Turbulent popular culture: Gender, sexuality and the ambivalent life of the official video for Tel Aviv Pride 2013

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In 2013, a well-known group that organizes dance club parties with Mizrahi* themes in Israel was commissioned to produce the official music video for the yearly Tel Aviv Pride. The video went viral on the Internet attracting a large number of viewers and igniting a heated set of discussions on YouTube. Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper is both theoretical and empirical. On a theoretical level, we develop a conceptual apparatus that bring into dialogue three approaches that have historically not spoken to each other, namely multimodal critical discourse analysis (Machin 2013), Foucault’s notion of heterotopia (1967) and Said’s (1978) conceptualization of “Orientalism.” With the help of this conceptual toolkit, we demonstrate how the video represents a heterotopia where “orientalist” stereotypes about Tel Aviv and Middle-Eastern men are strategically deployed in order to mock a colonial gay “tourist gaze” (Urry 2002) as well potentially unsettle hegemonic hypermasculine ideals. Such a post-colonial anti-hegemonic gender heterotopia, however, does not remain uncontested in the online discussions. Whereas posts from Israel respond to the questioning of gender norms, commentators from abroad expose the illusionary nature of the unsettling element in the heterotopia of the video; the latter group of commentators tend to view the video as another token of “pink-washing” that promotes the image of a “gay friendly” Israel but fails to acknowledge the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

*Mizrahi means “from the East” and indicates those who are historical descendants of Jewish communities settled in the Middle East.

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