

Progressive Islam in Practice



# A QUEER HISTORY OF ISLAM

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# Colonialism & Anti-LGBTQ Sentiments

- More than half of the world's remaining "sodomy" laws have their roots in British Colonial Rule.
- Colonizers, including the French, British, and Dutch, imported their homophobic laws into the colonies they controlled as they viewed these conquered lands as "morally lax" on sexuality.
- It was thought that the presence of sexual diversity, something common in countries colonized by European powers, would have a corrupting effect on their empires.



# The Indian Penal Code of 1860

- The Indian Penal Code of 1860 was the most notorious and influential of these laws, with Section 377 criminalizing gay sex, punishable by life in prison.
- The code was intended to condition colonized subjects to conform to authority.
- The law was put in place in India and eventually exported across other British colonies in South and Southeast Asia.
- Today, 57% of states with **laws** punishing homosexuality have a British colonial history and 70% of states with a British colonial history continue to **punish** homosexuality.



# Remnants of the Colonial Laws

- The Pakistan Penal Code of 1860 (Great Britain)
- Article 543 of Lebanon's Penal Code of 1943 (France)
- Section 377 of the Penal Code of 1860 of Bangladesh (Great Britain)
- Sections 377 A - D of the Penal Code of Malaysia (Great Britain)
- Section 377A of the Penal Code of Singapore (Great Britain)
- Article 365 of the Sri Lankan Penal Code (Great Britain)



# Hijras - Pakistan

- Hijra is the South Asian term for gender non-conforming individuals.
- It is an umbrella category for multiple genders and sexualities, including but not limited to transgender women, masculine women, and intersex individuals.
- Rooted in Islamic history, *hjr* marks the holy journey from Mecca to Medina and the beginning of Islam as a religio-political-cultural formation. Representing a double performance, it also denotes the beginning of the Islamic *hijri* calendar.
- Therefore, Hijra means migration and is a result of pre/post/colonial cartographies, histories of Pakistan and Islam.



# Bissu - Indonesia

- The Bugis, the largest ethnic groups in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, recognize five unique gender identities.
- The Bissu are considered to be the "meta-gender" or what people in the West would understand to be non-binary.
- The Bissu are a vital part of Bugis society, overseeing cultural ceremonies, including blessing ceremonies before pilgrims make the *hajj* to Mecca.
- They were also influential in the decision of the Bugis tribe to convert to Islam rather than Christianity.



# Köçek - Turkey

- Köçek dancing has made history tracing its practice from the early modern Ottoman Empire to present day Turkey.
- Originating from the term Čoček, a bellydance performed by 'feminine men'.
- This first generation dance is still performed in Turkey or immigrant communities as part of a social event like a wedding where others who learned the dance informally can participate.



# Sida-Sida - Malaysia

- In Malaysia, the term sida-sida refers to priests or courtiers born as male who undertook androgynous behavior or presented as females who were imbued with spiritual powers because of their gender identity.
- Until the mid 20th century, the sida-sida could be found across palaces in peninsular Malaysia, the homes of the Islamic royal families within the country.
- In the palaces, the sida-sida were entrusted with protecting the high ranking female officials in the palace and the female members of the royal families.





# Khawal - Egypt

- Before it became a word used to refer to anyone who acted queer, khawal were popular performers.
- In the late 18th century, a khawal was a biologically male dancer who presented as a woman to perform at celebratory occasions - such as weddings and births - after women had been prohibited from dancing in public.
- Khawal were considered sexually available by their male audiences who found their behavior desirable.
- A khawal was one in all aspects of their life; even after the dancing was over, they presented as women in public spaces.



# References

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