

Reclaiming Arabic words (2022-003-IG-UA)

User appeal to restore content to Instagram

Submit public comment [here](#).

Note: To allow people to provide comments on the nature and impact of the post and help people understand the Board's eventual ruling in this case, we are sharing some of the exact words used in this post. We do so in the interest of transparency, while recognizing that some of the quoted language has the potential to offend.

In November 2021, an Instagram account that identifies itself as a space for discussing queer narratives in the Arabic culture posted a series of pictures in a carousel (a single Instagram post that can contain up to ten images with a single caption). The caption explains that each picture shows a different word that can be used in a derogatory way towards men with “effeminate mannerisms” in the Arabic world, including the terms “zamel,” “foufou,” and “tante”/“tanta.” The caption, written in both Arabic and English, stated that the user did not “condone or encourage the use of these words.” The user explained in the post that they had been abused with one of these terms when they were a child and that the post was intended “to reclaim [the] power of such hurtful terms.” The content was viewed approximately 9,000 times, receiving around 30 comments and approximately 2,000 reactions.

Within three hours of the content being posted a user reported it as “adult nudity or sexual activity” and another user reported it as “sexual solicitation.” After reviewing each of these reports separately, Meta removed the content for violating its Hate Speech policy. The user appealed and Meta restored the content to the platform. After the content was restored a third person reported it as hate speech and Meta carried out a fourth review, removing the content again. The user appealed a second time and, after a fifth review, Meta upheld its decision to remove the content.

In its statement to the Board, Meta explained that it originally removed the content under their [Hate Speech policy](#) as “zamel” (زامل) is regarded as a “derogatory term for gay people,” which the company had designated as a slur for its “Arabic” and “Maghreb” markets at the time the content was taken down. Following an audit of the use of the word, on February 23, 2022, Meta removed the word from the “Arabic slur list” and kept it in the “slur list for the Maghreb region.” Meta performed an additional sixth review of the content and determined that it did not violate the Hate Speech policy. Meta explained that the removal was wrong because “the use of the slur fell within Meta’s allowance for content that condemns a slur or hate speech, discusses the use of slurs including reports

of instances when they have been used, or debates about whether they are acceptable to use.” All six reviews were carried out by human content moderators.

In their appeal to the Board, the user states that their intent in posting the content was to celebrate effeminate men and boys in Arab society who are often belittled through the use of derogatory language. The user further explained that they are attempting to reclaim derogatory words used against them as a form of resistance and empowerment. They stated that their content is allowed under Meta’s content policies which specifically permit the use of otherwise banned terms when used self-referentially or in an empowering way.

The Board would appreciate public comments that address:

- *How the Instagram Community Guidelines and Facebook Community Standard on Hate Speech, especially the rules on slurs, can best protect LGBTQ+ people from attacks using derogatory slurs, while also allowing LGBTQ+ people to engage in counter speech that may use the same slurs.*
- *The policy requirement for users to “clearly state their intent” if using hate speech terms to condemn, raise awareness or to empower, and if or how other contextual factors should be considered when enforcing this exception.*
- *Meta’s compliance with its human rights responsibilities in respect of Arabic speaking users of its products who are LGBTQ+, especially those located in North Africa and West Asia.*
- *Challenges and risks to LGBTQ+ people exercising their freedom of expression rights on Meta’s products in North Africa and West Asia.*
- *Any improvements to Meta’s products and approach to content moderation that would enhance the protection of rights for LGBTQ+ people on Meta’s platforms, including in respect of mass-reporting (also known as “brigading”).*

In its decisions, the Board can issue policy recommendations to Meta. While recommendations are not binding, Meta must respond to them within 60 days. As such, the Board welcomes public comments proposing recommendations that are relevant to this case.