

Hillary Clinton's Response to the Pulse Orlando Shootings

Written by Ali E. Erol

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ALI E. EROL, JUN 15 2016

On the early hours of June 12th 2016, shortly after the Pulse LGBT nightclub announced last call in its Latinx night, Omar Mateen committed what is now dubbed the worst mass shooting in American history – killing 49 and wounding 53 people. Initial reactions to the shooting, along with condolences and heartfelt sentiments, focused on issues such as gun control, Mateen's Afghan and Muslim background, and drawing caution to falling victim to Islamophobia. Important issues missing from the emerging discussion, however, were homophobia, transphobia, hegemonic masculinity, and the anti-immigrant sentiment. These attitudes are all unfortunately prevalent and salient in the United States due to ongoing popular public discussions regarding same-sex marriage, “nearly 200 anti-LGBT bills across 34 states in the first ten weeks of 2016” introduced by GOP (Griffin, 2016) including the well-known North Carolina's House Bill 2 that regulates access to restrooms based on gender, and the rhetorics of the candidates in the approaching presidential elections.

As one of the presidential candidates, Hilary Clinton made several statements regarding the attack. She released a statement on her official Facebook page few hours after the attack on Sunday morning, in addition to tens of tweets, an NPR interview on Monday morning, and a live speech in Cleveland in Monday afternoon. Clinton's remarks were especially important on several fronts: Clinton is the presidential candidate of the Democratic party and presumed to be more progressive than her Republican counterpart, Donald Trump. Moreover, some of Clinton's campaign platform relies on the fact that she is bidding to be the first woman president of the United States. For these reasons her stance and declaration of solidarity with the LGBT individuals would be monumental. However, Clinton's addresses had a different focus. In all the statements she made, Clinton drew attention to responding to such attacks and sustained the war against terrorism narrative. She emphasized expanding and strengthening intelligence agencies, law enforcement, and increasing the air raids against ISIS to defeat them on the battlefield. For instance, in her speech she made Monday afternoon, she laid out a three-part policy plan. She argued:

First, we and our allies must work hand in hand to dismantle the networks that move money and propaganda and arms and fighters around the world... Second, here at home, we must harden our own defenses. We have to do more to support our first responders, law enforcement, and intelligence officers who do incredible work everyday at great personal risk to keep our country safe... The third area that demands attention is preventing radicalization and countering efforts by ISIS and other international terrorist networks to recruit in the United States and Europe.

Clinton's response might make sense in her position as a presidential candidate. She makes policy suggestions. She offers practical resolutions and talks with depth and insight her Republican counterpart Donald Trump does not match. However, none of her statements have any plans or suggestions to counter homophobia, transphobia, or the wide spread anti-immigrant rhetoric. She does not mention a word about how she would repeal the hundreds of anti-LGBT laws, regulations, and policies or work to tackle the widespread anti-LGBT and anti-immigrant sentiment. Perhaps most strikingly for a candidate who takes pride and runs part of her campaign on her gender identity, she does not mention the role of hegemonic masculinity and its disposition to conduct violence towards women and LGBT individuals. In the only instance Clinton attempts to claim a sense of solidarity with the LGBT individuals at large and brings up LGBT concerns in her speech, she states:

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From Stonewall to Laremy and now Orlando. We've seen too many examples of how the struggle to live freely, openly, and without fear has been met by violence. We have to stand together. Be proud together. There is no better rebuke to the terrorists, to all those who hate. Our open diverse society is an asset in the struggle against terrorism, not a liability. It makes us stronger and more resistant to radicalization.

Unfortunately, Clinton's rhetoric does not help Latinx queer individuals, who were targeted by the attack, or others who are pushed to the margins of the society and suffer from systematic oppression, laws and policies. On the contrary, her rhetoric is yet another attempt to recruit queer subjects in to the normative fold of war against terrorism narrative and the us versus them binary such narrative puts forth. In this sense, Clinton asks that queer subjects should join the ranks of promoting global violence and waging war. In framing openness and diversity as "an asset in the struggle against terrorism," she takes liberation and subordination out of the LGBT struggle and attempts to replace it with confirming with the mainstream America in a homogenized sense of diversity that unites in conducting warfare overseas.

However, queer subjects have always been a problem in the context of populist rhetoric, policymaking, as well as scholarship. Cynthia Weber, who writes in the intersection of queer studies and international relations, suggests this is not due to a lack of queer scholarship or a symptom of indecency of those who engage in queer studies (Weber, 2015). Rather, Weber argues "queer subjectivities more than exceed binary logics of the *either/or*." (Weber, 2016: 3). Queer and queerness—as well as queer subjects—do not lend themselves on a stable position that could be pointed to or captured in a box; neither in public, public policy, nor in scholarship. For this reason, as Markus Thiel notes, queer politics pose a challenge to IR and mainstream LGBT organizing (Thiel, 2014).

Clinton's responses to Pulse shooting showcases why that is the case. Clinton's rhetoric, and the mainstream IR policymaking it represents, not only ignores, but also relies on the erasure of queer subjects for self-sustenance. Whether to recruit soldiers for the next battle, to frame success in war against terrorism, or to argue that a trade deal such as TPP is *good*, state-centered mainstream IR policymaking that takes neoliberalism and neorealism to heart owes its existence to *enemy* civilians who are killed and displaced in wars, people who are deprived of basic necessities for living, those who sustain their lives in borders, and workers who are exploited in trade deals. These subjects, who are ignored and cast aside by mainstream IR scholarship and policymaking, are lost in heated rhetorics after tragic events that call for action and unification. They are also the very subjects that inform the central perspective of queer IR scholarship (Wilcox, 2014).

Still, it is important to consider Clinton's argument in the context of a series of declarations that seems to be about displaying solidarity with the LGBT community at large to understand its function. Later in the speech she gave Monday afternoon, Clinton cited the aftermath of 9/11 as an example of how America should behave. She told the story of Bush's visit to a Muslim community to curb the possible rise of Islamophobia and people's inevitable tendency to blame Muslims for the 9/11 attacks. Uniting as a nation behind this tragedy, according to Clinton, is the epitome display of solidarity. Such call for unity, however, irons out the intersections of identities that have been targeted at the Pulse nightclub as well as have been historically subjected to violence by the very apparatus Clinton seems to rally behind. Terms and conditions that apply to such unity are that of ignoring the place of race in the massacre as well as in the war against terrorism narrative Clinton sustains, ignoring the role of hegemonic masculinity in dealing violence against those who are deemed other, and ignoring the history of the LGBT movement that took a counter stance against normativities imposed by heterosexuality and neoliberalism. Clinton, then, in her response tries to invoke what Puar calls "homonationalism", creating proper queer subjects via mobilizing the discourse of openness and diversity and pitting them against terrorist bodies to exemplify ethos of neoliberal democracy (Puar, 2007).

In her same work, Puar writes that "Queer times require even queerer modalities of thought, analysis, creativity, and expression in order to elaborate upon nationalist, patriotic, and terrorist formations and their imbricated forms of racialized perverse sexualities and gender dysphorias" (Puar, 2007: 204). As such, it falls on queer scholars and activists to deconstruct discourses and affective structures that attempt to put queer subjects in binaries that wash away intersections and offer proper citizenship in exchange of being a part of global warfare. Engaging with public debates, students, other scholars, politicians, and policymakers on these issues and on the assumed binary positions

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is the work that will disrupt the oversimplification required for recruiting queer subjects into the normative fold.

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