



The Queer Arabs of Halifax

June 10, 2016

Dear Halifax Pride Board members,

After consulting with members of our group and fellow queer groups of color, we found that there was no tangible steps taken at our initial meeting together that will allow us to be part of this coming Halifax Pride event.

Certainly, we will pursue a policy change with Halifax Pride at your next General Meeting where Halifax Pride's policy on its involvement with pinkwashing will be the main topic. As for this year, you have offered us a free booth at your event- an offer which unfortunately does not address the problem, but goes around it and keeps us in the margin.

We can't hold a booth at an event where our identity itself, as brown Arab queers, marginalizes us because of the presence of a tourism company (Tel Aviv Tourism) that runs at the expense of our blood. When Halifax Pride chooses to openly engage with a government guilty of international war crimes as observed by the United Nations- in other words, when Halifax Pride chooses to involve itself sideways with- and gives voice to- a violent regime and its ministry of tourism at an event meant for the oppressed queer people historically affected by violence, we are incapable of partaking.

Deeper into this matter, we see that pinkwashing does not exist as a solitary issue. Toronto's Black Lives Matter had to demand the disengagement of police forces from marching in the parade because in having police cars cheering in rainbows, an entire history of violence against black queers is immediately erased and silenced, pinkwashed and whitewashed into a past which denies the present and ongoing murders. Black struggles and queer struggles intersect where pinkwashing intersects with people's identities based on the color of their skin and the places they come from. To us, as an Arab and a brown voice, we cannot march in the same parade nor animate a booth at the same event where a foreign violent government is given the space to pinkwash a history of murder that is very much alive today in our immediate lives. That is not what we stand for. That is not what a Pride celebration should stand for.

Pride is a major public event initiated by queer people of color. It has a moral obligation to uphold its ethical stand. We strive to be part of an event that provides this much needed voice. Unfortunately, as long as the event itself supports emblems of oppression and violent regimes - in this case Tel Aviv Tourism, we cannot partake in the event and be complicit in our own pinkwashing marching side by side a violence whose presence we are forced to accept.

We are unable to engage with an event that knowingly provides a stage for the silencing of our suffering, and consoles us with a workaround that keeps us squeezed into the margin, regardless of the intention. Halifax Pride 2016 can choose to put our concerns on hold, however we cannot put our lives on hold. Our queerness and our brownness go hand in hand, and we cannot celebrate one while we mourn the other.

Pride started as a reclamation of space for the oppressed, the unheard, and the marginalized - not for those whose celebrations aren't those of struggle nor who advertise the marginalization of the silenced with touristic organizations that profit from our bloodshed.

We ask of Halifax Pride 2016 to put in a real effort to make space for brown, black, indigenous, and voices of color - not spaces rife with violence and complicit oppression, but safe places alive with the spirit of Stonewall that demarginalize us and our identities without the threat of pinkwashing, whitewashing, and open support of violent governments and political bodies that continue to silence, erase, and oppress us.

Sincerely,

The Queer Arabs of Halifax