

QUEER NATION TO HOMONATIONALISM: A DISCOURSE ON QUEER ACTIVISTS,
NATIONALISM, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

By

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Abstract

During the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, a new form of nationalism developed within the United States known as queer nationalism. The direct-action group Queer Nation, an offshoot of ACT UP, used nationalist and human rights language to unite, instill pride, and increase legitimacy among its members. Queer Nation demonstrated a new form of nationalism that placed queer people in positions of power. Following the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis and in the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, normative nationalism in the United States incorporated the agenda of homonationalism. This form of nationalism has co-opted gay people in an approach to justifying Islamophobic policies in the name of protecting gay rights. This paper examines several primary sources, including oral histories and news reports to investigate how nationalist and human rights discourses factor into queer nationalism and homonationalism. An analysis of findings suggests that queer nationalism can be understood from the bottom up, whereas homonationalism functions from the top down.

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Introduction

The twentieth century was a period of rapid social change in society, particularly with regard to rights for individuals and marginalized groups. Various social and civil rights movements emerged to challenge certain societal hegemonic structures, such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. Multiple racial minority groups emerged to fight white supremacy while women, through feminist groups, sought to define their position in the male-dominated society. Towards the end of the century, gay liberation movements emerged to change the unfavorable narrative about homosexuality.¹ The United States and other Western countries had a track record of discriminating against homosexuals as society viewed them as mentally ill- a biological or, more so, a diseased type of societal problem. Diverse lesbian, gay, and transgender groups emerged to fight for inclusion and recognition by the broader community.²³⁴ However, this group, or rather these groups, achieved a certain degree of success only after the emergence of the queer movement in the 1980s and 1990s. The emergence of HIV/AIDS⁵ in 1981 and the formation of ACT UP

¹ I want to be clear with the reader that historical papers such as this are concerned with the language used (and not used) during the period under research. LGBTQIA2S+ persons did, in fact, exist; however, the language did not. For example, 'homosexuals' in the 1960s would be more broadly considered today as inhabiting a more diverse set of identity markers or senses of being. When I use the term "queer" in this paper, I refer to people not identifying as cisgender straight people.

² Queer scholarship today now recognizes the significant contributions transgender women of color have made to overall LGBTQ+ rights. Two of these figures are Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson who founded STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolution). See the following two footnotes for additional details.

³ Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, "The Life and Times of Trans Activist Sylvia Rivera" In *Critical Dialogues in Latinx Studies: A Reader* edited by Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas and Mérida M. Rúa, (New York, USA: New York University Press, 2021), 241-253.

⁴ Joy Michael Ellison and Teshika Silver, *Sylvia and Marsha Start a Revolution!: The Story of the Trans Women of Color Who Made LGBTQ+ History* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2021).

⁵ HIV and AIDS are two distinct stages. HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a lifelong virus that attacks the body's cells, thus preventing the body from fighting infections. If left untreated, HIV can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), which is the most viral and deadly stage of HIV. A person can be HIV positive and not have AIDS, but all persons with AIDS are HIV positive. See here: "About HIV/AIDS," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, June 30, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/whatishiv.html>

(AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in 1987 stand as the first set of turning points in this paper. Queer groups of the 1990s, such as Queer Nation, introduced a new form of identity under the "queerness" umbrella, aimed at uniting sexual minorities and advocating for a new nationalism and human rights. Members used the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 80s and 90s to raise awareness and redefine their significance in a society that had caricatured them using negative connotations.

The September 11, 2001 terror attacks on US soil serve as the subsequent turning point for this paper, in which a new wave of nationalism emerged that scholars refer to as homonationalism.⁶ The movement established an identity around the issue of terrorism by rejecting claimed homophobic attitudes promoted by Islam and immigrants from specific Muslim-majority countries. These two periods of time—the queer activism during the HIV/AIDS crisis and the period following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks represent two of the most recent and distinctive forms of nationalism that concern queer subjects. As of today, queer nationalism and homonationalism are two of the most widely used terms concerning queer and nationalism studies.⁷ This paper seeks to explore these forms of nationalism, seeing how nationalist language is both applied to and used by queer subjects. These two forms of nationalism played a significant role in shaping the status and image of queer people today in different ways.

Nationalism and the quest for human rights were central to the queer movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Nationalism focuses on establishing identity, pride, and association with a community's social and political dynamics. The failure to see the multidimensional role of nationalism in relation to queer people and movements leaves the concept

⁶ 1. Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press, 2017).

⁷ I have found that the two most widely used terms coupling LGBTQ+ and nationalism are queer nationalism and homonationalism respectively. I became interested in the origins and practices of these forms of nationalism, which in part inspired this paper.

of nationalism not fully explored. On its part, a human right is an entitlement that every person must enjoy simply due to the status of being human, and the state must protect it. Some queer groups emerged as more radical groups aimed at creating a new identity for queer persons and challenging the complex heteronormative systems that had denied them an opportunity to live according to their aspirations. As they continued to further their place in society, queer people created a new paradigm shift that increasingly advocated for gay rights, inclusivity, and equal protection under the law. During the 1990s, Queer Nation members took an active role in HIV/AIDS activism by fighting stigmatization and advocating for increased access to health, especially for LGBTQ members.⁸

Besides human rights, members established a new form of nationalism premised on ethos, culture, geographical space, distinctiveness, and relationship with heterosexuals. Post-9/11, homonationalism aligned its goals with the war on terror by taking a strict stance on immigration and promoting xenophobic attitudes toward foreign forces that promoted homophobia. Notably, activists had negative attitudes towards Islam adherents, whom they saw as the chief advancers of homophobia not only in their countries but in the West too. As a result, some historians have continued to pay significant attention to the relationship between queer identity and nationalism. Although some scholars assert that queer identity and nationalism can coexist, others contend that nationalism is inherently incompatible with queer identity. The discussion examines the intersectionality between queer identity, nationalism, and human rights in two different movements: queer nationalism (HIV AIDS activism during the 1990s) and homonationalism (following the September 11 attacks). The results of the comparative assessment show that

⁸ Breana Bietsch, "Second Time Overlooked in Crisis: Examining How HIV/AIDS Health Policies in the USA Connect with Policy Implications Today for Aging LGBTQ Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work* 7, no. 3 (2022): 246-247.

establishing a favorable queer identity depends on how effectively the broader society incorporates sexual minorities into the nation's fabric and installs systems that guarantee them human rights.

This thesis contends that queer nationalism came from the bottom up and homonationalism came from the top down. The grassroots formation of Queer Nation and how nationalism operated in this context is an example of a bottom-up origin. Ordinary people that wanted to become involved in a direct-action movement sought change in social and political life. On the other hand, homonationalism derives from an academic origin used to describe how the normative nationalism had changed its relation to gay subjects. The term "homonationalism" has been primarily used in academic literature and is not widely known by LGBTQ+ people.⁹ This approach helps distinguish between these two forms of nationalism by looking at the origin, actors involved, and how the nationalist agenda is carried out. While the Queer Nation's agenda was carried out by civic activism in the streets, the agenda of homonationalism have been carried out by the nation-state, often at the highest levels of government.

Although these distinguishments have been made, this paper considers queer nationalism and homonationalism as both being linked to movements and specific periods of time. Queer nationalism was intrinsic to queer rights and HIV/AIDS activism movement, and homonationalism has been part of the shift to reform certain gay relationships within normative nationalism. In this sense, by seeing two periods and two corresponding movements, it can be understood that a shift occurred with regard to the dominant form of nationalism concerning certain LGBTQ+ subjects. The Queer Nation to homonationalism shift can be seen through several characteristics, such as

⁹ I should note that Queer Nation today is not well-known among the younger LGBTQ+ generation. But during the 1990s it was well-known within LGBTQ+ circles.

the nonconformity of Queer Nation and the assimilationist features of homonationalism, which more of will be addressed further in the paper.

The discussion will begin by defining the concepts of human rights and nationalism. In addition, it will provide background information on queer nationalism of the 1990s and homonationalism post 9/11. This paper will grant a detailed assessment of how the two periods incorporated nationalism and human rights language. Lastly, the discussion will end with an implication of how these movements influenced the gay community's conceptualization of human rights in relation to nationalism and a summary of the analysis.

Situating Human Rights as a Concept

The concept of human rights originated toward the end of the eighteenth century. However, its proper use began in the mid-twentieth century. In the latter stages of the eighteenth century, nations primarily paid significant attention to the practice of "natural rights" derived from natural laws.¹⁰ Over time, the concept of human rights evolved as states developed frameworks that acknowledged the place of a human in society and their inherent autonomy. For instance, in 1688, Britain formed the English Bill of Rights that primarily focused on "vindicating and asserting their ancient rights and liberties."¹¹ The most significant advances to the concept of human rights came with the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen" (1789) of the French and the United States Bill of Rights (1791).¹² The two documents influenced the Enlightenment notion of human rights that has continued to exist to the present. Later, the idea of human rights transitioned from local to international conceptualization. In defining the global perspective, Griffin says that "the central idea of international human rights is that states are responsible for satisfying certain conditions in their treatment of their people."¹³ After World War II, the need for human rights became more salient to the international community. Nations believed that the global war gave individuals the liberty to violate fundamental human rights, as witnessed by the Nazi Germans. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 became the foundation of human rights practice at the international level.¹⁴ Accordingly, human rights as a concept have deep historical roots influenced by historical realities.

¹⁰ James Griffin, *On Human Rights*. OUP Oxford, 2009, 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³ Charles R. Beitz, *The Idea of Human Rights*. OUP Oxford, 2009, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

Countries that continue to adopt human rights do so under diverse circumstances. Some nations regard human rights as critical ethical concerns aimed at creating a just system that promotes values like altruism and empathy. Marks emphasizes this by saying that "the moral basis of a right can draw on concepts such as natural law, social contract, justice as fairness, consequentialism, and other theories of justice."¹⁵ Regardless of the philosophical tradition, moralists believe that a right is an individual's entitlement due to their place as a human.¹⁶ However, some countries regard human rights purely as legal tenets. The approach, advocated by legal positivists, emphasizes the legal foundation of human rights and their significance in establishing social order. Instead of relying on ethical thought to justify human rights, legal positivists prefer affirmative action that utilizes political or legislative routes to creating human rights. As a result, failure to observe this requirement could have legal consequences.¹⁷ Over the years, many countries have taken this approach to conceptualizing human rights. Although most modern states are sovereign, the complexity of human rights has compelled states to come together under global institutions like the United Nations (UN) for proper compliance. Today, citizens of democratic countries enjoy diverse rights classified as group rights, civil and political rights (CPR), and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESCR). Group rights include the right to practice religion or enjoy one's culture. CPR encompasses the right to life and freedom from slavery. Examples of ESCR are the right to join trade unions and the right to a suitable workplace.¹⁸ Moreover, this classification determines the modern practice of human rights among democratically elected governments.

¹⁵ Stephen P. Marks, "Human Rights: A Brief Introduction." (2016). *Harvard University School of Public Health*, 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Situating Nationalism as a Concept

Many definitions of nationalism have primarily focused on one's feelings towards their nation or country. Some researchers have viewed it as a combination between patriotism and consciousness of one's national ideals and ethos. Kecmanovic illustrates that it also encompasses "a desire to forward a nation's strength, liberty, or prosperity."¹⁹ Historical analysis of the concept has shown that nationalism primarily emerges when several factors threaten an individual's sense of identity. As a result, people respond by preserving their national and cultural interests and compensating for any inadequacies. As an ideology, nationalism has continued influencing humanity over the past century. The ideological view of nationalism defines a social group's past, present, and future, implying their place within the larger society. A nationalistic ideology places loyalty and love for the nation above any other affiliation.²⁰ For instance, in some situations, individuals might recognize their religious or moral inclinations above the country. However, a nationalist must always choose their nation, especially in cases where their interests clash or conflict. Therefore, nationalism focuses on placing the nation's interests above other aspects.

Modern critics of nationalism have continued criticizing it for its biases and promotion of non-inclusive agendas. For instance, some scholars have viewed nationalism as a system that promotes masculinity. Nationalistic views are founded on traditional values regarding gender and gender roles. Since men have conventionally dominated states and allied institutions, these scholars believe nationalism promotes masculine hegemony. Volstrup confirms this by saying that

¹⁹ Dusan Kecmanovic, *The Mass Psychology of Ethnonationalism*. Springer Science & Business Media, 2013, 16.

²⁰ Kevin Harrison and Boyd Tony, *Understanding Political Ideas and Movements*. Manchester University Press, 2003, 156.

"masculinity is a central element of nationalism when nationalist politics become a venue for accomplishing or realizing an idealized masculine identity."²¹ As a result, this means that nationalism is not neutral but gendered. Besides the traditional gender roles and patriarchal relations, nationalism has fostered heterosexuality and cultivated it as the norm. Same-sex and other queer relationships are considered unnatural acts against normative nationalistic values.²² Generally, the concept of nationalism continues to undergo significant changes. The inherent bias associated with the term has continued to elicit different forms of consciousness, including queer nationalism, which hopes to challenge the dominant heterosexual views. Swimelar also discusses radical nationalism, which emerged after World War I. The main intention of this movement is to change the prevailing domestic and international orders that have existed for years.²³ Thus, despite the previous rigid description, the conceptualization of nationalism will continue to change to align with the prevailing sentiments.

²¹ Thomas Volstrup, "Nationalism and Homosexuality in Hungary." (2015), 3.

²² Safia Swimelar, "Nationalism and Europeanization in LGBT Rights and Politics: A Comparative Study of Croatia and Serbia." *East European Politics and Societies* 33, no. 03 (2019): 609.

²³ Ibid.

Queer Nationalism Background

Queer nationalism began toward the end of the twentieth century. One of the earliest groups, the Queer Nation New York, started operations in April 1990.²⁴ Historians estimate that in places like San Francisco and New York, queer nationalism must have started slightly earlier. Queer nationalism was part of the second-wave lesbian/gay liberation movement. The group is also known to have influenced the rise of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP).²⁵ Queer Nation emerged as a societal reaction group aimed at correcting some of the challenges faced by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) community.²⁶ During the late twentieth century, various activist groups emerged to challenge heterosexuality and sexual oppression prevalent in Western cultures. Historians argue that Queer Nation was one of the most ubiquitous and notorious among all the emerging groups.²⁷ Queer Nation was focused on achieving two fundamental goals. First, they wanted to show the world that being a queer was an acceptable form of being. Second, the group emphasized that their difference should not form the basis of their oppression and discrimination by the dominant heterosexual group.²⁸ Accordingly, queer nationalism aimed at appealing to members of the LGBTQ+ community due to their marginalized status. Using a rights-based approach was essential for making a case for legal gains toward equal treatment.

During the formation and growth of queer nationalism, members demonstrated several fundamental ideological positions. First, the activists rejected the idea of a "gay ghetto." The

²⁴ Peter Drucker, "What Is Queer Nationalism?"

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Anthony Slagle, "In Defense of Queer Nation: From Identity Politics to a Politics of Difference." *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports)* 59, no. 2 (1995): 86.

²⁸ Ibid., 86.

phrase gay ghetto has achieved significant popularity in North America and Western Europe. Members of these communities have used "gay ghettos" to describe the neighborhoods filled with queer people. The influx of queer people in these communities is associated with their low socioeconomic conditions.²⁹ Queer nationalism rejected the "gay ghetto" and viewed it as a form of mimicry advanced by their heterosexual counterparts. In addition, members of Queer Nation avoided looking at queerness from an essentialist perspective. Michael Sibalís states that "the queer movements consciously have avoided imposing an essentializing identity upon campaign members."³⁰ Generally, the essentialist view argues sexual orientation is a genetic construct. Instead, they accept an asocial constriction emphasizing that people have diverse sexual potential.³¹ Therefore, this movement had several underlying ideological inclinations that defined its operations.

The driving issue that defined queer nationalism was HIV/AIDS during the 1990s. Historians observe that the re-radicalization of queer advocacy peaked during the last decade of the twentieth century. Notably, members of the queer community dedicated their efforts toward HIV/AIDS awareness. On the one hand, Queer Nation advocated for the amendment of the law to consider same-sex relations as part of human rights. But more importantly, members fought government neglect of HIV/AIDS treatment through various efforts, including organizing, conducting preventive education, and ensuring that affected individuals had access to services.³² This was one notable difference between Queer Nation and ACT UP compared to less radical gay

²⁹ Michael Sibalís, "Urban Space and Homosexuality: The Example of the Marais, Paris'Gay Ghetto'." *Urban studies* 41, no. 9 (2004): 1739.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Thomas E. Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada*. University of Toronto Press, 2002, 247.

and lesbian organizations. The Human Rights Campaign Fund³³ was seen as more assimilationist compared to ACT UP, and activist Michelangelo Signorile claimed "there was often a bad relationship between ACT UP and... the Human Rights Campaign Fund... because none of them were at that time really pushing and really speaking out in the way that ACT UP felt it needed to be said. There was too much posturing."³⁴ Perhaps with this context, it can be seen that certain human rights organizations were considered too gradualist. In Canada, as Thomas E. Warner claims that "the new AIDS groups cropping across the country often had their beginnings within existing gay and lesbian community organizations."³⁵ Queer nationalism took an aggressive and radical strategy towards combating HIV/AIDS and incorporating themselves into society. For instance, many rejected the categorization into gay, lesbian, or transgender as they saw this as a deliberate move to label and subdivide them into 'meaningless' groups.³⁶ Moreover, members directly confronted HIV/AIDS and embraced public health approaches to help some of their members remain safe from the epidemic. As HIV/AIDS prevalence increased, homophobic attitudes increased in the Western world, particularly in the US and Canada.³⁷ As a result, queer activists viewed this as a chance to advocate for their people and mitigate any adverse attitudes that would likely contribute to excluding the queer community in the respective countries. Moreover, queer nationalism was a complex entity that engaged in various social endeavors to assert its place in society.

³³ Now just called the Human Rights Campaign

³⁴ Michelangelo Signorile, interviewed by Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, September 20, 2003, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6075fe20d281ea3f320a7be9/t/60db732ab3abd75728bfc8c1/1624994603229/029+Michaelangelo+Signorile.pdf>, 24.

³⁵ Thomas E. Warner, *Never going back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada*. University of Toronto Press, 2002, 247.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 249-250.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

Queer Nationalism and Human Rights Language

Protection against abuse and nondiscrimination were some human rights nomenclature utilized during the queer nationalism of the 1990s. Many countries today have constitutions that protect citizens from various forms of abuse, such as verbal, emotional, and physical violence. In addition, democratic governments with a comprehensive bill of rights have clauses that enhance equal protection under the law, preventing discrimination. During queer activism of the 1990s, advocates sought the safety of the LGBTQ+ community from various forms of human rights violation, especially with the increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS in society. As the HIV/AIDS prevalence increased in society, so did the stigma against gay men in particular.³⁸ Many AIDS advocates proposed the creation of an AIDS Bill of Rights, which would guarantee people with AIDS (PWA) the rights to healthcare, housing, and employment.³⁹ The AIDS Bill of Rights fell by the wayside due to intergroup disagreement on certain language but advanced critical discussions on the subject.

Some American religious fundamentalists managed to convince a considerable swath of the public that HIV/AIDS amounted to a punishment from God. A particularistic rights language espoused by the political right in the United States during this time was the promotion of the 'Gay Agenda' and the desire of gay people to have 'special rights.'⁴⁰ Such sentiments informed

³⁸ Dennis Altman, "Confronting AIDS: Human Rights, Law, and Social Transformation." *Health and Human Rights* 5, no. 1 (2000): 151.

³⁹ Ron Goldberg discusses the AIDS Bill of Rights, interviewed by Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, October 25, 2003, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6075fe20d281ea3f320a7be9/t/60db74c4d408e3551c8d6d34/1624995013207/032+Ron+Goldberg.pdf>, 59.

⁴⁰ Cheney Alvarado, "Radical Gay Agenda". In Pierceson, Jason (ed.). *LGBTQ Americans in the U.S. Political System*, 351.

government decisions in some countries like the US, leading to discrimination and neglect.⁴¹ As the queer community fought HIV/AIDS, it was also imperative to combat the prejudice against individuals who self-identified as gay. The formation of ACT UP was a deliberate move to petition the US government to show more responsibility in handling victims of the HIV/AIDS pandemic that had hit the country. Queer activists wanted the government to treat the affected people equally before the law and develop mechanisms that would safeguard the interests of the most vulnerable communities.⁴² For instance, queer activists called for increased spending by the US government. They argued that the authorities would have spent large sums of money had the disease been more prevalent among the heterosexual community.⁴³ Members used aggressive means to secure their rights, as explained by Robert Vazquez-Pacheco in an interview with Sarah Schulman in 2002. In responding to the level of aggressiveness, the interviewee said that "sometimes physically, we would stand between the cops and the demonstrators. So, we would try to keep our folks back, be careful, and keep people safe."⁴⁴ As a result, they interpreted the government's inaction as a form of discrimination that needed to stop. Accordingly, protection against abuse and nondiscrimination were some of the earliest human rights terms that characterized the homosexual activist groups of the 1990s.

Besides nondiscrimination and protection from abuse, queer nationalism also paid significant attention to privacy rights. Privacy and confidentiality are two interrelated terms that

⁴¹ Cheney Alvarado, "Radical Gay Agenda," 151.

⁴² Mbali, Mandisa. *TAC in the History of Rights-based, Patient-driven HIV/AIDS Activism in South Africa*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 2005.

⁴³ Ibid., 152.

⁴⁴ Robert Vasquez-Pacheco, interviewed by Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, December 14, 2002, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6075fe20d281ea3f320a7be9/t/607f7c9bd291d527d569bdd1/1618967707439/002+robert+vazquez-pacheco.pdf>, 22.

focus on the non-disclosure of crucial medical information. Today, countries have developed rights revolving around protecting patient information on different platforms, including electronic and non-electronic. For instance, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) ensures that healthcare workers respect the patient's right to privacy and confidentiality in the United States.⁴⁵ Queer activists advocated for privacy rights to protect the confidentiality of victims. During this period, the information regarding one's HIV status would lead to termination from work.⁴⁶ Also, as a general rule, inappropriately releasing patients' details without their consent violates their autonomy. More importantly, it threatens the patient's dignity and sense of worth. During the 1990s, HIV/AIDS was still in its infancy, so many misconceptions and stigmas surrounded it. For this reason, many HIV/AIDS activists sought to create clinics and practices that would uphold the dignity of PWA and queer persons, especially with regard to sensitive patient information and privacy. Activist and lawyer Mary Dorman was part of a team to create a queer physician not-for-profit organization. She stated that she was "retained... to form a not-for-profit corporation called... Physicians for Human Rights. And it was – in the purpose were the words, gay and lesbian physicians for human rights."⁴⁷ Queer activists understood the implications of this and moved quickly to demand privacy rights and protect their members from the shame and embarrassment of having their medical results shown to the public. Therefore, including this language in their fight for a place in society was groundbreaking in many ways.

⁴⁵ Deven McGraw and Mandl Kenneth D, "Privacy Protections to Encourage Use of Health-relevant Digital Data in a Learning Health System." *NPJ Digital Medicine* 4, no. 1 (2021): 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 152

⁴⁷ Mary Dorman, interviewed by Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, October 17, 2003, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6075fe20d281ea3f320a7be9/t/60db73b77ffa2c3532eefdf5/1624994744179/030+Mary+Dorman.pdf>, 8.

The right to expression and free speech was also at the center of the queer nationalism movement of the 1990s. In the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, queer nationalists remained outspoken and wanted to sensitize people regarding the disease and the adverse effects of stigmatization. Due to their aggressive strategy, members occasionally used bold language that challenged the heteronormative status quo.⁴⁸ Freedom of speech and expression remained a priority for members of the movements due to the existing censorship laws that curtailed members from speaking their minds. The rise of the queer movement also led to the proliferation of publications associated with gay and lesbian people. In countries like Canada and the US, the police and other authorities censored communication, citing that the queer community promoted obscenity.⁴⁹ As the government officials continued with the censorship,⁵⁰ queer nationalism resisted and became more interested in having their voices reach as many people as possible. The anti-censorship campaign played a critical role in redefining public discourse among LGBTQ+ members, giving them more confidence to advocate for their rights to expression. In the US, activists of queer nationalism often invoked the First Amendment, specifically the part of the US Bill of Rights that protects free speech. Members frequently petitioned the government to respect their expression and apply for equal protection under the law.⁵¹ While engaging in HIV/AIDS activism, queer nationalists used their freedom of expression to communicate controversial

⁴⁸ Brenda Crossman, "Censor, Resist, Repeat: A History of Censorship of Gay and Lesbian Sexual Representation in Canada." *Duke J. Gender L. & Pol'y* 21 (2013): 52.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁰ This is particularly timely to revisit considering the current right-wing attack of anti-queer censorship in the US such as banning drag shows and LGBTQ+ books in schools.

⁵¹ Timothy Zick, "The Dynamic Relationship Between Freedom of Speech and Equality." *Duke J. Const. L. & Pub. Pol'y* 12 (2016): 13.

messages such as "I HATE STRAIGHTS."⁵² The movement received widespread media attention as it continued, giving them new opportunities to enjoy the much-needed right to speech.

Queer nationalism also triggered an increased focus on human rights terms such as nonviolent protests and civil disobedience. Activist and civil disobedience tactics trainer Jamie Bauer described the rationale behind it when stating, "we really began to talk about civil disobedience as a safe tactic for making a stronger statement, making a very direct personal statement, and as a way of getting media attention. Because civil disobedience really does get you – or, at least it did at that point – get you some attention."⁵³ During the American civil rights movement, activists mainly used these strategies to agitate for the social justice issues that affected the African American community. Civil disobedience is one of the oldest mechanisms to garner human rights guarantees that date back to the mid-nineteenth century. The author says that "the concept of civil disobedience was introduced by David Henry Thoreau in 1849 by what he experienced in the fight against slavery in the USA."⁵⁴ Over time, citizens have used civil disobedience to trigger government policy changes. In Western countries like the US, people have used it to secure various forms of justice. As a result, these countries largely tolerate civil disobedience. Besides civil disobedience, many constitutions worldwide have protected nonviolent struggle as a tool for seeking political change. Scholars define nonviolent disobedience as using non-aggressive strategies to send social, economic, and political undertones. Some

⁵² Timothy Zick, "The Dynamic Relationship Between Freedom of Speech and Equality," 13.

⁵³ Jamie Bauer, interviewed by Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, March 7, 2004, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6075fe20d281ea3f320a7be9/t/61032e1b125a7607f681640e/1627598363957/048+Jamie+Bauer.pdf>, 27.

⁵⁴ Zawiyah Mohd Zain and Mohammad Agus Yusoff, "Civil Disobedience: Concept and Practice." *Asian Social Science* 13, no. 8 (2017).

methods include boycotts, strikes, protests, and demonstrations.⁵⁵ While participating in HIV/AIDS activism through the ACT UP movement, queer nationalists used demonstrations to communicate their messages regarding the health crisis that had affected the country, including their members.⁵⁶ As such, queer nationalism played a significant role in utilizing civil strategies to achieve certain objectives.

The ACT UP movement with Queer Nation gave queer nationalists an opportunity to discuss various violations of human rights that targeted members of the LGBTQ community. Members challenged the prevailing hate and bigotry directed against the queer community. In the wake of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, society held negative attitudes toward homosexuals and viewed them as the primary reason for the continued spread of the deadly disease. As a result, this earned them derogatory names such as "whores," "junkies," and, in some instances, "faggots."⁵⁷ The queer nationalist movement was two-fold. First, they wanted to secure the freedoms of people in need of medical help and ensure that the government protected their right to enjoy social, economic, and political rights. Second, Queer Nation members fought for their freedoms, including the right to disability assistance, work, and housing.⁵⁸ Furthermore, queer nationalists openly discussed sexual orientation. Understanding the fight for these rights requires individuals to contextualize the prevailing circumstances. Although the US is mainly liberal in its contemporary ideas,⁵⁹ the same was not the case several years back. During the 80s and the 90s, the majority of Americans held conservative views regarding sexuality and sexual relationships. Society believed that people who

⁵⁵ Chenoweth, Erica, and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Understanding Nonviolent Resistance: An Introduction." *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (2013): 271-276.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁹ This is relative; here I especially mean in terms of liberal democracy.

self-identified as gay had severe mental health issues.⁶⁰ In addition, with the emergence of HIV/AIDS, the heterosexual community blamed their homosexual counterparts and regarded them as the perpetrators of the illness. As a result, this reduced the chances of the gay and lesbian community enjoying any meaningful social or economic rights. Therefore, besides equal protection of the law, the ACT UP movement raised awareness of socioeconomic rights.

The right to health also formed a significant part of the conversation during the queer nationalism movement. Access to health remains a fundamental requirement for improved human well-being. International organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) have integrated human health as a critical part of their agenda. States must ensure that people receive timely, quality, and affordable healthcare. The right to healthcare further implies that individuals should have access to healthcare services whenever or wherever they need it. During the HIV/AIDS crisis, members of the LGBTQ community were disproportionately affected by their high-risk sexual activities. Regardless, the government failed to provide them with enough medical support due to the underlying stigmatization. Queer nationalists further decried the lackluster attitude of the government when responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic that had hit the country. In this regard, queer activists began agitating for the increased recognition of their health needs as fundamental human rights. The activists understood the value of health promotion and establishing health institutions that would serve the needs of persons living with HIV.⁶¹ Based on their recognition that healthcare is a crucial human right, queer nationalists petitioned the government to show more responsibility and care when handling the healthcare needs of gays and lesbians.⁶² Also, they called

⁶⁰ Bailey, J. Michael. "Homosexuality and Mental Illness." *Archives of general psychiatry* 56, no. 10 (1999): 883

⁶¹ Goltmakor, T, "The queer nation acts up: Health care, politics, and sexual diversity in the County of Angels." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10, no. 6 (1992): 609-636.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 637.

on more research and funding directed at the patient's primary and secondary healthcare needs. Bobbi Campbell was among the gay activists that emerged to challenge the status quo in the wake of the pandemic and the suffering of the queer community. In his letter, documented in "Bay Area Reporter," Campbell said, "I AM SICK of everyone in this community who tells me to stop creating a panic." He continued, "How many of us have to die before you get scared off your ass and into action?" ⁶³ Campbell was annoyed with the government's ignorance of the right of the people to receive healthcare and live decent lives. The activities of queer nationals during the HIV/AIDS activism of the 1990s reinstated the need to reconsider the health of queer people, and more so that of gay men, as a fundamental human right.

⁶³ Full text of "Bay Area Reporter, Volume 13, Number 11, 17 March 1983", March 17, 1983, https://archive.org/stream/BAR_19830317/BAR_19830317_djvu.txt.

Queer Nationalism and Nationalist Language

Reclaiming the word "queer" was the first effort toward a nationalistic transformation of the lesbian and gay advocacy groups. The individuals primarily emerged from communities that had suffered the most from the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Rather than describing themselves as members of the gay and lesbian community, the advocates used the term "queer" to avoid the unnecessary disintegrations associated with the nomenclature. More importantly, these individuals wanted to create an inclusive unit that would place them within the larger context of the nation. According to the authors, members tried to "bring people together who have been made to feel perverse, queer, old, outcast, different, deviant and to affirm sameness by defining a common identity on the fringes."⁶⁴

The naming of Queer Nation came about in a rather impromptu manner. One of the founders, Andrew Vélez, stated that "I remember going down to Washington, perhaps two years before Queer Nation existed, and Maria Maggenti and some other woman – it may have been her then-girlfriend, Heidi, I'm not sure – were sitting in front of me. And, I overheard them saying – I think Maria said to her, 'Wouldn't it be great if there was a queer nation?' And that phrase stuck in my mind."⁶⁵ At the first meeting, Vélez suggested the name Queer Nation "because queer includes everybody," and the majority of members liked the idea of a reclaimed umbrella term.⁶⁶ From this oral history, it seems that not so much planning went into the actual naming of the group, as though it was rather a circumstance that the terms "queer and "nation" became joined at all. The name

⁶⁴ Bay Area Reporter, 258.

⁶⁵ Andrew Vélez, interviewed by Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, February 26, 2004, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6075fe20d281ea3f320a7be9/t/60db7c1917cd8836e1d61fb8/1624996889543/045+-+Andrew+Velez.pdf>, 50-51.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 51.

resonated with members because of the brashness of "queer" and the large-reaching and communal tones of "nation." This can be further understood when activist Mark Milano argued for the importance nationalizing efforts when saying "we can beat this thing if we would do it like the Manhattan Project, like the Apollo Project. America's always been the one on the cutting edge of research. And if we can really make this a national effort, we could beat this thing."⁶⁷ Activists in ACT UP, Queer Nation, and other offshoots deemed it valuable to frame HIV/AIDS and queer visibility in national terms. Furthermore, the name suggests that Queer Nation members sought to create a broad community that was inclusive for queer individuals. This is a non-heteronormative form of nationalism because queer membership is valued, whereas straight membership is denied.

Despite their 'inclusivity,' members of Queer Nation created strict rules that defined in-group and out-group membership. Perhaps it goes without saying, but this group rejected any form of straight membership. One particular version of the Queer Nation manifesto from 1990 reads, "I hate every sector of the straight establishment in this country – the worst of whom actively want all queers dead, the best of whom never stick their necks out to keep us alive."⁶⁸ Queer Nation was well-known for taking an unapologetic anti-straight position. Not only straight people but broader members of the LGBTQ+ community viewed Queer Nation as a radical organization. For example, ACT UP activist Tony Arena, in referring to Queer Nation, claimed "these people are crazy" concerning the group's conduct.⁶⁹ Although it has been mentioned that "queer" includes everyone, it could be argued that this is not the case. "Queer" is an umbrella term for minority gender and

⁶⁷ Mark Milano, interviewed by Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, May 26, 2007, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6075fe20d281ea3f320a7be9/t/60e3cfa2f5f9156374de40da/1625542563203/077+-+Mark+Milano.pdf>, 31.

⁶⁸ Queer Nation, in *THE QUEER NATION MANIFESTO*, History Is a Weapon, 1990.

⁶⁹ Tony Arena, interviewed by Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, September 22, 2012, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6075fe20d281ea3f320a7be9/t/60f1c12f4339025699ee6ada/1626456368143/148+-+Tony+Arena+%26+Ron+Grunewald.pdf>, 73.

sexuality forms of identity, with the exception of the cisgender straight individual. Even in the case of queer nationalism, a particular group is vehemently excluded. From this point of analysis, it can be further understood and reaffirmed that any form of nationalism deals with inclusion and exclusion, both normative and non-heteronormative forms.

When discussing inclusion and exclusion, the discussion is oversimplified to only acknowledge the categories of gender and sexuality and not that of race. Accounts from queer people of color indicate that exclusion existed within the queer community itself. ACT UP and Queer Nation activist Ming-Yuen S. Ma described meetings and said that he was "a person of color in this huge room full of angry white people," and he went on to describe Queer Nation, saying, "on one hand, there's this, 'Wow, you're demonstrating, getting arrested'... you have these – you have your battle scars or whatnot. But then, on the other hand, there's the wariness about, ah, they're just whitewash – it's a white organization."⁷⁰ People of color were involved with ACT UP and Queer Nation, but they were vastly outnumbered by white members. Caucuses were formed, such as the API (Asian Pacific Islander) Caucus and the Black Caucus, to meet more specific needs.⁷¹ The component of race has historically been a complex and dividing issue within the LGBTQ+ community and was particularly nuanced during the HIV/AIDS crisis.⁷²

Using "queer" enabled members to overcome the identity politics used during the gay and lesbian liberation movements.⁷³ Members of different queer groups merged, integrated, and

⁷⁰ Ming-Yuen S. Ma, interviewed by Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, January 15, 2003, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6075fe20d281ea3f320a7be9/t/60da3326758eae692ffbcff6/1624912678481/007+Ming+Ma.pdf>, 15,28.

⁷¹ Abigail Halcli, "AIDS, Anger, and Activism: ACT UP as a Social Movement Organization," essay, in *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties*, ed. Jo Freeman and Victoria Lee Johnson (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999) 135-150.

⁷² I wanted to address the component of race for this section of the paper but due to countless limitations it does not receive the coverage it deserves. If this project receives subsequent work, I hope to further address issues of race.

⁷³ Bay Area Reporter, 258.

formed a *seemingly* homogenous nationalistic group that brought together diverse values and interests.⁷⁴ The immediate achievement of the nationalistic organization of the LGBTQ+ community was the creation of a more united front that enabled improved voice and made their contribution to national discourses more impactful. The broad-based coalition brought marginalized people together and gave them better bargaining power. Therefore, queerness was at the center of forming the first source of nationalism among members of the LGBTQ+ community on their own terms.⁷⁵

The commonality of interest remains another significant nationalistic language that defined queer HIV/AIDS activism during the 1990s. Nationalism is advancing common interests shared by members within the in-group dynamic- in this sense, membership is key. Before the emergence of queer nationalism, the gay and lesbian liberation movement was the only legitimate organization that fought for the interests of homosexuals in the US and other Western countries like Canada. The development of Queer Nation was informed by the realization that people of varying marginalized genders and sexual orientations faced similar societal challenges. For instance, although all groups within the queer umbrella faced unique challenges, all felt pressures and discrimination from heterosexism.⁷⁶ As a result, these people shared common interests, such as fighting the AIDS pandemic, eliminating stereotypes, and ensuring that Queer Nation members experienced the same rights as their heterosexual counterparts. In addition, the Queer Nation members acknowledged the need to challenge heterosexual institutions and create a new form of nationalism that advanced queer values, beliefs, and perspectives. The commonality of interests,

⁷⁴ Queer Nation did engage in coalition building and brought together a diverse group of people; however, there is fair criticism toward its inherent exclusivity as discussed previously.

⁷⁵ Abigail Halcli, "AIDS, Anger, and Activism: ACT UP as a Social Movement Organization," 135-150.

⁷⁶ V. Spike Peterson. 1999. "Sexing Political Identities: Nationalism as Heterosexism," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1(1). Pp. 34-65.

goals, and desires necessitated Queer Nation members to work together under the nationalistic umbrella. Furthermore, besides the queerness, the commonality of interests played a critical role in creating a stable nationalism that helped the LGBTQ+ community contribute to the fight against HIV/AIDS during the 1990s.

Similar to other nationalist groups, Queer Nation also promoted some distinctiveness that separated them from other groups. As previously indicated, queer nationalism remained one of the most significant paradigm shifts that characterized American social life during the 1990s. Despite their advertised inclusive approach, the queer members, directly and indirectly, communicated information regarding their uniqueness, including the in-group dynamics that characterized participation in their activities.⁷⁷ Participants believed in the aggressive confrontation of heteronormativity and its values in US society. Since they lived at a time discrimination against homosexuals was deeply entrenched, queer nationalists had to apply equal force to ensure that they secured a place in US society. Besides their aggressive nature, members held leftist views regarding sexuality and sexual engagement. In addition, they favored equality before the law and the need to protect the rights of the queer communities. Members rejected the divisive politics of LGBTQ+⁷⁸ and embraced a single voice that prioritized queerness. Therefore, as a nationalistic movement, these rules or criteria differentiated queer activism of the 1990s from any other form of nationalism that existed during the same time.

Anti-imperial resistance is another nationalistic language applied during the queer nationalism HIV/AIDS campaign of the 1990s. Coloma says, "nationalism is a powerful strategy

⁷⁷ Anthony R. Slagle, "In Defense of Queer Nation: From Identity Politics to a Politics of Difference." *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports)* 59, no. 2 (1995): 85.

⁷⁸ Generally speaking, members of Queer Nation wanted to only use the term "queer" and viewed the alphabet soup approach to be divisive.

for anti-imperial resistance."⁷⁹ Conventionally, nations form on the premise of love and brotherhood. The success of such a society depends on the ability of the members to maintain horizontal rather than vertical comradeship.⁸⁰ However, during the 1990s, the LGBTQ+ community in the US and other Western communities like Canada did not enjoy cordial treatment as equal members of society. The larger heterosexual society perceived that the homosexual community was responsible for the spread of the AIDS pandemic. In addition, the heteronormative landscape disfavored the LGBTQ community, exposing them to massive discrimination, stigmatization, and oppression. As a result, this violated the basic foundations that form a stable nation. In retaliation, queer nationalism developed an anti-imperial resistance movement to challenge the hegemonic heterosexual system. The aggressive nature of the campaign gave it the impetus to challenge the status quo and petition the government to respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic that was ravaging the homosexual community in the US. Thus, by premising its philosophy on anti-imperialism, the queer activists managed to create a nation premised on destabilizing the hegemonic systems propelled by the heterosexual society.

Cultural identity was another nationalistic aspect that characterized queer nationalism's efforts during the 1990s. Their cultural views influenced how they sought social change in society. For instance, due to their aggressive and explosive style, members favored short-term and high-publicized campaigns such as homosexual kiss-ins in public areas like shopping malls. Members of the community also devised catchy yet influential slogans and catchphrases which they used in their movements, such as "We're Here," "We're Queer," and "Get Used to It." Queer nationalism had unique cultural cues that helped them self-identify and exist within a social spectrum. For

⁷⁹ Roland Sintos Coloma, "CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: What's Queer Got to Do with It?: Interrogating Nationalism and Imperialism." *Counterpoints* 367 (2012): 230.

⁸⁰ Roland Sintos Coloma, "CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: What's Queer Got to Do with It?," 230.

instance, they conducted festivals and organizations, which they used as platforms to exchange ideas. In addition, contrary to many people's views, the queer movement identified itself as an ideological group that rejected hegemonic heterosexuals and embraced progressive ideas regarding gender and sexuality. Within their social spaces, members organized demonstrations, boycotts, and the circulation of pamphlets that communicated mixed messages regarding their existence and place in society. Accordingly, combining all their activities led to the queer cultural identity, which formed a critical part of their nationalism.

Nationalism also focused on appreciating geographical boundaries where individuals exist and pay their allegiance. Territoriality remains one of the primary facets of nationalism as it gives citizens something to self-identify with and acknowledge. During their AIDS activism, the queer nationals operated in several distinct areas which they regarded as their forte. Historical evidence shows that the earliest queer groups emerged in New York before spreading to different parts of the country. San Francisco and Los Angeles also provided these activists with the much-needed geographical space to conduct their business and embrace their cultural traits. Other places included Nebraska, Houston, Denver, and Utah. The territorial area played a significant role in influencing the level of success that activists would achieve. Besides giving them a sense of belonging, it also guaranteed them a secure space to continue their advocacy without feeling insecure or threatened by the dominant heterosexual society. As a result, this explains why they existed in these cities and states and not in others. Therefore, like culture and queerness, the geographical space had significant implications for the activists' sense of nationalism.

Homonationalism Background

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States had significant political, social, and economic ramifications on the country. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, people and stakeholders from various quarters sought whom to blame.⁸¹ Multiple individuals and organizations emerged to associate the terrorist act with the growing rights of minorities in the country. For instance, while appearing on the program "The 700 Club," Jerry Falwell accused homosexuals, abortionists, and feminists of playing an active role in the September 11 attacks.⁸² Despite the widespread condemnation that he received, it was clear that a section of the country believed that tolerance of "deviant" groups must have contributed to the disastrous act of terrorism that sent global shockwaves.⁸³ Before the 9/11 attacks, a section of the US population had a habit of associating queerness with harmful events. Evangelicals have been at the forefront of implicating tolerance to women and gay rights to adversities that affected US society.⁸⁴ Such attitudes resulted from the conservative nature of US society, particularly during the late twentieth century when the gay movement began agitating for their rights. Despite their association with calamities and other adverse events, the gay community remained steadfast and ready to take up its position in the polarized American society.⁸⁵

Although the 9/11 event awakened the stereotypical attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community, it also ushered in what scholars describe as homonationalism. Jasbir Puar described

⁸¹ Immediate the blame was assigned to Muslims / Arabs or "the gays". This type of 'immediate blame' has often been the case, consider the 1995 OKC bombing when Muslims were the first suspected perpetrators.

⁸² Karma R. Chavez, "The Precariousness of Homonationalism: The Queer Agency of Terrorism in Post-9/11 Rhetoric." *Qed: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 2, no. 3 (2015): 32-58.

⁸³ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁵ It is widespread for Christian nationalists and other extreme evangelicals in the US to blame "the gays" for natural disasters or mass catastrophes.

homonationalism as the overall, yet very limited, acceptance of the gay community and intertwining their interests with those of national politics. Homonationalism emerged during the US war on terror, as the US wanted to present itself as 'friendly' to homosexuals, unlike the 'homophobic' Muslims responsible for the terrorist attack.⁸⁶ Scholars and authors worldwide embraced homonationalism by writing gay-friendly with either blatant or undertones of Islamophobic sentiment materials. The movement spread outside the US, going to other nations in Western and Northern Europe. Homonationalist discourse primarily has embraced liberal Western ideals and regarded what are deemed 'radical' Muslims as the out-group members.⁸⁷ Puar described the movement as "a facet of modernity and a historical shift marked by the entrance of (some) homosexual bodies as worthy of protection by nation-states."⁸⁸ The new homonationalism established a paradigm shift in the relationship between sexuality, state, and capitalism. The new system embraced gays and lesbians and incorporated them into the overall US conceptualization of nationalism.⁸⁹ Therefore, this movement became more robust, helping US society change perspectives about gay people⁹⁰, especially during the post-9/11 era. I

In an interview with Sarah Schulman, ACT UP activist John Voelecker remarked on his concerns for the shift in gay culture, saying, "One of my long-term fears is that the – if we get marriage equality; if we get employment nondiscrimination, et cetera; middle-class and upper-middle-class gay white males will be prime fodder for recruitment by parties customarily

⁸⁶ Karma R. Chavez, "The Precariousness of Homonationalism", 37-38.

⁸⁷ Puar, Jasbir K. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press, 2018, 40.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁹ Spierings, Niels. "Homonationalism and Voting for the Populist Radical Right: Addressing Unanswered Questions by Zooming in on the Dutch Case." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 33, no. 1 (2021): 171.

⁹⁰ I importantly use the term "gay" here because as Puar points out—homonationalism only applied to a specific group- cisgender, mostly white gay people. Queer people of color and transgender people were not part of the homonationalist shift.

associated with some of the more socially regressive policies," to which Schulman replied, "Do you know that there's a word for that? Homonationalism. You heard that?"⁹¹ Voelecker had not heard of the term, and Schulman went on to explain that, "It's this professor at Rutgers has – because, like in England, more gay people are joining right-wing parties, and – yeah, exactly what you were saying."⁹² It is evident that in 2012 some, if not many, members of the LGBTQ+ noticed a type of cultural shift within the community. The fears Voelecker described are linked to homonationalism and rainbow capitalism.⁹³

The understanding of homonationalism continues to evolve in the modern era. During the early stages, nationalists primarily desire to establish a strong connection between sexuality and the idea of nationality.⁹⁴ They have challenged the heterosexual systems that have often legitimized discrimination and marginalization of sexual minorities in the country. Although it could be wrong to generalize that all nationalists are homophobic, the traditional tenets that have always defined nationalism tend to support heterosexual relations.⁹⁵ Most nations have held strict conservative rules concerning romantic and sexual relationships and what types of people should engage with one another. For years, critics have argued that sexual minorities, particularly gays and lesbians, present rhetoric that challenges institutions like the family, which form the foundation of nation-building. Proponents argue homonationalism also prevented the perennial

⁹¹ John Voelecker, interviewed by Sarah Schulman, ACT UP Oral History Project, May 30, 2012, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6075fe20d281ea3f320a7be9/t/610052eca2025f7c8a15c499/162741118116/130+John+Voelcker.pdf>, 51.

⁹² Ibid., 51.

⁹³ See for more on rainbow capitalism: Eric Smialek, "Who Needs to Calm down? Taylor Swift and Rainbow Capitalism," *Contemporary Music Review* 40, no. 1 (2021): 99–119, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494467.2021.1956270>, and Beatrix Lockwood, "'No More Rainbow Capitalism' as Protests Shine Light on Black Trans Lives," Reuters, July 1, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-minneapolis-police-blacktranslives-idUSKBN24276C>.

⁹⁴ Richard CM. Mole, "Homonationalism: Resisting Nationalist Co-optation of Sexual Diversity," *Sexualities* 20, no. 5-6 (2017): 660.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 660.

weaponization of homosexuality, which allowed politicians to divert from pressing social and economic issues.⁹⁶ Moreover, proponents argue homonationalism redefined the nation, giving it a more diverse outlook that embraces more individuals and includes more backgrounds.⁹⁷ Therefore, this created a new system of belief that departed from the hegemonic nationalism embraced or celebrated during the twentieth century.

Homonationalism was, in part, a psychological issue that focused on ensuring that sexual minorities in US society felt included. It was about triggering a feeling of pride and belonging for people who had endured years of exclusion and discrimination. In justifying this notion, Mole says, "in principle, any moves to ensure that LGBTQ individuals for whom national identity is an important aspect of their sense of self are not made to feel excluded should be welcomed."⁹⁸ Psychologists contend that association with social groups gives individuals a sense of belonging and, more importantly, self-esteem. Puar, in her text *Terrorist Assemblages*, uses homonationalism identity to show how the US government legitimized its counterterrorism⁹⁹ efforts. By creating a united front against the perceived enemies, the US nation became more united and determined to defeat the terrorist extremists worldwide. Proponents argue that despite the initial criticism of the gay community and accusations leveled against them, homonationalism emerged to become one of the most effective tools against terror in the post-9/11 era. Its ability to unite Americans with its perceived enemies was a game-changer in the country's quest to create a 'safe' society for its

⁹⁶ Richard CM. Mole, "Homonationalism", 660.

⁹⁷ In a sense, the proponents of homonationalism are true here. More people, being white cisgender gays, were enveloped into the national project. As we understand, Muslims have never been part of Western national projects as a whole. We can see that the extension of rights for a select group comes at the expense for another.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 660.

⁹⁹ Note that many would just say "terrorism."

people.¹⁰⁰ More importantly, it gave some gay people a sense of pride and belonging in a highly divided society.

Despite its popularity in the US, homonationalism received criticism from various actors. Critics particularly cited that the increased homonationalism closed doors to immigration. The continued heteronormativity within the (assimilationist) gay community has increased gay members' sensitivity to foreigners coming into the country. After the 9/11 attacks, Islamophobic sentiments increased in the country since the culpable individuals had affiliations with Islam. In addition, the gay community was more aggrieved by the cultural differences, particularly the homophobic attitudes held in Muslim countries.¹⁰¹ As a result, homonationalism favored Islamophobia, increasing people's negative attitudes toward the immigration of individuals from culturally 'unfriendly' countries. However, this was not unusual considering that individuals have always crafted a sense of nationalism through in-group and out-group dynamics. By ideologically supporting the exclusion of homophobic individuals, homonationalism wanted to create an in-group membership where the sexual minority could enjoy rights without reprisal.¹⁰² Although it was deemed necessary to embrace protectionism, some critics viewed it as a form of xenophobia.

¹⁰⁰ At the expense of countless innocents in the Middle East

¹⁰¹ Mia Liinason, "Homonationalism across borders. Exploring cross-border exchange and strategic homonationalism in the construction of progressive nationalism." *Sexualities* (2022): 13634607221112647.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 5.

Homonationalism and Human Rights Language

Although most debates regarding queer nationalism focused on social rights, homonationalism extended to political freedoms. Due to the anti-immigration sentiments held by these individuals, members significantly impacted the country's political future. In the US, the gay community had a significant say, overtly and covertly, in shaping the immigration process. Through their views and perspectives regarding US exceptionalism, the government embraced a stricter policy against perceived "cultural enemies." Similar sentiments occurred in European countries like the Netherlands, where most gay people voted for PRR, a group of political parties that supported the native culture and pushed away any attempts to destabilize the gay heritage that defined the country.¹⁰³ As a result, this shows that the gay community became more aware of its political influence in the country. In another case, consider Alice Weidel, an open lesbian that is co-leader of the alt-right AfD (Alternative for Germany) party.¹⁰⁴ The elevation of a cisgender white lesbian in a German right-wing populist party that is infamously Islamophobic is the perfect case study of homonationalism today. Whereas the queer nationalism of the 1990s primarily focused on social aspects, including challenging hegemony and ensuring that the queer community had access to healthcare, especially on the verge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Post-9/11, members of the affluent gay community had gained more influence, and their interests intertwined with those of the nation. As a result, this gave them more impetus to contribute to national politics and

¹⁰³ Mia Liinason, "Homonationalism across Borders", 171.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Wildman, "The German Far Right Is Faltering. They're Hoping a Lesbian Mom Can Reenergize the Party.," Vox, July 5, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/7/5/15856998/germany-afd-alice-weidel-populist-lesbian-mom-far-right>.

become more aware of their rights to influence the politics of the day. Some right-wing political parties wish to court the votes of certain gay people.

It is a multifaceted issue that could be teased out in the case of former US president Donald Trump. In his first interview with 60 Minutes after being elected in 2016, Trump was asked about his view of same-sex marriage, and he replied, "These cases have gone to the Supreme Court. They've been settled. And I'm — I'm fine with that," which effectively made him the first US president-elect to not be opposed to same-sex marriage.¹⁰⁵ Previously at a campaign event in October of 2016, Trump was photographed holding a pride flag with the writing "LGBT for TRUMP" written across it, which controversy and drew condemnation parts of the LGBTQ+ community.¹⁰⁶ One of his supporters on Twitter wrote, "Trump waves LGBT flags and says Caitlyn can use his bathrooms. Hillary takes money from countries that execute gays. Trump is the bigot."¹⁰⁷ This case highlights how homonationalism has continued to be salient in US political discourse from the early 2000s to the near present. Despite posing with a pride flag, while Trump was president, many executive actions were aimed at limiting rights for the LGBTQ+ community, especially for transgender people.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, in the context of homonationalism, Trump's Muslim Ban must come into consideration. With the 2017 Trump Muslim Ban, Trump hoped to turn the US LGBTQ+ community against Muslims when he said, "as your president, I will do everything in my power to protect our LGBT citizens from the violence and oppression of a hateful

¹⁰⁵ Eli Stokols, "Trump Says He's 'fine' with Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage," POLITICO, November 13, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/donald-trump-same-sex-marriage-231310>.

¹⁰⁶ Gwynn Guilford, "Donald Trump's 'Support' of LGBT Communities in One Image," Quartz, October 31, 2016, <https://qz.com/823649/donald-trump-unfurled-a-rainbow-flag-with-lgbt-written-on-it-at-a-rally-in-greeley-colorado-to-express-his-so-called-support>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ See Trump's transgender military ban: Hallie Jackson and Courtney Kube, "Trump's Controversial Transgender Military Policy Goes into Effect," NBCNews.com, April 12, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/trump-s-controversial-transgender-military-policy-goes-effect-n993826>.

foreign ideology."¹⁰⁹ Under the Trump presidency, transgender people and Muslims were negatively impacted. This demonstrates how certain gay people can be co-opted to further a nationalist agenda—in the case of protecting domestic gays from 'foreign anti-gay Muslims.'

Although queer nationalism focused on fundamental human rights for queer people, homonationalism went for more complex aspects, triggering a paradigm shift in US society. Legalizing same-sex marriage was one of the primary human rights language issues during this period. The post-9/11 era, particularly the election of President Obama into office, continued to fuel these sentiments. The queer politics of the 1990s helped challenge the heteronormative society, including the underlying institutions that sanitized sexual discrimination.¹¹⁰ However, at the turn of the century, it was important for the activists to take their advocacy to a new level and focus on issues that would redefine their relations.¹¹¹ As illustrated by Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages*, homonationalism encompasses incorporating homosexuality into the national aspects. While in an interview with ABC, President Obama made several comments aligned with Puar's conceptualization of homonationalism. Part of his response stated, "At a certain point, I have just concluded that for me personally, it is important to go ahead and affirm that I think same-sex couples should be able to get married."¹¹² The president addressing same-sex marriage as an urgent societal change shows that homosexuality was now a significant part of the nation-building process. Accordingly, homonationalism regarded gay marriage as a critical human right need that needed attention.

¹⁰⁹ Tony Hoang, "The Advocate - Trump's Despicable Plan to Turn LGBTs against Muslims," Equality California, February 27, 2017, <https://www.eqca.org/lgbt-islam/>.

¹¹⁰ Huang, Hans Tao-Ming. *Queer Politics and Sexual Modernity in Taiwan*. Vol. 1. Hong Kong University Press, 2011, 8.

¹¹¹ Paisley Currah, "Homonationalism, State Rationalities, and Sex Contradictions." *Theory & Event* 16, no. 1 (2013):2.

¹¹² Ibid., 2.

Post 9/11, gay activists, with the government's help, helped reverse some of the institutions that had normalized heterosexuality in the country. Efforts included changing laws and petitioning lawmakers to review the policies that had for many years oppressed the LGBTQ+ community. During the 2008 presidential campaign, Democratic candidate Barack Obama presented himself as a staunch supporter of gay rights. Besides supporting progressive laws like the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, Obama was determined to advance the rights of gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) parents and their families.¹¹³ The Democratic Party further demonstrated its commitment to end punitive policies like the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" rule that applied in the military. The repeal of all sodomy-related statutes was also a direct move toward ending the oppression of LGBTQ members in the country.¹¹⁴ With these new changes, the country was slowly embracing homonationalism by respecting their autonomy and regarding their concerns as critical human rights issues.

Furthermore, the gay community called for more standardization of human rights. The US embraced a system of governance that gives states some level of autonomy in creating laws. In justifying this, Currah says, "at the state level, the extent to which gay and lesbian individuals enjoy fundamental civil rights was determined by geography."¹¹⁵ For instance, gay families living in Vermont enjoyed almost similar rights to their heterosexual counterparts. Also, before 9/11, the geographic location within a state would determine the kind of rights LGBTQ+ persons wanted. As a result, as the country embraced the new millennium, the LGBTQ+ community felt that it was vital to standardize laws and ensure that members of the LGBTQ+ community enjoyed equal rights regardless of where they lived. Homonationalist sentiments coupled with the Obama liberal

¹¹³ Paisley Currah, "Homonationalism, State Rationalities", 1.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 1.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 2.

policies gave room for a national dialogue allowing federal laws to grant LGBTQ+ persons equal laws irrespective of their geographic location. In addition, states became more aware of the need to expand their rights and treat the queer community like their heterosexual counterparts. Therefore, the focus on rights shifted from one's sexual orientation to their humanity.

Homonationalism and Nationalist Language

Like queer nationalism, which focused on establishing boundaries, homonationalism thrived in exceptionalism through its anti-immigration undertones. Immigration became an issue in the US following the 9/11 terror attacks, the aftermath of which helped further harden an already Islamophobic society. Some in the US gay community took advantage of the situation and considered Islam as one of the most significant promoters of a heterosexual institution. The hostility towards Islamic immigration has formed the basis of homonationalism in the US and different countries worldwide. Coloma exemplifies this by saying, "gay Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn of the Netherlands pledged to terminate immigration and asylum and used anti-Muslim rhetoric to propel his political party."¹¹⁶ While the queer nationalism movement of the 1990s established norms and values to define its nationalistic identity, homonationalism promoted xenophobic attitudes that focused on keeping away any citizens from Islamic cultures that held homophobic views. It simply has not been in homonationalism's scope to consider homophobic culture in Western countries, as that is not what homonationalism is. Research conducted in the Netherlands has further demonstrated how homonationalism influences individuals' perceptions regarding immigration. According to Coloma, the Populist Radical Right (PRR) parties have continually protected the homosexual community from outsiders, particularly Islam. In the words of Puar, the Dutch believe that the acceptability of gay people must act as the barometer to define who belongs to the nation.¹¹⁷ Therefore, homonationalism has thrived with exceptionalism, a principle that helped it to define in-group and out-group members.

¹¹⁶ Roland Sintos Coloma, "CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: What's Queer Got to Do with It?: Interrogating Nationalism and Imperialism." *Counterpoints* 367 (2012): 19.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

With the anti-immigration policy, homonationalism also spearheaded anti-Islam rhetoric. Homonationalism crafted its sense of nationalism by creating the ethnic and religious 'other.' The dominant US gay community regarded Muslims as the main villains in their quest for an inclusive society.¹¹⁸ During the post-9/11 period, referred to as the "war on terror," the US played a critical role in creating a sense of nationalism by establishing a system of dualism. First, it painted itself as a country that embraces members of the gay community. Second, it depicted the outside world, particularly the Muslim world, as an intolerant group of individuals with homophobic values.¹¹⁹ The anti-Islamic sentiment emerged from the teachings of the religion. Like with Christianity, followers of the Quran interpret it to criminalize sexual relations between members of the same sex, notably between men. However, with the secularization of the world, many Christians have since accepted a new world order that accepts certain gay people. Proponents of homonationalism portray Muslim adherents as remaining strict and asking their followers to shun gay relationships. Therefore, the anti-Muslim rhetoric helped establish homonationalism due to the emphasis on the philosophy of "us versus them."

Like the queer nationalism movement, homonationalism relied on territorial integrity to build their sense of nationalism. Besides looking at the religious or ethnic aspects, proponents of homonationalism appreciated their geographical boundaries, including the 'countries' with homophobic tendencies. In emphasizing this point, Dhoest says, "all of these constitute out-groups ('them') that are placed in opposition to, and instrumentally used to redefine, the national in-group ('us')."¹²⁰ Territoriality remains one of the most fundamental aspects of nationality. The aspect

¹¹⁸ Alexander Dhoest, "LGBTs in, Muslims out: Homonationalist Discourses and Counterdiscourses in the Flemish Press." *International Journal of Communication* 14 (2020): 155.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 156.

¹²⁰ Alexander Dhoest, "LGBTs in, Muslims out: Homonationalist discourses 156.

helped homonationalism in two primary ways. First, it enabled the movement to make meaningful international relationships with its counterparts worldwide in its effort to spread and expand the US nationalist agenda. Second, it also assisted in reshaping Western immigration perspectives. This falls in line with the US position on human rights and foreign relations. Accordingly, knowledge of geographical spaces supporting their agenda was crucial in shaping their movement.

Unlike in *Queer Nation*, which viewed itself as a radical approach, homonationalism advanced an assimilationist agenda. Establishing the "homophobic other" became the new norm, with words such as 'modernity' and 'civilization' describing the new standard. The sentiments continued outside the US to other places like Europe. As elaborated by Slootmaeckers, homonationalist discourses in Europe sought to delineate the difference between homophobic immigrants and the progressive homo-tolerant individual.¹²¹ The queer nationalism of 1990 was about crafting a path for visibility. However, homonationalism built on the successes of its predecessors and agitated for more 'advanced' goals and aspirations. As a result, this explains why homonationalists¹²² considered themselves progressives who embraced modernity and civility while also regarding their counterparts as servants of an archaic society.

Although queer nationalism was radical and abrasive to the status quo, homonationalism primarily relied on endearing to the general population and aligning more tame gay values to those of the nation-state. Homonationalists used more friendly terms like "patriotism" and "citizenship" in defining their newly acquired status within the overall American socioeconomic matrix.¹²³ Homonationalism differentiated their activism from queer nationalism by incorporating two

¹²¹ Koen Slootmaeckers, "Nationalism as Competing Masculinities: Homophobia as a Technology of Othering for Hetero- and Homonationalism." *Theory and Society* 48, no. 2 (2019).

¹²² I am simply using this term to identify someone that advanced the homonationalist agenda instead of saying proponents of homonationalism.

¹²³ Koen Slootmaeckers, "Nationalism as competing masculinities, 91

divergent values. Sloodmaeckers explains this by saying, "Puar locates homonationalism as collusion between (homonormative) homosexuality and US nationalism simultaneously produced by patriotic, inclusive narratives."¹²⁴ With their continued quest for equality, homonationalist activists realized that their values could coexist with the ideas that have traditionally defined heterosexuality, such as marriage and patriotism. Essentially, this was a deliberate effort to harmonize the two polarizing sides using the melting pot adage. However, this sharply contrasted the aggressive Queer Nation activities of the 1990s that involved derogatory terms and the application of force to reverse heteronormativity. Using more tame and diplomatic means helped homonationalism receive widespread support from the government and other social institutions that sought to redefine the place of gay communities in US society.

Unlike the queer nationalism of the 1990s, Americans turned homonationalism into a global context of cultures. Queer nationalism saw a localized war, mainly in several states and cities across the US. Due to the group's novelty, it was challenging to receive the worldwide recognition that their homonationalist counterparts gained during their operation. As Evangelista argues, homonationalism worked well in the context of clashing civilizations. The Western world separated and distinguished itself as a modern world that identified with the immediate needs of certain gay people.¹²⁵ While doing so, it caricatured Islam and other developing countries by regarding them as uncivilized and incapable of safeguarding the interests of the gay community. As the author describes, the US pitted itself as the "avatar of freedom and modernity."¹²⁶ In addition, it presented itself to the world as the chief defender of the rights of homosexuals and

¹²⁴ Koen Sloodmaeckers, "Nationalism as competing masculinities, 91.

¹²⁵ John Andrew G Evangelista, "Mess up the empire: Deploying and disrupting homonationalism." *Sexualities* 25, no. 4 (2022): 349.

¹²⁶ John Andrew G Evangelista, "Mess up the empire, 349.

painted the rest of the world as less sensitive to their needs. Besides the protectionism described earlier, homonationalism turned the nation-building process into a global contest on who had the proper mechanisms and tools to protect the interests of the gay community.

Besides "othering," homonationalism built its nationalism in derogatory and sometimes demeaning ways. The Abu Ghraib case study best exemplifies this issue. In 2004, CBS aired a segment dubbed "60 Minutes II." The documentary showed first-hand accounts of images depicting sexual torture orchestrated by the American military in Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad.¹²⁷ The American soldiers forced the Iraqi prisoners into sexually humiliating situations, many of which had homosexual connotations. The torture scandal spread worldwide, with the US receiving widespread condemnation for what many viewed as despicable acts of inhumanity. The use of homosexuality to torture the Muslim captives symbolically demonstrated America's growing desire to impose its sexual identity on the world. More importantly, it despised the out-group members and depicted them as less valuable due to their extreme culture that promoted homophobic values.¹²⁸ Accordingly, the Abu Ghraib scandal emphasized America's efforts at homonationalist efforts premised on disdaining non-western cultures they viewed as hostile to the West. This example is an example of how homonationalism can result in the degradation of human rights for some members of society, in this case, Muslim POW victims. Homonationalism presents a human rights contention as some in the US gay community may gain rights while other human rights are the target of the weaponization of Islamophobia.

¹²⁷ Rosner, Emma D. "Abu Ghraib, Homonationalism, and the Rationalization of Modern Torture." *Inquiries Journal* 12, no. 09 (2020): 1-2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

Implications for Queer Rights

The queer nationalism of the 1990s and the homonationalism movements have demonstrated how human rights have often occupied a central position in LGBTQ+ affairs. Today, stakeholders at large recognize and view LGBTQ+ rights as a key part of the human rights dispensation. In many countries, including the United States, LGBTQ+ movements began as liberation movements fighting for survival through visibility. However, since the twenty-first century, some gay groups have slowly fought for incorporation into the national discourse, focusing on their civil rights.¹²⁹ In addition, the internationalization of such movements influenced the recognition of gay freedoms as a crucial part of the international human rights agenda. As nationalist movements have integrated the gay community into some countries' social fabric, the gay community is now actively advocating for inclusion within the nation.¹³⁰ With the new dispensation, the gay community now enjoys the autonomy to establish intimate relationships that align with their interests and identities. While doing so, the state must protect them just like they would have safeguarded the rights of any other heterosexual individual.¹³¹ Accordingly, this means that gay rights and human rights, as initially conceptualized, are compatible and inseparable.

The continued agitation for human rights has also led to internationalizing gay human rights needs. Organizations like the United Nations (UN) now recognize the unique position of LGBTQ+ people in society. Members of the LGBTQ community have continued to form global organizations that enable them to sensitize governments and people on the need to observe their

¹²⁹George Andreopoulos and Kabasakal Arat Zehra, *On the Uses and Misuses of Human Rights: A Critical Approach to Advocacy*. Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014, 30.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹³¹ Ibid., 32.

rights and freedom.¹³² An example of such a movement is the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). ILGA has a membership of about 1900 members across 169 countries. Since 1978, the organization has played a critical role in advocating for the rights of LGBTQ+ people.¹³³ ILGA has also embraced its role as a human rights watchdog, especially in European and African countries that have failed to respect human rights. In 2020, ILGA wrote a letter to the Hungarian government petitioning it to stop the ban it had placed on the gender recognition of trans citizens in the country. Part of the letter reads, "we, along with our members in Hungary, strongly opposed the proposed amendment to the national registry, such that it will effectively make legal gender recognition for trans and intersex people impossible in Hungary, which contravenes EU and international human rights law and violates the well-established right to private and family life for trans and intersex Hungarians."¹³⁴ By directly addressing the Hungarian government's Prime Minister, ILGA demonstrated its commitment to achieving the equality of gay people regardless of where they lived.

Through the petitions spearheaded by LGBTQ+ advocates, courts worldwide have made landmark pronouncements that continue to shape local and international jurisdictions on gay rights. Supreme Courts of some of the established democracies in the world have made several landmark rulings that have decriminalized sexual acts and recognized same-sex partners as legitimate families. Parental rights and same-sex marriage freedoms have expanded thanks to the favorable interpretation of courts in certain developed countries.¹³⁵ *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) is arguably

¹³² George Andreopoulos and Kabasakal Arat Zehra, *On the Uses and Misuses of Human Rights*, 29.

¹³³ "Homepage - ILGA-Europe," ILGA, March 20, 2023. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/>.

¹³⁴ "Joint Letter to the Hungarian Government," TGEU, May 19, 2020, <https://tgeu.org/joint-letter-to-the-hungarian-government/>.

¹³⁵ Angioletta Sperti, *Constitutional courts, gay rights and sexual orientation equality*. Vol. 14. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017, 4.

the most significant constitutional interpretation in the US regarding issues of gay rights. The Supreme Court ruling in the case legalized same-sex marriage, giving the gay community the right to marry.¹³⁶ In this case, the legal question in front of the Supreme Court was whether the Fourteenth Amendment protected the rights of same-sex couples to engage in same-sex marriage. In their ruling, the court argued that marriage bans that excluded same-sex couples from enjoying civil marriage's rights and responsibilities were unconstitutional. The court noted that "these facially discriminatory laws impose concrete harms on same-sex couples and send the inescapable message that same-sex couples and their children are second-class families, unworthy of the recognition and benefits that opposite-sex couples take for granted."¹³⁷ As a result, the justices established that the Fourteenth Amendment gave gay people the same rights as their straight counterparts to participate in a recognized civil marriage. This landmark interpretation demonstrated the commitment of the courts to expand gay rights and strengthen them through constitutional reforms continually.

The continued sense of nationalism among the queer community has expanded their knowledge and commitment to their rights. Pride Month is an example of a movement that has continued to create a sense of community and pride, and perhaps a sense of nationalism, among LGBTQ+ people. Through such events, LGBTQ+ members converge, share values, and establish a common stance regarding their interests and desires. In 2009, during President Obama's tenure, the gay community received a boost to their activities due to the liberal environment promoted by

¹³⁶ Aloy, Ojilere, "Obergefell v. Hodges and the Judicialization of Same-Sex Marriage in America: Legalizing the Impossible." (2016), 33-34.

¹³⁷ "In the Supreme Court of the United States - U.S. Department of Justice." Accessed March 28, 2023. <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2015/03/06/obergefellhodesbrief.pdf>.

the Democratic-led government.¹³⁸ President Obama recognized the critical role that Pride Month played in creating consciousness of LGBTQ+ members' civil and political rights. The outcome of this form of nationalism became apparent in the increased participation of LGBTQ+ people in government affairs. For instance, President Obama appointed a transgender person, Amanda Simpson, to serve in a senior government position.¹³⁹ Such efforts focused on changing the nation's history and shunning the retrogressive heterosexual attitudes that had subdued the actions of the queer people. More importantly, it showed a desire, whether it be genuine or political, to incorporate the gay community into the national matrix and treat them equally to their heterosexual counterparts. At the same time as these actions, the US government continued its military involvement in the Middle East. While some advancements were made for some gay people domestically, the US continued bombings that killed many innocent civilians in the Middle East, but criticism was often absent because the victims were Muslim.¹⁴⁰

Social media has provided members of the gay community with a new way of building their sense of community and a platform to push for their rights. Social media remains one of the most powerful tools in the new era. It allows activists to gather and advocate for changes by sharing various perspectives. Over the years, Twitter has provided advocates with an open platform where they can interact with other like-minded people to push for agendas.¹⁴¹ Steinberg contends that "social media platforms provide a low-cost, fast, and easy-to-use tool that effectively disseminates

¹³⁸ Notaro, Sheri R. *Marginality and global LGBT Communities: Conflicts, Civil Rights and Controversy*. Springer Nature, 2019, 18.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴⁰ Consider the devastating NATO-led bombing of Libya in 2011: Joe Dyke, "NATO Killed Civilians in Libya. It's Time to Admit It.," *Foreign Policy*, March 20, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/20/nato-killed-civilians-in-libya-its-time-to-admit-it/>.

¹⁴¹ This is likely in the process of drastically changing with Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter.

information and helps advocates garner support for their cause."¹⁴² The LGBTQ+ community has used social media for various roles. Some have seen it as a safe space to come out and open up about their sexuality. Others have used it as a platform to push conversations related to human rights and the LGBTQ+ community. In some instances, social media platforms have granted gay people a chance to boycott and demonstrate their power to the public. For example, between 2008 and 2010, Chick-fil-A donated over \$3.2 million in a bid to promote anti-LGBTQ sentiment.¹⁴³ Members of the LGBTQ+ community responded by rallying their members to boycott the company. Social media played a critical role in ensuring the message reached these people. Therefore, this shows the power of social networking platforms in creating unity, pride, and, more importantly, fighting for gay rights locally and internationally.

Educational institutions are also making concerted efforts to promote equality for the LGBTQ+ community. Universities and colleges have remained active in advocating for the rights of the queer community.¹⁴⁴ Some organizations are taking affirmative action, such as increasing the diversity of the people working in these facilities. For instance, by appointing LGBTQ+ members as part of the academic staff, universities are showing increased support for sexual equality in the country.¹⁴⁵ Besides affirmative action, universities have also served as promoters of national and international discourses about LGBTQ+ rights. In the wake of the increased discrimination against sexual minorities and homophobic attitudes, schools in the Philippines

¹⁴² Stacey B. Steinberg "Advocacy: Social Media Activism's Power to Transform Law." *Ky. LJ* 105 (2016): 413.

¹⁴³ Erica L. Ciszek, "Digital activism: How Social Media and Dissensus Inform Theory and Practice." *Public relations review* 42, no. 2 (2016): 315.

¹⁴⁴ Kristen A Renn, "LGBT Student Leaders and Queer Activists: Identities of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Identified College Student Leaders and Activists." *Journal of College Student Development* 48, no. 3 (2007): 311.

¹⁴⁵ "The Inclusion of LGBT People in Education Settings of Paramount Importance to 'Leaving No One behind,'" OHCHR, October 2, 2019. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2019/10/inclusion-lgbt-people-education-settings-of-paramount-importance-leaving-no-one>.

formed a movement known as "Just Let Us Be." The primary aim of this movement is to ensure that schools become safe spaces for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation. The movement advocates directly confronted discrimination, bullying, and sexual assault, often directed against LGBTQ+ people.¹⁴⁶ In addition, it hopes to ensure that LGBTQ+-related information flows to students without any hindrance. As a result, higher education institutions have played a critical role as sources of gay community and pride in the US and other parts of the world. Thus, the gay rights enjoyed today are partly a result of the efforts placed by students in their respective learning institutions.

The sense of community, pride, and of nationalism, coupled with a focus on human rights, incentivized the LGBTQ+ community to start thinking about families. The LGBTQ+ community became bold by challenging the traditional definitions of what a family entails. Over the years, critics have viewed non-heteronormative relationships as unnatural acts that violate fundamental family values. However, with the continued LGBTQ+ activism, this notion has changed. Statistics now show that between 2 million and 3.7 million children in the US below 18 have an LGBTQ+ member as a parent.¹⁴⁷ In addition, statistics also show that same-sex couples are raising about 200,000 children in the United States. Legal and political debates over the years have focused on whether same-sex couples qualify as good parents. However, evidence from social science and empirical evidence show that gay parents are as good as their heterosexual counterparts.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, the LGBTQ+ community continues to agitate for political rights, citing the need to influence the country's leadership. Research has shown that political participation is crucial

¹⁴⁶ Ryan Thoreson, "'Just Let Us Be,'" Human Rights Watch, September 11, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/06/21/just-let-us-be/discrimination-against-lgbt-students-philippines>.

¹⁴⁷ Gary J Gates, "Marriage and family: LGBT individuals and same-sex couples." *The Future of Children* (2015): 67-87.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 67.

for minorities. Such engagement is a tool for maximizing inclusivity and providing the much-needed value to serve group-specific needs.¹⁴⁹ Members of the gay community now realize that they need more rights and queer-friendly policies that serve their interests. They can no longer rely on the heterosexual majority to represent their interests at the state and national levels. As a result, several gay politicians have offered themselves to run for office at different levels in the US electoral system. In 2019, Pete Buttigieg, a gay candidate, ran for the Democratic Presidential ticket. Many people regarded his move as a culmination of years of struggle and desire for inclusion into the national discourse. In one of his speeches during the campaign, Buttigieg inferred identity, representation, and inclusivity as fundamental aspects that inspired his candidacy.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Stuart J. Turnbull-Dugarte and Townsley Joshua, "Political Engagement and Turnout among Same-sex Couples in Western Europe." *Research & Politics* 7, no. 4 (2020): 2053168020976952.

¹⁵⁰ Alexander Burns, "Pete Buttigieg's Campaign Kickoff: Full Speech, Annotated," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, April 15, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/15/us/politics/pete-buttigieg-speech.html>.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis between queer nationalism of the HIV/AIDS activism and homonationalism of post-9/11 has shed light on new insights. First, in both events, the quest for human rights and nationalism remained apparent. To varying degrees, actors in both eras wanted to self-identify with national politics while expecting the government to reciprocate by protecting their interests. However, although queer nationalism used radical tactics to gain recognition, homonationalism relied on collaboration with the state and the promotion of an exceptionalism strategy that would block 'homophobic ideas from infiltrating the country.' In both circumstances, activists relied on in-group and out-group dynamics to establish a sense of nationalism. While queer nationalists created an identity around fighting for the health of the queer community and fighting heterosexual systems, homonationalism wanted more recognition and appreciation from the status quo. Human rights language was at the center stage of the movements' discussions. Queer nationalists advocated for various rights, including access to health, privacy, civil disobedience, speech, and nondiscrimination. On the other hand, homonationalism focused marriage equality and family rights such as adoption. Due to the different eras represented, the two groups' goals, aims, and aspirations differed.

Furthermore, the discussion has also shown the significance of the nationalism debate in their respective movements. Queer nationalism focused on redefining their activities and distinguishing them from the politics of gay liberation. Rather than focusing on issues associated with the LGBTQ+ community, members sought to establish a new identity under the "queerness" umbrella. Members challenged the traditional definition of nationalism that has favored heterosexual values. They also demonstrated territorial nationalism by identifying the specific

areas in which they operated on US soil. Homonationalists used the existing war on terror to leverage their quest for inclusion. They embraced a xenophobic and often racial approach that painted Islam as an out-group member. Members established a new form of nationalism characterized by negative attitudes towards immigration and the integration of people from countries labeled as 'backward and homophobic.' As a result, queer nationalists developed a sense of territorial nationalism by identifying countries supporting gay rights.

Importantly, this paper has demonstrated how LGBTQ+ people and differing forms of nationalism operate in complex ways. The form of nationalism, as seen in Queer Nation, was radically left politically and formed from a bottom-up movement composed of ordinary queer activists. In contrast, homonationalism is an academic term used to describe the normative nationalism present in Western countries that has adapted its relationship to certain gay subjects. From this perspective, homonationalism is considered a top-down form of nationalism because it is a way to analyze a particular phenomenon. Queer Nation was a meaningful means of grouping queer people in their everyday lives. Homonationalism is a concept that acts as a guide to better understand nationalist trends in the United States and other Western countries.

The comparative assessment of the two events has shown that nationalism and human rights can coexist or work against one another. Human rights stem from a group's acceptability in society and the nation's commitment through a social contract. The two activist groups helped to bring certain LGBTQ+ issues into the limelight. In addition, they played a critical role in integrating some LGBTQ+ matters with aspects of national interests. As a result, for years, countries have found it necessary to accept homosexuals and grant them equal society. However, concerning their ability to break the heteronormative structures, this is a work in progress. Thus far, they have shown the rest of the world that gay rights are human rights. Yet at the same time,

it has been shown that homonationalism presents a human rights dilemma. Critics of homonationalism ask why the expansion of certain gay rights must come at the expense of Muslims.

Efforts witnessed during queer nationalism and homonationalism have had a direct influence on LGBTQ+ persons' conceptualization of human rights. With the continued integration into the social fabric and national debate, LGBTQ+ people in the United States have continued to actively fight against discrimination, including book bans, anti-transgender laws, and hate speech.¹⁵¹ Many more people are openly LGBTQ+ and using social media to push for pro-gay 'agendas.' The increased social networking has also leveraged their efforts, making their voices impactful locally and internationally. Learning institutions such as colleges and universities are legitimate hubs for the gay rights movement. In addition, the queer community has increasingly embraced political participation through direct and indirect engagement in leadership affairs.

¹⁵¹ Brian Levin et al., rep., *Report to the Nation: 2020s – Dawn of a Decade of Rising Hate*, August 4, 2022, <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/2022-08/Report%20To%20The%20Nation8-4-22.pdf>.

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