

Liberatory Archives and Memory

Archiving Our Movements

Issue 01

A conversation with Haneen Maikey:
alQaws's Palestinian Queer Movement Archive

whose  knowledge?

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Whose Knowledge?

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Archiving our movements is a podcast series
by the Liberatory Archives and Memory
programme at Whose Knowledge?, where we
centre community voices on how archival
practices become tools of resistance in the face
of state violence and genocide.

Liberatory Archives and Memory (LAMy) is a programme at Whose Knowledge? an action to build critical archival knowledge and document archival practices. It brings together a community of individuals, groups, and institutions from across the world to collectively reimagine “the archive” and “sites of memory” as powerful spaces and acts of resistance, healing, and transformation.

Central to the program are the infrastructures of (liberatory) archives and memory for imagining alternatives to Big Knowledge (archives, museums, libraries and other memory institutions such as academic and publishing) and examine how knowledge, history, and memory are produced, held, and shared.

www.liberatoryarchivesmemory.org

Whose Knowledge? is a global, translocal multilingual non-profit organization and a campaign centering the multiple knowledges, histories, leadership, and imaginations of the minoritised majority of the world (including but not only, on the internet), towards collective liberation. We are working towards feminist and plural futures anchored in reparative frameworks and practices at the intersections of epistemic, social, and tech justice.

The Global Majority comprises 3/4 of the online population, coming from Asia, Africa, Latin America. Our leadership, design, and imaginations have rarely been centered in institutions of what we call “Big Knowledge” (mainstream academia, publishing, museums, archives, libraries and memory organizations) as well as “Big Tech” (Silicon Valley and other regionally dominant tech capitalist companies). To address this, we intentionally collaborate with women, indigenous and racialised communities, LGBTQI+ communities from the Global South to build towards more representation of our knowledge.

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“Queers passed through here” Ramallah, Palestine

Archiving Our Movements, a podcast series by the Liberatory Archives and Memory program. Haneen Maikey speaks about alQaws's Palestinian queer movement archive and what it means for the Palestinian story and how queer organising is part of the liberation struggle.

Narrating alQaws's archival process, Haneen shows us crucial archival practices that intend to tell a bigger story through collective care, reflection and learning.

Listen to the podcast at
<https://www.liberatoryarchivesmemory.org/alqaws/>

Ezrena: I'm Ezrena from Malaysia
Sally: and I'm Sally from Egypt

This is Archiving Our Movements, a podcast series by the Liberatory Archives and Memory program at Whose Knowledge? where we centre community voices on how archival practices become tools of resistance in the face of erasure, violence and on going genocide.

In this episode, we'll be speaking to Haneen Maikey, co-founder of AlQaws (alQaws for Sexual & Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society, a civil society organization founded in grassroots activism). She is also part of AlQaws's archiving team.

Haneen: Thank you for the invitation and for opening the space. It is really magical that we all found each other now [by] connecting around the archive. I wonder what that means [for] global collaboration, building alliances. Maybe this is an opportunity so thank you for that.

My name is Haneen. For the last 20 years of my life, I was involved in co-founding and building the Palestinian queer

movement through the national LGBT queer organization called alQaws. alQaws was created in 2001 during The Second Intifada, without going into details about what this event is. But for me, as someone who is 47 years old, lived in Palestine all of my life, The Second Intifada is the main major political event that shaped my generation. The Palestinian queer movement and myself. I am saying, myself, because we as individuals were also going through this political analysis and experience. So that is how my queer life, queer being, became so intertwined with exploring my Palestinian history as a colonized subject. For me being queer is also exploring who I am as a Palestinian.

In the last five years, after stepping down from my director role that I led for 20 years, I started to be involved in archiving work, which is really funny! I am not coming from documentation and archiving and memory, but I feel like it is also a part of me as someone who always struggled with erasure on so many levels. So it's like, I get it! It is really fun to learn the tools and skills with a lot of friends and comrades in the last two years. I think the archival space is giving people my age and my experience some kind of a new way to re-engage with the community while committing to change, you know? It is like not bringing our old selves to the movement, but just really giving ourselves the opportunity to re-explore who we are in the community. I think, at least, I found the archival work rewarding in that sense. That's it. I've been based in Palestine all of my life and that's my introduction.

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Sally: Haneen, alQaws started in 2007, right? What motivated you to start alQaws as a project? What was the first step like?

Haneen: I am going to tell the story. alQaws started in 2001, not in 2007. But you are right, you did not make up that number. That 2007 is basically the year that we decided we want to be an independent movement and reject all of our relationship to colonization and a lot of Israeli groups. Unfortunately, but not unfortunately and I would explain it now, alQaws started as a small local project inside an Israeli, Zionist organization. If you go research how the civil society in Palestine was built, unfortunately, all of the movements started as co-movements. It was not much of a co-thing, but it was more like, you know, 'we are giving space to some Palestinians.'

So I will tell the story because it is inherently connected. The Israeli group used to have a lot of Palestinians coming to their space because they were a local Jerusalem-based [organization that is] not really involved in politics. So they were a bit friendly. During The Second Intifada in 1999, 2000, 2001, Palestinians stopped coming to the center, which raised a lot of concerns by the Israeli groups who wondered why the Palestinians stopped coming. So they brought me! I was a young, stupid community organizer exploring my queerness. From the beginning, we understood, this is weird, who the fuck are they? The whole thing started, I was working five hours a week then. The more we met

people and explored who we are, [the more] the political atmosphere became crucial.

We started in 2003, two years after, to lead some kind of a leadership process nationally, not only in Jerusalem, with the question: who are we and who do we want to be? Is this our place? Is this the reality we want to invest in or is there something else for us? In 2007, that was the end of a four-year national process, facilitated by a lot of amazing friends and comrades. We decided we are a Palestinian, anti-colonial, queer organization and we want to be independent.

So basically, the fact that we are registered as an NGO, wasn't an ideological [choice]. It was a 'we needed to do [this] because we needed to formalize the breakup,' right? I call it breakup because this is why a lot of people critique alQaws politics and history and funding and all of that, because we were in relations with an Israeli organization. I would say, but that is exactly the point: we had it all easy and we decided that this is not the story. We went through a decolonization of our minds to understand these are not our partners, not our future, not our vision. As every other Palestinian movement, the feminist, the human rights' [movement], we slowly made distance and this distance became a political one. They [the Israeli organization] knew from 2003 that this is the direction. We rented a space for a couple of years. Then we moved on to our space. So it's really important for me to explain this story because it is not only the history of decolonization of alQaws, but this is one

example of the history of civil society in Palestine [and of] how much control [there is] from the zionist movement of resources. We still see it like [with] the feminist movement of '48, that is super complicit with the Israeli or the zionist movement.

This is how 2007 is us saying we are called alQaws, we have our own registration number and we have our own board and our money and that's it. Although from the beginning, we were controlling all of these kinds of aspects, this is how we [came to be]. At the beginning, we only discussed language, family, the basic, basic stuff, how we call ourselves and all of that. It was so naive and simple in a way. That is how we started. I remember even just breaking [out] from the small local Jerusalem group to a national kind of potential. In 2003, someone suggested that we do a party, which annoyed the hell out of me, like, ah, gay men and parties! Especially now, this is the joke: Haneen organized a party for 20 years and never went to the dancing floor. That first party, we invited two people. I invited two people, and 120 people showed up in the club. That was the breaking point of: oh, wow, we have people from Haifa and Jaffa/Yafa, Ramallah, and we are not alone in Jerusalem and maybe there is a bigger potential. That's how alQaws became a local national kind of a dancer in a way? Which brought a lot of tension and labor for alQaws. But from the beginning, that was the beauty! If people from Ramallah can meet people from Jaffa/Yafa! Until now, people would say: oh, wow, you are from Haifa? This is the first time I see someone from

I think the archival space is giving people my age and my experience some kind of a new way to re-engage with the community while committing to change, you know? It is like not bringing our old selves to the movement, but just really giving ourselves the opportunity to re-explore who we are in the community. I think, at least, I found the archival work rewarding in that sense.

Haifa! Oh, you are from al-Khalil? I never heard about al-Khalil! So you could see that ‘meeting [geographical] fragmentation’ on a daily basis in alQaws. I know I go to a lot of spaces and places when you ask questions, Sally. So if you need me to be more precise, let me know.

Sally: No, this is super fun!

Ezrena: I have a question. It is a really simple one. But what does alQaws mean?

Haneen: alQaws is a rainbow, unfortunately, as someone who critiqued rainbows a lot! I think the story of the name, alQaws, is that back then in 2003, we had the first -I don’t know how we are going to document that because we lost all of the data around it- but we had a website chat forum back in 2002 (correction:2005) and we called it alQaws because it is easy to write in English. But that discussion forum was like a project that also had facilitators of chat rooms from Saudi, from Iraq, from Palestine and suddenly [we had] that online presence, I don’t know how we are going to document that! But basically it became so famous globally in the Arab World because it was the only one. So someone who hates me said: oh, these [rainbow] people; and I was like, oh, that’s actually interesting that you call us [that]. We didn’t want to say alQaws so I think alQaws was chosen because it is easy, kind of a catchy name, though the rainbow is killing our soul. But I think, the rest of [the story] is the most important for us. Is it alQaws for LGBT Palestinians? Or is it alQaws for

sexual and gender diversity? Why the Palestinian society? Why not Palestinian? Why not in Palestine? Like all of these [questions] took us months of debates. But that's it. alQaws was the easy [choice]. We still feel a bit ashamed [of it] because it's a Western kind of concept but also it is cool how you write it. I edit pages [and change] the capital A in the beginning to a small a and I keep saying it's a brand, lovely people, it's a brand. Just a small a and a capital Q.

Ezrena: That's an amazing story. I love it! I wonder if you can go to Wayback Machine to see if you can find the chats.

Haneen: Yeah, I need to get into this. I don't know where it is. We lost two: this one and the pinkwashing Israel website which I'm so angry about, but it is what it is. Someone didn't pay the hosting fees. That's it!

Sally: For me, growing up in Egypt, I remember the minute I saw al-Qaws, I was like: wow, I know what that means! I remember specifically the party and the hotline. I think it was totally well-branded and I love the image of Haneen organizing a party for 20 years. I love that, Haneen!

Haneen: I was the toughest in the party scene in Palestine. I think that I [c]ould speak for hours about that connection because you meet 400 queer Palestinians every month and they are not your 'activists'. They're coming from all villages, from all parts, socioeconomic classes, education [backgrounds], even relationship to the community, married,

not married. It's just insane! It's doing queer organizing in the wild, if that makes sense. We would go home so exhausted. I would stay up Saturday and Sunday. Every weekend, we would have a party. Our parties were from 5 till 11 pm. We refused to organize the party according to any queer/gay party standards. People would say it's early hours [and we would say] go to another party? 400 people for 20 years from 5 to 11, right? We broke all the rules around what is a queer party. Till now, people would be in coffee shops and they would record the music and say: oh my God, [this is] alQaws party music, Elisa and all, right? Like hishek bishek. We claimed it as alQaws party music and our DJs that we interviewed, they're so funny, they would have alQaws [DJ sets] and they would play it in London or anywhere else because it became for them as a concept. They would say, sometimes we go into a club and we know that we need to play this music!

Sally: You started the trend, that's now the queer Arab music.

Haneen: The queer Arab music, yeah. Which I cannot stand anymore. I cannot!

Ezrena: Please share the playlist. Please share the playlist and archive the playlist, please.

Sally: I shamelessly love it, Haneen. I endorse it. I want to build on something you said and I would love for you to draw some attention [to] pinkwashing. I, in my own experience,

learned a lot about pinkwashing through your work and I would love to hear more about that from you, specifically at this [historical] moment.

Haneen: Yeah, I'm laughing because now we are going to explore together with a group of comrades who were involved in building our anti-pinkwashing activism around 2008 to 2012, I think. We are going to hold a memory workshop in Amsterdam this fall to just really explore that activism. Why I'm [telling you this] is because even who invented the pinkwashing term is a debate, right? It's a debate between white queers and Israeli queers, which is really funny, while we were doing the work. So I don't know who invented the term pinkwashing, but I think it started, I remember, when I was young, 21 or 22, going into the queer movement. Israeli ministers [would] have these old-fashioned flyers. I call it the first generation of pinkwashing, that would have a list of [countries like] Iraq, Saudi, Iran, 'who kills the gays' and then Israel [on a separate list]. This simple kind of propaganda, but even before this, there is the Zionist kind of media groups. So this is the beginning of it, right? Then the Israeli groups capitalized on this and started to use it.

I [wouldn't] have [a] problem with pinkwashing if it was a propaganda tool because a lot of people claim the heart of pinkwashing is basically Israel saying, 'we love the gays.' So why [would] I have a problem with that? But we know that pinkwashing is not that, right? Pinkwashing is a

manipulation tool to divert attention. It doesn't say Israel is queer friendly. Yeah, it does say that, but it says also, 'they are killing their gays,' right? [These two] are always together. It's not about Israel being democratic. They can be democratic -that doesn't mean they're not committing a genocide- [but] it's [also] saying, we [Palestineans] believe inherently in dictatorships, right? We want that oppression. We are 'barbaric, violent human beings. Homophobia is rooted in our skin.' These kinds of statements, for years, became the main kind of frameworks that global queer solidarity worked under. Unfortunately, I see that [it] was co-opted by the BDS movement specifically, and a lot of celebrity queer activists who found pinkwashing and queer global solidarity as their way to be involved in Palestinian solidarity. That created a lot of tension, and Sally, I will speak about the Gazan page because it gives a lot of nuance about that. I spent the last 10 years saying, guys, pinkwashing is not propaganda. Pinkwashing is colonial violence. That shift started when we stepped away from global queer solidarity work and looked inside and started to see how a 19-year old queer gay guy who's calling us from Nablus, and explaining the oppression and the lack of opportunities and the contact with Zionist organizations and the process they go through. Wow... This is a propaganda and violent tool to trap Palestinian queers, right? We shifted the whole thing [by] saying, oh, it's colonial violence. It's fragmenting Palestinian queers from their own queer friends (and their own selves) and their society. They're convincing the Palestinian society that we are collaborators with the West or at least victims

So it's really important for me to explain this story because it is not only the history of decolonization of alQaws, but this is one example of the history of civil society in Palestine [and of] how much control [there is] from the Zionist movement of resources.

who've been saved by our colonizers, right? So we started to see this is making more harm [in the] inside.

It's not about convincing the white, trans, queer activist who's living in Brighton now how Israel is using gay rights to convince him that Palestinians are awful. [This is about] the direct impact on queer bodies in Palestine and how, for example, in our last strategic planning, we were talking about [this]. If we want to fight pinkwashing, we need to invest in outreach, right? We don't need to invest in advocacy against pinkwashing. We need to find ways to be in contact with queer youth across Palestine. We need to be the first address. We need people to know us before they know about the Israeli organization [although] we don't have the resources and the capacities and the money to do that. But this is how we started to fight it. I got really frustrated last week because there was suddenly a page on Instagram for queers from Gaza that's been really suspicious [with their] content but 7,000 people -half of them are my friends- are following this page. They are reading my stories and my analysis and going back and following that page! I don't understand it! Someone was saying, Haneen, their location was Israel and they changed it and I was like, no, you are stupid! I could live in Haifa and my location would be Jordan or Gaza. We are so close that this is not the sign. But all of what I was saying was not convincing. So I don't know what is difficult about explaining pinkwashing and that's where I think we failed because clearly, this incident [the Instagram account] shows us that it's not that clear. [That] still the

sentiment of someone potentially being queer and Gazan and outspoken and all of that is more important than reading the content, which is AI generated images and text! These are smart friends. These are my friends. So this is what pinkwashing is. I think I'm referring to how pinkwashing has been used all the time and now it's almost irrelevant because this incident is showing us that it's either propaganda or nothing.

Sally: I don't think you [alQaws] failed at all. I think anyone who is facing [this] story of creating this binary that Israel is advocating for, as the only 'queer friendly country in the region' and then by default, it means that all our countries are misogynist and homophobic. I think anyone with that mindset will assume [or] eliminate the queer Arab struggle in itself. It's very naive so I don't think you guys failed. I feel like you actually set the discourse and you gave practice to it. In my opinion, alQaws solidified what that means to actually oppose pinkwashing. I don't know how this looked from your end, Ezrena, in your part of the world.

Ezrena: I need some time to think about that.

Sally: Of course. But Haneen, I think for me, actually, the most important question of today's conversation is why is it important for you, as Haneen, to archive a movement with all of the intimacy of it, with all the complications, with all the pain and loss? We have spoken about this multiple times, and I can listen to you speaking about archiving and

movements more and more.

Haneen: Oh, so many layers but I don't know why you're asking me, and I'm thinking about myself. You know, it's hard. We all know how hard it is for founders to leave the movement. I know it's not that spoken about, but a lot of our movements, a lot of leaders feel trapped for a lot of years because of the lack of options. Leadership, and all of that, feeling trapped in roles inside alQaws for a lot of people inside alQaws, it's a major kind of experience. As the director, I had to decide many times how I'm going to lead, like even [leading to] the decision to leave my position, [I] committed for a five-year process because I understood that I needed to. So moving on from all of that, I think having the space of four years of disconnect from the movement and dealing with the aftermath of chronic pain, depression, [and] burning out completely. I think the archive is a space where I think -I opened with this- I don't need to go to my old role, but just find some other space. For instance, I refuse to join the alQaws board. I [made] the decisions for 20 years. I led the board. I don't need that power. I'm almost beyond that. I want a space for learning, for reflection, for care. This is where I find I want to be on a personal level. Maybe. I brought to the movement toughness, sharpness, discourse, no bullshit, you know, and I'm doing [harshening] my voice like this intentionally. I'm bringing something different, but it's almost reassuring to the movement at the same time, right? Because it's almost [like] saying, oh, this experience, I want to use it now to build more power for me. It's just,

oh, we have all of this experience, how could we share this power with [another] generation. We had a meeting with some regional activists talking about the region's story too. I still find the motivation for the local archive and the regional story is [like] a lot of love for the new generation. Someone left the meeting saying, I'm glad you are bringing love because I'm bringing revenge and anger. So I feel like it's not my generation, it's me personally committing to bringing that kind of, you know, it's not a performative love.

Listening to [the] amazing young hotline coordinators speaking about their own experience. They talked about this guy from Gaza that has been calling alkhat (the hotline) for eight years apparently! I [didn't] know the story and all of the three of them that coordinated alkhat for eight years know him. The current coordinator said that alkhat didn't stop operating for the last half a year, he didn't call us and a couple of weeks ago he called! [they were worried about him because of the genocide in Gaza]. They talk about how even someone from Gaza going through genocide is saying, I just want to hear your voice and tell you that I'm okay. We could romanticize this, but this is about the hope that people think movement brings; hope as in saving the movement. It's just these small spaces, [that] someone could find someone! They spoke about it for half a year. That person from Gaza shaped their lives. Going now into genocide for the last two years, it changed it, changed how they look at this experience. So just going into how the outside and the inside [connect] This dialogue [happens] all the time in alQaws. I don't know why I

came to this. I even forgot your question, but this is the thing I'm living today, I think. So I'm sharing because it's still super fresh.

Ezrena: I love that because sometimes when we are recording something or documenting something or think that we know something, and then things change, the timeline or whatever it is that you think you know, it completely changes. You suddenly find yourself having to readjust and adapt to the new information that has come, right? Or the new time[line], always evolving. I think that's also the beauty of archiving. The entanglements of things that are always moving, just the organic [nature] of it, which leads us to the next question. Tell us about the Palestinian Queer Movement Archive.

Haneen: I think the idea emerged back in 2020 because we held a two-year process saying that I'm leaving at the end of 2020, a final decision, and we all need to commit to the leadership transition because it's not about removing me and bringing someone new. It is about reshaping the organization and what is grounding this conversation because I admit I was a grounding force [and so] I'm not going to be replaced. We need to find something more internal, more genuine, more shared, value-oriented, all of this. So we did this amazing[ly]. I had someone interview me about leadership transition and they would say: how will the leadership transition be successful? I was like, well, never! Because we led the most amazing leadership transition and it

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failed, right? Because it is the nature of leadership transition. It's beyond being so intentional and all of that. It's about the fact that someone will leave, and it's just more than that.

But anyway, we did this amazing kind of process and one of the insights was, maybe [I] can share [my] experience with the new generation because it's 20 years of perspective. So I wrote the proposal of archiving, that alQaws picked up from somewhere on the drive a couple of years ago and they started to collect data, I think in the conversation of rebranding their website and all of that. So they started to do data collection, categorization and maintenance. Then they invited me to come because the idea was simple. We will hire Haneen, she will write a story and we will open a website in 2025 and we will publish the story. That was the project! I came and I was like, oh, the story is not one story. I'm not the one who should write the story. Where are the others? I forgot most of the things that others could help me with. Suddenly, from this position, we started to discover the community value of this connection. I had to submit a concept note about the archival project in January. I could complete it in May, but only after I spoke with a lot of activists. I couldn't even imagine the archival project not being shaped by all of the people who were my comrades in 2000 and 2009 [during] all of these milestones. So the Queer Archive Project, it is some kind of a resistance tool against erasure and pinkwashing and all of that. But I love to think about it as a space for the community to come and explore

gratitude and dreaming and imagination, learning from the past, finding passion and vision for the future. I'm more connected to this kind of aspect.

At the end of the day, yeah, we will say we are here and we will correct information and we will provide our stories. But if we are an anti-colonial, feminist, queer organization, the people who made the movement are the main story. All of the aspects of their stories, of how they came to alQaws and how they left alQaws, how they love alQaws and how they hold anger [against] alQaws. alQaws is so meaningful. We have so many feelings about this organization. I always say: express it all, but don't exaggerate. It's still an organization. It's us. It's a space that we could project, with no judgment. But also, if you want to do that, you also need to collect, frame, offer something else. You could also vomit all of your critique. But there are two sides of it. So this became a community archival project [which] means a lot of questions are still open and [we are] exploring our strategies. But there is one thing that we discovered that this is a moment globally and locally and regionally that has a lot of potential to really maybe connect in the process of telling our histories and connecting with the young generation. There is a lot of power here. But anyway, that's another story. It's real, right? There is 'a moment' and co-option [comes] like this, it's so fast. It's insane.

Sally: Haneen, I want to ask you, how do you navigate for the Queer Archive not to become the story of one group? As

you said, it's always a community, it's a story and it cannot happen by one person or one entity. How do you navigate this in your work?

Haneen: I think [through two things] to be value-oriented, to be committed to the values -and I will explain now what I mean- and also practice spaces and ways to make it happen, right? I faced this. I hold a lot of power and authority and I was in the middle of a lot of stressful conversations, conflicts and all of that. I think I dealt with a lot of conflicts in a lot of good ways but also in negative ways, and I think facing myself hesitating and seeing: oh, so I basically can invite anyone who I'm comfortable with. I could invite my friends and we will have fun and we will write the stories. But then I understood that at the end of the conflicts, they are the people who founded alQaws. The conflict is not external or like far away, right? I think framing that, the archive, the accessibility to the archive and the accessibility to tell your own perspective about this big story is your right as an activist. [This] is what shifted everything. I will give you an example. We are now inviting this Palestinian queer from BDS founders to the Amsterdam meeting. So when I speak with people, I say: we intentionally excluded two names from this group because of this and that and we are going to write about it. So even the people we exclude intentionally because of corruption, because of violence and exclusion, we feel we owe them an explanation why we think that, right? It's not about trashing the name and saying they're corrupt, but it's [about] that commitment. So it's hard, right? Now, we

see a lot of people saying: we don't want to remember, I wish I didn't see this timeline, [or] oh my God now we are hearing these kinds of stories. Maybe I can talk with you about this, but I don't want to talk about this.

So it's like, 25 years later, people still have the same pain? So what does that mean about the process we did for the whole 10 years? This is why I feel it will be successful to build a safe healing space and not a triggering space. That is our next challenge. I think that's what we were all talking about in the Cara Page session [a session organized by alQaws], that desire. How I can give this opportunity, not only [to] alkhath activist who was so proud about the hotline [work], but there were a lot of people with different kinds of feelings. Now we are filming all of the positive, good, you know, 'there is no conflict' [type of stories] but I'm worried more about the complicated stories. I think the activists tried to tell their story and we gave them the right instead of us [making] the decision. That shifted some of the ideas, and I'm sorry, but we are all so old that we don't remember most of the things. So if we want to build a crucial kind of archive, a concrete one, we need a collective memory because the things we forgot, they are a part of the story too. We found ourselves forgetting the same things, the same people, you know?

Ezrena: You said that doing this archiving has a lot of power and also that we need each other to build this collective memory. So what are some of the challenges that you faced? Because, you know, as someone who is also archiving the

queer movement in Malaysia, there are a lot of challenges. Like you said, like we're so old, sometimes we don't remember things, for example, just like spaces, right? Or how spaces look like. So when someone brings a photograph of, oh, this is the nightclub that we used to go to in 1995, you'd be like: oh my gosh, you don't remember it? I guess my question is, what are the challenges? How do you navigate things like co-opting, extraction and dealing with funders? Yeah, I think these are two different questions, but yeah [both are about] challenges.

Haneen: Yeah, I will share my thoughts and nothing is clear now, we are developing these approaches [as we go]. How [do I] explain that? I decided, for instance, that our queer global story is going to be a story about extraction, tokenism, and that's one thing. The second thing, there is the story and there is the project, but there is also thematic archiving: why we are anti-colonial, how we came here, the story I just told you, right? Putting it in a context, a historical and theoretical kind of context. These are the ways we are dealing with it. Tomorrow, a research I co-authored about funding and LGBT grassroots organizations globally will be out. I mean, the stories about funding are global. So I feel like writing our story with funders is so insightful.

Our story is how you challenge capitalist things. I never in my life submitted any timesheet to any funders, ever. This is not acceptable. I'm not going to ask my team, [who] bring their soul and heart and time, so [I] can submit it to the

I really believe,
because we were so
interconnected to the
outside and that colonial
kind of context and
resisting it, that our
story is the Palestinian
story.

Swedish government. I don't care. You know, they would say, so we cannot give you money and do audits and I would say, thank you. They would [still] give us the money. So [this is] just a proof that none of these things really, really, really matter. It's a control thing. So how to really resist control, how to make proposals, grant writing, and reports as internal tasks and not external tasks. I'm not evaluating alkhath so I can take the next \$10,000. I'm evaluating [it] because it's important for me, for the community, for all of the volunteers. We want to understand the statistics. We want to update, and upgrade alkhath. If we take money because of this, you know, funders will call us saying: what an amazing report! [Yes], because I didn't write it for you. This is the kind of story we want to tell. So definitely we are going to add a layer besides the videos with activists and the timeline and the stories of the project. I moved on from, you know, the general mainstream, 'queer movement' of alQaws story. That's an easy one! But just like, what are the additions we could show, right? To show the depth of the queer movement in terms of discourse, political analysis, and reach. It's not only the story of alQaws. It's how you could offer a gender analysis to what happened in the region, sadly, because I think it was gendered because it was a specific generation and how gender dynamics were co-opted by funders and been used and manipulated. These are the stories we want to tell. Stories that the young generation could learn from and be smarter and resist, right?

We still have a lot of anger that we didn't resist tokenism

from the global queer [movement]. We did, but like, I was just telling yesterday to the young generation that back then we were alQaws and PQBDS and Pinkwatching Israel, and there were two other small groups and they all were us. But that was my strategy of making so many noises that people thought the Palestinian queer movement was huge. It was me most of the time running all of these initiatives, right? But that's like the ways of how we created noise and impact and power, which in real life we didn't have, but this is how we built it. So it's really interesting to see all of these kinds of things happening, coming together in the archive. I'm intrigued like you, what kind of story it will tell, because I have the story I want to tell now, but I have zero desire to control the end result. I'm curious about it.

Sally: Very strategic! Would you tell us a little bit more about the archiving process? You mentioned that you're also doing recordings with people from the movement and you're also recording from the archivist team. [What] does this look like? Who is involved? [Who] is the team that is doing the archive?

Haneen: Yeah. So now we are two people and a half, working [part-time] together, all of us. So it's a small, small, small team.

I'm leading the overall project, including the writing of the timeline and the main story. We have a person in charge of data, and we have a friend, Lynn Darwich, who's leading the research about the regional and the global archive. I

think that the process that we are doing is opening spaces for collective archiving. We did a pilot with three projects, our party, our hotline, and the group of founders. So we have been playing with how we build the story. One time I wrote the main story and they gave feedback in a memory session. One time we just did a memory circle then we wrote the story and people gave feedback. But the engagement of activists is not only by participating in building the information and the structure and the content of the story, but also how you want to be filmed? What question do you desire to answer? What would make you comfortable? Is me doing the dialogue with you feeling comfortable? You want things not to be asked? So it's also building this kind of, uh, you know, giving full control for activists to do that. Um, and, you know, Sally, we spoke a lot about visibility and invisibility that we thought it's going to make the whole process get stuck because who has the answer about invisibility and visibility? No one. So in a way, we changed our [agreement] with activists and said, let's drop all of [our] interest [in] the public kind of archive. No one is doing any public archives now, you know, nothing of what we are writing or filming is going to be out, [no] version of it is going to be out. [This means] that now your consent is on this: I want you to feel free to sit for two hours, have a dialogue with your former comrades in alQaws and about your life there. That's it. Later on, we will get your [other] consent.

I think breaking [down the concept of] consent and the levels to this strategy opened a lot of space. So now people

want to be in the video, right? Of course it poses a lot of security [questions]: where are the videos saved? Who has access? What will happen in the coming five years with these materials? We are partnering with a social media security[-focused], Palestinian organization to do an audit for the archive and build this kind of strategy. After that, we will expand it to alQaws in general, because these things we are not good at until now. Someone told me care means giving information to activists, so I'm spending the last few weeks writing everything, explaining everything that this videotaping will be for this and that your consent [is for this]. I really give everyone all the information I have and share with people what questions are still open and give them the option [because] the security thing is not a closed [topic] and done deal in this archive. You have the right not to give us your right, but this is the situation and we are committing to solve it. So this kind of also, the accountability, we are taking, not only, you know, the process, but just moving to[wards] involvement. We thought collective memory work is easy, but it's not easy. It's bringing 10 people [together] every time, which is a lot. So we are now diversifying our tools. So Lynn Darwich is choosing PQBS and interviewing two people from the seven [team members]. Going to Pinkwatching Israel, [we are] interviewing one activist.

[We are seeing] how personal interviews could contribute, [and] then bring it [back] to them [through] collective feedback. We are bringing the timeline and saying, guys,

this is the timeline, where do you desire to be involved. Just choose one or two. [They would reply]: I want to speak to the researcher, I want to write an entry, I want to co-write the entry, all of that! So we gave at least five different options of individual work and collective work, passive and active, that people could choose [from].

We [also] keep repeating, nothing is urgent. No one will be saved by this war. It is for us. So if it's not suitable now, [if it is] too much now, it's okay. Like we are committed to reach out to you again, and you are welcome to reach out whenever you want. People sometimes call me with a lot of drama about the things they are feeling. I always tell them, feel everything you want to feel. For me, it's okay that you are going to take up space, a year or two. We will continue writing the story. I mean, the archive is not depending on anyone specific or anything. It's just a dynamic process that I'm trying to involve as many voices as we can [in], and also trusting the process, you know, we don't have an end vision [or goal]. This is what we are. They keep asking me, what is the outcome? Fuck outcome. It's not the outcome. This archive could be just that! I don't need to even publish it or share it with anyone. It should be only the process, this process. It's dealing a lot with misconceptions in our organizing life. We need to publish, we need outcomes, we need a budget, we need to spend the budget. I was like, I'm not the director. I don't want to spend anything. I want to just, you know, have fun talking with my friends about our past in a way.

Sally: I think honestly, listening to you, it makes me think of how queer work and archival work have this commonality of responding to erasure. It almost comes from the same place. What drives us to do queer organizing is the same thing that drives you to document and archive. [It is] to say: this happened and this is how we want to narrate it. Applying all the lenses on collectiveness and consent and feminism, it becomes the politics that drive the archive and the organizing. It's all super powerful.

Haneen, I'm so happy that you guys are doing [this work]. I think in previous conversations, you said one thing that stayed with me, which was applying today's lens on past events. What do you mean by that while you're doing the archival process? I remember you said that in relation to filling the gaps, [that] you had the opportunity to reflect on certain events and now in the archival process, it also impacts the story.

Haneen: I'm trying to remember the specific context, but I think the first desire that we came with was [that] we want to write everything and publish as soon as possible. I think we got this slap in the face of this is not how archiving works. [Archiving] is not an NGO kind of a project. That desire brought with it this naive [sentiment that] we want to talk about everything. I learned this from GALA, the South African Queer Archive, that it's okay. There is the general story and the timeline and through that, you will see the gaps. You will ask yourself: where are the trans folks? How

is there no picture from 20 years of parties? [Or] let's talk about disability and invisibility. Let's talk about trans roles in specific areas in the movement. But it is not going there from 'oh, we need to cover this and that.' I was like, oh, wow, we have such a rich history that we don't need to cover everything. We need to just hold these with respect and see the right timing and window to say: okay, now we are going to document the trans experience in alQaws and it's going to be a harsh one. Meanwhile, [if] there are no trans people who could document this, who's going to document it? Are we waiting? So these kinds of questions! It's holding these gaps close. I mean, part of the archive is having these gaps and respecting them and holding them in the future. It's not about covering everything now, right? It's like [asking what is] the queer movement before Israel or the queer movement in a post-colonial context. So I'm like, I'm interested in; what do you call it in English? I'm going to borrow from the fitness world! If you do an exercise at [one] level, right? Like you [know if] are pushing this [way] or you are pushing [that] way. [Each movement] is a different kind of way of practicing your body. So this is how I imagine in the archive. There are the people and the community and there is the political [layer] and there is a social [one] and the intersection and there's the discourse and how it plays [out].

Luckily, I get so inspired when I'm in this mess. Like people see mess. I see structure. I see potential. I see the future of the archive and I can hold it. I can see it. That's where I am in the archive and with the gaps.

It's not running to fill the gaps, [it is] respecting them. It's saying, oh, we failed here. So I wonder: if we failed with trans politics and trans activism, should we write how we failed? Like, is it our right? And so all of these questions of like, who is owning them or if we want to tell the story of trans invisibility in alQaws, should we have a specific role in that? Like maybe we should talk about why this happened from our side, and not talk about the trans [community]. All of these political questions could make someone crazy, but it's just so inspiring. In a way, putting more air and structure to the archive, right? It's the gaps, the politics, the commitment to connection, to reconnection and also recognizing that I have a specific perspective that among other people will be a lost one. That's the grief, right? Like I'm hearing the stories of people yesterday from alkhat, and I'm feeling, no, no, no, it's not 'correct.' You got it all wrong, you know? And like, not trusting that the story will be [told], and someone else would say, I don't agree with you. I think it [must be] intentional. I [am] also trusting that people learn different things, and there are gaps. While archiving, we have gaps in history. If you joined in 2020, and I joined in 2001, we definitely have different experiences. But also, in a way, respecting that 20 years, it's not like a two-year kind of documentation, it's a whole process.

Sally: Yeah, of course. Haneen, I know we're running a little bit over time, but we have one last question. In times of cultural genocide, and destruction of a lot of heritage, I wanted to know, how do you view the Queer Archive in

relation to the Palestinian Archive?

Haneen: Yeah, I think it's really simple for us. I always say in alQaws, when we did our PQBDS, anti-pinkwashing, that no one is noticing us so let's talk about Palestine. So when I traveled the world doing a lot of fundraising, and all of that, my idea was that I'm going to use alQaws and the queer movement to talk about Palestine. It's really funny how immediately, we heard things like: oh my God, the hotline story is alQaws story. [No], al-Qaws story is a Palestine story because I think who we were, [is]really integrated in this anti-colonial structure. We were impacted by [it]. Our story [of] creation [happened] in the second intifada. Our ancestors and our legacy is our people who participated in the first intifada, [who] learnt community organizing there and mutual aid and all of that. Then to see, to hear alkhat's stories, how they reacted as a system to all of the political events in the last 10 years, and what they learned and how they changed the structure. I really believe, because we were so interconnected to the outside and that colonial kind of context and resisting it, that our story is the Palestinian story.

So we think the queer story would give another kind of perspective [of] the liberation project and how we could deal with it. So it's not only the queer [part]. I was amazed how this is an obvious thing among everyone who comes to the project. I think that's the legacy of alQaws. We already established queer organizing as part of the liberation

struggle. I think it will get complicated, Sally, when we are going to talk about our society, right? There is going to be a lot of tension there [more] than[there are] link[s]. Part of it is also political, because our political approach confused a lot of [the] Palestinian society. People would say either we are collaborators with the Zionists, or someone would say you are using your anti-colonial [politics] so I can love you but I would love you without it, too. These would be the assholes! But this is like, it's very confusing. Why do you want that? It's almost like, why do you want that? Just be a queer group. So our political kind of mandate annoyed everyone. [It] annoyed the Zionists, [and] annoyed [the] civil society in Palestine and that was a major thing. I think that will be complicated. But also, I think we [are] committed to explaining, we had a responsibility and people hated us for that. When there is a major event, political education and analysis is needed, right? So if there is someone, a queer youth that was stabbed by his brother, right, we are going to offer an analysis that will not scream homophobia, familial violence, but locate this kind of incident in a larger context. That annoyed a lot of people, because people would just say, he was stabbed, and we love him, and fuck his family. That's what people desired and we always offered something more and the amount of people that was [annoyed by this] was insane.

I think what I'm trying to say is just, we [are] also learning about how colonized societies behave around divisive issues, right? It's impacted by colonialism and bringing this kind of approach to our communities saying: what you see in social

media, ‘[the] kill [this group] or kill [that group]’ [discourse], that’s binary thinking that oppression creates among colonized people, right? This binary thinking, or this lack of imagination. So this [is] kind of how the violence is shaped and practiced, it’s very colonial, even if the one practicing it is my cousin, right? So we spend a lot of time there, trying to explain to ourselves and our community, what’s happening around us? Is it, really, [that] the PA is going to arrest us? Yeah, [then] of course, we are going to call a human rights organization. We’re going to do all of that. It’s okay. But what is really happening? Like, why? And how we link it to Egypt, and how we link it in Lebanon, and how we link it to anti-rights globally. So this is the kind of role we took upon ourselves to always complicate realities, and also provide some kind of multilayered analysis without saying, there is no homophobia, and this is the immediate reason why this brother stabbed his brother and it’s really exhausting to do that, right?

Sally: Thank you so much, Haneen. Truly. Shukran shukran.

Haneen: Anytime.

Ezrena: Powerful conversation.

Haneen is a queer anti-colonial organizer from Palestine. From 2001 to 2020, she co-founded alQaws—the Palestinian national LGBTQ organization—and served as its director, working across colonized Palestine, including the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the ‘48 areas. She has been a key figure in global anti-pinkwashing efforts through collectives like Palestinian Queers for BDS and Pinkwatching Israel, and her writing explores queer organizing in colonized Palestine while challenging the dominance of Western queer frameworks. Since 2022, she has been leading the Palestinian Queer Movement Archive, a community-based initiative preserving the history of Palestinian queer struggle against patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism.



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