

# Where the Rainbow Ends: American Muslims and LGBT Activism\*

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## Introduction

*And Allah is not shy of the truth.* (Q. al-Aḥzāb, [33:53](#))

*If only there had been, among the generations before your time, people with a remnant of good sense to forbid corruption on the earth! We saved only a few of them, while the unjust pursued the enjoyment of plenty and persisted in sin.* (Q. Hūd, [11:116](#))

In the Quran, Allah ﷻ informs us of past peoples who, when presented with guidance, chose to disobey. These people were obstinate, arrogant, and rapacious. Though Allah often speaks of these disbelievers as an undifferentiated category, a few societies were distinctive in their iniquity. Their crimes were too brazen, transgressions too felonious, and rejection too manifest to go unchecked, and so Allah destroyed them. In recounting their destruction, Allah ﷻ says: “So We seized each for their sin: against some of them We sent a storm of stones, some were overtaken by a (mighty) blast, some We caused the earth to swallow, and some We drowned. Allah did not wrong them, but it was they who wronged themselves” (Q. al-‘Ankabūt, [29:40](#)).

Of the few societies whose destruction is related in the Quran is the people of Lot (as). Their misdeeds are registered in the Quran, and the most significant of them, singled out repeatedly alongside their mention, is the sin of sodomy. The words of the verses mentioning this sin could not be clearer: they “approached men with sexual desire instead of women.”

Though the people of Lot were unique in many ways, their propensity to sin was not. Human beings all share the trial of desiring vice, and this is something the Prophet ﷺ spelled out directly in one [hadith](#):

every son of Adam sins, and the best of those who sin are those who repent. In another [hadith](#), the fire of Hell is described as surrounded by temptation, while Paradise is surrounded by hardship. Elsewhere, the “goods of Allah” are [mentioned](#) as precious and weighty (*sil’at Allāh ghāliya*), these “goods” being admission to Paradise. In these and other reports, the basic theme and instruction are clear: we have a choice to obey or disobey Allah’s commands, and obedience often comes with hardship, difficulty, and trials. Moreover, obedience requires us not only to follow Allah’s command but also to stand up in difficult circumstances to call for what is right and true against those who disobey and deny, regardless of their number and might.

The moral imperative to stand for truth has become increasingly challenging for Muslims in the West with the rise of the LGBT movement. Though this movement has been around for decades, recent years have witnessed a radical advance in LGBT rights, cultural programs, political campaigns, and a virtual ubiquity of LGBT representation in the media. Within such a setting, we are often told that being critical of the LGBT movement is being “on the wrong side of history.”

How did things get this way? It is surreal at times to reflect on the pace of change when it comes to the LGBT movement. Just six years ago, the Supreme Court narrowly decided in a 5–4 ruling that same-sex couples enjoyed a “fundamental right” to marry. At the time, President Obama, though himself still opposed to gay marriage only three years earlier, [praised](#) the ruling as an “extraordinary achievement.” But he was also sensitive to conscientious dissent. Obama spoke of “Americans of goodwill” holding a range of beliefs on the matter and described people opposing same-sex marriage as motivated not by irrational animus but by “sincere and deeply held beliefs.” He went on to urge people to “revere our deep commitment to religious freedom” while also recognizing “different viewpoints.”

Not all were as sanguine as President Obama on the potential for cultural compromise. In his [dissent](#), Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito portended the following:

Today’s decision . . . will be used to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy. In the course of its opinion, the majority compares traditional marriage laws to laws that denied equal treatment for African-Americans and women. E.g., ante, at 11–13. The implications of this analogy will be exploited by those who are determined to stamp out every vestige of dissent.

In hindsight, Justice Alito’s prognostication was prescient. A movement that was once publicly focused on obtaining marriage rights has since radically expanded its political remit, shifting its focus in recent years to transgender advocacy. LGBT representation in media—including, crucially, children’s programming—is now a mainstay of popular programming. Recent years have witnessed curriculum adjustments throughout the country to further entrench LGBT-related teachings in public schools, including far-left pieties regarding gender fluidity, non-traditional families, and “stereotype-breaking” modes of living. Whereas the program of LGBT cultural initiation once played out mainly on college campuses, today’s indoctrination begins in spaces occupied by children as young as three years old.

In the face of all this, the Muslim community in America has demonstrated little willingness to resist these cultural forces, opting most often to stand behind the movement as a matter of public advocacy. This

capitulation to LGBT promotion has been especially pronounced among Muslim civil rights organizations. Muslim Advocates, a leading civil rights organization [committed to](#) ensuring that “American Muslims have a seat at the table with expert representation,” has supported a wide range of LGBT rights, going so far as [praising](#) a Muslim drag queen as “living her [*sic*] truth.” Meanwhile, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) [featured](#) lesbian TV actress and producer Fawzia Mirza in its annual conference as a “Muslim creative.” Mirza’s media productions have focused on queer Muslim representations, including her writing for an episode of the CBS television show *The Red Line*. Mirza’s episode was significant in that it [marked](#) “the first instance of a gay-Muslim romance on network television.” In 2019, Muslim Advocates, MPAC, and CAIR-Oklahoma collectively [submitted](#) an amicus brief in favor of gay and transgender employment protections alongside the heretical “reformist” organization Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV)—a peculiar inclusion, particularly given MPV president Ani Zonneveld’s prior [repudiation](#) of Yasir Qadhi, Hamza Yusuf, the Council on American–Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Hussam Ayloush (Executive Director, CAIR-LA), Nihad Awad (co-founder and Executive Director of CAIR), Zaytuna Institute, and the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) as “homophobic.” All the aforementioned organizations rely heavily on the Muslim community for support and publicly claim to be zakat eligible, justifying their solicitation of zakat monies under the rubric of working “in the path of Allah” (*fī sabīl illāh*).

Indeed, the list could go on. Despite the ubiquity of LGBT advocacy, in addition to the many public and repeated acts of political support for LGBT put on by Muslim organizations and leaders, little has been written offering a theologically or even a politically defensible theory for *why* Muslims should take such a stance. This article acts as an intervention in this regard, arguing emphatically for the opposite. Specifically, I contend that

1. Muslim political advocacy for the vast majority of LGBT rights is fundamentally immoral and inimical to the sexual and gender ethics of Islam;
2. the political rationales so far offered for such advocacy, few as they are, have been ill-supported and often rely on infirm or otherwise tendentious assertions that have managed to dodge any serious scrutiny;
3. the general ambivalence of the Muslim community towards the LGBT-critical stance advocated here has exacerbated the already powerful effects of the pro-LGBT *Zeitgeist*, preying on young Muslims who already struggle to negotiate their identity in a society increasingly inhospitable to a life of faith; and, finally,
4. a continuation of the status quo will only deepen extant theological crises while paradoxically politicizing the Muslim community, even while attempting at times to do the very opposite.

We ask Allah ﷻ to guide our thoughts in this regard and to protect us from error. *Āmīn*.

## I. Clearing the Theological and Moral Air

It is important at the outset to lay out a few straightforward points of Muslim confession, points increasingly ignored by Muslims who spend most of their days online arguing about Islam. The first of

these is that being Muslim is predicated on a *belief*, which is to say that one is not simply a Muslim through self-identification. The moniker “Muslim” carries entailments, and one of the most essential of these is the acknowledgment that this world and our place in it have been created and are managed by an Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Merciful Creator, Allah ﷻ, before whom we will be taken to moral account after our days in this world have come to an end. That account will examine our deeds and their accordance with His guidance as revealed to His final messenger Muhammad ﷺ and preserved in the Quran and Prophetic Sunna. Of this reckoning Allah says:

On that Day, the weighing of deeds will be true and just. Those whose good deeds are heavy on the scales will be the ones to prosper, and those whose good deeds are light will be the ones who have lost their souls through their wrongful rejection of Our messages. (Q. al-A‘rāf, [7:8–9](#))

As Muslims, therefore, we are obligated to submit to Allah ﷻ and adhere to His commands. Our failures to act morally are a matter of sin (with some greater than others), and although sins are indeed weighty, they do not expel a Muslim from the fold of Islam provided the sin is not a sin of disbelief. Moreover, our trespasses are forgivable through repentance and righteous conduct, and a great many good deeds expiate wrongdoings—even grave ones. Indeed, a believer should never lose hope in Allah’s mercy, no matter the quantity of his misdeeds.

However, the propensity to sin (and sinning itself) is altogether different from *denying* that sin is sin. The latter amounts to a rejection of Allah’s instruction. Although mitigating factors, such as coercion or ignorance, may pardon such rejection on a situational basis, it is important to note that as a normative matter, denying Allah’s revealed guidance is tantamount to disbelief. A Muslim may commit the sin of drinking wine and still remain a Muslim; he may not, on the other hand, deny the sinfulness of wine drinking and remain a Muslim, even if he has never imbibed so much as a drop of alcohol.

Allah’s instruction and guidance are divided into matters that are clear and unambiguous, on which there is no scholarly disagreement and which are fixed across time and place, and those that allow for some plausible range of interpretation, most often bounded within a scope of recognized scholarly difference. A number of details within Sacred Law fall under those matters that are subject to legal reasoning (*ijtihād*) and on which the acceptable range of positions may therefore vary. Nonetheless, the essential elements of Islam—that Allah ﷻ is one, that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is the last and final messenger of God and that his religion supersedes all previous dispensations, that the Quran is the inerrant word of Allah, and that the Prophet’s Sunna provides us guidance to be followed—are beyond dispute. Akin to these central tenets is a host of moral instructions that likewise form an indefeasible part of Muslim belief and are thus identified by scholars as belonging to those things that are “known of the religion by necessity” (*ma‘lūm min al-dīn bi-l-ḍarūra*). The prohibition of wine, swine flesh, fornication/adultery (*zinā*), murder, theft, and much else falls under this designation. Like it, the prohibition of homosexual behavior—and all sexual acts that fall outside specifically delineated legally sanctioned relationships (all of which are necessarily heterosexual)—is also “known of the religion by necessity.”

The proofs for the prohibition of same-sex sexual behavior are many. The most explicit verses condemning such behavior appear in the story of Lot (as), where Allah ﷻ reprimands Lot’s people for “approaching men with sexual desire instead of women” (*la-ta’ūna l-rijāla shahwatan min dūni l-nisā’*)

(Q. al-Naml, 27:55). Although same-sex behavior was not the only offense Lot's people committed, it was nonetheless their emblematic transgression. It is the sin most commonly imputed to them in the Quran and is mentioned repeatedly, while their remaining crimes, like highway robbery and practicing evil in their gatherings, are mentioned only once. However, the verses of Lot, unequivocal and self-evident as they are, do not stand alone. The entire corpus of the Quran and Sunna sanctions very specific sexual relationships between men and women and provides instruction for how these relationships should be practiced. This instruction includes everything from how marriages are to be conducted, the specifics and limits of polygyny, what kinds of sexual behavior are permitted within marriage, inheritance distribution when a spouse passes away, and, of course, how to dissolve a marriage when things go south. In addition to matrimonial relationships, the Quran, Sunna, and Sacred Law speak of contractually bound sexual relationships between a master and a concubine ("what your right hands possess"). At no point is there even implicit support for homosexual relationships in all of this mention.

In recent years, heterodox groups have emerged proposing reforms to this sexual ethic, arguing that the Quranic message has been misunderstood by jurists or that perhaps the language itself is malleable enough to accommodate same-sex relationships alongside normative heterosexual ones. Interested readers may review two pieces I have authored in refutation of such arguments, [one](#) attending to Scott Kugle's revisionist arguments and a [follow up](#) reflecting on responses to that piece.

The sexual ethics of Islam are based on a clear socio-familial ethic, which is directly undermined by the adoption of a non-heterosexual norm. As I have [written](#) previously on the question of Islam's sexual ethics:

The principal wisdom undergirding the prohibition of same-sex acts is situated within the principle objectives (*maqāṣid*) of Islamic law. One of the five principal objectives of Islamic law is the preservation of lineage (*nasl*) along with the accompanying family structure predicated upon that lineage. Accordingly, Islamic law not only prohibits adultery, fornication, sodomy, and tribadism [i.e., lesbian sex], but slanderous accusation (*qadhf*) that casts doubt upon one's lineage (common examples include referring to someone as "a child of fornication," or bastard – '*ibn zinā*'). The socio-familial guidelines in Islam are thus regarded as paramount, with the complementarity of the male and female as necessary constituent elements for any legally sanctioned relationship. The teleology of the male and female bodies for reproduction and penetrative sexual intercourse refracts this heterosexual paradigm and purpose of preserving progeny. The fact that reproduction cannot occur in any same-sex arrangement absent artificial insemination or surrogacy only reinforces the organic biological and physiological realities of paradigmatically heterosexual acts. God speaks of this often in the Quran when addressing the matter of creation. A verse in chapter 49, *Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt*, reads: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. Indeed, God is Knowing and Acquainted." Elsewhere, men and women are said to have been created from a unified soul, and from them to have produced posterity: "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear God, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed God

is ever, over you, an Observer” (*Sūrat al-Nisā’*, 4:1). By disregarding this cosmic purpose, same-sex acts dishonor this ordering of creation.

The religion of Islam therefore prescribes a clear sexual ethic in light of which homosexual acts are prohibited and the act of sodomy specifically is a grave moral sin (as are heterosexual fornication and adultery). Attempts to approve homosexual acts not only violate clear verses of revelation (thus constituting a position of disbelief, or *kufṛ*) but also profoundly undermine the very socio-familial ethic whose preservation is an essential principle and one of the main overriding objectives of Islamic law, namely, the preservation of lineage (*nasl*).

Discussions of homosexuality are complicated by the notion of sexual identities, which abounds in any discussion of sexuality today. Terms such as sexual orientation, gay, straight, homosexual, heterosexual, and the like are all exceedingly recent categories and concepts, inaugurated in the late nineteenth century and which, according to Michel Foucault and others, served to introduce a new “species” of sexual being, one to be studied, examined, and pathologized for medical purposes.<sup>1</sup> Though many scholars have supported this periodization, a few recent voices have argued for slightly earlier beginnings, with some locating the origin of “homosexuality” (as a social concept, if not a fully formed term) in late eighteenth- / early nineteenth-century Germany.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it is important here simply to note that although some people in the past (pre-nineteenth century) certainly expressed and acted on homoerotic desires, they had no concept of an attending identity to which that sexual expression was tethered. Unlike past peoples, the modern individual experiencing same-sex attraction begins first to conceive of his identity before anything else: his first order of business is to wrestle with whether he is “gay.” And that identity, once internalized, carries with it a number of entailments. When the homosexual identity is fully internalized, being gay (or lesbian) denotes not only to whom one is attracted sexually but also how one behaves romantically and sexually, how one thinks politically or socially, how one relates to religion, and, of course, who one truly *is*. The gay person today is not simply a person with same-sex desire but someone whose “being gay” is an essential part of his or her very being.

When homosexuality is viewed in this manner, the withholding of moral approval from homosexual acts and disapproval of the gay identity come to be seen as a rejection not of a discrete set of sinful acts and a problematic self-conception but of the very person himself. It is precisely for this reason that people objecting to homosexual activism are seen not as individuals with a specific moral claim about what does and does not constitute acceptable sexual behavior but as retrograde, hateful bigots. In such a setting, few feel confident in saying as little as “of course homosexual acts are *ḥarām*.”

In spite of a discursive context that routinely levels charges of hate and bigotry against traditional religious groups and that brooks no opposition on this topic, Muslims have no choice but to be forthright about the Islamic faith and its sexual and family ethics. It is an obligation to preach the religion clearly and confidently, even—indeed, especially—in difficult times. We must do so with discernment, taking great care to avoid the frequent conglomeration of sexual desires (which in and of themselves do not necessarily constitute sin), sexual acts, and everything else that is bound up in the homosexual identity

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Beachy, “The German Invention of Homosexuality,” *The Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 4 (2010): 801–838, <https://doi.org/10.1086/656077>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

and with an eye towards helping confused members of our community understand this topic more easily. In doing so, we must remember that we do not control hearts. Indeed, even the Prophet ﷺ was told by Allah ﷻ in the Quran: “You [Prophet] cannot guide whomever you wish to the truth; rather, it is Allah who guides whomever He wills” (Q. al-Qaṣaṣ, [28:56](#)).

Not everyone will accept the message of Allah, but if we remain silent on a topic that is increasingly difficult for young Muslims to understand, what chance are we giving them ever to accept that message when they come of age? In what world will someone exposed to the media storm of LGBT representation and a totalizing LGBT-affirmative discourse ever view Islam as reasonable—or even moral, for that matter—on the topic of sex and sexuality when Muslims have made no attempt to offer an explanation for this disjunction let alone defend the Islamic faith itself? This task—of preaching with wisdom the values of Islam—is even more urgent in an environment like ours that grates against religious guidance, views it as bigoted and hateful, and promotes disbelief under the guise of religious reform. As Muslims, we absolutely must keep this in mind when thinking about homosexuality or the LGBT movement more broadly and our responsibilities connected thereto.

An additional component of the LGBT movement is that of transgenderism. Gender and gender nonconformity are lengthy topics that cannot be covered comprehensively here. Suffice it to say, however, that Islam makes no distinction between one’s (biological) sex and one’s (psychological) gender and that it explicitly prohibits the deliberate imitation of the opposite sex/gender. Nevertheless, the Sharī‘a does account for intersex individuals and for innate gender nonconforming behaviors. Legal discussions addressing disjunctions between behavior and mannerisms can be found in an earlier [study](#) in which I review scholarly treatments of gender nonconformity. A lengthier [follow-up article](#) provides a comprehensive review of contemporary transgenderism and discusses the prohibition of medical interventions for gender dysphoria, including hormone therapy and so-called sex reassignment surgeries. In short, ***the core elements of the homosexual and transgender movements are immoral, as they normalize, promote, and celebrate behaviors and actions that constitute patent transgressions of the divine command.*** It is imperative that Muslims not lose sight of this elementary fact.

In exercising our judgment on any question at a given point in time, we as Muslims should not merely think as a secular civic community untethered to any greater commitments but instead ask ourselves what would obtain the pleasure of Allah. The answer to this question is not always straightforward and people of faith may sincerely differ on it. Chances are, however, that when deciding between what pleases Allah ﷻ and what is socially expedient, many will conflate the two or incline to expediency, particularly in the face of intense social pressure. “Resistance” is a nice slogan to throw around and lay claim to when it falls within the status quo, but it is a difficult ethic to uphold when the cost of resisting the regnant ethos and remaining firm on the path of Allah could be ostracism (or worse). This is why the Prophet ﷺ gave [glad tidings](#) to “the strangers” (*al-ghurabā’*), those who experience alienation in following Allah’s guidance yet persist in spite of it. May Allah ﷻ give us the fortitude to be among the *ghurabā’*. *Āmīn*.

## II. Political Rationales for Muslim LGBT Advocacy

The bulk of what follows is a review of what I have termed theo-political arguments for pro-LGBT political and social advocacy, namely, arguments that some have attempted to make on the basis of Sacred Law or with reference to religious precedent. The principal proponents of these arguments have endorsed a limited set of LGBT rights as being compatible within an Islamic framework of negotiated pluralism. In particular, Dr. Sherman Jackson, an esteemed scholar of Islamic law, has written a fair amount on the question of same-sex marriage, while an equally esteemed scholar, Dr. Jonathan Brown, has likewise argued in general terms for supporting some LGBT rights. Brown later clarified that his support of certain LGBT rights [did not entail](#) “celebrating” LGBT lifestyles while also [stating his support for](#) the efforts of Muslims in Birmingham [to oppose](#) LGBT teachings in schools. He has more recently [emphasized](#) the importance of religious freedom and freedom of conscience in the face of certain pro-LGBT measures in the United States, even expressing his support for the Christian baker in the infamous “[gay wedding cake](#)” [case](#). Brown has done so while promoting a “common cause” platform, though in recent years he has expressed second thoughts about the feasibility of such a platform. More recently, he retracted a widely-read [publication](#) he had authored at Yaqeen Institute arguing for the “common cause” approach.

Notwithstanding, the arguments of Jackson, Brown, and others continue to animate American Muslim politics and to provide fodder for those seeking scholarly support for LGBT advocacy. And although these figures do not address, for instance, whether gender fluidity should be taught in elementary schools (we can, I believe, safely assume that they are opposed to it), some of the arguments they have made in favor of LGBT rights do not stipulate any limiting conditions for when LGBT demands should *not* be supported (at least they do not do so explicitly). Accordingly, it is important to review the specific arguments themselves and to examine whether they ever held ground, even within the contexts within which they were originally imagined. In doing so, it should be noted that it is not my intention to treat Jackson or Brown as antagonists or to cast their scholarship in disrepute altogether. As a personal matter, I hold both in high regard as they have expended considerable scholarly energy over the years in defense of the Quran, the Prophet ﷺ, and the Muslim community. Nevertheless, this religion was described by the Prophet ﷺ as *naṣīḥa*, or good counsel, and a healthy community should pursue the truth, even if it requires correction along the way.

Finally, a word about my specific use in this piece of the terms “LGBT advocacy” and “LGBT rights.” Already elusive, the meaning of these terms is complicated by the frequent [motte-and-bailey](#) sidestepping of activists who, on the one hand, push for legislation that [specifically undermines](#) the rights of religious communities in the name of LGBT protections while, on the other hand, insisting that their work is merely about “saving trans lives” or ensuring that gay children are not bullied in school. As of the writing of this piece, same-sex couples enjoy a nationwide right to civil marriage, gay and trans individuals are [protected](#) by Title VII protections, and members of the US military are [free](#) to be “out and proud.” LGBT representation in the media continues to climb, with roughly [ten percent](#) of all characters on primetime television counted as LGBT-identified. GLAAD, a prominent LGBT advocacy organization, has called on Hollywood to raise that number to [twenty percent](#) (!) by 2025—a figure many times greater than the [actual number](#) of LGBT-identified people in the population—while hardly a day passes without a new celebrity “coming out” as sexually or gender atypical.

The term “LGBT rights” as used in this piece encompasses a wide range of claimed rights. Though some are already recognized in law, such as same-sex marriage, “LGBT rights” refers mainly to the many



proposed measures that are still under deliberation. Such measures include efforts to change school curricula by introducing critiques of gender, masculinity, femininity, and “heteronormativity” while also changing sex-specific spaces, such as bathrooms and locker rooms, into “gender identifying” ones. The push for “gender-identifying” spaces seeks to supplant the notion of gender as defined by sex with the notion of gender identity as a self-chosen psychosocial reality, which then determines the facilities one uses, the sports one plays, and the way one must be spoken to. LGBT rights also refer to those measures that continue to impinge on religious communities, such as the Equality Act’s [explicit subordination](#) of religious freedom, [pushes](#) for the integration of sexual orientation and gender identity (“SOGI”) education into school curricula without so much as an opt-out possibility, and deliberations over “affirmative therapy” as the only permissible intervention for gender dysphoria or dissatisfaction with one’s homosexual thoughts and desires. Meanwhile, the term “LGBT advocacy” as used in this piece refers to all that goes above and beyond the explicitly political. It denotes the unceasing public program of indoctrination and the shoehorning of LGBT themes into all corners of life, including public libraries and the media, the [rewriting](#) of [history](#), and the refracting of LGBT issues and perspectives into myriad disciplines and endeavors—including, significantly, religion.

In light of the foregoing considerations, it is my contention that

- a. all the aforementioned LGBT rights and advocacy efforts are unequivocally harmful for society,
- b. such rights and advocacy efforts can have no reasonable political or theological justification for Muslims, and
- c. those specifically restricting their “support for LGBT” to limited anti-discrimination protections have no need to advocate for them, as such protections have long since been passed into law; consequently, continuing to appeal to them serves no other purpose than the further curtailment of religious freedoms and conscientious objection.

LGBT advocacy is not merely about accommodating a small community that identifies as gender or sexually atypical; rather, it actually serves to *induce* sexual and gender confusion while promoting LGBT lifestyles as liberating and worthy of unending celebration. The fomenting of gender and sexual confusion is evidenced in the rising number of youth who [identify](#) as LGBT, as well as the growing “[sampling](#)” of same-sex experiences. The proliferation of sexual immorality sullies the soul of a society, while unquestioned support for LGBT rights and advocacy produces spiritual crises, with religious teachings that run counter to the LGBT perspective [reported](#) as a major cause of apostasy across religious boundaries in recent years.

In stating all this, I recognize that *some* of what is occasionally raised in discussions of “LGBT rights” may, in fact, be supported by American Muslims without any moral conflict. It goes without saying that certain forms of harassment, bullying, and violence should not be sanctioned, even against iniquitous or otherwise immoral people. However, the crux of the debates in our current political climate is those areas that have moral implications for religious communities, such as the right for religious organizations to exercise moral discretion in their hiring practices, to maintain sex segregated spaces without having to reconfigure them to accommodate subjective gender identities, and so forth. The collapsing of all these issues under the general umbrella of “discrimination”—without any distinction between the “LG” and the “T,” any consideration for conscientious exceptions, or even a minimal tolerance for the *mere belief* that

LGBT-related acts are inherently immoral—makes it very difficult to have honest discussions about what things we can all agree count as mistreatment and how we can come up with a *modus vivendi* capable of accommodating individuals and groups with vastly differing moral outlooks.

*A. Theo-political Arguments for Supporting LGBT Rights: Zoroastrian Incest Marriage*

Although a handful of justifications for Muslim support of LGBT rights have been marshalled over the years, perhaps the earliest and most commonly cited theologically informed position was expounded by Dr. Sherman Jackson. Beginning with a 2003 [article](#) entitled “Shari‘ah, Democracy, and the Modern Nation-State: Some Reflections on Islam, Popular Rule, and Pluralism,” Jackson contests the hegemonic nature of the modern nation-state, describing it as an institution that exercises “an absolute monopoly over law-making and [carries with it] the concomitant imposition of a uniform standard of conduct on all of its citizens.” From there, he contrasts the institutional domination of the modern state with the legal pluralism of pre-modern Muslim polities. According to Jackson, these polities afforded considerable moral autonomy to minority faith communities, such that a number of acts prohibited under Islamic law were nonetheless permitted for minority religious groups whose faith traditions allowed them. To buttress this point, Jackson draws on the judgment of the famed Hanbalī theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350 CE), who, in his *Ahkām ahl al-dhimma* (Rulings for protected peoples), addresses the practice of Zoroastrian “self-marriage,” in which a man would marry his mother, sister, or daughter—a practice referenced frequently in Muslim juristic and exegetical works that mention Zoroastrians. For Ibn al-Qayyim, self-marriage, though morally repugnant by the standards of Islam, was a type of marriage that the Muslim polity would recognize, provided that (1) adjudication concerning such marriages was not presented to Muslim courts and (2) the marriages were themselves permitted in the religious tradition in question. (I hereafter refer to these twin stipulations as the “two conditions.”) Jackson goes on to suggest a sort of libertarian compromise on the question of marriage, one in which the government relinquishes the right to define or bless marriages and assigns this prerogative to religious communities instead.

In 2006, Jackson wrote another [piece](#) commenting briefly on gay marriage entitled “Legal Pluralism Between Islam and the Nation-State: Romantic Medievalism or Pragmatic Modernity?” In it, he argues *against* efforts to ban or prevent gay marriage, [regarding](#) such efforts as “unduly entangling the government in religion (at least for that sizeable segment of the population that sees marriage as a religious institution) and of discriminating against those established religions that do not proscribe homosexual relations.” As in his 2003 piece, Jackson again [exposits](#) the legal diversity of prior Muslim polities, which acknowledged “the standards to which constituent communities held themselves,” and makes passing reference to Ibn al-Qayyim’s “self-marriage” position cited in the 2003 article. In lieu of efforts to define marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution, Jackson once more proposes compromises that would result in a legal decentralizing of marriage, removing it from the monolithic control of the state in favor of a pluralism that would delegate authority in marital matters to religious institutions or other non-state bodies.

One year later, in 2007, Jackson wrote perhaps his most explicit support of gay marriage legislation for the *Washington Post*’s now defunct OnFaith blog in a piece entitled “On Morality and Politics.” In it, he states that although Islamic law imposes stiff sanctions on homosexual acts, such legislation in the past generally applied “only to Muslims.” He continues: “As for non-Muslims whose religious traditions

sanctioned homosexuality, many jurists, perhaps a majority, would place them under the general provision that left religious minorities to their own discretion, at least in the private realm (marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc.).” Jackson makes clear in this article where his own moral commitments lie—namely, as a Muslim he opposes homosexual acts on religious grounds—while also asserting that the very same Muslim commitments he maintains would nonetheless require him to validate the existence of alternative moral regimes in the public square.

Jackson’s Zoroastrian “self-marriage” argument was picked up by later scholars and writers who similarly argued that Muslims should support gay marriage and LGBT rights more generally. In a [2014 piece](#) in the *Huffington Post*, Dr. Faisal Kutty opined that “gay marriage may not be contrary to Islam,” citing, like Jackson, the example of Ibn al-Qayyim and Zoroastrian self-marriage. In a popular [2016 article](#) published at Al-Madina Institute, Dr. Jonathan Brown wrote in a similar vein, following up a few months later with a more provocative [piece](#) elaborating not only on Zoroastrian self-marriages and Ibn al-Qayyim’s *Ahkām ahl al-dhimma* but also on the (often coerced) immolation of Hindu widows in Mughal India as another example of what Muslims have been willing to “tolerate” in the way of the morally reprehensible.

Given the centrality of the appeal to Ibn al-Qayyim and his treatment of Zoroastrian self-marriages, it is important here to revisit Ibn al-Qayyim’s discourse on the topic, as well as why his seeming accommodation for Zoroastrians may not produce the purported goods desired by contemporary Muslims seeking theological justification for the support of same-sex marriage and LGBT rights more broadly.

First, it is important to note that the aforementioned treatments of Ibn al-Qayyim’s treatment of self-marriage are partial and selective. Ibn al-Qayyim poses the question of Zoroastrian self-marriages and responds with *two* opinions, not one. The first of these opinions is one of limited allowance of the practice (provided that the previously mentioned “two conditions” are met), while the second entails a forceful dissolution of self-marriages. The first position is primarily supported by the Prophet’s ﷺ direct instructions to collect the *jizya* tax from Zoroastrians with no further mention of their marriages, worship, or various other immoralities. The absence of any explicit instruction in this regard from the Prophet ﷺ is taken as tacit acceptance of Zoroastrian practice and accounts for the support this position received in subsequent scholarship, which continued appealing to the Prophet’s ﷺ instructions. The second position contests this view by referring to the directive of ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb (ra), who instructed that Zoroastrian self-marriages be dissolved during his tenure as caliph.

Ibn al-Qayyim reconciles these two views by arguing that each is appropriate within a given set of circumstances. The Prophet’s ﷺ instructions were given when Muslims had little authority over Persia and were in no position to curb self-marriages without risking revolt and loss. ‘Umar’s subsequent order to dissolve self-marriages came when those dynamics had changed. During ‘Umar’s reign, Muslims gained firm political control of Persia and thus had the ability to put an end to self-marriages. Ibn al-Qayyim describes ‘Umar’s willingness to act in this regard as “one of his best [acts of] juristic discretion” (*min aḥsan ijtihādihi*), one that is beloved to Allah ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ.

Moreover, Ibn al-Qayyim’s gloss of the first view (that of permission contingent on the fulfillment of the “two conditions”) *explicitly rejects* any possible expansion of this permission to authorize, alongside Zoroastrian self-marriage, the acts of sodomy (*liwāṭ*) or fornication (*zinā*) in particular. Ibn al-Qayyim’s

reasoning on this point appeals to the possible effects of sodomy and fornication on the Muslim community. Unlike these two enormities (*kabā'ir*), self-marriages could be localized and kept out of the sight of Muslims. Their presence in Zoroastrian quarters would not harm the Muslims, whereas a legalization of fornication and sodomy would.<sup>3</sup>

Although Ibn al-Qayyim does not elaborate on how permitting sodomy and fornication could harm Muslims, his reasoning is not difficult to surmise on the basis of revelation and his own writings elsewhere. When mentioning the people of Lot (as), Allah ﷻ describes sodomy as an iniquity (*fāḥisha*) and as wanton excess (*isrāf*) and those who engage in it as transgressive (*ādūn*). Elsewhere, He describes fornication and adultery (*zinā*) as an iniquity and an “evil way” (Q. al-Isrā', 17:32). In his work *al-Dā' wa-l-dawā'* (The ailment and the cure), Ibn al-Qayyim cites a report from Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855 CE) stating that he knows of no sin greater in the eyes of God after murder than fornication.<sup>4</sup> This report is buttressed by a [verse](#) from the Quran that reads (in part): “those who invoke no other deity besides God, nor take a life that God has made sacred except by way of justice, nor commit fornication” (Q. al-Furqān, 25:68). In a later section detailing the gravity of sexual immorality, Ibn al-Qayyim cites a report in which the Prophet ﷺ says that the majority of those who enter the Fire shall do so on account of their tongues and their sexual organs (i.e., the sins committed with them), then mentions a hadith in which the Prophet ﷺ declares adultery (*zinā al-muḥṣan*) a capital crime.<sup>5</sup> In a subsequent section, Ibn al-Qayyim addresses the gravity of sodomy in particular, drawing on a number of scholars who regarded it as a more heinous sin than (heterosexual) fornication, one whose consequences include the potential ruining of one's worldly life, a total loss of shame and modesty in front of both God and man, and a severe punishment in the life to come.<sup>6</sup> Though incest of the Zoroastrian type undoubtedly constitutes a reprehensible sexual transgression as well, it is indeed possible, perhaps even probable, that Ibn al-Qayyim and others considered that practice more easily localizable (given the natural repugnance almost all people feel regarding incest) to a small minority religious community that interacted little with Muslims and whose members would conceal their incestuous relationships from believers when the two parties met.

Moreover, Ibn al-Qayyim goes to great lengths in his *Aḥkām* to make clear his principal concern for the welfare of the believers. Muslims, he avers, must retain a distinctive position that evinces clear and unambiguous superiority in social status and standing within an Islamic polity. Nothing can be allowed to jeopardize that, and permissions granted to the *ahl al-dhimma* are frequently stipulated as being provisional, contingent upon the social and political stability of the *umma*. On this, Antonia Bosanquet writes in her exposition of the *Aḥkām*:

The book (i.e., *Aḥkām*) as a whole is a statement of Muslim power over the dhimmi subalterns and a reminder of their submission to the law that they rejected. In this sense, the exercise of power acquires a theological or apologetic relevance. Nowhere in *Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma* is this

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<sup>3</sup> See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Aḥkām ahl al-dhimma*, ed. Yūsuf b. Aḥmad al-Bakrī and Shākir b. Tawfīq al-'Arūrī (Dammām: Ramādī lil-Nashr, 1997), 764–769.

<sup>4</sup> See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Dā' wa-l-dawā'*, ed. Muḥammad Ajmal Iṣlāḥī (Jeddah: Dār 'Ālam al-Fawā'id, 2008), 261.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

more evident than in the demarcation of territory, boundaries and control that forms part of Ibn al-Qayyim's construction of space in the text.<sup>7</sup>

The delineation of space, with hard boundaries between believing and unbelieving communities (with distinct quarters, markets, and so on), animates Ibn al-Qayyim's work in crucial ways. As Bosanquet notes when commenting on the topic of space, "Ibn al-Qayyim is relatively unconcerned with what happens within dhimmi separate space . . . It is as if, having established the boundaries and defined the space, he has no further interest in their contents."<sup>8</sup> The bulk of Ibn al-Qayyim's writings and scholarly effort in *Ahkām* revolve around where the boundaries between believer and dhimmi break down or are transgressed. In those moments, the integrity of the community comes first. Understanding this dynamic of space is essential to the presuppositions undergirding his vision for relations between Muslims and *dhimmī* peoples. In this context, even permissions provided to the *ahl al-dhimma* are often conceived of as activities that occur entirely outside the Muslim eye and away from Muslim spaces.

Sensitivity to the harms that various practices posed to the Muslim community is not exclusive to Ibn al-Qayyim, as it abounds in all discussions of *ahl al-dhimma*. Jurists generally permitted non-Muslim minorities to practice their faith and to live according to their own moral code, though this permission was never unqualified. For example, non-Muslims were not to trade in swine and alcohol in predominantly Muslim quarters and spaces, at least not publicly.<sup>9</sup> Transacting in Islamically forbidden items was to be limited to towns and regions that were predominantly or exclusively populated by non-Muslims or else was to be done discreetly. If Muslim rituals and worship, such as congregational prayers and public observances of Eid, appeared in the towns, then the forbidden transactions would have either to occur out of sight and away from Muslim residents or to be moved altogether to a neighboring town or locale where Muslims did not live in large numbers.<sup>10</sup> Non-Muslim minorities were also required to adhere to certain dress requirements in public spaces. Women often donned the hijab and, at a minimum, were forbidden from making wanton displays of their charms (*tabarruj*) or revealing more than their hair and hands, while men were also to ensure that their *awra* was covered in public spaces in order to prevent the spread of corruption (*dar' al-fasād*) and to maintain the norms of Islamic propriety.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the case of "new religions" was always fraught: though the Islamic polity created negotiated spaces for non-Muslim

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<sup>7</sup> See Antonia Bosanquet, *Minding Their Place: Space and Religious Hierarchy in Ibn al-Qayyim's Ahkām ahl al-dhimma* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ al-Rāzī, *Mukhtaṣar Ikhtilāf al-'ulamā'*, *taṣnīf Abī Ja'far al-Ṭaḥāwī*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 1995), 3:497.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Badr al-Dīn al-Ba'ī, *al-Manhaj al-qawīm fī ikhtiṣār Iqtidā' al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm li-Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya*, ed. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-'Imrān (Mecca: Dār 'Ilm al-Fawā'id, 2001), 90. See also Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sarakhsī, *Sharḥ al-Siyar al-kabīr*, 5 vols. (No City: al-Sharika al-Sharqiyya lil-I'lānāt, 1971), 1533–1535.

<sup>11</sup> See *al-Mawsū'a al-fiqhiyya al-Kuwaytiyya*, 2nd ed., 45 vols. (Kuwait: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1987), 10:63–64. See also Maḥmās b. Jal'ūd, *al-Muwālāh wa-l-mu'ādāh fī al-sharī'a al-islāmiyya*, 2 vols. (Riyadh: [no publisher listed], 1987), 684–691 and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, 13 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1379/1959), 6:191. Beyond the scope of this study, much has been written on the so-called "*aḥkām al-'Umarīyya*," or the laws ascribed to the renowned Companion and caliph 'Umar (ra) (though they were almost assuredly produced later). Nevertheless, the laws appear to have been significant in defining the terms for coexistence between believers and the *ahl al-dhimma* at various points in time, and they included specific dress codes for non-Muslim subjects, including the *ghiyār* overcoat that was subsequently enforced under later sultans and caliphs.

minorities, these were almost always for religions whose existence predated the appearance of Islam. On this, Yohanan Friedmann writes in his *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*:

Wholly different is the case of religions which came into being after the revelation of the Quran. For them the harshest treatment is reserved, especially if they are derived from Islam. Few people tried to establish a new religion in the lands ruled by Muslims in the medieval period and no toleration was accorded to those who did. In view of the dogma asserting the finality of Muhammad's prophethood, any prophetic claim in the Muslim period was nipped in the bud.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of LGBT rights, those who instrumentalize Zoroastrian incest-marriage permissions make no attempt to square away the possible harms that the advancement of these rights presents to Muslims, both domestically and abroad. Rather, they tend to treat political judgments as hermetically sealed activities that have no relationship to, and bear no consequences for, culture or society at large. Furthermore, they draw incommensurate analogies on the basis of permissions granted by past Muslim authorities to religions that, while errant, nonetheless drew from officially recognized doctrines and traditions, not emergent cultural and social phenomena that post-dated Islam and/or that had no grounding in any religious tradition whatsoever.

#### B. *Ahl al-Dhimma as a Model for Political Engagement?*

In addition to the above considerations, more fundamental questions relate to whether the status of *ahl al-dhimma* and the phenomenon of self-marriage provide the appropriate frame of reference for modeling contemporary Muslim political engagement. For one, Muslims are not at the moment being asked to formulate policy on gay marriage, though the aforementioned defenses of a Muslims-for-gay-marriage posture seem to presuppose just that: namely, that Muslim opinion on the question of gay marriage would somehow affect policy debates or otherwise influence broader social trends. The Supreme Court's 2015 [Obergefell](#) decision recognizing same-sex marriage took place despite objections from corners more numerous and politically influential than our own, and subsequent LGBT activism has proceeded with little concern for American Muslim opinion. Perhaps more important, as Jackson himself notes, the modern nation-state is qualitatively different from pre-modern Muslim polities. The emergence of modern technologies has introduced a degree of control over vast swaths of land that was previously unimaginable in societies and empires just a century or two ago.<sup>13</sup>

The current state of technology not only supports far quicker and more reliable communication between peoples, but it also—more nefariously—enables a high degree of state hegemony and invasiveness through the use of surveillance, media, and sprawling governmental institutions self-tasked with monitoring and influencing the general public. Both the hard and the soft power of the state engender forms of social and cultural conformity. Given these realities, the moral foundations of law and the relationship between law and morality, as well as the objectives of negotiated moral commitments for non-Muslim minorities in a Muslim-majority polity, bear little meaning in this new age in which the state

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<sup>12</sup> See Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Something as simple as communication was tenuous and unreliable, even after the invention of the telephone. Some World War II conflicts, for instance, [continued](#) for weeks and sometimes months after the war had ended owing to the difficulty of communicating the cessation of conflict to globally distributed battalions and units.

seeks to dominate and subordinate all in the name of its own self-legitimation. In this, Jackson's drawing on pre-modern Zoroastrian self-marriage as a paradigmatic case of legal pluralism for supporting contemporary LGBT rights in reality engages in what Alasdair MacIntyre has critiqued as a "process of projecting the present onto the past and of retrieving a modernized past into the present."<sup>14</sup>

As Wael Hallaq has observed in his *The Impossible State*, the Sharī'a "did not possess a political will, at least nothing comparable to the will of the state. The Sharī'a was about society and far less about politics; it was about the moral social character, not political society."<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, self-regulation most often occurred in social terms, not legal ones, and "apart from the distant presence of the ruler and his unsystematic attempts to tax them, societies practiced self-rule."<sup>16</sup> The family and religious institutions were essential components of this moral self-regulation. Modern society has undermined the strength of family, religious institutions, and other private, non-state actors that were once crucial to the stability and ongoing activity of pre-modern societies, supplanting the roles that these various actors previously played with the political will of the modern state and its attendant institutions. There is no escaping these institutions, as the state leviathan oversees, dictates, and controls people's lives, while its legal/political regime serves to consecrate the ever-shifting moral fashions of the elite and superimpose them on recalcitrant communities. Given these disjunctions between past Muslim societies and the contemporary secular West, the purported "pluralism" of prior Muslim polities serves as poor fodder for those Muslims looking to make a theologically persuasive case for endorsing newfangled liberal pieties.

In addition to the political disanalogies inherent in popular appeals to Zoroastrian self-marriage, additional divergences come to the fore when we consider what some social scientists have termed "sociologies of the self." Put simply, the Zoroastrian who practiced self-marriage was not in any meaningful way *defined* by this self-marriage. He did not maintain a broader social identity to which his incestuous marriage was related. He did not have cultural opinions that were predicated on that social identity nor a political orientation that likewise related in significant ways to such an identity. Indeed, he did not even advertise his incestuous self-marriage in public (and certainly not in front of non-Zoroastrian residents). For all intents and purposes, he registered in the eyes of others primarily as a Zoroastrian member of society, and his marital practices were incidental, not essential, to his sense of selfhood and public identity.

This, however, stands in sharp contrast to how modern-day homosexual and transgender individuals view themselves. They seek not to legitimize a religious practice that has a meaningful precedent anchored in a recognized tradition but instead to inaugurate a fundamental reordering of the moral life of society. In this, gay marriage and transgenderism do not simply reconfigure a few minor policies and concomitant distribution of rights; rather, they profoundly redefine what it means to be a "good" person—indeed what it means to be a family, a husband and wife, a man and a woman. It is on the basis of this remoralization that opposition to homosexuality and transgenderism has been cast not merely as a matter of differing discretionary judgments or subjective moral preferences but as one of discrimination, hatred, and regressiveness. The centrality of *identity* to both homosexuality and transgenderism and the connotations

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<sup>14</sup> Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 82.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

of these identities in the social, cultural, and political spheres make an “Islamic” endorsement of gay marriage and LGBT rights, even as purely political matters, ever more fraught as they set the groundwork upon which the undermining of religious freedoms for Muslims (and the adherents of other religions) gains steam.

### C. The “*Shirk, therefore*” (or “*sati, therefore*”) Argument

Related to the aforementioned theological arguments is another common argument that is either implied by them or explicitly posited as a “commonsense” religious inference: namely, since the Sharī‘a permits *shirk*—overt idolatry—to exist within its political boundaries, anything less than *shirk* should enjoy similar accommodation. Likewise with a related argument: the Muslim polity of Mughal India tolerated, to varying degrees, the Hindu practice of widow burning, or *sati*, which involved the sacrificing of a living widow over her dead husband’s funeral pyre.<sup>17</sup> If morally grotesque acts like *sati* could be tolerated, then on what grounds should Muslims feel compelled to oppose LGBT rights? The reservations of Muslims who object to LGBT rights are therefore regarded as more of a cultural taboo than something entailed by a reasoning process indigenous to Islam. After all, if the Sharī‘a can permit the practice of idolatry—the most heinous sin in the eyes of Allah—within the borders of Dār al-Islām or feel at home with widows being put to the torch, then surely it can allow Muslims in a non-Islamic polity to tolerate sexual transgression.

Perhaps the most obvious and immediate retort to this argument is to ask whether Muslims should then have any moral concerns for society at all. If they can permit non-Muslims *shirk*, rightly highlighted as an abominable crime against Allah ﷻ, then, on this reasoning, we would be right to ask why we cannot simply be pleased for them to permit everything. What rationale would there be for advocating any limits on the desires of non-Muslims? If our tolerance for the reprehensible begins with *shirk* and burning widows alive, then why care about income inequality? Or the environment? Or violence against women? Why should Muslims care about criminal justice reform? Should we simply remain silent on debates over legalizing gambling, narcotics, prostitution, and more?

It goes without saying that just about any concern we have for the world around us—short of *shirk*, of course—will, by definition, fall below the line of open idolatry. And if we lower the bar from *shirk* to burning widows alive, there is still a great deal in the world that may animate our interests that would pale in comparison to the obscenity of witnessing a living woman put to the torch. The mere idea of a Muslim politics would be practically eliminated under such a rubric.

There are more arguments, of course: the fact that the Sharī‘a did not categorically accept *shirk* without stipulations and controls or without instituting incentives to convert to Islam as part of its political program (the *khilāfa* was hardly a *shirk* free-for-all); the fact that the Sharī‘a prohibited much that falls within the domain of social morality, such as prostitution and public indecency;<sup>18</sup> the fact that Allah ﷻ

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<sup>17</sup> Whether a proper articulation (or really any articulation) of the Sharī‘a itself permits or allows *sati* is a lengthier topic to which I will be returning in a forthcoming article. Interested readers can follow my blog [medium.com/@mobeen](https://medium.com/@mobeen) to read a review of the topic in the future, insha’Allah.

<sup>18</sup> The question of how various Muslim polities did or did not uphold such interdictions is also a lengthier topic beyond the scope of the current article. However, it should be noted that immoralities, even ones occurring in full



and His Messenger ﷺ condemned the Quraysh's practice of infanticide when the Muslims had no political power to speak of and were a beleaguered and weak minority; the sociological and cultural consequences and direct effect of LGBT advocacy and the passage of LGBT rights on Muslims generally and the acute effects on young Muslims specifically; the practical irrelevance of Muslim "support" for causes like LGBT given the diminutive size of the community and its consequent lack of meaningful influence on high-stakes public debates; and more, though this will suffice for now.

#### D. Socio-political Arguments for Supporting LGBT Rights: Intersectionality and Quid Pro Quo

Having addressed the primary theological justifications offered in support of Muslim LGBT advocacy, it is now time to turn to those justifications that are proffered in secular terms. Such arguments are occasionally made by those Muslims drawn to reformist views on the permissibility of homosexual acts and transgenderism or who, at the least, [doubt the univocality](#) of their prohibition. Though these arguments come in several variations, the most common of them appeals to the question of individual freedoms in a secular state.

On this understanding of American politics, the US Constitution enshrines a distinct separation of church and state for the purpose of protecting the rights of all religious (and secular) persons to live in a manner consistent with their beliefs, provided those beliefs do not impinge on the rights of others. Accordingly, all people are free to express themselves as they wish, and the force of law will only be brought to bear when that expression harms someone else or is itself being threatened. Muslims are said to be in special need of these protections given their status as a beleaguered minority, and legislation that targets Muslims unfairly can only be overcome by resisting the impositions of the state in the name of freedom and justice. Furthermore, just as Muslims depend on freedom and justice to live in a manner expressive of their commitments and beliefs, so too do other minority groups—including, naturally, sexual and gender identity minorities as well. Given this shared challenge, it is argued, collaborating as civic minority

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public view, were not always policed by Muslim societies. For instance, when "visiting the city of Laodicea (the modern Denizli) in western Anatolia, the traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 770/1368f.) was moved to comment: 'The people of this city do not take action against offences (*lā yughayyirūn al-munkar*), nor do the people of this entire region (*iqīm*).'" See Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 316. Likewise, it is not uncommon to discover at certain points in Muslim history wine taverns, as well as bath houses where sexual immorality was commonplace. Legally, scholars strove to avert the application of *ḥadd* penalties, which, in the case of prostitution and brothels, involved a recourse to *shubha*, or legal ambiguity, by allowing the possibility that such public transactions were taking place between a concubine and her master or being offered as a dower for marriage. Nevertheless, discretionary (*ta'zīr*) punishments were more commonplace, and books of Islamic law make mention of many sexual transgressions that may be subject to such penalties, including a number that would strike many in the contemporary West as quite trivial (e.g., physical affection short of sex between unmarried men and women). For more details on this topic, see James Baldwin, "Prostitution, Islamic Law and Ottoman Societies," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55 (2012), 117–152, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852012X628518125>. See also Elyse Semerdjian, "Off the Straight Path": *Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008) and Norman Calder, *Islamic Jurisprudence in the Classical Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a detailed treatment on commanding the good and forbidding the evil, see Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, esp. the section "Confronting Society" (p. 67 ff.). Finally, for a good synthesis of sexual transgressions that are subject to discretionary punishment (*ta'zīr*), see Fahd b. Šāliḥ al-'Ajlān, *al-Taḥrīm wa-l-tajrīm: fī bayān al-'alāqa bayna al-taḥrīm al-shar'ī wa-l-tajrīm al-qānūnī* (No City: Al-Bayan Center for Research and Studies, 2017), 61–62.

groups seeking to obtain rights from the state and protection against discrimination not only makes sense strategically but is also necessary to ward off criticisms of hypocrisy (i.e., that we are in favor of freedom for our own identity group but are unwilling to extend that freedom to those with whom we differ).

This argument, convincing as it may sound at first blush, relies on a number of tendentious assumptions. Some of these assumptions lie at the heart of secular society, such as the notion of a secular society being able to detach itself from a set of “thick” beliefs and values (alongside the [category of “religion”](#) itself and what it entails) or the idea that law and policy can be meaningfully negotiated without appeals to deeply held beliefs (see this [piece](#) on law and narrative). These philosophical and conceptual arguments are beyond the scope of this article, though they have been elaborated at length by scholars and thinkers who have critiqued the secular project as inherently contradictory, incoherent, and generally unsustainable. Interested readers can avail themselves of a few of [these critiques here](#).

Setting structural critiques aside, there are yet other assumptions that tend to be elided in discussions concerning the “common cause” imperative promoted by Muslim advocates of LGBT politics. Perhaps the most significant of these assumptions relates to the underlying question of “freedom.” Unbeknownst to many, the very concept of freedom itself is heavily contested and not nearly as self-evident as most would like to imagine. As Eric Foner chronicles in his [The Story of American Freedom](#), American history is replete with political conflicts between parties appealing to “freedom.” Should the government provide corporations the freedom to act with no government interference, or is it responsible for protecting the freedoms of the labor class? Should universities be free to admit students based on their own criteria, or should the government impose rules (such as affirmative action) to ensure fair admissions for minorities? Legal historian Michael Klarman [writes](#) about the seemingly infinite malleability of “freedom” as something that makes virtually all court decisions not a matter of adjudicating between a freedom and a non-freedom but instead a matter of determining *which* freedom should be advanced over another. Understanding just about all legal disputes as matters of competing freedoms renders the concept “freedom” itself plastic—something amenable to manipulation and distortion—as well as something that often cannot independently determine obvious outcomes in disputes. In this vein, Klarman [observes](#) that freedom is, in fact, an “empty concept.” As a consequence, he continues, “to say that one favors freedom is really to say nothing at all.”

Because “freedom” can accommodate virtually any position, it is conceptually infirm. In practice, this infirmity results in the ostensible persuasiveness of a given freedom stemming from the attractiveness of the cause with which it is associated and *not* whether its adoption leads to a state that is objectively more “free” than the alternative. As Klarman [notes](#) when discussing *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954):

White southerners who criticized *Brown v. Board of Education* as an invasion of their freedom did not misunderstand the concept. The freedom of local communities to govern their own schools and of individuals to choose with whom they associate have long and respected historical pedigrees. Such freedom arguments are unpersuasive to us today not because they misconstrue the concept of freedom, but rather because we no longer choose to respect the freedom of those who denigrate other human beings because of their race or to defer to the freedom of local political majorities to use their power in the service of white supremacy.

The point Klarman makes about freedom can easily be extended to two other vital concepts that pervade modern political and moral discourse: equality and harm. Steven Smith, in *The Disenchantment of Secular Discourse*, argues persuasively that the concepts of equality and harm, in addition to the concept of freedom, are infinitely malleable and, therefore, essentially without content, that is, empty.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, the question of Muslim support for LGBT rights is not whether Muslims should support LGBT rights on the basis of a common commitment to “freedom” and “equality” but rather whether Muslims should endorse the *particular conception of freedom and equality* advanced by LGBT groups. In committing to the specific articulation of freedom and equality advanced by these groups, Muslims have paradoxically undermined alternative conceptions of these notions that would preserve heterosexual marriage, the right of children to their biological mother and father and to grow up learning about the family as something normatively consisting of a mother and father, the ability of men and women to be meaningfully distinguished biologically, and more.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, American Muslim promotion of the LGBT freedom and equality platform has drastically undermined the ability of the Muslim community itself to live with, or even conceive of, a conception of freedom and equality that would be most conducive to sexual probity, moral decency, and the preservation of faith across generations. Indeed, if elementary freedom, equality, and justice require the social and legal equation of homosexual with heterosexual relationships, then the Shari‘a—like all traditional religions that prohibit homosexual acts—is indeed oppressive and unjust. What could possibly be gained for the Muslim community if we adopt discourses and engage in actions that inevitably lead to such a conclusion?

An additional argument relates to the demand for reciprocity, or *quid pro quo*. LGBT groups are regarded as reliable allies who protest and lobby for causes specifically beneficial to Muslims, such as opposing the infamous “Muslim ban” and speaking out against Western imperialism. This support, it is argued, warrants reciprocity on our part. Thus, Muslims should make an effort to demonstrate that just as LGBT groups support Muslims, so too do we support them.

Now, while it is true that some LGBT groups do occasionally support Muslim civil rights and lobby on our behalf, it is also true that they do so *in line with their own moral commitments*. The popular platform of LGBT advocacy resides in leftist political spaces, and opposition to imperialism and support for immigration fit firmly within that space. Therefore, their advocacy, though beneficial to Muslims, does not pose any material or moral conflicts for them as a community. Moreover, when those conflicts do arise, LGBT groups are generally steadfast in their *opposition to* the rights in question, even if such rights are beneficial to Muslims. How so?

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<sup>19</sup> See Steven D. Smith, *The Disenchantment of Secular Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> For an excellent defense of natural families, based on “traditional” (i.e., male–female) marriage, and a robust critique of newfangled alternative experimental arrangements—including same-sex parenting, rampant no-fault divorce, and third-party reproduction (in the form of artificial methods of conception involving donated sperm, donated eggs, and/or surrogate wombs, all of which are prohibited in the Shari‘a)—as violating many of the most basic rights and fundamental interests of children, see Katy Faust and Stacy Manning, *Them Before Us: Why We Need a Global Children’s Rights Movement* (New York: Post Hill Press, 2021). The authors’ conclusions, interestingly enough, align closely with Islamic norms and teachings regarding family and reproduction in almost all respects.

Let us imagine a situation in which LGBT groups were asked to support Muslims specifically in things that go against their own deeply held convictions. Imagine, for example, that we asked them to come out and positively affirm Muslim views on gender, sexual morality, and family norms. It is hard to imagine them doing so, as they recognize our views on these issues to be in direct conflict with some of their most profoundly held moral beliefs. But, one might object, they need not come out and “march with us,” so to speak, on such issues just as long as they agree to support our freedom to uphold our values and practice our beliefs within our own spaces and society at large. But are they doing even that? The truth of the matter is that many LGBT advocacy organizations are aggressively attempting to winnow away whatever remaining spaces religious groups and other LGBT naysayers have to organize themselves and their communities in line with their own principles on matters related to gender and sexuality. This is evident in LGBT [opposition](#) to religious rights, including the rights of religious groups like ours to maintain moral autonomy in various spaces. LGBT groups [oppose](#), for instance, religious exemptions to LGBT discrimination laws, even for explicitly religious organizations. Moreover, their [advocacy](#) pushes for LGBT teachings to be integrated throughout school curricula, thus putting students in a position where opting out is either implausible or, increasingly, not even offered as an option. Taking this even further, recent efforts have resulted in schools not only [adopting](#) an “affirmative therapy” approach to counseling children concerned about their gender identity (or sexual orientation) but also [concealing](#) from parents any gender transition for which children may opt in consultation with teachers, counselors, and school administrators.

When viewed in this light, what is being asked of Muslims is not so much to reciprocate support for LGBT groups on the basis of a quid pro quo but to participate politically in a manner that is *explicitly contrary to* our own moral commitments—in return for LGBT groups participating politically in a manner that is *in accord with* theirs. This can hardly be called a fair bargain.

#### *E. The Enemy of My Enemy Is Not My Friend and More Coalition Building*

Given the [intensity](#) of political partisanship today, popular political calculus on virtually any issue of consequence is most often conducted by evaluating how the opposition will respond. When politics is conceived of in this way, social groups develop quickly among allies. “We’re all in this together” becomes the siren call for activists, and the new in-group, formed initially to band around a solitary cause, builds ideological solidarities around a broader platform. This more thoroughgoing ideological solidarity, especially in our times, is often paired with contempt for members of the political opposition, viewing them principally as bad-faith antagonists in an unending series of existential conflicts.

The aforementioned dynamics—of affiliation, social group identification, political ideological adherence, and partisan hostilities—relate to what political scientists [refer](#) to as “political socialization.” Political socialization [describes](#) “the process by which citizens crystalize political identities, values and behavior that remain relatively persistent throughout later life.” Recent research has studied the degree to which this [occurs within](#) or [produces](#) “echo chambers,” the point being that political activism today is (1) highly tribalized, (2) ideology shaping, and (3) identity forming.

It is within this politically charged context that another common argument finds root. Espoused by several Muslim activists,<sup>21</sup> this argument begins by ascribing political enmity to the “right” as archetypal Islamophobes. It then proceeds to urge coalition building against this right-wing nemesis, resulting in devout loyalty to the “left.” Put simply, it is the simple calculus of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” which in this case results in the left being viewed as “pro-Muslim” and the right as “anti-Muslim.”

But this calculus, even at a casual glance, does not hold up. In recent years, the Democratic Party has become more favorable to the national security state. In fact, Democrats today are far more [supportive](#) of the FBI, CIA, and NSA than their Republican counterparts. They are also in favor of greater Internet censorship, are allied far more deeply with big tech, are more likely to [favor](#) free speech restrictions, and are more likely to [oppose](#) religious freedom. Seeing how Republicans sit on the other side of these policy debates, should Muslims reflexively support Democrats and become advocates of the national security state too? Should they, too, seek to impose ideological censorship on anti-liberal content? Recently, progressive groups have come out [against](#) efforts by the GOP and centrist Democrats seeking to rein in China over human rights abuses against the Uyghur Muslims. Should Muslims, too, abandon our Uyghur brothers and sisters simply because the GOP has recently gotten behind them? At what point can we call on Muslims to use their own brains and live with principle instead of slavishly shifting with the winds of left-right politics in Western nations?

Dogged political partisanship serves no one well. It results in obsequious obedience meant to curry favor with political elites. It serves to alienate scores of those—the [majority](#), in fact—who do not feel represented by either wing of the regnant political establishment. It often produces moments that can charitably only be described as embarrassing, such as the 2016 Presidential Eid Banquet, when scores of Muslim attendees [chanted](#) “Four More Years!” for a president whose legacy included the radical expansion of the drone program and the [initiation](#) of Israel’s “Iron Dome” and who, two months after the banquet, passed the [largest](#) military aid package for Israel in American history.

Rather than reduce our public behavior to Machiavellian political calculations and alliances that demand conformity to that which violates our beliefs and values, Muslims should seek to transcend partisan politics altogether. The values of Islam, divine in origin, are timeless. The fights in front of us and the alliances beckoning us, alluring as they may be, are not.

### III. Time for a Change

It is past time for a change. The common logic of intersectional advocacy and coalition building has for too long gone uncontested, with its promises never scrutinized or revisited. In the meantime, the LGBT movement has grown considerably more muscular and demanding, its political and social engineering program ever more totalizing.

What is more, LGBT advocacy has long shown itself to be an essential cog in the wheel of Western colonial imposition, championed by the wealthiest nations in the Western world as a marker of Western

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<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, the video on this topic by the [Institute for Social Policy and Understanding](#) (yet another organization claiming zakat eligibility on account of working “*fi sabil illāh*”).

superiority. This colonial agenda is regularly weaponized against Muslim nations and often used to justify brutal forms of repression. Just last May, AIPAC, the renowned Zionist advocacy organization, posted a [tweet](#) reading: “Do you support LGBTQ+ rights? Hamas doesn’t. Hamas discriminates against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people”—a tweet posted at the height of Israeli bombardments of Gaza. At the same time, Israeli embassies eagerly tweeted [pictures](#) of their embassies flying rainbow flags, juxtaposing their support for the LGBT movement with the restrictions on homosexual practice in place throughout the Middle East. Avi Mayer, the Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee, recently [tweeted](#): “I’m super-excited [*sic*] for Gaza #Pride, which will be taking place \*checks notes\* never, not at all. Because Hamas executes you if it thinks you’re gay.” Julie Burchill at the *Spectator* [took aim](#) at celebrity support for Palestine by highlighting the apparent contradiction between Palestinian social values and the otherwise strident LGBT support offered by celebrities:

Show-business types are notorious for their desire to get drunk, sleep around and be homosexual. I’m not knocking it – it’s what makes them so much fun to hang out with. But why then are they throwing their weight behind a movement wherein music is haram and ‘break a leg’ isn’t a blessing but something Hamas might do to gays? No matter what contortions a performer might have learned at circus school, you cannot support both gay rights and a Palestinian state; the only place in the entire region where people are free to be gay is Israel.

This program of neo-imperialism is increasingly bipartisan. In 2019, Ilhan Omar [condemned](#) the Palestinian Authority for not allowing gay pride events to take place in the West Bank. Popular liberal talk show host Bill Maher has often [inquired](#) of guests defending Palestine where the gay bars are in Gaza, while the Palestinian queer group Al Qaws has become a favorite of progressive activists eager to promote queer Palestinian voices. Can there be a non-liberal future for Muslims in their own lands? Will the West tolerate it?

Although Palestine is a prominent example, it is not the only one. Liberal social values have regularly been weaponized by Western nations to justify militarism, sanctions, and political penalties of various kinds. President Biden announced in his first [foreign policy speech](#) that he was “ordering all US government agencies active abroad” to promote LGBT rights. He also mentioned LGBT rights in his [remarks](#) to the 2021 Africa Summit, while the State Department recently [condemned](#) “anti-LGBT rhetoric” in Turkey. This past February (2021), the Biden administration issued a [memorandum](#) entitled “Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World,” the goal of which is to promote LGBT causes globally. Glenn Greenwald [observes](#) on this now common tactic:

Figuratively dressing up American wars in the pretty packaging of progressive social causes, or literally decorating pernicious spy agencies with the colors of the LGBT cause, should leave no doubt about what this tactic is. Militarism and aggression don’t become any more palatable because the institutions that perpetrate them let women and gays participate in those abuses.

As of the writing of this article, imams and Muslims around the world are being targeted for their views on gender and sexuality. Imam Mmadi Ahamada, originally from the Comoros Islands, is currently facing [deportation](#) from France—the self-styled home of *liberté*—for mentioning verses from the Quran during

his Eid sermon that instruct women to remain in their homes. These verses, French officials claimed, are contrary to [France's](#) “Republican values.” More recently, Mohamed el Mehdi Bouzid, a Tunisian imam also working in France, has been [dismissed](#) from his employment and is back in Tunisia following a sermon where he criticized female immodesty. The mosque at which Bouzid preached was threatened with closure, leading the mosque’s president to remark that “every mosque in France should be worried about its future.” Farrokh Sekaleshfar, a Shi‘ī imam, [quickly](#) left Australia following a scandal for having made “inflammatory remarks” about gays. Earlier this year, the Belgian government [deported](#) a Turkish imam for stating on social media that being gay is an “illness.” The government of Flanders has since [embarked](#) on an effort to “clean up” Islamic communities by targeting, inter alia, the views of Muslim leaders on homosexuality. Popular preacher Bilal Philips was [asked](#) to leave Germany and never return on account of his “open homophobia.” In Birmingham, protests [erupted](#) recently over the introduction of LGBT teachings in predominantly Muslim schools, and the president of a university Islamic society in London was [removed](#) from his post following public outrage for his tweeting that “homosexuality is a disease of the heart and mind.” Meanwhile, gay rights campaigners in the UK have [urged](#) the government to ban “homophobic clerics” from mosques. So much for reciprocity and for “live and let live” with respect to “non-affirmative” religious groups.

Given this context, Muslims who continue to support the LGBT movement make themselves instruments of this global machine that is being used to socially engineer the values even of their brothers and sisters in the Muslim world while radically undermining the ability of Muslims to so much as speak about their own sexual ethics in Western societies. The days of Western Muslims feigning ignorance over the implications of their political decisions—or otherwise insisting that their support for LGBT rights is merely instrumental as part of a limited, shared-freedoms platform exclusive to Western, liberal societies—are over.

The LGBT movement itself has also pivoted from targeted political advocacy to the work of much broader social indoctrination. Whereas it once fought for limited legal protections and so-called “marriage equality,” it currently seeks to impose itself on every man, woman, and child. Today’s LGBT advocates seek to rework school curricula, calling for pedagogical materials to include “trans affirmative” instruction for children. They work to eliminate any and all disagreement over transgenderism, including childhood gender dysphoria / gender identity disorder, and to remove any and all obstacles that would impede unfettered access to transgender medical intervention for adolescents and adults.<sup>22</sup> They push for LGBT lifestyles to be seen as chic and publish ever more literature targeting children and young adults, urging libraries far and wide to feature this literature whenever possible and to host “[drag queen story hours](#).” They regularly target diverging opinions, pushing for legislation that would outlaw non-LGBT affirming positions in professional quarters and appealing to big tech and other sectors to [censor](#) LGBT-critical speech. Even career feminists who have reservations about transgenderism are summarily dismissed as bigoted, disparagingly [described](#) as “trans-exclusionary radical feminists” (TERFs). Perhaps most concerning, LGBT advocates actively seek to [override](#) and dissolve any possible religious exceptions to the above. Again, so much for reciprocity and for “live and let live.”

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<sup>22</sup> For an excellent, not to mention harrowing, investigative analysis of this phenomenon, see Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2021).

A few examples. Just a year and a half ago, congressman Beto O'Rourke, then a member of the House vying for the Democratic presidential nomination, [supported](#) removing the tax-exempt status of religious organizations that oppose same-sex marriage. More recently, the Equality Act—proposed by Democrats, passed in the House earlier this year, and [endorsed](#) by the White House this past June (2021)—explicitly [states](#) that “the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which became law in 1993, cannot be used to challenge the Act’s provisions or be used as a defense to a claim of unlawful discrimination under the Act.” Groups like the ACLU support such measures [while deriding](#) “religious freedom” as merely a cover for unlawful discrimination. Even more recently, the White House retreated slightly after [initially](#) committing to uphold exemptions for religious schools from extant anti-LGBT discrimination laws. In a revised statement, government attorneys [wrote](#) that “the Department of Education is conducting a comprehensive review of its regulations implementing [the law], which sets forth the current administration’s policy on guaranteeing an educational environment free from discrimination on the basis of sex.” Unlike their initial statements, this revision is noncommittal and potentially opens the door to revoking religious freedom protections for religious schools.

Given the maelstrom of pro-LGBT advocacy and the total denunciation of any belief or position critical of LGBT lifestyles, it was always naïve to believe that young people would or could ever make their political determinations in an exclusively secular capacity—as something compartmentalized and distinct from their “true self” and deeply held religious beliefs. No one can have [two faces](#), nor has Allah ﷻ created two hearts in any man’s breast (see Q. al-Aḥzāb, [33:4](#)), not least those who are already beset with challenges and doubts about their faith in the modern world. Recent [polls](#) have revealed dramatic shifts in American Muslim opinion on issues like transgenderism and gay marriage. Leading organizations like the ISPU publish [guides](#) for “LGBT Muslims” and “scholars’ takes” saying things [like](#) “Muslims cannot privately consider same-sex couples as morally inferior while publicly maintaining that everyone is equal under the law” and “same-sex marriage is considered a sin. Still, that does not mean this particular understanding of Islam is not contestable,” while contemptuously [describing](#) the Council of Glasgow imams opposing same-sex marriage as “backward” “Indian sub-continent” immigrants who do not speak English and need to “move with the times.” And this type of openly anti-Islamic rhetoric from an organization that claims—absurdly—to be zakat-eligible and to be working *fī sabīl illāh!*

Perhaps even more damaging, the continued promotion of LGBT rights by Muslim leaders has the effect of demoralizing Muslims. One need not be a scholar to understand fully where LGBT acts and the LGBT agenda fit within the moral paradigm of Islam. And yet, repeated abandonment of those morals in the interest of political gains has the effect—as Dr. Jonathan Brown has [described](#) it aptly in a different context—of placing a ceiling on Muslims’ political expectations. The modern state, as both Jackson and Brown argue elsewhere, is a hegemon that controls and dominates the societies under its aegis. Telling Muslims that they should never hope for better governance or for a better social order crushes their spirit and integrates them into the Western social order as inferiors who are the lone group not permitted to have a political voice that is truly its own. As Brown [writes](#) when discussing categorical appeals to political quietism,

every other country, nation or religious community can demand that their governments do a better job using the only means that ever convince the powerful to change, namely some public display of displeasure by sufficiently large numbers or sufficiently influential individuals. But not for



Muslims. For us, there can be no calls for accountability, transparency, less corruption, better provision of services, etc.

Brown's sentiments, put slightly differently in an LGBT context, might read: "Every other group in this country can make demands in accordance with their moral commitments using the only means that ever convince the powerful to change, namely, some public display of displeasure by sufficiently large numbers or sufficiently influential individuals. But not for Muslims, and *never* on LGBT."

The toll of LGBT advocacy on Muslims cannot be overstated. A colonial tool of global oppression, domestic coercion, and social domination, totalizing in its moral demands and proliferating at a rapid rate with little signs of letting up, the LGBT movement is now a juggernaut of cultural power and authority. The decision of some Muslim leaders and activists to do and to say nothing meaningful on the LGBT question—or, worse, to actually support the movement—sets the stage for heresy, apostasy, untold spiritual crises, and communal demoralization. If the goal of American Muslims is to retain and uphold our faith as minorities in the West, the promised benefits, or *maṣāliḥ*, of LGBT advocacy have never materialized, while multitudinous social, cultural, and spiritual harms abound, both domestically and internationally.

#### IV. So What's the Point? Concluding Thoughts

Under current conditions, the sociological winds do not appear to be in our sails. Recent [polling](#) shows that support for gay marriage in the United States stands at seventy percent, with majorities of both Democrats and Republicans now backing the legal recognition granted by the Supreme Court's *Obergefell* decision of 2015. The days of a meaningful debate on this topic are, at least for the moment, behind us. We need to be attentive to political realities, and it would be foolish to propose a politics that does not at least acknowledge how many LGBT rights are beyond debate in the current political and social climate. Nonetheless, there remains important ongoing deliberation as to how LGBT rights should be negotiated for those who maintain moral reservations regarding homosexual acts and transgenderism. Though there is no telling where all these debates will land, it should be expected that many will be decided in ways prejudicial to the interests of religious communities like our own. Some issues will be adjudicated by the courts, while others will be subject to the deliberative mechanics of public opinion and majoritarian politics, which are fickle and subject to alteration over time.

There are also many reasons to be discouraged by what the future might hold for Western Muslims. Religions in the West before us have largely collapsed at the altar of homosexuality and are quickly proving incapable of resisting transgenderism too. Just this May, a Lutheran pastor in California became the [first transgender bishop](#) in a major American denomination. It should be expected that more will follow suit. Self-identified Muslim organizations promoting revisionism on the question of homosexuality are sprouting up by the day, many of which are well-funded through government, corporate, and university grants.<sup>23</sup> Some Muslim figures who have built public reputations through social justice work

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<sup>23</sup> For the US government's long-term strategy to liberalize and secularize the Muslim community in the United States, see the popular RAND report entitled "Blueprint for Building Moderate Muslim Networks," [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9251.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9251.html).

have come out strongly in support of LGBT rights, while lesser-known ones have likewise been unequivocal in their support of Pride month.

Concerning these realities and more, I am under no illusions about our ability as Muslims to reform society or substantially to influence the direction in which our culture is headed. How Muslims poll in 2030 for Pew or Gallup is not something a single paper will change, nor is it an outcome that is within our control. We should keep in mind our limitations, as well as remind ourselves that it is Allah ﷻ who is in control of our affairs, not we. Our relative agency, being exercised as faithfully as we can in a proximate, worldly sense by way of a unified politics, may still fail to make much of a dent in the larger Western socio-political sphere.

That being said, our moral obligations as Muslims—and the social responsibilities that stem from those obligations—are never, and can never be, reduced to mere calculations of *Realpolitik*. And it is important to be clear here about what this paper is not: it is not a call for Muslims to become Republicans or Democrats. On LGBT rights, Republicans and Democrats are far more bipartisan in their support than public debate would lead one to believe, even if important differences exist regarding where the two parties fall in some current debates. What this paper is, however, is a call for Muslims to transcend partisan political interests, to move past thinking of every issue of political or social concern through the prism of which party serves us best (as imperfect as that service is in either case), and to become comfortable standing up for and speaking the truth, even at the expense of public ostracism. We need to remember that Allah’s prophets ministered to people who often rejected them. The truth can be a bitter pill for those habituated to falsehood. In this vein, Shabbir Akhtar writes:

The Prophet inculcated in Muslims a sense of their colossal social responsibility so that they cannot plead neutrality about political stances. It is every Muslim’s duty to identify injustice<sup>24</sup> and to call it by its name. Wherever religious obligation and the demands of professional detachment clash, the Muslim scholar is religiously obliged to indicate which loyalty comes first. Genuine religion – the qualification is necessary – entails political activity though not necessarily impulsively revolutionary activism.<sup>25</sup>

How numerous are the verses and prophetic teachings that tell us to command the good and forbid the evil? Indeed, the very act of doing so is essential to a faithful adherence to Allah’s path. In an inverse of this instruction, Allah ﷻ [describes](#) the hypocrites as those who “enjoin what is evil, forbid what is good, and withhold [what is in] their hands” (Q. al-Tawba, [9:67](#)). In the verse that follows this description, Allah [promises](#) the hypocrites the fire of Hell. In yet another verse, in Sūrat al-Nūr, Allah [condemns](#) those who “love to see indecency spread among the believers” (Q. al-Nūr, [24:19](#)). The very weakest of faith is [described](#) by the Prophet ﷺ as opposing evil in one’s heart, while the best is acting to change the evil one sees.

Even in seemingly hopeless circumstances, Muslims are called upon to stay the course. In the Quran, Allah ﷻ mentions the story of those who circumvented His command not to fish on the Sabbath. As part

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<sup>24</sup> On the veritable injustice (particularly to children) caused by so much of the current sexual adventurism of Western society, see, again, Faust and Manning, *Them Before Us*.

<sup>25</sup> Shabbir Akhtar, *Islam as a Political Religion* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011), 239.

of Allah’s test, fish appeared in abundance on the Sabbath but were sparse on other days. Among those who resisted the urge to pursue the world in defiance of Allah’s command were some who warned the transgressors, while others said nothing. Those who said nothing [asked](#) those who warned, “Why do you preach to a people whom God will destroy or [at least] punish severely?” Those who warned [replied](#), “In order to be free from your Lord’s blame, and that perchance they may take heed” (*ma ‘dhiratan ilā rabbikum wa-la ‘allahum yattaqūn*) (Q. al-A‘rāf, [7:164](#)).

We ask that Allah ﷻ raise us among those who lived righteously in this world, that He free us from His blame, and that He bless our efforts such that others may, perchance, take heed. Ameen.

And Allah Knows Best.