

‘Dykes for Palestine’: Radical Potentialities of Identity in Transnational Solidarity Activism

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ABSTRACT

“Dykes threaten every system of oppression. Whose side are you on?” This quotation is how the British activist group the *Dyke Project* envisions its radical, emancipatory politics. Focusing on the Dyke Project as a primary case study, this thesis will uncover the differences dyke identity creates in transnational solidarity activism for Palestine. Principally, this thesis uses a mixed-methods approach that combines grounded normative theory, critical discourse analysis, and a case study. Critical discourse analysis is employed to examine the group’s manifesto, social media posts, and news coverage. The relationship between intersectional identity and radical activism is a central, underpinning question throughout. In particular, the group’s origins as a response to the gender-critical feminist organization the *Lesbian Project* are foundational to the Dyke Project’s intersectional lens. The thesis is organized into three sections that critically examine the Dyke Project’s activism: 1. Who is the Dyke Project and how does it fit into broader theoretical debates between gay and lesbian studies and queer theory, 2. Subaltern solidarity and its application to the Dyke Project’s activism for Palestine and, 3. Addressing the potential of feminist coalition building and mutual aid for meaningful activism. In sum, the thesis develops that the Dyke Project draws on the emancipatory roots of queer theory to express solidarity with Palestinians, whom it considers a similarly subaltern population. My critical intervention emphasizes the importance of the positive inclusion that feminist coalition building and mutual aid can contribute to the Dyke Project if it seeks to create alliances and meaningful change for Palestinians.

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Of course, I give many thanks to my loved ones for their support during this degree and honours project.

Thinking, researching, and writing this thesis took place across Treaty Six and Seven in Alberta. This thesis explored British queer solidarity with Indigenous Palestinians, and therefore, I would be amiss not to express my queer solidarity with the Indigenous peoples who have allowed me to grow up and learn on this land.

There would be nothing to write about if it were not for the work of the *Dyke Project*, which this thesis focuses upon. The members of this group do not know this thesis has been created about them; however, I hope that if they ever come across it, I have given their work the justice it deserves. Any misrepresentations or errors in this thesis about the Dyke Project's work or purpose are my own.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY:

This thesis makes a concerted effort to explain terminology and acronyms as they appear. However, for the sake of clarity and space, sometimes this is forgone. The list below includes important terms that will regularly appear.

Al-Aqsa Flood: Also colloquially known as October 7th, 2023

Cis: Cisgender

OPT: Occupied Palestinian Territory

LGBTQ+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, plus

Palestine: I often utilize the name “Palestine” when referring to what is now known as “Israel” as to recognize the Indigenous name of the land

Trans: Transgender

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

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INTRODUCTION

THE DYKE PROJECT AND LESBIAN ACTIVISM

The identity and the labels one chooses for themselves can reflect their inclination toward emancipatory social movements. In the specific case study of activist group the *Dyke Project*, the use of the term dyke is indicative of the group's commitment to inclusive and radical activism, for both trans people and Palestine. The group's politics towards trans people predisposed them to be in solidarity with Palestinians after the Al-Aqsa Flood on October 7th, 2023. Furthermore, their expression of transnational solidarity was not paternalistic or imperial, like some groups fall prey to in relationships of stark power imbalances, because the Dyke Project envisions itself as similarly subaltern in their respective geographies. Yet, as a queer feminist group located in the global north and imperial mecca of Britain, their activism and solidarity have much room to grow and change if they take the lead from feminist coalition building and mutual aid.

The Dyke Project is a “trans, cis and non-binary feminist dyke collective” located in London (Dyke Project, n.d). Created in March 2023, the group began as a response to the trans-exclusionary group the Lesbian Project. Thus, both the name and purpose of the Dyke Project signal a more inclusive, intersectional identity politics. The Dyke Project’s popularity widened from a social media post released on October 27, 2023 of the group’s direct action activism “hack[ing] 100 ads across TfL tube, bus and rail networks to share queer Palestinian stories, and to show that queers stand with Palestine” (Dyke Project 2023). Specifically, the Dyke Project had pasted over regular advertisements with images from “Queering the Map”, a website where queer people across the world can anonymously post stories about their lives and identities. As articulated in the caption quoted above, the Dyke Project used stories from queer people in Palestine to articulate its solidarity and spread awareness to Londoners about the bombardment

of Gaza by Israel, as well as the British Government's complicity. For this author, this direct action from the Dyke Project was the first time I came across the group, and subsequently, inspired this thesis.

Cis, trans, straight, and queer women have been at the forefront of solidarity activism for Palestine. Yet, these far-away activists would not exist without the Palestinian feminist movement which inspired the queer Palestinian movement (Atshan 2020, 1). Both of which, importantly, articulated that the liberation of women and queer people must be simultaneous with the liberation of Palestine from Israel (Atshan 2020, 1). Therefore, there is an inherent radical decolonial politics in these groups. Popular feminist and queer activist groups within the occupied territories are al-Qaws and Aswat, both of which conduct advocacy and run programs for Palestinians.

In line with what Sa'ed Atshan argues is the centrality of women and queer people in decolonial grassroots activism in Palestine, I believe that the Dyke Project is built on the foundation of al-Qaws, Aswat, and the lesbian activism in Britain and North America since the twentieth century. The radical lineage of the Dyke Project is made explicit in its logo, a bomb, which is a reference to the Lesbian Avengers. The Lesbian Avengers were an American direct action activist group popular in the 1980s, particularly during the AIDS epidemic. While the Lesbian Avengers were dedicated to gay liberation in America, key member and author of *The Lesbian Avenger Handbook: A Handy Guide to Homemade Revolution*, Sarah Schulman, is a prominent figure in the queer solidarity movement for Palestine. This overlap cannot be a coincidence and instead, I argue, is indicative of my theory that intersectional queer social movements often have radical decolonial politics. Furthermore, this is particularly relevant and present in lesbian feminist social movements, which harness the ability to push their politics to

be emancipatory. Importantly, the use of the term “lesbian” in the Lesbian Avengers affirms my assertion that my argument around the Dyke Project is *not generalizable*. The Lesbian Avengers do not succumb to the same regressive, non-emancipatory politics as the Lesbian Project.

Outside of this case study, using the term lesbian to name yourself or the activist group you are part of does not prescribe you with a transphobic or Zionist ideology. Furthermore, claiming that all lesbian feminist movements are either radical or exclusive would be essentialist (not to mention incorrect). Generalizability is not a goal in this thesis, in line with traditions of feminist standpoint theory and place-based Indigenous political thought.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the existing literature about queer solidarity for Palestine hinges on the terms homonationalism, homonormativity, and pinkwashing.

Homonormativity, as Lisa Duggan (2002) theorized, “upholds and sustains” the “dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions” in society (179). Furthermore, homonormativity is inextricably linked to neoliberalism in that it promotes a “privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan 2002, 179). Gay rights and liberation are thus achieved in tandem with the liberal state's policies and laws. For example, those who advocate for neoliberal homonormativity desire things like marriage equality and gay inclusion in the military. There is a marked desire to conform and blend into the liberal, hegemonic state for homonormative queers.

Homonationalism is the theory that “homosexuality is no longer excluded from nationalist formations” (Puar 2007, 2). While not the sole focus of *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Puar and other scholars extrapolate the theory of homonationalism and apply it to Israel's queer policies. Israel presents itself as a bastion of

liberal values as a democratic state that protects queer rights in a geographic location where these principles are lacking; that being, the neighbouring countries in the Middle East. Thus, Israel practices homonationalism by justifying the Israeli state and its occupation of Palestine to protect Israeli queers from purported oppressive Palestinian Muslim hate (Puar 2002, 18). While this explains the theory behind Israeli homonationalism, pinkwashing is the governmental and media practice of Israeli exceptionalism as a queer safe haven.

In what began as a “marketing plan” to “harness the gay community to reposition [Israel’s] global image”, pinkwashing utilizes homonationalism in an attempt to “conceal the continuous violations of Palestinians’ human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life” (Schulman, 2011). Rebranding Israel’s illegal occupation of Palestine as justified for the protection of women and queers has been essential against the growing suspicion of flagrant violations of international law and human rights. Thus, pinkwashing is the verb of homonationalism; it is the physical action of justifying Israeli occupation and genocide by way of expanding a liberal rights-based framework for queer inclusion.

One of the methods of the queer international solidarity movement for Palestine was “pinkwatching”. Springing into visibility in 2002 and plateauing around 2012, queers in solidarity with Palestinians displayed their dismay with Israel by “deconstructing and debunking pinkwashing” (Atshan 2020, 1-5). Using online platforms and spreading the message to their local communities, pinkwatchers would call out instances of Israeli pinkwashing in attempts to unsettle the public’s indoctrination that queerness and Palestinian-ness are incongruent.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis employs a mixed-method approach encompassing case study, grounded normative theory, and critical discourse analysis. Perhaps a mixed-methodology is automatically inferred once a researcher commits to case study research. This is because, as Gerring (2007) argues, the case study usually “employ[s] a great variety of techniques— both quantitative and qualitative— for the gathering and analysis of evidence” (33). Therefore, the case study approach demands the involvement of, in this thesis, theory-building and critical discourse analysis to properly unfold the intricacies of the Dyke Project. The mixed-method approach allows this project to properly handle the multifaceted and nuanced nature of the topic. Common to much mixed-method research, the approach allows the researcher to “blend description, causality and understanding seamlessly in the same research project” (McNabb 2021, 363). For this project, each chapter exemplifies the mixed methodology by first providing a brief literature review on the focal topic to underpin and create the theoretical argument to follow. While the literature informs the theoretical assumption, the critical discourse analysis builds upon and supports the argument. The critical discourse analysis further incorporates and acts as a vehicle for the reentrance of the case study. Therefore, the mixed-method is actioned through a simultaneous sequential, integrated, and embedded approach to the three core methods.

Typical uses of mixed-methodologies in research are for the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (McNabb 2021, 364). I refute this prescription as my use of critical discourse analysis is purposefully qualitative. Therefore, this project uses mixed methods which are either theoretical or qualitative. As emphasized by McNabb (2021, 365) and relevant to this project, the mixed-methods approach is used for triangulation, complementarity, and reinforcement. Triangulation involves using different approaches to the same problem/question

to “corroborate or reinforce the validity of the findings” (McNabb 2021, 365). Inherent in the name, complementarity refers to how a mixed-method approach complements or enhances the understanding of the research’s analysis (McNabb 2021, 365). Finally, reinforcement involves extrapolating the findings from one method to inform the use and interpretation of the following method (McNabb 2021, 365). Therefore, the mixed-methodology of this project acts to compound and build upon the theory and findings of each methodological step.

GROUNDED NORMATIVE THEORY

Grounded Normative Theory is both a methodological and theoretical framework. Thus, it describes how research is physically conducted as well as the theoretical tradition behind it. Grounded Normative Theory (GNT) “facilitate[s] both the empirical and normative evaluation of specific projects” (Cabrera and Ackerly 2025, 2). In carrying out its dual-purpose research utility, GNT has four commitments: comprehensiveness, recursivity, epistemological inclusion, and epistemic accountability. First, comprehensiveness explains the methodological sequence in which the empirical research conducted is aimed at expanding the “normative claims, understandings, emotional expressions, etc., to be considered. The theorist’s own empirical or normative understandings are often challenged in the process” (Cabrera and Ackerly 2025, 3). Therefore, the way I imagine and enact a methodological practice of GNT is to take a pre-existing idea and conduct research to test and complicate it. The second commitment of GNT is recursivity which “involves the ongoing revision of argument as new insights are gained” (Cabrera and Ackerly 2025, 3). Feminist theorists might relate recursivity to reflexivity, that is, a critical examination of the researcher, the research topic, and vehicle unto which conclusions are being made. I understand and enact recursivity as essentially a commitment to being flexible

during the research process and open to changing the methods, topics, and materials being examined. Rigidity in my research question and methods only hinders the extent to which I can holistically and appropriately capture my interests with academic rigour, which is why I have chosen GNT. The third commitment of GNT is epistemological inclusion. This commitment “is concerned with engaging the voices of persons who are being theorized, often those excluded from political and social power structures, and seeking to better incorporate them into normative understandings and claims” (Cabrera and Ackerly 2025, 3). In the same vein, the fourth commitment, epistemic accountability, “is a commitment to address imbalances in power, knowledge, and agency” (Cabrera and Ackerly 2025, 3). These last two commitments are feminist in tradition and hold political perspectives on the ethics involved in research. In practice, this looks like representing the Dyke Project and the Lesbian Project based on the statements they release about themselves online.

Conducting a thesis using GNT involves a further choice on the type of route in the methodology the researcher desires to take. For this thesis, I have chosen the “Theory Testing and Investigation” variant of GNT. To use this variant, the researcher must “begin with draft normative claims that are linked to empirical suppositions identified as needing further investigation” (Cabrera and Ackerly 2025, 5). This is what I mentioned above by taking an idea and testing it. For this thesis, I was exposed to the Dyke Project through social media and developed a perspective and claim about it. Thereafter, I strengthened and tested this “draft claim through engagement with relevant normative literatures and academic dialogue” (Cabrera and Ackerly 2025, 5) such as existing theories of the queer international, homonationalism, and pinkwashing. From this preliminary research, I found a gap in the literature about queer women’s solidarity for Palestine and decided to address the gap by delving into a mixed-method research

process. Along the way, a commitment to epistemological inclusion and epistemic accountability allowed me to refocus my research with an ethical framework of who to focus on and what sources of knowledge I would draw upon. Therefore, GNT acted as both a theoretical framework and methodology to guide my use of other methods.

CASE STUDY

The case study methodology is the through-line throughout this mixed-method project. A case study is “an intensive study of a single unit or small number of units (the cases)” (Gerring 2007, 37). The Dyke Project is the single unit/case unto which each chapter considers and all research is centred around. Contrary to Gerring (2007) who described *all* case studies as intensive, Swanborn (2010) differentiates between intensive and extensive case study research. Due to the focus on a single case in great depth (Swanborn 2010, n.p), this project exemplifies the characteristics of an intensive case study. Importantly for the theoretical aspirations of this project, intensive case studies look at each instance/case in its “own specific context” (Swanborn 2010, n.p). Therefore, generalizability is neither inherent nor necessarily a goal in intensive case study research.

While there are three types of case studies (McNabb 2021, 276), this project is an intrinsic case study. Due to the reason I chose the case and the purpose of this project, the intrinsic case study is the most appropriate type of case study. Similarly to how McNabb describes the intrinsic case study (2021, 276), I chose this case because I “think that [the case] is interesting or because it will enhance understanding of the phenomenon”. Overall, the Dyke Project was chosen to “contribute to a greater understanding of a topic of interest” (McNabb 2021, 276). The topic of interest being queer solidarity activism for Palestine.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Belonging to the broader field of critical social analysis (as too does this thesis), critical discourse analysis (CDA) focuses on the systems of power and ideology inherent in language (Fairclough 2023, 11). Contrary to other forms of discourse analysis, inherent in CDA is a qualitative, holistic focus on meaning instead of counting or statistics. In practice, this method is devoted to ‘mining for meaning’. That is, the language used by actors is not natural or neutral; the words and phrases chosen by the Dyke Project both describe and create political meaning. The very creation of the group and its name are political responses to the use of language. Furthermore, the Dyke Project’s choice of words, identity markers, and phrases is indicative of its decolonial political aspirations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this thesis is similarly mixed as the methodology. Queer theory and intersectional feminism are the overarching frameworks for this project. However, Chapter Two takes a Gramscian turn in discussing solidarity. All three chapters identify their theoretical framework in fleshing out the literature and scholarly debates around each topic. Therefore, I find it redundant to talk in-depth about each theory in the introduction. However, this thesis is a work of critical theory, and acknowledging this approach to knowledge production and consumption is important in understanding why I have chosen to write a thesis about dyke politics and Palestine. Critical theory is an interdisciplinary approach to research with fundamental critiques of power and social systems to advance emancipation. Belonging to the

Frankfurt School, critical theory is often traced back to the works of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, and Jürgen Habermas (Celikates and Flynn 2023, n.p.). Critical theory has multiple offshoots (many of which make appearances in this thesis), such as feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory, and postcolonial/decolonial theory (Celikates and Flynn 2023, n.p.). What sets critical theory apart from traditional theory is the fundamental challenge to the existing world order and social reality. Research in critical theory is often described as holistic, deep, or thick; ultimately signalling its focus on unearthing the unequal and oppressive fabric of reality. Alternatively, traditional theory “fails to analyze the broader social context in which they are embedded” in favour of taking a more ‘objective’ and empirical approach to research (Celikates and Flynn 2023, n.p.). The absence of emancipatory aims and critical inspection of systems and institutions in the name of positivist research is precisely the reason I have chosen critical theory. I am wholly uninterested in doing “hard science” and equally dissatisfied with the willful undervaluation of queer feminist research that I have encountered in writing this thesis. Therefore, in this time of the genocide of Palestinians and the increasing subjugation of trans and queer people, critical theory is as important as ever. I am committed to conducting research that reflects the times and takes decisive action to expose and correct theoretical and material injustices.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

The thesis is broken into three body chapters, bookended by an introduction and conclusion. By the end of this thesis, the reader should know *who* the Dyke Project is, *what* the Dyke Project does, and *why* there is potential for meaningful, sustained activism.

Chapter 1: The Dyke Project versus the Lesbian Project: Radical Politics of Intersectional Identity?

This chapter lays the foundation for the thesis by introducing the Dyke Project and the history of its creation. The Lesbian Project is also introduced as the driving force behind the inception of the Dyke Project, its use of the term “dyke”, and the radical politics inscribed in the group’s solidarity activism.

Chapter 2: Subaltern Solidarity: The Dyke Project and Palestine

Using the queer theory of Chapter 1, this chapter introduces Antonio Gramsci and David Featherstone’s use of “subaltern” and “subaltern solidarity”, respectively. The chapter shifts focus from dyke-transgender solidarity to dyke-Palestinian solidarity by way of using a queer and feminist interpretation of subaltern solidarity.

Chapter 3: Beyond the Rally and Toward Coalition Building

Finally, Chapter 3 interrogates the viability and meaningfulness of reactionary subaltern solidarity, as evidenced by the Dyke Project’s activism for Palestine. Feminist coalition building and queer mutual aid are compared and contrasted to create a potential pathway for the Dyke Project to continue its transnational solidarity activism for Palestine during its sustained genocide and occupation.

CHAPTER ONE: The Dyke Project versus the Lesbian Project: Radical Politics of Intersectional Identity?

“Queer' not as being about who you're having sex with (that can be a dimension of it); but 'queer' as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and that has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live” (bell hooks 2014)

This chapter will explore the tensions and entanglements of identity politics with emancipatory social movements. To begin, a broad analysis of the turn from gay and lesbian studies to queer theory in the 1990s will be mapped out for application to the political ramifications of the turn from lesbian to dyke in the isolated case study of the Dyke Project. Supporting my connection of queer theory and dyke politics will be source material from the Dyke Project's manifesto and social media accounts. Connecting queer theory to the Dyke Project explains why and how they are in solidarity with Palestinians. Essentially, the radical, politically queer nature of the Dyke Project predisposed the group to advocate its support for Palestine. The essential argument of this chapter is that the political function of the use of 'dyke' is informed by queer theory and chosen by the Dyke Project in response to the use of 'lesbian' as a trans-exclusive term by the Lesbian Project.

Chapter One is the foundation for my subsequent descent into solidarity and emancipatory coalition building. Therefore, this chapter answers the essential questions regarding *why* the Dyke Project has been selected as the primary case study of this thesis. Building off the instructive value of explaining why the Dyke Project is focused upon in this thesis is a connection between the liberatory politics of queer theory and dyke identity. In whole, this chapter is an exploration of identity politics, labels, and the ever-morphing nature of

community infighting, for better or for worse. Political queer identity is correlated with an inclination toward solidarity for Palestine. Overall, the explanation of how identity is formed and used by the Dyke Project underpins the function of their solidarity, which is explored in the following chapter.

QUEER THEORY

Let us backtrack to the term “queer” as a label and identity reclaimed by LGBTQ+ peoples. Historically, the word queer was used as a derogatory term wielded against gay men and women. It was not always an epithet, however, as up until the nineteenth century it was used as an adjective to describe something abnormal or odd (Hanhardt n.d.). Moving into the twentieth century, queer denoted sexual or gender non-conformity, hence why queer activists themselves moved away from the term (Hanhardt n.d.). As is common with derogatory terms, queer began to be reclaimed in the 1980s and 1990s, largely due to radical activism during the AIDS crisis in North America (Hanhardt n.d.). In the early days of the popularization of queer- such as in activism and the coining of queer theory- debates persisted as to *who* is queer. Cathy Cohen (1997) challenged whether queer was solely about sexuality and gender, or if being queer meant a relative marginal position to power. Nowadays, the identity label of queer often takes two routes: a term that *replaces* or *refuses*. What I mean by this is that some lesbian, gay, and bisexual people also consider themselves queer, and therefore, replace and interchange their identity label with queer. On the other hand, queer identity can be a non-cisheteronormative person who refuses traditional labels and creates expansive space of unknowability by choosing to refer to themselves as queer. Put another way, queer can be “an identity itself or a non-identity – a refusal to label” (Schotten 2018, 79).

Queer theory is the aftereffect of scholars' dissatisfaction with the lack of emancipatory promise of lesbian and gay studies. Largely traced back to the early 1990s, queer theory pushes the boundaries of what constitutes queerness and the rigid boundaries of identity. This school of thought is a cousin of poststructuralism and postmodernism (Loveaas et al. 2006, 6). The early scholars of queer theory were motivated to break out of lesbian and gay studies because they saw the field as unnecessarily rigid by focusing on sexuality as fixed and maintaining the homosexual/heterosexual binary (Loveaas et al. 2006, 6). A common angle in the debate between queer theory and lesbian and gay studies is the dissident promise of either one. Often considered a seminal scholar of queer theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argued for the radicality of queer theory as a politic “against both assimilationist politics and separatist identity definitions” (Sedgwick 1993, 28). Writing in the early days of queer theory, Cathy Cohen (1997) contributed to the debate on whether queer theory holds radical promise in her piece, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The radical potential of queer politics?” Ultimately, Cohen argues that queer theory and politics require a greater commitment to intersectionality to realize its radical potential (1997). Even while critiquing the shortcomings of queer theory, Cohen acknowledges that it stands in opposition to “the normalizing tendencies of hegemonic sexuality” and “challenge the multiple practices and vehicles of power which render [queer people] invisible and at risk” (438-439). This, I argue, is exactly where and how queer theory can extend to subjects beyond gender and sexuality and deal with topics of colonial oppression, such as Palestine.

A reckoning conversation in the community, largely inspired by queer theory, is the notion that not every gay person is ‘politically queer’. Therefore, there is a marked political difference between being gay and being queer. For example, a gay conservative would not be

considered queer in this line of thinking that entangles queerness with progressive politics. To be politically queer is an “adherence to a politics that transcend[s] liberal-legal claims” (Sabsay 2013, 80). This question of the radicality of queer people and queer politics largely mirrors the women's movement and feminism. Not all gay people are queer in the same way that not all women are feminists. There must be a conscious effort towards a liberatory politics; it does not come automatically with a marginalized identity. An important distinction is that anyone (including men and gender-diverse people) can be a feminist, whereas cisheteronormative people cannot claim to be queer. That is not to say that cisheteronormative people cannot believe and pursue the same queer emancipatory politics inscribed in queer identity; it is simply a matter of labels that demand exclusivity of the term to the people it describes. Emancipatory politics does not demand any level of experience of oppression for someone to believe in or join radical movements. The identity label of queer, in my opinion, requires deviant sexual or gender expression *and* a subscription to liberatory political ideals. The importance of tracing queer politics back to feminism is to acknowledge the entanglements of the two in historical formation (the political events that have led to the delineation between identity and radical politics) and nature (marginalized identity can often lead to a unique understanding of liberation). As will be explored at the end of the chapter, some brands of liberal feminism demand an interrogation as to whether feminism or queer theory is the most productive vehicle in liberation movements.

The political difference between gay and queer, in both theoretical fields and political activism, is mirrored in the conversation of lesbian versus dyke for the Dyke Project case study. In the case of the Dyke Project and literature on lesbian identity, much of the debate centers around *who* can claim a lesbian identity. The answer to this is indicative of whether someone engages in progressive politics and can claim to be politically queer or feminist.

LESBIAN POLITICS

Lesbian politics is in a critical period of flux due to the debate between intersectional versus bioessentialist or gender critical feminism. Yet, the debate is not new and instead is having its renaissance, particularly in the United Kingdom (UK), over arguments of “single sex spaces”. To be clear, this debate is not isolated to lesbian politics; rather, it is being championed by a large coalition of ‘feminist’ or women-centred advocacy groups (Amery 2025). The current legal and political conversation over single sex spaces is not solely a lesbian matter, and instead, has been taken up by trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs). Bioessentialism is the belief in only two genders or sexes and moreover that gender and sex are synonymous (Boskey et al 2025, 90). In their article, Boskey et al (2025) further differentiate bioessentialism from reactionary bioessentialism, whereby the latter engenders a politically charged belief in the “erasure of transgender and gender diverse individuals from all areas of society” (90). Previously known as radical feminism, gender critical feminism is concerned with the “claim that women’s ‘sex-based rights’ are under threat and need defending” (Amery 2024, 1241), particularly against transgender women whom they view as a predatory threat. Fran Amery (2024) convincingly employs a Foucauldian framework of biopower to analyze gender critical feminism in the UK. Specifically, Amery (2024) claims that, similarly to Foucault’s theory of biopower, gender critical feminism is concerned with the control of bodies and populations (1240). The argument over trans inclusion in the category of women is mirrored in the creation of the Lesbian Project and the Dyke Project. Essentially, the debate above has created varied reactions which has led to the formation of social movements/organizations that support or rail against gender critical feminism.

Due to the focus of this thesis on the creation of the Dyke Project due to the gender critical feminism of the Lesbian Project, particular attention will be paid to the lesbian (as opposed to heteronormative feminist) iteration of anti-transgender sentiments in political organizing since the late 1980s and burgeoning in the 1990s. From there, we will retrace the radical feminism of the 20th century back to the gender critical feminism of the Lesbian Project, the starting point for the creation of the Dyke Project and its emancipatory politics.

Much of the contestation *against* queer theory came from ‘feminist’ lesbians and marked the foundation of the Dyke Project in name and politics. Writing in 1996, Suzanna Walters described the turn to queer theory as the “displacement” of radical and lesbian feminism (832). Walter’s criticism of queer theory begins with a distaste for reclaiming derogatory terms of the past, and therefore, would undoubtedly criticize the Dyke Project for the same reason. Furthermore, Walters incorrectly claims that the “queer” in queer theory is a “synonym for (trendy) gay and lesbian studies and even gay/lesbian identity” (1996, 833). In the same breath, she paradoxically acknowledges the radical origins of queer as a term and theory by tracing its origin to the AIDS activism of Queer Nation and ACT UP (Walters 1996, 833). Walter then backtracks by claiming that queer identity and theory are solely focused on sexuality and not gender (1996). Her prevailing argument on queer theory is that it “share[s] a problematic perspective on feminism and the women's movement” and goes so far as to say that queer theory has an “implicit and explicit marginalization and demonization of feminism and lesbian-feminism” (Walters 1996, 837). Therefore, we can see that since the inception of queer theory, it has been pitted against lesbianism and feminism as incongruent and antagonistic.

Similar writing critical to queer theory in the 21st century takes issue with transgender inclusion in queer theory and politics as an alleged targeted erasure of women and lesbians. “The

Disappearing L” is both a refrain and the title of a book concerning the perceived phenomenon that gender theory was mainstreaming transgender ideology at the expense of cisgender lesbians. The book *The Disappearing L: Erasure of Lesbian Spaces and Culture* by Bonnie Morris (2016) has an entire section in chapter 2 entitled “The Trans Issue” whereby the author takes issue with transgender women’s fight for inclusion at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival (117-129). Furthermore, the introduction to the book pits lesbianism against queer theory by the author’s invocation that she is “a woman, lesbian, and feminist: a dinosaur facing extinction in this new *queer* jungle’ (Morris 2016, 10, my emphasis). Perhaps implied in this “queer jungle” is the author’s discomfort with racialized queer people “disrupting” white lesbian women’s spaces. Jungle, after all, could be read as racially targeted. While I do not dispute the author’s recognition that lesbian spaces are diminishing- such as lesbian bars- it is her insistence on the disappearance of cisgender women-only lesbian spaces as a negative thing that is particularly problematic. Yet, Morris is not alone in the blame-casting on transgender women for an alleged disappearance or infiltrated lesbian scene.

Published in 2003, Sheila Jeffrey’s book *Unpacking Queer Politics* blamed queer theory for an alleged “epidemic of transexualism” causing a “destruction of lesbianism” (122). Once again, transgender identity and lesbianism are being pitted against each other in a zero-sum game of identity politics and community infighting. Essentially, the perspective offered by these gender critical lesbian feminists is that transgender women are not ‘pure’ or ‘true’ women, and therefore, are a threat to the safety and politics of lesbians.

Tracing the above argument is imperative for understanding why the Dyke Project was created and how it mirrors a larger, historical trend in feminist and queer history. That is, feminists/lesbians have been clutching onto strict identity labels and policing the gender and

sexuality of others by scapegoating transgender women in pursuit of protecting themselves. Gay and lesbian studies and gender critical feminism are in the same category of rigid boundaries in identity and desperate attempts to preserve tradition due to a supposed threat from those who want the community to be more inclusive.

THE LESBIAN AND THE DYKE PROJECT

The inception of the Dyke Project displays the real-life implications of gender critical feminism and lesbian identity politics. If it were not for the Lesbian Project, an activist group exclusionary of transgender and gender diverse lesbians, the Dyke Project would not have come into fruition.

The Lesbian Project is a UK-based “non-partisan” not-for-profit that purports to “build a knowledge base about lesbian lives, promote sensible and evidence-based policy, and contribute to building lesbian community in the UK and internationally” (The Lesbian Project n.d.). The founders of the group, Julie Bindel and Kathleen Stock, are at the forefront of the group and its website and are unabashed in their claim, similarly to Morris above, that lesbians are ‘disappearing’. Bindel and Stock are both white, educated, and well-off lesbians who believe that “same-sex attracted females, needs are not being addressed or even identified” (The Lesbian Project n.d.); perhaps the irony need not be addressed. Both women are known for their belief in radical or gender critical feminism. Therefore, it is unsurprising that under the “Principles” section of their website they write: “Our focus is same-sex-attracted females. We don’t think either biological sex, or being attracted to others of the same sex, are choices. By definition, *only females can be lesbians*, in virtue of their *biological sex*” (The Lesbian Project n.d., my emphasis).

The Lesbian Project held its first event in London on March 25th, 2023 entitled “Putting Lesbians Back into Focus” (The Lesbian Project n.d.). The event was a day-long workshop that focused on lesbian inclusion in “research, media representation, and law” (The Lesbian Project n.d.). In response to the group's inaugural event, the Dyke Project organized a protest of over one hundred people outside of the venue (Dazed 2023). Tweeting about the protest, the Dyke Project stressed that Bindel and Stock’s Lesbian Project were “claiming to protect lesbians from erasure by separating from trans people” and that the protest's goal was to communicate the group's belief that “*us dykes*, we're thriving, undivided! #onecommunity” (The Dyke Project 2023, my emphasis). The use of “us dykes” demarcates an intentional use of labels and separation from the lesbians of the Lesbian Project. Essentially, the Dyke Project is separating “us dykes” who are progressive and intersectional from “those lesbians” who are transphobic and divisive. From this early tweet, the Dyke Project is creating the political, transgender-inclusive connotation of the term “dyke” as an iterative response to the Lesbian Project.

This political connotation of the term “dyke” is not universal nor widely agreed upon. It is important to reiterate that this thesis’s argument of the difference between lesbian and dyke is not generalizable. Instead, this argument is distinctly place-based and tied to the particular example of the creation and politics of the Dyke Project. For example, in an op-ed entitled “Dyke Culture and the Disappearing L”, Morris (2016) reiterates the main argument of her previously mentioned book while doubling down on the usage of the term “dyke”. Contrary to this case study, Morris claims that dyke is the name for the “fierce woman-identified-woman” whose antonym is the “more inclusive *queer*” (Morris 2016, original emphasis). To Morris, dyke is the antithesis to queer theory and identities “disidentification with the categories *woman* and *lesbian*” (Morris 2016, original emphasis). Claire Heuchan’s (2019) article “Dyke is not a gender

neutral word. That's why it's powerful" similarly echoes the sentiment of Morris. In their op-ed, Heuchan uses the example of the Chicago Dyke March as a contributor to the watering-down of the lesbian "woman centric" life (2019). The Chicago Dyke March's politics are reflective of the trans-inclusive priority of the Dyke Project. At the time of Heuchan's writing and still today, the Chicago Dyke March labels itself as "anti-racist, anti-violent, volunteer-led, grassroots mobilization and celebration of *dyke, queer, bisexual, and transgender* resilience #BlackTransLivesMatter" (Chicago Dyke March, my emphasis). The group noticeably does not include the term lesbian, and instead, opts for the label of dyke alongside the identities implicitly included in the Chicago Dyke March. Even across the ocean and operating in different timelines (the Chicago Dyke March's Twitter has not posted since 2019), the Dyke Project and Chicago Dyke March are noticing and responding to the lesbian label being weaponized against transgender folks.

The Dyke Project does not explain its name or why they chose it in any social media posts. Therefore, this thesis can only speculate on the use of the term through a discursive analysis. Dyke is used, more obviously, to differentiate themselves from the Lesbian Project. Yet, the group is also politically infusing the world with a trans-inclusive meaning. Furthermore, dyke comes to denote the politically radical posture of the group overall, with its use in wider activism about Palestine.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The Dyke Project's social media presence began on March 18, 2023, only days before they held their counter-protest against the Lesbian Project. That inaugural post was a picture of their logo on Instagram with no caption (The Dyke Project 2023). The following post was made

on March 25, 2023 on the Dyke Project's Twitter account the day the group held their counter-protest against the Lesbian Project. This is the first post that articulates the group's identity politics as a direct response to the Lesbian Project's trans-exclusionary rhetoric. The content of the post are as follows:

"The Dyke Project is throwing a party. We're a collection of *trans, cis, non-binary lesbians & queers of all persuasions*. Some want to sow hate and divide us by saying lesbians are being erased & need protecting -- so not true! We're thriving and strongest when together. Those who want to divide us say that "the lesbian social scene is going extinct" and that we must protect it by excluding those who are trans - we're outside their conference today to say: hell no! We're thriving & united! #onecommunity" (The Dyke Project 2023, my emphasis).

First, this post clarifies *who* is welcome and included in the Dyke Project, that is, essentially anyone who wishes to claim the label. Trans inclusion is the marked difference between the Dyke Project and Lesbian Project, and therefore, it is no coincidence that trans comes first in the list of people in the group. Furthermore, the remainder of the tweet is directly addressing the gender critical feminism of the Lesbian Project and some lesbian scholars explored earlier in the chapter. The Dyke Project is calling out the rhetoric of these 'feminists' with the language of "erased", "need protecting", and "extinct"; all of which are used colloquially and in gender critical feminist literature to describe what is happening to lesbians. Therefore, the existence and self-describing language used by the Dyke Project is in direct opposition to gender critical feminism/lesbianism.

The Dyke Project formalized and entrenched its trans-inclusive message in a manifesto to represent who they are and what they stand for. Physically, the manifesto is a deconstructed box of hormone-replacement medication with text printed on the blank inside.

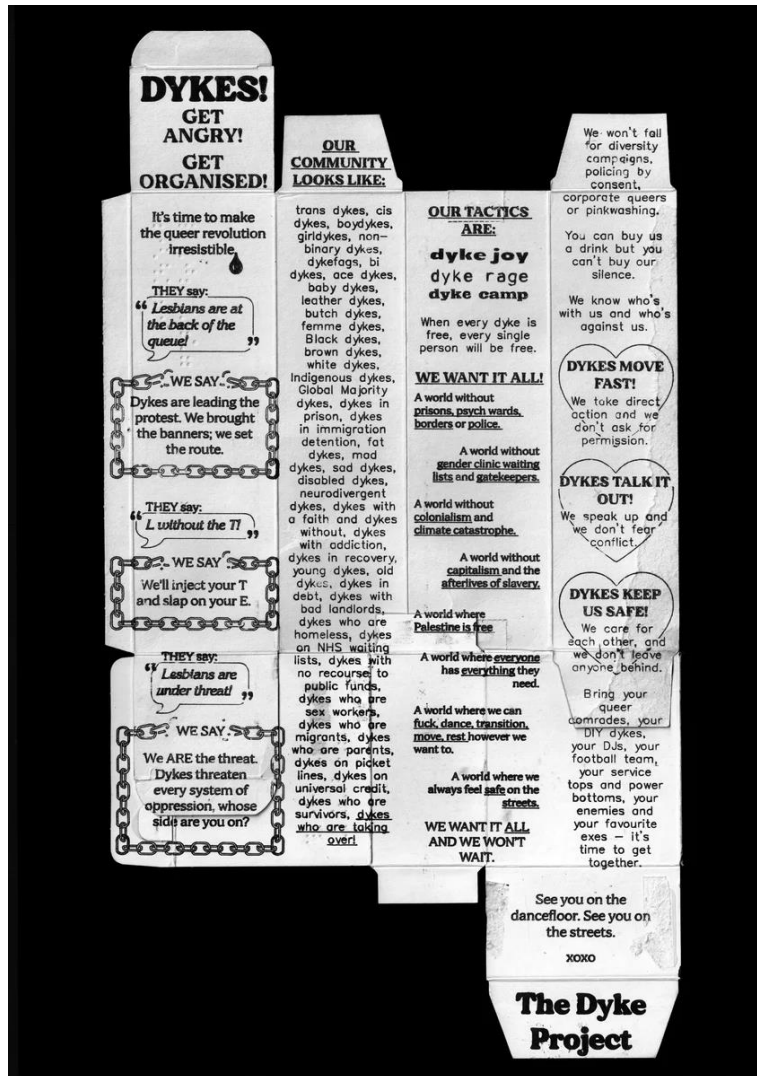


Figure 1.0: The Dyke Project Manifesto

The construction and presentation of the manifesto is a physical representation of the trans-inclusive background of the group. Four vertical panels of the manifesto describe different facets

of the group and its members. Relevant to this chapter on inclusive and radical identity politics in the Dyke Project are the sections that explain who dykes are and what they stand for.

On the far left column, the manifesto articulates the Dyke Project's responses to various dialogue exchanges that frame dykes as politically progressive.

“They say: ‘Lesbians are at the back of the queue!’ We say: *Dykes* are leading the protest. We brought the banners, we set the route. They say: ‘L without the T!’ We say: We’ll inject your T and slap on your E. They say: ‘Lesbians are under threat!’ We say: We ARE the threat. *Dykes* threaten every system of oppression, whose side are you on?” (The Dyke Project 2024, my emphasis).

In the above quote taken from the manifesto, I have emphasized the use of the term dyke as a strategic identity term pitted in opposition to or differentiated from lesbian. Lesbian is used in the dialogue examples being posed to the hypothetical dyke, and in response, dyke is used in the response. This is undoubtedly to further the Dyke Project's political response to the Lesbian Project. However, by not specifically naming the Lesbian Project and instead framing it as “they say”, the manifesto is engendering dyke as an inherently politically charged, trans-inclusive term. More explicitly, the line “They say: ‘L without the T!’ We say: We’ll inject your T and slap on your E” (The Dyke Project 2024) is the most obvious expression of lesbian and transgender solidarity central to the Dyke Project. “L without the T”, meaning “lesbian without the transgender”, refers to the gender critical belief that lesbianism is not trans-inclusive. The response that “We’ll inject your T and slap on your E” (The Dyke Project 2024) is the Dyke Project's vow to support trans dykes by (figuratively and literally) administering testosterone and estrogen hormone replacement therapy. “They say: ‘Lesbians are under threat!’ We say: We ARE the threat. *Dykes* threaten every system of oppression, whose side are you on” (The Dyke

Project 2024) is the formulation of the dyke identity as being an intersectional, marginalized, and political identity. The assertion that “Dykes threaten every system of oppression” (The Dyke Project 2024) is underpinned by the intersection of multiple marginalized identities that are at odds with the cisheteronormative state. The Combahee River Collective had a similar argument as a group composed of many lesbian black women. In the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977), the authors wrote: “If black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression” (7). This is exactly what the Dyke Project is arguing: that if cis and transgender lesbians were free, the world would have already rid itself of the entangled systems of oppression that held them as exterior to the state. As we will uncover in Chapter Two, this subscription to the Combahee River Collective’s belief that systems of oppression are intersectional is also how the Dyke Project envisions Palestinian emancipation.

The manifesto has an undeniably playful edge while still expressing the invaluable nature of the dyke identity on activism and politics. In the second column labelled “Our Community Looks Like”, the Dyke Project infuses humour into the contested terrain of who can be a dyke. The entire-column-long section lists as many dyke identities as one could imagine, such as:

“Our community looks like: trans dykes, cis dykes, boydykes, girldykes, non-binary dykes, dykefags, bi dykes, ace dykes, baby dykes, leather dykes, butch dykes, femme dykes, Black dykes, brown dykes, white dykes, Indigenous dykes, Global Majority dykes, dykes in prison, dykes in immigration detention...dykes who are taking over” (The Dyke Project 2024, original emphasis)

This humorous section is not about listing every possible identity so the group can ‘cover its bases’. By demarcating the different types of identities included and represented in the Dyke

Project, the group is articulating its purposefully intersectional mandate. In this regard, the Dyke Project is answering the intersectional call of the Combahee River Collective and Cathy Cohen by broadening its scope of who is included in queer and feminist activist movements.

Unsurprisingly, the list begins with “trans dykes” as yet another example of the trans-inclusive focus of the Dyke Project. The identities I included in the above quote, as well as those I neglected, embody an intersectional gaze of race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, class, and geography. Whereas the Lesbian Project sets strict parameters as to who is ‘allowed’ to be a lesbian, the Dyke Project has a purposefully expansive view of inclusion, to the point of humorous redundancy in the long list. Other than claiming the dyke identity, the only necessary similarity of those in the Dyke Project is an emancipatory focus. This requirement is evident in the last sentence of the column, that common to the group are “dykes who are taking over” (The Dyke Project, 2024).

In a similar spirit of inclusion, the far right-hand section of the manifesto emphasizes the group's activism as:

“Dykes keep us safe! We care for each other, and we don’t leave anyone behind. Bring your queer comrades, your DIY dykes, your DJs, your football team, your service tops and power bottoms, your enemies and your favourite exes– *it's time to get together*” (The Dyke Project 2024, my emphasis).

Perhaps a humorous play on the previous line about bringing “your favourite exes”, my emphasis on “its time to get together” displays the group's inclusivity and solidarity (The Dyke Project 2024). In the same spirit of inclusion, the Dyke Project is insisting that they “don’t leave anyone behind”, followed by a small list of humorous, dyke-specific, people to invite to join the movement (The Dyke Project 2024).

Understanding the identity politics between the Lesbian Project and Dyke Project is essential to my argument of how the emancipatory lean of the Dyke Project foregrounds their solidarity with Palestinians. Essentially, the Dyke Project follows the lineage of queer theory to imagine identity as intersectional and necessarily political. In contradistinction to the Dyke Project, the Lesbian Project exemplifies the theory of gay and lesbian studies that inscribes identity as something to be protected and exclusionary, often exhibiting reactionary conservative ideals. Due to this political distinction, the Dyke Project is more likely to be in solidarity with another oppressed group, such as trans people and Palestinians. Subaltern solidarity, which is explained and explored in the following chapter, could not be achieved between the Dyke Project and Palestinians without the Dyke Projects emancipatory politics derived from queer theory.

Prominent feminist lesbian, Judith Butler, wrote in *Gender Trouble* what the Dyke Project is exactly arguing:

“Identity categories tend to be instruments of *regulatory regimes*, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression. This is not to say that I will not appear at a political occasion under the sign of the lesbian, but that I would like to have it *permanently unclear* what precisely that sign signifies” (Butler in Schotten 2018, 81, my emphasis).

CHAPTER TWO: Subaltern Solidarity: The Dyke Project and Palestine

*“Opportunities for solidarity lie in what is **incommensurable** rather than what is common across these efforts” (Tuck and Yang 2012)*

Queer solidarity for Palestine is often viewed through the lens of what we (queers and Palestinians) have in common, how we are in conversation with one another, and how these identities co-constitute one another. This chapter argues that what queers and Palestinians have in common is unique subalternity. Subalternity in geography and in the fight against state hegemony. Yet, what queers and Palestinians have in common is not the greatest tie between them. Oftentimes, their actions overlap in separate circles; this is their commonality. When a dyke lives in London, that subalternity. When a Palestinian lives in Israel or the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OCP) of Gaza, the West Bank, or East Jerusalem, that is the social position of subalternity.

This chapter argues that the dyke in London must resist every urge to say "I am like Palestinians because...". The dyke in London is importantly unlike the Palestinian. Obviously, there are Palestinians in London and queers in Palestine. What I am referring to, however, is the social position (subalternity) of the dyke in London (Palestinian or not) and the Palestinian in Palestine (queer or not). What makes this activism subversive and threatening to the nation-state is the fact that the state and hegemonic world order can subjugate people on different continents, and they can still find their way to each other politically. This is exactly why they tell the dyke in London that they must not care about the Palestinian because the Palestinian will kill you. They are afraid that the dyke and Palestinian can care about one another without ever stepping foot in

the same geographic region. They are afraid that the dyke and Palestinian are forging bonds beyond the nation state, that the nation state does not matter in their relationship, that solidarity is in spite of the borders and governments and world order.

This is exactly why the tradition of transnational solidarity is relevant to this case study. Yet, it is not because the dyke and the Palestinian see one another as some global citizen or higher-order relative. No bond, whether citizenship or blood, constitutes this queer subaltern solidarity. The dyke and the Palestinian do not need anything in common to relate to or care about one another. It is their unique subalternity that has placed their struggle in conversation with one another. What the dyke and the Palestinian have in common is their unique subalternity and force against the state system.

The dyke and the Palestinian do not need to coordinate solidarity visits to each other's lands to care about one another. That does not mean land and one's connection to it is unimportant. Land is important; the state is not. Identity is important; citizenship is not. That non-statal way of being puts the dyke and Palestinian into conversation with each other.

A real or imagined exteriority to the state is what connects the dyke and the Palestinian. Our experiences of this exteriority are not the same; they are unique and contextual. This exteriority is what Gramsci called “subalternity”.

THE SUBALTERN

The “subaltern” is a demographical concept coined by Antonio Gramsci in his Prison Notebooks. The subaltern are subordinate to the ruling class in terms of political and social power. Gramsci took a creative turn from Marx’s “proletariat,” using “subaltern” to describe those in the “lowest strata of society” (Green 2021, xxxii). Gramsci differentiated the subaltern

from the proletariat due to the different economic class contexts in Northern and Southern Italy (Chatterjee n.d.). Therefore, from the outset, the subaltern was a place-based term molded from the political, economic, and geographic environment around it. Conveniently for students of Gramsci and subaltern studies, he never provides a precise definition of his vision of the subaltern groups (Green 2021, xxxvii). Yet, Gramsci does acknowledge the subaltern's lack of political power by claiming they are “subject to the initiatives of the dominant class” (Gramsci Notebook 3 §14, quoted in Green 2021, xxxvii). Therefore, the subaltern goes beyond Marxist economics and instead incorporates political and social hierarchy into what makes someone subaltern. Importantly for my study of the subaltern, even in their position of relative powerlessness, Gramsci described them as rebelling against the dominant class in pursuit of liberation (Green 2021, xxxvii). Yet, “despite periodic rebellions, [the subaltern] never adequately challenge dominant classes”, according to Martin (2023). Therefore, perhaps it is the coming together of subaltern peoples that can be the catalyst to change. While Gramsci used the subaltern to replace the proletariat, I use the queer feminist subaltern as a turn away from the necessity of labour or class as defining characteristics. In a further differentiation from Gramsci, the queer feminist subaltern is primarily about the centrality of identity and place as opposed to economic and political hierarchy within the state.

Gramsci’s musings on the subaltern remained under the radar in academic pursuits until the popularization of the term by Ranajit Guha in 1982. Guha began using the term to critique the historiography of South Asian studies, which often leaves out the subaltern peoples (Green 2021, xxi). In his original writings, Guha defined the subaltern as those subordinated in Indian society due to their class, age, gender, and caste (862). In 1988, Guha collaborated with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to publish the now well-known essays on the subaltern, and in turn, kick-

started the field of post-colonial subaltern studies. Spivak's infamous article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" argued that the subaltern's ability to speak and be represented is taken away by the elite (Spivak 1988). The subaltern cannot speak in a form comprehensible to the elite due to structures of colonialism (Spivak 1988).

Since these original publications, subaltern studies now involve research in a variety of disciplines such as literature, history, and political science. As notioned to above, subaltern studies intersect and overlap with post-colonial studies, and many use the two in conjunction as methodologies (Green 2021, xxii).

SUBALTERN SOLIDARITY

In activism and the academy, solidarity has been debated, studied, and theorized. In the academy, sociologists and psychologists take up interest in solidarity through the lens of human behaviour, attending more specifically through the paradoxical practice of subverting self-interest. Political scientists, on the other hand, view solidarity as an act of activists to assess the political viability of such movements. Despite these differences, these disciplines are concerned with the question of whether and to what degree solidarity requires commonality of traits/circumstances/sameness. The question of sameness as a precursor for solidarity is a strain of solidarity scholarship that persists today in tandem with other conceptions.

In its most essential categorization, solidarity can be distinguished between two types: solidarity *with* and solidarity *among*. Solidarity *with* does not require symmetry in identity, and therefore, those who are in solidarity *with* are not members of the target group (Sangiovanni and Viehoff 2023). Solidarity *among*, however, "usually requires a rough symmetry in the attitudes and dispositions of its members" (Sangiovanni and Viehoff 2023, n.p.). I argue that these are unhelpful categories, as many forms of solidarity activism exhibit both solidarity *with* and

among. Furthermore, this binary thinking has been criticized by scholars such as Sebastian Garbe (2022) for being fundamentally unable to take up intersectional identities and their social movements. That is to say, historical theorizations of solidarity have been studies by and of white, cisgender, and heterosexual men. These critiques by Garbe and others have led to the modern, non-hegemonic conceptions of solidarity that we will now explore.

The root or origin of a display of solidarity is divided into three traditions: social, civic, and political (Garbe 2022). Social solidarity refers to communal/social relations and fundamentally requires a sense of *belonging* (Scholz 2008). Thus, a common trait or experience is the baseline for social solidarity. Civic solidarity, on the other hand, is state-centric and based on the sense of belonging an individual feels or is ascribed due to membership (Garbe 2022). Therefore, civic solidarity is often institutional and protected/created by law. Related to the case of the Dyke Project and most Palestine solidarity activism is the third tradition of political solidarity. Political solidarity is rooted in the tradition of socialist, anarchist, decolonial, and feminist activism (Garbe 2022). It arises in response to “human suffering” and manifests as a “positive duty” and “collective responsibility” (Scholz 2008). Therefore, one could say that political solidarity is *reactionary*. This also makes it harder to maintain momentum because the solidarity can fizzle out just as swiftly as it was enacted. Furthermore, a political solidarity activist group might take up solidarity with whoever is in the news and lacks a long-term commitment to emancipatory activism. What differentiates political solidarity the most is its potential formations and futures. For example, feelings of political solidarity can morph into “different scopes of intervention” such as rebellion or revolution (Garbe 2022, 37). Of course, the potential of this form of solidarity to become radical and emancipatory necessitates a move away from its reactionary tendencies.

In this research, the essential question of solidarity used to be: “do we have to be similar to be in solidarity?” Whereas now the question is: “should solidarity be universalizing or reflexive?” Jodi Dean (1996) questions whether we should be in solidarity with one another because we are all human, or should we recognize and retain our differences *and yet* still care for one another. Does solidarity require me to see myself in you? Dean argues in favour of feminist solidarity, which might emphasize “the particularity and situatedness of different actors” to ensure “reflexive solidarity” (Dean 1996). On the other hand, David Featherstone (2012) argues in favour of solidarity being a potentially universalizing factor to connect human struggle internationally. Further complicating this tradition is Sebastian Garbe’s overarching conception of solidarity as a decolonial theory that rejects the proscription of “social cohesion” (2022).

David Featherstone (2012) theorized that political solidarity is created by subaltern actors, not elites, and has the transnational power to connect people across geographies and uneven power relations. This idea of relating across uneven power relations brings Nira Yuval-Davis’ (1999) theory of transversalism into conversation with political solidarity. Transversalism is a feminist praxis of remaining rooted in one’s identity while being open to shifting perspectives while speaking across power asymmetries (Yuval-Davis, 1999). While Yuval-Davis does not explicitly mention transversalism as a form of solidarity, it is interesting to think about and potentially apply transversalism to Featherstone’s subaltern solidarity. However, Yuval-Davis’ feminist theory of transversalism is perhaps more properly compared to Dean’s feminist solidarity theory due to their emphasis on reflexivity through difference. This thesis will amalgamate Featherstone’s theory of solidarity as “constructing...new ways of relating” beyond similarities between actors (2012) with Dean and Yuval-Davis’ feminist idea of maintaining identity differences. Importantly in my case of queer solidarity for Palestine, political solidarity

is “forged from below” among the subaltern (Featherstone 2012) without erasing difference (Yuval-Davis 1999; Dean 1996). Essentially, the dyke and the Palestinian remain rooted and identifying-with their place of origin while being in solidarity.

Not only do solidarities start at the grassroots level, but they also challenge state hegemony and prescribed geographies of connection (Featherstone 2012). Featherstone calls this form of solidarity internationalism, a term that has been used in Sarah Schulman’s conception of the “queer international” (2012), or Indigenous internationalism, as used by Jonathan Crossen (2017). Internationalism is sometimes replaced by the term transnationalism in the literature on solidarity, specifically in the feminist space. However, no matter the term used, Featherstone’s key argument is that solidarity “is the generative world-making possibilities of subaltern political activity” (Featherstone 2012, 9). Relatedly to this thesis, Featherstone’s use of Gramsci’s “subaltern” in the solidarity activism context will be extrapolated to my case of queer solidarity for Palestine.

Queer solidarity for Palestine has long been viewed as paradoxical and even dangerous. Zionists, however, understand the need to cast a wide net and promote their cause by appealing to a wide audience, including Western progressives. Especially in the face of decades of human rights abuses that raise even a liberal’s eyebrows, Zionists have created a marketing campaign using gay rights to bolster and protect their settler colony in Palestine. A common refrain coming from these liberal Zionists is that “Western queers should not care about Palestine because if they went there they would be killed for being queer”. Barring the legitimacy of this claim, why should Western queers express solidarity for a potentially hostile people in the Middle East? This is a central tension my thesis will comment on: the subversion of homonationalist rhetoric through an analytic of political solidarity.

The homonationalist allegation of the incompatibility of queer solidarity for Palestine is challenged but not theorized in many papers and books. In their article about the life and death of Queers Against Israeli Apartheid Toronto, Kouri-Towe (2017) only briefly acknowledges the tension queer activists face in organizing for Palestine. Kouri-Towe explains this phenomenon as a paradox between neoliberal human rights discourse and “instrumentalized sexualities” by the state to serve and reinforce hegemonic violence (2017). Perhaps most puzzling to the outsider when considering queer solidarity for Palestine is “its refusal to call for the sexual liberation of the queer subject” (Kouri-Towes, 2017). If we politicize a hierarchy of needs, queers for Palestine understand the need for decolonial liberation *before* an internal discourse on queer rights. Jasbir Puar succinctly put it that “Palestinian queer organizers assert that it is irrelevant whether Palestinian society is homophobic or not” since “the occupation is the primary site of struggle (Puar, 2013). However, queer Palestinian Sa’ed Atshan has challenged this line of reasoning from Western solidarity groups as reinscribing homophobia or supporting its existence in Palestine. In his book *Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique*, Atshan (2020) argues that the anti-imperial impulse of Western solidarity groups often pits decolonization over the struggle against Palestinian homophobia and toxic masculinity. Atshan coined the term ethnoheteronormativity to describe the intertwined oppression that queer Palestinians face “from dual systems of ethnocracy on one hand and heteronormativity and toxic masculinity on the other” (2020, 10). Therefore, he calls for the dual recognition of oppressive Zionism and homophobia.

Queer solidarity for Palestine is a radical act in and of itself due to homonationalism. Therefore, ‘radical’ conceptions of liberation- such as an end to the occupation rather than a ceasefire as an end-goal- are less of an ideological stretch for queer people. Morgensen (2015)

notes that “queer Palestinian activism is grounded in Palestinian decolonization” (312). Furthermore, Morgensen notes that queer solidarity for Palestine must be reflexive in recognizing the colonial realities that we (Western queers) live within. Therefore, queer solidarity is rooted within the feminist tradition since both demand reflexivity in their activism for the subject.

Queering solidarity is undertheorized in the solidarity canon in general, and the queer solidarity for Palestine specifically. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will take a theoretical approach and create a specific idea of solidarity as it pertains to queer activists in solidarity for a decolonial peace in Palestine. Specifically, the chapter will explore in-depth and relate Gramsci’s subaltern theory and Featherstone’s subaltern solidarity to queer solidarity for Palestine. This ambition will be carried out through the method of theorizing with the aid of pulling in materials from the *Dyke Project’s* manifesto and/or social media material.

How does one use subaltern solidarity in this particular case without bastardizing the subaltern or committing the unfeminist sin of presenting Western queers and Palestinians as equal variables? Integral to my defense of comparing these cases is the idea that “subalternity constitutes a *general dynamic*... within different conditions and contexts” (Thomas 2018, 874, my emphasis). Dykes in London and Palestinians are not the same and do not experience the same material or marginalized reality. Instead, it is their *unique* subalternity that puts their struggles into conversation and solidarity with one another. David Featherstone’s subaltern solidarity provides a fruitful litmus test of effective and emancipatory solidarity activism, particularly in its goal as a transformative way of relating (Featherstone 2012, 5).

Gramsci and authors in the field of Subaltern Studies inspired David Featherstone’s (2012) concept of subaltern solidarity. Featherstone’s subaltern solidarity is central to this

chapter's argument and will act as a framework unto which the Dyke Project's social media posts and manifesto will be analyzed. Ultimately, this thesis understands subaltern solidarity as the solidarity between two subaltern groups who are uniquely oppressed in their own geographical context, and yet, still care about one another's liberation.

THE DYKE PROJECT AND SUBALTERN SOLIDARITY

The *Dyke Project's* earliest conception of subaltern solidarity is displayed in the creation of the group and initial organizing against transphobia. Solidarity between dykes and transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people exhibits an evolution of how the group envisions solidarity. On one hand, this solidarity is *between* dykes and trans people; a form of solidarity that is more like that of dykes and Palestinians. In this case, members of the Dyke Project are organizing to oppose anti-trans legislation and rhetoric by envisioning trans people as part of a larger, queer subaltern community. On the other hand, the Dyke Project is specifically *including* trans people within the category of "dyke". This is in direct opposition to the Lesbian Projects' argument that lesbians are women sexually attracted to women. Let us take these two avenues of solidarity in turn.

The latter case is present in the consolidation of the activist group and its goals. Importantly, this solidarity instills the belief that dykes can be trans (and vice versa). In the early days of the Dyke Project, its first protest exemplified a definition and display of solidarity still to be evolved. The first protest the Dyke Project initiated was not an example of subaltern solidarity. This is because the group was specifically framing its activism around supporting all members of its community: cisgender and transgender. Organizers with the Dyke Project worded their support for transgender/non-binary/gender non-conforming lesbians as "we are one

community” (Hansford 2023). Therefore, the Dyke Project is not in solidarity with a different, related or not, group. Instead, this form of solidarity is with a subset of its own “community”.

In the former case, the Dyke Project imagines a subaltern solidarity with *all* transgender folks, regardless of if they consider themselves dykes/lesbians. For example, when the Dyke Project advocates against the reevaluation of trans-inclusion rules for Hampstead Heath Ponds in London (Dyke Project 2025), this is an act of subaltern solidarity. In this case, the Dyke Project is organizing to support all trans people, regardless of sexual orientation; therefore, identifying oneself as a lesbian or dyke is not grounds for exclusion in the group's care for the issue. It should not be argued that the Dyke Project is in solidarity with trans folks in the traditional sense of two explicitly different groups. There are trans dykes, to be sure, as that is the entire purpose of creating the Dyke Project. The Dyke Project is in solidarity with *all* trans people, not just trans dykes. In a similar way to how the Dyke Project is in solidarity with all Palestinians, not just queer ones. Therefore, the Dyke Project's more recent activism against transphobia is the act of putting two differently subaltern groups into conversation and solidarity with one another. Yet, this case of subaltern solidarity is not as rich in study as the Dyke Project's solidarity with Palestinians; a case that demands to know if nationality, geography, citizenship, and borders are at odds with the concept of solidarity.

The earliest case of the Dyke Project's solidarity with Palestinians was on October 19, 2023, twelve days after the Al-Aqsa Flood operation. The Instagram post (Dyke Project, 2023) is a call to protest as part of the “Joint Struggle Bloc”, a group of activist organizations supporting the *Palestinian Youth Movement* in London. Immediately, the Dyke Project is comprehending their solidarity for Palestine in a subaltern fashion. The language of a “joint struggle” signifies a recognition of the difference in oppression, because, importantly, they are not claiming a singular

struggle. In the post, the Dyke Project writes, “What is our ‘joint struggle’? We are *united in our fight* against systems of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism which *oppress us all*. We are unconditionally in solidarity with the Palestinians in *their struggle* against settler colonialism” (Dyke Project, 2023, my emphasis). The wording of this caption is indicative of subaltern solidarity. First, the definition of a “bloc” is a “combination of persons, groups, or nations forming a unit with a common interest or purpose” (Merriam-Webster, n.d). The use of ‘bloc’ is also a re-entrance of Gramsci who defined the “historic bloc” as a category distinct from economic class (similarly to the subaltern versus proletariat) formed under a specific hegemony (Martin 2023). The maintenance of difference is integral to the definition and use of the term bloc. There is a marked coalitional aspect to a bloc, where different parties are coming together around a shared interest but remaining individual in character. “United in our fight” continues the work of “bloc” by implying recognition of difference between members of the bloc and Palestinians. Importantly, the Dyke Project is not claiming to have the same fight as Palestinians or any other group at the protest. Instead, being united in the fight against oppressive systems characterizes each group as uniquely subaltern that experience intersecting “systems of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism which oppress us all” (Dyke Project, 2023). This sentiment echoes that of the Combahee River Collective in Chapter One. Furthermore, “their struggle” preserves the individuality of the conditions and experiences of settler colonialism and genocide for Palestinians in particular. While the construction of the bloc is articulated as “our fight”, the subject of the activism— the Palestinians in Gaza facing genocide— sustains their individuality in this expression of solidarity.

A common expression of subaltern solidarity between the Dyke Project and Palestinians is the refrain of an interconnected liberation. This frame of solidarity beckons to what Angela

Davis called the “indivisibility of justice” (Davis, 2017). The concept expresses that one group's justice and freedom are contingent on the justice and freedom of the other. “The indivisibility of justice implies that we cannot separate different causes, different struggles” (Davis, 2017):

Davis’ theory does not necessitate an erasure of difference. Instead, she argues that one cannot be selective in one's pursuit or advocacy of justice. Meaning, dykes cannot want trans rights while being Zionist, because queer liberation is dependent on everyone's liberation. Therefore, Davis’ concept exemplifies a feminist subaltern solidarity because there is a recognition and maintenance of difference— it is our necessary difference that drives a justice-based activism in solidarity with similarly or differently oppressed people. Davis directly addressed the issue of queer rights and Palestinians at the end of her speech. Specifically, she claims that the activist group “Queers for BDS” agrees that “justice is indivisible, equality is indivisible” (2017). In mentioning this group, Davis argued that there must be an “internationalization of justice” and that her audience in the West must expand their activism to include those facing oppression in Palestine (2017). This is exactly what transnational activism does, and therefore, the Dyke Project is involved in the internationalization of the indivisibility of justice. Since its inception in early 2023 as a trans-rights focused activist group, the Dyke Project exemplifies the adoption of an indivisibility of justice framework by taking up the issue of Palestine post October 7, 2023. The utility of Davis’ concept for the Dyke Project is used and expanded upon in their manifesto and Instagram posts.

The Dyke Project’s manifesto expressly reflects the indivisibility of justice in stating that “dykes threaten every system of oppression” (Dyke Project Manifesto, 2024). On one hand, this statement beckons to the politics of dyke identity, as covered in Chapter 1. On the other hand, this line can be read as claiming that the dykes involved in this movement have taken up a

subaltern form of solidarity that emboldens them to challenge intersecting and varied systems of oppression. Furthermore, in a post from November 2, 2023, the Dyke Project is imploring others to join a protest for a free Palestine by claiming that Palestinians and dykes “fight is interconnected and [they] stand in complete solidarity with Palestinians because [dykes] are not truly free until Palestine is free” (Dyke Project, 2023). By claiming that the oppression faced by dykes and Palestinians is “interconnected”, the Dyke Project is invoking subaltern solidarity and the indivisibility of justice simultaneously. Importantly to my application of subaltern solidarity, the Dyke Project is maintaining the delineation and difference between British dykes and Palestinian oppression. Yet, by claiming that their struggles and fight are interconnected, the Dyke Project is aligning itself with Davis’ idea that one group’s freedom is contingent on the other.

As the genocide progressed, so did the Dyke Project's conception of the connection between Palestinian and queer struggles. On the second anniversary of the Al Aqsa Flood, the Dyke Project released a post that is a markedly more comprehensive and clear articulation of the indivisibility between queer and Palestinian oppression. The post read: “Our liberation will always be dependent on Palestinian freedom from Zionism. As the contradictions of liberal identity politics are laid bare, our solidarity remains unconditional. Palestinian liberation is the condition for our liberation” (Dyke Project, 2025). Politically, the group’s messaging is becoming more sophisticated in naming Zionism as the oppressor of Palestinians. In comparison to the above quote from 2023 relating to the indivisibility of justice, this post is more direct in claiming that queer liberation is “dependent” and “conditional” to Palestinian freedom from Zionism and liberal identity politics. The reference to “liberal identity politics” is likely an acknowledgement of Zionist pinkwashing that would have British dyke’s solidarity as

incompatible with the Palestinian struggle due to purported rampant and violent homophobia. Of course, the Dyke Project combats this homonormativity by claiming their solidarity is “unconditional”; that is, regardless of the presence of homophobia in a group of people, justice and freedom from oppression are the guiding forces of their activism. Thus, the indivisibility of justice is, in fact, *driving* the Dyke Project’s practice of subaltern solidarity.

In conclusion, subaltern solidarity describes how two vastly different, but interconnected peoples can be in solidarity with one another. The Dyke Project views itself and Palestinians as subaltern while maintaining a place-based distinction between the groups identity. The dyke and the Palestinian are both subaltern and their liberation is predicated on the other. Yet, relating to Palestinians as a subaltern group does not come without a radical, queer perception on politics and relation; something that by virtue of their identity politics the Dyke Project is able to understand.

CHAPTER THREE: Beyond the Rally and Toward Coalition Building

LIMITATIONS OF STATE-CENTRIC SOLIDARITY

The Dyke Project's solidarity activism for Palestine begins and ends at formal protests aimed at the state. Using Gould (2007), I would describe the Dyke Project's activism for Palestine as *discursive* solidarity in that there is little material change resulting. Protests and social media posts regarding Palestine often focus on what the group wishes the British government would do, and therefore, this activism is local and bound to a state-centric model. Many posts on the Dyke Project's Instagram account repeat messaging such regarding British funding, arming, and support of Israel. Furthermore, the group often advocates for a ceasefire, an end to the occupation, and lifting the siege on Gaza. Criticizing governments is a common and important function of activist groups. However, the Dyke Project uses an additional tactic when advocating for trans rights: mutual aid. Organizing clothing drives, making art, and facilitating workshops make up the politics the Dyke Project engages in for trans people. The relational element afforded to their activism for trans people is markedly missing for that of Palestinians. In this chapter, I argue that queering and feministing subaltern solidarity through coalition building and mutual aid will remedy the Dyke Project's waning activism for Palestine.

At the time of writing (April 2026), the last time the Dyke Project posted directly about Palestine was December 11, 2025. Furthermore, the frequency of their posts dedicated to Palestine has decreased since the height of social media activism after October 7th, 2023. This lull in activism for Palestine is indicative of the reactionary nature of the Dyke Project's solidarity.

The first Instagram post the Dyke Project created on the topic of Palestine was posted on October 19th, 2023. In this post, the group is calling for the Labour Party (government of Britain at the time) to enact an “immediate ceasefire, stop arming Israel, and end the occupation” (Dyke Project 2023). The purpose of that post was to call attention to a protest the Dyke Project was taking part in. Therefore, the post is both state-centric- it calls for action from Britain and Israel- and focused on protesting. Protests have taken place at high-visibility locations such as the Labour Party Headquarters, Speakers’ Corner, Robert Raikes statue, Liverpool Street Station, BBC, Oxford Circus, Hyde Park, Embassies, and Westminster Bridge. Yet, common to all of these protests and the Dyke Project’s activism for Palestine is a goal of state intervention communicated through the vehicle of protests/rallies. This chapter interrogates how useful a primary use of *disruption* as an activist tactic is in times of crisis.

In contrast, the Dyke Project’s activism for trans rights is more robust and relational. To be sure, the Dyke Project has participated in and led protests/rallies for trans rights in London. However, they also regularly raise money or hold events that go beyond a state-centric focus. The first non-rally method of activism the Dyke Project posted on their Instagram was a clothing drive for trans people in prison (Dyke Project 2024). The Dyke Project partnered with a local group called Bent Bars to collect and donate gender-affirming clothing for trans prisoners in the United Kingdom. Not only does this exemplify a shift toward material action in response to a problem, but it is also an example of creating bonds with other activist organizations.

In response to a City of London consultation process regarding trans inclusion in the public swimming ponds at Hampstead Heath, the Dyke Project planned community events to “reclaim” the area (Dyke Project 2025). Taking place on November 8th 2025, the event called “Whose Ponds? Our Ponds!” gathered people to partake in a variety of activities such as screen-

printing, foraging, a queer history walk, sports games, and visual arts (Dyke Project 2025).

According to the Dyke Project, the purpose of the events was to “celebrate some of the beautiful things about our community and resist the transphobia of the consultation” (2025). Building community, having fun, and materially contributing to a cause is reflective of a relational mutual aid that the Dyke Project fosters for trans issues. Perhaps a result of the group's awareness raising and community building around the trans-exclusionary policy proposal, the consultation process yielded a 9 in 10 response rate voting to keep Hampstead Heath trans-inclusive (Dyke Project 2025). While it cannot be conclusively attributed to the work of the Dyke Project, there is no doubt that including people in community-minded events leads to positive political effect.

A future direction the Dyke Project could take to create sustainable and relational solidarity activism for Palestine is by interacting with Palestinians and providing mutual aid. Chapter Three's turn to feminist coalition building and mutual aid is aimed at remedying the Dyke Project's waning activism for Palestine and practically queering and feministing subaltern solidarity. Chapter Two developed a theory of what *type* of solidarity the Dyke Project exemplifies in its activism for Palestine. However, what does subaltern solidarity *require*? Put another way, does queering and feministing subaltern solidarity demand material action and meaningful change? Mutual aid is a queer and racialized tradition of providing material and psychological care to others in one's community. In the feminist tradition, coalition building is often enacted as cross-community dialogue and relationship building. This chapter will explore both avenues of solidarity alongside the current work of the Dyke Project to determine what emancipatory, intersectional politics requires.

MUTUAL AID

Mutual aid is a practice born out of queer and racialized communities. Much conversation and scholarship around mutual aid was reignited during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the necessity of leaning on one's neighbours in a time of 'stay at home' orders. For example, Natalie Kouri-Towe published an article in 2020 about how times of risk- such as pandemics- necessitate a turn toward "articulations of solidarity through mutual aid" (191). Interestingly, Kouri-Towe is framing mutual aid as a practice of *solidarity*, therefore making it particularly useful for this study on transnational solidarity activism.

In practice, mutual aid or "collaborative human survival" (Kouri-Towes 2020, 191) can look like cooking a meal or sending money to a community member. Thus, there is a distinct ethic of care and relational aspect to mutual aid. Hobart and Kneese (2020) describe care as "affective connective tissue between an inner self and an outer world [that] constitutes a *feeling with*, rather than a feeling for, others" (2, my emphasis). "Feeling with" is a distinctly solidaristic framing of care that emphasizes a non-hierarchical feeling of shared experience/subalternity. Radical care, as theorized by Hobart and Kneese (2020), is a responsive gesture "that can radically remake worlds that exceed those offered by the neoliberal or postneoliberal state, which has proved inadequate in its dispensation of care" (3). Perhaps it seems naive to believe that acts of solidaristic care can meaningfully help Palestinians facing mass atrocities. However, the dyke in London does not have the social or monetary capital to stop a genocide, as evidenced by the little change created by the Dyke Project's protests toward the British government. Therefore, subverting the state-oriented channel of change through solidarity and mutual aid networks that operate below the state is a viable and direct way to provide help. Unfortunately, the need to outsource support to the average individual *is* an outcome of the failure of state and multilateral

governments to protect civilians. In some cases, mutual aid can be seen as a band-aid solution to a systemic problem, for example, when people without healthcare insurance create GoFundMe accounts to raise money for treatment. However, I believe it is simultaneously true that there is a need for state/multilateral protection of Palestinians *and* collectivities of mutual aid must be fostered below the state to create resilient communities.

An example of a people facing the mass atrocity of genocide and receiving mutual aid from a similarly subaltern group happened in 1847 and is instructive of how organizing beyond the state is meaningful even during times of acute crisis. 15 years after experiencing mass displacement and genocide, the Choctaw Nation in the United States sent \$170 to Ireland to help during the Great Hunger. Between the years 2020 and 2024, a GoFundMe in Ireland sent \$2.4 million to Indigenous Nations in America in what the Irish consider a repayment for what the Choctaw Nation sent them during the Great Hunger (O'Neill 2025). I see this exchange of mutual aid as a profound act of subaltern solidarity, the care between two people facing genocide, cultural assimilation, and starvation (Gaffney 2023). What I call subalternity can be reimagined as shared vulnerability, as written by Kouri Towe (2020). Yet, I maintain the use of subalternity as it denotes a more political identification as people under the oppressive hierarchy of the state. Yet, the solidarity between the Irish and Choctaw is quite different from this case study of queers and Palestinians due to power asymmetry. Importantly, dykes in Britain have never faced genocide, statelessness, or displacement. Therefore, practices of queer and feminist subaltern solidarity through a vehicle of mutual aid must “acknowledge that [the dyke and Palestinian] are divided and must develop strategies to overcome fears, prejudices, resentment, competitiveness, etc” (hooks 1986). This is where the issue of mutuality and altruism comes into

play. Does mutual aid demand repayment? Can the Dyke Project provide mutual aid without expectation of anything in return?

The most obvious form of mutual aid might be sharing food in a community, insofar as everyone involved in the exchange has their needs met. Therefore, is donating money to Palestinians mutual aid or is this better referred to as charity? Mutual aid is often thought of as anti-capitalist as it operates beneath the state and without the purpose of profit or capital accumulation. But, if mutual aid must involve me receiving something tangible in return, is its anti-capitalist nature circumvented? The short answer to both questions above is: yes. Donating money to Palestinians without expectation of anything in return *is* mutual aid. Because the Dyke Project would provide funds and materials, its solidarity would not count as charity, as it is non-hierarchical and based on what Palestinians are requesting (Holloway et al. 2024). Furthermore, if the Dyke Project commits to providing aid once the genocide ends, this is an act of mutual aid because it is “working together before, during, and after crises” (Holloway et al. 2024, 57).

Gould (2007) describes transnational mutual aid and solidarity as “when people or associations stand in solidarity with others at a distance, they identify with these others in their efforts to overcome oppression or to eliminate suffering, and they take action to aid these others or stand ready to do so if called upon” (156). When the Choctaw Nation sent money to the Irish, they had no intention or motive to receive anything in return. This was still mutual aid because it was horizontal organizing to send funds to another subaltern group. The Irish sending money over a century later is the possibility of future-making of mutual aid. Giving now while expecting nothing in return so the recipients can survive and potentially send you something in the future when they are able. However, even if the Irish did not provide aid during the

pandemic, this would not undermine the mutual aid dimension. Mutual aid is future-oriented; it is delivered with the intention of helping another subaltern group create its own future.

The use of digital technology by Irish citizens to send millions in aid to Indigenous peoples in America exemplifies solidaristic, below-the-state organizing and the opportunity of technology for mutual aid. Kouri-Towe (2020) emphasizes how COVID-19 shifted community practices of mutual aid as able to reach further due to social media. Therefore, I argue that the pandemic has helped shape the digital mutual aid era we live in. Transnational mutual aid is more obtainable than ever before; people can send and request money to and from others across the world in an instantaneous loop of international banking. But, how can the Dyke Project transfer funds and who will receive them? This is where the practice of feminist coalition building is key to building coalitional solidarity between dykes in Britain and Palestinians.

COALITION BUILDING

Perhaps one of the most well-known pieces on coalition politics is a speech given by Bernice Johnson Reagon in 1981 entitled “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century”. In the speech, Reagon describes the imperative of doing coalitional work in an increasingly interconnected world. That is, working with other people, even those who “who could possibly kill you, because that’s the only way to stay alive” (Reagon 1981, 115). She gives the metaphor of a barred room where a bouncer-of-sorts controls who comes in; this is the exclusionary politics antithetical to coalitions and unhelpful to enacting political change. The activist group in the barred room can become coalitional, Reagon argues, so long as they use the time in that “nurturing space” to construct a political meaning (1981, 116). While not as exclusionary as the Lesbian Project, the Dyke Project exemplified this protective, ‘single-issue’ politics from March

until October 2023, when they focused their energy on pro-trans organizing. However, after October 7th 2023, the Dyke Project realized that “there is no chance that [they could] survive by staying inside the barred room” (Reagon 1981, 116) and began working toward a coalitional politics by expanding their solidarity toward Palestinians. Why was it necessary for British dykes to care about Palestinians? Faced with the reality of a government at home aiding a genocidal government in Israel, the Dyke Project realized that “the barred rooms will not be allowed to exist. They will all be wiped out. That is the plan that we now have in front of us” (Reagon 1981, 119). This sentiment harkens back to Chapter 1, where the Dyke Project articulates their oppression as interconnected and indivisible from that of the Palestinian. Therefore, the barred room where the Dyke Project focused on queer and trans British people was no longer safe and comforting; it was constraining, and constricting their solidarity to the confines of that room and geographical borders meant ignoring the coalitional calling of another subaltern group. Subaltern solidarity, therefore, is the calling of all “these people who also got sick of somebody being on their neck. And maybe if they come together, they can do something about it” (Reagon 1981, 119). Coalitional politics is the manifestation of Davis’ indivisibility of justice; it is the realization that the survival of the dyke is predicated on the survival of the Palestinian which calls for meaningful solidarity organizing.

Some of the feminist activists interviewed by Cole and Luna (2010) in their research on feminist coalition building expressed that intersectional identity enhances coalition building. The ability to “shift between communities and constituencies” as a person of multiple oppressed identities was identified as a predisposing factor for productive coalition building (Cole and Luna 2010, 75). It could be said, in the language of this thesis, that coalition members’ *subalternity* allows them to enter into productive relationships with people who are similarly or

differently subaltern/oppressed. Furthermore, Eleuterio and van Amstel (2020) argue that care is more important than sharing a similar concern in feminist coalitions because it acts as a stronger cohesive force when members of a coalition care about their fellow members and community. Similarly regarding the non-fixity of identity in coalition building, Butler argued that coalitions are “precarious communities” (Butler in Taylor 2018). Accommodating the complexity of identity in coalition building, according to Taylor (2018), requires “politico-ethical coalition politics” (PEC). Taylor describes PEC’s three characteristics as struggle, self-reflexive political commitment, and existential transformation. PEC was distinctive and born out of 1980s women of colour feminist movements in the United States. However, because of PEC’s devotion to “undermining interlocking oppressive forces”, I argue the Dyke Project falls in the lineage of this history of coalitional politics.

Coalition building is fraught “and if you feel the strain, you may be doing some good work” (Reagon 1981, 119). Similarly to the importance of mutual aid at times of risk we explored above, feminist coalition building “can be an effective organizational form to fight against oppression” in critical times (Eleuterio and van Amstel 2020, 18). On the one hand, coalition building has been thought of as feminist utopianism, that is, a romanticization of people getting along and agreeing upon a political course of action. On the other hand, scholars and activists like Reagon emphasize the hard work and discomfort of coalition building. Reagon spoke about how coalition building required working with people who could kill you and often left her feeling like she was going to “keel over any minute and die” (115). Unequal power relations often hinders the creation and maintenance of coalitions. In the colonial context, “intertwined histories of oppression and exploitation” between the colonized and colonizer can pose a threat to sustainable coalition work (Cole and Luna 2010, 86). Relating between two

subaltern groups is not automatically horizontal in its power relations; instead, one subaltern group (or members within each group) may have access to certain degrees of power than the other. Therefore, self-reflexivity, acknowledgment of intersectionality, and a commitment to non-oppressive relationships are imperative for coalitions.

Queering and feministing subaltern solidarity requires a melding of coalition politics and mutual aid. Feminist coalitions and mutual aid constitute one another by providing either the practical or emancipatory edge the other forgoes. Writing about mutual aid, Dean Spade described what I outline as the central goal of queer feminist subaltern solidarity: “the radical act of caring for one another while working together to transform the world” (Spade in Holloway et al. 2024, 48). Caring for one another is actioned through mutual aid while working together motions to coalitional politics. Overall, the goal of transforming the world in these practices of solidarity require a queer theoretical frame. Queering, as explored in Chapter One, is a deconstructivist reimagination of social bonds and world order. Therefore, it is imperative to queer feminist coalition building so it does not fall prey to liberal reifications of the state. Queer feminist subaltern solidarity is the undermining of British and Israeli hegemony through below the state political organizing and forging of transnational bonds.

While the difference between the Dyke Project’s solidarity activism for Palestinians and trans people is a fact, this chapter can only speculate why. The lack of coalition building and mutual aid activism that the Dyke Project engages in for Palestine leads to a couple of central questions: why does the Dyke Project not engage with Palestinians? Why does the Dyke Project focus on state-pointed activism even when the British and Israeli governments do not budge on their military and foreign policy? Perhaps the Dyke Project has not connected with any Palestinian groups because of the dire situation in Gaza. That reasoning is insufficient when

much of the literature explored above stressed the relevance of mutual aid and coalition building during crisis. What better time than during a genocide, occupation, and blockade to provide material or monetary means to Palestinians? The question might then switch to, *who* should the Dyke Project get in touch with, especially when access to the internet can be fraught in Gaza since Israel cut off access to power. There are many pre-existing Palestinian organizations that operate in the West Bank or nearby countries that can act as an intermediary for delivering goods and funds to Gaza. Palestinian queer and feminist groups al-Qaws and Aswat are established and well-known organizations operating in the West Bank that have experience working with Western solidarity groups. The purpose of this brief section is to anticipate some of the potential excuses that could be rendered as to why the Dyke Project has not shifted its focus to coalitional mutual aid.

To conclude this chapter, I will make suggestions on the practical way the Dyke Project can do the above. For coalition building, the Dyke Project should consider forging connections with Palestinian activists and organizations. al-Qaws and Aswat are obvious choices, given the extensive literature on the two organizations' histories of working with queer solidarity groups. Speaking to and building relationships with activist organizations will help the Dyke Project avoid presuming what Palestinians need and believe. It is a “crucial requirement to allow the others [in this case, Palestinians] to determine the forms of aid or support most beneficial to them” for participating in anti-paternalistic transnational solidarity (Gould 2007, 157). Furthermore, a coalition with Palestinians is imperative to direct the funds and materials obtained through mutual aid. Jennifer Gammage (2021) describes this model of coalitional mutual aid as “recipients [having a] place at the organizing table”. For example, the Dyke Project can liaise with a Palestinian organization to find out what is needed then use their relative privilege to raise

money in Britain and send it back to Palestine. Gammage would describe this coalitional mutual aid as “horizontal organizing [that] allows for radical action beyond the protest site or the picket line”. Radical change, in Gammage’s view, requires “those of us living with the hangover of individualistic notions of the subject to relate to others in new ways that allow for reciprocal changes in beliefs and/or behaviors to be understood as a collective strength rather than a personal injury”. This anti-capitalist, below-the-state, ‘subaltern political economy’, remedies the ineffectiveness of state-pointed rallies while contributing to the resilience of Palestinians.

CONCLUSION

Often relegated outside of political science, queer women have a rich history of activism and solidarity that work toward decolonial peace. The Dyke Project is a continuation of this history; whereby both the group and this thesis is heavily informed by Black lesbian feminist thought. Faced with the polycrises of the backsliding of trans and queer rights, genocide in Gaza, increasing hostility toward migrants, and overall unpredictability of the geopolitical landscape of Britain and the world, the Dyke Project's ever morphing solidarity activism is ready to take it on. Problematized in this thesis however, the Dyke Project's solidarity is often reactionary, state-centric, and short-lived. Therefore, if the group aims to persist and take on more solidarity campaigns, it should engage in coalition building and mutual aid.

In conclusion, this thesis has answered the following questions: What difference does dyke identity create for transnational solidarity activism for Palestine? and What is missing in this activism and how can a reactionary movement be sustainable and productive to the lives of Palestinians?

Each chapter in this thesis has been structured to build on the previous to leave its readers with the impression that queer feminist subaltern solidarity is informed and created by an amalgamation of emancipatory queer theory, feminist coalition building, and mutual aid. By now, it should be clear that queer theory inspired and informed the Dyke Project's emancipatory, non-universalizing solidarity for Palestine. Dissatisfied with the economic and class focus of Marx, Gramsci, and Featherstone's theories of solidarity among workers, this thesis queered and feminized Featherstone's subaltern solidarity to draw on broader categories of difference such as gender, sexuality, and coloniality.

The discourse analysis in this thesis has yielded insights into the political meaning of the label “dyke” and the differences between activism strategies for trans issues and Palestine. While the reclamation of derogatory terms, such as queer and dyke, do not automatically inscribe a radical politics, I have found that in this case study it has. In particular, derogatory terms such as dyke have been purposefully used by the group to differentiate itself and its politics from liberal, gender critical groups. Through social media posts and the manifesto, the Dyke Project infuses dyke with a trans-inclusive, progressive connotation.

Analysis of social media posts have uncovered the different strategies of activism the Dyke Project engages in for different issues. By comparing posts about trans and Palestinian solidarity, I found that the Dyke Project’s activism for trans British people involves more relational, mutual aid acts whereas formal protests and rallies were the extent of activism for Palestine. While I do not intend on devaluing the importance of attending protests for Palestine, I used the Dyke Project’s work on Hampstead Heath ponds to exemplify how going beyond the rally can produce positive, material change.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Just as I argued there are limitations and future directions the Dyke Project should consider, this thesis has its own constraints and possibilities for future research. First, the discourse analysis method is a limitation because it is largely speculative. Conducting interviews with members of the Dyke Project would have (and could be in the future) allowed me to gain clear answers on the intention of the group to use the term dyke as well as to articulate their vision of solidarity. Nonetheless, social media and written media tells an isolated story to its viewers, and therefore, the discourse analysis of this thesis has produced research into how the

average person can understand the Dyke Project just by being a passive audience. Perhaps a future project comparing the construction of meaning by their social media and manifesto to member and leader conceptions would be productive research on methodology when researching fluid solidarity activist groups.

Another limitation related to not being in contact with the group is my inability to see *who* are members of the Dyke Project. Race and ethnicity are absent categories in this study. Are there diasporic Palestinians in the Dyke Project? How diverse is the membership? These are important questions that complicate analysis. Interestingly, the Dyke Project held a meeting for “dyke of colour” on August 13, 2025 (Dyke Project 2025). This meeting seemed to be targeted as a recruitment event, so therefore, perhaps the Dyke Project is predominantly white. I can only speculate, which is why further research into the demographics of the group should be conducted. Furthermore, I anticipate race to be a complicating factor in my theorization of subaltern solidarity; which is all the more reason to consider it.

Future research emanating from this thesis is the broader use and resurgence of the term dyke in British/Scottish queer politics. Gender critical feminism and the insistence on single sex spaces is predominant in Britain and Scotland. While Lesbian Project founders Bindel and Stock have been mentioned in this thesis, another notable name in this transphobic politics is J.K Rowling. The lesbian iteration of gender critical feminism is particularly underresearched, and therefore, future study of the Lesbian Project could yield further insights.

The Dyke Project do not appear to be the only activist groups using the term dyke to distance themselves from the Lesbian Project. Therefore, a larger-scale project analyzing these groups is needed in relation to this thesis’ inaugural research on the phenomenon.

This thesis has focused on categories other than class and economics for defining someone as subaltern. However, further research could bring economics back into the conversation through a connection between mutual aid as a “subaltern political economy” (as I have coined it). Connections would be made with traditions of feminist political economy and peace political economy. This research would be relevant to studies of anti-capitalism and solidarity.

RELEVANCE AND PERSISTANCE

As of April 2026, Gaza has been under nearly persistent fire by Israel for 29 months. Figures from October 2025 estimate that there have been 236,505 casualties in Gaza, which is 10% of the population (Crawford 2025). As implemented by the Trump peace plan, there has been a ‘ceasefire’ between Israel and Hamas since October 2025. However, Israel continues to bomb Gaza almost daily. Furthermore, the resumption of normal life is far out of reach for Palestinians as many are displaced, disabled and in humanitarian camps. A UN report estimates that human development in Gaza has been sent back 77 years and the cost to rebuild will be \$71 billion (United Nations 2026). Rebuilding Gaza is an economically appeasing idea for real estate and natural resource countries (such as the USA) and moguls. Therefore, a ceasefire with Israel is not an absence of imperialism since the USA is controlling the future of Gaza. The genocide in Gaza is persisting and so should transnational solidarity activism.

Research on British solidarity for Palestine is particularly relevant due to the repression of activists there. The proscription of Palestine Action in July 2025 was a watershed moment in the criminalization of solidarity protests for Palestine. Palestine Action’s mandate is to “end complicity with Israel’s genocidal apartheid regime” and often targets arms manufacturers (such

as Elbit Systems) and airports where arms flow through (Palestine Action n.d.). In June 2025, the direct action group Palestine Action vandalized two Royal Air Force (RAF) aircrafts at Brize Norton. Three days after this direct action, the Government of Britain decided to proscribe Palestine Action under the 2000 Terrorism Act. Proscribing an organization effectively means criminalizing anyone who is a member, expresses, or displays support of the group (Rowbottom 2025). As a result, over 2000 people were arrested for ‘supporting’ Palestine Action (Johnson 2026). This ‘safety’ measure by the British government is disproportionate to the harm caused by Palestine Action. For example, another proscribed group is Al-Qaeda. Therefore, this decision by the government has been considered a targeted repression of pro-Palestinian protest in particular. The High Court of England and Wales agreed with activists when they found the UK government’s proscription to be unlawful in February 2026. Taken together, we can see the particular landscape of the UK provides grounds for research on activist repression and anti-Palestinian racism.

In sum, the repressive, imperial, and genocidal environment we live in demands solidarity between the subaltern. Understanding the oppressed as uniquely, and place-specifically subaltern provides productive grounds to care *for* and *with* other subaltern groups. Building relations and providing care for those most predominantly subaltern at any given time is imperative for collective survival. I am not arguing for discursive solidarity to be forgone. Instead, I am pushing for a tripartite solidarity activism in which social commentary, affective dialogue, and material action co-constitute subaltern solidarity.

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