



The Queer Arabs of Halifax
May 6th, 2016

Dear Halifax Pride Committee members,

We're writing this letter regarding our concern with the potential presence of Tel Aviv Tourism at this year's Halifax Pride Community Event. As a significant queer voice of color, we feel the need to alert you of this issue, as we not only feel marginalized but also unfortunately erased and silenced. We respect Pride and care to engage with it as members of the queer community, however we are unable to participate in this event as long as this remains unsolved. We are approaching you with this matter because we find it important to make Halifax Pride inclusive and non-violent. In this letter, we shall bring to light the pinkwashing of our trauma and the exclusion of Middle Eastern brown queer voices through the presence of a non-queer, touristic organization that benefits from the oppression and struggles of our people, directly affecting queer bodies amongst our Halifax community.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one that affects our lives on a daily basis. Members of our group have been displaced, lived in refugee camps, and experienced the military violence of the conflict. After our families managed to flee the Occupied Territories, they found refuge in neighboring countries, and in Canada. Here, we've integrated into society. Many of us became true Nova Scotians, and made significant work to advance and engage the Halifax queer, art, and gender-activism scene. We are proud of our Canadian identity, yet we cannot divorce our Middle Eastern roots. Our dark eyes, our brown skin, and our curly hair will always be a part of who we are. As much as we would like to celebrate our queer identities with pride, it is so hard for us to engage with an event that supports, even unknowingly, the cause of pain in our families and histories. We respect the work and exposure that Halifax Pride has brought to our beautiful province, and we only seek the welcome and peace that we deserve in our queer community, especially here in Canada far away from the conflict. To include Tel Aviv Tourism is to paint an image of Israel that exploits queer celebration on account of the continuous violence, exodus, and apartheid that we ourselves continue to face. The general term 'x-washing' refers to a situation in which a version of history is glossed over for the capitalistic benefit of a dominant group at the expense of those at the bottom of the societal chain. For instance, queer people have been those who have faced this marginalization for the longest time. In North America, people of color and notably black and Indigenous people continue to face the whitewashing of their histories that erase years of genocide and pain that those communities have had to face. Today, the Middle Eastern community continues to struggle with the pinkwashing of our trauma. Every day, we wake up with the weight of the continuous foreign military attacks on our families in our home countries, and the displacement of our native communities in Palestine, as well as Lebanon, and Jordan. Pinkwashing is the promotion by Tel Aviv's "free" LGBT bodies as somehow representative of Israeli democracy, obfuscating the reality of apartheid and occupation. It is the process by which a dominant, military society hides its wrongdoings towards the marginalized communities around it. In this case, it is the silencing of the queer Middle Eastern voices that we are a part of, using Tourism and Sexual Freedom as a tactical tool to beautify a violent history. We would like to ask you to rethink this unnecessary violent presence that does little to promote queer pride, and a lot to harm the queer folks that need the values that Pride works for the most.

We know that Halifax Pride is seeking to be more inclusive towards people of color. The Queer Arabs of Halifax, in solidarity with the queer and gender-rights groups listed below, are fully willing to engage with this proposal and work together to lift Pride to the inclusive status it deserves. On behalf of these organizations alongside the Queer Arabs of Halifax, we thank you for your collaboration, and hope we can move forward together towards an intersectional, multi-cultural, diverse, and Nova Scotian event that celebrates our queer identities in all of its colors.

Sincerely,
The Queer Arabs of Halifax