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## Cultural Rage: A Severe Threat to Gay Men

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## Cultural Rage: A Severe Threat to Gay Men

### Abstract

Men who have sex with men have become a world cultural flashpoint. Fomenting and exploiting cultural rage at the West is a useful way for Islamists to gain electoral and other types of support, even though the motives of the Islamists may have more to do with the drive for power, regional influence, or economic benefit.

### Keywords

Human rights, Homosexuality, Islam

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## Cultural Rage: A Severe Threat to Gay Men

by Rhoda Howard-Hassmann

Men who have sex with men have become a world cultural flashpoint. Fomenting and exploiting cultural rage at the West is a useful way for Islamists to gain electoral and other types of support, even though the motives of the Islamists may have more to do with the drive for power, regional influence, or economic benefit. But not only Islamists object to men having sex with men. The [Roman Catholic Church](#) still opposes equal marriage rights for gays everywhere, as well as ordination of openly gay priests, although it has—at least in Canada—somewhat modified its hostility to homosexuals by asserting that, in general, they should be treated respectfully. The world Anglican (in the U.S, Episcopalian) religion is split over rights for gay men. [Anglican bishops in Africa](#) are uniting with socially conservative Anglicans and Episcopalians in both Canada and the United States to oppose ordination of gay priests. Recently, there have been proposals in Nigeria to make it illegal even to communicate with a homosexual. These [Nigerian proposals](#) to socially isolate male homosexuals resemble the first steps made against the Jews in 1930s Germany.

In the past many Islamic societies tolerated men having sex with men. In some societies, men who took the “active” as opposed to the “passive” role in sex were not considered to be homosexual. Indeed, male prostitution (especially with Western sex tourists) is still not considered to be homosexuality in some Islamic societies, as long as the prostitute takes the active role. A man temporarily engaging in sex with another man could still be considered a socially-conforming heterosexual, as long as he contemporaneously—or at the appropriate age—married and had children.

Nowadays, one of the problems is that men who have sex with men assert themselves as “gay” men. They assert a new identity that flouts cultural norms of sex roles and marriage. The worldwide movement towards liberation of homosexuals, their demand that their sexual activity be recognized, even honored, is deeply offensive in many traditional societies. It is offensive in part because it rejects traditional sex roles and the traditional procreative function of marriage. In the modern West, traditional sex roles have changed; marriage is no longer socially mandatory and its purpose is considered to be for companionship as much as for reproduction. These normative changes have not permeated the non-Western, Islamic or African worlds, however. Yet gay activists, in the West and increasingly elsewhere, want to be socially recognized. They want their relationships, and their sexual practices, to be honored, and to be considered as socially valid as heterosexual relationships and sexual practices. They want formerly shameful, hidden practices to become honored and public.

It is ironic, however, that some Egyptians think gay liberation is part of the American imperialist agenda. The United States is quite regressive in its attitudes toward gay rights, as compared to other countries such as [Canada](#), where gay marriage is legally recognized at the national level. The strong conservative movement in the United States, rooted in part in evangelical Protestant fundamentalism, is one reason why gays still live a precarious existence in many American states, not even enjoying rights to non-discrimination in employment.

Gay men (and to a lesser extent, lesbian women) are one of the most vulnerable groups in the world today. They are a symbolic flashpoint for much of the cultural rage against the West. Yet their rights are barely protected in international human rights law. Although the few legal cases that have been taken to the United Nations Human Rights Committee (such as the [Toonen case](#)) have resulted in greater protection of their rights, and although the [European Union](#) strongly protects their rights, it is unlikely that any international treaty to protect them will be proposed, let alone approved, at the United Nations in the foreseeable future. If such a treaty is ever proposed, it will probably be subject to far fewer ratifications and far more reservations, just as the Convention on Women's Rights was considered a cultural flashpoint 20 years ago.

Faced with the rise of anti-homosexual ideologies, policies and activities in Islamic and Christian-dominated societies, the international human rights community must make protection of the rights of gays and lesbians a top priority. Some human rights activists still seem to think gay and lesbian rights are of peripheral concern, while the right to eat, or women's rights to equality, are far more pressing. Some older human rights scholars and activists, I suspect, are still uncomfortable with overt support of homosexuals. Yet what will we call it if someday gays are subjected to more than massive discrimination, social isolation, torture, and execution? We will need a new word for a new type of genocide: mass murder for reasons of sexual orientation.

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