

Israel also draws upon racialized homophobia and transphobia in its abuse of Palestinians.

This abuse includes the blackmailing of queer Palestinians, with a former Israeli Intelligence corps member sharing that in training to disregard Palestinians' privacy and manipulate their personal lives for Israeli state interests, "we actually learned to memorise and filter different words for 'gay', in Arabic." There are detailed accounts from Palestinians imprisoned in Israeli jails of verbal and sexual harassment which use homophobia and transphobia as a threat.

The use of homophobia and queerphobia as a cudgel on behalf of Israel is certainly not conducive to queer liberation and is an abhorrent practice.

Through pinkwashing, **Palestinians are reduced to either being a victim of internal Palestinian homophobia in need of saving or to a violent perpetrator of homophobia** among Palestinians and "terrorism" against Israelis. They are forced to walk a tightrope between having queerphobia exploited by Israel as carte blanche for their own dispossession and the ways Zionist colonialism shapes the queerphobia they face within their own communities.

We must end all forms of oppression against Palestinians!

Queer Palestinian organizers are calling for the promotion of Palestinian LGBTQ rights while challenging the appropriation and weaponization of that cause by Israeli organizations. We must instead engage first and foremost with Palestinians, rather than perpetuating the erasure of Palestinians inherent to Zionism.

Resources



Decolonize Palestine: Pinkwashing

This zine was adapted from this essay; read the full version here with hyperlinked sources! Decolonize Palestine is an independent, self-funded project founded by two Palestinians living in Ramallah.



Beyond Propaganda: Pinkwashing as Colonial Violence

A 2020 analysis paper by alQaws for Sexual & Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society, exploring the past decade of its grassroots community organizing to center the experiences of queer Palestinians.



Pinkwashing Exposed

Pinkwashing Exposed: Seattle Fights Back! is a free, hour-long documentary on anti-pinkwashing and Palestine solidarity activism in Seattle edited by Amy Mahardy and directed by Dean Spade.



Say No to Pinkwashing

The Boycott, Divest, Sanctions Movement's page on pinkwashing illustrates ways to fight against pinkwashing in your own community!

REJECT pinkwashing!

Adapted from
Decolonize Palestine's
essay on Pinkwashing.

No queer
liberation
without
Palestinian
liberation!



DecolonizePalestine



DecolonizePalestine

Pinkwashing is when a state or organization appeals to LGBTQ+ rights in order to deflect attention from its genocidal practices.

From university student clubs to queer film festivals to Pride Parades to New York Times editorial pages, **the contrived presence of the Israeli flag alongside the rainbow flag has become all too common**, despite consistent pushback by queer activist groups.

StandWithUs, a Zionist group founded in 2009, is one of the most egregious offenders of this conflation of Zionism and queer liberation. Buoyed by hundreds of millions from the Israeli Foreign Ministry's branding initiative, its campaigns have included brochures that declare Israel a "gay paradise" for queer Palestinians as well as newspaper ads with headlines such as "Hamas, ISIS and Iran kill gays like me".

Pinkwashing is a twist on "greenwashing," where eco-friendly claims are made to turn a profit. In the case of Israel, **pinkwashing is done to salvage its abysmal global reputation of being a colonial aggressor, through exploiting and encouraging anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia** to present itself as a comparatively modern cosmopolitan haven- and boost its tourism revenue in the process.

Pinkwashing is also the inevitable manifestation of the intrinsically homophobic and Orientalist nature of Zionism, itself a manifestation of European colonial thought.

As Palestinian queer rights organization Al Qaws has explained, **"pinkwashing is the symptom, settler-colonialism is the root sickness."** The pinkwashing of Israel relies on the understanding that the East remains stubbornly backwards regarding homosexuality because of a refusal to learn from Western progressivism. However, as Joseph A. Boone outlines in *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, **this idea ignores several hundred years of history** where "it was the uptight Christian West that accused the debauched Muslim East of harboring what it euphemistically called the 'male vice' (sodomy)".

This is not to oversimplify how homophobia functions in the SWANA region, or to lay blame on the West; rather, it is to understand that current depictions of homophobia in the region as resistance to "Western modernity" obscures how today's understandings of sexuality are in fact modern; they are the result of modern nation-state building and the accompanying construction of the "Other" as inferior, to be stigmatized, exploited and discriminated against.

Israeli prime minister Netanyahu, in a 2011 joint meeting of US Congress, declared the Middle East is "a region where women are stoned, gays are hanged, Christians are persecuted. Israel stands out. It is different." **Missing from this narrative, of course, is how Israel profits from the very persecution he describes** through Israeli spyware used to crackdown on dissidents, including queer people.

Israel being praised for supposedly being so 'queer-friendly' is dependent on Palestinians (and Arabs and Muslims in general) being demonized as uniformly homophobic.

This is evident in a 2008 Israel Project report extolling progressive values: "The family as an institution is central to Israeli Jewish society. Therefore, parents would rather accept their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children than let homophobia destroy family unity." As Palestinian scholar Steven Salaita has analyzed, the purpose of such a grotesque statement is to imply that Palestinians "are neither family oriented nor tolerant...**homosexuality is not embraced by Israeli Jews; it is merely tolerated in the interest of family unity.**"

The weaponized understating of this queerphobia in Israeli society functions by treating Palestinians "as a site onto which queerphobic Zionists may project their queerphobic fantasies", as articulated in Saffo Papantonopoulou's article, *Even a Freak Like You Would Be Safe in Tel Aviv*. She explains that Zionists' deflections of their own queerphobia onto Palestinians is meant to **"allow the queerphobic Zionist to live out his own queerphobic fantasy while simultaneously deploying a pretext of caring about queers."**

As Queers Against Israeli Apartheid have pointed out, **"there is no pink door in the apartheid wall."** Queer Palestinians, like all Palestinians, live under the control of a state that has deemed them demographic threats, obstacles in the way of a Jewish State. Most Palestinians have never set foot in Tel Aviv for this reason.