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OPINION | COMMENTARY

Islam's Jihad Against Homosexuals

The rise of modern Islamic extremism has worsened an institutionalized Muslim homophobia.



Near the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Fla., after the mass shooting there, June 12. PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

By **AYAAN HIRSI ALI**

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The Orlando massacre is a hideous reminder to Americans that homophobia is an integral part of Islamic extremism. That isn't to say that some people of other faiths and ideologies aren't hostile to members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, or LGBT, community. Nor is to say that Islamic extremists don't target other minorities, in addition to engaging in wholly indiscriminate violence. But it is important to establish why a man like Omar Mateen could be motivated to murder 49 people in a gay nightclub, interrupting the slaughter, as law-enforcement officials reported, to dial 911, proclaim

his support for Islamic State and then pray to Allah.

I offer an explanation in the form of four propositions.

1. Muslim homophobia is institutionalized. Islamic law as derived from scripture, and as evolved over several centuries, not only condemns but prescribes cruel and unusual punishments for homosexuality.

2. Many Muslim-majority countries have laws that criminalize and punish homosexuals in line with Islamic law.

3. It is thus not surprising that the attitudes of Muslims in Muslim-majority countries are homophobic and that many people from those countries take those attitudes with them when they migrate to the West.

4. The rise of modern Islamic extremism has worsened the intolerance toward homosexuality. Extremists don't just commit violence against LGBT people. They also spread the prejudice globally by preaching that homosexuality is a disease and a crime.

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Muslims are homophobic. Many are gay or lesbian themselves. Some even have the courage to venture into the gender fluidity that the 21st century West has come to recognize. But these LGBT Muslims are running directly counter to their religion.

In his 2006 book "Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law," the Dutch scholar Rudolph Peters notes that most schools of Islamic law proscribe homosexuality. They differ only on the mode of punishment. "The Malikites, the Shiites and some Shafi'ites and Hanbalites are of the opinion that the penalty is death, either by stoning (Malikites), the sword (some Shafi'ites and Hanbalites) or, at the discretion of the court, by killing the culprit in the usual manner with a sword, stoning him, throwing him from a (high) wall or burning him (Shiites)."

Under Shariah—Islamic law—those engaging in same-sex sexual acts can be sentenced to death in nearly a dozen countries or in large areas of them: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan, the northern states of Nigeria, southern parts of Somalia, two provinces in Indonesia, Mauritania, Afghanistan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates. Death is also the

penalty in the territories in northern Iraq and Syria controlled by ISIS.

Iran is notorious for hanging men accused of homosexual behavior. The Associated Press reports that since 2014 ISIS has executed at least 30 people in Syria and Iraq for being homosexual, including three men who were dropped from the top of a 100-foot building in Mosul in June 2015.

No fewer than 40 out of 57 Muslim-majority countries or territories have laws that criminalize homosexuality, prescribing punishments ranging from fines and short jail sentences to whippings and more than 10 years in prison or death.

These countries' laws against homosexuality align with the attitudes of the overwhelming majority of their populations. In 2013 the Pew Research Center surveyed the beliefs of Muslims in 36 countries with a significant Muslim population or majority, including asking about their views of homosexuality. In 33 out of the 36 countries, more than 75% of those surveyed answered that homosexuality was "morally wrong," and in only three did more than 10% of those surveyed believe that homosexuality was "morally acceptable."

In many Muslim-majority countries—including Afghanistan, where Omar Mateen's parents came from—LGBT people face as much danger from their families or vigilantes as they do from the authorities.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Islamic extremists condemn homosexuality in the strongest possible terms. The Middle East Media Research Institute reported in 2006 that when Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, one of the world's leading Sunni clerics and chairman of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, was asked how gay people should be punished, he replied: "Some say we should throw them from a high place, like God did with the people of Sodom. Some say we should burn them, and so on. There is disagreement. . . . The important thing is to treat this act as a crime."

Such ideas travel. In 2009 Anjem Choudary, an infamous London imam and self-proclaimed "judge of the Shariah Court of the U.K.," stated in a press conference that all homosexuals should be stoned to death. Here in the U.S., Muzammil Siddiqi, former president of the Islamic Society of North America, has written: "Homosexuality is a moral disorder. It is a moral disease, a sin and corruption . . . No person is born homosexual, just like no one is born a thief, a liar or murderer. People acquire these evil habits due to a lack of proper guidance and education."

Farrokh Sekaleshfar, a Shiite cleric educated in London, declared of homosexuality in 2013: "Death is the sentence. We know there's nothing to be embarrassed about this. Death is the sentence." He was speaking at the Hussein Islamic Center outside Orlando.

Yes, Orlando. He spoke there again in April.

These men express their hostility toward the LGBT community only verbally, but the Orlando attack was hardly the first manifestation in the U.S. of Islamist antigay violence. During a New Year's Eve celebration in the first hours of 2014, Musab Masmari tried to set fire to a gay nightclub in Seattle; he is serving 10 years in prison on federal arson charges. Law-enforcement officials say that Ali Muhammad Brown, an ISIS supporter who is now in prison for armed robbery, also faces charges for terrorism and four murders, including the 2014 execution of two men in Seattle outside of a gay nightclub.

Following the horrific attack in Orlando, people as usual have been rushing to judgment. President Obama blames lax gun laws. Donald Trump blames immigration. Neither is right. There has been comparable carnage in countries with strict gun laws. The perpetrator in this case was born in the United States. This is not primarily about guns or immigration. It is about a deeply dangerous ideology that is infiltrating American society in the guise of religion. Homophobia comes in many forms. But none is more dangerous in our time than the Islamic version.

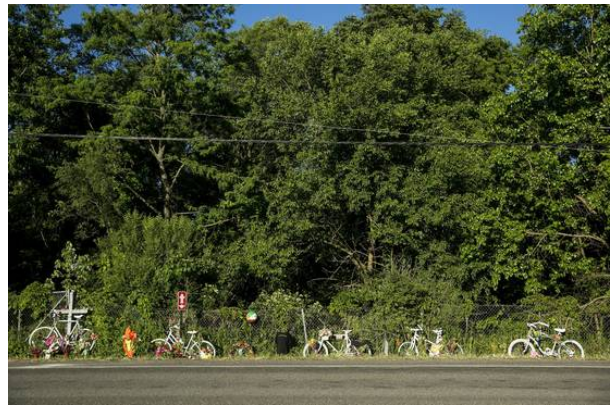
Ms. Hirsi Ali, a fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School, is the author of "Infidel" (Free Press, 2007) and "Heretic: The Case for a Muslim Reformation" (HarperCollins, 2015).

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