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Schulman, S. (2012). *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*. Duke University Press.

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In *The Queer International*, Sarah Schulman takes the reader through her narrative of becoming part of the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) movement and the experience of being openly queer while advocating for Palestinian rights. At the core of her book stand her struggles to reconcile her queer activism with the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), analysing ‘if there is such thing as a bridge between boycott and queer that makes sense’ (Schulman, 2012, p. 64, 84, 131). Her account begins with an invitation to speak at the Tel Aviv LGBT studies conference, prompting her to question if one can visit Israel while maintaining the boycott and if so, how (Schulman, 2012, p. 46).

Being a Polish-Jewish activist lesbian who grew up in the United States, Schulman reflects on her position and responsibility in the global response to Israel’s genocide (Schulman, 2012, p. 57), unravelling the challenges that come along with this reflective practice. Engaging with Jewish and Palestinian queer scholars, activists, artists and organisations, Schulman does not hesitate to call herself out, providing the reader insight into her privileges and internalised prejudices as she is trying to overcome them (Schulman, 2012, p. 31, 37). She continues her search for an inclusive justice with a solidarity visit to Palestine (part I), followed by a tour in the United States promoting the BDS movement and informing the broader (queer) public on the Israeli occupation and its misuse of gay rights (part II).

Within Schulman’s attempt, a key strategy to create a more progressive, feminist and pro-Palestinian movement seems to emerge with Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (PQBDS)¹, an organisation established in Ramallah in 2010. PQBDS considers queer movements to be inherently political, analysing the intersections between different struggles and challenging dominant discourses, claiming that ‘Israel has been leading an international campaign presenting itself as the “only democracy” and “gay haven” in the Middle East, while simultaneously portraying Palestinians, who suffer every single day from Israel’s racism and terrorism, as barbaric and homophobic’ (Schulman, 2012, p. 126). The strength of the PQBDS strategy lies in uniting different movements across oppression – the queer movement and the pro-Palestinian one – echoing Audre Lorde’s sentiment that ‘there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives’ (Lorde, 2012, p. 138). Furthermore, this intersectional approach centers non-violent sanctions.

A central challenge for this key strategy however lies in its dependency on external support to carry out its ambitions. Schulman emphasises that ‘we have to be the ones to impose sanctions, or else there are no sanctions’ and that ‘the PQBDS strategy is devised by the oppressed, but dependent on allies’ (Schulman, 2012, p. 126). This reliance prompts a broader debate on the responsibility of nation-states and the European Union to support boycott initiatives. Unfortunately, such debate has not yet been universally embraced. Facing backlash and lack of funding due to her stance on an inclusive solidarity (Chapter 10), Schulman highlights the need for ongoing dialogue and critical engagement with diverse perspectives within the queer community and beyond in order to reach the justice for *all* that she explores throughout her book.

Drawing from Jasbir Puar’s concept of homonationalism in the United States (Puar, 2007) and what Heike Schotten calls ‘gay imperialism’ (Schotten, 2016), Schulman then develops her theory on ‘the shifting structures of homophobia and homosexuality in the context of global politics’ (Schulman, 2012, p. 103-104) and tries to understand why Palestinian queers get so little recognition in their struggle for human rights. Within this context, she distinguishes two types of events: LGBT and Queer (Schulman, 2012, p. 115). Whereas LGBT actions reinforce homonationalist views and construct an Arab homophobic ‘other’, Queer actions underline an intersectional aim to dismantle interlocking systems of

¹ Organisations with similar objectives are Al Qaws, Aswat and Pinkwatching Israel

oppression. Schulman illustrates this difference with Toronto Pride excluding Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QAIA) from their march, followed by similar events in other cities. This, again, triggers a broader conversation on how identity-based politics are deployed in geopolitical contexts, and invites a critical reconsideration of what kinds of alliances, exclusions, and meanings these categories can produce within transnational activist landscapes.

To conclude, *The Queer International* offers a great introduction into international queer politics. As a white queer scholar trying to navigate the complex dynamics of intersectional activism and resistance against oppressive structures, I often struggle to understand my role and position in emancipatory movements: ‘How much space can I take up when advocating for others, especially those less privileged? When do I occupy this space? And how do I center marginalised communities?’ By listening attentively to these communities, mobilising with and for them, and using my privileges to act on their behalf, my journey as an activist reflecting on their engagement has only just begun. As such, I could relate to Schulmans discovery of a decolonial praxis and referral to ‘all these people she should talk to and read’².

Still, *The Queer International* felt more like a coming of age rather than the theoretical-ethnographic manuscript that I had hoped it to be and Schulman’s writing occasionally felt slightly disappointing, as my academic pursuits inspired me to read it. In the meantime, I am looking forward to reading *Queer Palestine and The Empire of Critique*, *Decolonial Queering in Palestine*, and *Female homosexuality in the Middle East: Histories and representations*.

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² Schulman mentions discovering the work of Naomi Klein (p. 25-28), Judith Butler (p. 28), Dalit Baum (p. 28), Omar Barghouti (p. 28, 31), Edward Said (p. 46), Joseph Massad (p. 66) and many others.