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# Culture is a Language, Can't You Read?: Reading Gay Rights as Human Rights

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Culture is a Language, Can't you Read? Reading Gay Rights as Human Rights.

by

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“The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our ‘liberation’ is in the balance”

-Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume One*.

“Gay people are born into and belong to every society in the world...Being gay is not a Western invention; it is a human reality” –Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Remarks in Recognition of International Human Rights Day*.

“Non-Westerners who seek to understand their local histories must also inquire into Europe’s past, because it is through the latter that universal history has been constructed. That history defines the former as merely “local”—that is, as histories with limits” –Talal Asad

## Introduction

In the last several years, conversations around queer politics have reached the international level-gaining significant amounts of political capital and international attention of which Western governments have played a significant leadership role. Human rights activists, governments, and NGOs have cast the plight of LGBT people around the world as a human rights issue of particular concern. The zenith of this international moment occurred on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011 when then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton delivered a speech commemorating International Human Rights Day. From the Palace of Nations in Geneva Switzerland she proclaimed that “gay rights are human rights” (2011), an action that would publically solidify the United Nations’ global commitment to gay rights. This speech not only earned her a standing ovation, but it more importantly highlights the intentional situation of LGBT rights narratives within a human rights framework.

Implicit in this connection is the move from personal, communal, and institutional oppression into full citizenship. On its face, the speech frames “gay rights as human rights” as the natural progression of a modern “global” society whose fundamental purpose is to protect the essential human rights of all people. Upon closer examination, however, Clinton’s speech bears all the components typical of a Western rescue narrative reconfigured to feature a new cast: LGBT people.<sup>1</sup> The rhetorical devices employed in these types of narratives produce protected categories that work to forge a sense of international urgency that trigger the deployment of the protector category. Most importantly, and perhaps most significantly absent, these narratives create a visceral predator category that has historically been premised on the production of a racialized and (and now) sexualized other. Finally, the speech also creates and enforces a universal sexual identity premised on Western conceptions of sexuality. Scholars writing about postcolonialism, race, and gender have warned against universal conceptions of identity (Mohanty, 1993; Spivak, 1988), but Western states have managed to expand their agendas through the production of sexual citizenship (Sabsay, 2012). In what follows, I attempt to unpack the component structures of Clinton’s speech in order to tease out the ways in which she reproduces racist, Orientalist and Islamophobic rhetoric using this relatively new, albeit recycled, narrative. Using contemporary scholarship that explores the intersection of sexuality, race, and nationalism, I will argue that Clinton’s speech, using tried and true colonialist strategies, works to expand the Western imperial project through promulgation of an internationally recognized sexual identity that is linked to citizenship and a politics of belonging.

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<sup>1</sup> There has been extensive conversation around rescue narratives in postcolonial studies regarding women. More recent work (examined here) has broadened that discussion to include gays as well.

In the following pages, I will read the key issues Clinton espouses in the struggle for human rights. First, I will attempt to identify the problems inherent in human rights rhetoric that intentionally produces others who are then left out of humanness and rights. Second, I will unpack the invisible minority and explicate the imagery that Clinton uses to conceive it. Third, I will address the statement that gay rights are human rights using scholars that take an intersectional approach to the study of sexuality. Fourth, I will explicate the imagery and allusion to struggle for women's rights that Clinton employs to talk about gay rights. Fifth, I will discuss Clinton's conception of universal human rights to tease out the problem of Western liberalism and how the success of mainstream LGBT rights narratives are predicated on the production of racialized and sexualized others. Sixth, I will examine the case of Israel in order to answer the question posed by Clinton of how the world shall work to embrace gay rights as human rights. Finally, I will use the last section to meditate on the contemporary scholarship that reads race and sexuality together as well as interrogate the problems of an internationally recognized sexual identity.

This work is primarily interested in the criteria of separation that sorts specific bodies into categorical populations that are either incorporated into the nation or cast outside of it. By looking at how axes of power manage specific bodies, I hope to ultimately get at the question of what happens to the racialized and sexualized other when LGBT rights narratives are co-opted and successfully advertised by the state. Some of the questions driving this work have asked how international gay rights narratives have aided in the production of inherently homophobic, brown, Muslim, male others by using the same orientalist, racist, and Islamophobic logic employed by international women's rights narratives. Additionally, how have Western states linked powerful symbols like honor

killings, widow burnings and female genital mutilation to gay rights discourse in order to produce a sense of urgency around a newly constructed protected category? How does Clinton's speech read the notion of "modernity" and how does the sexual citizen function as an articulation of the modern at the expense of those bodies who are denied categorically premodern? In order to get at the complicated nature of these questions, I examine the contextual background within the discourse community working on these problems.



## **Universal Human Rights: Gay Rights as Human Rights**

On its face, linking gay rights to human rights appears an effective way to protect LGBT populations from communal or institutional homophobic violence. If gay rights are understood as a discourse of self-identification and are read as a pathway to human rights, can it be argued that acceptance of a universal gay identity is a prerequisite for accessing humanness? If it can be argued, the question must be asked: what authority determines what it means to be human and what are the precise conditions for participation? The problem of identity as admission into universal human rights discourse is predicated on the notion that in order to be human, one must have an acceptable identity. Identity is always oppositional (black/white, man/woman, gay/straight) and it is always modern (Foucault, 1980). These particular formations have recently found themselves in the clutches of state powers that deploy them for nefarious reasons. In this historical context, state and NGO attempts to internationally institutionalize the gay/straight paradigm works to fashion specifically racialized and sexualized others who are identifiable by their premodernity.<sup>2</sup> Universal human rights paradigms are derived from Western liberal philosophy, but it is through this lens that the entire world is forced to see itself<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, we can understand “gay rights as human rights” as an extension of a Western

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<sup>2</sup> “The universalist moment here is the assimilationist moment which guarantees that the sexual subjectivity of the Western purveyors of international lesbian and gay politics itself is universal while its racial/national/class constitution is carried out through the repudiation of the subjectivities of those unfit to defend themselves by the fittest subjectivity of all” (Massad, 40).

<sup>3</sup> Talal Asad explains this hegemonic lens to elucidate the plight of these others, “Non-Westerners who seek to understand their local histories must also inquire into Europe’s past, because it is through the latter that universal history has been constructed. That history defines the former as merely ‘local’” (Asad, 82).

imperial project that invokes LGBT rights narratives using Western identity formations to further state agendas.

*Being gay* is presented in Clinton's speech as an essential characteristic that one is born with instead of a socially constructed category that is either inherently political or is made political. Mainstream gay rights, from which Clinton takes her cue; have generally sought a politics of inclusion based on this essentialist claim. As mentioned previously, this is a problematic way of conceiving human rights because the mechanisms deployed in its production work to create a protected population that functions to categorically exclude those who refuse to accept Western conceptions of sexuality (and identity). The problem with a universal rights claim based on an essentialist framework is that one (groups, nations?) must accept this essentialist position in order to access the promise of universal *human* rights-quite literally, a logic steeped in an us/them binary.

Different cultures have various conceptions of sexuality and identity in general and there has been significant reluctance to embrace Western identity claims. This anti-assimilationist position has been framed by the international human rights community (lead, not so ironically, by the West) as fundamentally homophobic, pre-modern, and barbaric-not ever as a way of resisting cultural imperialism. The theoretical frame shaped in this paper attempts to resist this inclination and instead takes the position that identities and their discontents are socially constructed. This project is specifically interested in how Clinton's speech reinforces cultural imperialism by universalizing an international sexual subject and attempts to think through how Western powers rely on this narrative in order to justify oppression of racialized and (hetero) sexualized others. Given the cognitive dissonance that inevitably arises when talking about the imperial tendencies of

international LGBT rights narratives, it seems important to reiterate that this work is aware of the epistemological differences between the all too often essentialist position of mainstream LGBT identity movements and the social constructionist leanings of queer theory. Thus, this reading of “gay rights as human rights” identifies (if I may) with the latter while attempting to frame the former as an inevitable politics of assimilation or (near) death.

Clinton’s “Gay Rights are Human Rights” speech lays out criteria for human rights that internationally solidify a new sexual subject in need of protection from those who would deny or threaten his existence. The threats described by Clinton are compared and rhetorically linked with gender violence (discussed more below) in order to internationally elevate the immediacy of gay rights as the newest group of concern. The purpose of this linkage within the text functions as a call for protection. It is significant to interrogate the political implications of universal rights claims in order to unearth the ways in which those claims are predicated on a politics of inclusion and exclusion. The operationalization of how “human rights” in general function as an ideal rooted in liberalism and how this structure implies an already universalist position.

## **Discourse Community**

The discourse community surveyed in this project rejects an essentialist sexual identity and is interested in unpacking the ways in which a normative gay identity premised on an essential character is deployed by Western powers to further imperial agendas. Scholars interested in this problem also employ various disciplines to read race and sexuality together. My thesis enters this body of scholarship by thinking through the international implications of a normative (homo) sexual subject conceived through human rights discourse by evaluating statements given by Hilary Clinton in her International Human Rights Day speech. I follow the scholarship under review here in that the deployment of this sexual subject is predicated on the production of racialized and sexualized others.<sup>4</sup> The basic assumptions regarding sexual and racial identity in all the scholarship surveyed here are premised on Foucault's work around the history of sexuality and Edward Said's work on Orientalism. Below, I will explore these seminal works in order to illuminate the greater theoretical framework and lexicon through which to read Clinton's speech.

Foucault, rejecting the psychoanalytic theory of repression popular during the time of his writing *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, argues that sexuality was incited into discourse by power in the West during the nineteenth century (1978). Prior to the post Enlightenment rise of medical and legal discourses, sexuality was conceived primarily through the married couple (Foucault, 1978). The production of hetero and homo sexualities seen in the nineteenth century, therefore, created an axes of difference that premised heterosexual as natural/normal and homosexuality as unnatural/perverse.

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<sup>4</sup> For a more in depth analysis see *Terrorist Assemblages* where Puar develops this concept further.

Historically, the induction of perverse sexualities traversed both medical and legal discourses where homosexual identities were scientifically inscribed on the body and subsequently regulated and prohibited by law. Foucault, however, warns of confining the ways power moves through identity purely through medical or legal discourse, for power moves everywhere-towards and away from-not only through state institutions. Discourse on sexuality (and identity in general) does operate in an oppositional fashion, but its subordinate position is not always fixed. This move is what Foucault (1978) calls “reverse discourse” in which “homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (101). This unstable conception of power provides the framework for thinking about how homosexuality (and othered identities) once medically inscribed and legally condemned are now at the forefront of international human rights discourse.<sup>5</sup> Foucault’s conceptions of power relations in particular are an overarching theoretical theme and *The History of Sexuality Volume I* is a canonical text in this discourse community.

Another foundational text in this discourse community is Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, which offers a critical analysis of the Orient as an artifact produced by the West. The production of the Orient (Middle East) as a style of thought, a mode of domination, and an imperial tradition finds its roots in the British and French context. This text, taking its cue from Foucault’s work on discourse, is interested in how knowledge regarding this “place” is

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<sup>5</sup> “Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy...it is one of the essential traits of Western societies that the force relationships...gradually became invested in the order of political power” (Foucault,101)

replicated and produced inside and outside of those contexts. There are multiple converging factors that foreground Orientalism as a discourse with Western roots and Said is interested in unraveling the multiple layers of this tradition in order to see how the West constitutes itself against the production of the Orient. This text is central to the work around LGBT rights narratives because the discourse of Orientalism produces specific types of homophobic bodies that are understood against Western identities.

Proceeding from Foucault's conceptions of power (read identity) and Said's work around the Orientalism and its counter identities, Joseph Massad, Talal Asad, Chandra Mohanty, and Gayatri Spivak argue that conceptions of identity assume a universality conceived through Western liberalism that, like colonialism, has spread the world over.<sup>6</sup> The concepts posed by these scholars confront the universal assumptions used to conceive and read the sexual subject. Critiques of universalism are indeed rampant in postcolonial studies and now queer studies (Sabsay, 2011),<sup>7</sup> but it is still important to bring to light the ontological sameness of identity discourses because it is through "reverse discourse" conversions that an understanding of how LGBT rights narratives rely upon a politics of exclusion or in some instances a complete erasure can be unearthed. For example, postcolonial scholars have argued that the international reach of White Western feminist discourse effectively created and simultaneously erased the experience of Third World Women (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988). By universalizing the "experience of women", the consequences of White Women's interest in the study of Third World Women situated those feminists in a power position due to their status as Western and White,

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<sup>6</sup> See Talal Asad in footnote 3.

<sup>7</sup> Sabsay's lament about the pervasiveness of universality seems misplaced because it is precisely these discussions that blow open the underlying orientalist assumptions about identities in the first place.

The discursively consensual homogeneity of 'women' as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women. This results in an assumption of women as an always-already constituted group, one which has been labelled 'powerless', 'exploited', 'sexually harassed', etc., by feminist scientific, economic, legal and sociological discourses (Mohanty, 65).

It is significant to connect the imperialist tendencies of (certain) Western feminist movements and mainstream LGBT rights narratives because these discourses are dependent on Western constructions of identity that are then deployed internationally as universal.

Joseph Massad extends this critique by arguing that LGBT rights discourse has followed in the footsteps of the Western feminist tradition by employing the same universalist logic to conceive a global sexuality. Developing what he calls the Gay International—an amalgamation of NGOs, government agencies and the discourses that produce them—Massad argues that the colonialist tendencies of sexual identity politics have followed a hegemonic feminism. He argues (2003), using Foucault, that by “inciting discourse about homosexuals where none existed before, the Gay International is in fact *heterosexualizing* a world that is being forced to be fixed by a Western binary” (383).

Jasbir Puar extends Massad’s argument by elaborating how this “heterosexualizing” of non-Western populations who resist (or cannot resist) this binary are racialized and cast out of state narratives often through violence, incarceration, and detention. Puar’s work, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, is a signal post in this scholarship. Her development of what she calls homonationalism foregrounds the “emergence and sanctioning of queer subjecthood...through a parallel process of demarcation from populations targeted for segregation, disposal or death, a reintensification of racialization through queerness” (Puar, xii). This work is an extension of Lisa Duggan’s work on

homonormativity described as a "politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan, 179).<sup>8</sup> The conceptual frameworks that tease out the folding in of certain queer bodies (Duggan) against the casting out of racialized bodies (Puar) illuminate the racist, Orientalist undertones of the "inherent" character of Muslim homophobia, or what Jin Haritaworn, Tamsila Tauqir and Esra Erdem call gay imperialism. According to the authors, "the construct of 'Muslim homophobia' confers value to 'Western' identities. It also confers political capital to some 'Westerners' who have traditionally been excluded from it" (Haritaworn, et al. 80). Together, homonationalism and gay imperialism give a deeper context to the words Clinton uses to entice the world to embrace a universal conception of sexual identity. I use these conceptual frameworks in order to read the Clinton's speech in its correct historical context.

It is important to note that even though initially conceived as frameworks for analyzing specific national contexts, homonationalism<sup>9</sup> and gay imperialism have spread internationally as scholars from multiple countries (and disciplines) have taken up the question of a rights-based sexual citizen and its implications. The relevance for examining the convergence of homonormativity, state exceptionalism, and the rise of Islamophobia both as a dual politics of inclusion and exclusion as well as the universal conceptions of sexual identity that racialize and sexualize oppositional others (or those who cannot opt in

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<sup>8</sup> Moves toward gay marriage all over the Western world as well as the corporatization of pride festivals are perfect examples of a domestic and consumerist (international) gay culture.

<sup>9</sup> Puar more thoroughly explores the travels of homonationalism in "Homonationalism as assemblage: Viral travels, affective sexualities".



to a Western identity) is highlighted by the incorporation of this scholarship in multiple contexts. These hegemonic processes are integral to understanding how Clinton's text deploys the politics of inclusion and exclusion,

Lesbian and gay liberal rights discourses produce narratives of progress and modernity that continue to accord some populations access to cultural and legal forms of citizenship at the expense of the partial and full expulsion from those rights of other populations (Puar, 25).

The telling absence of discussions of race from mainstream LGBT rights discourse has framed the international debate around sexuality. The remainder of the scholarship surveyed in this paper, premised on the work discussed above, focuses on how race is used to drum up threats to Western conceptions of sexual subjecthood.

### *Method*

The purpose of my research is to unpack the homonational, imperial, and racist undertones of Clinton's human rights speech by weighing the literature against her statements. The methodology employed in this essay can best be described as interdisciplinary drawing upon postcolonial, queer and feminist theory. This work is textually grounded and attempts to look at how concepts like gay imperialism and homonationalism can be mapped internationally in order to apprehend the ways in which Western powers extend imperial projects through the articulation of a sexual rights. I also use the terms gay, queer, and LGBT interchangeably because I don't find any of them to do rigorous theoretical work. However, I want to make known that Lesbian and Gay studies and queer theory are two distinct discourses with difference epistemologies. The hegemonic/assimilationist tendencies of the former have succeeded to some extent in neutralizing queer as an identity. At one time, perhaps, queer was an adequate way of

describing and living an anti-assimilationist politics, but at this historical moment I believe it has largely failed to live up to a promise it never made in the first place (Butler, 1993).

### **Unpacking the Invisible Minority: Gays in Distress**

Although the historical context of the human rights narrative emerges out of a post-World War II West shattered by assembly line genocide and nuclear bombs, it is nevertheless framed as a story of regeneration and ultimate triumph. Clinton begins her speech describing a birth scene where a struggling UN General Assembly votes, at three o'clock in the morning and after two years of intense labor, to adopt the final draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The emergent document proclaims “a simple powerful idea: all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (Clinton, 2011). The birth narrative sets the stage for what Clinton describes as an “invisible minority” whose cryptic introduction is framed as the “one of the remaining human rights challenges of our time”. The plight of this minority is illustrated in such a way as to arouse a remembered sentiment,

They are arrested, beaten, terrorized, even executed. Many are treated with contempt and violence by their fellow citizens while authorities empowered to protect them look the other way or, too often, even join in the abuse. They are denied opportunities to work and learn, driven from their homes and countries, and forced to suppress or deny who they are to protect themselves from harm (Clinton, 2011).

Inevitably, we come to learn that the invisible minority is LGBT people. Given the imagery and positionality of this passage, one would not be far from correct in assuming that Clinton is attempting to highlight a philosophical congruence. The temporal specificity of Clinton’s timeline necessarily positions gay rights as a logical destination point on the trajectory of human rights. The historical allusion to the West’s profound success over its identity crisis allows the reader to imagine how the boundaries of life in the wake of industrial death are reconstituted and conditioned as a righting of an inexplicable wrong. The connection with and simultaneous moving away from the horrors of World War II

allows Clinton to link homophobia with that shameful history and it is a tool she employs for the remainder of her speech.

The function of Clinton's allusion to the fascist past works to construct a global sense of urgency<sup>10</sup> to protect what Puar calls serviceable figures (Puar, 2013). Historically, this tactic has been implemented within Western colonial projects to justify and sustain imperial violence. The savior narrative ensconced in this tactic, famously articulated by Spivak as white men saving brown women from brown men (1988), has historically applied to women (colonized or not) but has since grown to incorporate sexual minorities as well. State cooptation of gay rights for which Clinton's Speech is an international signal post, works to promulgate a new protected category in order to frame certain communities as a dangerous poison that only Western liberalism can eradicate. The language of "saving gays", to borrow Sarah Bracke's term, like women's emancipation before it, functions as a rhetorically powerful marker of the universalist tendencies of liberal democracy. By positioning the Western world and its allies as a place safe for gays, Clinton rhetorically sets up (or rather illuminates) the conditions that draw out and position nations of homophobic others.

The theoretical linkage of gay rights to women's rights had already independently taken shape in many Western countries at a national level. In the Dutch context for example, Sarah Bracke describes how gay emancipation comes to be associated with women's emancipation via a public conversation regarding Islam between openly gay, far-right politician Pim Fortuyn and chief editor of Dutch feminist monthly *Opzij*, Ciska

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<sup>10</sup> Corrine Mason develops this notion in regards to women. I am employing it here in order to show how a sense of urgency is employed in Clinton's speech in order to mobilize racist, Orientalist sentiments.

Dresselhuys. The conditions for the tenuous philosophical alliance between these two frameworks take place against the backdrop of a shared Islamophobia (and a shared whiteness). Bracke argues that justifications for Islamophobia that were (and still are) attached to cultural stereotypes of treatment of women are now additionally predicated on the perceived innateness of Muslim hostilities toward homosexuals (Bracke, 2012).

The trope of serviceable figures operates in two distinct ways within Bracke's text. First, it provides the conditions for the assent of (certain) queer bodies into the state apparatus based on shared Islamophobia by way of Puar's analysis (more below). Second, it allows identities (read woman and gay) that intersect at whiteness the ability to publically commensurate a shared oppression by a straight, homophobic, racialized male other. It is the operationalization of this second structure that ties so neatly into Clinton's narrative because without even mentioning a perpetrator (she never outwardly does), the listener is left to imagine who that person might be. Because we know exactly who he is, because we can imagine him so clearly, we can see directly see the success of homonationalism and gay imperialism at the state level of racializing homophobia is already brought to bear in Clinton's speech.

Though not an origin point, the convergence of these factors was in no small way galvanized by the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the subsequent war on terror. Puar describes a similar yet distinct phenomena in the United States in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The main argument in Puar's text centers on the concept of homonationalism which she defines as a convergence of sexual exceptionalism, queer as a regulatory framework, and the ascendancy of whiteness against a backdrop of specific historical events (Puar, 2007) The biopolitical and necropolitical rearrangements that result from a

homonationalist framework are predicated on the production of (new) citizens (read white and gay) and (non-citizens) terrorists (read brown, male and straight) who are then respectively “folded” back into life or relegated to death<sup>11</sup>. Puar articulates the importance of reading bio/necro politics together in order to highlight how certain queer bodies assimilated into the state apparatus is constitutive of the production of terrorist bodies whose paradoxically queer existence is manufactured as a threat to the newly incorporated homosexuals and the nation they come to embody. The articulation of homonationalism within the United States following September 11<sup>th</sup> may have started as a geographically specific project, but has since been taken up by many Western scholars who have transposed its theoretical usefulness onto their own national contexts. In that vein, it is significant to note that homonationalism as articulated by Puar (2007), “is a process, not an event or an attribute. It names a historical shift in the production of nation-states from the insistence on heteronormativity to the increasing inclusion of homonormativity” (26).

It is for this reason that the underlying structure of Clinton’s speech works to deploy gay rights as a sign of modernity and progress to a global audience. By locating the invisible minority as geographically omnipresent and calling global attention to its existence, Clinton effectively spreads the presence of the West (and its identities) to all corners of the globe. It also, if I may expand Fatima El-Tayeb’s idea, represents a successful integration of certain minorities into the West (2012).<sup>12</sup> In this context, we can see how the quest for LGBT rights functions as a final frontier of modernity that aims to universalize (in the same manner as

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<sup>11</sup> In the last section, I will discuss necro/biopower in more detail.

<sup>12</sup> El-Tayeb argues that integration into gay politics, specifically for white, gay, males represents a successful integration of minorities into the city-an integration that, she argues, is impossible for Muslim communities because of their positioning as a threat to gay minorities. She is talking specifically about the Dutch context, but I argue that her position can be mapped onto the international context.

other types of rights in general) Western identity claims. For Clinton, it is self-evident that sexuality and gender identity are essential universal truths (discussed below) and her proclamation hinges on the idea that human beings are born with sexualities. Conversely, it is also dependent on the essentialized homophobia of the racialized and sexualized other.

### **Honor Killings, Widow Burnings, and Female Genital Mutilation: Predators**

Rescue narratives are powerful tropes in the Western world, a guiding philosophical principle that triggers visceral and swift responses when cries for help are heard (or manufactured). Clinton's invocation of gays in distress situates LGBT rights within a rescue narrative that is imbued with a sense of urgency to protect. Clinton's text is a call to mobilize-to protect against an eminent threat. Though never directly named, the threat is instead metaphorically conjured through the description of specific types of cultural violence,

The third...issue arises when people cite religious or cultural values as a reason to violate or not to protect the human rights of LGBT citizens. This is not unlike the justifications offered for violent practices towards women like honor killings, widow burning or female genital mutilation (Clinton, 2011).

There are probably few things that trigger a more visceral response to Western sensibilities than honor killings, widow burnings, and female genital mutilation. The last three decades has seen an overwhelming barrage of news reports and talk shows, political speeches, and NGO attention in the West paid to these types of violence. Media attention, especially since September 11<sup>th</sup>, has assisted in the production and spread of a politics of saving (Bracke, 2012). Clinton's speech does not hesitate to continue the tradition. By aligning the cultural practices of honor killings, widow burnings, and female genital mutilation with homophobia, the text produces a particularly violent brand of homophobia, locates it in specific parts of the world, and conjures an absent figure to which this homophobia is culturally and religiously bound. In other words, specific cultures become specifically homophobic.



The rhetorical power of such an alignment creates an exceptionally homophobic character that is racialized and heterosexualized. Racialized in the sense that the geographical underpinnings of the described violence is located outside the West and heterosexualized in the sense that violence against women is always gendered and heterosexually motivated. In their examination of the way in which LGBT rights narratives are deployed in Britain, Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem argue that “notions of sexual rights and migrant rights have been institutionally positioned as mutually oppositional by a populist politics” (Haritaworn, et al, 69). The underlying mechanism behind this positionality is gay imperialism in which the production of “Muslim homophobia” racializes the language of freedom and human rights wherein “Muslim and homophobic are increasingly treated as interchangeable signifiers” (Haritaworn, et al, 72). More simply, Muslim homophobia is framed as inevitable and universally oppositional to the language of rights that not only threatens the modern world, but “Islam becomes associated with death of a civilization” (Ahmed, 129). Though an empirically specific study, the implications of the findings can be brought to bear on Clinton’s speech and the international context.

When mapped internationally, this argument illuminates the Western tendency to exhibit rational superiority around the treatment of an identity of its own invention. Clinton’s intentional sidestep of specifically calling out Islam leaves the reader to imagine a predator already known through a story so familiar that Western consciousness need not stretch far in order to drum it up. Clinton’s speech is the story of the Frontier.<sup>13</sup> The phrasing and linguistic significance of honor killings, widow burnings, and female genital

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<sup>13</sup> “Colonies are similar to the frontiers. They are inhabited by ‘savages’. The colonies are not organized in a state form and have not created a human world...the zone where violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in service of ‘civilization’ ” (Mbembe, 24).

mutilation is that they play on the deeply ingrained instrument of this landscape, producing threats to the “universal” while systematically annihilating them,

In the eyes of the conqueror, *savage* life is just another form of *animal life*...the savages are, as it were, “natural” human beings who lack the specifically human character, the specifically human reality, “so that when European men massacred them they somehow were not aware that they had committed murder” (Mbembe, 24).

Clinton’s speech, while heavily reliant on what Mbembe is suggesting, evokes a different kind of oppositional structure. The Frontier, as it exists today, is now positioned on a more modern axis where the signifying dichotomies of difference have moved from nature to culture and moral to rational. Heavy reliance on the ever-changing politics of difference allows power to pivot from one discourse to another or to create a new one entirely if it benefits the desired position. The framing of specific practices as representations of certain “religious or cultural values” portrays the cultural as inherently violent while the “universal” position of rational human rights narratives becomes the justification for eradicating that culturally motivated predator. Clinton’s speech foregrounds the recycled terrain of the Frontier while the work around gay imperialism shows how colonial logic is maintained by the universalizing and re-inscribing of the shifting boundaries (and bodies) of the Western world.

Finally, it is worth noting that the purpose of this section is not to debate the morality of honor killings, widow burnings, or female genital mutilation, but is to instead examine how these acts are intentionally materialized in order to create racialized and sexualized threats that are culturally and geographically specific. By locating threats to LGBT people outside the West, Clinton’s speech replays a predator politics that does not specifically name, but passively (read universally) locates. The invocation of gays in

distress is the newest mechanism that conjures this rhetorically absent figure. A barbaric silhouette whose deep essential connection with culture (previously nature) confounds all reason. It is a colonial tactic tried and true and Clinton does not hesitate to employ it. By linking violence against gays to honor killings, widow burnings, and female genital mutilation, this predator, once only sexist, is now homophobic as well.

### **Being Gay is Not a Western Invention: Universal Human Rights**

Clinton's reliance on an essentialist position regarding homosexuality is used to upset the cultural (though also essentialized) attachments to homophobia. The logic employed here is predicated on the notion that Western conceptions of sexuality are biologically premised. To deny the existence of those identities<sup>14</sup> is framed as a denial of biology—a denial of a scientific reality. Clinton's speech and much of the rhetoric surrounding LGBT international rights narratives is premised on this biological essentialism. In the middle of her text, Clinton states that, "gay people are *born* into and belong to every society in the world...being gay is not a Western invention. It is a human reality" (2011). The certainty with which Clinton makes this proclamation speaks to the reliance on the scientific legitimacy she uses to make her argument.<sup>15</sup> It also raises many questions.

The assertion that LGBT people are born in every corner of the earth suggests that these identities are biologically fixed. However, Foucault's work around the history of sexuality has traced the historical emergence of these categories. Through what he calls incitement to discourse (read power), sexuality is pulled into discourse through the mechanism of identity (1978). More specifically, when sexual acts are apprehended by power, discourse determines the way those acts are situated, talked about, and evaluated through other discourses. The power apparatus uses the interrogation and examination of sex, the regulation and enforcement of sex, to produce sexually embodied subjects. The notion that science passively uncovers the truth about sexuality points to a binary that

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<sup>14</sup> It is critical to note the term identities. The existence of same sex attraction is not what is under discussion here.

emerges from having a sexuality that is premised on what is natural (uncovered by science). The relatively new formation of a racialized and sexualized other is positioned against LGBT identity (reverse discourse) which shows not only the historical origins of these identities but how power, in this case the state, can resituate and repurpose categories in order to achieve imperial objectives. The extension of the human rights narrative (already premised on Western ideals) to include LGBT rights incorporates this essentialism as a sort of pay to play for those outsider identities. Leticia Sabsay (2012) calls this process sexual modernization,

Considered from the perspective of the constitution of potential sexual citizens or, more precisely, potential sexual political subjects, what is at stake here is the hegemony of a western mode of understanding the sexual subject who would become, by virtue of this sexuality, a potential claimant of rights...while various culturally specific sexual practices are destroyed through this framework, they are also being offered 'admission' to democratic modernity on the condition that they conform to Western norms (610).

Clinton's speech highlights clearly this process of sexual modernization. By proclaiming that gays are born into every corner of the earth, she effectively erases culturally specific sexual practices, passively creates a threat that is racialized and sexualized, and then offers paid admission into democratic modernity as a sexual citizen,

And finally, to LGBT men and women worldwide, let me say this: Wherever you live and whatever the circumstances of your life, whether you are connected to a network of support or feel isolated and vulnerable, please know that you are not alone. People around the globe are working hard to support you and to bring an end to the injustices and dangers you face. That is certainly true for my country. And you have an ally in the United States of America and you have millions of friends among the American people (Clinton 2011).

The violent conditions and those sexualized and racialized others who create them previously mentioned by Clinton, set the stage for this invitation. It is not extension of

friendship, but rather is an invitation to democracy premised on the acceptance of Western conceptions of sexuality.

Joseph Massad's work around the Gay International can elaborate this point more fully. His argument is premised on the notion that the creation and enforcement (whether punitive or celebratory) of Western sexualities have already invaded and conquered the Arab world through the extensive work of NGO groups and human rights activists interested in liberating gays in the Middle East. Massad (2007) rightly accuses these groups of imposing sexual binaries that are not part of existing ontological structures in the Middle Eastern context,

Human rights advocates are not bringing about the inclusion of the homosexual in a new and redefined human subjectivity, but in fact are bringing about her and his exclusion from this redefined subjectivity altogether while simultaneously destroying existing subjectivities organized around other sets of binaries, including sexual ones (41).

It is critical to point out that Massad is not arguing the existence of same sex attraction. Instead, he contends that the hegemonic fashion in which Western sexual identities arrive, conquer, reproduce themselves, and are subsequently talked about are premised on an already colonial logic based in Orientalism. The creation of a new rights-bearing subject entitled to sexual freedom under a Western liberal paradigm erases Arab sexual culture and ways of knowing sex.

Therefore, Clinton's assertion that being gay is not a Western invention and that gay people are born in every corner of the world works to erase other ways of conceiving and knowing sex. International LGBT rights narratives are always forever linked to a Western identity politics premised on a liberal paradigm and identities themselves are always a hospitable climate for human rights claims or for deciding what it means to be human in

the first place. Clinton's imagery of the terrorized invisible minority grounds her representation of the West as the place of sexual liberation. Meanwhile, the doomed categorical existence of the sexualized and racialized other as the fundamental enemy of gay rights is relegated to the Frontier as the omnipresent savage.

### **How Do We Bring the World to Embrace Human Rights?**

Clinton concludes her speech with a fifth and final question, “how do we do our part to bring the world to embrace human rights for all people including LGBT people?” As explored above, state use of rescue narratives function as an imperial tool to universalize Western sexual identity by offering the promise of “liberation” to assimilated bodies from backwards, already homophobic cultures. However, the substantive realities of bringing the world to embrace gay rights can be seen through violent state oppression of racialized and sexualized others. The enforcement mechanisms activated that enable the protector category to separate populations for the purpose of control is a combination of state bio/necropower. Foucault’s notion of biopower can be understood as the multiple ways in which power attempts to manipulate and regulate outsider bodies in order to fold them into the state apparatus (Foucault, 2010). Mbembe argues that Foucault’s conception of biopower is not adequate in explaining state interest in and responsibility over death. He proposes that governments are indeed interested in the management of death, but that management is framed through life as near death (2003). It is masked.

While Clinton’s speech activates notions of biopower (bringing gays towards life), the realities of those bodies that are racialized and sexualized are dire indeed. Puar argues that the politics of homophobia and the politics of occupation are inextricably linked (2013). States, like Israel for example, have exploited LGBT rights narratives in order to justify occupation of Palestine. As a nation defined by struggle and forever at war (whether physically or ideologically), Israel has sought to change its global image through the process of what Puar (2013) calls pinkwashing, “the practice of covering over or distracting from a nation’s policies of discrimination of some populations through a noisy touting of its



gay rights for a limited few” (27). Beginning in the 1990s, popularly regarded as Israel’s gay decade, public conceptions of LGBTQ rights started shifting and the state began incorporating that narrative into its national agenda by legally recognizing work place discrimination, rights of domestic partners, and open service in the Israeli military (Puar 2011). This domestic shift elevated LGBTQ communities to a protected category within Israeli society. In more recent years, continued state co-opting of LGBTQ rights has looked beyond the borders of Israel in search of a liberal facelift. For example, campaigns such as “Brand Israel” (Puar, 2011) traveled to Western countries like the United States and Canada in order to market Israel as a modern democracy by positioning it as a gay-friendly destination. This was a concentrated effort by the Foreign Ministry to alter international (specifically Western powers) perceptions of Israel from militant and religious to liberal and rational. Queers living in and visiting Israel were encouraged to feel safe now that recognition of their right to exist had captured the global imagination.

Conversely, this notion of the “LGBT right to exist” was incorporated into an already existing national mythos and has been used to justify continued violence and occupation of Palestine. By constructing itself as a gay friendly destination, Israel has concomitantly framed Palestine, once a threat to Israel’s existence, as inhospitable to gay people. In addition to being backwards, dangerous, and premodern, Palestinians are now internationally recognized as exceptionally homophobic. This process of re-branding Palestinians as “gay-unfriendly” has had detrimental consequences. For example, state co-opting of LGBT rights rhetoric have positioned queer bodies as physical representations of liberal democracy. Palestinian homophobia, therefore, presents a threat not only to national and international LGBT communities but also to liberal democracy itself and helps

to legitimize occupation. Israel's homonational project is foundational upon a protected LGBT category and has to great effect masked violence, repression, and occupation of Palestine by creating a sense of urgency around protection of LGBT rights.

Most importantly, it frames Palestinians as an undesirable backward problem that only Israeli hegemony can solve. Using Israel's homonational project as an example, we can understand how the language of gay rights as human rights, as employed in Clinton's speech, has framed global discussion of sexual identity in much the same way; as a physical marker of a liberal democratic society under constant threat of racialized and sexualized others. As Puar (2011) points out, "to be gay friendly is to be modern, cosmopolitan, developed, first-world, global north, and most significantly, democratic" (138). Israel has succeeded in presenting itself as a gay friendly mecca amidst a desert of homophobic Arabs. Clinton's speech follows a similar position. She frames the embrace of gay rights as a choice that is made. However, the material realities of (forcefully) bringing the world towards accepting gay right are reflected in the Israeli case. By folding certain LGBT bodies into the state apparatus (biopolitics) and casting others, who are constructed as a danger to those bodies, out and relegating their existence to near death (necropolitics), Israel engages both frameworks as guiding principles.

## **Conclusion**

The rights-based sexual subject has come to represent the face of the modern West and Clinton's speech frames violence against this individual as violence against democracy. By linking gender violence to homophobic violence, Clinton has drawn out the same formidable character who is not only misogynistic and a danger to women's rights, he is now inherently homophobic and a danger to gay rights as well. By investigating the component structures of Hilary Clinton's speech, I argued that her employment of a rescue narrative using LGBT rights to invoke a sense of urgency continues the Western production of racialized and sexualized others-often brown, Muslim, straight, male and fundamentally homophobic. The development of a universal sexual citizen imbued with human rights is predicated on Western conceptions of identity that are always oppositional. Clinton's linkage of specific types of cultural gender violence with homophobic violence passively located a racialized and sexualized other whose inherent homophobia marks him as deserving of state violence.

The Israeli context is perhaps the most glaring example of an international homonationalist project that has somewhat successfully downplayed racial and cultural violence against a certain population by folding certain LGBT bodies into the national agenda. The international success of Israel framing itself as a gay friendly destination has resulted in the "near death" status experienced by Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank. Clinton's speech utilizes similar frames by calling upon a siege mentality in order to protect gay people from distant, omnipresent threat. Clinton's location of LGBT all over the world effectively destroys other cultural conceptions of sex (not sexuality) and in so doing offers states around the world an opportunity to join the cause.

It is important to also interrogate a queer reading of Clinton's speech. While perhaps adept at deconstructing the specific taxonomies of mainstream LGBT rights narratives and their subsequent deployments, queer as a politics of identity (read LGBT-Q) and a politics of anti-assimilation is situated in an already universalist position. What, then, does it mean to take up this perspective as a means of reading the problems of a rights-based sexual subject and what does it mean to step into discourse while simultaneously being constituted by it? Does an adoption of a queer identity or politics function as a coming out in the Western context as well as a coming toward the West in a postcolonial context? These are questions need further consideration and exploration. The consequences of Western universality are fully acknowledge in this scholarship, but there is still a long way to go in terms of bringing this knowledge to bear on the consciousness of mainstream LGBT rights whose narratives currently determine who lives and who dies.

## Appendix

### “Remarks in Recognition of International Human Rights Day”

Hillary Clinton

Good evening, and let me express my deep honor and pleasure at being here. I want to thank Director General Tokayev and Ms. Wyden along with other ministers, ambassadors, excellencies, and UN partners. This weekend, we will celebrate Human Rights Day, the anniversary of one of the great accomplishments of the last century.

Beginning in 1947, delegates from six continents devoted themselves to drafting a declaration that would enshrine the fundamental rights and freedoms of people everywhere. In the aftermath of World War II, many nations pressed for a statement of this kind to help ensure that we would prevent future atrocities and protect the inherent humanity and dignity of all people. And so the delegates went to work. They discussed, they wrote, they revisited, revised, rewrote, for thousands of hours. And they incorporated suggestions and revisions from governments, organizations, and individuals around the world.

At three o'clock in the morning on December 10th, 1948, after nearly two years of drafting and one last long night of debate, the president of the UN General Assembly called for a vote on the final text. Forty-eight nations voted in favor; eight abstained; none dissented. And the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. It proclaims a simple, powerful idea: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. And with the declaration, it was made clear that rights are not conferred by government; they are the birthright of all people. It does not matter what country we live in, who our leaders are, or even who we are. Because we are human, we therefore have rights. And because we have rights, governments are bound to protect them.

In the 63 years since the declaration was adopted, many nations have made great progress in making human rights a human reality. Step by step, barriers that once prevented people from enjoying the full measure of liberty, the full experience of dignity, and the full benefits of humanity have fallen away. In many places, racist laws have been repealed, legal and social practices that relegated women to second-class status have been abolished, the ability of religious minorities to practice their faith freely has been secured.

In most cases, this progress was not easily won. People fought and organized and campaigned in public squares and private spaces to change not only laws, but hearts and minds. And thanks to that work of generations, for millions of individuals whose lives were once narrowed by injustice, they are now able to live more freely and to participate more fully in the political, economic, and social lives of their communities.

Now, there is still, as you all know, much more to be done to secure that commitment, that reality, and progress for all people. Today, I want to talk about the work we have left to do to protect one group of people whose human rights are still denied in too many parts of the world today. In many ways, they are an invisible minority. They are arrested, beaten, terrorized, even executed. Many are treated with contempt and violence by their fellow citizens while authorities empowered to protect them look the other way or, too often, even join in the abuse. They are denied opportunities to work and learn, driven

from their homes and countries, and forced to suppress or deny who they are to protect themselves from harm.

I am talking about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, human beings born free and given bestowed equality and dignity, who have a right to claim that, which is now one of the remaining human rights challenges of our time. I speak about this subject knowing that my own country's record on human rights for gay people is far from perfect. Until 2003, it was still a crime in parts of our country. Many LGBT Americans have endured violence and harassment in their own lives, and for some, including many young people, bullying and exclusion are daily experiences. So we, like all nations, have more work to do to protect human rights at home.

Now, raising this issue, I know, is sensitive for many people and that the obstacles standing in the way of protecting the human rights of LGBT people rest on deeply held personal, political, cultural, and religious beliefs. So I come here before you with respect, understanding, and humility. Even though progress on this front is not easy, we cannot delay acting. So in that spirit, I want to talk about the difficult and important issues we must address together to reach a global consensus that recognizes the human rights of LGBT citizens everywhere.

The first issue goes to the heart of the matter. Some have suggested that gay rights and human rights are separate and distinct; but, in fact, they are one and the same. Now, of course, 60 years ago, the governments that drafted and passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were not thinking about how it applied to the LGBT community. They also weren't thinking about how it applied to indigenous people or children or people with disabilities or other marginalized groups. Yet in the past 60 years, we have come to recognize that members of these groups are entitled to the full measure of dignity and rights, because, like all people, they share a common humanity.

This recognition did not occur all at once. It evolved over time. And as it did, we understood that we were honoring rights that people always had, rather than creating new or special rights for them. Like being a woman, like being a racial, religious, tribal, or ethnic minority, being LGBT does not make you less human. And that is why gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights.

It is violation of human rights when people are beaten or killed because of their sexual orientation, or because they do not conform to cultural norms about how men and women should look or behave. It is a violation of human rights when governments declare it illegal to be gay, or allow those who harm gay people to go unpunished. It is a violation of human rights when lesbian or transgendered women are subjected to so-called corrective rape, or forcibly subjected to hormone treatments, or when people are murdered after public calls for violence toward gays, or when they are forced to flee their nations and seek asylum in other lands to save their lives. And it is a violation of human rights when life-saving care is withheld from people because they are gay, or equal access to justice is denied to people because they are gay, or public spaces are out of bounds to people because they are gay. No matter what we look like, where we come from, or who we are, we are all equally entitled to our human rights and dignity.

The second issue is a question of whether homosexuality arises from a particular part of the world. Some seem to believe it is a Western phenomenon, and therefore people outside the West have grounds to reject it. Well, in reality, gay people are born into and belong to every society in the world. They are all ages, all races, all faiths; they are doctors

and teachers, farmers and bankers, soldiers and athletes; and whether we know it, or whether we acknowledge it, they are our family, our friends, and our neighbors.

Being gay is not a Western invention; it is a human reality. And protecting the human rights of all people, gay or straight, is not something that only Western governments do. South Africa's constitution, written in the aftermath of Apartheid, protects the equality of all citizens, including gay people. In Colombia and Argentina, the rights of gays are also legally protected. In Nepal, the Supreme Court has ruled that equal rights apply to LGBT citizens. The Government of Mongolia has committed to pursue new legislation that will tackle anti-gay discrimination.

Now, some worry that protecting the human rights of the LGBT community is a luxury that only wealthy nations can afford. But in fact, in all countries, there are costs to not protecting these rights, in both gay and straight lives lost to disease and violence, and the silencing of voices and views that would strengthen communities, in ideas never pursued by entrepreneurs who happen to be gay. Costs are incurred whenever any group is treated as lesser or the other, whether they are women, racial, or religious minorities, or the LGBT. Former President Mogae of Botswana pointed out recently that for as long as LGBT people are kept in the shadows, there cannot be an effective public health program to tackle HIV and AIDS. Well, that holds true for other challenges as well.

The third, and perhaps most challenging, issue arises when people cite religious or cultural values as a reason to violate or not to protect the human rights of LGBT citizens. This is not unlike the justification offered for violent practices towards women like honor killings, widow burning, or female genital mutilation. Some people still defend those practices as part of a cultural tradition. But violence toward women isn't cultural; it's criminal. Likewise with slavery, what was once justified as sanctioned by God is now properly reviled as an unconscionable violation of human rights.

In each of these cases, we came to learn that no practice or tradition trumps the human rights that belong to all of us. And this holds true for inflicting violence on LGBT people, criminalizing their status or behavior, expelling them from their families and communities, or tacitly or explicitly accepting their killing.

Of course, it bears noting that rarely are cultural and religious traditions and teachings actually in conflict with the protection of human rights. Indeed, our religion and our culture are sources of compassion and inspiration toward our fellow human beings. It was not only those who've justified slavery who leaned on religion, it was also those who sought to abolish it. And let us keep in mind that our commitments to protect the freedom of religion and to defend the dignity of LGBT people emanate from a common source. For many of us, religious belief and practice is a vital source of meaning and identity, and fundamental to who we are as people. And likewise, for most of us, the bonds of love and family that we forge are also vital sources of meaning and identity. And caring for others is an expression of what it means to be fully human. It is because the human experience is universal that human rights are universal and cut across all religions and cultures.

The fourth issue is what history teaches us about how we make progress towards rights for all. Progress starts with honest discussion. Now, there are some who say and believe that all gay people are pedophiles, that homosexuality is a disease that can be caught or cured, or that gays recruit others to become gay. Well, these notions are simply not true. They are also unlikely to disappear if those who promote or accept them are

dismissed out of hand rather than invited to share their fears and concerns. No one has ever abandoned a belief because he was forced to do so.

Universal human rights include freedom of expression and freedom of belief, even if our words or beliefs denigrate the humanity of others. Yet, while we are each free to believe whatever we choose, we cannot do whatever we choose, not in a world where we protect the human rights of all.

Reaching understanding of these issues takes more than speech. It does take a conversation. In fact, it takes a constellation of conversations in places big and small. And it takes a willingness to see stark differences in belief as a reason to begin the conversation, not to avoid it.

But progress comes from changes in laws. In many places, including my own country, legal protections have preceded, not followed, broader recognition of rights. Laws have a teaching effect. Laws that discriminate validate other kinds of discrimination. Laws that require equal protections reinforce the moral imperative of equality. And practically speaking, it is often the case that laws must change before fears about change dissipate.

Many in my country thought that President Truman was making a grave error when he ordered the racial desegregation of our military. They argued that it would undermine unit cohesion. And it wasn't until he went ahead and did it that we saw how it strengthened our social fabric in ways even the supporters of the policy could not foresee. Likewise, some worried in my country that the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" would have a negative effect on our armed forces. Now, the Marine Corps Commandant, who was one of the strongest voices against the repeal, says that his concerns were unfounded and that the Marines have embraced the change.

Finally, progress comes from being willing to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. We need to ask ourselves, "How would it feel if it were a crime to love the person I love? How would it feel to be discriminated against for something about myself that I cannot change?" This challenge applies to all of us as we reflect upon deeply held beliefs, as we work to embrace tolerance and respect for the dignity of all persons, and as we engage humbly with those with whom we disagree in the hope of creating greater understanding.

A fifth and final question is how we do our part to bring the world to embrace human rights for all people including LGBT people. Yes, LGBT people must help lead this effort, as so many of you are. Their knowledge and experiences are invaluable and their courage inspirational. We know the names of brave LGBT activists who have literally given their lives for this cause, and there are many more whose names we will never know. But often those who are denied rights are least empowered to bring about the changes they seek. Acting alone, minorities can never achieve the majorities necessary for political change.

So when any part of humanity is sidelined, the rest of us cannot sit on the sidelines. Every time a barrier to progress has fallen, it has taken a cooperative effort from those on both sides of the barrier. In the fight for women's rights, the support of men remains crucial. The fight for racial equality has relied on contributions from people of all races. Combating Islamophobia or anti-Semitism is a task for people of all faiths. And the same is true with this struggle for equality.

Conversely, when we see denials and abuses of human rights and fail to act, that sends the message to those deniers and abusers that they won't suffer any consequences for their actions, and so they carry on. But when we do act, we send a powerful moral



message. Right here in Geneva, the international community acted this year to strengthen a global consensus around the human rights of LGBT people. At the Human Rights Council in March, 85 countries from all regions supported a statement calling for an end to criminalization and violence against people because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

At the following session of the Council in June, South Africa took the lead on a resolution about violence against LGBT people. The delegation from South Africa spoke eloquently about their own experience and struggle for human equality and its indivisibility. When the measure passed, it became the first-ever UN resolution recognizing the human rights of gay people worldwide. In the Organization of American States this year, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights created a unit on the rights of LGBT people, a step toward what we hope will be the creation of a special rapporteur.

Now, we must go further and work here and in every region of the world to galvanize more support for the human rights of the LGBT community. To the leaders of those countries where people are jailed, beaten, or executed for being gay, I ask you to consider this: Leadership, by definition, means being out in front of your people when it is called for. It means standing up for the dignity of all your citizens and persuading your people to do the same. It also means ensuring that all citizens are treated as equals under your laws, because let me be clear – I am not saying that gay people can't or don't commit crimes. They can and they do, just like straight people. And when they do, they should be held accountable, but it should never be a crime to be gay.

And to people of all nations, I say supporting human rights is your responsibility too. The lives of gay people are shaped not only by laws, but by the treatment they receive every day from their families, from their neighbors. Eleanor Roosevelt, who did so much to advance human rights worldwide, said that these rights begin in the small places close to home – the streets where people live, the schools they attend, the factories, farms, and offices where they work. These places are your domain. The actions you take, the ideals that you advocate, can determine whether human rights flourish where you are.

And finally, to LGBT men and women worldwide, let me say this: Wherever you live and whatever the circumstances of your life, whether you are connected to a network of support or feel isolated and vulnerable, please know that you are not alone. People around the globe are working hard to support you and to bring an end to the injustices and dangers you face. That is certainly true for my country. And you have an ally in the United States of America and you have millions of friends among the American people.

The Obama Administration defends the human rights of LGBT people as part of our comprehensive human rights policy and as a priority of our foreign policy. In our embassies, our diplomats are raising concerns about specific cases and laws, and working with a range of partners to strengthen human rights protections for all. In Washington, we have created a task force at the State Department to support and coordinate this work. And in the coming months, we will provide every embassy with a toolkit to help improve their efforts. And we have created a program that offers emergency support to defenders of human rights for LGBT people.

This morning, back in Washington, President Obama put into place the first U.S. Government strategy dedicated to combating human rights abuses against LGBT persons abroad. Building on efforts already underway at the State Department and across the government, the President has directed all U.S. Government agencies engaged overseas to

combat the criminalization of LGBT status and conduct, to enhance efforts to protect vulnerable LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, to ensure that our foreign assistance promotes the protection of LGBT rights, to enlist international organizations in the fight against discrimination, and to respond swiftly to abuses against LGBT persons.

I am also pleased to announce that we are launching a new Global Equality Fund that will support the work of civil society organizations working on these issues around the world. This fund will help them record facts so they can target their advocacy, learn how to use the law as a tool, manage their budgets, train their staffs, and forge partnerships with women's organizations and other human rights groups. We have committed more than \$3 million to start this fund, and we have hope that others will join us in supporting it.

The women and men who advocate for human rights for the LGBT community in hostile places, some of whom are here today with us, are brave and dedicated, and deserve all the help we can give them. We know the road ahead will not be easy. A great deal of work lies before us. But many of us have seen firsthand how quickly change can come. In our lifetimes, attitudes toward gay people in many places have been transformed. Many people, including myself, have experienced a deepening of our own convictions on this topic over the years, as we have devoted more thought to it, engaged in dialogues and debates, and established personal and professional relationships with people who are gay.

This evolution is evident in many places. To highlight one example, the Delhi High Court decriminalized homosexuality in India two years ago, writing, and I quote, "If there is one tenet that can be said to be an underlying theme of the Indian constitution, it is inclusiveness." There is little doubt in my mind that support for LGBT human rights will continue to climb. Because for many young people, this is simple: All people deserve to be treated with dignity and have their human rights respected, no matter who they are or whom they love.

There is a phrase that people in the United States invoke when urging others to support human rights: "Be on the right side of history." The story of the United States is the story of a nation that has repeatedly grappled with intolerance and inequality. We fought a brutal civil war over slavery. People from coast to coast joined in campaigns to recognize the rights of women, indigenous peoples, racial minorities, children, people with disabilities, immigrants, workers, and on and on. And the march toward equality and justice has continued. Those who advocate for expanding the circle of human rights were and are on the right side of history, and history honors them. Those who tried to constrict human rights were wrong, and history reflects that as well.

I know that the thoughts I've shared today involve questions on which opinions are still evolving. As it has happened so many times before, opinion will converge once again with the truth, the immutable truth, that all persons are created free and equal in dignity and rights. We are called once more to make real the words of the Universal Declaration. Let us answer that call. Let us be on the right side of history, for our people, our nations, and future generations, whose lives will be shaped by the work we do today. I come before you with great hope and confidence that no matter how long the road ahead, we will travel it successfully together.

Thank you very much.

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