

T-Iransexual

By S.L. Hager

Seems like everyone's got something to say about Islam these days, and some of what's being said isn't very pleasant. I ask that we look over the fences of our western culture, specifically, beyond our occidental value judgments, and look to the east. Motives aside, it appears that Iran has become a leader among traditionally conservative Islamic nations in practicing a consistent and humanitarian approach to gender dysphoria. Indiscreet or ill-fated homosexuals may be at risk for the death penalty, and as with the rest of the world, there is no such thing as gender equality, but in Iran, they make space at the table for the T-Iransexual.

Here's the scoop: There are conflicting dates in the literature, but it was sometime back in the seventies when Imam Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was confronted in his private chambers by a man who had been trying unsuccessfully to obtain an audience with him. Apparantly, this distressed fellow was actually a woman trapped in a man's body, and she/he successfully convinced Imam Khomeini that she/he was indeed a transsexual and in desperate need of help. After a delay-- a revolution and overthrow of the government to be exact --- Imam Khomeini issued a Fatwa (a legal ruling in Islam) in 1983, stating that certain candidates, under certain conditions, may be given permission to undergo sexual reassignment surgery for “Sexual Identity Disorder“. [i]

Iran's policy must be distinguished from those of a few other nations such as Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Iran has recognized Sexual Identity Disorder and requires “proof“ before a permit will be given for surgery, whereas Kuwait[ii] seems to have followed Cairo, by relying on an edict issued by Egypt's top Sunni Religious Institute, Al — Azhar in 1988:

“ It is permissible to perform the operation in order to reveal what was hidden of male or female organs. Indeed, it is obligatory to do so on the grounds that it must be considered a treatment, when a trustworthy doctor advises it. It is, however, not permissible to do it at the mere wish to change sex from woman to man, or vice versa.“[iii]

This clerical- legal decision was made after consulting religious texts, and stated that Hermaphrodites, with the proper willingness, will be excused from condemnation and should be treated for their misfortune. On the one hand, it sounds like that those of proven intersex will be allowed to change, whereas all others (gender dysphorics) will have to find some other solution to their adversity; but on the other hand, something is better than nothing, even if it is only for a select few.

In the same vein, Saudi Arabia forbids surgery for transsexuals, but in 2004 “gender correction“ surgery, rather than sexual reassignment surgery, was carried out for five sisters who were diagnosed as intersex. [iv] Istanbul, in contrast, will exchange a genetic male's blue identity card for pink one, rendering the new cardholder legally female, if it can be established that “ there has been a change of sex after birth documented by a report from a committee of medical experts“. [v] This relatively relaxed approach to transsexuals may be due to the popularity of the subgroup, especially in the “entertainment“ industry. Turkey is also considered a moderate Muslim nation.

There are reasons why these restrictions exist in parts of the Muslim world, but that is, shall we say, fuel for another fire. Just as there are those who live in these areas who suffer inescapable hopelessness from gender dysphoria --- as well as severe persecution and abuse for not living within a strict sexual duality --- there are also those who accept the judgments of their religious leaders (Yes, you read correctly; some Muslim women do not wish to be rescued [vi] from behind their Burkas or Chadrads and there are plenty of young women in France who would like to wear a head scarf to school so that they may practice hijab). Oddly enough, a religious structure that has traditionally considered transsexuals and homosexuals to be evil, is the same system that has made room for one of them at the table. Antiquated belief systems-- especially about gender, sex and power; traditions, mores and taboos---do not necessarily get removed along with unwanted body parts, so if this policy of recognition doesn't at least teach compassion, then hopefully it will enforce tolerance. [vii]

But since gender different people like me are horribly out of luck in Iran, I would do the next best thing in order to distance myself from the executioner and maybe even find a peace of mind—— I'd become a T-Iransexual.

[i] From: Iran's Transsexuals, by? Original data from Caroline Mangez. 13/11/2005, from Irandokht.com. Retrieved 21 Feb. 2006 from <http://www.irandokht.com/news/readnews.php?newsID=14819>

[ii] From: Kuwait sex- change case upheld, by? BBC news., April 2004. Retrieved from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3657727.stm 21 Feb. 2006

[iii] From: Changing Sex-Changing Islam, by Yoshie. August 2004 Retrieved 21 Feb. 2006 from:
<http://montages.blogspot.com/2004/08/changing-sex-changing-islam.html> 02 21 06

[iv] Gender Correction for Saudi Girls, by Sebastian Usher. June 2004. BBC news. Retrieved from:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3814041.stm, 21 Feb. 2006

[v] Transsexuals and the Urban Landscape in Istanbul, by Deniz Kandiyoti Retrieved from:
<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer206/turksx.htm> 21 Feb. 2006

[vi] Dear Christian, I am a Muslim. By Fatima Aly Jaffer. Suite101.com. Retrieved from:
<http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/17935/107366> 21 Feb. 2006

[vii] Baie danke, Robert.