



June 4, 2023

Countering Homophobia in the Name of Religion

Last week in advance of Pride month, a position statement entitled “Navigating Differences: Clarifying Sexual and Gender Ethics in Islam” was published and signed by over 150 imams, sheikhs and religious leaders, across the United States and Canada. Their position states their constitutional right to deny the humanity and constitutional rights of queer Muslims and non-Muslims, a position they substantiate with a patriarchal interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence.

Over and over again, queer folks and their lived experiences have served as a unifying factor for the world’s religious right who, regardless of both their religious affiliation and their nationality, continue to demonstrate their unwavering commitment to demonize and deny the humanity of queer people worldwide. It is particularly galling when these “scholars” take it upon themselves to define Islam for the rest of us, citing ijma, or infallible agreement within the Muslim community, while at the same time denying any dissent that contradicts their declaration, erasing those dissenting as “non-authoritative”.

Since 9-11, Muslims in America have faced their share of discrimination as a minority population in the United States, often unjustly treated or discriminated against simply for being Muslim. The signatories of this statement, in perhaps their only accurate observation, acknowledge the bigotry and exclusion that Muslims have faced across the Western world. Yet these Muslim “leaders’”, who have no doubt spoken up numerous times against Islamophobic exclusion and their constitutional right to be protected and feel safe, have the impudence to demand acceptance and reject all forms of criticism for their intolerance of a minority population .

Although upsetting, the hypocrisy from the religious right is nothing new. More disconcerting is the blatant disregard these signatories show for teachings of the Qur’an, the Hadith, and the Sunnah and the long traditions of sexual and gender diversity across Islamic civilizations. What happened to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad that call on Muslims to stand up to the oppression of the most vulnerable? What enticed these



religious “leaders”to conveniently omit that Prophet Muhammad never punished anyone for being gay despite there being plenty of evidence of the existence of queer people during his time? Nor do they mention that there is no punishment for being homosexual in the Qur’an, and yet, they utilize the holiest text in Islam to promote their homophobic and transphobic teachings.

What about the “mukhannath”, or gender-variant people mentioned multiple times in the Hadith or the phrase “men who do not desire women” in Qur’an 24:31-24:33? These are direct references to sexual diversity in what Muslims believe to be, God’s own words, mentioned without an iota of hate or prejudice. Muslim societies throughout the ages even had inheritance laws for hermaphrodites. The omission of all these rich facts by these religious leaders are nothing short of misleading, falsifying the true teachings of the Qur’an and the long presence that Queer Muslims have had in Islamic societies.

The fact of the matter is that much of the Muslim world never had discriminatory laws against homosexuality prior to colonization. It was the European colonizers who introduced institutionalized and systemic homophobia and transphobia to these societies often in the form of penal codes. It is unfortunate that much of the Muslim society, regardless of their geographic locations, have now embraced this discriminatory belief as their own with such religious fervor rather than looking at the religious truth and historical facts .

In 2017, PEW reported that 52% of American Muslims are accepting of LGBTQ+ folks. More telling is that 52% of American Muslims are millennials, and 60% of them say homosexuality should be accepted by society (PEW 2017). These religious leaders and scholars in question realize that millennials will no longer stand passively by as they espouse their misogynistic and homophobic beliefs while claiming to speak for all Muslims. They can see the youth have moved on without them because this new generation is now reverting back to the age-old practice of ijthad, studying the Islamic texts for themselves and striving to build their own personal relationship with God. I can attest to this shift as I experienced this personal change of heart and mind myself, through my own journey in re-learning Islam for myself.

Once your heart and mind is open to a theology of inclusivity, there is no going back. It is



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a fire in the belly that is

inextinguishable.

For the Muslim religious leaders in America who have not signed on to this hateful position statement, I urge you to make your voice count, be a leader, live up to the Islamic conviction of human dignity and justice for all by signing on to our #NoHateInMyFaith campaign, which reads: “I pledge to refute and combat discrimination against any individual or community, including Blacks, the LGBTQ+ community, women, Jews, Shi’a, Sunni, and Ahmadiyya Muslims, Baha’i, non-Muslims, atheists or any “other,” no matter who that other is. I pledge to eradicate all divisive, homophobic, and/or misogynistic teachings in my community and in religious institutions I am affiliated with, and will affirm the dignity of all individuals.”

If you call yourself a Muslim religious leader, then lead for the good of humanity. Meanwhile, a group of Muslims have taken it upon themselves to lead in the counter narrative which we urge everyone to sign on to [here](#).