

Rainbow Flags Won't Conceal Genocide

Until the end of 2023, I flew a rainbow flag - the symbol of queer pride and solidarity - on my Twitter/X profile but when I began to speak out in support of Gaza and the Palestinian people, that symbol was weaponized against me. Instead of reasoned, factual debate, my posts attracted ad-hominem attacks designed to discredit and silence. Some were couched in concern: "You know what they do with gay people in Gaza." Others were blunt and cruel, invoking memes like "Queers for Palestine is like chickens for KFC," or recycling the tired trope that I would be "thrown off a roof" if I were there. I was an experience shared - and corroborated - by many others.

This narrative is not just reductive; it is politically manipulative, historically dishonest, and factually inaccurate. The oft-repeated claim that queer people are executed by being thrown off rooftops in Gaza is not based on any verified instances involving Palestinians or the governing authorities in Gaza. Instead, it originates from ISIS propaganda videos - not from Hamas, and certainly not from the broader Palestinian population. There is **no credible evidence** that public executions of queer people have occurred in the manner these critics suggest.

What we are witnessing is a textbook case of **pinkwashing**: the instrumentalization of LGBTQ+ rights to deflect from or delegitimize a struggle for justice. It's a rhetorical sleight of hand that tells queer people they must choose — either support queer rights or Palestinian liberation, but not both.

Homosexuality and Islam: Beyond the Weaponized Narrative

Much of the rhetorical assault on queer people who support Palestine leans on sweeping generalizations about Islam and its supposed exceptional hostility toward LGBTQ+ people. The implication is that queer identity and Islamic faith are inherently incompatible, and that solidarity with a Muslim-majority population is naive or even self-destructive for LGBTQ+ individuals.

This framing is not only Islamophobic; it is also historically and theologically unsound. Traditional Islamic jurisprudence, like many religious legal systems, discourages same-sex acts. The Qur'an references the people of **Lut (Lot)**, often cited as condemning male-male sexual behavior. Yet these verses are far more ambiguous than they are portrayed. They center on **inhospitality, coercion, and corruption**, not consensual love or sexual identity. Unlike Leviticus 20:13 in the Hebrew Bible — "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death" — the Qur'an prescribes **no punishment** for same-sex intimacy.

The **Hadiths** (sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him), which inform much of Islamic law, contain varying and often disputed references to same-sex behavior. Importantly, there is **no record during the Prophet's lifetime** of anyone being punished for being gay. Islamic ethical teachings traditionally emphasized **privacy, discretion, and repentance**, not surveillance or public shaming.

In fact, Islamic civilization has a rich and complex history regarding gender and sexuality. Classical Arabic poetry abounds with homoerotic imagery. Sufi mysticism, with its metaphors of divine love, often transcends rigid gender binaries. Scholars like **Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle** and **Amina Wadud** have offered progressive reinterpretations of the Lut story, arguing it condemns coercive sexual violence, not consensual same-sex love.

This diversity of interpretation is lived, not just theoretical. Queer Muslims exist, organize, resist, and thrive. The weaponization of Islam to discredit pro-Palestinian queer people does not just erase these voices; it reduces an entire faith tradition to a culture war cudgel.

Colonial Roots of Criminalization: A Timeline of Imported Homophobia

The idea that institutionalized homophobia is an intrinsic feature of Arab or Islamic societies collapses under scrutiny. The historical record shows that **pre-modern Islamic legal systems did not criminalize homosexuality in the same way Europe did**. Instead, the codification of anti-LGBTQ+ laws in the Arab world can be traced to **European colonialism**, not the Qur'an.

Across centuries of Islamic rule - from the Umayyads to the Ottomans - there was no unified penal code outlawing same-sex intimacy. Social attitudes could be conservative, and religious scholars debated the morality of various behaviors, but the legal systems of these societies **rarely prioritized the policing of private sexual conduct**, especially when it did not threaten public order. What is more, the rich literary and artistic traditions of the Arab-Islamic world - filled with homoerotic poetry, intimate male friendships, and depictions of same-sex desire - reveal a cultural space that, while complex and at times contradictory, was not shaped by legal persecution of queer people as seen in Europe.

By contrast, in **Christian Europe**, homosexual acts were aggressively criminalized, often under pain of death. Medieval and early modern legal systems - from the Inquisition to British common law - prescribed gruesome punishments for "sodomy," including burning, hanging, and mutilation. In some areas, such as Habsburg-controlled territories along the Danube River, historical records describe suspected homosexuals being sentenced to **tug ships upstream** as a form of execution through exhaustion and exposure. These punishments were not fringe but **institutionalized**, sanctioned by church and state alike.

When European powers colonized the Arab world, they exported these legal codes. Palestine is a prime example:

Period	Legal Status of Homosexuality in Palestine
Pre-1917	Not criminalized under Ottoman law
1929	British Mandate imposes Section 152 (anti-sodomy)
1951	Decriminalized in West Bank under Jordanian Penal Code
1967–present	Gaza retains British-era code; no known prosecutions since 1994 (HRW)

This historical arc is crucial: the **legal persecution of queer people in Palestine began under British rule**, not Islamic governance. Today, Gaza technically retains the colonial-era law, but **there have been no recorded prosecutions under it in decades**. Meanwhile, the **State of Israel**, often hailed as a queer haven, has **denied asylum to over 99% of queer Palestinian applicants**. The contrast reveals the hollowness of “Brand Israel” — a narrative that uses LGBTQ+ rights to **mask occupation and apartheid**.

Understanding this history matters. It challenges the simplistic narrative that posits a civilizational divide between a queer-friendly West and a homophobic East. It also reaffirms the agency of queer Arabs and Muslims who are not victims of their culture, but rather survivors of **both domestic repression and imported colonial violence**.

Alan Turing: The Western Mirror

To fully understand the cruelty and absurdity of criminalizing queer existence, we need only turn to one of the most tragic and telling stories of the 20th century: that of **Alan Turing**. Today, Turing’s name is widely recognized due to the **Turing Test**, a foundational concept in artificial intelligence and the basis for modern CAPTCHA systems used online. But his true legacy goes far deeper - he was the brilliant mathematician and cryptanalyst who **designed the machine that cracked the German Enigma code**, a decisive contribution to the Allied victory in World War II.

Turing’s work at **Bletchley Park** remained classified for years, but it is now understood that he **shortened the war by as much as two years**, saving millions of lives. In any just society, he would have been celebrated as a national hero, honored in his lifetime, and remembered with gratitude and respect. But Alan Turing was also gay. And in 1950s Britain, **that was a crime**. Like many gay men of his era, Turing was forced to live a double life - sneaking out of his home to meet his partners in secret.

When Turing reported a burglary in his home, suspecting involvement from his recent partner, Arnold Murray, he eventually disclosed their relationship during police questioning. What started as a routine investigation into stolen goods swiftly became a prosecution for **“gross indecency”** - the same charge that destroyed Oscar Wilde. The lead detective, seeing the case spiral beyond its intent, later apologized to Turing, lamenting that his cooperation had unleashed an unstoppable judicial machine.

Despite his wartime service and scientific genius, Turing was put on trial and convicted. The court offered him a choice: prison or chemical castration. He chose the latter, a so-called “treatment” involving synthetic estrogen intended to suppress his libido. The side ef-

fects were horrific. Turing experienced **gynecomastia (breast development), depression, and mental deterioration**. The once vibrant mind that had helped save Europe from fascism was now being eroded by state-sanctioned cruelty. In 1954, at just 41 years old, **Turing took his own life** by biting into an apple laced with cyanide.

Decades later, after public outcry and a slow national reckoning, Turing was posthumously granted a royal pardon. But history cannot be undone. A man who gave everything to a country that repaid him with shame and punishment was lost - not to war, but to the very laws that claimed to protect society. Turing's story is not just tragedy - it is indictment. The criminalization of LGBTQ+ lives has never been about protection. It has always been about **control, fear, and the policing of desire**. And when Western voices today condemn other cultures for homophobia, they do so with **selective memory**. The laws that killed Turing were born in London, not Mecca and his death stands as a solemn rebuke to the myth of Western moral superiority.

Gender Violence and the Myth of the Civilized Patriarch

When Western pundits frame Arab and Muslim societies as uniquely “barbaric” or “backward” on issues of human rights, they rarely speak from a place of historical honesty. This isn't just misleading - it's projection. The same societies that claim moral superiority today were, until shockingly recently, upholding deeply violent and patriarchal norms within their own legal systems - often with the force of the state behind them.

Take, for instance, the issue of **domestic violence and marital rape**. In Arab and Muslim societies, while there have always been patriarchal structures - as in all cultures - the idea that a man had an unlimited right to beat or sexually violate his wife was **socially unacceptable**, even if not always criminalized. When a man crossed those boundaries - beating his wife, harming his children, or behaving violently - his behavior was often met with **community intervention**. Elders, family members, or peers would confront him, and if he persisted, his wife and children could seek refuge with **extended family, friends, or neighbors** without social shame.

It was understood: some behavior simply made a man **unfit to be head of a household**, regardless of whether the state intervened.

Now compare this to **Europe and North America** in the early and mid-20th century. In countries like the UK, France, and the United States, the law recognized a husband's **“conjugal rights”** - a euphemism for **marital rape**, which was not legally recognized as a crime in many Western countries until the **late 20th or even early 21st century**. In the UK, **marital rape was legal until 1991**. In parts of the U.S., it was **legal until the 1990s or later**. These laws did not merely permit abuse - they codified it.

Corporal punishment of wives and children was not just tolerated - it was **openly encouraged**. Men were granted legal authority over their families, and disciplining them through violence was considered a private, even responsible, exercise of that power. A man could beat his wife for “talking back,” deny her autonomy, and legally isolate her from the outside world. If a woman fled her abusive husband, she risked losing her children, her prop-

erty, and her social standing. This is not ancient history. These were the laws **during and after World War II**, in the same countries that were criminalizing homosexuality, colonizing the Global South, and **telling the world they were the standard-bearers of civilization**.

So when modern-day critics in the West hold up LGBTQ+ rights or women's rights as proof of Western moral superiority over Arab or Muslim societies, the hypocrisy is staggering. Not only are such rights **a recent and hard-fought development** in the West itself, but the framing erases the **existing, culturally grounded systems of accountability** that have existed in non-Western societies for generations. The erasure of this context is not accidental. It allows Western powers to maintain the illusion of civilizational leadership while ignoring both **their own history** and the **damage they've inflicted** on the societies they colonized - often destroying or displacing the very communal structures that once offered protection.

Pinkwashing as Statecraft

Israel's "Brand Israel" campaign, launched in 2005 by the Foreign Ministry, explicitly promoted Tel Aviv as a gay-friendly haven. This effort was not organic pride; it was **state propaganda**. While showcasing rainbow flags abroad, Israel **cut funding for local LGBTQ+ services** and continued to oppress Palestinians under occupation. Queer Israeli groups like **Black Laundry** (Kvisa Shchora) protested this co-optation, refusing to let their identities be used to sanitize apartheid. As Black Laundry activists put it:

"You can't celebrate Pride on occupied land. Our liberation cannot come at the expense of another people's oppression."

Likewise, Palestinian queer organizations like **alQaws** and **Palestinian Queers for BDS (PQBDS)** have long rejected pinkwashing. PQBDS stated:

"Our struggle is not for inclusion in a racist state, but for the dismantling of that state."

These voices are rarely heard in mainstream Western discourse, which prefers to tokenize queerness as a justification for militarism, rather than amplify the people living at its intersections.

So when Western voices mock or condemn Arab and Muslim societies for their treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals, it is rarely in solidarity with queer people on the ground. More often, it functions as **an Islamophobic trope** - a way to portray Muslims as irredeemably intolerant and unworthy of self-determination. It is an old colonial tactic dressed up in progressive language.

Queer Liberation is Incomplete Without Justice for Palestine

When queer people are told that solidarity with Palestine means siding with homophobia, we must recognize the strategy: it's **not about protecting queer lives**. It's about **protecting state power**.

To claim that LGBTQ+ liberation belongs to the West is not only incorrect - it's dangerous. As history shows:

- Homosexuality was **not criminalized in Arab or Islamic societies** until European colonial powers imposed their laws.
- Domestic violence and marital rape were **legally protected in the West** long into the modern era.
- Today, **queer Palestinians are denied asylum by Israel**, even as it promotes itself as a queer utopia.

The systems that surveil trans people in the U.S., deport queer asylum seekers in the UK, and bomb hospitals in Gaza are interconnected. Queer liberation cannot be severed from anti-colonial struggle. It is not charity; it is **strategy for collective survival**.

“Our liberation is bound up together,” as queer organizers have long said. Not as metaphor, but as material reality.

To stand with Palestine is not a contradiction of queer identity. It is a fulfillment of it. To be queer and anti-colonial, queer and anti-apartheid, queer and pro-Palestinian, is not hypocrisy. It is coherence.

True solidarity doesn't ask us to deny who we are. It asks us to **refuse the scripts written by those in power** - those who would turn our identities into tools of division. It asks us to listen to queer Palestinians, to support their right to exist in all their complexity, and to fight alongside them for a world where no one is displaced, dehumanized, or denied dignity.

Queer people do not owe allegiance to empires that criminalized them yesterday and tokenize them today. We do not need to choose between our identities and our principles. We are not props for power. We are people. And we will be free - **together**.

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