

BRAND ISRAEL AND PINKWASHING

Israel is great for queers right. So why shouldn't queers support Israel?

On October 2, 2005, after examining “specialized research conducted by American marketing executives,” the directors of Israel’s three most powerful ministries, the Foreign Ministry, the Prime Minister’s Office and the Finance Ministry, announced their “**Brand Israel**” strategy. “The idea here is to have a major branding campaign in America and Europe,” said Gidon Meir, of the Foreign Ministry.¹

Brand Israel is based on **marketing theory** that argues that establishing “brand loyalty” among consumers is more important than actually arguing the merits of a product—like companies that try to sell phones by associating them with cute animals. Brand Israel therefore downplays religion, and avoids any mention of the (messy) Palestinian conflict. Instead, it tries to associate Israel with nice things—contributions to culture or medicine, being modern and cool. It’s hoped that the resulting “brand loyalty” to Israel will render the North American public impervious to Palestinian arguments about human rights and international law.

According to the UK Guardian, “One of the most remarkable features of the Brand Israel campaign is the **marketing of a modern Israel as a gay-friendly Israel.**” “To be gay friendly is to be modern, cosmopolitan, developed, first-world, global north, and, most significantly, democratic.”² In 2010, the city of Tel Aviv alone spent nearly \$100,000 to promote itself as a “fun free and fabulous” international gay capital. Israel dedicated a stand to gay tourism at the 2011 Berlin International Tourism exhibition.

Homosexuality was finally decriminalized in Israel in 1988. Since then, Israeli queers have overcome government and religious resistance and won important rights in a number of court cases. But

after 2005, the Israeli government cynically began to use this progress to portray the country as an oasis of gay tolerance. The queer rights it once opposed have become part of its propaganda efforts to deflect attention away from Israel’s abysmal human rights record towards Palestinians.

This attempt to distract attention from Israel’s occupation and human rights abuses by portraying the country as an oasis of queer tolerance is what we call the **Pinkwashing** campaign.

In August 2008, the Israeli consulate in Toronto announced that Toronto was to be a test market for Brand Israel.³ QuAIA was formed that same year.

We oppose the Israeli government’s use of queer rights to drive a wedge between our communities and Palestinians, progressive Arabs, and queers struggling against homophobia in Arab countries. We must not let ourselves be implicated in Israel’s human rights abuses. We’re glad that queers have made progress in Israel, but we endorse the call by Palestinian civil society for a campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions until Israel complies with international law and ends its occupation of Palestine.

¹Popper, Nathaniel. “Israel Aims to Improve Its Public Image..” *Forward*. 14 October. 2005. <http://www.forward.com/articles/2070/>

²Puar, Jasbir. “Israel’s gay propaganda war.” *The Guardian*, 1 July. 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/01/israels-gay-propaganda-war>

³Levy-Ajzenkopf, Andy. “Brand Israel Set To Launch in GTA.” *Canadian Jewish News*. 21 August. 2008. http://www.cjnews.com/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=15198&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=86