’ radical-self determination, local practices, artworks, and narratives of queer futurity. The concept of ‘decolonial queering’ challenges the hegemonic assimilation of the settler colonial vision of sexual emancipation, especially the centrality of the ‘Pinkwashing’ agenda used by Israel to project itself as a progressive, democratic, and gay-friendly nation against the depiction of backwardness and homophobia as specific features of Muslim/Arab Palestine. Its underlying politics of ‘native queer refusal’ operates at multiple levels to boycott campaigns, the ‘International liberal ga(y)ze’, and the sexual alienation under the moralizing discourses of the Palestinian National Authority that strengthen Israel’s ‘savior’ myth and entrap the dehumanized queer native within the colonizing frames. It also rejects the predominance of the mainstream Western approaches to LGBT rights activism focusing on individualistic, visible, privatized, and depoliticized gay identity, filtered through Israeli spaces like ‘Tel Aviv’ that is offered as a ‘queer refuge’ or model of development and sexual freedom for Palestinians. Instead, it proposes modes of ‘self-determination’, an alternative mapping of self-realization that not only unsettles the sensibilities of hetero-conquest but also restores the native sense of being without succumbing to the colonizer’s space/sense of freedom.

The book is appealing in the way it sutures instances of queer aesthetic productions and excerpts from alQaws’s documents to help the readers understand the multilayered politics and everyday struggles of the Palestinian queer. It discusses how alQaws features as spaces of “unwinding, sharing, and listening” (p. 123) and aims at the spatial integration of Palestinian voices from across different corners in its historical entirety. It envisions social agency by reconstructing meanings of home, family, and belonging using the registers of familiarity, safety, care, and love entrenched in indigenous ways of life and local culture. For instance, it refers to the appropriation of Palestinian folk music to present ‘hikaya’ (stories) of exiled/invisible Arab indigene and connects it with the invisible queer to trigger discussions on gender and sexual violence. Similarly, the author cites techniques of distancing and affective apparatus used in the productions of Palestinian short films, video art, and photography that relate to the artists’ exilic native positions, histories of displacement, and colonial spectacles.

While references to the group’s use of pedagogic articles, discussion forums (Hawamesh), and field research in local dialects underline the ‘activist-educator’ roles of making aware of the complex nuances of interlocking structures like hetero-patriarchy, colonialism/racism, and capitalism, the analysis insists on locating the native self within a community-based understanding specific to Palestinian culture and sensory ways of knowing rather than personal articulations of identity. Thus, decolonial art like Tariwha explored in ‘Future Imaginaries’ speaks of queer subjectivity in terms of diverse affective responses to quotidian situations while guiding the readers to the alternative visions of an inclusive world charted through reality and fantasy. The ability to manipulate national political tools, like graffiti in making queer presence felt in city spaces or the coupling of political and the sexual in satirical art, and the use of fashion, unravel the longing for agency through creative practices in shaping “affective, symbolic and material possibilities” for a liberated futurity (p. 188).

Decolonial Queering makes a significant contribution to the ongoing debates surrounding Transnational Queer politics and decolonial options in conflict-affected regions like Palestine. Alqaisiya’s work addresses the complex terrains of identity politics by examining the historic fragmentation of Palestine and shows how liberal/settler colonialism remains an indispensable reference while articulating the queer Palestinian positionality and vice-versa. It presents the theoretical limitations of both the prevailing ‘deconstructionist/disidentification’ approach to ‘queer’ in academia and the mainstream

LGBTQ movements in Euro-American cultures and reinforces the appropriateness of ‘grassroots’ activism as a site for decolonial praxis and social change in Palestine.

The onus on intersectional scope, modes of solidarity, and “engaged analyses” (p. 11) attempts to build upon the earlier critiques of essentialism, homonationalism, and radicalism directed at the Palestinian Queer movement and formulate a sensitive model of activism. Particularly, the idea of ‘counter identification’ as a non-essentialist method of decolonial politics to render the regional-cultural specific meanings of ‘being queer in Palestine’ offers a new approach. The distinct focus on communal, performative, and dialogic understanding of desire tends to resist its alignment with state-normalizing LGBT practices.

However, the book primarily considers the activism and works of alQaws from Palestine. The analysis of a single queer group to argue for the validity of a decolonial framework remains a significant limitation of the study. Moreover, the framework’s radical approach towards conceptualizing the Palestinian native queer positionality also runs the risk of incomprehensibility and of generating differences for people who fall outside the ambit of activist and academic spaces. Yet, the book makes a fresh attempt to disentangle Queer movement in Palestine from a web of criticisms and redirect the readers to newer perspectives on local-global dynamics. The interplay between affect, art, activism, and politics illustrates an interesting method of claiming a broader cultural impact while rendering its “geopolitical/geocolonial specificity” evident (p. 42). On a broader note, the study is a valuable addition to the fields of Postcolonial Studies, Gender/Queer Studies, and Middle Eastern Studies.