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Homonationalist Futurism: “Terrorism” and (Other) Queer Resistance to Empire

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Abstract *This article argues that queer theory is useful for political theory in thinking about US empire and theorizing modes of resistance to it. In particular, it is argued that the work of Lee Edelman and Jasbir Puar can be appropriated for political theory and, when combined together into a single political project, help illuminate the temporal and sexual contours of US empire, providing crucial resources for theorizing “terrorism” and understanding it as an act of political resistance.*

Queer theory is a field of study that critically examines sex, gender, sexuality, and sexual desire from a dissident and “gay affirmative”¹ perspective. Its primary aims are the denaturalization of (hetero)sexuality and (hetero)normative gender categories, identities, and expressions.² This article contends that, so understood, queer theory has much to offer political theory, and in an unlikely area: the theorization of radical resistance to US empire.

This may seem a dubious interdisciplinary intervention. There is a widespread (if unspoken) belief within political theory that sex/uality is not political (in this vein, recall how hard feminists fought to get gender recognized as worthy of political theory’s attention) just as, in queer theory, there is a sense that its concerns do not overlap much with those of political theory, traditionally understood. As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have argued, “Queer theory has flourished in the disciplines where expert service to the state has been least familiar and where theory has consequently meant unsettlement rather than systematization.”³ However, Berlant and Warner do not thereby conclude that queer theory is not political: “This failure to systematize the world in queer theory does not mean a commitment to irrelevance; it means resistance to being an apparatus for falsely translating systematic and random violences into normal states, administrative problems, or minor constituencies.”⁴ Indeed, on Berlant and

¹ “Gay affirmative” is taken from Eve Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990), and is considered a founding text of queer theory in its setting forth of “axiomatic” presuppositions of “antihomophobic” inquiry.

² C. Heike Schotten, “Queer Theory,” in Michael Gibbons, Diana Coole, William E. Connolly, and Elisabeth Ellis (eds), *Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (Oxford, UK: Wiley Blackwell, forthcoming).

³ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?” *PMLA* 110:3 (1995), p. 348.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Warner's telling, queer theory registers a commitment to "resistance" understood as disruption, purposeful refusal of order, and willful de-systematization of administrative, institutional, and identificatory processes. Broadening queer theory's founding insistences on making "gender trouble"⁵ and resisting "regimes of the normal,"⁶ Berlant and Warner see a decisively political bent to the very notion of "queer."

Berlant and Warner are among the most prominent queer theorists who endorse this explicitly political content for "queer," a meaning that can be traced to the field's founding shift from an ostensibly more identity-based gay and lesbian studies.⁷ Queer theory's emergence in the 1990s signaled a turn away from representational politics and clearly demarcated notions of sexual "orientation" to embrace a more dissident politics that disdains propriety and any straightforward or naturalized configuration(s) of sex, gender, and sexuality. More recent developments in queer theory have broadened the scope of "queer" even further, using it to analyze, explain, and denominate other facets of identity and identification such as race, migration, criminality, and class.⁸ Although, in these developments, queer is not necessarily linked to radicalism or political dissidence as such,⁹ there is overlap insofar as queerness is not simply or solely tethered to sexuality or sexual "orientation" per se.

Two recent and extremely influential works in queer theory continue this tradition of queer's expansion: Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*¹⁰ and Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*.¹¹ Both Edelman and Puar use "queer" in unexpected ways: for Edelman, queer demarcates anyone who falls outside the specific contours of a temporality

⁵ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), often considered a founding text of queer theory *avant la lettre*.

⁶ Michael Warner, "Introduction," in Michael Warner (ed.), *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press). Here Warner asserts that social and political theory must take its constitutive heteronormativity seriously and "make sexuality a primary category for social analysis—if indeed 'sexuality' is an adequate grounding concept for queer theory" (pp. xiv–xv).

⁷ Schotten, "Queer Theory." While Sharon Marcus concludes that this broadening of the scope of "queer" drains it of meaning even as it appears to trump "gay and lesbian" as both more inclusive and less dogmatic with regard to identity (Sharon Marcus, "Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay," *Signs* (2005) 31:1, pp. 195–196), Berlant and Warner deny this: "queer work wants to address the full range of power-ridden normativities of sex . . . Queer commentary in this sense is not necessarily superior to or more inclusive than conventional lesbian and gay studies; the two have overlapping but different aims and therefore potentially different publics" (Berlant and Warner, "What Does Queer Theory Teach," pp. 345–346). Cf. David Halperin's recent critique, "The Normalization of Queer Theory," *Journal of Homosexuality* 45:2–4 (2013), pp. 339–343.

⁸ See, for example, "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" in David Eng, J. Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz (eds), special issue of *Social Text* 23:3–4 (2005); and the longstanding work of Cathy Cohen, as epitomized in her foundational article, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ* 3:4 (1997), pp. 437–465. I return to Cohen's work later in this article.

⁹ With the exception of Cohen, who follows Warner's broadening of queerness into resistance to heteronormativity rather than heterosexuality.

¹⁰ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

he interprets as irredeemably heteronormative. Puar, by contrast, uses queer to specify processes of racialization internal to nationalist formations and US exceptionalism. Both of these texts are as important to the field of queer theory as they are different from one another (and it is unlikely their authors would see themselves as sharing any political, methodological, or theoretical commitments). Moreover, neither text explicitly offers its version of queer as demarcating political dissidence as such. Hence the project of this article: to extract and harness the radical political potential from these two theorists' work on queerness by linking them together in an attempt to think through resistance to US empire. Edelman's notion of queerness is a continuation of the dissident impulse that marked queer theory's emergence as a field, and Puar's work is crucial to making Edelman's text apposite to the current political moment (although, to be clear, Puar rejects the inherent dissidence of "queer" as a form of "queer exceptionalism"¹²). While *No Future* is known for many things, it has yet to be read as a work of political theory that claims temporality as a crucial component of politics and essential to its internal determinations regarding friends and enemies. By contrast, Puar's groundbreaking *Terrorist Assemblages* is explicitly political, offering a searing diagnosis of the post-9/11 moment in US politics and an unflinching reading of the ways in which (homo)sexuality is constructed, organized, and marshaled by nationalist discourses to fortify US imperial power. However, it has yet to be read as having anything to do with the decisively white, masculine, and structurally psychoanalytic project laid out by Edelman in *No Future*. Although Edelman resists concrete specification of his political project or examination of its workings outside any contexts other than that of the white gay male, his understanding of reproductive futurism offers a crucial axis by which to understand the formation of the queered terrorist body to which Puar alerts us in *Terrorist Assemblages*. Moreover, Edelman's explicit commitment to social disruption or, more pointedly, *revolt*, adds a galvanizing spark of resistance to Puar's dissident but otherwise largely diagnostic tract on post-9/11 US politics. Taken together, these two thinkers make clear not only the exceedingly ideological and civilizational investments that determine who and what constitutes a "terrorist," but also the ways in which sexuality is essential to those determinations, even as sexuality constitutes the very domain of the political as such. This combined project can be seen as a development of—and contribution to—a radical tradition of revolutionary thought within political theory.¹³ Although Puar and Edelman have not been put into conversation in this way (and perhaps would not wish to be), from the perspective of political theory and the interested position of resistance to US empire, there is much to be gained by their theoretical—and not simply theoretical—collaboration.

¹² Puar thinks making "queer" the preserve of radicalism operates as a form of "queer exceptionalism" that exerts its own normalizing imperatives and implicitly smuggles in a notion of the sovereign subject capable of undermining or transcending its identities (Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, pp. 22–24; cf. Michael Warner, "Queer and Then: The End of Queer Theory?" *The Chronicle Review*, January 1, 2012).

¹³ See Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992); C. Heike Schotten, *Nietzsche's Revolution: Décadence, Politics, and Sexuality* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).

This article proceeds as follows: first, I offer a reading of *No Future* that foregrounds and appropriates its political theory. Next, I examine Puar's work and show the unexpected resonances between her claims and the re-fashioned political theory of *No Future* offered in Section I. Finally, I conclude by examining the usefulness of this combined queer/political theory for radical politics, offering two examples of the ways in which it not only diagnoses the sexual-political workings of so-called "terrorism," but also provides a framework for recognizing it as an act of resistance to empire.

Edelman: *No Future* for Politics

In queer theory, *No Future* has largely been read as making an argument regarding the constitutive heteronormativity of the social order. Edelman names this heteronormativity "reproductive futurism" and argues that it inevitably dooms homosexuals—branded as non-reproductive sexual nihilists—to instantiating society's death drive. I contend, however, that *No Future* can be understood more generically as a work of political theory, especially given that Edelman explicitly describes its subject matter—reproductive futurism—as "the logic within which the political itself must be thought."¹⁴ Identifying this political theory, however, requires some appropriation, given that, ultimately, Edelman is more concerned with Lacan than politics. Reading with and into the text, then, I propose three modifications of the psychoanalytic politics Edelman advances in *No Future* in order to more fully appropriate it for political theorizing.¹⁵ The first is to insert a distinction between the "futurism" and "reproductive futurism" he discusses, the latter being understood as a specific version of the former. Put simply, *futurism* is synopsized by the "presupposition that the body politic must survive,"¹⁶ the putatively apolitical article of faith in the necessary continuity of politics as such. "[E]very political vision," Edelman claims, is "a vision of futurity."¹⁷

¹⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, p. 2. This political theory has been obscured by the accurate if now-commonplace critique of *No Future* for its constitutive racism and sexism: as yet another elaboration of the white gay male's privileged perspective (José Esteban Muñoz, "Thinking Beyond Antirelativity and Antiutopianism in Queer Critique," in "Conference Debates: The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121:3 (2006), 825–6; Shannon Winnubst, "Review Essay: *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28:1 (2010), 178–183), a narcissistic celebration of (white) gay male sexuality and sexual culture (José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); Juana María Rodríguez, "Queer Sociality and Other Sexual Fantasies," *GLQ* 17:2–3 (2011), 331–348), and/or a deliberate turn away from intersectionality in queer critique (David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010)). As Lisa Duggan has summarized, Edelman's *No Future* offers a "singularly unmarked white masculinist politics" (Lisa Duggan, "Atlas Shrugging: The Impossible Desire of Ayn Rand," Keynote Address at the 2nd annual *International Feminist Journal of Politics* Conference, "(Im)possibly Queer International Feminisms," University of Sussex, Brighton UK, May 17, 2013). I will return to the issues raised by these critiques.

¹⁵ While I believe there is good reason, both textual and otherwise, for the modifications I propose, I take no position as to whether or not Edelman would accept them. As I explain below, authorial intentions are not a guiding principle of my interpretation of either Edelman or Puar in this project.

¹⁶ Edelman, *No Future*, p. 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

More specifically, *reproductive futurism* is characterized by “a set of values widely thought of as extrapolitical: values that center on the family, to be sure, but that focus on the protection of children.”¹⁸ The iconographic signifier of reproductive futurism is the child; its mantra, “Whitney Houston’s rendition of the secular hymn, ‘I believe that children are our future,’ a hymn we might as well simply declare our national anthem and be done with it.”¹⁹ Reproductive futurism is the apolitical imperative that the present be held in service to the children’s future adulthood:

[W]e are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of a future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child. That figural Child alone embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation’s good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights “real” citizens are allowed. For the social order exists to preserve for this universalized subject, this fantasmatic Child, a notional freedom more highly valued than the actuality of freedom itself, which might, after all, put at risk the Child to whom such a freedom falls due.²⁰

Whether discussing the survival of the body politic (futurism) or the future as symbolized by the child (reproductive futurism), Edelman is clear that the presuppositions of both are deemed apolitical, although that is precisely what makes them “so oppressively political.”²¹ For the presuppositions of (reproductive) futurism are the very terms of politics as such. To participate in politics at all, even in protest or dissent, requires that one “submit to the framing of political debate—and, indeed, of the political field—as defined by the terms of . . . reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such.”²²

This is how and why Edelman says that there is no future for queers: politics itself designates “queers” as futureless. By definition, politics seeks to install an order of sameness through the ideological (re)production of a future that promises a seamless plenitude of meaning. Rather than acknowledge the impossibility of such an achievement, however, this failing is instead foisted onto a person, people, or set of forces that instantiate that impossibility in their very existence. These unforgivable obstacles to futurism’s achievement are “queers”: “the queer dispossesses the social order of the ground on which it rests: a faith in the consistent reality of the social . . . a faith that politics, whether of the left or of the right, implicitly affirms.”²³ Defined as non-reproductive sexual nihilists, the positioning of queers as culture’s self-indulgent, sex-obsessed death drive thus functions to secure the health, happiness, and adult normality of heterosexually reproducing humanity. While this persuasive reading of heteronormativity and homophobia has generated the most critical enthusiasm for *No Future*, I want to argue that *reproductive futurism* is neither exhaustive of the political nor futurism’s exclusive form. However hegemonic, reproductive futurism is only “one of the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

forms" this "calamity" might take.²⁴ For clearly one can invest in the future as signified by any number of possible oppressive and unattainable ideals: not only the child, but also, for example, Christ, security (for example Hobbes), or the American way. As Edelman himself observes, "The Child, in the historical epoch of our current epistemological regime, is the figure for this compulsory investment in the misrecognition of figure."²⁵ Futurism itself, however, he calls "the substrate of politics."²⁶

My second proposed modification follows from the first, its mandate being to situate Edelman's political theory more distinctly within history.²⁷ In this regard, suspicious reader John Brenkman helpfully provides the political theory references missing from *No Future*, noting that "modern critical social discourse, whether among the Enlightenment's *philosophes*, French revolutionaries, Marxists, social democrats, or contemporary socialists and democrats" all engage in the kind of future-wagering Edelman describes as definitively political.²⁸ Historically, Brenkman is correct—futurism is a distinctively modern phenomenon that must be tethered to, among other things, the advent of industrial capitalism, colonialism, and the rise of the nation-state. This second modification makes clear that, in naming futurism, Edelman has identified a fundamental baseline of *modernity* and the workings of *modern* politics. However, Brenkman's concern is less with history than the fact that Edelman seems to foreclose the possibility of such critical discourse by consigning it to the same status as the discourse of the Catholic Church and the religious Right. While Brenkman's point is well-taken, it is already Edelman's. For, whether liberal or conservative, Left or Right, communist or fascist, *every* modern political theory is invested in the repetition and reproduction of the social order, cast as a future aspirational ideal, to which the present is held hostage. This is as true of conservative movements as of radical or revolutionary ones—modern politics *as such* is defined by its investment in reproducing an order of sameness at the expense of the difference of now.²⁹

Tavia Nyong'o has argued that Edelman's reading of homophobia operates as a kind of nostalgia for a political moment already past, a moment when homosexuality really did pose an ominous and spectral threat to the social order, but does so no longer.³⁰ However—and this is the third modification I wish to assert—the "queer" of *No Future* is by no means a crudely identitarian homosexual subject, nor is the child solely emblematic of procreation and childrearing. Edelman would agree with at least part of this point. He insists there is "nothing intrinsic to the constitution of those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, or queer" that "predisposes them to resist

²⁴ Lee Edelman, "Ever After: History, Negativity, and the Social," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 106:3 (2007), p. 471 (emphasis added).

²⁵ Edelman, *No Future*, p. 18 (emphasis added).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁷ In this I follow Duggan, "Atlas Shrugging"; Chandan Reddy, *Freedom With Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the U.S. State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Winnubst, "Review Essay." I am grateful to Shannon Winnubst for pressing me on this point.

²⁸ John Brenkman, "Queer Post-Politics," *Narrative* 10:2 (2002), p. 176.

²⁹ Edelman, *No Future*, p. 151.

³⁰ Tavia Nyong'o, "Do You Want Queer Theory (or Do You Want the Truth)? Intersections of Punk and Queer in the 1970s," *Radical History Review* 100 (Winter 2008), p. 115.

the appeal of futurity, to refuse the temptation to reproduce, or to place themselves outside or against the acculturating logic of the Symbolic."³¹ And indeed, it is not difficult to find examples of gay reproductive futurism, the most obvious being the movement for "marriage equality." As former Human Rights Campaign (HRC) President Joe Solmonese puts it: "The fight for marriage equality for same-sex couples is quite possibly the most conventional, family-friendly equal rights struggle ever." He continues, "History bends not only toward fairness and equality, but also toward common sense. Marriage strengthens couples and families, who in turn help strengthen their communities, one at a time—leading ultimately to a stronger, more robust nation."³² Mixing nationalism into a gay progress narrative of ever-expanding equality and familial inclusion, Solmonese here writes the playbook for reproductive futurism's political palatability. Tellingly, Andrew Sullivan's earlier praise of gay marriage is even more explicit on this count, invoking the importance of the future's promise not just in the name of the children, but more specifically for *gay* children, who must be saved from having otherwise been *born into* futurelessness:

More important, perhaps... its [marriage's] influence would be felt quietly but deeply among gay children. For them, at last, there would be some kind of future; some older faces to apply to their unfolding lives, some language in which their identity could be properly discussed, some rubric by which it could be explained—not in terms of sex, or sexual practices, or bars, or subterranean activity, but in terms of their future life stories, their potential loves, their eventual chance at some kind of constructive happiness. They would be able to feel by the intimation of a myriad examples that in this respect their emotional orientation was not merely about pleasure, or sin, or shame, or otherness (although it might always be involved in many of those things), but about the ability to love and be loved as complete, imperfect human beings. Until gay marriage is legalized, this fundamental element of personal dignity will be denied a whole segment of humanity. No other change can achieve it.³³

³¹ Edelman, *No Future*, p. 17. Cf. p. 165, n. 10: "As my insistent refusal of identity politics should be taken to suggest, the *sinthomosexual* has no privileged relation to any sex or sexuality—or even, indeed, to any species, as chapter 4 [on Alfred Hitchcock's film, *The Birds*] makes clear."

³² "Answers to Questions About Marriage Equality," a publication of the Human Rights Campaign, <http://www.hrc.org/documents/HRC_Foundation_Answers_to_Questions_About_Marriage_Equality_2009.pdf>. Cf. President Obama's abrupt, 2012 election-year endorsement of gay marriage on the basis of "members of my own staff who are in incredibly committed monogamous relationships, same-sex relationships, who are raising kids together" as well as "those soldiers or airmen or marines or sailors who are out there fighting on my behalf and yet feel constrained, even now that Don't Ask Don't Tell is gone, because they are not able to commit themselves in a marriage" <<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/05/obama-comes-out-i-think-same-sex-couples-should-beable-to-get-married/>>, and the viral video of Zach Wahls testifying against a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage in Iowa ("Two Lesbians Raised a Baby and This is What They Got") wherein he effectively presents *himself* as the future of gay marriage, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLMb8RIIDQ>>. Wahls now has a book (written with Bruce Littlefield): *My Two Moms: Lessons of Love, Strength, and What Makes a Family* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012).

³³ Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1996), p. 184. The resonance of Sullivan's words with the message of Dan Savage's now-sprawling "It Gets Better" campaign should give us pause, suggesting as it does a

As we can see, even when the Child is gay, its salvific promise is neither diverted nor diluted. It simply straightens out the queer threat potentially posed by bent children.³⁴ Dangling the lure of “constructive happiness” before the eyes of youths for whom not sugarplums but sex parties dance in their heads, Sullivan here offers up the gay version of reproductive futurism, paternalistically reassuring us that a life of sex for sex’s sake is the meaningless, self-indulgent, anti-civilizational existence every good moralizer ever told us it was.

Taken together, Sullivan and Solmonese helpfully illustrate the fact that Edelman’s argument is, in the end, not really about identity and not even about gay people (or, for that matter, straight people). Futurism is a logic that transcends the specifics of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and “queer” in Edelman’s vocabulary does not necessarily—or, perhaps, even primarily, anymore, as Nyong’o suggests—stand in for gay and lesbian people. But, to return to my third modification, this also means that the child is not irrevocably tied to the existence, reproduction, or raising of “historical children.”³⁵ In other words, even as the non- or anti-identity politics of Edelman’s figure of queerness is increasingly evident, he neglects to establish the similarly and necessarily non-identitarian iconography of the future he inscribes (which also returns us to my first proposed modification, the distinction between futurism and reproductive futurism). The queer as homosexual and the Child as historical child may be concrete, daily exemplars of (certain ubiquitous if not exclusive versions of) heteronormativity. However, understood as a specific form of a more generalized futurist logic, it becomes clear that the child cannot simply be equated with reproduction, child-bearing, and child-rearing, just as the “queer” cannot simply mean “homosexual” in Edelman’s temporal sense. The child, along with the queer, is a crucial space for political and historical concretization of Edelman’s radical but otherwise unduly narrow political project.

Puar: Terrorism, Homonationalism, and US Sexual Exceptionalism

The HRC’s language of nationhood and the non-exclusivity of the child as futurist icon are the places to begin pushing Edelman’s queer theory toward an explicit engagement with the politics of race, nation, and US empire. For Solmonese’s statement is not simply the rhetoric of reproductive futurism. It is also the language of *homonationalism*, a term Jasbir Puar has coined to document the “transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states,

Footnote 33 continued

shared neoliberal assimilationist politics between these supposed political antagonists in their purveying of normalcy (Sullivan) and bourgeois happiness (Savage) to queer youth.

³⁴ Thus the criticism that Edelman overlooks the queerness of children is incorrect (see Tim Dean, “The Antisocial Homosexual,” in “Conference Debates: The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory” and Michael Snediker, “Queer Optimism,” *Postmodern Culture* 16:3 (2006)). Edelman is not *advocating* the purity and innocence of childhood but diagnosing and critiquing reproductive futurism’s perpetuation of these notional fantasies: “the cult of the Child permits no shrines to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness, for contemporary culture at large as for [the film] *Philadelphia* in particular, is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end” (Edelman, *No Future*, p. 19; cf. J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 73; and J. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), p. 174).

³⁵ Edelman, *No Future*, p. 11.

particularly the United States, from being figures of death (in other words, the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (in other words, gay marriage and families).³⁶ Homoliberalism is an abbreviated combination of the words “homoliberal” and “nationalism,” the former term borrowed from Lisa Duggan, who describes “the new homoliberality” as a political realignment of the late 1990s/early 2000s in which gay rights became compatible with certain neoliberal, anti-statist, conservative, American nationalist viewpoints.³⁷ Combining homoliberality with nationalism, then, Puar augments Nyong’o’s critique, arguing that the assimilation of certain gay and lesbian subjects into the mainstream of American normalcy, respectability, and citizenship has entailed the “fleeting sanctioning of a national homosexual subject”³⁸ who is “complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to them.”³⁹ One effect of homoliberalism in the post-9/11 context of the “War on Terror” is the perverse sexualization or “queering” of Arabs and Muslims (and all those held to be such) in the figure of the “terrorist,” a figure of monstrosity, excess, savagery, and perversion. To be clear, Puar is not suggesting that the “terrorist” is the new queer. Rather, she is arguing that “queerness is always already installed in the project of naming the terrorist; the terrorist does not appear as such without the concurrent entrance of perversion, deviance.”⁴⁰ Neither an identity nor a defining behavioral activity (for example, homosexuality), Puar elaborates queerness as a *biopolitical tactic* that functions to define and divide populations through processes of racialization, a “management of queer life at the expense of sexually and racially perverse death in relation to the contemporary politics of securitization, Orientalism, terrorism, torture, and the articulation of Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian sexualities.”⁴¹ In this view, “the contemporary U.S. heteronormative nation actually relies on and benefits from

³⁶ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, p. xii. Terminologically, homoliberalism has advanced beyond the original confines of *Terrorist Assemblages*, such that Puar now suggests it functions more broadly as a demarcator of modernity, neoliberalism, and the nation-state (see, for example, Jasbir Puar, “Rethinking Homoliberalism,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45:2 (2013), pp. 336–339). In this article, I rely solely on the definition and usage of homoliberalism in *Terrorist Assemblages*.

³⁷ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2004). Duggan cites “third way” neoliberal gay bloggers and political commentators as evidence of this realignment, focusing particularly on the (now-defunct) Independent Gay Forum and its most influential avatar, Andrew Sullivan. Duggan argues that the emergence of these commentators’ political position signals a “decisive break from the centrist liberal/progressive to radical left continuum generally invoked by the phrase ‘the gay movement’” (p. 65) and foretells a decisive, neoliberal realignment of economic, cultural, and sexual politics.

³⁸ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, p. 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xiii. Puar’s use of queerness in this text (in the form she calls “queer as regulatory”) is a deft rearticulation and application of Foucault’s understanding of racism, as explained in his 1975–1976 lecture series at the Collège de France, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003): “What in fact is racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (p. 254). In *Terrorist Assemblages*, queerness functions as this “break”—as the biopolitical caesura that divides the population into those whose lives must be fostered and

the *proliferation* of queerness."⁴² Homonationalism, as a biopolitics of queerness, functions to discipline and (re)produce homosexuality as white, American, patriotic, and upwardly mobile while designating people of color, immigrants, and Arabs and Muslims as both heterosexual and yet dangerously "queer"—as "terrorists" or "failed and perverse" bodies that "always have femininity as their reference point of malfunction, and are metonymically tied to all sorts of pathologies of the mind and body—homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, madness, and disease."⁴³

As is evident, queerness in Puar's account veers from any simple conflation with gay and lesbian subjectivity; as she says, "Race, ethnicity, nation, gender, class, and sexuality disaggregate gay, homosexual, and queer national subjects who align themselves with U.S. imperial interests from forms of illegitimate queerness that name and ultimately propel populations into extinction."⁴⁴ The happily married couples that populate the HRC's literature and website, then, would be the homonational, or properly queer; the "monster terrorist fag" abjected into existence through torture at Abu Ghraib or Guantánamo, detained indefinitely in any of the US's many illegal prisons, surveilled incessantly in mosques and cafes, and stigmatized as suffering from arrested development by the psychologizing literature of security studies, would be the *improperly* queer.⁴⁵ Puar's point is that these queernesses go together and require one another, much as, I think, Edelman can be seen to be arguing that the child and the queer go together and require one another. What Puar concretizes, however, in theorizing queerness as a "process of racialization"⁴⁶ is not simply the analytic point that "queer" and "homosexual" are distinct but, more importantly, the urgently political point that the abjected or improper queer who stands outside the social order and is in effect antagonistic to it is, in this contemporary moment, much more likely to be a Muslim or someone perceived as "looking like" a Muslim to the American gaze than, let us admit it, the newly engaged same-sex couples thronging state houses in Minnesota, Connecticut, and Colorado (much less the "homosexual" figure of queerness in *No Future*).

Understanding queerness as a process of nationalization and racialization also concretizes and expands the understanding of heteronormativity or, in Edelman's words, the future. For the terrorist in Puar's analysis resists or denies a future that is symbolized and defined not only or simply by the child, but also by the American nation and secular Christianity. As she says, "In the political imagination, the terrorist serves as the monstrous excess of the nation-state."⁴⁷ Post-9/11, Puar notes that this terrorist threat is undeniably linked with Islam,

Footnote 41 continued

protected—for Puar, the gay patriot—and those who must be eradicated if the body politic is to survive—the queer/perverse terrorist.

⁴² Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, p. xxv (emphasis added).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, xxii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁴⁵ Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots," *Social Text* 20:3 (2002), 117–148.

⁴⁶ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, p. xi.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 99. Elsewhere, Puar notes that her interest in *Terrorist Assemblages* was to investigate queerness as a "white Christian secular norm" (Keynote Address, *Homonationalism and Pinkwashing Conference*, City University of New York, April 11, 2013).

which often serves as its “explanation.”⁴⁸ As she observes, Islam signifies, to the ostensibly secular and modern US, both “excess” and “savagery”: “Religious belief is thus cast, in relation to other factors fueling terrorism, as the overflow, the final excess that impels monstrosity—the ‘different attitude toward violence’ signaling these uncivilizable forces.”⁴⁹ Puar’s reading suggests that Islam threatens the futurist temporality of American empire. Cast as retrograde, backward, and frozen in pre-modern religiosity, Islam threatens the progress narrative of US imperial wars which are alleged to bring ever-greater freedom, not only to women and homosexuals, but also to uncivilized, savage, and undemocratic people(s) and nations around the world.⁵⁰ Finally, then, it is important to note that as Islam has been queered or come to signify queerness, it does so in two ways: first, through the phobic association of Islam with terrorism; and, second, through the racist and Orientalist conflation of Islam with homophobia, anti-feminism, and sexual backwardness more generally.

Putting Puar’s analysis in an Edelman-esque frame, we might say that the figure of the “terrorist” who threatens national goals, progress, hope—indeed, the nation’s very existence—can be cast as the excessive, anti-social, future-denying figure of the “queer” in Edelman. Or, we might say that just as the domain of normativity has expanded to include some gay people, correspondingly, the domain of (inassimilable) queerness also has shifted. Puar’s analysis of the collusion “between homosexuality and U.S. nationalism”⁵¹ as producing two figures, the homonormative patriot and the queer terrorist, notes them as, on the one hand, the embodiment and normative achievement of the social order and, on the other hand, the dissolution and destruction of that social order.⁵² No longer designating “the homosexual” per se, “queer” names the monstrously

⁴⁸ Sometimes these are construed causally, as when the *New York Times* writes in Osama bin Laden’s obituary, “The world’s most threatening terrorist, he was also known to submit to dressings down by his mother” (Kate Zernike and Michael T. Kaufman, “The Most Wanted Face of Terrorism,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 2011).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 55. Jin Haritaworn, Tamsila Taquir, and Esma Erdem note the frequent conflation of Islam with Nazism in European and American political discourse, creating “a basic equivalence between ‘Muslim = Nazi’ and ‘Muslim = Evil,’ in which specific persons, relationships and events appear ultimately interchangeable” (Jin Haritaworn, Tamsila Taquir, and Esma Erdem, “Gay Imperialism: Gender and Sexuality Discourse in the ‘War on Terror,’” in Adi Kuntsman and Esperanza Miyake (eds), *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Racality* (York, UK: Raw Nerve Books, 2008), p. 81). This is perhaps the most distinctive civilizational slander offered to smear the Muslim/Arab figure of queerness: not only or simply self-indulgent, narcissistic, and immature, the Muslim represents the West’s example of annihilation par excellence—the Holocaust—a figuration that casts the West as victim of unprecedented oppression and simultaneously reinforces the ostensible solidarity between “Western civilization” and Israel, itself cast as eternal victim of genocidal violence (cf. C. Heike Schotten, “Reading Nietzsche in the Wake of the 2008–09 War on Gaza,” *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 19:1 (2012), pp. 67–82).

⁵⁰ Mahmoud Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2004).

⁵¹ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, p. 46.

⁵² The example she provides in the text is instructive: Mark Bingham, a white gay man who attempted to divert one of the hijacked planes on 9/11, is billed as an American hero, in contrast with Osama bin Laden, the perversely queered racial villain: “[E]xemplary of this transference of stigma, positive attributes were attached to Mark Bingham’s homosexuality: butch, masculine, rugby player, white, American, hero, gay patriot, called his mom (i.e., homonational), while negative connotations of homosexuality were

raced and perversely sexualized Arab/Muslim/terrorist Other that threatens the American social and political order, an order that (some) properly gay and lesbian subjects can now, through their incorporation into normative American national life, inhabit and reproduce. In sum, we have a theorization of “queer” wherein the sexually backward Muslim is led by the irrationality and violence of her/his religion to annihilate those who serve and protect freedom for all. In this analysis of “the sexually exceptional homonational and its evil counterpart, the queer terrorist of elsewhere,”⁵³ the “terrorist” is to the HRC what, in Edelman’s analysis, the queer is to the child.⁵⁴

Edelman and Puar: Theorizing Resistance

Puar’s theorization of homonationalism is a significant contribution to queer theory and an essential corrective to Edelman’s otherwise historically and racially unmarked analysis of (reproductive) futurism. Her work allows us to critique futurism in ways that are responsive to the specificities of its racial and national workings, consequences gapingly unattended to by him. While Edelman deftly parses the logic of power in terms of futurism’s hegemony, he fails fully to unpack its coercive force by focusing solely on futurism’s relationship to an exceedingly narrow version of non-reproductive homosexuality. Although he claims that the theory of politics he explicates in *No Future* is indifferent to race, arguing that “the fascism of the baby’s face . . . subjects us to its sovereign authority as the figure of politics itself . . . whatever the face a particular politics gives that baby to wear—Aryan or multicultural, that of the thirty-thousand-year Reich or of an ever expanding horizon of democratic inclusivity,”⁵⁵ what is clear is that the reproductive futurism he critiques is symptomatic of a very specific bourgeois class culture within the imperial US, a culture that garners his criticism only insofar as it is bound up with heteronormativity.⁵⁶

By contrast, Puar’s demand that we focus our attention on the racial and nationalized logics of queerness(es) and the unexpected complicities between queers, nationalism, and empire remains only suggestive of futurism’s determinative role, never naming it specifically. Now, this is likely because Puar neither endorses nor conceptualizes futurism as a useful diagnosis of modern politics, just as Edelman may very much wish to privilege (white male homo) sexuality in his psychoanalysis of futurism. However, I suggest that authorial intentions—both Puar’s and Edelman’s—be respectfully disregarded, not only because we have become savvy to the multiple begged questions inherent in any invocation of authorial intention, but also because more than our scholarly work is

Footnote 52 continued

used to racialize and sexualize Osama bin Laden: feminized, stateless, dark, perverse, pedophilic, disowned by family (i.e., fag)” (Ibid.).

⁵³Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, p. xxv.

⁵⁴The only difference is that, in *Terrorist Assemblages*, “queer” does not stop referring to “gay and lesbian” (and bisexual and transgender) people as well. As Puar notes, there are acceptable and unacceptable queernesses, not—as Edelman might have it—Children (and those in thrall to them) and queers (all those who are the murders of Children). In other words, Puar does not and would not endorse my appropriation of her work on queerness and terrorism to serve dissident political ends.

⁵⁵Edelman, *No Future*, p. 151.

⁵⁶See the references in n. 14, as well as Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, pp. 210–211.

at stake when it comes to forging critical resistance to US imperial power. Indeed, while the net effect of Edelman's analysis is that only white gay men are considered the deathly threat portended by queerness in *No Future*,⁵⁷ if we return to his definition of "queer" and insist on distinguishing between futurism and reproductive futurism, we note that "queer" designates anyone who fails to abide by the rules of social temporality—that is, anyone who sacrifices the future for the sake of the present. As such, futurism's ruthless machinations stigmatize all sorts of populations as emblematic of the death and destruction of the social order. This broad array of misfits and perverts may include some gay, lesbian, and queer people. It necessarily also includes the "terrorist" and "Muslim" whom Puar argues are biopolitical targets of abjected queerness.

This analysis also suggests that temporality is a crucial axis of determination regarding *all* "enemies" of the social order, a notion that links Edelman's political theory to other important work in radical queer politics. For example, in her definitive essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," Cathy Cohen argues for a re-thinking of marginal positionality in terms of one's relation to power rather than in terms of a binary categorization of queer vs straight. She cites the examples of the prohibition of slave marriages and the long history of obsession with black women's reproductive choices in the US as examples of ostensibly heterosexual people inhabiting positions outside the bounds of normative sexuality because of race, class, and property status. In arguing for a more capacious, intersectional queer politics that is accountable not simply to the question of who is and is not heterosexual but, more broadly, to the question of what each of our relationships with and proximity to power may be, Cohen writes:

As we stand on the verge of watching those in power dismantle the welfare system through a process of demonizing the poor and young—primarily poor and young women of color, many of whom have existed for their entire lives outside the white, middle-class heterosexual norm—we have to ask if these women do not fit into society's categories of marginal, deviant, and "queer." As we watch the explosion of prison construction and the disproportionate incarceration rates of young men and women of color, often as part of the economic development of poor white rural communities, we have to ask if these individuals do not fit society's definition of "queer" and expendable.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The thesis of Edelman's Chapter 2, which demands that we read homosexuality as the concrete "cultural Figure" that symptomatizes futurism's disavowed and destructive *jouissance* (Edelman, *No Future*, p. 39), makes this authorial investment clear. Edelman explains his privileging of *male* homosexuality as avoiding "the introduction of taxonomic distinctions" that might "dissipate the force of my larger argument against reproductive futurism" (p. 166, n. 10).

⁵⁸ Cohen, "Punks," p. 458. Cf. Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), Chapter 1; and Dorothy Roberts' rehearsal of the stigmatizing taxonomy of futureless black womanhood: "A popular mythology promoted over centuries portrays Black women as unfit to bear and raise children. The sexually licentious Jezebel, the family-demolishing matriarch, the devious welfare queen, the depraved pregnant crack addict, accompanied by her equally monstrous crack baby—all paint a picture of a dangerous motherhood that must be regulated and punished. An unmarried Black woman represents the ultimate irresponsible mother—a woman who raises her children without the supervision of a man" (Dorothy Roberts, "Feminism, Race, and Adoption Policy," in *INCITE! Women of Color Against*

Cohen's understanding of "queer" as a kind of non- or anti-normativity based on one's proximity to power might also be understood in terms of futurism and its flouting by "deviants." For, if the key characteristic of queerness is a temporal one, then having "too many" babies is just as much a threat to America's future as not having any at all—it just depends on which queers we are talking about (not only Reagan's welfare queen, but also recall the manufactured election-year discourse about "anchor babies").⁵⁹ Naming these explicitly makes futurism a useful tool to diagnose the contemporary political moment from a radical queer perspective that does not fetishize sexuality as either the primary domain of subordination or the sole focus of political struggle and resistance.

Indeed, this amended rendering of the logic of futurism alerts us to the fact that slanders like "queer," "terrorist," and "welfare queen" are the inevitable effects of the very functioning of modern politics itself. Committed to an ideological (re)production of a promised yet impossible plenitude that never arrives, politics also and necessarily (re)produces the *enemies* of that future, those who refuse, deny, or disdain its mandate to postpone today for the sake of tomorrow. This ceaseless and inevitable futurist logic leads Edelman to dismiss any attempt at amendment or reform of the political landscape. Instead, he suggests, we must refuse politics itself. Rather than fall prey to the logic of the child and its imperatives of protection, sacrifice, futurity, and hope, Edelman encourages queers to *embrace* their stigmatized positioning as the negativity, death, and futurelessness of social life. He boldly admits this means, in the case of feminists and gay people, adopting the conservative Right's belief that abortion and non-procreative sexual pleasure lead to the undoing of social life and the downfall of civilization. But this is because social conservatives are *right* in their insistence that civilization itself depends on the child or, more generally, on the hope and belief in a future that will validate all present human activity. In Edelman's view, conservatives grasp the logic of futurism more astutely than liberals, who tend to seek accommodation *within* futurism's terms rather seek to upend them. Edelman therefore suggests that instead of piously vying for "a place at the table"⁶⁰ of reproductive futurism or "whining for" another piece of "America's carbon monoxide pie,"⁶¹ queers should *accede* to their positioning as the dissolution of the social order and get to work doing precisely that: "By choosing to *accept* that position . . . we might undertake the impossible project of imagining an oppositional political stance exempt from the imperative to reproduce the politics of signification . . . which can only return us, by way of the Child, to the politics of reproduction."⁶² *Denying* one's queerness—one's status as, say, self-indulgent, narcissistic, or "terrorist"—and becoming good, white, upwardly mobile, repronormative citizens may allow some of us "to cast off that queerness and enter the properly political sphere." But it will do so only by

Footnote 58 continued

Violence (eds), *Color of Violence: the INCITE! Anthology*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006), p. 45).

⁵⁹ Reddy, *Freedom with Violence*, pp. 175–176.

⁶⁰ Bruce Bawer, *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

⁶¹ P. Califia, "A Secret Side of Lesbian Sexuality," in *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press, 2000 [1979]).

⁶² Edelman, *No Future*, p. 27.

shifting “the figural burden of queerness to someone else. The *structural position* of queerness, after all, and the need to fill it remain.”⁶³

Edelman’s insistence on embodying and even typifying the very loathsomeness of queerness makes *No Future* a radical text with resources for theorizing resistance. He states:

the only oppositional status to which our queerness could ever lead would depend on our taking seriously the place of the death drive we’re called on to figure and insisting...that we do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter tomorrow, since all of these fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future. We choose, instead, *not* to choose the Child, as disciplinary image of the Imaginary past or as site of a projective identification with an always impossible future.⁶⁴

Edelman is suggesting that the refusal of politics is, in fact, *the* act of political resistance. While clearly an “oppositional” entreaty, he insists that it is not oppositional in any way that the politics of the modernity has traditionally understood. For it is not an internal opposition to a particular stance *within* the political, akin to agitation for reform or inclusion within its ranks. Rather, it is opposition to *politics as such*, to the very movement of temporality and the social that dictates the contours of the political itself. Edelman demands we refuse that which is impossible to refuse—the “presupposition that the body politic must survive.”⁶⁵ He thus dismisses utopianism in the name of an immediacy that insists that “the future stop here.”⁶⁶ He challenges us to live life as an insistent presentism that will do nothing else afterward but die, casting this alliance with death as *the* act of radical resistance.

Terrorism and Temporality

Edelman’s radical politics entails the substantial risk of identifying oneself with precisely the most derogatory fantasies about one’s existence, and it is here that some readers part company with Edelman.⁶⁷ However, it is worth pointing out that, in advocating that queers accede to the deathly positioning to which they are always already relegated by reproductive futurism, Edelman is not advocating *suicide*. That is, in advocating “death” or an embrace of the social order’s “death drive,” he is not recommending the cessation of life of a biological organism—

⁶³ Ibid. Muñoz misses this point in his critique of the whiteness of the child and the racism of *No Future*. In calling for racial “inclusion” within the hegemony of reproductive futurism, for “a ‘not-yet’ where queer youths of color actually get to grow up” (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 96), Muñoz repeats the logic of reproductive futurism rather than resists it. Although he is correct that “racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity” (Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 95) (and thus that the heteronormativity Edelman diagnoses is essentially also a formation of bourgeois whiteness), Muñoz does not make clear how a multicultural reproductive futurism would be any more liberatory for queer youth of color than the current hegemony of the white child (cf. Reddy, *Freedom With Violence*, p. 174).

⁶⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, pp. 30–31.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁷ Dean, “Antisocial Homosexual”; Snediker, “Queer Optimism.”

either individual or collective.⁶⁸ Indeed, *whatever* he is recommending, he is recommending it *in the name of* something—not quite the future, and surely not life in a biological sense, but also not quite death in a biological sense, either. In that case, then, and perhaps despite himself, even Edelman’s own project is wedded to life, albeit a life that is unlivable *as* life. As he says in recommending an embrace of the death drive, “political self-destruction inheres in the only act that counts as one: the act of resisting enslavement to the future *in the name of having a life*.”⁶⁹

I think Edelman’s political injunction amounts to the demand that the dead *live*—that those consigned by the requirements of social life to dissolve it take up their position *as* its destroyers and get to work. What in the world that might mean or look like practically, as well as its relationship to “terrorism,” is thus the focus of the concluding section, wherein I examine what I believe are two specifically anti-futurist resistances to empire of precisely the kind Edelman advocates, were he to advocate resistance to empire: first, a particularly audacious example of queer accession to deathly figuration, as portrayed in a short, three-and-a-half-minute video made by the notorious David Horowitz Freedom Center⁷⁰; and second, in a reading of the Palestinian liberation slogan, “To Exist is To Resist.” In both cases, personification of “terrorism” exemplifies Edelman’s injunction that the dead live, and constitutes a complex act of resistance to empire that we can, using Edelman’s vocabulary, call queer.

The short video documents a single question and answer exchange between a University of California Davis student and Horowitz himself. It begins with the student identifying herself as a member of UC Davis’s Muslim Student Association (MSA) and asks what evidence Horowitz has for his claim that MSAs across the US are linked with “jihadi terrorist networks.” Worth noting is that the student begins her question by introducing herself, saying that her name is Joumanah Imad Mousa Ahmed Al Bahri, a resolute articulation of her full Arabic name, which includes her grandfather’s and father’s names. This seemingly innocuous gesture is itself a bold move, a defiant assertion that Arabic will be pronounced and heard and allowed to echo, if only for a moment, in this room where both Arabic and Islam are equated with “jihadi terrorist networks” and, in Horowitz’s words, “Hitler youth week” (his description of campus Israeli Apartheid Week events).⁷¹ Rather than addressing Al Bahri’s question, however, Horowitz instead responds with his own question, demanding of her, “Will you

⁶⁸ Rather, the “death” or “death drive” that queers must take up is something like the inarticulate and inarticulable Lacanian drive, which Edelman insists queers can only “figure,” but never *be*. While Tim Dean vociferously rejects this “embrace,” arguing it is impossible both psychoanalytically and politically, Edelman is well aware of this and recommends it precisely for that reason (Dean, “An Impossible Embrace: Queerness, Futurity, and the Death Drive,” in James J. Bono, Tim Dean, and Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (eds), *A Time for the Humanities: Futurity and the Limits of Autonomy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008)).

⁶⁹ Edelman, *No Future*, p. 30 (emphasis added).

⁷⁰ <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fSvyv0urTE>> .

⁷¹ Nadine Naber, Eman Desouky, and Lina Baroudi note that merely identifying oneself as Palestinian is taken to be a political act (Nadine Naber, Eman Desouky, and Lina Baroudi, “The Forgotten ‘-ism’: An Arab American Women’s Perspective on Zionism, Racism, and Sexism,” in INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (eds), *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006)).

condemn Hamas, here and now” as a “homicidal, terrorist organization?”⁷² In the terms of the queer political theory so far examined in this article, Horowitz can be understood as asking Al Bahri either to align herself with the project of life as dictated by imperialist and Zionist US futurism or out herself as the deathly threat he already suspects her to be by aligning with those terrorists who are “against” life, against the Jews, against hope, and thus against the future. Horowitz’s question, in other words, synthesizes the homonomalist futurism of the US social order that inevitably queers Arabs and Muslims as terrorists.

Consistently more astute than Horowitz, Al Bahri answers cannily, “Are you asking me to put myself on a cross?” Fully aware of the constraints that render Horowitz’s question a mirror of the impossible social and political constraints governing the lives of Muslims in post-9/11 America, Al Bahri instead references a Christian metaphor of self-sacrifice to make clear that, regardless of her response, she (knows she) is always already guilty, always already a terrorist, inevitably—because of her Muslim religion—cast as the spectral threat of death produced by the current moment’s post-9/11, futurist imperial logic. And she deploys this metaphor perhaps also as a reproach, for no redemption will come from her accession to the terms of this debate. She cannot, in other words, speak outside the terms Horowitz presents, terms which—to reference both Edelman and Puar—are the very terms of post-9/11 American imperial futurism as such. She is always already queer(ed)—as a “terrorist” (that is, a Muslim), she is a representative of the dissolution of the social order, the “queer” who portends the “death drive.” Answering Horowitz’s question *at all* legitimizes this framing presupposition, for even to answer “no” as a “good Muslim” still shores up the constitutive suspicion of Islam and affirms its inherently threatening character.⁷³ Al Bahri can either say “yes” and (be left to) die either as a member of the queered, biopolitical population targeted by the post-9/11 US security state (Puar) or in her figuration of the “death drive” (Edelman), or answer “no” and speak in the only words allowed to her—the words that speak Islam as menace, threat, annihilation.

Unperturbed, Horowitz concludes that Al Bahri’s response indicates her support for Hamas, explaining that “If you don’t condemn Hamas, obviously you support it.” When the student tries to explain that her answer to any question about Hamas is constrained by the threat of arrest and indefinite detention by Homeland Security, he ignores her, listing other MSA students who have similarly “refused” to “condemn” Hamas. Unwilling to allow anything but a yes or no answer to his question, Horowitz then ups the ante, re-stating the question to Al Bahri this way: “I’m a Jew. The head of Hezbollah has said that he hopes that we will gather in Israel so that he doesn’t have to hunt us down globally.” Horowitz then raises his voice and speaks directly into the mic, demanding: “FOR it or AGAINST it?” Immediately understanding the depth of the situation, Al Bahri replies coolly, quietly, and without missing a beat: “For it.” Perhaps surprised to receive such a direct answer, a pleased Horowitz thanks Al Bahri for “coming and showing everybody what’s here.”

Among certain narrow groups on both the Left and the Right, this video went viral. And although it was not talked about on the Left, I suspect this was because

⁷² For an update on this same confrontation, see Sean Hannity’s recent “interview” with Yousef Munayyer: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgeeXILyKvM>> .

⁷³ Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*.

for virtually every viewer, Al Bahri's answer seemed to confirm all the horrifying presuppositions upon which racist Islamophobia relies, presumptions which those on the Left would want to suggest are mere fantasy or bigotry: Arab = Muslim = terrorist = Nazi. But Al Bahri's response can be considered disturbing only within a futurist politics wherein the Holocaust and "terrorism" (that is, Muslims, Arabs, and Palestinians) are figured as analogous menaces to the existence of Americans, Jewish people, and/or Israel (in Edelman's terms, as "queer"), while hopefulness and futurity remain lodged in the perpetuation of a never-ending security culture of American empire and Israeli colonialism. The (homo)nationalist futurism of contemporary US and Israeli politics dictates that Al Bahri cannot do or be anything other than a terrorist. Boldly, powerfully, and righteously, she owns that identification and dares to figure exactly the death and destruction to which she is already, inevitably consigned. This, I contend, is precisely what Edelman recommends in his suggestion that queers "embrace" the deathly figuration to which they are already consigned.

Horowitz ends his exchange with Al Bahri by telling her that she is wearing a "terrorist neckerchief"—that is, a keffiyeh—as if he needed some further, external confirmation of her terrorist nature. Made internationally famous through association with Yasser Arafat, this scarf has since become a globalized symbol of (solidarity with) the Palestinian liberation struggle, even as it is an iconic signifier of terrorism to people like Horowitz. But in fact, there is a way in which Palestinians are seen as the world's terrorists *par excellence*—not simply Arabs as well as uniformly Muslim in popular imagination, but also, sometimes and in actual fact, perpetrators of acts deemed terrorist by Western powers.⁷⁴ And so I conclude with a reflection on Palestinian resistance and, in particular, a revolutionary refrain of the Palestinian cause (and rallying cry of indigenous struggles everywhere): "to exist is to resist." While the anti-futurist resistance of Al Bahri potentially mimics the visibility strategy of "coming out" that is the model for much US LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) politics, further examination of the "terrorism" of Palestinians offers a productive counterpoint to the politics of recognition and representation that often exhaust the liberal/Left US political imagination.

This slogan is definitive of the Palestinian struggle, and can be seen graffiti'd on the Palestinian "side" of Israel's enormous, 26-foot-high wall that slices through the West Bank in jagged, aggressive strokes. If one wanted to see this graffiti as a tourist, one would first need to pass through the enormous, airport terminal-like Qalandiya checkpoint where one is greeted, on the Israeli "side," by an enormous sign tacked onto the wall by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, visible through multiple loops of barbed wire, entreating "Peace Be With You" in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. The Orwellian impact of this encounter perhaps

⁷⁴What exactly constitutes "terrorism" is clearly at stake here; much turns on who is doing the defining and whom is being defined. I do not explore the vast literature on terrorism here; however, for a recent, pathbreaking excavation of the expert discourse on terrorism and the emergence of a field—terrorism studies—in which the object of study lacks any agreed-upon definition, see Lisa Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror: How Experts Invented Terrorism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Stampnitzky tracks the emergence of a "Manichean world of good versus evil" (p. 19) within terrorism studies and the formation of "the terrorist" as an identity rather than a tactic potentially available to any political actor.

prepares one for the flood of graffiti, paintings, images, and protestations spray painted on the other, Palestinian “side” of the wall, none above approximately five feet, highlighting the enormity of this 26-foot-high concrete barrier. There this slogan can be seen, proclaimed boldly in red, as part of a larger mural wherein it is inscribed within the folds of a keffiyeh that covers a face of which only big, long-lashed, brown eyes can be seen: “To Exist is To Resist.”⁷⁵ Its meaning is clear: for an indigenous people subject to ethnic cleansing and systematic dispossession since 1948, the commitment to remain, to simply *exist* is itself a form of resistance. This political resistance is, as Ali Abunimah writes, largely ignored by mainstream media caught up in the frenzied identification of Arabs and Muslims with violence and terrorism:

One of the things that the violence-obsessed media coverage conceals is that nonviolence is and has always been integral to Palestinian resistance. The word for it in Arabic is *sumud*—steadfastness. When Israeli walls and roadblocks prevent people from moving, and yet children and old women, workers, students, mothers each day, every day climb hills and mountains to get where they need to go, that is *sumud*. When Israeli occupation forces uproot trees and farmers replant them, that is *sumud*. When Israel uses every administrative and legalistic means to force Palestinian Jerusalemites to leave the city for good, but instead they stay, even if it means being painfully separated from family members in the West Bank, that is *sumud*. Millions of Palestinians practice nonviolence every day, yet this is ignored by the media and by politicians and is totally invisible to the vast majority of Israelis.⁷⁶

Surely, this form of daily resistance is of the same character as Al Bahri’s avowal of her alleged “terrorism.” Palestinian steadfastness makes clear that resistance need not be a visibility politics of “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it” to nevertheless constitute a radical rejection and undoing of the existing order. In other words, while “terrorism” is an obvious candidate for the deathly figuration of social life, so too, sometimes, is mere survival. As Scott Lauria Morgensen notes, “The normative function of settlement is to appear inevitable and final.”⁷⁷ Palestinians, in exercising *sumud*, in continuing *simply to exist*, are resisting the imperative of settler colonialism that seeks to disappear them from the land and from history.⁷⁸ In remaining, they flout the conceits of the colonizing, occupying nation. Further disarticulating futurity from reproduction, here it is clear that Palestinian *life* is the site of death within Israeli futurism (as it says underneath “To Exist is to Resist” on the Wall, “*Viva Palestina*”). This is confirmed by the discourse of “demographic threat” that circulates routinely in various Israeli and Zionist circles by academics and politicians alike. As Abunimah consistently points out, the thoroughly militarized country of Israel, known to possess hundreds of nuclear weapons, seems nevertheless profoundly threatened

⁷⁵ A Google image search will yield multiple photos of this mural; one is here: <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/14490658@N08/1470254026/>>.

⁷⁶ Ali Abunimah, *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), p. 50; cf. Raja Shehadeh, *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank* (London, UK: Quartet Books, 1982).

⁷⁷ Scott Lauria Morgensen, “Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities,” *GLQ* 16:1–2 (2010), p. 117.

⁷⁸ See Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8:4 (2006), pp. 387–409.

by the birth of Palestinian babies, whose existence is invoked as the dissolution perpetually menacing the “Jewish state” and threatening its demographic annihilation.⁷⁹

Al Bahri’s excruciating courage and the endurance of the Palestinians in their respective acts of resistance make clear that political radicalism need not be violent in order to portend death, need not be legible or visible in any straightforward way in order to be radically queer, and need not invest in the false trap of futurism in order to be fundamentally committed to transformative change. Edelman says we must reject not simply politics but all hope for the future of politics, for that future is what will inevitably inscribe us as queer. However, it is impossible to ignore the fact that even the espousal of rejection is itself an espousal; to advocate the refusal of hope is still to advocate a turn of events that has not yet occurred and thus to take up a future-oriented position. But maybe it is possible to commit to politics *without* investing in the future. This is precisely the challenge that Edelman’s text simultaneously forecloses and incites. Resisting futurism means thinking radically about presentism, about *sumud*. How else might queers refuse empire and seek radically to transform it, enacting solidarity with those consigned to destroy it?

Notes on Contributor

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⁷⁹ Ali Abunimah, “Keynote Address,” Penn BDS Conference, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, February 4, 2012.