

**An intersectional analysis of the systemic discrimination confronting LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East: The cases of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt.**

By

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree,

**Magister Artium**

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Date: 1 December 2022

## DECLARATION

I, Simone Bekker (Student number: 2015261759), hereby declare that,

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2. I am the owner of this study and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.
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12/01/2023

## **Acknowledgements and Dedication**

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Hussein Solomon. Words cannot express my gratitude to Prof Solomon for his guidance, support, patience, and continued encouragement. Without his consistent feedback, generous exchange of knowledge, and expertise I could not have undertaken this journey and none of this would have been possible. I am forever thankful for your confidence in my ability and the many opportunities with which you provided me. It was a great privilege to observe your high level of knowledge and ability to discuss any given topic.

To my mother and my best friend, Madelein Bekker, thank you for believing in me on the days I did not believe in myself. This dissertation stands as a testament to your unconditional love and encouragement. I am thankful to my father, Willie Bekker, and my friends Sanet and Henning van Schalkwyk for their love, support, and encouragement throughout my studies. A special thank you to my stepfather and stepbrother Chris and Marno Swart. In 2016 when all odds were against me to be enrolled at the University of the Free State, they fought tirelessly for me to get the opportunity to study at the UFS. To my late grandmother and guardian angel in heaven, Elizabeth Johanna Bekker – I hope that you are smiling in the heavens and watching my successes. You always believed that I would be the first in our family to obtain a degree at university level, but we did so much more than just that.

Finally, I would like to give all the glory to God Almighty, I know that I gave my best and God did the rest.

I dedicate this dissertation to my LGBTQ+ family, Mahsa Amini, and all brave protestors who lost their lives during the 2020 protests in Iran. You have inspired me. To those we have lost in the fight, those who continue to be brave enough to fight for our rights, and those who are not yet able to live their truth: this is only some words on white paper, and on the days when I read terrible stuff in the news, I wish that I could do so much more. But for now, I hope that this small effort might lead to some relief for us all someday. In the words of Audre Lorde: “My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you”.

## ABSTRACT

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The road to equality is not straight, and for LGBTQ+ individuals the road holds various intersections of discrimination. Aspects such as identity and gender have directly impacted the level to which individuals are shunned by their families, communities, and social nexus. Although discrimination against LGBTI people undermines the human rights principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, discrimination and violence against people in the LGBTI community are all too common. Homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic attitudes remain deeply embedded in many cultures around the world.

A significant amount of research on intersectionality concentrates primarily on African American women and other women of colour, and it seems that the research on intersectionality has not sufficiently addressed the lives of Middle Eastern LGBTQ+ individuals. Often, LGBTQ+ individuals are misrepresented by selected states from the region at international forums such as the United Nations General Assembly and Human Right Council. Using claims based on religious and cultural values, selected states undermine the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals, and Arab-speaking and Muslim majority states seem to form a homogenous entity with a uniform view on LGBTQ people. All LGBTQ+ members are assumed to be faced with the same systemic discrimination and to have the same human rights needs and experiences. For this reason, intersections of multiple systems of oppression are not recognised and the interests of some are privileged while the experiences of others are marginalised. To address this gap, this study uses an intersectional framework which notes that the LGBTQ+ community in the Middle East is not a singular entity, and even though conditions differ based on country, gender, and from individual to individual, as a whole, the LGBTQ community in the region has not been granted the “freedoms” linked to Western ideals of homosexual progress, such as open displays of romantic affection, gay marriage, and other superficial indications of acceptance in society.

This study analyses differences of experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals within three separate case studies, namely Iran, Turkey, and Egypt. It does so by applying an intersectional lens to recognise the ways in which different social identities produce intersecting systems of privilege or oppression, and how these systems create

different lived experiences, and/or common experiences within a social context. This dissertation is a qualitative study which utilises case study methodology to analyse the existing literature related to the topics. Discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals directly undermine the human rights principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The fact that so many instances of such violation continue to go unchallenged is testimony to the deep cultural roots of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.

## VOORWOORD

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Die pad na gelykheid is nie reguit nie, en vir LGBTQ+ lede hou die lewe verskillende kruisings van diskriminasie in. Aspekte soos identiteit en geslag beïnvloed die mate waartoe individue verwerp word deur hul gesinne, gemeenskappe, en sosiale nexus direk. Diskriminasie teen LGBTI+ lede ondermyn die menseregtebeginsels soos uiteengesit in die Universele Verklaring van Menseregte. Tog kom diskriminasie en geweld teen mense in die LGBTQ+ gemeenskap gereeld voor. Homofobiese, bifobiese en transfobiese houdings bly diep ingebed in baie kulture regoor die wêreld.

'n Beduidende hoeveelheid navorsing oor interseksionele of kruispuntbesonderhede konsentreer hoofsaaklik op Afro-Amerikaanse vroue en ander vroue van kleur, en dit wil voorkom asof die navorsing oor interseksionaliteit nog nie die lewens van Midde-Oosterse LGBTQ+ individue voldoende aangespreek het nie. Dikwels word LGBTQ + individue deur geselekteerde state uit die streek verkeerd voorgestel op internasionale forums soos die Verenigde Nasies se Algemene Vergadering en die Raad vir Menseregte. Deur gebruik te maak van eise gebaseer op godsdienstige en kulturele waardes, ondermyn geselekteerde state die regte van LGBTQ + individue, en Arabiessprekende en Moslem-meerderheid vorm skynbaar 'n homogene entiteit met 'n eenvormige siening oor LGBTQ-mense. Daar word aanvaar dat alle LGBTQ+ lede dieselfde sistemiese diskriminasie ondervind en dieselfde menseregte behoeftes en ervarings het. Om hierdie rede word kruisings van veelvuldige stelsels van onderdrukking nie erken nie en word die belange van sommige bevoorreg terwyl die ervarings van ander gemarginaliseer word. Om hierdie leemte aan te spreek, gebruik hierdie studie 'n kruisingsraamwerk wat daarop dui dat die LGBTQ + -gemeenskap in die Midde-Ooste nie 'n enkelvoudige entiteit is nie, en selfs al verskil toestande op

grond van land, geslag, en van individu tot individu, word daar aan die LGBTQ-gemeenskap as geheel in die streek nie die “vryhede” toegeken wat aan Westerse ideale van homoseksuele vooruitgang gekoppel word nie, soos openlike betoning van romantiese toegeneentheid, gay huwelike en ander oppervlakkige aanduidings van aanvaarding in die samelewing.

Hierdie studie ontleed verskille in ervarings van LGBTQ + individue in drie afsonderlike gevallestudies, naamlik Iran, Turkye en Egipte. 'n Interseksionele lens word toegepas om te recognise the ways in which different social identities produce intersecting systems of privilege or oppression die maniere waarop verskillende sosiale identiteite kruispunt-stelsels van voorreg of onderdrukking produseer, raak te sien, asook hoe hierdie stelsels verskillende ervarings skep en/of lei tot algemene ervarings binne 'n sosiale konteks. Hierdie proefskrif is 'n kwalitatiewe studie wat gebruik maak van gevallestudiemetodologie om die bestaande literatuur wat met die onderwerpe verband hou, te ontleed. Diskriminasie en geweld teen LGBTQ + individue ondermyn direk die menseregte-beginsels soos uiteengesit in die Universele Verklaring van Menseregte. Die feit dat soveel voorvalle van geweld steeds onverhinderd voorkom, bevestig dat homofobie, bifobie, en transfobie diep in die kultuur gewortel is.

**Key words:** LGBTQ+, intersectionality, discrimination, human rights, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, lesbian, gay, homophobia, violence, sexual orientation, gender identity.

## Glossary

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**Ally** - A person who publicly advocates for LGBTIQ+ human rights. While allies are often classified as individuals who are not LGBTIQ+, LGBTIQ+ people can also be allies. For instance, a gay, cisgender, man who advocates for intersex rights may be considered an intersex ally.

**Bisexual** - A sexual orientation in which a person is sexually or romantically attracted to both women and men.

**Cisgender** - Describes an individual whose birth sex matches with their prescribed gender. In essence, it is a term often used to describe an individual who does not identify as transgender or agender.

**Conversion Therapy** - Sustained and deliberate efforts to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. These practices are often referred to as "conversion therapy" although they do not have therapeutic value, have been rejected as harmful by leading healthcare associations, and often take place outside of healthcare settings.

**Gay** - Synonym in many parts of the world for homosexual; often used to refer to the sexual orientation of a male whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is towards other males.

**Gender** - Is different from sex in that sex refers to one's physiological composition, whereas gender is typically the expression of masculine, feminine, or neither of those two characteristics. Descriptively, men usually choose to express their gender by being masculine while women express it by being more feminine. Though this may be a prevalent cultural norm, it is purely stereotypical. Many individuals deviate from these traditional gender roles, hence the need for descriptive terms such as "tomboy," for example.

**Gender Confirmation/Reassignment Surgery** - Gender confirmation, or gender reassignment surgery refers to medical interventions that may be part of the transition process. Not all people choose or can afford medical interventions such as hormone therapy or surgery.

**Gender Identity** - Refers to how individuals express their gender or label themselves. This may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth.

**Gender expression** - Individuals use a range of cues, such as names, pronouns, behaviour, clothing, voice, mannerisms and/or bodily characteristics, to interpret other individuals' genders. Gender expression is not necessarily an accurate reflection of gender identity. People with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics do not necessarily have a diverse gender expression. Likewise, people who do not have a diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics may have a diverse gender expression.

**Heterosexual** - Sexual orientation of a person whose primary sexual and romantic attractions are toward people of a different sex.

**Homosexual** - Sexual orientation of a person whose primary sexual and romantic attractions are toward people of the same sex.

**Homophobia** - The irrational hatred, intolerance, and fear of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, and a form of discrimination.

**Honour Killing** - The murder of a person, usually a woman, suspected of having offended the "honour" of her family or community, generally on the basis of sexual behaviour deemed transgressive - for example, engaging in a sexual relationship outside of heterosexual marriage.

**Intersex** – An umbrella term that refers to a range of traits and conditions that cause individuals to be born with chromosomes, gonads, and/or genitals that vary from what is considered typical for female or male bodies. "Intersex" originated as a medical term and has been reclaimed by some as a personal and political identity. Intersex is not the same as transgender, which describes individuals whose gender differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

**LGBT** – Is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender.

**LGBTI** – Is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex.

**LGBTQ** – Is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer.

**Lesbian** - A sexual orientation in which a female is primarily sexually or romantically attracted to other females.

**Masculinity/Femininity** - Possession of the qualities associated with men and women in a particular society at a particular time.

**Sex** – Describes the classification of people as male, female, or intersex based on a combination of bodily characteristics, including chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based only on the appearance of their external reproductive organs.

**Sexual Orientation** - A person's sense of attraction to, or sexual desire for, individuals of the same sex, another sex, both, and neither.

**Transgender** – An adjective describing those whose gender identity or expression does not match the biological sex they were assigned at birth. A transgender person may or may not undergo hormone treatment or sex reassignment surgery, and medical intervention is considered just one part of a larger transition process. May be shortened to “trans” or “trans\*” in certain instances. The asterisk emphasizes that many different identities fall under the larger transgender umbrella term.

**Transgender Man** - A term used to describe someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.

**Transgender Woman** - A term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.

**Transphobia** - The fear or dislike of someone based on the fact they are trans, including denying their gender identity or refusing to accept it. Transphobia may be targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, trans.

**Queer** – A critique of identity-based, bounded categories of sexual or gender identities; also used as an umbrella term covering multiple identities.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

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“There is nothing wrong with you. There is a lot wrong with the world you live in”.

– Chris Colfer

## 1.1. Background and significance:

As the world marks more than 30 years since “homosexuality” was declassified as an internationally designated disease Wareham (2020), a map by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA, 2020) shows that it is at the time of writing (2020/1/2) still illegal to be LGBTQ+ in 71 countries, and individuals so designated could incur the death penalty in 12 countries (see Appendix 1). This means that only 65% of people living in United Nations (UN) countries across the world can now legally be in consensual same-sex relationships. Sometimes, hostility directed at the LGBTQ+ community is stoked by the same governments that should be protecting them (Mendos, et al., 2020).

Despite major changes in laws and norms surrounding the issue of same-sex marriage and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other (LGBTQ+) people around the world, public opinion on the acceptance of homosexuality in society remains sharply divided by country, region, and economic development (Poushter and Kent, 2020). Depending on where they are in the world, people may be faced with violence and inequality – and sometimes torture, or even execution. Amnesty International (n.d.) explains that this discrimination could be based on sexual orientation (who you are attracted to); gender identity (how you define yourself, irrespective of your biological sex), gender expression (how you express your gender through your clothing, hair, or make-up), or sex characteristics (for example, your genitals, chromosomes, reproductive organs, or hormone levels.)

According to Jewkes et al. (2015) laws that criminalise same-sex intimacy and gender non-conformity, do more than outlaw particular sexual acts or gender expressions, they essentially prevent LGBTQ+ people from expressing their identity. These types of laws assist in fostering a social climate that promotes rigid gender norms and gender inequalities. Perry (2001) explains that anyone who falls outside these expected norms and ‘ways of being’ is not only resisted by the law, they are also prone to be subjected

to acts of targeted interpersonal violence. A legal culture that excludes LGBTQ+ people from the protection of the law also creates a culture of impunity where violence towards LGBTQ+ people goes unchallenged. In this regard, bias, and hate-motivated violence and abuse, are tools used by both state and non-state actors to control and punish the transgression of established sexual and gender norms.

According to ILGA (2020), of the 11 UN member states that proscribe the death penalty for consensual same sex relations, five were in the Middle East (Iran, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Qatar). In addition, except for Israel, there are not employment, constitutional, or other protections for LGBTQ+ individuals in the region. El Shafei (2016) explains that the “LGBTQ+ community in the Middle East” is not a singular entity. Although circumstances differ according to country, gender, city, or urban settings, and of course from individual to individual, as a whole the queer community in the Middle East has not been permitted the same “freedoms” linked to Western ideals of homosexual progress, such as gay marriage, open displays of romantic affection, and other superficial indications of acceptance in society. In the majority of Arab-speaking states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, consensual same-sex relations remain criminalized. Sodomy, debauchery, and public morality laws are among the tools used by states to violate the rights of the LGBTQ+ community (OutRight., 2018). Younes (2020a) supports this statement by explaining that countries that do not have laws that directly criminalize same-sex relations, such as Bahrain, Egypt, and Jordan, use spurious “morality law”, debauchery and prostitution laws to target LGBTQ+ people, often without legal grounds and at variance with international law.

Although laws across the MENA region are far from uniform, in most countries, same-sex acts between consenting adults in private are treated as a criminal offense. In Algeria, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen, and part of Palestine (Gaza), laws explicitly prohibit same-sex acts, and consist of gender-neutral terms or explicitly focus on both women and men. Mauritania’s laws also criminalize same-sex conduct for both sexes, but while sex between adult Muslim men is subject to a sentence of “death by public stoning,” sex between women carries a lesser sentence. Kuwait, Sudan, and part of the UAE (Dubai) prohibit consensual sex between men, or sodomy, and Qatar prescribes penalties for any male, Muslim or not, who “instigates” or “entices” another male to commit an act of sodomy or immorality. Several countries use gender-neutral

“morality” laws to persecute people for consensual same-sex conduct. These provisions can be particularly insidious because of their vagueness. They use terms such as “indecent” or “immoral” without defining what falls into these categories (Human Rights Watch., 2018). As a result, in the Middle East, the LGBTQ+ community exists mainly underground, and members of the community often live in fear of being discovered. If revealed or perceived to be homosexual, LGBTQ+ people risk being ostracised by the entire society, including their own family. In general, these communities have no legal protection whatsoever (United Nations Human Rights Council., 2019).

## **1.2. Problem statement: framing the research problem**

### **1.2.1 The state and the issue of gender:**

The American Psychological Association Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance (2009) describes gender as a set of socially constructed standards of identity, community, covert and overt behaviours, assigned to individuals by virtue of their apparent biological sex. This description has been propounded for some time (example gratia, by West and Zimmerman, (1987), organisations such as the World Health Organization (n.d)). Similarly, Butler (1990) in her influential book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* argues that gender is a performative identity that is socially constructed through repeated acts of performance and that gender norms are imposed upon individuals through social conditioning and cultural expectations. Gender interconnects with other social identities and categories such as age, ethnicity, race, social class, and sexual orientation and has been viewed as a critical means by which societal structures of power, privilege, and oppression are shaped (Moradi and Yoder 2011; West and Fenstermaker 1995; Yoder 2013). The operationalization of gender-related constructs has created a rich body of research.

In the volume *Gendering the Nation-State*, Abu-Laban (2014: 3) notes that the way in which the nation-state (a central organizing unit in the modern world and thus equally central in modern social science and political science, but especially the latter) is diversely encoded by gendered assumptions ultimately produce gendered outcomes. An analysis of the historical development of state sovereignty and state identities as they have developed over time indicate deeply gendered constructions that have not included women in the same way it does men. In sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, states were identified with the person of the sovereign king (Nussbaum and

Glover, 1995:62). A visual representation of this early-modern form of sovereign authority was displayed in the frontispiece of perhaps one of the most famous treatises on the state in all political theory, Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, where the body of the sovereign is demonstrated as male, and moreover a male figure composed of people, all seemingly also male (Carver, 2014).

Grant (1991: 9) notes that taking men as the sole political actors and citizens, the political theory borrowed by the academic discipline of International Relations (IR) assumes a domestic/international divide based on the private/public distinction that consigns women to a space outside politics. Lascuarín Fernández and Villafuerte Valdés (2016) explain that the development of the feminist movements within social and political theory has created discussions of specifically gendered definitions of security, power, and authority, among others. Since the 1990s feminist theorists have increasingly examined the implications of gender and other forms of difference at both national and global levels, in turn exposing the ongoing tensions around regarding "women" as a unified subject and addressing differences resulting from identity/culture or from memberships in marginalized or privileged groups based on class, race, ability, heteronormativity, et cetera. The rights and freedoms that purportedly derive from the social contract as envisioned by modern theorists such as Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau are challenged by Pateman (1988) who claimed that they neglected to consider a prior sexual contract. Pateman argues however, that the sexual contract allows for the patriarchal control of men over women; its contemporary iterations are to be found in contracts concerning marriage, prostitution, and surrogate mothering.

Since the idea of state-making depends so immensely on an idealised gender order, the existence of LGBTQ+ people with a different understanding of the nation can be seriously unsettling (Berlant and Freeman, 1992). Efforts made by LGBTQ+ people to either enter areas of public life from which they have before been excluded or to really reshape national politics to better include their interests, have been consistently rejected by various countries. Governments regulate sexuality to a degree, because they regard dissident sexualities as a threat to social cohesion. The creation of national identities based on the idea of a safe or civilized, space "inside" depends on the construction of an "outside" whose identity often appears strange or threatening (Tickner, 2010; 55). LGBTQ individuals are often left in a state of "otherness", as they fall outside the realm of what is considered "normal" or "good".

Hildebrandt (2014) believes that one of the major obstacles to the process of LGBTQ+ rights advancement is the resistance of certain states to decriminalizing same-sex acts and the emergence of political homophobia as a transnational phenomenon that allies governing elites with nationalist and/or religious movements (Weiss and Bosia, 2013). The very mechanisms of border passage, for example are gendered, according to Currah and Mulqueen (2011). In the majority of countries, it is required of one to state their gender (male or female) on any official form. Moreover, LGBTQ+ people are restricted in their ability to travel and live freely based on the borders that surround them. Those unlucky enough to be born into a nation in which homosexuality is criminalized exist in a state of “placelessness” or “otherness”, as their very existence is not allowed (A Pinto, 2019). Until recently states have been unable to recognize the existence of persons whose gender identity does not conform to a binary choice. According to Human Rights Watch (2018), although only implemented domestically, bureaucratic systems have forced LGBTQ+ people into this place of “otherness”. Today, global society is fractured in its treatment of homosexuality, ranging from complete acceptance to wide-ranging discrimination on the basis of sexuality. This also reflects the global politics of gender.

Research that has accounted for gender often downplays the role of homophobia. As Von Schulthess (1992: 71) notes, the initial and significant study of anti-lesbian hate crime conceptualized “lesbianism as an “extension of gender” and anti-lesbian violence as an “extension of misogynistic violence”. Perry’s (2001: 11) work has subsequently been influenced by this understanding of anti-queer violence as shaped primarily by gender, as Perry conceptualizes “gay- bashing as a response to doing gender inappropriately,” making little reference to homophobia and heterosexism. By adopting an intersectional approach, the current study regards gender and sexuality as overlapping rather than competing systems of inequality, not privileging one system over the other.

### **1.2.2 Systemic Discrimination**

The Council of Europe (n.d) explains: Systemic discrimination includes the procedure, routines, and organisational culture of any organisation that, generally without intent, contribute to less favourable outcomes for minority groups than for the majority of the population, from the organisation’s policies, programmes, employment, and services. In this study, the term systemic discrimination is one of a range of types including

structural discrimination, institutional discrimination, systematic discrimination, family discrimination, religious discrimination, discrimination in the public/media, and political homophobia. LGBTQ+ individuals of all ages and in all regions of the world are faced with egregious abuses of their human rights by deeply embedded homophobic and transphobic attitudes generally combined with a lack of adequate legal protection against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender (United Nations. n.d.).

According to the The Victorian Government (n.d., 16), systems of oppression take place when structures in the manner in which society functions, such as service systems, create inequality and result in exclusion. This transpires because such structures are frequently formed by dominant groups in society and generally do not take into account how differences affect all individuals. Social identities and systems of oppression do not exist in isolation from each other. They intersect and in service contexts lead to the concurrent categorical and hierarchical classifications including but not limited to gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, colour, nationality, refugee or asylum seeker background, migration or visa status, language, religion, ability, age, mental health, or socioeconomic status.

### **1.2.3 Minority in a minority**

With more than 1.6 billion followers, Islam is the second-largest religion in the world, and renowned for its diversity of culture and ethnicity (Jaspal, 2016). With this diversity comes a multitude of intersections of peoples' multiple identities. Among these are several minority identities. An individual can identify as a racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, or gender minority. The oppression experienced because of one's minority identity can produce an environment in which it is extremely difficult for individuals to navigate their true self.

The Human Rights Campaign (n.d.) asserts that since Islam does not have a central governing body, it is not possible to state clear policies regarding issues of interest to LGBTQ+ people. Depending on generation, nationality, family upbringing, and cultural influences, Islamic individuals and institutions are spread over a wide spectrum, from welcoming and inclusive to a level of rejection that can be marked by a series of actions ranging from social sequestration to physical violence. Throughout the MENA region, LGBTQ+ individuals face oppression, marginalization, and a hostile

environment on a daily basis. Isolation, abuse, psychological terror, state-sponsored discrimination, and anal exams are regularly mentioned words describing the situation of LGBTQ+ individuals in the region (Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2018; Mesahat Foundation for Sexual and Gender Diversity, 2016).

Literature concerning the Middle East propose that various factors related either to identities such as ethnicity and religion or status such as economic or social position, age, and disability intersect either to advance or hinder the promotion of gender equality. Moreover, in certain cases where conflict and war are present inequalities deriving from the intersection of specific identities and status are exacerbated. Thus, it is important to identify and analyse the multiple levels of inequality and oppression faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in different countries of the Middle east taking into consideration that differences in identities, statuses, and living conditions lead to different experiences. Therefore, applying an intersectional approach is important in this context as it highlights marginalised groups who may otherwise be left out of development initiatives and as it provides a more multifaceted comprehension of social life and social categories. Traditional or mainstream research is restricted by its predisposition to consider marginalized or minority groups as the “other”, to homogenize experiences and to erase the intricacy and distinctiveness of the individual’s experiences by conceptualizing social relations and identities separately such as class, gender, or race in a linear or one-dimensional approach (Hill Collins, 2000).

Intersectionality as a framework recognizes the interconnectedness of socio-political categories that overlap with systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Brown et al., 2021). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) explains that the theory of intersectionality originally applied to class, gender, and race, but soon became a staple of critical race theory (CRT) and developed to explore an array of other social categories and identities, including sexuality. CRT applies the theory of intersectionality to understand certain systems of oppression that impact people who possess membership in more than one marginalized group. Critical race theorists and black feminists such as Crenshaw and Hill Collins challenged the idea that oppression experienced by middle class white women was the same as the oppression experienced by women of colour or poor women. Crenshaw and Hill Collins stated that class, gender, and race intersect

to create unique types of oppression that are overlooked when they are addressed separately (Crenshaw, 1998: 140., Hill Collins 2000: 41-48).

The term 'intersectionality' was officially coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989). However, the main ideas of intersectionality have long historic roots within and beyond the United States. Black activists and feminists, as well as Latina, post-colonial, queer, and Indigenous scholars have all created work that explores the complex factors and procedures that shape human lives (Bunjun, 2010; Hill Collins, 1990; Valdes, 1997; Van Herk, Smith, and Andrew, 2011). As the concept of intersectionality has become more widely accepted, it has been interpreted and discussed in numerous ways; for instance as a theory, methodology, paradigm, lens, or framework. This study accepts Hulko's (2009) orientation of utilising intersectionality as a lens or perspective to comprehend methodologies at a fairly narrow, microscopic level of inspecting social identity multiplicity in a way that is neither additive nor reductive.

Hankivsky, Cormier, and De Merich, (2009: 3) explain that, broadly speaking, intersectionality goes beyond single or generally favoured categories of analysis such as class, gender, race, and sex to consider coinciding interactions between diverse features of social identity like ethnicity, class, age, gender, ability, immigration status, race, indigeneity, sexuality, religion, and geography, as well as the effect of systems and processes of oppression and domination, for example ableism, racism, homophobia, and sexism.

The diversity that comes with the Middle Eastern region and the different forms of discrimination experienced because of an individual's minority identity or identities have increased the demand for a more comprehensive analysis of dynamics of systemic discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East, including the intersection of various forms of discrimination. Depending on the specific location Turkey, Iran, or Egypt, these individuals may be experiencing more discrimination and have more intersections. Not all LGBTQ+ discrimination experiences are the same and some LGBTQ+ individuals are subjected to intersecting forms of discrimination. Most academic studies concerning LGBTQ+ rights in the Middle East have focused mainly on a single-axis framework such as violence against LGBTQ+ individuals and thus have overlooked the intersecting discrimination facing minority identities in the

region. Although there is substantial literature on intersectionality to analyse LGBT rights, very little has been applied to the Middle East. Due to the lack of research concerning different intersections of systemic discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community in the Middle East, this study is motivated by the primary objective to apply an intersectional lens in an effort to recognise the ways in which different social identities produce intersecting systems of privilege or oppression, and how these systems create different or similar lived experiences within a social context. This study has the potential to highlight the various intersections of systemic discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East such, as ethnic-based violence, as well as disadvantages, obstacles, and difficulties LGBTQ+ individuals face in the matter of economic, social, cultural, political, and civil rights as a result of the intersection of ethnic, class, gender-based, sexuality, religious, and tribal discrimination both in the public and the private domain.

### **1.3. Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to examine how LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East are confronted with different intersections of systemic discrimination, and what measures are being taken to overcome discrimination

More specifically the objectives of the study are:

- To construct a clear interpretation of the main arguments of intersectionality theory which offers a focus on a multiplicity of identities that expands beyond the hetero/homo dichotomy, beyond the realm of sexual politics to challenge power relations
- To answer the research question; how are LGBTQ+ individuals faced with systemic discrimination in the Middle East
- To explore the extent of discrimination experienced by LGBTQ+ people in the Middle East by means of three-country case studies
- To determine what measures are being taken to overcome discrimination
- To propose measures to end the discrimination experienced by these communities and individuals.

### **1.4. Research methodology and limits to the study**

The focus of this thesis is on understanding and exploring how systemic discrimination affects LGBTQ+ individuals in the MENA region, and what these individuals and their

allies are doing in an attempt to overcome it. Overall, the research goal of the study is a descriptive one as it will describe the systemic discrimination confronting LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle Eastern region with a specific focus on three case studies, namely Iran, Turkey, and Egypt. The study will be conducted from an intersectional theoretical perspective with a focus on LGBTQ+ individuals in the MENA regions who are confronted by systemic discrimination in various aspects of their private and public lives. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon, both narrative descriptions and systematic methods are utilized to describe conditions, issues, services, programs, or provide information on various topics, such as the living conditions of a community or attitudes towards an issue (Kumar, 2012). Ultimately, the objective of these types of studies is to address specific questions related to the what, where, when, and how aspects of a particular investigation (Babbie, 2007: 99).

The descriptive research goal of this study will be achieved by the use of a qualitative approach. Mouton (1996: 168) explains that qualitative research can be defined as research aimed at understanding phenomena from within a specific context and setting and is ultimately focused on discovering why phenomena occur. Qualitative research can be utilised to analyse political attitudes and behaviour which are not possible to quantify or where quantification is not appropriate. This thesis adopts an ontological position as it acknowledges that reality is not purely objective (Harrison, 2001: 75-78). Intersectionality is generally accompanied by qualitative research method as the key vehicle of providing a voice and encapsulating the complexity of inequalities formulated via focus groups, narrative interviews, action research and observations (Hunting, 2014).

The current qualitative study is based on both a primary and a secondary source of information. The research will be primarily conducted by means of secondary sources of information and will include investigations of academic journal articles, media reports, publications, newspaper articles, books, documentaries, and other relevant information. However, the study will also make use of primary sources such as statements and publications by governments of Iran Turkey, and Egypt as well as official United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and other documents relevant to the concept of the systemic discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the MENA region.

Given the overt focus on these two fractions of the region, the study will follow an ideographic research strategy. It takes into consideration that the three main case studies under review, namely, Iran, Turkey, and Egypt, are different in terms of background and context. It is also important to note that this study is considered to be deductive. A deductive approach begins with theories and assesses their comparative strength in understanding and explaining empirical cases. In the current study, the researcher will start with intersectionality as a theoretical basis, and then explore the role of institutions, cultures, and context as well as individual political identities, attitudes, and behaviour.

This study will also examine the differences between the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals within three distinct contexts across the region. By applying an intersectional analysis to the political experiences of these populations, this research may highlight the ways in which different identities are associated with distinct attitudes, behaviour, and political outcomes. Intersectionality research in political science often offers deeper insights into political phenomena that were previously examined with a single-axis approach (Brown et al., 2021). Using intersectionality is beneficial in analysing the experiences of Muslim LGBTQ+ individuals who are multiply burdened as it acknowledges the facets of their lives that demonstrate various sources of disempowerment impacting the lives of the marginalized community. Brewer, Conrad, and King (2002) explain that the multilevel feature of intersectional thinking provides a breadth and complexity with which organizational scholars and equality practitioners can engage. The power of intersectionality as a framework is its potential to tap into theoretical, applied, and lived experiences.

An important limit to the study is that in terms of timeframe, this study is limited to a specific period, namely 2000-2022. This study focuses only on this date range as it would be able to efficiently examine the changes in laws and policies as well as social attitudes related to LGBTQ+ individuals and rights over a specific date frame, allowing for an analysis of progress or regression in the region. In addition, this timeframe allows the study to examine recent events and developments related to LGBTQ+ rights in the Middle East, including the emergence of LGBTQ+ movements and advocacy groups in the region. Moreover, by focusing on a specific time period such as 2000 - 2023, the study would be able to draw upon a more comprehensive and accessible

set of data sources, as data collection and reporting on LGBTQ+ issues in the Middle East have improved over the past two decades.

Additionally, this study will focus on only three countries within the Middle East namely Iran, Turkey, and Egypt. These three countries were chosen as case studies as all three have large populations which makes them important players in the region's politics, culture, and society. All three of these countries have experienced significant social and political changes over the last few decades, especially within the given timeframe that this study will focus on. Moreover, Iran, Turkey, and Egypt have had different approaches to LGBTQ+ rights, with Iran criminalizing homosexuality, Turkey being more tolerant but still facing challenges, and Egypt having a mixed record on LGBTQ+ rights. Studying these different approaches can provide insights into the factors that contribute to discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in the region. In addition, these three countries has had significant LGBTQ+ movements and activism, which have challenged discriminatory laws and practices, making them important case studies for understanding how social and political change can be driven by activism and advocacy. Overall, a case study on systemic discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East would benefit from examining these three countries, given their significance in the region and their varied approaches to LGBTQ rights.

On account of the limited period of time available to complete this study, the scope of this analysis cannot cover every aspect within the political reigns of these three countries or even the region. This study does not claim to account for anti-LGTBQ+ discrimination against all individuals in the region but offers insights into the experiences of some individual's, combined with a thematic review of available data-based evidence, and details the extent, nature, and impacts of systemic discrimination. A broader, more comprehensive study with a longer time period allowed for research, will improve the quality and depth of the study.

### **1.5. Literature Review**

Although many academics disagree over the exact time and circumstances of the emergence of intersectionality as a conceptual framework and organizing tool (Ferguson, 2012: 91), Kimberlé Crenshaw, legal scholar, is most often credited for coining the term "intersectionality" in her 1989 article *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory,*

*and antiracist politics*. Crenshaw's original idea was to create a conceptual frame that would be "sensitive enough" to account for the positionality of black women and other women of colour in civil rights movements in the United States (US). Crenshaw was of the opinion that a single-axis framework would be centred on either race or gender, thus altering, and removing the lived experiences of black women by failing to address the "multidimensionality" that underlines the marginalized subjects (Crenshaw, 1989: 139). Crenshaw explained it as the limited focus on one identity at the expense of another and argued that it "works to exclude or marginalize those who are different", and consequently, "contemporary feminist and anti-racist discourses have failed to consider intersectional identities such as women of colour" (Crenshaw, 1991: 1242-3). Crenshaw argued that one should see things in terms of their intersections in order to explain them more effectively:

*"Consider an analogy for traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happened in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination."* (Crenshaw, 1989: 149).

Crenshaw (1989) explains that identities such as race, class, gender, and other forms of discrimination or subordination can be likened to the roads, and the policies affecting those identities to the cars on the roads. Thus, an individual standing at such an intersection would be hit by traffic from both roads. For example, a black woman hit at the intersection of the roads representing 'blackness' and 'femaleness' would not be able to get help there. Neither a race nor a gender "ambulance" could come along and help her, as they would mistakenly ask which road she belonged on as if only one identity had jurisdiction over her (Gao, 2018). According to Crenshaw (1989: 149), black women occasionally experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences and sometimes they share very similar experiences with black men.

Although Crenshaw has been widely credited for creating the term intersectionality, Aguilar (2012) argues that paying attention to this scholar exclusively is nothing more than a sign of "intellectual laziness" that ranks professionalised feminism at the expense of the extreme, revolutionary struggles of women-of-colour organisations

whose operation headed Crenshaw's theorising for decades. While reconstructing the conceptual genealogy of intersectionality is beyond the scope of this study, it is nevertheless relevant to mention the works of other scholars too.

Hill Collins (1990: 225), for example, postulated that categories such as class, race, and gender should be considered systems of oppression that interlock within a matrix of domination.

In *Considerations on mainstreaming intersectionality*, Dhamoon (2010: 4-5) uses a model that distinguishes between *identities* (example gratia, a black trans-woman), the *categories of difference* (example gratia, race and gender), the *processes of differentiation* (for example racialization, gendering, and sexualization), and the *systems of domination* (for example racism, colonialism, sexism, patriarchy, heterosexism) where "each emphasises something different in our understanding of subject formation, difference, and power".

In the book *Intersectionality and LGBT Activist Politics: Multiple others in Croatia and Serbia*, Bilić and Kajinić (2016) acknowledged and wrote about intersecting discriminations and symmetrical power distributions that shape gender expressions and identifications. They intertwined intersectionality and LGBT activism in the highly complex political space of contemporary Serbia and Croatia.

Literature on intersectionality, reveals a primary focus on gender, ethnicity, and class, with an inclination for sexuality and specifically non-male/female gender identities to be removed or ignored. According to Richardson (2007), the tendency for writers to merge gender and sexuality may in a sense account for this omission. In the work of Shields (2008), for example, sexuality is tagged in some cases, while Crenshaw (1977) includes sexuality as a form of difference that could be added into analysis. There have also been some clear exceptions such as the work of Bilić and Kajinić (2016) and Rosenblum's (1994) work on queer intersectionality. Additionally, Meyer (2012) in his study *An intersectional analysis of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people's evaluations of anti-queer violence* used an intersectional framework to examine how LGBTQ+ people evaluate the severity of their violent experiences. Meyer did this by conducting 47 semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which revealed that Black and Latino/Latina respondents often perceived anti-queer violence as implying that they had negatively represented their racial communities,

whereas white respondents typically overlooked the racialized implications of their violent experiences. By adopting a feminist intersectional perspective, the current study will regard gender and sexuality as overlapping rather than competing systems of inequality, not benefiting one system over the other.

### **1.6. Terminology**

Definitions and conceptualisations of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are ongoing and fluid processes. General terminology is influenced by contemporary politics and social norms, but it is also grounded in historical and religious teachings, and, to a limited extent, in medical science (Goodall and Walters, 2020: 11). For the purpose of this study, the acronym LGBTQ+, which includes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer will be used. In some parts of this study, the researcher will refer to LGBT or LGBTQI (which includes intersex) where referencing the work of organisations/researchers that have specifically used these acronyms.

### **1.7. The structure of the study**

This study is divided into six chapters. Chapter One introduced the reader to the significance of the study and provided a literature review that contains an introduction to some of the main sources for this study. This chapter also states the research question; how are LGBTQ+ individuals faced with systemic discrimination in the Middle East as well as the aim of the study. It further provides a layout of the research methodology of this study together with the limits of the study.

Chapter Two contains a theoretical conceptualisation of the foundational concept of the study, namely intersectionality theory, in order to clarify what is presupposed by the term in this study. This will subsequently set the structure for the main object of the research in this study and form the basis of the factors analysed in the remainder of the study. While this study cannot completely encapsulate the breadth of sophisticated debates that have proliferated along the evolutionary course of intersectionality, the objective is to not only present it as an analytical and theoretical lens, but also, and possibly primarily, as a political tool to uncover the systemic discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East.

Chapter Three, Four, and Five will focus on the intersections of systemic discrimination directed towards LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran, Turkey, and Egypt, respectively.

The final chapter will present the conclusion of the study, where the findings and the previous chapters will be summarised and an answer to the research question will be formulated based on the findings in chapter 3, 4, and 5.

# Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

## Intersectionality *n*

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The intersected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, deemed as establishing interrelating and interdependent practices of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise (Oxford Dictionary)

### 2.1. Introduction

A theoretical framework is the conceptual point of departure and also the section of a study wherein a frame is provided for exploring the phenomena chosen for investigation (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:55). In an effort to provide an analytical perspective on the intersections of systemic discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East, it is necessary first and foremost to provide an account and overview of intersectional concepts and theoretical points of departure. By applying intersectionality as a methodological framework, research on LGBTQ+ individuals could be more likely to take into consideration the diversity within the identities and lived realities of these groups (Fish, 2008). This chapter contains a theoretical Chapter 2 contains a theoretical conceptualisation of the foundational concept of the thesis, namely intersectionality theory, in order to clarify what is presupposed by the term in the thesis. This will subsequently set the structure for the main object of the research in this thesis and form the basis of the factors analysed in the remainder of the project. While this thesis cannot completely encapsulate the breadth of sophisticated debates that have proliferated along the evolutionary course of intersectionality, the objective is to not only present it as an analytical and theoretical lens, but also, and possibly primarily, as a political tool to uncover the systemic discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East.

### 2.2. Conceptualization of intersectionality

This chapter contains a theoretical conceptualisation of the foundational concept of the project, namely intersectionality theory, in order to clarify what is presupposed by the term in the project. This will subsequently set the structure for the main object of the research in this project and form the basis of the factors analysed in the remainder of the project. While this project cannot completely encapsulate the breadth of

sophisticated debates that have proliferated along the evolutionary course of intersectionality, the objective is to not only present it as an analytical and theoretical lens, but also, and possibly primarily, as a political tool to uncover the systemic discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East.

Originating from discontentment with treatments of “women” as a homogenous group, intersectionality evolved into a theoretical research paradigm that attempts to comprehend the interaction of various social identities and how these interactions define societal power hierarchies. Intersectionality encourages us to embrace the complexities of group-based politics by critically observing the differences in social location among those claiming membership in groups. At the same time, intersectionality helps to make sense of the experiences of people who find themselves living at the intersections of social identities. As noted earlier, intersectionality focusses on the systems that give meaning to the categories of race, gender, class, and sexual identity, among others. In other words, at the societal level intersectionality seeks to make visible the systems of oppression that maintain power hierarchies and organize society while also providing a means to theorize experience at the individual level (Smooth, 2013: 11).

In the words of Crenshaw (1989): *“Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things”*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Crenshaw (1989,1994), who is credited with developing the concept of intersectionality, used the metaphor of intersecting roads to describe and clarify the ways in which gender and racial discrimination intensify each other. Crenshaw maintained that a single-axis framework explored a focus on either race or sex and consequently failed to take into consideration how marginalized women are vulnerable to both fields of discrimination. Hence, even a mixture of studies about women and studies about race frequently erased the experiences of black women.

The idea that racism impacts minority and white women inversely uncovered the need to regard women as a heterogeneous group to consider the power relations between advantaged and disadvantaged members of this group (Severs, Celis, and Erzeel,

2016: 2). King (1988: 47) explains that the added understanding that women of colour are discriminated against as 'women of colour', and not only as 'women' or 'people of colour', questioned additional methods to analysing inequality which maintained that each system of domination has an independent impact on individuals' status. For this reason, intersectionality is utilised to explain how systems of domination interact and impact individuals' identity and subject formations in ways that go beyond the sheer simultaneity of systems of domination. Consequently, intersectional approaches (McCall 2005; Zinn and Dill 1996) propose that efforts to amend social inequality should account for the multiple and simultaneous effects of systems of oppression, taking into consideration the experiences of individuals who are oppressed along multiple axes of inequality.

Intersectional theory maintains that social phenomena are often best understood by investigating the overlap of institutional power structures like class, gender, race, and sexuality (Choo and Ferree 2010; Hill Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991). Hooks (2000) supports this explanation by stating that the theory of intersectionality investigates how structures of oppression based on separate social categories such as class, gender, race, and religion interrelate to create multifaceted types of inequality in society. Approaches that take only one system of oppression into account often offer homogenized and distorted views of marginalized groups, progressing the interests of more privileged individuals (King, 1998; Zinn and Dill, 1996). For example, a large part of intersectional theory has critiqued race-only or gender-only frameworks that might enhance the impacts of one system of oppression, while at the same time supporting other power structures (Bettie, 2003; Cohen, 1999; Ward, 2008). Intersectional approaches contend that no social group is homogenous. Merely knowing that a woman lives in a sexist society is insufficient information to describe the complexity of her daily social interactions. Diverse life experiences such as stereotyping, silencing, and marginalization cannot be comprehended by mere categorical analysis based solely upon gender. It is also crucial to take into consideration factors like ethnicity class, sexual orientation, religion, and race of the woman in question in order to explain said experiences accurately, particularly when individuals can experience disadvantage and privilege simultaneously through the combined statuses of gender, race, and class.

While intersectionality is acclaimed as the most persistent influence of black feminism on social theory in the last quarter century (Cooper, 2015; McCall, 2005), it has become so widely held that there does not seem to be an agreement on what it exactly is and how an intersectional analysis should be done (Davis, 2008; Parent, DeBlaere, and Moradi, 2013). Although black feminist theory continues to be an important theoretical home for the study of intersectionality, scholars have advocated for more contemporary discussion of intersectionality which moves away from thinking of intersectionality as only a framework that explains the experiences of women of colour to thinking in terms of how intersectionality offers stronger understandings of power differentials that occur among various groups in society (Hancock, 2007).

According to Brown et al. (2021), intersectionality is, at its heart, a study of relative power. For this reason, political scientists have employed this approach as both theory and method to analyse political behaviour and the state's interaction with social groups as citizens as well as non-citizens. Lyke (2010: 50) explains that fundamentally, intersectionality can be regarded as a theoretical and methodological tool to analyse how historically certain types of power differentials and/or constraining normativities, based on, institutionally and/or structurally constructed sociocultural categorizations like ethnicity, gender, age/generation, class, dis/ability, sexuality, nationality, et cetera, interrelate, and by doing so produce different types of societal inequalities and unjust social relations. As a concept, theory, method, and analytical tool, intersectionality shines a light on how power structures around social differences arise and interact (Lykke, 2010; Cho et al., 2013; Buckingham and Le Masson, 2017).

The general aim of intersectional analysis' is to explore intersecting patterns amongst various structures of power and how individuals are simultaneously positioned and position themselves in multiple categories such as class, gender, and race (Phoenix, 2011; Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006). Yuval Davis (2006a: 201) supports this statement by claiming that one of intersectionality's main goals is to socially include previously ignored and excluded populations, and that it is applicable to any group of people, advantaged as well as disadvantaged. It is generally agreed that intersections create both advantages and disadvantages or oppression and opportunity (Zinn and Dill, 1996: 321-331). Shields (2008: 302) explains that being on the advantaged side means more than just avoidance of disadvantage or oppression; it opens up access to opportunities, status, and rewards unavailable to other intersections. An

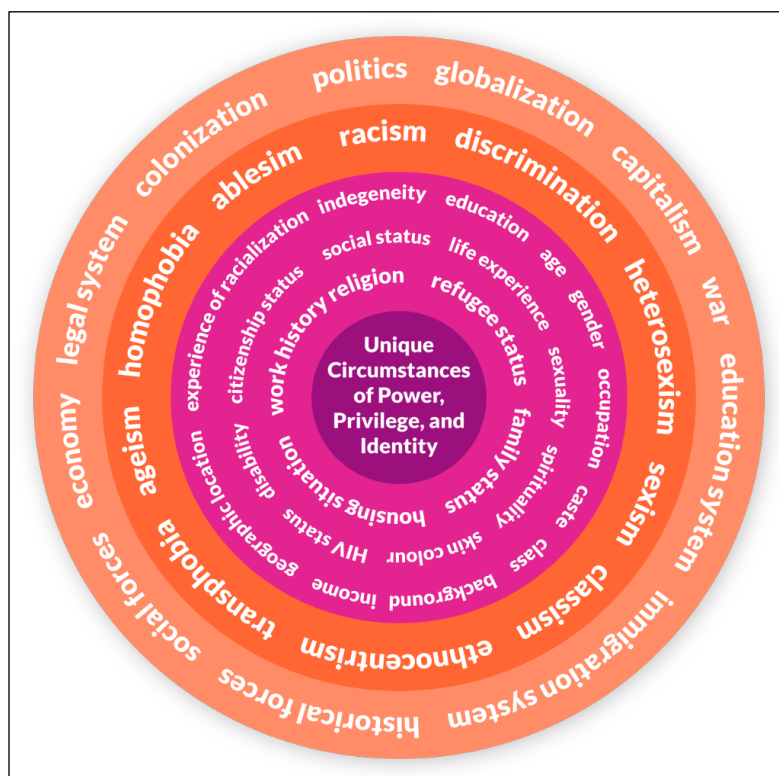
intersectional position could be disadvantaged relative to a certain group but advantaged relative to other. A white lesbian may be disadvantaged as a result of divergence from the heterosexual norm and standard, but relative to other lesbians she enjoys racial privilege.

### 2.3. Theorizing and measuring intersectionality

If a more comprehensive view of intersectionality as a theoretical concept and its importance in understanding the Middle East as well as the status of LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran, Turkey, and Egypt, is to be created, it is essential to analyse various aspects of how LGBTQ+ individuals throughout the Middle East face oppression, marginalization, and a hostile environment on a daily basis.

#### 2.3.1 Analogies of intersectionality.

Numerous analogies have been created to explain the essence of intersectionality. One such analogy was proposed by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, which depicted intersectionality in a wheel diagram encapsulating some of the multi-level dimensions of experience that shape social exclusion, from individual identity and circumstances to macro-forces (see **Figure 1**).



**Figure 1:** Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (2009: 5).

Hankivsky's (2014: 2) definition of intersectionality as a theory resonates with the illustration in **Figure 1** as he notes that intersectionality fosters a comprehension of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations such as class, race/ethnicity, age, sexuality, gender, disability/ability, religion, indigeneity, geography, and migration status. These interactions, according to Hanvisky (2014) take place within a context of related systems of power like laws, state governments and other political and economic unions, media, policies, and religious institutions. Via such processes, interdependent types of privilege and oppression shaped by ableism, colonialism, racism, imperialism, patriarchy, and homophobia are created.

In addition, Hill Collins (1995, cited in Hulko, 2009: 47), a prominent black feminist, expanded on the term to distinguish between intersectionality and interlocking oppressions: *"First, the notion of interlocking oppressions refers to the macro level connections linking systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender. This is the model describing the social structures that create social positions. Second, the notion of intersectionality describes micro level processes—namely, how each individual and group occupies a social position with interlocking structures of oppression described by the metaphor of intersectionality. Together they shape oppression"*.

Moreover, Romero (2017) uses the metaphor of a Rubik's cube, which has six faces, each covered by nine stickers to conceptualise the various intersections. This visual of six solid colours, white, red, blue, orange, green, and yellow, arranged in different combinations in which each face turns independently to mix up the colours, can be used to conceptualise the rotating mix of identities and shifting systems of domination which result in certain social identities being more prominent than others at a given time and place. It is noted in Romero's (2017) work that a Rubik's cube does not depict the variability of systems of domination, but it could be useful in visualizing various layers of domination and intersection of system of oppression.

Dhamoon (2011: 232) is of the opinion that no concept can completely capture all the complexities of irreducible types of difference. Therefore, she notes, there does not need to be an individual, universally agreed concept as such a belief would permit undisputed constructs to develop in certain geopolitical contexts. In addition, as theories develop it is vital to be specific about the critical capacity of the constructs chosen and to be open to different terms. In an attempt to move beyond a single

definition of intersectionality, Dhamoon (2011: 232) introduces the term *intersectional-type approaches* which indicates the duplicity often found within feminist work, while at the same time offering a recognizable framework. Four facets of socio-political life have been and continue to be studied within these *intersectional-type approaches*:

- 1) identities of individuals or social groups that are considered different, such as “a Muslim woman” or “black women”;
- 2) categories of difference like gender and race;
- 3) systems of domination such as racism, colonialism, patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia; and
- 4) processes of subject formation like gendering, racialization, and sexualization.

Dhamoon notes that in some ways these four facets of analysis are different, and in other ways they fuse with one another, or a mixture exists but altogether they are consistent with intersectional type of analysis. Each of these four facets “emphasizes something different in our understanding of subject formation, difference, and power, and thus it cannot be assumed that they are doing the same analytic work” (Dhamoon, 2011, 233). Dhamoon’s (2011) identities and categories of difference can be viewed as similar to Hill Collin’s (1995, cited in Hulko, 2009: 47) micro-level processes and therefore similar to intersectionality. The processes of differentiation and the systems of domination correlate with macro-level processes, and thus with the notion of interlocking oppressions.

Dennissen, Benschop, and van den Brink (2020: 223) are of the opinion that in order for an intersectional methodology to be considered a “proper” one, it should be able to take into consideration the “methodological murkiness” (Nash, 2008: 5) and the “complexity that arises when the subject of analysis expands to include multiple ... categories of analysis” (McCall, 2005: 1772). McCall (2005: 1773) addresses these methodological challenges by introducing three approaches to study intersectionality. Firstly, *anticategorical complexity* concentrates on the deconstruction of categorical divisions, which allows for analyses of “... individual social locations that may be unique and the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories” (Jones, 2009: 290).

Secondly, *intracategorical studies* or categorical approaches focus on the unique experiences of those at specific socio-demographic intersections (McCall, 2005:

1775). Studies such as these may develop and apply intracategorical discrimination measures particular to certain intersections such as measures of microaggressions faced by LGBTQ+ people of colour (Balsam et al.,2011) or Black women (Lewis and Neville, 2015). Categories are used to define the subjects of analysis and to describe the “broader structural dynamics” that are present in the subject’s life (McCall,2005: 1780).

The final group of studies examine *intercategorical complexity*, also called the categorical approach (McCall, 2005: 1784), measure discrimination and its impacts across a range of inter-sections. Intracategorical measures such as those described above are inappropriate for intercategorical studies as they are only applicable to specific intersections by design. For example, by definition non-Black women and Black men do not experience anti-Black-woman microaggressions; items explicitly measuring this construct from Black female positionality would not be administrable to other intersections, nor include micro-aggressions specific to those intersections. It is important to note that some researchers such as Yuval-Davis (2011: 7) insists on complementing the inter-categorical approach with an intra-categorical approach (example gratia, not all heterosexual men are privileged and not all lesbians are oppressed). This nuance between intracategorical and intercategorical complexity is where the analysis of the current study is situated. This study recognises both the micro experiences of intersecting phenomena and the macro processes that impact their intersection.

### **2.3.2. Forms of intersectionality**

Crenshaw (1991) distinguishes between structural intersectionality and political intersectionality. *Structural intersectionality* is focused on how the experiences of people within a certain identity category are qualitatively different from each other depending on their other intersecting identities (Cole, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991). This type of intersectionality includes the ways in which, classism, sexism, and racism interlink and oppress black women while shaping their experiences in several fields (Pedulla, 2014). Crenshaw (1991) offers an operational definition of structural intersectionality via field-based research and analysed the experiences and resilience of battered women taking shelter in Los Angeles, America. A key finding of her research involved how non-white women faced the issues of racism, poverty, unemployment, gender, and violence. In these circumstances, the women of colour

were found to be vulnerable since they failed to meet the eligibility requirements for permanent resident status in the United States (Crenshaw, 1991). The reason behind such eligibility requirements directly aligns with systemic barriers in the policies of immigration law and language (Hill Collins, 2000, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991; Yuval-Davis, 2006b;). Chaulagain and Pathak (2021: 152) argue that these barriers, based on politics, power, and practices, increase the domination patterns that overtly intersect women's domestic violence experience. Thus, structural intersectionality pays attention to people's individual experiences at the intersections of multiple identities (Dennissen, Benschop, and van den Brink, 2020: 220). Of importance here is that both positive and negative identity categories contribute to structural intersectionality. A person can be advantaged by a social category that enables socio political or economic empowerment, while simultaneously being disadvantaged by belonging to other social categories that are sources of subordination (Boogaard and Roggeband, 2010: 56).

Conversely, *political intersectionality* addresses the ways in which social identity groups organize themselves between two or more political agendas or movements. Crenshaw notes that in political intersectionality, women of colour are situated in at least two subordination dimensions, namely, women and racialized groups. Crenshaw's study uncovered how domestic violence has been purposely politicized, revealing the working strategies of social institutions (Crenshaw, 1991). Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013: 800) note that the idea of political intersectionality suggests a two-fold interest for resisting the systemic forces that extensively form the differential life chances of intersectionality's subjects and for reshaping modes of resistance beyond allegedly universal, single-axis approaches. Political intersectionality offers a practical aspect to the insights of structural intersectionality by providing a framework for contesting power and thereby linking theory to existent and emergent social and political struggles.

In addition, the The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) (2004: 5) is of the opinion that researchers who use intersectionality, should value a "bottom-up" approach to research. This means that the objective of the analysis should be to expose how practices and policies shape the lives of those affected, as compared to the lives of those not subject to similar influences. An example of this would be that intersectional analysis would not be completed when the finding has been produced

that women are disproportionately poor in a given region, but would explore which groups of women are the poorest, which policies and structures add to their poverty, how the historical and political circumstances interject, and whether development projects and policy initiatives are addressing the particular problems faced by various groups of women.

### **2.3.3. A work-in-progress**

As a theory and methodology, intersectionality is not bound to any geographical location or political methods within a specific nation-state focusing only on the gender issues. As a critical theory, intersectionality has facilitated numerous analyses related to social and political issues. Carbado (2013) highlights the notion that these analyses consider both Western and non-Western contexts. They also consider various categories of difference, such as ethnicity, caste, language, religion, gender, and more. These categories are often defined and enforced by those in positions of power.

According to Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson, (2013: 304), it is important to pay attention to the movement of intersectionality in order to clearly comprehend that the theory is never done, nor exhausted by its previous articulations or movements. It is always an analysis-in-progress. In other words, there is possibly always another set of concerns to which the theory can be directed other places to which the theory might be moved, and other systems of power it can be deployed to examine. This is why Crenshaw (1989) described her intervention in *Demarginalizing the Intersection* as “provisional,” “one way” to tackle the problem of intersectionality. Interpreting intersectionality as a work-in-progress implies that it makes little sense to structure the notion as a contained entity. Neither is it beneficial to incarnate the notion as its own agent complete with particular concerns and undertakings that reveal its capacity and fundamental orientation. Understanding intersectionality as a work-in-progress induces researchers to see the theory in places in which it is already doing work and to imagine other kinds of work that agents might utilise intersectionality to perform.

In Cho’s (2013) essay, *Post-Intersectionality: The Curious Reception of Intersectionality in Legal Scholarship*, she challenges the postulation that just because intersectionality has not yet joined a certain field, it cannot join that field productively. Cho opposes the argument that because intersectionality was first introduced in an

article on race and gender issues (in particular, the Black female experience) it cannot engage experiences outside of that subjectivity. Cho disputes this argument both narratively by claiming that it is not true that intersectionality has concentrated exclusively on Black women's experiences, as well as theoretically by contending that there is no reason intersectionality cannot engage other categories of power and experience such as sexuality. To quote Cho: "Race and gender intersectionality merely provided a jumping off point to illustrate the larger point of how identity categories constitute and require political coalitions". To put it in another way, intersectionality is not fixed to any particular social position. "The theory can and does move" (Carbado, et al., 2013: 306).

#### **2.4. Gender, identity, and Intersectionality**

Davis and Zarkov (2017: 315) asserts that a main concern by European feminist scholars regarding intersectionality is keeping its analysis strongly linked to questions of social inequality. A case in point is Crenshaw's 'crossroads' metaphor which has been taken up in post-structural feminist visions of intersecting differences. Although intersectionality theory has been beneficial to the analysis of an extensive array of differences as interconnected and mutually constitutive, it is still important to ask how one can study the particular facets of differences, for example, racism is different from homophobia or class relations. Yuval-Davis (2006) explains that a possible solution is to ground every intersectional analysis within the particular context and utilise the context to conclude which facets need to be investigated in order to understand social inequalities and consequences of power hierarchies.

Some authors claim intersectionality as a central aspect of feminist thinking, an aspect which has transformed the conceptualisation of gender in research (Monro and Richardson, 2010:99). Intersectionality can be used as a "method for interrogating the institutional reproduction of inequality, whether at the level of the state, the family, or of legal structures more generally" (Graham et al., 2009: 2). By using this more structural form of intersectional thinking, the researcher moves analysis away from the individualising approaches that have been criticised. Such an approach allows for the understandings of inequality, identity, and difference in the area of sexuality, an area which generally has been neglected within the field of intersectionality studies (Richardson and Monroe, 2012: 99). A focus on identities is important when utilising intersectionality to analyse the systemic discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals

in the Middle East. It is essential to identify the relation between identity and gender, as it impacts the entire spectrum of gender-specific issues in the Middle East (Singh, 2019).

According to Davis and Zarkov (2017: 316), the main notion of intersectionality as a theory of identity is that all social categories are experienced in regard to and established by other social categories. However, the authors of the *European Journal of Women's Studies* (2017) depart from the notion that intersectional analysis entails creating a complete map of all the potential identifications. Instead, they propose that it is essential to comprehend when, how, and under which circumstances certain intersections arise and become prominent, as well as to grasp what consequences such intersections have for comprehending discourses and practices of domination, exclusion, and marginalization. Rather than limiting their intersectional analysis to the 'Big Three' – gender, class, and race – they decided to focus on the particular context and investigate how certain power relations and axes of discrimination not only differ from one another, but also have different impacts.

Ashmore et al. (2004) explain identity as the social categories through which an individual claims membership as well as the personal meaning associated with those categories. As seen already, the specific definition of intersectionality differs as different researchers and their specific field utilise it, but Shields (2008: 302) defines intersectionality as “social identities that serve as organising features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalise one another”. Mutually constituting, according to Shields, means “that one category of identity, such as gender, that takes its meaning as a category in relation to another category”. The term reinforcing implies that “the formation and maintenance of identity categories is a dynamic process in which the individual is actively engaged”. For this reason, identity plays a substantial part in the very definition of intersectionality and sexual orientation is significant as it impacts the identity of various participants in the Middle Eastern region and their social life. Heterosexual individuals have an identity that conforms with the standards set by governments and decisive bodies in the region whereas LGBTQ+ individuals experience a very different identity for themselves in the Middle Eastern context.

These different identities affect the way intersectionality is shaped and explain why gender identity is considered an important variable for any analysis in the Middle Eastern context. Social identities are produced, accepted, and upheld by social arrangements (Hill Collins, 2009; Davis, 2008). For example, gender as a social construction is imbricated with ethnicity, class, race, et cetera. and therefore race is always gendered and vice versa. Intersectionality theory as explained by McCall (2005) emphasises that various truths and realities can co-exist while at the same time impacting the larger structure of power relations, which is significant to consider as there are different levels of identity reconciliation evident in the literature of LGBTQ+ identity (Al-Sayyad, 2010).

In theory, intersectionality has altered the discussion surrounding gender. Feminist theorists uncover and challenge the taken-for-granted beliefs regarding gender that surround conventional theoretical and methodological approaches to empirical research. Intersectional theory reveals that an individual's social identities strongly impact that person's beliefs about and experience of gender. Thus, feminist researchers are of the opinion that the individuals' social location as revealed in intersecting identities must be at the forefront in any investigation of gender. In particular, gender needs to be recognised in the context of power relations entrenched in social identities (Hill Collins, 1990: 2000). Rahman (2010: 951) notes that "intersectional theory directs us to researching the standpoint of those identities located at the site of intersection" as is the case of LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle Eastern region.

In addition, when critically examining the experiences of unrepresented populations it is vital to include the intersection of several grounds of identity (Crenshaw, 1991: 1241, 1245). When several grounds of identity are considered, awareness of possible intersectional subordination is needed. Intersectional subordination is more likely where an individual identifies with several disempowered groups. An example of this would be Muslim LGBTQ+ individuals who do not fit into the single category of either "just Muslim" or "just LGBTQ+", making them vulnerable to oppression on the grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression as well as instantaneously falling outside of the traditional religious protections (such as those provided by dogmatic views on Islam). This means that Muslim LGBTQ+ individuals struggle against the problems of intersectionality as they are both religious and sexual

orientation minorities, with neither community offering sufficient legal protection for their specific needs.

## **2.5. Intersectionality in the Middle East**

According to the United Nations' Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia ESCWA (2017) report, almost two thirds of the Arab population are either poor or vulnerable to poverty and more than four in ten households are constantly affected by poverty in the region. Poverty remains a crucial barrier to education adding to the instability and conflict in the region and resulting in stagnant or worsening enrolment rates. These overall socio-economic issues and political factors such as on-going conflicts and movement of people, the governance and institutional deficits, and the unstable economic growth shape the Arab region, which intensify social norms and power structures, have led to the rise of intersecting gender-based inequalities in a region that is home to complex identities. As noted earlier, the LGBTQ+ community in the Middle East lacks protection from state and private persecution. However, it is important to note that facing violence is not unique to the LGBT community. In the Middle East, activists, dissident, and sometimes even ordinary civilians are subject to violence, dictatorship, and political suppression as well as censorship, often with Western support and even participation (El Shafei, 2016).

Recognising and analysing intersecting discriminations and asymmetrical power distributions that impact the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, is particularly relevant in a region where most people believe that homosexuality should be rejected (97% in Jordan, 95% in Egypt and 80% in Lebanon) (Dimock, 2019). Public debates depict Arab citizens as universally opposed to homosexuality (Kligerman, 2007). Prominent voices even imply that being a religious Arab citizen and supporting homosexuality is a contradiction in terms (Bereket and Adam, 2008; Scull and Mousa, 2017). OutRight.org<sup>1</sup> 2018 explains that the MENA region is often described as the worst place on earth to be LGBTQ+ as the area has some of the world's harshest anti-LGBTQ+ and pro-morality laws. Existing quantitative studies show that homosexuality is opposed more strongly in Muslim-majority countries than in other countries (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009; Smith et al., 2014) and that Muslims on average oppose

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<sup>1</sup> Outright International works with partners around the world in an attempt to strengthen the capabilities of the LGBTQ+ human rights movement by documenting and amplifying human rights violations as well as advocate for inclusion and equality.

homosexuality more than non-Muslims do (Hooghe et al., 2010; Jäckle and Wenzelburger, 2015).

In the MENA region, gay men and transgender women have described torture and ill-treatment at the hands of police officers and members of security forces in the region, such as by being beaten with electric cables and raped with an iron rod in Lebanon (Human Rights Watch., 2016). In Egypt, police “took off their belts and put them around our necks and made us walk like dogs” (Human Rights Watch., 2017), while in Kuwait people reported being raped by police and then thrown out of a moving police car into the streets (Human Rights Watch., 2012: 26), and in Iraq being hung upside down from a hook in the ceiling (Human Rights Watch., 2009: 29-30).

Throughout the region LGBTQ+ individuals also face the threat of violence from ordinary civilians. Human Rights Watch has documented such violence in Kuwait, where men sexually assault transgender women with impunity (Human Rights Watch., 2012: 40-41), in Morocco, where people perceived to be gay or transgender have been subject to mob violence (Human Rights Watch., 2015), and in Iraq, where gay men reported severe beatings and death threats at the hands of their own family members (Human Rights Watch., 2009: 43-46). TransHomos<sup>2</sup> (2016) is of the opinion that in all such cases, perpetrators know that anti-LGBT laws will likely dissuade their victims from seeking recourse.

In recent times, the rainbow flag, which is known around the world to represent pride for LGBTQ+ individuals, has been the centre of controversy in two Gulf states. On 14 June 2022, a Saudi Arabian state-owned television station called Al Ekhbariya, broadcasted a report on rainbow-coloured toys and their alleged connection to homosexuality. In the broadcast, a Ministry of commerce official was interviewed in a children’s toy store in Riyadh, where he claimed that the toys “promote homosexuality in an indirect way”. The report stated: “Gay people flood global markets with toys carrying their colours and slogans”. Soon thereafter, a similar development occurred in Kuwait after the Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce and Industry published an image of the rainbow flag adding that it “violates morals”. The Ministry appealed to the public to report any use of the flag. These events all coincided with Pride month which is

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<sup>2</sup> TransHomos is an Algerian organisation that advocates for the rights of LGBTQ+ communities in Algeria.

celebrated by the LGBTQ+ community around the world during June every year (Lucente, 2022).

To quote Brah and Phoenix (2004: 75), “the need for understanding complexities posed by intersections of various axes of differentiation is as pressing today as it has always been”. Intersectionality serves as a voice that not only draws attention to problems and points the finger at (institutionalised) privileges, exclusionary practices, and agreements that limit possibilities, but also clarifies agency and acclaims approaches of coping and survival (Bilić and Kajinić, 2016: 13). As applied in this study, intersectionality aims to highlight systemic disparities in social location that can account for marginalisation and erasure of LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran, Turkey, and Egypt.

Habib’s (2010) collection contains evidence on the experiences of those who identify as homosexual within some contemporary Muslim cultures (Malaysia, Pakistan, Iraq, Singaporean Malay Muslims). This evidence illustrates that there is a contemporary discourse of cultural opposition between sexual diversity and Islam, with the former being identified with the west. This study accepts the notion that an intersectional approach refers to a common analytical crux for example, that diverse social categories mutually constitute one another as general forms of types of social differentiation or systems of oppression (Hill Collins, 1998; de los Reyes and Mulinari, 2005; Mellström, 2003) together with producing complex identities where diverse identifications are continuously mutually constitutive (Buitelaar, 2006; Staunæs, 2003). A review of the literature of LGBTQ+ rights in the Middle East demonstrates that intersectionality has not been sufficiently used to explore discrimination and systems of inequality in relation to the LGBTQ+ community in the Middle East.

A significant amount of research on intersectionality concentrates primarily on African American women and other women of colour (Alexander Floyd, 2012; Banerjee and Connell, 2018; Bhabha et al., 1992; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981; Ferber, 1998; Harris, 1990; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016; Wacquant, 1997; Williams, 1991). It seems that the research on intersectionality has not sufficiently addressed the lives of Middle Eastern LGBTQ+ individuals yet. LGBTQ+ individuals are often misrepresented by select states from the region at international forums such as the United Nations General Assembly and Human Right Council. In a report on LGBTQ Progress in the

Middle East and North Africa, the organisation OutRight states: “Using arguments based on religious and cultural values, certain states undermine the rights of LGBTQ people, and project Arabic-speaking and Muslim-majority states as a homogenous entity with a uniform view on LGBTQ people” (OutRight., 2018). All LGBTQ+ members are assumed to be faced with the same systemic discrimination and to have the same human rights needs and experiences. For this reason, intersections of multiple systems of oppression are not recognised and the interests of some are favoured while the experiences of others are marginalised. To address this gap, the current study uses an intersectional framework that notes that the LGBTQ+ community in the Middle East is not a singular entity, and even though conditions differ based on country and gender, and from individual to individual, as a whole, the LGBTQ community in the region has not been granted the same “freedoms” linked to Western ideals of homosexual progress, such as open displays of romantic affection, gay marriage, and other superficial indications of acceptance in society. Ahmady (2018: 2) explains that even the ostensibly inclusive term ‘LGBTQ+’ is restrictive because the term is seen in the Middle East as a Western ideology that reflects history created in the West, filled with struggles accomplishments, experiences, and identities exclusive to Western societies, and not automatically relevant to societies in the Middle East.

Decades have passed since the first approaches to gender were created. This study focuses on the issues of gender roles in the Middle East and the opportunities that are on the horizon for greater changes in the region. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to open a great window to new horizons to intersectionality research and to take into consideration regional variables that would not necessarily be a factor in other regions. As the Middle East is a unique region with complex norms and patriarchal social practices that cannot merely be employed by the basic intersectional framework to study the region’s human rights issues, nor apprehend the new opportunities in the region, building on previous research on the intersection of identity this study will demonstrate that by including different variables such as economic inequality, religion, racial or ethnic hierarchy, caste domination, and differences based on sexual orientation could impact the region as the nexus of identity, power, and gender.

It is crucial to build on the contribution of scholars by utilising intersectionality as a tool for the analysis of power relations, the importance of identity categories and the invisibility of the experiences of the marginalised. This study draws on the approach

of Yuval-Davis (2015) and combines the perspective of both intracategorical and intercategorical complexity, as the analysis adopts a multi-level perspective.

## Chapter 3: Case study of Iran

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*“Abuses are perpetrated by the Iranian government, the judiciary system and by non-state actors such as schools, communities, and families. No one is held accountable for these serious violations of basic rights”*

- Outright International

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter will start with a brief introduction of the current status of lesbians, gay, and Transgender individuals in Iran; followed by the intersections of identities within Iranian society by exploring the intersections of being a woman and a lesbian in the country as well as the intersections of being a gay man in Iran; after which the chapter will focus on the intersecting discrimination in Iran such as the homophobic rhetoric of the government / state- sponsored discrimination, the discrimination faced in public and/or by the media, discrimination faced within family structures, and structural discrimination. In order to use an intersectional-type approach to analyse the systematic discrimination faced by LGBT+ individuals in Iran, this chapter will refer to the first two facets of Dhamoon’s (2011: 232) four facets of socio-political life. Firstly, the study will analyse the identities of individuals or social groups that are considered different, such as a lesbian Muslim woman and gay Muslim men. Secondly, the study will explore the systems of domination such as state-sponsored discrimination, and homophobia in familial, public and media environments. Thus, structural intersectionality pays attention to people’s individual experiences at the intersections of multiple identities (Dennissen, Benschop, and van den Brink, 2020: 220). Of importance here is that both positive and negative identity categories contribute to structural intersectionality. A person can be advantaged by a social category that enables socio political, or economic empowerment, while simultaneously being disadvantaged by belonging to other social categories that are sources of subordination (Boogaard and Roggeband, 2010: 56).

As mentioned earlier in this study, Iran is one of eleven countries or entities that impose the death penalty for consensual same sex-relations (ILGA, 2019). Iran is notorious for its oppressive laws and policies against the LGBTQ+ community. Same-sex practices are penalised by incarceration, flogging, and even capital punishment,

which violates the most basic human rights of these individuals. This fundamentalist governance was introduced after the post-revolution era in 1979 when the legal system was established on Islamic jurisprudence and the creation and interpretation of the law was authorised by religious scholars (Javanheri, 2010). Homophobic rhetoric has been engrained in political discourse as powerful leaders set the tone of what is and is not tolerated in the nation. Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, state officials in Iran have constantly depicted homosexuality as a “deviant” sexual proclivity that has a corrupting effect on society. This troubling pattern has continued over the years with authorities using numerous derogatory adjectives to degrade and dehumanise homosexual individuals.

In the past Iranian authorities regularly denied the existence of homosexuality within the country. In response to a question about the execution of the two gay men in Iran in 2007 Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, claimed: “In Iran, we don’t have homosexuals like you do in [America] ... In Iran we don’t have this phenomenon ... I do not know who has told you we have it” (Daily Mail, 2007). However, recent official statements suggest that homosexuality and transgendered individuals have been acknowledged, but only as subjects of illness. In 2012, Iran’s Supreme Leader, Seyed Ali Khamenei, grouped homosexuality and incest into the same category as he warned: “If we were to presume that human desires legitimize hamjensbazi (Faggotry) then someone could also have the desire to commit incest and they should face no impediment. In principle, all impediments would then have to be removed” (Khamenei, 2012). In another speech in 2014, Khamenei said: “The promotion of same-sex marriage is a blatant example of the failure of the Western civilization in the area of ethics” (Fars News Agency, 2014). Ebrahim Raisi, current (2022) Iranian President, declared in an anti-gay tirade in 2014 (when he headed Iran’s judiciary) that same-sex relations are “nothing but savagery”. In 2021, an Iranian cleric, Ayatollah Abbas Tabrizan, claimed that the Covid-19 vaccine turned people gay. Tabrizan wrote on the messaging platform to his almost 210 000 followers: “Don’t go near those who have had the Covid vaccine. They have become homosexual” (The Guardian, 2021).

In Iran’s penal code, known as the Islamic Penal Code (2013), Articles 233 to 240 criminalise same-sex relations, with death as the legal punishment for males who are considered to be the “passive party” in the questioned sexual act or males who are non-Muslim and have engaged in same-sex sexual acts with a Muslim man. In

addition, the punishment for other men and for women who are involved in same-sex sexual intercourse, is 100 lashes. The Islamic Penal Code also stipulates that any woman who has been punished three times for engaging in such sexual activity may be sentenced to death on the fourth occasion. Acts of affection such as kissing or touching with persons of the same sex can also be punished with between 31 and 74 lashes (Iran's Islamic Penal Code, 2013). Article 147 of the IPC also states that penalties apply to children under the age of 18 as the age of criminal responsibility in Iran is nine lunar years for girls and 15 lunar years for boys. OutRight.org. (2016: 3) articulates that criminalising same-sex consensual sexual behaviour together with homophobic rhetoric of the Government, established severe stigma and prejudice against LGBTQ+ Iranians. This in turn legitimizes violence and discrimination by private individuals and state agents against individuals on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression.

In addition to criminal liability, Iranians experience various types of violence and discriminatory practices based on the actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, including abuse by police and judiciary, discrimination in the workplace, expulsion from educational institutions, domestic violence, denial of employment opportunities, bullying and abuse in schools, as well as sexual violence (custodial rape) (OutRight.org., 2016: 3). Furthermore, LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran report experiencing violence and discrimination at the hands of family members in the form of verbal abuse, beatings, rape, and sexual assault. There have also been reports of individuals facing abuse by state actors, including torture, beating and rape by police officers. A research report by 6Rang<sup>3</sup> (2020) describes a survey of 230 individuals over a 3-month period. The report revealed the realities of living in Iran as an LGBTQ+ individual. Of the people surveyed 77% reported violence including:

- 62% from immediate family
- 52% in public spaces
- 49% from friends/classmates
- 46% in education system
- 38% from extended family
- 38% face pressure for forced marriage

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<sup>3</sup> 6Rang (The Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network) is a member of ILGA and was established following the first Iranian lesbian and transgender gathering held in 2010.

- 30% sexual violence
- 24% at work
- 20% in legal system
- 19% in healthcare system.

### **3.2. Intersections of LGBTQ+ identities in Iran**

Intersectionality as a theory helps researchers to make sense of the experiences of people who find themselves living at the intersections of social identities. It does so by focussing on the systems that give meaning to the categories of race, gender, class, and sexual identity, among others. By applying an intersectional lens, this study can critically analyse how oppression manifests in societies. In Iran, people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities face widespread discrimination and violence based on their gender identity and gender expressions including their accessories, dress, cosmetics, hairstyles, and mannerisms. This is mainly the result of laws and regulations that enforce strict Islamic dress codes for both men and women and compulsory veiling (hijab) specifically for women. According to 6Rang (2017b:13), these laws enable police, and paramilitary Basij Forces<sup>4</sup> as well as other public officials to consistently intimidate, harass, assault, and arbitrarily detain individuals whose gender expressions including physical appearance are deemed “religiously offensive or inappropriate”.

As an analytical framework, concept, or methodology we can use intersectionality to expose the interconnections between identities and how those interconnections create variable experiences of discrimination and privilege. An intersectional lens offers the conceptual space to engage with the complexity of gender issues which needs to be taken into consideration if sustainable peace is to be achieved. In this chapter, the objective is to critically analyse the theoretical as well as practical/empirical manifestations and implications of understanding and applying the inner workings of intersectionality through the logics of domination. The analysis in this study is grounded in the strategies of othering and difference evident in the cases of lesbians, gay males, and transgender individuals in Iran. In particular, the study is focused on

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<sup>4</sup> The Basij Forces is a paramilitary volunteer militia which is integrated into the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Amnesty International, 2019).

the intersecting discriminations such as state-sponsored discrimination, discrimination in the public/media, discrimination in the family, and religious discrimination.

In order to use an intersectional-type approach to analyse the systematic discrimination faced by LGBT+ individuals in Iran, this chapter will refer to the first two facets of Dhamoon's (2011: 232) four facets of socio-political life. Firstly, the study will analyse the identities of individuals or social groups that are considered different, such as a lesbian Muslim woman and gay Muslim men. Secondly, the study will explore the systems of domination such as state-sponsored discrimination, and homophobia in familial, public and media environments. Thus, structural intersectionality pays attention to people's individual experiences at the intersections of multiple identities (Dennissen, Benschop, and van den Brink, 2020: 220). Of importance here is that both positive and negative identity categories contribute to structural intersectionality. A person can be advantaged by a social category that enables socio political, or economic empowerment, while simultaneously being disadvantaged by belonging to other social categories that are sources of subordination (Boogaard and Roggeband, 2010: 56).

### **3.2.1. At the intersections of being a woman and a lesbian in Iran**

It is important to note here that both positive and negative identity categories contribute to structural intersectionality, as explained in the previous section. Any woman in any country can experience being simultaneously advantaged and disadvantaged.

While the Islamic Republic penal code's punishment for sexual conduct is less harsh for lesbians than for gay men, their social and economic situation is significantly more restrictive when compared to gay men. In comparison to gay men in Iran, the situation of lesbian rights in the country is particularly complex, as they are faced with a double discrimination - firstly as women, and then as lesbians. Discrimination against lesbian women is more extreme with the intersection of gender and sexuality, which means that Iranian lesbians are highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In addition to the restrictions on their rights as women, lesbians in Iran face supplementary restrictions due to the criminalisation of same-sex conduct, together with widespread social intolerance. This double discrimination adds to the abuse they face. According to Crenshaw's (1991) notion of political intersectionality, social identity groups organize themselves between two or more political agendas or movements. In this regard,

lesbian women in Iran are situated in at least two subordinate dimensions, namely, women and homosexuals.

In the first place, then the Iranian legal system discriminates against women and girls. The law requires a more restrictive Islamic dress code for women (hijab) than for men, impedes the rights of women in personal status matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody, and prohibits women's full enjoyment of their rights in employment and participation in public affairs matters. According to a report by the Human Rights Watch (2010), the rights of women in Iran are restricted in terms of their freedom of movement and expression, and the strictly patriarchal structure permits men (fathers, brothers, and husbands) to assert direct control over women and girls. According to the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report, produced by the World Economic Forum (2020), Iran ranks among the last ten countries (148 out of 153) for gender equality, including equality in economic participation. In 2018 women's economic participation was placed at 15.9% in contrast to men at 64.1%. Furthermore, the unemployment rate for women is almost double that of men with 19.1% for women and 10.1% for men (Minority Rights Group International, 2019). Social expectations for women to marry, together with the noted lack of economic and legal independence means that lesbians are faced with the fact that their decisions are made for them by males in their family, because they are women. Lesbians have little chance or aptitude to contest or resist when the decision is made that they will marry a man. This can lead to situations where lesbians live their entire lives in marriages in which non-consensual heterosexual sexual acts are continually and regularly forced upon them (OutRight.org., 2016: 2).

The institutions of religion, family, and the state, which all conclude that women are wives and mothers and should be submissive to the males in their families, dictate the gender norms governing women in Iran. Structures and frameworks that acknowledge only women who are married and are mothers limit the capability of lesbian women (women who are single and childless) to access empowerment opportunities. Limiting the economic opportunities of women generally further intensifies their dependence on their families, which may increase their vulnerability to forced marriage and abuse, or result in being rejected by families altogether, with little protection from the discriminatory and abusive actions of public or private actors. Marriage of girls at a young age is prevalent, which means that they have no agency over their

relationships, let alone their sexual orientation (UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council. 2015: 8) There is very little room within these structures for challenging the gender norms, and lesbian orientation challenges them on many levels. By breaking traditional gender roles, lesbians in Iran directly challenge the anticipations for them to be wives and mothers within traditional bonds of heterosexual marriage (OutRight.org., 2016: 12).

It is noteworthy that many of the families of lesbians are aware of, and even incite, abuse by authorities, members of society, police, and medical professionals. Lesbians challenge gender norms to their core and the causal sequence affects the entire family. In Iran, family law has its roots in a system of male guardianship over women via the institution of marriage and laws that control the family unit. Consequently, women are faced with restrictions of their rights and limitations to their autonomy throughout the processes of marriage, divorce, child custody, et cetera. Iran's Civil Code authorises husbands as the head of the family and thus women are placed under their guardianship. In this scenario, husbands have authority over their wives in an array of matters. The Suuntaus project<sup>5</sup> (2015) noted that in their role as heads of the household, men have particular financial obligations in marriage. This includes nafage (spousal support), mahriye (dower payment) and orjat al-mesl (compensation for domestic work). In exchange for these, it is expected that women abide by the principle of tamkin, or compliance with the will of their husbands. Women are held responsible by Article 1108 of the Civil code for the duty of fulfilling their husbands' sexual needs. If she fails to abide by the principle of tamkin, a wife can lose her right to nafage (Iranian Civil Code, 1928).

One of the most common forms of violence inflicted against Iranian women is the state-sponsored measures to enforce the compulsory veil. Iranian women are required by law to cover their hair, arms, and curves in public. According to Mahtani (2020), ever since the 1979 Islamic revolution, women have been forced by the compulsory Hijab law to cover up. The Islamic Penal Code of Iran (2013) stipulates that girls and woman who fail to comply with the dress code risk being arrested, fined, lashed, and even

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<sup>5</sup> The Suuntaus Project is a funded project of the Country Information Service of the Finnish Immigration Service, the purpose of which is to identify major country information topics and to better anticipate future information needs.

imprisoned for committing haram<sup>6</sup>. Teenage girls and women in Iran who fail to cover their head and wear loose fitting outfits in public spaces can be punished with a cash fine or imprisonment under Article 638 of Iran's: Islamic Penal Code (2013).

On 14 September 2022, 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, was arrested in Tehran by morality police for what authorities described as an "improper" hijab. Amini, who was travelling with her brother, was taken to the morality headquarters for an "educational and orientation class", however two hours later, her brother discovered she was taken to a hospital. Amini died on 16 September 2022 after Iran's Police Information centre claimed she had suffered a cardiac seizure while in custody (Far, 2022). Amini's death has caused outrage and grief in Iran and across the globe. In Iran, thousands of protesters took to the streets to express their anger over issues including personal freedoms in the Islamic Republic and an economy reeling from sanctions. Women have been at the forefront of the protest chanting slogans such as "death to the dictator" while cutting their hair and burning their hijabs in public. Huge photographs of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei were also set alight suggesting a general discontent with the state as opposed to just Amini's death (Gritten and Slow, 2022). Online the hashtag *#MahsaAmini* started to trend on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, with women around the world posting videos of themselves cutting their hair in solidarity (Von Hein, 2022).

Although the debauchery law is discriminatory against all girls and women, this provision in particular has a severe bearing on lesbian women and other female-bodied individuals who do not conform to stereotypical models of femininity, and desire to display their gender through physical appearance – including accessories, cosmetics, dress, hairstyles, and mannerisms stereotypically associated with men (6Rang, 2017a:14). Such individuals may be sentenced to cash fines and imprisonment. They may also be accused of "crossdressing" and sentenced to flogging under provisions in the Islamic Penal Code that prohibit conducts deemed "religiously forbidden" (haram) or otherwise "offensive to public morals" (Iran: Islamic Penal Code, 2013: Article 638).

The Iran Wire (2015) points out that women are taught by the Iranian legal code that their testimony is worth half that of a man's and that the domestic violence a woman

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<sup>6</sup> Haram is an act which is outlawed by Islamic Law.

might suffer at the hands of her husband has no legal definition. The limited representation in Iran's politics and judiciary is not the only realm that reflects the secondary status of women, it is also reflected in their homes. By law, husbands hold primary control over domestic affairs. Several women across the country (especially in the more remote and impoverished areas) struggle with normalised patterns of coercion, physical violence, and marital rape - a crime which is at this time still unrecognized by Iranian law (Minority Rights Group International, 2019). According to Iranian law, rape is meticulously defined as non-consensual or forced penetrative sex with someone outside the traditional relations of marriage. This means that "rape" is only punishable (by death) in circumstances of non-consensual adultery, fornication, or sodomy (Islamic Penal Code, 2013: Article 22).

OutRight.org. (2016: 10) explains that the lack of impartial legislation identifying and criminalising rape independent of a heteronormative marriage relationship leaves all sexual violence victims in Iran vulnerable. If they are not able to prove they were raped, they risk being found guilty of engaging in consensual sex outside the marriage and thus subject themselves to prosecution. However, the LGBTQ+ community is arguably impacted more by the absence of such legislation, especially lesbians, as they are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and gender-based violence. In addition, women are not allowed to file for divorce without either the cooperation of their husbands or providing a legitimate reason to courts – processes that can take years. Men, on the other hand, can divorce their wives by simply filing for divorce without reason (Yong, 2010).

### **3.2.2. At the intersections of being a gay man in Iran**

As noted, lesbians in Iran are faced with a double discrimination – first, as women and then as lesbians. However, men who identify as gay in Iran face harsher consequences based merely on the fact that they are gay males. Iran's new penal code was introduced in 2013 and includes important revisions to sections on same-sex sexual acts and makes distinctions between gay males and lesbians as well as distinctions among gay males between the "top" and the "bottom" (penetrator or penetrated partner), Muslims, and non-Muslims, married and unmarried. In general, and with certain reservations, lesbians, "tops", non-married men, and Muslims are treated more lightly.

It might appear that in general and on the surface, sanctions have become more lenient; however, changes were made in the wording and categorising of sexual act which hold crucial symbolic and real consequences for the control of sexuality. In particular, under Article 234 of the Islamic Penal Code 2013, male individuals who engage in same-sex intercourse (lavat<sup>7</sup>) face different punishments varying according to whether they are the “active” or the “passive” partner and whether their actions are characterised as consensual or non-consensual. Bereket and Adam (2006: 131) note that male-male sexual relations are assumed to exemplify a gendered division between an inserter partner (active) which is considered ‘masculine’ and a receptive partner (passive) who is expected to show some aspects of the feminine gender in the way they dress, their voice, or behaviour. Amnesty International (2016) explains that if the conduct is considered consensual, the “passive” partner of same-sex anal conduct would receive the death penalty. However, the “active” partner faces a sentence to death only if he is married, or if he is not a Muslim and the “passive” partner is a Muslim. If the intercourse is considered non-consensual (lavat be onf), the “active” partner is sentenced to death, but the “passive” partner is pardoned from punishment and treated as a victim. The risk of this legal framework is that a situation could arise where willing “recipients” of anal intercourse may feel obliged, when targeted by the authorities, to characterize their consensual sexual activity as rape in order to avoid the death penalty.

In this regard, Crenshaw’s (1991) concept of *structural intersectionality* can become evident as it focuses on how the experiences of people within a certain identity category are qualitatively different from each other depending on their other intersecting identities (Cole, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991). Gay Iranian men experience discrimination differently depending on their intersecting identities such as “top”, “bottom”, “passive”, “active”, Muslim, non-Muslim, married and unmarried. These identities interlink and shape their experiences in several fields. The heteronormative ideal of the masculine/feminine pair is the dominant cultural binary through which male-male relationships have come to be widely understood. That is, one partner is expected to be masculine and insertive, and the other feminine and receptive

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<sup>7</sup> Article 223 of the Iranian Penal Code defines Lavat as ‘penetration of a man’s sex organ (penis), up to the point of circumcision, into another male person’s anus.

In their study, Karimi and Bayatrizi (2019) make the argument that males within the Iranian community also face intersecting discriminations as the hierarchy of punishment shows a gendered understanding of sexuality in the existing scriptures of religious texts, and the understanding of it reverberates with particular concerns regarding masculinity in the current social and geopolitical context in Iran. The harsher punishment against homosexual “bottoms” / “passive” partners reverberates with the need to project strong masculine Shia-Muslim national identity to the world at a time of heightened tensions with regional rivals and continued contestations with global adversaries.

Article 235 of the Islamic Penal Code 2013 defines tafkhiz as “putting a man’s sex organ (penis) between the thighs or buttocks of another male person”. Unlike *livat*, there is no distinction between the active and passive partner. Regardless of if one partner is married or if one is forced to engage in the act, both men are punished the same. If found guilty of tafkhiz, both partners would be sentenced to one hundred lashes. The only exception, however, is when the active partner is a non-Muslim and the passive partner is a Muslim, the non-Muslim active partner is sentenced to death.

By taking these two Articles into consideration, it’s evident that there is a comparably lighter penalty for female partners of homosexual acts. The wording of the penal code of Iran imply that lesbian sexual acts (*musaghegheh*) do not include penetration and the actors are not overtly divided into “active” or “passive”. Thus, by the virtue of law, lesbians do not act against their “natural” position as the passive recipient of penetration. Moreover, it’s assumed that women are in no position to austereously jeopardise public order or threaten the sanctity of family and marriage. This situation is not limited to Iran (Karimi and Bayatrizi, 2019: 10). As a result of the harsher punishments against gay men in Iran, there have in recent years been many more reports of gay men being punished in comparison to reports on lesbians being punished.

On 8 October 2013, Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps announced that they arrested a “network of homosexuals and Satanists” in the western city of Kermanshah. According to Dehghan (2013), the raid took place when almost 80 people including straight and gay Iranians came together to celebrate a birthday in the region. It was noted that at least 17 people who had make-up, tattoos, or wore rainbow bracelets

were blindfolded and taken to an unknown location. According to the accounts of some of those involved, officers stripped detainees naked and filmed them, beat them, and prepared them as if for execution. On 6 August 2014 two men, Abdullah Ghavami Chahzanjiru and Salman Ghanbari Chahzanjiri, were hanged in Southern Iran, for allegedly having engaged in consensual same-sex sexual acts (Michaelson, 2017). Amnesty International (2016) reported that on 18 July 2016 Hassan Afshar, a 17-year-old-boy, was hanged in Arak's Prison in Markazi Province after having been convicted of *lavat-e be onf* in early 2015. Even though the Office of the Head of the Judiciary promised Ashar's family that they would review the case on 15 September 2016, the execution still went ahead despite Afshar maintaining that the sexual acts were consensual. In April 2017, 30 men were arrested in a gathering in central Iran, transferred to Dastgerd Prison, and charged with sodomy by a local court (6Rang, 2017b).

In 2021, 20-year-old Ali Fazeli Mofared was beheaded in an alleged honour killing after his family found out that he was gay. Several of Mofared's male relatives took him to a rural village and executed him on May 4 (Salo, 2021). In 2022, Iran executed two gay men, Mehrdad Karimpour and Farid Mohammadi, who were convicted on charges of sodomy after they spent six years on death row. Karimpour and Mohammadi were sentenced to death for "forced sexual intercourse between two men" and hanged in a prison in the North-Western city of Maragheh. In 2021, two other men were executed on the same charges in Maragheh (ABC News. 2022).

### **3.3. Intersecting discriminations**

Intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological tool will be used in this chapter to analyse how historically certain types of power differentials and/or constraining normativities based on broadly, institutionally and/or structurally constructed sociocultural categorizations like ethnicity, gender, age/generation, class, dis/ability, sexuality, nationality, et cetera, interrelate, and by doing so produce different types of societal inequalities and unjust social relations for LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran. This chapter will highlight the intersections between various forms of discrimination faced by LGBTQ Iranians.

### **3.3.1. Homophobic rhetoric of the government / state-sponsored discrimination**

The discrepancy between LGBTQ+ rights, or lack thereof, and the unique policies that support state-funded subsidies for trans people is not a coincidence. This section will investigate how the Iranian government has disguised their political regulation of trans bodies and gatekeeping to basic rights and freedoms as a façade of rights and financial support, which is nothing more than a way to provide themselves with easier control in their system of suppression.

Iranian authorities have time and again rejected the recommendations of international human rights organizations and the UN calling on them to abolish the use of the death penalty for consensual same-sex sexual relations and to end human rights abuses against LGBTQ+ individuals. In a dramatic turn of events, for the first time, two women known to be lesbians have been sentenced in September 2022 to death in Iran, marking a new stage in the republic's persecution of LGBTQ+ individuals. (See Chapter 4.3). Ali Larijani, the Speaker of the Parliament, has justified the use of the death penalty for consensual same-sex sexual conducts, and stated that this punishment "is effective in keeping society safe from perversion" (Aftab News. 2011). In 2012, Mehrdad Bazrpash, a former Member of Parliament and a former deputy to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said: "It is a great honour for the Islamic Republic to violate the rights of homosexuals" (Fars News Agency. 2012). In an interview with The New York Times, Iran's first supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1979), justified executing LGBTQ+ individuals as necessary to "eliminate corruption", likening them to gangrene and claiming the condemned people would otherwise "contaminate others and spread".

It is important to note that, despite the above-mentioned dogmatist declarations against LGBTQ+ individuals, Khomeini has since 1986 issued a fatwa (religious decree) not just acknowledging transgender individuals, but officially favouring state subsidies for gender-confirmation surgeries (GCS) also called sex reassignment surgeries (SRSs). At the time of writing (2022), Iran has the second highest number of SRSs per year, second to Thailand (The Jerusalem Post, 2020). According to 6Rang (2014), however, existing data on the numbers of SRSs carried out in Iran are inconsistent and contradictory. In addition, the numbers are also difficult to attain, seeing that SRSs take place in various public and private institutions and include a range of inter-related but clear procedures. However, Iranian government data

indicates that approximately 4 000 SRSs are performed in Iran each year (Kyriacou, 2020). But Shadi Amin, an Iranian-born activist, claims that the number is actually much higher (Hodge, 2020).

Generally, the legalisation of sex change operations would be seen as a method of protecting individuals' right to convey their sexual identity. However, taking into account Iran's criminalisation of same-sex relations and the proclamations by state officials that certain sexual identities are seen as a medical issue, it is evident that the State not only privileges relations and attraction amongst men and women but violates a range of human rights by subjecting lesbian women and gay men to a variety of measures ranging from therapeutic treatments to SRSs. Prominent LGBTQ+ activists claim that these procedures are part of a sinister programme created to eradicate queer people (Hodge, 2020). 6Rang (2014 (b): 53) notes that for the surgery to take place individuals are allegedly compelled to undergo between eight and twelve psychotherapy session, together with hormonal and chromosomal tests, with a view to getting a medical statement that diagnosis them with "Gender Identity Disorder". According to Bahreini (2008: 20-22), these treatments often involve electroshock treatment and administration of antipsychotic medications (neuroleptics), which can have mind-altering side effects. If individuals prove unable to be "cured" of his or her sexual orientation, the individual will be approved for SRS. However, Terman (2014) notes that Khomeini's fatwa offered little guidance on the mechanisms and procedures required to carry it out. Reports indicate that surgeries are done in a hurry and often are not fully completed. This alleged lack of care in the performance of these surgeries has reportedly led to post-operation complications such as improper sizing of sexual organs, paralysis, and infectious diseases (IQO/HA/IHRC, 2013: 16).

If this is the case, these surgeries are not performed in accordance with Iran's international legal obligations under the right to health in relation to standards of quality and professionalism (Bevilacqua, Harper, and Kent, 2014: 14). A report by 6Rang (2017b) noted that the number of private as well as semi-governmental psychological and psychiatric clinics allegedly participating in "corrective" treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals continued to grow, and that there had been an increased use in such clinics of electric shock therapy to the hands and genitals of LGBQ+ individuals, prescription of psychoactive medication, hypnosis, and coercive masturbation to pictures of the opposite sex. The report further asserts that many of these practices may comprise of

other forms treatment regarded as cruel, degrading, or inhuman under international law. Consequently, many LGBTQ+ individuals flee the country, generally to Turkey as they do not need a visa. From there they typically apply for asylum in a third country in Europe or North America. However, they are sometimes required to wait for years, and in the process, they may be settled in socially conservative provincial cities, where prejudice and discriminations are common (Hamedani, 2014).

Fountain-Stokes (2007: 671-672) explains that these LGBTQ+ Iranians carry a double burden, first due to their existence as a refugee and then to their existence as a LGBTQ+ individual. These double burdens impact their experience of belonging or fitting with an acceptable social group and marginalises them by severely distancing LGBTQ+ individuals from traditional supports systems and resources. For many of these Iranian LGBTQ+ members, this marginalisation adds an additional layer to the already challenging barriers and daunting process of seeking asylum. By this account, asylum seekers who are part of the LGBTQ+ community are faced with barriers that other asylums seekers do not encounter.

In addition, to forced SRS's, the Iranian government has also taken visible steps to politically regulate the LGBT community. Since 2007 there have been numerous confirmed reports of state-led raids at private functions, which had resulted in mass arrest and detention of those suspected to be homosexual. It is reported that detainees have been beaten and exposed to other cruel, degrading, or inhuman treatments or punishments including anal examinations by medical doctors without consent (6Rang, 2014b: 39). Many LGBTQ+ Iranians feel obligated to hide their sexual identity as the government has made extensive efforts to create semi-official and vigilante organisations mandated to maintain "public morality". Some of these government regulations concerning homosexuality and public morality was established in 2007 and since then, Iran's security forces, including the police and paramilitary known as the Militia, have made use of discrimination laws to arrest, harass, and detain people believed to be homosexuals. While some of the incidents take place in parks and cafés, there are cases where the security forces have raided homes and monitored Internet sites for the purpose of detaining people they suspected of gender and sexual non-conformity.

Moreover, in September 2018, Rezvaneh Mohammadi, a gender-equality activist, was arrested by authorities in Mohammadi and held in solitary confinement for a number of weeks, where she was pressured with threats of rape, to confess to receiving money to overthrow the government. On 13 December 2019, Rezvaneh Mohammadi was charged with “collusion against national security by seeking to normalise homosexual relations” and sentenced by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Iran to five years of imprisonment. According to 6Rang, this was the first time that an activist faced this type of accusation in Iran (The Jerusalem Post, 2019).

According to USSD (2019: 50), the Iranian government has censored all materials regarding the status of conduct of the LGBTQ+ community. In particular, the authorities blocked websites or content within sites that conversed about LGBTQ+ issues, including the censorships of Wikipedia pages that defined LGBTQ+ and other related topics. Article 15(B) of the Cyber Crime Act sets out a penalty of between 91 days and one year of imprisonment and a fine of between 5 million and 20 million Rials for anyone who makes use of online and digital communication, including social media, blogs, and websites, to instigate the public to “participate in crimes against chastity ... or acts of sexual perversion” (Iranian Cyber Police n.d.). A report by Bishop, et al., (2021) which used the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONIs) technology to examine LGBTQ+ website censorship in six countries between 1 June 2016 and 31 July 2020, Iran had the highest number of blocked LGBTQ+ URLs. A total of 74 unique LGBTQ+ URLs were detected as blocked. In addition, Iran has the second highest prevalence of blocking Autonomous System (AS) networks, with LGBTQ+ websites blocked on 84 AS networks.

Human Rights Watch (2015b) asserts that Iran’s cyber police, which is locally known as FATA, monitor online activity and arrest individuals who they suspect of using social media either to meet members of the same sex or promote same sex relationships. On 4 February 2014, the Iranian cyber police confirmed the arrest of a person who was allegedly responsible for posting gay-related material online. News reports indicated that the suspect was identified via online surveillance as well as different techniques and methods (Iranian Students’ News Agency, 2014). Additionally, on 23 September 2014, Iranian authorities verified the arrest of a gay man suspected of setting up romantic dates on Facebook. The head of East Azerbaijan Cyberspace Police, Mohammad Ghasemlou, told media that the surveillance of the gay man

started after the Cyber Police forces detected the Facebook profile of a man who had posted his mobile phone number online asking other men to call him to have “immoral relations” (OutRight.org, 2016: 41).

### **3.3.2. Discrimination faced in public/media**

As noted earlier in this chapter, any departure from Iran’s system of sexual classification is labelled under the category of mental and behavioural disorders and the state policies which criminalise any conduct regarded as homosexual acts, create spaces where LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran are abused, extorted, and blackmailed. These state policies, together with social norms that stigmatise LGBTQ+ individuals, bring about a situation where public information regarding or specifically relevant to minority sexual identities and gender identities is largely inaccessible. As noted earlier, when such orientations and identities are discussed publicly, it is usually in the form of derogatory speech that contributes to misconceptions and bigotry. A report by ACCORD (2018) claims that the level of social acceptance of homosexuality in Iranian society is low. The general social attitude towards LGBTQ+ individuals remains “don’t ask, don’t tell”. Karimi and Bayatrizi (2019: 8) support this statement by noting that Article 241 of the Islamic Penal Code (2013) is similar to a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy as it bans authorities from performing investigations into “issues that are hidden and kept from the public eyes”. Without evidence or a confession, authorities are unable to investigate same-sex acts unless sexual assault, luring, and kidnapping are suspected.

Historically, public spaces have been known as the fighting ring for disadvantaged groups. Even in countries with strict local protections harassment against LGBTQ+ individuals could be seen in public places. It is not surprising, therefore, that 52,2% of the participants of the survey by 6Rang (2020: 20) reported experiences of violence in public places. Strangers in public accommodations, places of business, public transport, taxis, public toilets, and restaurants are another main source of violence against the LGBTI community in Iran.

According to Human Rights Watch (2010), LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran are faced with abuse that ranges from verbal insults and harassment to beatings, arbitrary arrests, and in some cases even sexual assault. In addition to regular police forces, a number of semi-official and “vigilante” entities allegedly dedicated to enforcing public morality

in the country, are supported by the police and judiciary. LGBTQ+ individuals interviewed by Human Rights Watch (2010) reported that most confrontations that took place in the streets were initiated by two frequent forces: firstly, members of the basij, and secondly the national police force, Niruy-e Entezamiy-e Jomhuyi-e Eslami (NAJA).

Furthermore, due to social stigma homosexual individuals have a greater fear of how they are treated by their immediate surroundings than of the treatment by authorities. If a family member reports a person as being homosexual, they run the risk of being dismissed from work or university. In addition, many employers openly discriminate against people whom they consider queer, leaving trans-identified individuals with little financial means which results in poor economic survival. In Iran, conformity to one's identified sex is crucial for participation in most aspect of daily life, such as entering a mosque, sitting in a classroom, dressing in the morning, and even marriage (Shakerifar, 2011; Tait, 2009). LGBTQ+ members who fail to conform to state-monitored gender norms can be penalised by public humiliation or incarceration.

The Iranian government has also restricted various media publications in order to suppress and censor discussions of issues related to homosexuality. Network (2015: 5) noted that the Press Law imposes a ban on the "promotion of prostitution and vice, and publication of photos, images and articles found to be against public morality". Moreover, Circular Number 660 of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution bans publications from crossing boundaries that may result in "anti-family propaganda", "the weakening of family values" and "the promotion of deviant and immoral individuals and movements. The Iranian government's rhetoric of criminalizing same-sex conduct does not just impact sexual or gender nonconformists, but also those who express views which are regarded as advocating, supporting or merely tolerating such conduct. This was displayed by then-Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini, who told reporters on 23 June 2012 that the Iranian authorities terminated the licence of Cheshmeh Publications to publish books and accused its publisher of "promoting Western culture and loose behavior," including "homosexuality." In addition, during January 2011, a Revolutionary Court in Tehran sentenced journalist Siamak Ghaderi to four years in prison, sixty lashes, and a fine, for articles that he wrote based on interviews he had conducted with members of Iran's lesbian, gay, or bisexual community (Human Rights Watch., 2015 b).

### 3.3.3. Family discrimination

LGBTQ+ persons also face significant abuse at home. They are not, however, afforded legal protection against abusive family members. Iranian laws give parents extensive discretion in disciplining their children. Moreover, filing a complaint against abusive parents or siblings could endanger LGBTQ individuals, making it very unlikely that such abuse gets reported. Iranian parents, fathers in particular, are shielded from legal consequences when they abuse minor as well as non-minor children by means of Qisas which is enshrined in the IPC, and which stipulates that the father or the male paternal ancestor of a murdered person has the ultimate right to demand retribution for the death of his son or daughter. In this regard, if a father kills his son or daughter he will not be put to death because it is within his own discretion to exercise the right to exact retribution for his child's death (Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, 2013). Islamic Civil Code (Article 1179) states: "Parents have the right to punish their child, but they cannot punish their child in a manner that exceeds the norms of discipline".

According to a report by 6Rang (2014), an extensive amount of LGBTQ+ individuals interviewed by the organisation reported various types of abuse at the hands of their family members as a result of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Such abuse includes beatings and floggings, neglect and abandonment, psychological abuse such as enforced seclusion and isolation from friends and society, verbal insults, and death threats. According to a survey by 6Rang (2020: 16) almost 63% percent of Iranian LGBTQ people reported experiencing violence perpetrated by their nuclear family and almost 38% experienced violence perpetrated by their extended family. 26% of the participants described the constant experience of violence during their childhood. 6.Rang.org. (2020: 17) notes the types of violence reported in nuclear families as well as a frequency indication which is divided into 'always', 'often', 'sometimes', and 'rarely' (see **Figure 2**).

Type of Violence	Frequency			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Verbal	6.95	13.19	20	23.91
Physical	7.82	8.69	22.17	39.13
Psychological (humiliation, insult)	6.95	6.52	23.42	30.34
Financial deprivation	3.91	10.86	10.43	16.95
Sexual	1.30	5.21	5.65	16.95
Neglect (e.g. forced labor, lack of support)	13.04	20	24.78	36.52
Control of social relations / Contact with friends	10	10.86	14.74	20.86
Threat to forced marriage	8.69	4.78	11.73	13.47
Deprivation of work	4.7	2.17	6.95	10
Deprivation of education	3.91	3.47	3.91	5.65

**Figure 2:** A table by 6.Rang.org. (2020: 17) indicating the types of violence experienced in nuclear families divided into a frequency order.

LGBTQ+ Iranians normally do not have recourse to justice or support for the abuse and violence they routinely suffer within their familial structure, which leads to non-state actors feeling emboldened to enact homophobic and transphobic violence with impunity. As mentioned in 3.2.1 of this study, women in Iran are already trapped in a cultural and structural paradigm of patriarchy which is intensified by the discrimination they face as a result of their sexual orientation. The financial and social survival of lesbians in Iran depends on their ability to repress or hide their sexual identity in different ways. It is important to note that this self-repression generally stems from the fear discovery. If an Iranian lesbians' family was to find out about her sexual orientation, she is likely to become subject to abuse, beatings, and even murder. In Iran, so-called "honour killings" by male kin are not uncommon, and the socially justifiable status of such crimes reflects the conservative value-norms of the Iranian society. However, some families arrange marriages for their lesbian daughters, thinking that it will prevent the expression of their homosexual desires. In these cases, women live an existence that on a daily basis denies their sexual nature. In lesbian or female-to-male transgender cases, abuse by family members intensifies to threats to or actual coercion to arranged marriage.

Families in some cases kill or physically harm, LGBTQ+ members or force them into arranged marriages with the intent to protect or defend the honour or reputation of the family and/or community. LGBTQ+ Iranians have given accounts of being beaten by family members until they abandoned their homes or being told to become “normal” (6Rang, 2020: 16). Almost 26% of the participants in the survey by 6Rang (2020:18) reported forced marriage as a concern to different extents.

In Iran, the greater social environment produces additional obstacles for LGBTQ+ members, such as the military service. Compulsory service in the Iranian military unlocks various doors for Iranian men, in particular with the accrual of a document card. When completing military service, Iranian men receive a card that awards them a number of privileges, including the ability to qualify for a passport, gain employment with the government, officially buy or sell goods, and participate in public sector activities (Samimi, 2013). The Office for the Socially Harmed at the Welfare Organization of Iran responded in 2010, to the strategic lobbying and activism by trans-identified individuals to reclassify their military exemption from the “mental disorders clause” (Section 33.8) to the “glandular disorders clause” (Section 30) (Najmabadi, 2011, p.2). This in theory reduced the number of discriminations faced by trans-identified men when looking for employment as a more socially permissible exemption showed on their identification. However, gay men still have to abide by the “mental disorder clause” which categorises them as “moral and sexual deviants”. In their situation, a card is stamped with the words “sexual deviant” or “behavioral disorder” as a “red-exemption,”<sup>8</sup> stigmatizing labels that leave LGBTQ+ individuals virtually unemployable (Human Rights Watch, 2010, p.24).

In 2021, Ali Fazeli Monfared, a 20-year-old gay Iranian man, was allegedly killed by male family members in an “honour killing” after they discovered that he was gay. It was reported that Monfared, known as Alireza by friends and family, applied for military exemption service so that he could leave Iran and move to Turkey to live with his close friend. Monfared received an exemption card from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the mail after disclosing his homosexuality. However, one of his female relatives discovered it and found out that he was gay (6Rang, 2021). BBC Persian

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<sup>8</sup> “Red-exemptions” indicate the physical colour of the card exemptions from compulsory service due to sexual orientation which used to be printed on in the past. (HRW, 2010: 24) noted that Section 33 clauses are still seen as “red-exemptions” however, this no longer has any link to the colour of the documentation card.

(2021) reported that audio recordings were leaked to them in which his life was threatened by family. Following the discovery of his exemption card, a group of male relatives took Monfared to a rural village near Ahvaz on 4 May 2021 and killed him (6Rang, 2021). In addition, a 23-year-old trans man, known as Siavash, was shot dead by his father in Khorramabad in 2017, in an alleged honour killing. After checking that his son was dead, the father then turned the gun on himself. Moreover, a 27-year-old trans woman, known as Mahsa, who previously underwent reassignment surgery, was also murdered by her father, brother-in-law, and cousins in the desert near Shadegan at the start of 2019 (Dehkordi, 2020). 6Rang. (nd.) noted that Shadegan police arrested Mahsa's father on counts of complicity in premeditated murder and Mahsa's brother was arrested on murder charges. However, as the matter concerned members of the same family, there was no one entitled to "blood money", which meant that Mahsa's father was just released and did not serve time in jail or pay any money.

Tara Sepehri Far, who investigates human rights abuses in Iran and Kuwait for HRW said that there are no statistics or record in Iran or other countries who criminalise homosexuality of the numbers of anti-LGBTQ+ "honour killings" which are perpetrated by relatives who feel that the LGBTQ+ individual brought "dishonour" to the family. Far claimed that Monfared's case underlines the importance of the role of the family in LGBTQ people's lives when the state criminalizes who they are (NBCNews, 2021).

#### **3.3 4. Structural Discrimination**

This section provides an overview of experiences of violence perpetrated by institutional officials in government or government-related settings. Taking into consideration that the current chapter has thus far focused heavily on legal and judicial discrimination, this section will primarily focus on education and healthcare systems. A survey by 6Rang (2020: 13) found that 107 of the 230 participants reported experiencing violence in their educational environments. This meant that almost half of them (46.5%) faced violence at school or university. Moreover, 18% of the participants reported having been constantly insulted and humiliated by the school administration. This kind of aggression can range from physical violence to verbal, sexual, or even psychological violence and is generally expressed via acts of bullying, intimidation, and repression by classmates, trainers, or other school staff.

According to UNESCO (2011), “it is often in the primary school playground that boys are deemed by others to be too effeminate or young girls seen as tomboys endure teasing and sometimes the first blows linked to their appearance and behavior, perceived as failing to fit in with the heteronormative gender identity”. A report by Justice for Iran (2012: 76) declared that segregation by gender in schools, together with the criminalization of sexual orientation and gender identity, had extremely negative effects on young people’s access to secondary education. LGBTQ students are in some cases refused admission or expelled because of their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity, or they are forced to undergo sex reassignment surgeries as prerequisite for enrolment. In addition to the SRS’s already discussed in this chapter, Iranian LGBT individuals also face barriers to accessing healthcare. One of Iran’s pioneering HIV/AIDS practitioners, Dr. Arash Alaei, who was imprisoned between 2008 and 2011 under the charge of “communications with an enemy of the government” was of the opinion that sexual health services remained inaccessible to many LGBTQ+ citizens as their public promotion is limited by legal restrictions on discussing same-sex sexual activity (OutRight.org. 2016: 3).

A number of LGBTQ+ individuals interviewed by Human Rights Watch (2010) indicated that primary school was one of the “most traumatic periods in their life” as it is typically the first time many LGBTQ+ individuals were exposed to the harsh realities of the outside world, where looking, acting, or feeling different generally leads to ridicule, harassment, and at times abuse suffered at the hands of classmates, teachers, and others. Farzam, a dental student at Azad University in Tehran, told Human Rights Watch that in 2008 he kissed his boyfriend, Ali-Reza, next to the lockers, and did not realise that there was a camera. A couple of days later when Farzam went to get his graduation papers signed, they sent him to *Herasat*<sup>9</sup> (government units responsible for monitoring public order and security at universities and public institutions around Iran). After being confronted by the head of Herasat, and the President of the university, Farzam was shown a picture of himself and Ali-Reza kissing. They asked Farzam: “Why have you done this?” ... “You have a sexual disease,” they told him. Eventually, Farzam was expelled by university authorities, despite being weeks away from receiving his diploma.

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<sup>9</sup> Herasat offices at universities generally organise their activities with security and intelligent forces, including basiji students and are responsible for spying and reporting student activities on campus.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

In accordance with Crenshaw, 1998: 140 and Hill Collins 2000: 41-48 notions that women of colour are discriminated against as 'women of colour' and not only as 'people of colour' or 'women', but this chapter also highlights how lesbians in Iran are faced with a double discrimination at the intersection of being second class citizens as women as well as being homosexual. In Iran, institutions of religion, family, and the state presume that women are wives and mothers, who ought to be submissive to the males in their families. These institutions dictate the gender norms governing women in Iran. As a result of Iran's family law which is rooted in a system of male guardianship over women via the institution of marriage and laws that control the family unit, women are faced with restrictions of their rights and limitations to their autonomy throughout the processes of marriage, divorce, child custody, et cetera. Lesbian women in Iran are exceptionally vulnerable due to the lack of impartial legislation identifying and criminalising rape without reference to a heteronormative marriage relationship. Current legislation could result in sexual abuse and gender-based violence. However, of importance in Iran is the current situation. Amini's death has become a symbol of resistance not only against the enforcement of the hijab but also the religious dictatorship of Iran. International sanctions are biting, and Tehran has never been more isolated in its region. The current protests come at a time when Iran's political establishment is confronting a leadership crisis.

Under structural intersectionality the experiences of people within a certain identity category are qualitatively different from each other depending on their other intersecting identities (Cole, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991). Gay Iranian men experience discrimination differently depending on their intersecting identities, as explained earlier. These identities interlink and shape their experiences in several fields.

Moreover, an intersectional framework encourages us to think critically about how oppression manifests in societies. Various types of discriminations such as state-sponsored discrimination, discrimination faced in public/media, familial discrimination, and structural discrimination are not independent from one another and should be viewed as interlocking systems of oppression. The Iranian government has camouflaged or hidden their efforts to provide themselves with easier control in their system of suppression. The legislation of sex change operations in most other contexts would be seen as a method of protecting individual's right to convey their

sexual identity, but in Iran's case evidence shows that the State privileges relations and attraction amongst men and women and thus violates a range of human rights by subjecting lesbian women and gay men to a variety of measures ranging from therapeutic treatments to SRSs. The government has also taken visible steps to politically regulate the LGBT community via state-led raids at private functions, and by censoring all materials regarding the status of conduct of the LGBTQ+ community.

Another form of oppression faced by the Iranian LGBTQ+ community is discrimination in public and by public media. Iran's state policies, together with social norms that stigmatise LGBTQ+ individuals, result in public information regarding or specifically relevant to minority sexual identities and gender identities being largely inaccessible. LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran are faced with abuse that ranges from verbal insults and harassment to beatings, arbitrary arrests, and in some cases even sexual assault. In addition to regular police forces, a number of semi-official and "vigilante" entities allegedly dedicated to enforcing public morality in the country are supported by the police and judiciary. In order to suppress and censor discussions of issues related to homosexuality, the Iranian government also restricts various media publications.

Furthermore, LGBTQ+ persons also face significant abuse at home. They are not, however, afforded legal protection against abusive family members. Generally, LGBTQ+ Iranians do not have recourse to justice or support for the abuse and violence they routinely suffer within their familial structure which leads to non-state actors feeling emboldened to enact homophobic and transphobic violence with impunity. Families in some cases kill, physically harm, or force LGBTQ+ members into arranged marriages with the intent to protect or defend the honour or reputation of the family and/or community.

## Chapter 4: Case study of Turkey

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*“I believe homosexuality is a biological disorder, an illness and should be treated.” - Aliye Kavaf, Turkish Minister of State Responsible for Women and the Family, 2010.*

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter will begin with a short introduction of the current status of lesbian, gay, and transgender individuals in Turkey. The chapter will then look at the intersecting discriminations faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey such as religious discrimination, discrimination in the workplace, discrimination faced by men, the military, and the medical field, as well as institutional discrimination; this chapter also focuses on the experiences and resilience of LGBTQ+ refugees in Turkey.

Turkey at the time of writing this thesis has the 19<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, and thus holds a strong economic position amongst Western countries. While this may be true, the situation of sexual minorities lags standards that are deemed to be essential by human rights organisations such as the General Assembly of the United Nation, the European Court of Human Rights, and the Supreme Court concerning LGBTQ+ issues. This is despite the fact that Turkey is often seen as an example of a modern Muslim state, with a secular, functioning democracy and a growing secular tradition, very different to many other Middle Eastern governments that are run by dictatorships and religious fundamentalism (Kemal, 2011).

Turkey is also considered an important country because of its geographical location between sometimes Islamophobic Europe (Muhammad, 2012), the Middle East, and Asia, which gives it easy access to strategically important regions and major energy resources. Furthermore, Turkey’s geographical location offers it importance as a member of NATO which gives the association an important strategic position at the intersection of Europe and Asia, astride both the Middle East and the Black Sea. As a result, Turkey is in a unique position to impact both international and domestic policy in the region on issues relating to finance, trade, and culture (Trofimov, 2014). Although Turkey’s culture is largely impacted by European values as a result of its geographical location, traditional Islamic values remain deeply ingrained in most of the social institutions of the country (Saktanber, 2002). In its progress report, the European Commission (2014: 58) notes that in its quest to gain admission to the

European Union, Turkey's legal and cultural traditions have been under international scrutiny, specifically in the arena of equal protection and human rights. The LGBTQ+ community, in particular, has been one of the groups impacted by Turkey's weak human rights record.

In order to fully understand the current situation, it is necessary to consider briefly the history of social and religious impacts on Turkish policies. Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, modern Turkey was established under the leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. During this time, the cultural and political climate of Turkish society was greatly impacted by the Kemalist movement which idealised modernisation and secularisation, shaping what it meant to have a Turkish identity in the 20th century (Pope and Pope, 1997). Gözaydın (2009, 2014) explains that modernisation and secularisation have been incorporated into socio-political economic life under the control of the state since the late Ottoman era. As a result, Islam had not been in contradiction with modernisation and secularisation (Azak 2010). Kemalist founders of the Turkish Republic pursued the path of the Ottoman era by espousing a joint approach centred around Sunni Islam and Turkish citizens, yet they also sought to manage religion's function via a multitude of secular legislations and state institutions while, at the same time, introducing westernised national truths as substitutes for religious ones (Gülalp 2017, 49).

Murray (2007: 101-16) asserts that although homosexual relationships were apparent during the Ottoman era, before the establishment of the Turkish republic, the rise of non-heteronormative identities as a personal and collective identity did not take place until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, Engin (2015: 840) notes that the increasing visibility of same sex relations did not translate into an increasing public tolerance toward homosexuality. Traditional Islamic values remain omnipresent in most government and societal institutions, despite the fact that the Turkish republic was created as a secular state. The impact of these values on Turkish policy making has led to further marginalisation, stigmatisation, and socially disadvantageous results for those who do not conform to the dominant hetero-normative gender norms and sexual identities.

Öz (2010) is of the opinion that as a possible result of Turkey's secularism, homosexuality is treated by Turkish law in a rather neutral way, by failing to mention sexual orientation in much of their national law. The Turkish Imperial Penal Code

(1858) made no mention of same sex sexual act between adults, neither does the Turkey: Criminal Code [Republic of Türkiye] (2004). Culturally, however, homosexuality remains a taboo subject in most areas of Turkish society, where a “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach is adopted. According to a global study conducted in 2019 by the Pew Research centre, acceptance of homosexuality in Turkey increased from 9% in 2013 to 25% in 2019. Although this was an increase, there remains a low tolerance toward homosexuality in the country, which has brought about various forms of violence and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals not only legally but also socially (Pew Research Center, 2019).

This type of violence and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals is evident from reports such as the one by KAOS GL<sup>10</sup> (2021) which noted that there were 150 self-reported attacks on LGBTQ+ individuals during 2019, 129 of which took place in public spaces and 41 included more than one attacker. In August 2016 Hande Kade, a transgender activist, was murdered after being raped (BBC, 2016). According to a transgender Europe report by Trans Respect (2022), a total of 58 transgender individuals were murdered from 2008 until September 2021.

In addition, ILGA (2021) ranked Turkey 48<sup>th</sup> regarding the legal and policy situation of people in 49 European countries. Although homosexuality is not illegal in Turkey, it is generally seen as immoral and unnatural, and LGBTQ+ individuals are not mentioned in the anti-discrimination act, or in publications relating to hate crimes, except for the Turkish Armed Forces Health Aptitude Regulation and Law No. 5275 On the Execution of Penalties and Security Measures (Turkish Armed Forces Disciplinary Law). However, KAOS GL (2017) notes that the ambiguous terms such as “public morality”, “obscenity” and “the Turkish family structure” in those legislations are used in an attempt to limit or prevent LGBTQ+ individuals from enjoying their basic rights. This leaves Turkish LGBTQ+ members vulnerable to discrimination and violence.

As noted earlier, a legal culture that excludes LGBTQ+ people from the protection of the law creates a culture of impunity where violence towards LGBTQ+ people goes unchallenged. In this regard, bias- and hate-motivated violence and abuse are tools used by both state and non-state actors to control and punish the transgression of

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<sup>10</sup> KAOS GL is a news portal for LGBTQ+ individuals with all recent and relevant news and is one of the oldest and largest LGBTQ+ rights organisation in Turkey.

established sexual and gender norms, as is the case in Turkey. For this reason, intersectionality theory would be an applicable theory to apply in the case of Turkey as it maintains that social phenomena are often best understood by investigating the overlap of institutional power structures like class, gender, race, and sexuality in order to see how they create multifaceted types of inequality in society.

## **4.2. Intersecting discriminations**

Applying an intersectional analysis to this study allows the researcher to critically analyse how oppression manifests in Turkish society. Social taxonomies of class, race, and gender discrimination are not independent from one another and therefore need to be examined as intersectional. This would align with Hill Collins' (1995) notion of intersectionality which contends that micro level processes together shape oppression.

### **4.2.1. Religious discrimination**

When analysing the experiences of underrepresented populations, it is vital to include the intersection of several grounds of identity (Crenshaw, 1991: 1241, 1245). When several grounds of identity are considered, awareness of possible intersectional subordination is needed. Intersectional subordination is more likely where an individual identifies with several disempowered groups. In predominantly Muslim societies such as Turkey, religion plays a much bigger intersecting role with gender and sexuality in comparison to most Western societies, which results in alarming levels of institutionalised discrimination (Engin, 2015: 842). Muslim LGBTQ+ individuals, who do not fit into a single category of either "merely a Muslim" or "merely a LGBTQ+ member", are vulnerable to oppression on the grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, in addition to instantaneously falling outside the traditional religious (such as dogmatic views on Islam) protections.

As LGBTQ+ individuals have been systematically oppressed on grounds of their sexuality and gender, they tend to have minority status. Their oppression is a result of the patriarchal regime that punishes same-sex relations under Islamic beliefs. Muedini (2018: 9) asserts that although LGBTQ+ members around the world are faced with discrimination perpetuated by perpetrators of different religions, an unfortunate reality is that a large number of the rights abuses that do take place happen within Muslim majority societies and under governments who go out of their way to ensure that

LGBTQ+ rights are not guaranteed. LGBTQ+ Muslims occupy an intersectional location between social and political cultures, which results in them suffering oppression due to this position.

A debate surrounding Islam and homosexuality was put in the spotlight of international affairs after a mass shooting at a LGBTQ+ nightclub in Orlando, Florida in 2016. Since the shooter, who killed 49 people, was a Muslim, questions regarding the compatibility of “Islam and homosexuality”, as well as opinions of Muslims on the issue of LGBTQ+ rights, were raised (Hüroğlu, 2018: 10). Scholars argue that when discussing Islam and homosexuality it is difficult to know exactly how interpretations of Islam impact all individual attitudes and potential changes in position regarding issues of gender. Huaman (2019: 14) notes that the leading discriminatory and marginalising tool used against LGBTQ+ Turkish Muslims, or LGBTQ+ Muslims in general, is the rejection of their sexual identity and practices by interpretations of the Islam religion. Many conservative Muslim leaders argue that identifying as mutually LGBTQ+ and Muslim is forbidden. For many of the Muslim communities these identities are seen as mutually exclusive. However, of importance here is a survey conducted by KONDA Barometer (2012) which revealed that levels of piety were flat or had even declined in comparison to a decade ago. Moreover, it was noted that the number of nonbelievers had tripled in the last decade, with the number of Turks who say they adhere to Islam decreasing from 55% to 51%. Additionally, a significant drop was seen in respondents who call themselves “religious conservative”.

In April 2020, Ali Erbaş, head of Turkey’s Directorate of Religious Affairs, also called Diyanet, a state-funded agency that runs mosques and appoints imams, said that Islam condemns homosexuality as it “brings illness and corrupts generations” (Reuters, 2020). Erbaş added that homosexuality causes the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) which leads to AIDS. During his weekly sermon, he said: “Come and let’s fight together to protect people from such evil” (Reuters, 2020). Erbaş’ comments received some support from social media users who trended a hashtag that translated to “go to Holland”, which has been frequently used as an anti-LGBTQ+ statement and which refers to the legislation of same-sex marriage in the Netherlands (Pink News, 2020). Various leaders publicly supported Erbaş. The Presidential Spokesperson and Chief Advisor, İbrahim Kalın, commented that Ali Erbaş “put the divine truth into words”. The Minister of Family, Labour, and Social Services, Zehra

Zümrüt Selçuk, commented that Erbaş' words "remind us of our religious values in order to protect our families and generations during Ramadan". Kaos GL (2020), a major Turkish gay rights organisation, reported that Parliamentary Human Rights Investigation Commission Spokesperson, Osman Nuri Gülaç, asserted that humanities future is only feasible via "legitimate" marriages and referred to LGBTQ+ factions starting to penetrate various aspects in many countries around the world, such as academia, politics, and media (Kaos GL, 2020).

Going against the tide, the Ankara Bar Association of lawyers accused Erbaş of inciting hatred against gay people while ignoring child abuse and misogyny. However, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, dismissed the criticism, stating "an attack against the Diyanet chief is an attack on the state", before adding: "What he said was totally right" (Willks, 2020). According to the Stockholm Centre for Freedom (2021a), the head of the Ankara Bar Association together with 10 members of the association's executive board face up to two years in prison due to their press statement in which they criticised Erbaş for his remarks targeting LGBT and HIV positive people. Earlier on, in 2015, an Islamist group known as the Young Islamic Defense pinned posters across Ankara in an attempt to use religious references to incite hatred against LGBTQ+ individuals (See Appendix 4). The group quoted a verse from the Hadith, a collection of sayings of Prophet Muhammad, prompting readers to "kill whoever does the ugly business of the people of Lot, whether he may perpetuate it or lets it happen" (Sanderson, 2015). Religiosity adds to the legal and social oppression of those who do not conform to rigid gender norms (Cüneyt and Delice, 2012). Stewart (2022) notes that of the 71 countries that have anti-LGBTQ+ laws, 49% (35 countries) have a Muslim majority, in comparison to majority-Christian countries which account for 44% (31 countries) of the total. Of importance here is that in recent years the number of Christian-majority nations with anti-LGBTQ+ laws have decreased, both via court rulings (Belize in 2016, Trinidad in 2018) and via legislative action (Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, and Palau in 2014, Angola and Botswana in 2019, Seychelles and Nauru in 2017). However, no Muslim-majority nation has acted recently to repeal an anti-LGBQ+ law.

This, however, does not mean that the views on homosexuality in these countries have remained the same. In 2017, ILGA (2017) conducted a survey asking Turkish people if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "It is possible to respect my

religion and be accepting of people who are romantically or sexually attracted to people of the same sex". Surprisingly, 41% of people strongly agreed or somewhat agreed, in contrast to 35% who strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed. Additionally, 24% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. This demonstrates that while there is a substantial number of Turkish people who use the religious argument to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people, there is a greater segment who are both religious and accepting of LGBTQ+ people. Thus, it seems that a larger part of the Turkish population has successfully reconciled their religious beliefs and their acceptance of homosexuality. However, Turkey's increasing anti-gay rhetoric is part of the revival of polarising identity politics in the country, as President Erdogan tries to resonate with the strong nationalist and religious vein to strengthen his Islamist-rooted party's slumped support, which many argue has decreased to its lowest during Erdogan's 17 years of rule (Jackley, 2020).

#### **4.2.2. Discrimination in the workplace**

Intersectionality theory is an adequate methodology to explore inequalities at work as inequalities have a complex intertwined nature and thus cannot be analysed through a single category focus, which would fail to capture the complex reality of intersecting inequalities that individuals experience (Aydin and Ozeren, 2018; Ozbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli, and Bell, 2011). Discrimination against the Turkish LGBTQ+ community in employment has been widespread as discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is not prohibited in the Employment Law (Yılmaz and Birdal, 2012: 1). According to McClain and Waite-Wright (2016: 166), while Article 5 of the Turkish Labour Act prohibits discrimination by employers against certain groups, it does not include discrimination based upon sexual orientation or gender identity. In particular, Article 125 of the Civil Servants Code is of concern for the LGBTQ+ community, as public employers can under this act discipline civil servants (such as judges, prosecutors, army officers, police officers, et cetera.) whose behaviour undermines the dignity of their profession or is regarded as immoral.

Article 27 of the Law on Elementary and High Schools Teacher's Promotion and Discipline Number 1702 particularly states that teachers can be fired from their posts if their behaviour is found to be "impure". As already mentioned in this study, homosexuality is accepted as "immoral" or "impure" and thus this discipline may be imposed on LGBTQ+ teachers (Öz, 2010). A policeman's home in Istanbul was raided

by security forces in 2009, after an informant alleged that he had child pornography on his home computer. Although the criminal accusation proved groundless, “evidence” showed that the officer was gay, which triggered an internal investigation. The High Discipline Board of the Interior Ministry then discharged the officer from public service, stating that he had “committed disgraceful and shameful acts that conflict with the quality of a public servant”.

In 2014, Adnan Türkdamar, a deputy legal advisor at the Interior Ministry, defended the dismissal of the policeman and claimed that the officer in question sometimes stayed at the same house as two men while living with a woman, describing it as a “disgraceful and shameful act” (Hurriyet Daily News, 2014). In addition, in 2020 the Turkish Health Ministry dismissed a transsexual doctor from her position at a public hospital, claiming that her social media posts corrupted the morals of the public. Larin Kayatas said in a Twitter post (Kayatas, 2020) that a colleague filed a complaint regarding her appearance just one day after she started her job. According to Kayatas, local health authorities conducted an investigation while she was suspended. During the investigation she was interrogated about her political learnings, her attendance at a Women’s Day march, as well as her sexuality. Kayatas claims that she can no longer work as a doctor as she is compelled to complete her internship at a public hospital before she can seek work in the private sector (Stockholm Centre for freedom, 2021b). In 2021, Sarp Oztas, a 25-year-old Physiotherapist trans man, applied for a job at a private rehabilitation centre in Sultangazi. Oztas was rejected on the grounds that he could not do the job because he was a trans man. The manager at the centre told Oztas that they were looking for “male employees” (ILGA, 2022).

As a result of the possible discrimination, most LGBTQ+ individuals feel the need to hide their sexual orientation out of a fear of not being hired, losing their job, or not being promoted. According to a study by Kaos GL (2017), only 17 out of 100 employees are completely open in their workplace about their sexuality. 44% of employees are completely closeted (hiding their sexuality) in their workplace, whereas 39% of employees are partially open about their sexual identity. Human Rights Watch (2008: 25) notes that those who do not hide their sexual identity convincingly are denied employment and generally pushed into entertainment or enter the sex industry which created a double prejudice against them. According to Mustafa Sariyilmaz, an expert on social policy at the Association for Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Research (SpoD) in Istanbul, in a democratic state nobody may be victimised on the basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Turkey, like many other countries belong to the Council of Europe and the United Nations, vowed to honour this principle. Sariilmaz noted that Turkey must enforce it too (Karakas, 2019).

#### **4.2.3. The three M's - men, military, and medical.**

In this section the researcher will focus on three of Dhamoon's (2011: 232) four facets of intersectional-type approaches, namely categories of difference (meaning gay males), systems of domination (such as the military), and processes of subject formation (via medical discrimination). This section will support the claims made in section 1.2.1 of this thesis. Of importance here is the argument made earlier in this thesis; that the idea of state-making depends so immensely on an idealised gender order which means that the mere existence of LGBTQ+ people with a different understanding of the nation can be seriously unsettling (Berlant and Freeman, 1992). This chapter has thus far revealed how Egypt has continuously refused the efforts of LGBTQ+ individuals to enter public spheres that had previously excluded them or to alter national politics to be more inclusive of their concerns. This is due to the government regulating sexuality to some extent, viewing nonconforming sexualities as a danger to social unity. National identities are formed around the concept of a secure and civilized space "inside," which necessitates the creation of an "outside" whose identity often seems odd or menacing (Tickner, 2010; 55). LGBTQ+ people are frequently left feeling like outsiders since they do not fit into the category of what is perceived as "normal" or "good." This argument will be further explored in this section.

Turkey's military explicitly prohibits gay males from serving in the Turkish armed forces as it deems homosexuality a psychosexual disease (Engin, 2015: 841). Human Rights Watch (2008) explains that medical mythologies - the belief, discredited in most medical systems, that homosexuality is an illness - are a sinister manner in which expectations of gender and sexuality persist. According to Basaran (2015), the Turkish military have a known history of maintaining the Turkish nation's gendered binaries by rejecting women and homosexual men. The Turkish military is a social institution that endorses hegemonic masculinity by excluding feminine bodies (or in this case passive gays) from service. Atuk (2019) explain that the military does not necessarily see homosexual relationships or transgender identity as a threat, but rather the perceived effeminacy and failure to demonstrate traditional masculinity. While there have been

cases of new recruits who wish to avoid military service due to their sexuality, they were obliged to undergo intensive questioning regarding the nature of their sexual orientation and experience. In some cases, they are asked for photographs of themselves engaging in homosexual intercourse, and in which they can be seen as the passive partner (Azizlerli, 2012, Cengiz, 2013).

Basaran (2015: 570) notes that as with Iran, gay men who successfully convince military psychologists of their homosexuality are given a *curuk raporu* (a certificate that labels biological men as “rotten”), colloquially called “the pink certificate”. With homophobic attitudes occurring frequently in most areas of Turkey, where a very traditional form of masculinity is idealised, these pink certificates can result in years of discrimination as they force gay men to announce their sexuality publicly, when those who live outside of the more liberal urban areas of Turkey would be safer if they could have kept it hidden. Turkey’s socially conservative populations, especially outside of major metropolitan areas, have shown little willingness to accept LGBTQ+ communities or behaviour. Moreover, employers who see that an individual did not serve in the military, may use their sexual orientation and/or gender identity against them in employment discrimination (Kaos GL, LGBT News Turkey, and IGLHRC, 2015).

Only recently (in 2015) the humiliation faced by gay Turkish men did not stop at their obligatory admission that they are “ill”, the military also performed humiliating and degrading medical inspections on those who sought exemption from mandatory military service because of their sexual orientation. These examinations included psychological testing and intrusive anal tests to “prove” their sexuality. The military silently amended this regulation, allowing homosexual men to voluntarily disclose or conceal their identities which merely amounts to a shift to a “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy (Gurcan, 2015).

In addition, the Young Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Intersex Youth Studies, and Solidarity Association, Young LGBTI+ (2020), conducted a study on the state of the LGBTQ+ community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey found that 23% of the participants struggled to access health services and medicine, while 15% claimed that they had no health insurance. Moreover, 32% of the participants stated that their health conditions were negatively impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of

the most frequently reported problems were the postponement of appointments of the psychiatric unit, the failure to prescribe medication for transgender individuals in the body adjustment process, and the failure to take HIV and HPV tests and medication. This is especially concerning for gay men as the HIV epidemic among men who have sex with men has posed a significant public health problem in several parts of the world (Sargin, and Goktas, 2017: 58). As already noted in this chapter, Erbaş as well as other prominent figures in Turkey condemns homosexuality as it “brings illness and corrupts generations” (Reuters, 2020). Erbaş’ HIV comments is a blatant attack on gay men and leave them vulnerable for further discrimination. This also means that gay men gaining access to HIV medication might not be at the top of their lists.

#### **4.2.4. Institutionalised discrimination: The Turkish government’s clampdown on rainbows (rainbow flag hunt), pride, and women.**

Brown et al. (2021) explain that at its heart, intersectionality is a study of relative power. For this reason, the theory of intersectionality will be employed as both theory and method to analyse political behaviour and the state’s interaction with social groups as citizens as well as non-citizens. To examine and comprehend the diverse life experiences such as stereotyping, silencing, and marginalisation one cannot use a categorical analysis based solely upon gender. It is also crucial to take into consideration factors like ethnicity class, sexual orientation, religion, and race of the individuals in question to explain said experiences accurately, particularly when individuals can experience disadvantage and privilege simultaneously through the combined statuses of gender, race, and class.

In February 2022, Justice Minister and Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu took to Twitter to call LGBTQ+ individuals’ “perverts”. His remarks provoked a wave of hate speech on social media against the LGBTQ+ community. This continued hate campaign against the community took place in the context of increasing hateful rhetoric against the LGBTQ+ community by not only representatives of high-level religious and political institutions, but also actions and legislation attacking human rights defenders and civil society organisations (ILGA, 2022).

In a country extremely polarised along political and religious lines, the rainbow symbol has become another cultural battleground. Milton (2020) reported that the Reklam Ozdenetim Kurulu (the Advertising Self-Regulatory Board) board members

unanimously decided that LGBTQ+ and rainbow-themed products sold online should be advertised with an 18+ warning as it risks children's "mental, psychological, and social development". In addition, the LC Waikiki textile company told its employees in Turkey to "not use rainbows in a way that can be perceived as LGBTQ+, to decrease the numbers of colours used in products, and to differentiate the shades of colours". This was in an attempt to ensure that during the months of June and July (known as pride month and LGBTQ+ awareness month around the world) rainbow, unicorn, or rainbow-unicorn themes are not used in a way that creates LGBTQ+ perception (Korkmaz, 2020).

At the start of January 2021, various students and faculty members at the Bogazici University in Istanbul protested against President Erdogan's appointment of Melih Bulu as rector of the university. Many claimed that the appointment process of Bulu, who is a long-standing political ally of the ruling Justice and Development Party, also called the AKP Party, was undemocratic and seen as government's efforts to interfere in academia (Butler and Kucukgocmen, 2021). According to the BBC (2021a), following weeks of protests, protesters hung an artwork opposite the new rector's office depicting the Kaaba (a building at the centre of Islam's most important mosque, the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, Saudi Arabia) together with images of the rainbow flag. It was reported that activists proclaimed that Bulu had close links to the AKP. Consequently, four students from the University were arrested over the artwork. President Erdogan's chief adviser, Ibrahim Kalim, commented that "neither freedom of expression nor the right to protest" could defend the artwork. President Erdogan praised the youth wing of his ruling AKP for carrying out the "glorious history of this nation" and not being "LGBT youth". During Erdogan's speech 159 protesters were detained, but 100 were released the next day (BBC News, 2021b).

Furthermore, on 18 September 2022, thousands of demonstrators gathered and marched during the Big Family Gathering march in Istanbul. Many of the protesters held banners which read "Law for the development of the spirit and moral" and "LGBTQ, remove your dirty hand from our children". The anti-LGBTQ+ protests were approved by the government and promoted by Turkey's media watchdog which broadcasted a promotional video that called LGBTQ+ individuals a "virus" (VOA News, 2022). However, it was reported that when LGBTQ+ activists attempted to protest, they were met with riot police, which led to the arrest of hundreds of participants. Many

of those detained were handcuffed and kept in hot vehicles without air-conditioning, food, or water. Many of them were prevented from having access to lawyers within a reasonable time frame and one lawyer was reportedly met with violence when she spoke to police about her client (Crick, 2022).

Although Turkey is one of the few countries in the Middle East to have ever organised or hosted gay pride marches, LGBTQ+ rights activist in the country have in recent years been an unmistakable target for state-sponsored repression of gay rights. Until 2015, the pride march had been held on 12 occasions, becoming the largest LGBTQ+ ever in a Muslim country with thousands taking part. Istanbul pride, which at its peak in 2014 attracted more than 100 000 participants, was banned in 2015 (Fanack.com. 2019).

Knight (2015) notes that in 2015 the Istanbul Governor's Office violently disbanded the city's pride march, citing security concerns and the need to uphold public order. However, organisers of the event claimed that the last-minute clampdown was because the parade overlapped with the month of Ramadan. Hayrettin Karaman, a theology professor whose religious statements are known to be in line with and in certain circumstances even guide Erdogan in his decisions, voiced his opinion one week before the 2015 pride march. Karaman said: "The political order of a country can be secular, liberal, or democratic but no one should forget that the overwhelming majority of this country's population are Muslims, and Muslims see homosexuality as immoral. Homosexuals cannot just come out and expect to have a standing among honest and proud people. If they do, their actions will be seen as misdemeanours and they will be viewed with contempt" (Mutluer, 2019: 8).

Nonetheless, there have been people who tried to gather in spite of the bans, and police responded ruthlessly, using excessive force to arrest and disperse participants. In 2016 hundreds of riot police cordoned off Taksim Square, used tear gas, and detained approximately 19 activists who gathered to issue a statement to mark gay pride week after authorities banned the event (The Telegraph., 2016). In 2017, small groups gathered in various parts of central Istanbul, while a heavy police presence blocked entry to the nearby Istiklal Street where the march was planned to take place. Police again used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse people and at least 41 people were detained (Al Jazeera. 2017). In addition, in November 2017 the Ankara

Governor's Office banned all LGBTQ+ events such as "film and other screenings, theater plays, panels, talks, exhibitions et cetera. which touch on certain social sensibilities and sensitivities" in the province for an indefinite period which was followed by a string of bans on LGBTQ+ related events in the country. Local authorities cited "social sensitivities", "protecting public health and morality", "protecting other people's rights and freedoms", and "public security" as reasons for the bans (Human Rights Watch. 2017a).

In its latest campaign against LGBTQ+ rights activism and freedom of expression, the Turkish government enabled its security forces to attack and arrest hundreds of people during the Istanbul Pride March on 26 June 2022. Kaos GL (2022) reported that the number of arrests was three times that of the total arrests made during the previous seven Istanbul marches combined, with 34 of the arrestees being youth aged under 18. Even before the march commenced, local authorities ejected people from cafes (Euronews, 2022), shut down metro stations (RailyNews, 2022), and pre-emptively arrested 52 people. The journalists' union, DISK Basin-IS, reported that during the pride march police beat numerous participants and attempted to prohibit journalists from photographing or recording the event. This included detaining a photographer from *Agence France-Presse* (Human Rights Watch., 2022a).

Human Rights Watch (2019) asserts that LGBTQ+ organisations in Ankara such as Pink Life were forced to halt their Ankara-based monthly events such as masculinity workshops, coming-out talks, transition talks, trans men and women breakfasts, and family meetings, all aimed at providing social space for sexual and gender minorities. Moreover, the LGBTQ+ community in 2018 continued with the pride march despite it being banned and despite security force harassment to the marchers. It was reported that at least 11 people were arrested and taken to the Vatan Police Headquarters, while the police fired rubber bullets and sprayed teargas (McKenzie, 2018). During the 2022 pride parade in June, Turkish police attacked a number of pride attendees as well as arresting and subsequently releasing 373 people (Flint, 2022). Human Rights Watch (2022a) notes that prior to the march, local officials shut down metro stations, ejected people from cafes, and arrested 52 people even before the parade started.

In May 2020 the pro-government newspaper *Yeni Akit* (2020) called for LGBTQ+ organisations to be closed, while *Ayinlik* (2020) criticised funding for LGBTQ+ from

organisations such as Amnesty International, Freedom House, and the British Embassy. Takvim (2020), also a pro-government newspaper, called for a boycott of the sports shop, Decathlon, after it celebrated Pride month. It is important to note that these are only a couple of examples of bans and attacks on LGBTQ+ events in Turkey, and a more focused study would reveal that the crackdowns on pride events and other LGBTQ+ supporting measures, such as curbs on free speech, reinforce stigma and prejudice as well as encourage homophobia. This is incompatible with the notions of equality, pluralism, and tolerance inherent in a democratic society.

Additionally, in 2021, as part of the Turkish government's war against the LGBTQ+ community, it became the first country to unilaterally withdraw from the 2011 Istanbul Convention on Women's Rights, a milestone international treaty on preventing gender-based violence. Government officials justified the move to withdraw and attempted to appeal to conservative voters with the specious claim that the Convention "normalizes homosexuality – which is incompatible with Turkey's social and family values" (Pink News, 2021, The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communication. n.d). On 1 July 2021, the effective date of Turkey's withdrawal, thousands of women took to the streets in the largest cities to demonstrate. Amongst a sea of multi-coloured flags, loudspeakers, rainbows, lilac masks, and drums, some signs displayed photographs of approximately a dozen recently murdered women with the slogans "Let's put an end to femicide" and "Turkey is giant cemetery for women" (Zambrana, 2021). Lawyers and activists working on women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights in the country claim that the decision to withdraw was a major setback, showing a lack of political commitment to gender equality, without which there will always be massive obstacles to combatting domestic violence in Turkey and addressing its root causes (Human Rights Watch, 2022b).

Initially as a result of tireless activism of feminist and LGBTQ+ groups, the majority of Turkey's population opposed the decision to withdraw. However, a survey conducted by Bulut and Yildirim (2021) has shown that President Erdogan's public discrimination has influenced not just his supporters but also opposition voters. The survey revealed that while in July 2020, 63% of the population opposed the withdrawal and merely 17% supported it, by March 2021 opposition decreased to 53% and support for the withdrawal increased to 27%. The murder of Basak Cengiz in November 2021 triggered a massive outcry over what women's rights activists said was the

government's failure to prevent gender-based violence. Cengiz was killed while walking down a street in Istanbul's Atashir district by a man who claimed that he just wanted to kill someone and chose a woman because he thought "it would be easier" (Farooq, 2021).

Cengiz's case is not an isolated one. Women's rights groups and independent media record hundreds of femicides in the country each year. According to a report by Turkey's Interior Ministry to a 2020-21 parliamentary commission looking at the causes of violence against women, fluctuation numbers of femicides have been recorded over the past five years. The lowest number was 268 femicides in 2020 with the number for 2021 rising to 307 (Human Rights Watch, 2022b). Discrimination comes in various forms, as could be seen when in 2021, Erbar Karakurt, a Turkish Olympic volleyball player, posted a photo of herself with her girlfriend on Instagram. Karakurt eventually deleted the photo after receiving abuse online (BBC, 2021c).

Human Rights Watch (2022a) notes that during Women's Day celebrations across Turkey in March 2021, participants reported that authorities not only prohibited individuals from bringing rainbow-colored objects to the demonstrations, but they also tried to stop trans women from joining the assemblies. During a daytime assembly police arrested five trans women together with four other women who attempted to stop the arrests. They were all sentenced to one month of house arrest (Kaos GI, 2021). That same day President Erdogan's communication director, Fahrettin Altun, made an anti-LGBTQ+ speech saying: "Families and children [are] targeted through ... tolerance for homosexuality propaganda". Altun also called homosexuality an "ugliness".

This section demonstrated that lesbian and trans women in Turkey are not just discriminated against as women, but also as lesbian and trans individuals, which means that each system of domination has an independent impact. Thus, intersectional approaches as proposed by McCall (2005) as well as Zinn and Dill (1996) contend that efforts to amend social inequality should account for the multiple and simultaneous effects of systems of oppression, taking into account the experiences of individuals who are oppressed along multiple axes of inequality.

### 4.3. The real outsiders

Akin to Crenshaw's (1991) study on battered women taking shelter in America, this section analyses the experiences and resilience of LGBTQ+ refugees in Turkey. This section takes on Chaulagain and Pathak's (2021: 152) argument that barriers in the policies of immigration law are based on politics, power, and practices, and they increase the domination patterns that overtly intersect LGBTQ+ individuals' experiences. In this regard, structural intersectionality pays attention to people's individual experiences at the intersections of multiple identities (Dennissen, Benschop, and van den Brink, 2020: 220). As noted earlier in this thesis, Hildebrandt (2014) believes that one of the major obstacles to the process of LGBTQ+ rights advancement is the resistance of certain states to decriminalizing same-sex acts and the emergence of political homophobia as a transnational phenomenon that allies governing elites with nationalist and/or religious movements (Weiss and Bosia, 2013). Think here of Currah and Mulqueen's (2011) notion that the very mechanisms of border passage, for example are gendered.

The dire situation faced by the LGBTQ+ community in Turkey not only impacts Turkish citizens but also extends to LGBTQ+ refugees that cross the border into Turkey in pursuit of protection from violence and discrimination in their respective home countries. As mentioned in Chapter 3, a significant number of people applying for asylum in Turkey are members of the LGBTQ+ community. Sahinkaya and Aslan (2021) note that while there are no official data on the amount of Iranian LGBTQ+ refugees in Turkey, more than 1 400 Iranians requested international protection from Turkey's Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) in 2020. Although some flee persecution unrelated to their sexual orientation or gender identity, there are others who are at risk of persecution precisely because they are LGBTQ+ members. As a result of its geographical location, Turkey is a transit route for thousands of migrants fleeing to Europe from the Middle East, trying to escape the inhumane conditions in their home country.

In September 2022, two LGBTQ+ activists, Zahra Seddiqi-Hamedan (who also uses the name Sareh) and Ellham Choudbar, were found guilty of "promoting Christianity and communicating with media opposed to the Islamic republic", a charge that human right activists say is fabricated (Strzyżyńska, 2022). They were both sentenced to

death in Iran on “corruption on Earth” charges. Although the death sentence was confirmed by Iran’s judiciary, it denied that the charges stemmed from the women’s activism and rather accused them of trafficking and exploiting young women (Esfandiari, 2022). Gritten (2022) reports that Sareh, who was from the predominantly Kurdish town of Nagadeh in the West Azerbaijan province which borders both Turkey and Iraq, was arrested on 27 October 2021 by the IRGC while attempting to cross the border into Turkey to seek asylum. It has been reported that from October 2021 to December 2021, Sareh was held in a detention centre in Urumieh where she enforcedly disappeared for 53 days, during which an IRGC agent allegedly subjected her to “intense interrogations accompanied by verbal abuse” and “threatened to execute or otherwise harm her and take away the custody of her two young children” (Gritten, 2022). A large group of UN-appointed independent human rights experts stated that Iran should “immediately” stay the executions of the two women and said in a statement: “We strongly condemn the sentencing of Ms. Sedighi-Hamadani and Ms. Choubdar to death and call on authorities to stay their executions and annul their sentences as soon as possible” (United Nations, 2022).

Kaos GL (2019: 7) notes that LGBTQ+ refugees fleeing from their home countries because of their discrimination and persecution often are faced with the same circumstances on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex conditions, and/or gender expression in addition to xenophobia against refugees. The violence maintained by xenophobia and racism in parallel with homophobia and transphobia makes LGBTQ+ refugees more fledgling and more vulnerable in their lives during their stay in Turkey. This discrimination can be perpetuated by both state institutions and local people, together with other refugee networks, which may exclude LGBTQ+ refugees from refugee communities by similar discriminatory and marginalising practices.

Muedini (2018: 49). explains that, taking into consideration the problems faced by refugees in their home state, together with the limited laws that Turkey offers to refugees and asylum seekers, those who enter Turkey and who identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community often face extra challenges when seeking safety. As briefly mentioned, many of the LGBTQ+ asylum seekers leave their country of origin because of the discrimination they faced. When the host country does not provide legal mechanisms to recognise sexual orientation and gender identity as categories of

protection, however, then their conditions continue to be dangerous. This is the case with Turkey, where legal safeguards for LGBTQ+ individuals are virtually non-existent. In many cases asylum seekers and refugees feel that not enough support is offered in Turkey as a result of the way that Turkey approaches these people coming into the country. Turkey extends protection under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees only to people originating from Europe. However, a large majority of the asylum seekers in Turkey are not from Europe which means that they are not eligible for refugee status in Turkey. Instead, their protection and prospect for durable solutions fall mainly under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Those who are recognised as refugees by the UNHCR become eligible for resettlement in a third country, generally the U.S, Canada, or Australia (Muedini, 2018: 48).

LGBTQ+ refugees' conditions are notably different from other refugee groups who are persecuted on the basis of belonging to a specific group. Being both asylum seeker and LGBTQ+ leads to double marginality as these individuals experience not just the collective sum of belonging to both groups but also exponential marginalisation on the basis of extreme distancing from traditional support systems and resources (Randazzo, 2005: 38). One of the problems faced by LGBTQ+ asylum seekers in Turkey are the limitations they face regarding where they will be placed to live. During the extended wait time for resettlement to a third country, LGBTQ+ refugees are required to reside in a province designated by DGMM (Sahinkaya, and Aslan, 2021). As Amnesty International (2011) notes, asylum seekers and refugees are obliged to reside in locations that are often more socially conservative than the larger cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir where LGBTQ+ civil society groups provide assistance and solidarity. However, even in more metropolitan areas such as the city of Istanbul, LGBTQ+ members are not necessarily safe. In 2016, Wisam Sankari, a Syrian refugee, was beheaded in a homophobic attack after he met up with another gay man in Istanbul.

According to Hossam, a Syrian who organises weekly support sessions for gay refugees in Istanbul, Sankari's murder was one of at least 20 homophobic attacks on Syrian refugees within the first six months of 2016 (Kingsley, 2014). In 2021, Asya, a trans refugee from Syria, was attacked in Beyogly by her ex-girlfriend and suffered severe burns on her face (ILGA, 2022). Actions such as the police violence during

pride marches have led many to feel that Turkey itself is no longer a place where LGBTQ+ rights are respected. Thus, refugees not only have to deal with the typical series of difficulties but for LGBTI individuals, the security concerns are intensified. This feeling of insecurity has sadly become more and more of a concern.

Moreover, the Turkish refugee system, unlike the European refugee system, expects refugees and asylum seekers to pay for their own housing, as well as all other expenses during their stay in the transit country. Kara and Calik (2016: 10,37) note that refugees stressed that their landlords increased their rents just because they are foreigners and, in some cases, refugees had to share a flat. In addition, Trans refugees claimed that they couldn't find a place to rent and when they did, they had to pay higher rents. They explained that for LGBTQ+ refugees who did not fit the predominant gender roles, getting access to housing was harder. Besides housing problems, LGBTQ+ refugees struggle with access to employment opportunities, which leaves those seeking protection waiting in atrocious social and economic conditions. Refugees in Turkey are not allowed to hold jobs without obtaining the required permits, which often takes too long and in some cases are denied because of their sexuality. This forces them to find employment in the black market where they are subject to abuse, exploitation, sexual harassment, and fines they have to pay to authorities for working underground. If they are found working illegal jobs, the consequences are serious. Many refugees have been jailed and, in some cases, have been faced with deportation by Turkish immigration and police, which is in contradiction with the UN convention refugee Act (Levent, 2022). In recent years there have been cases where the Turkish government attempted to deport refugees. In 2021, four Iranian refugees from the Denizli district were held at the Aydin Removal Centre and sentenced to deportation on the grounds of 'violating public order' for participating in the Istanbul Convention protests (Tar, 2021).

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

In Turkey, homosexuality is not against the law, but there is no legal protection for the LGBTQ+ community. Turkey's legal culture excludes LGBTQ+ people from the protections of the law, which creates a culture of impunity where violence towards LGBTQ+ people go unchallenged. This has been explored in this case study where bias, hate-motivated violence, and abuse are tools used by both state and non-state

actors to control and punish the transgression of established sexual and gender norms.

Intersectionality theory maintains that intersectional subordination is more likely where an individual identifies with several disempowered groups. This can be seen when including a social category such as religion into the analysis. Muslim LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey struggle against the problems of intersectionality as they belong to both religious and sexual orientation minorities, with neither community offering sufficient legal protection for their specific needs. Religiosity adds to the legal and social oppression of those who do not conform to rigid gender norms. LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey face discrimination by religious leaders such as Turkey's top cleric, Erbaş, whose views are supported and justified by President Erdogan who tries to resonate with the strongly nationalist and religious followers whose votes he has seemingly started to lose. However, recent surveys revealed that while there is a substantial number of Turkish people who use the religious argument to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people, there is a greater faction who are both religious and accepting of LGBTQ+ people. In this regard it seems that a larger part of the Turkish population has successfully reconciled their religious beliefs and their acceptance of homosexuality. However, Turkey's increasing anti-gay rhetoric is part of the revival of polarising identity politics in the country, and the LGBTQ+ community is caught in the crossfire.

This chapter examined the various forms of intersecting discriminations that LGBTQ+ members in Turkey face. In the employment sector, discrimination against the Turkish LGBTQ+ community has been and continues to be widespread as they are not protected by the law. Various LGBTQ+ employees have been fired because of their gender identity or sexual orientation. As a result of the possible discrimination, most LGBTQ+ individuals feel the need to hide their sexual orientation out of a fear of not being hired, losing their job, or not being promoted. In addition to workplace discrimination, many gay men in Turkey are faced with various intersecting discriminations which ranges from medical to military.

Gay men are banned from serving in the Turkish armed forces where homosexuality is considered a psychosexual disease. Moreover, new recruits who wish to avoid military service due to their sexuality are obliged to undergo intensive questioning

regarding the nature of their sexual orientation and experience. Those who successfully convince military psychologists of their homosexuality are given pink certificates which opens up new doors of discrimination. Until recently, the military also performed humiliating and degrading medical inspections on those who sought exemption from mandatory military service because of their sexual orientation.

This chapter employed intersectionality theory as both theory and method to analyse political behaviour and the state's interaction with social groups as citizens as well as non-citizens. The Turkish government has visibly clamped down on any and all LGBTQ+ rights activism and freedom of expression, including any rainbow themes which are regarded as the symbol of LGBTQ+ pride around the world. In addition to the embargo on the rainbow symbol, the government has also restricted freedom of expression, assembly, and association of LGBTQ+ people via pride bans and violently breaking up any attempt at a pride march, which violates their fundamental human rights. The latest series of attacks on LGBTQ+ members during the 2022 pride march follow a tidal wave in what were already very treacherous waters for LGBTQ+ individuals in the country. The Turkish government's assault on LGBTQ+ rights include taking measures to undermine freedom of expression, association, and assembly for those approving or allegedly approving pro-LGBTQ+ rights speech, and then proceeding to justify these rights violations under the guise of upholding public morality.

In addition, this chapter revealed that the dire situation faced by the LGBTQ+ community in Turkey not only impacts Turkish citizens but also extends to LGBTQ+ refugees who cross the border into Turkey in pursuit of protection from violence and discrimination in their respective home countries. By analysing the interconnections between economic, cultural, historical, political, and physical elements of migration and sexuality, this study revealed how the Turkish regime organises the everyday realities of sexual minority refugees. Although these policies and practices shape the lives of all asylum seekers, this chapter identified unique discriminations and oppressions faced by sexual minorities in Turkey. These individuals are faced with a double burden. Their hoped-for experience of belonging turns into an experience of fitting with an unacceptable social group and being marginalised, based on severe distance from traditional support systems and resources. For many of them, this marginalisation creates an additional layer to the already challenging barriers and

daunting process of seeking asylum. By this account, asylum seekers who are part of the LGBTQ+ community are confronted with barriers that other asylum seekers do not face.

## Chapter 5: Case study of Egypt

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*“To the world, you’ve been greatly cruel, but I forgive” – Sara Hagazy, Egyptian lesbian activist.*

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter starts with a short introduction of the current status of lesbian, gay, and transgender individuals in Egypt; followed by an analysis of the history of LGBTQ+ rights in Egypt from 2001 – 2022. The LGBTQ+ community in Egypt is not only faced with the current authoritarian policies, but they are also confronted with an additional struggle in Egyptian society which does not accept or even respect their fundamental human rights. To truly comprehend the systemic discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ Egyptians, it is important to first understand the build-up of events that has taken place in the country since 2001; next up will be an examination of the intersecting identities of being a gay man in Egypt as well as being double marginalised as a woman and a lesbian. This chapter will then look at the intersecting discriminations faced by the LGBTQ+ Egyptian community including state-sponsored homophobia against transgender individuals, and government monitoring and hunting of LGBTQ+ individuals.

International news headlines on the topic of LGBTQ+ issues have been dominated by the Arab Republic of Egypt which has attracted global attention as a serial LGBTQ+ rights offender throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although not a nation that explicitly bans or criminalises homosexuality, Egypt’s state security apparatus is still able to target, criminalise, and imprison LGBTQ+ individuals. Many scholars point out that Article 9, paragraph (c) of Law No. 10/1961 of the Egyptian Penal Code is selectively utilised to target individuals who conform to diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Long, 2004).

ILGA (2022: 115) reports that the key charges made under this law include “habitual” practice of *fujur* and *di’ara*<sup>11</sup> with a maximum of three years imprisonment under Article 9-c. Long (2004: 13-14) is of the opinion that *fujur* has “taken a life of its own as courts

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11 The Arabic term *di’ara* is commonly understood to mean prostitution in the sense of commercial sex (ILGA, 2022: 115), while *fujur* is a much broader term (translated here as “debauchery”), a decree inconsistently defined by the state to meaning either (or all): habitual for-profit male prostitution, promiscuity from a man, or consensual sex between men (Long, 2004).

and the criminal justice system determined what was immoral and concentrated on homosexual conduct". Under Article 14, charges include "publicising an invitation to induce debauchery", and "incitement to debauchery" (Article 1). A report by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (2017: 8-9) notes that during the period from October 2013 to March 2017, 232 people were arrested on charges of debauchery on the grounds of their private sexual practices or sexual orientation pursuant to the Law on Combating Prostitution. This was an average of 66 people per year, which was far more than the 198 individuals with an average of 14 people per year in the previous 13 years (2000-2013). The report further revealed that, based on media monitoring, the methods used to track down and arrest these 323 individuals were diverse:

- 129 were arrested through dating and social networking websites,
- 39 were arrested following police reports of domestic violence,
- 10 were arrested after being put under surveillance,
- 6 men were arrested for wearing women's clothing,
- 6 arrests originated from hotels,
- 3 were arrested randomly on the street,
- 3 were arrested without stating the means or conditions of arrest.

In addition to Law No. 10/1961, various articles of the Penal Code have been utilised to target LGBTQ+ individuals. Article 178 of the Penal Code imposes a maximum of two years' imprisonment for anyone who produces or purchases articles or images which violate public morals; Article 269 penalises the "incitement to commit debauchery" with imprisonment of up to one month.

Since the start of the twenty-first century, Egypt has experienced ongoing uprisings, which terminated a decades-long dictatorship, led to its first elected Islamist president, and eventually a military coup which resulted in yet another despotic leader. Regardless of the type of leadership, Egypt has had a regular pattern of state-sponsored LGBTQ+ crackdowns (Huaman, 2019: 19).

Egypt joined the twenty-first century as a dictatorship under former "president" Hosni Mubarak who ruled Egypt since 1981. As time went on, the Egyptian citizens became dissatisfied with the government as the economic status deteriorated for many of them. In an attempt to contain disapproval, Mubarak's administration in 2001 began the first highly publicized state-sponsored LGBTQ+ crackdown (Long, 2004: 7). However,

Howard and Hussain (2013: 20-22) note that this was not enough to amend Mubarak's public approval ratings and thus, in 2011, with the development of globalization and social media advancements, Egypt became one of the Arab nations to stage a revolution in the Arab Spring era, resulting in Mubarak's ousting.

According to Ghoshal (2018: 14), despite the revolution and the presidential election that followed, President Al-Sisi's coup disrupted the possibility of a more democratic Egypt as he adopted Mubarak's strategy of targeting LGBTQ+ people, apparently as a method of proving his religiously conservative credentials and getting rid of Islamist challenges. This extension of state-sponsored LGBTQ+ discrimination has obstructed and delayed the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights and tolerance in Egypt. The LGBTQ+ community in Egypt is not only faced with the current authoritarian policies, but they are also confronted with an additional struggle in Egyptian society which does not accept or even respect their fundamental human rights. In order to truly comprehend the systemic discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ Egyptians, it is important to first understand the build-up of events since 2001.

## **5.2. How did we get here; The situation of LGBTQ+ rights since 2001 - 2017**

On 11 May 2001, the Egyptian police raided the "Queen Boat", a gay nightclub on the Nile River visited by natives and foreigners. It is believed that the Queen Boat incident represented a new era in LGBTQ+ prosecution in the country, as it displayed patterns that the Egyptian authorities still use (Long, 2004: 2). Huaman (2019: 24) notes that at least 55 men were arrested at the scene and in random police pickups on the streets. Of the 55 men, however, only 52 were charged with *fujur*, and they became known as the Cairo 52. Noralla (2021a: 2) asserts that authorities portrayed the men as a "blasphemous cult" and referred the men to the medical forensic office to conduct anal examinations on them in an attempt to determine whether they "did have gay sex or not". Villarreal (2020) notes that Egypt is one of seven countries around the world that at the time of writing still use forced anal exams to "prove" a person's homosexuality.

According to the so called "medical reports" 16 men were indeed penetrated from their anus. Over the ensuing six months the men's names made headlines while their faces were displayed in newsstands. On 14 November 2001, 23 of the men were sentenced to a maximum of 5 years imprisonment. However, one year after the raid, and under

international pressure, former President Mubarak's regime rescinded the sentences and referred the prisoners to an ordinary misdemeanour court which reduced their sentences (Noralla, 2021b: 19). This reprieve was short-lived, as the same group was re-tried in 2003 and received the maximum sentence of three years (Long, 2004: 46). Huaman (2019: 26) explains that although one could argue that the sentences were short and the charges classified as misdemeanours, the lives of these men were, for the most part, never the same and for some of them their reputation seemed almost impossible to restore in Egypt.

Whilst the Queen Boat incident was the most striking LGBTQ+ crackdown under Mubarak's regime, it was not peculiar to this regime. The Egyptian revolution of 2011 offered a political momentum and space for LGBTQ+ organisations in Egypt that were remarkably dynamic with regard to movement building. Following the revolution, LGBTQ+ individuals in Egypt, together with activists and organisations, became more visible and more fervent to be part of the changing social and political landscapes that looked promising and empowering (Londono, 2011). LGBTQ+ activist started to mobilize not just for LGBTQ+ rights, but other intersecting rights such as those of women, gender, sexuality, civic, and indigenous people as well, which shaped LGBTQ+ activism in the post-revolution years. However, LGBTQ+ rights issues were not among the reforms demanded by many of those who protested during the 2011 Egyptian revolution. As a result, the embargo on LGBTQ+ individuals continued after the revolution under Al-Sisi's presidential term.

Under Al-Sisi's rule two momentous anti-LGBTQ+ incidents took place at the start of his term. The first was the "gay wedding video" case. In September 2014, a video of a gay couple getting married on a boat on the Nile which was uploaded onto YouTube went viral and was picked up by the local press, which condemned the ceremony. The footage showed two men, in the presence of a small group of friends, exchanging vows, rings, and a kiss. All eight men who appeared in the video were captured and charged with "debauchery, incitement of debauchery, and publicizing materials that offend public decency, and publishing a video that invites debauchery" (Hamid, 2017: 19). Kingsley (2014) reported that, just like in the Cairo 52 case, two of the men were subjected to humiliating anal exams, a procedure which at this point was well established and conventionally condemned by the UN, under the committee of torture (Hamid: 2017: 31). Authorities concluded that the results showed that they did not

engage in homosexual relations. However, they were sentenced to one year in prison for publicizing and advertising debauchery.

In December of that same year another significant LGBTQ+ clampdown incident known as the Bab al-Bahr bathhouse case took place. Hamid (2017: 20,22) claimed that police received a tip from TV-presenter, Mona Iraqi, who pointed out the Bab al-Bahr bathhouse as a place of gathering for homosexual men where they would have sex parties. Based on that tip alone, police raided the bathhouse, arresting 26 men, all while Iraqi filmed and later broadcasted the footage of the half-naked men in the bathhouse. The footage showed Iraqi narrating the raid and verbally assaulting the men, degrading them as “sexual deviants”. Although the Bathhouse men did not serve any time, this was not the end of the LGBTQ+ suppression under Al-Sisi, as the anti-LGBTQ+ attitude and targeting of the LGBTQ+ Egyptian community continue until today. Pratt (2007: 129) is of the opinion that the persecution of the Cairo 52 set a new modern and public precedent for Egypt in the twenty-first century. After the Queen Boat raid, the Egyptian government assumed the right to police the (private) gender and sexuality of its citizens to ensure that they conform to cisgender and heterosexual norms.

### **5.3. Intersecting identities**

Intersectionality theory contends that no social group is homogenous. Merely knowing that a woman lives in a sexist society is insufficient information to describe the complexity of her daily social interactions. Applying an intersectional approach makes it possible to highlight marginalised groups who may otherwise be left out of development initiatives, as it provides a more multifaceted comprehension of social life and social categories. Traditional or mainstream research is restricted by its predisposition to consider marginalised or minority groups as the “other”, to homogenise experiences, and to erase the intricacy and distinctiveness of the individual’s experiences by conceptualising social relations and identities such as class, gender, or race separately in a linear or one-dimensional approach (Hill Collins, 2000). Intersectionality as a framework recognises the interconnectedness of socio-political categories that overlap with systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

### **5.3.1. At the intersection of being a gay man in Egypt**

Earlier in this study it was mentioned that both positive and negative identity categories contribute to structural intersectionality. A person can be advantaged by a social category that enables socio-political or economic empowerment, while simultaneously being disadvantaged by belonging to other social categories that are sources of subordination (Boogaard and Roggeband, 2010: 56). This is the case for gay men in Egypt. They might be advantaged under the patriarchal system because of their gender but it is the same system which discriminates against them if they identify as gay and not a heterosexual man in Egypt.

An important aspect that stood out in the previous section is that most of the crackdowns were merely targeting men. According to Pratt's (2007) research, these crackdowns were performed in an attempt to reconstruct a homonormative and patriarchal society. The Egyptian government aspires to propagate the view that a woman's role is to be dependent, domestic, and feminine, while the man's role is to be independent, breadwinner, and masculine – all of which are disrupted by LGBTQ+ identities and lifestyles. As a result, the state uses moral panics such as the mentioned raids as a political tool in order to install fear in communities and “closet” the different sexualities and genders, in an attempt to maintain societal approval and control along with increasing its legitimacy as a strong heteronormative regime (Hauman, 2019: 37-38).

Noralla (2021a: 25) makes the argument that Law No. 10/1961 is a good example of the case in point as the law in most cases punishes homosexual men, while at the same time rewarding heterosexual men. The biggest issue with the law is its difference in both its application and interpretation in protecting heterosexual men, but not gay men. This can be seen when courts give an authoritative interpretation of the law which allows heterosexual men to escape accountability under the law in cases of “habitual debauchery”. According to Human Rights Watch (2017c), police in Egypt regularly round up gay men and transgender women, actively seeking them out and entrapping them on dating apps and through social media. In Egypt, men and transgender women who are accused of “debauchery” are systematically referred to the Forensic Medicine Authority, an arm of the Ministry of Justice, to conduct forced anal examinations. The men are forced by doctors to strip and kneel. They massage, dilate, and in some

cases penetrate prisoners' anal cavities in search of signs that they have been "habitually used" in "sodomy". The results of these tests are regularly used in court to convict them on the grounds of their perceived sexual orientation (Long, 2004).

In August 2020, Egyptian security forces, probably from the National Security Agency, arbitrarily arrested two men who witnessed a high-profile gang rape in Cairo in 2014. The men, who were to give evidence, had their phones unlawfully searched by officers while they were held incommunicado for several days. After photos of them engaging in same sex conduct were allegedly found, the men were subjected to forced anal examinations (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Additionally, in 2019 a man known under the pseudonym Salim was arbitrarily detained twice. Salim was meeting a friend at night in Ramses in Cairo when police officers approached him and demanded to see his ID. A police officer told Salim that they were "cleaning the streets of faggot". They then beat him, handcuffed him, and threw him in a police vehicle. A month after his first arrest, Salim was again randomly arrested on the street, searched, and detained overnight. A judge at the Abbasiya Court later cleared him of charges of debauchery which were brought against him after his second arrest (Younes, 2020).

### **5.3.2. From marginalised to double marginalised**

Applying political intersectionality in this section offers a practical aspect to the insights of structural intersectionality by providing a framework for contesting power and thereby linking theory to existent and emergent social and political struggles. Political intersectionality looks at the ways in which social identity groups organise themselves between two or more political agendas or movements. Crenshaw (1991) is of the opinion that in political intersectionality, women of colour are situated in at least two subordination dimensions, namely, women and racialized groups. Women in Egypt are situated in at least two subordination dimensions, namely women and LGBTQ+ marginalized groups. Intersectionality is an appropriate mechanism through which the status of women in Egypt can be accurately analysed. Violence in Egypt is a shapeshifting tool deeply entrenched in the society and utilised to reduce the influence of women, resulting in them being seen as mere individuals bereft of any identity and opening the door to gender-based discrimination and violence against them (Sharma, 2020).

In September 2017 the Lebanese band Mashrou' Leila, whose lead singer is openly gay, played a concert for 30 000 people in Cairo. As was to be expected from their previous crackdowns, the Egyptian pro-state media obtained pictures of young fans who waved rainbow flags during the concert, reported on the matter, and prompted the government to find and arrest these “society-destabilizers” (Davis, 2017). Egyptian authorities then rounded up approximately 75 people linked to waving rainbow flags at the concert (Goshal, 2018: 25). Of those arrested, more than 40 were sentenced by Egyptian courts to a maximum of six years imprisonment under debauchery laws. Additionally, the Supreme State Security Prosecution charged two with “membership to an illegal organisation” allegedly aimed at interfering with the constitution. Sara Hagazy was one of the two who were charged with both charges. Hagazy told her lawyers that police at the Saida Zenab police station in Cairo allowed cellmates to beat and sexually harass her after informing them that she was charged with “habitual debauchery” (Human Rights Watch, 2017b).

Younes (2020c) notes that although Hagazy was released on bail after three months, those who arbitrarily deprived her of liberty and tortured her were never held accountable. Hagazy was fired from her job, rejected by her family, and fearing re-arrest and a prison sentence went into exile in Canada, where on 14 June 2022, she took her own life. She ended her suicide note with the words: “To the world, you’ve been greatly cruel, but I forgive”. The charges placed on Hagazy showed that the debauchery ploy was no longer aimed at men only and was now also used to oppress women in Egypt, especially lesbian women. In addition, the independent news media organisation Egyptian Streets (2018) maintains that lesbian women in Egypt face death threats from their families and loved ones as well as mistreatment from family members, which includes beatings, being locked in the house, forced conversion therapy, humiliation, forced institutionalisation, pressure to get married, being forced to give up education or jobs, and receiving death threats.

While the onslaught on lesbian women in Egypt has historically been less harsh than on gay men, the situation of lesbian women in the country is particularly complex as they are faced with double discrimination. Although LGBTQ+ individuals all face different types of discrimination, lesbian women in Egypt are faced with a double discrimination as they are women who are seen by the patriarchal system as second-class citizens. In addition to that, they are also seen as members of a group which

poses the biggest threat to the ideals of “manhood” in the society. This “manhood” is regularly guarded and celebrated in society whilst “womanhood” is mostly something that requires containment within the religious conservative patriarchy of the society. This is because it is believed that a women can bring shame to the family if she does not conform to the assigned gender roles.

Patriarchy is entrenched in the conservative Egyptian society and is often state sponsored, as the government encourages a very narrow understanding of gender and sexuality (El-Bahery, 2017). As mentioned earlier in this study, governments tend to regulate sexuality to a significant degree, because they regard dissident sexualities as a threat to social cohesion. The creation of national identities based on the idea of a safe or civilized space “inside” depends on the construction of an “outside” whose identity often appears strange or threatening. LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey are left in a state of “otherness” as they fall outside the realm of what is considered “normal” or “good”. Hagazy’s history is a good example, as she posed a threat to the ideals of “manhood”.

It is important to note that in addition to facing discrimination for their sexual orientation lesbians in Egypt are also vulnerable to discrimination and violence because they are women. As a result of Egypt’s patriarchal and male-dominated society, pressures on women, and lesbian women in particular, are compounded by different overlapping forces, such as objectification, homophobia, and female subjugation in the household as well as workplace. Egypt’s patriarchal nature can be seen in every aspect of Egyptian life, from educational, judicial, and religious institutions, all the way to families and households. According to a study by UN Women in 2017, 86,8% of Egyptian men and 76,7% of women claimed that the primary role of women in society is to cook at home and care for the family. Moreover, the study found that more than 90% of men in Egypt and 58% of women believe that the final say when it comes to major household decisions should be made by a man (Salem, 2020).

In Egypt, gender discrimination can take on various forms ranging from young girls receiving less education than boys, to women not being afforded jobs solely on the grounds of their gender and not based on their merit or skills. Women in Egypt are engaged in endless battles that take place on all levels of society. According to a study by The National Council for Women (2020), 7.9 million Egyptian women suffer from

different types of violence yearly and less than 1% of this number report it or seek help. What is even more worrying than the statistics is the brutality of the crimes. In June 2022, 21-year-old Nayera Ashraf was approached by a colleague and stabbed several times. A video of the attack shows her on the ground fighting for her life as bystanders attempt to help her when her assailant waves his knife in their faces before cutting her throat. It later emerged that the motive for the attack was that Ashraf had rejected a marriage proposal from her attacker (Shawkat, 2022).

Less than two months later, in August 2022, 20-year-old Salma Bahgat was repeatedly stabbed with a knife by her 22-year-old classmate. It was reported that Bahgat was killed because she declined two marriage proposals from her attacker (Maher, 2022). Both these attacks came one year after women in Egypt launched the social media campaign *#GuardianshipIsMyRight* to oppose amendments to the Personal Status law which many argued would further discriminate against women and would have allowed male guardians to seek annulment of their female relatives' marriage if they deemed the husband to be impotent (El-Rifae, 2021).

Another example of the discrimination and violence faced by girls in Egypt is the fact that they have less access to education in comparison to boys in the country. According to statistics by UNESCO (2017), women are on the lower end of the literacy scale in Egypt with 67% of women being literate compared to 83% of men. Girls in Egypt are typically pulled out of school before completing their secondary education. According to UN Women (2018), women and girls aged 10+ spend 22,3% of their time on unpaid care and domestic work, in comparison to men who spend 2,4% of their time on such service. The different types of discrimination faced by women in Egypt leaves them in an already marginalised gender category. Adding their sexuality into the equation leaves them in a doubly marginalised group.

The Egyptian government continues to fail to adequately protect women and girls from sexual as well as gender-based violence. Those who do speak out or criticize the government's failure to protect women are reportedly targeted. In May 2018, activist Amal Fathy posted a video on her personal Facebook page protesting the sexual harassment in Egypt and the fact that government does little to combat it. She was arrested three days later, following an extensive smear campaign by Egyptian state media (Cullinane, 2018). In September 2018, Fathy was sentenced to two years'

imprisonment by a criminal court for “publishing false news”, as well as fined 10 000 EGP for making “public insults” (Masr, 2018). In January 2022, the Court of Cassation reduced her sentence to one year imprisonment for time served (Middle East Observer, 2022)

## **5.5. Intersecting discriminations faced by the LGBTQ+ community**

In the current chapter intersectionality is used as a “method for interrogating the institutional reproduction of inequality, whether at the level of the state, the family, or of legal structures more generally” (Graham et al., 2009: 2). LGBTQ+ individuals in Egypt face various intersecting discriminations by not only state actors but also fellow Egyptians. Intercategorical intersectionality is explained by McCall (2005) as expressing multiple inequality relations within existing social groups in order to illuminate those relations and the way in which they operate within and across analytical categories. As Hill Collins (2000: 18) clarifies, “Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice”. By applying an intersectional framework this section focuses on interlocking systems of oppression namely, state-sponsored homophobia against transgender individuals and how the government monitors and hunts LGBTQ+ individuals, in an attempt to see how these systems, overlap and impact LGBTQ+ individuals’ struggle.

### **5.5.1 State-sponsored homophobia against transgender individuals**

An earlier analysis explored how the Egyptian state uses debauchery laws to target LGBTQ+ individuals. This section will explore how the LGBTQ+ community in Egypt faces oppression, marginalisation, and a hostile environment through state-sponsored homophobia, with a particular focus on transgender individuals. Younes (2020b) explains that during Egypt’s third Universal Periodic Review (UPR), where members of the United Nations Human Rights Council weighed in on countries’ human rights records, Egypt rejected recommendations by various states to end arrests and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Egypt contended that it “does not recognize the orientation terms mentioned in this recommendation,” thus effectively denying the existence of sexual and gender identity. This is extremely alarming. How can a state protect its citizens if it does not recognise them?

In Egypt, people who do not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth or those who are in the process of transitioning to align their sex with their gender identity are faced with extreme oppression and marginalisation. Emam (2020) claims that official data on the actual number of people who transition in Egypt is extremely scarce as the country does not have a clear system for the transitions. Presuming that these individuals survive the fury of their families, those who want to transition must apply for an operation at one of the state-run hospitals. However, before the operation, transgender individuals in Egypt have to undergo complicated psychological assessments and wellness checks and the surgeries cannot be carried out without approval from Al-Azhar, Egypt's most important Islamic Institution. For several years Egypt offered free gender affirmation surgery for anyone diagnosed with "gender identity disorder". In 2016, however, the government committee in charge of issuing permits for surgery stopped doing so as they were lodged in a debate about the morality of the operations (Murdock, 2016). Consequently, those who wish to change their gender are left with no choice but to turn to private hospitals and clinics.

According to Noralla (2022), a dangerous and expensive underground medical industry has emerged in the absence of government-sponsored gender-affirming healthcare. This has resulted in unsupervised treatment in unlicensed centres, without avenues for accountability. In August 2021, Ezz Eldin, a 26-year-old Egyptian transgender man, died after he was prematurely discharged following the sex reassignment surgery, he had undergone the week before at a private hospital in Dokki, Giza (Masr, 2021). In addition, a 28-year-old transgender woman known as Nada commented on her experience undergoing surgery in one of these underground clinics in Egypt. According to Nada, these surgeries are nothing but a trade for the private doctors as they charged her 7000 EGP for the first operation which was a very painful and traumatic experience for her. She claimed that she had to leave the clinic before she even recovered (Noralla, 2022).

In addition to the bureaucratic issues with which transgender individuals in Egypt struggle, they are faced with other abuse and discrimination. In February 2015, seven allegedly transgender men were arrested by morals investigators after they met at a Cairo club to celebrate a friend's birthday. A few months later police also arrested two allegedly transgender individuals whom they charged with prostitution (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Furthermore, in 2019 Malak el-Kashif, a 20-year-old transgender

woman and human rights activist, was arbitrarily imprisoned for a period of four months, sexually harassed, and abused, all while being kept in a male prison. An appeal filed by her lawyers requesting the Interior Ministry to provide separate detention facilities for transgender detainees in accordance with their gender identity was dismissed in 2020 by an administrative court (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

### **5.5.2. Government monitoring and hunting of LGBTQ+ individuals**

In Egypt the government entraps and tracks what it calls “dissidents” across the country via monitoring their social media usage and applications (apps). As noted earlier in this chapter, it is alleged that of the 232 people arrested on charges of debauchery in 2017, 129 were arrested via dating and social networking websites. According to the advocacy group, Solidarity with Egypt LGBTQ+, 114 criminal investigations involving 274 LGBTQ+ individuals were launched between the end of 2013 and November 2016, 66 of which were conducted via the use of social media by authorities (Human Rights Watch, 2017d). In 2014, the Egyptian government bought a surveillance system from a cybersecurity firm called See Egypt, in order to monitor all online communication. This provided the Egyptian state authorities with an unprecedented ability to penetrate any programme and to gather data and information from Skype, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, among others. Although the system was to be used to prevent terrorist acts or communication between perceived terrorist groups, another justification for the use of the surveillance system was also to monitor conversations between individuals from the LGBTQ+ community. An official from the Egyptian government said: “Those taking part in debauchery or homosexual acts would be watched for the protection of Egypt. We are safeguarding values that are important to Egyptians and which will keep us safe” (Frenkel and Atef, 2014).

The Middle East Eye (2017) notes that the Egyptian morality police use tactics that reveal the degree of the repression and surveillance in use against LGBTQ+ members which goes far beyond the normal arrests in other countries around the world. In many of the cases the morality police officers pose as gay men on message boards (such as WhatsApp), websites (like Facebook), and dating apps (like Grindr), where they develop relationships (which can take months) with the men in an attempt to entrap and then arrest the targets. Some of the officers go as far as to send sexual messages in exchange for explicit photographs which they can then use as evidence.

There have also been reports that the Egyptian government used the rainbow flag incident in 2017 to conclude a swathe of existing surveillance operations. Amr Abdul Rahman, head of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights civil liberties programme, commented that the Egyptian government “have been pouring enormous resources into this for a long time now and that’s the reason they were able to make 60 arrests in a single week following the flag incident” (Middle East Eye, 2017). In addition to the police, many homophobic individuals also use these online platforms for their own personal agendas. A 37-year-old gay man under the pseudonym Ashraf was beaten and mugged by a group of men who showed up for a date he had set up on Reddit. Ashraf explained that he was threatened with rape and public outing and intimidated into giving them money. He added that he wanted to resist and fight them but couldn’t bear a scandal or any interference from the police (Sorour, 2021).

In another attempt to monitor homosexuality in the country, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) in October 2017 released an order to ban all types of backing through promotion or sympathy towards the LGBTQ+ community via media outlets, as well as any appearance of LGBTQ+ individuals on media outlets (Egypt Independent, 2017). Makram Mohamed Ahmed, head of the SCMR, maintained that these measures are not an attempt to completely ignore or deny the phenomenon of homosexuality but rather are focused on how to end it by providing parents with the “appropriate ways of raising children”. He claimed that it is an illness that spreads for reasons that need to be exposed and treated, which is where the media’s role becomes significant. In 2019, Mohamed al-Ghiety, a TV presenter, was sentenced to one year of hard labour and 3 000 Egyptian pounds for “promoting homosexuality”. This was after he conducted an interview in 2018 on his privately owned LTC TV channel with a gay man about his life as a sex worker. In addition to the fine and jail term, al-Giety was ordered by the misdemeanours court to be put under surveillance for one year after serving his sentence (BBC, 2019).

A supplementary method of entrapping LGBTQ+ individuals in Egypt is through deportation by the Ministry of Interior of foreign nationals who are, or are suspected of being, LGBTQ+ even in cases where debauchery charges are not upheld and sometimes even without the cases going to court. The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (2017) notes that in 2008 a Libyan graduate student was deported and banned from re-entering Egypt on the grounds of his sexuality. After seven years a court in

Egypt upheld the decision to deport him, contending that in its ruling the Ministry of Interior has the “authority of evaluation” which enables it to determine what is in the country’s best interest.

It is important to note that the evident human rights violations performed by the Egyptian government and state authorities against the LGBTQ+ community and anyone who publicly demonstrates their rights cannot be ignored. In its embargo on LGBTQ+ individuals, the government failed to adhere to the commitments in international human rights law, in particular the due process and fair trial guarantees protected under Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In addition, the crackdown also violates Article 7 of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights. Furthermore, the practice of forced anal examinations discussed in this chapter is regarded as a form of brutal, humiliating, intrusive treatment and a type of torture which violates the ban against torture and other ill treatment, either physical or mental, as codified in Article 1 of the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In addition, the procedure infringes on the right to privacy under Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. All of these rights are protected under Chapter Three of the Egyptian Constitution which addresses freedoms, public rights, and duties (Fadel, 2017).

## **5.6. Conclusion**

Since the start of the twenty-first century, the Egyptian government has had a regular pattern of LGBTQ+ crackdowns. LGBTQ+ individuals in Egypt have been faced with state-sponsored LGBTQ+ discrimination from Mubarak’s regime to that of Al-Sisi, which has alienated and delayed the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights and tolerance in the country. The LGBTQ+ community in Egypt are not only faced with the current authoritarian policies, but they also have to contend with an additional struggle in Egyptian society which does not accept or even respect their fundamental human rights. The Egyptian state authorities have launched a systematic attack on the LGBTQ+ community which is fuelled by a social stigma in which homosexuality is regarded as a disease and indication of psychological disturbance. Egyptian authorities continued attempts to sequester LGBTQ+ rights as a cultural issue (a threat to family, religious, and moral values) obscures the bigger picture: the political context and anti-rights agenda underpinning the government’s crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights and anyone who supports the cause.

The current study regards gender and sexuality as overlapping rather than competing systems of inequality, not benefiting one system over the other. This chapter revealed that despite homosexuality not being considered a crime per se in Egypt, it is de facto<sup>12</sup> illegal under Law 10/1961, which the government uses to target LGBTQ+ individuals. This law especially targets gay men in Egypt who, as structural intersectionality contends, can be advantaged by their social category while at the same time be at a disadvantage because of it. Men in Egypt are advantaged under the patriarchal system, but it is the same system that creates a disadvantage for them. Under Law 10/1961, men who identify as homosexual are punished, but men who identify as heterosexual are rewarded. The kind of violence and torture perpetrated against gay men in Egypt has not been observed in the case of lesbian women in the country, as they have not been subjected to the same kind of state scrutiny and persecution. There have not been any crackdowns on lesbians in Egypt that can compare to those against gay men.

However, although the debauchery law is mainly used by the Egyptian state to punish men, the rainbow flag incident of 2017 brought a change. For the first time, women, and lesbian women in particular, were also targeted under the debauchery ploy. Women who were already seen as second-class citizens under the country's patriarchal regime were now also targeted by this law for "inciting debauchery". Intersectionality theory provides a framework for contesting power and thereby linking theory to existent and emergent social and political struggles. Although all LGBTQ+ individuals in Egypt face different types of discrimination, lesbian women in Egypt face a double discrimination as they are now not just seen as second-class citizens under the patriarchal system, but they are also seen as members of a group which poses the biggest threat to the ideals of "manhood" in the society.

When analysing the realities of LGBTQ+ experiences in Egypt, it is evident that discrimination against these individuals does not take on one singular form, but rather a combination of factors that exclude and uphold homophobic narratives at all levels of society.

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<sup>12</sup> De facto means that although the law does not explicitly criminalise consensual same-sex relations, it is used in practise to arrest, prosecute, and convict individuals of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

LGBTQ+ individuals in Egypt face various intersecting discriminations by not only state actors but also fellow Egyptians. These LGBTQ+ Egyptians, transgender individuals in particular, are faced with oppression, marginalisation, and a hostile environment through state-sponsored homophobia, family, and societal discrimination. In Egypt, people who do not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth or those who are in the process of transitioning to align their sex with their gender identity are faced with extreme oppression and marginalisation. Transgender individuals who survive the wrath of their families and wish to transition are required to apply for an operation at one of the state-run hospitals after undergoing psychological assessments and wellness checks. However, in 2016 Al-Azhar stopped issuing permits for surgery, leaving transgender individuals with no choice but to turn to private hospitals and clinics. This has created a dangerous and expensive underground medical industry which has resulted in unsupervised treatment in unlicensed centres, without avenues for accountability.

In its crackdown on LGBTQ+ individuals, the Egyptian government makes use of various entrapment measures and monitor what they call “dissidents” across the country by monitoring their social media usage and apps. The Egyptian government and state authorities violate the basic human rights of LGBTQ+ individuals through its suppression, directly violating various rights protected under Chapter Three of the Egyptian Constitution.

Of importance, however, is that despite the Egyptian government’s attempts to marginalise and suppress the LGBTQ+ community in Egypt by banning their appearance in the media, their presence has started to gain support and momentum, especially in recent years. This has been seen particularly following the death of Hagazy. Despite the challenges faced by human rights defenders and LGBTQ+ activists in the country, they remain determined to demand respect for basic rights and they continue to create a space for action.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion: Discussions and findings

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*“First of all,” he said, “if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view-” [...] “-until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.” Atticus to Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee (p. 33)*

In this final chapter the focus will fall on offering a general overview of the three case studies of Iran, Turkey, and Egypt, identifying overarching themes and considering possible future research.

### 6.1. General Overview of Case Studies

The case studies addressed in the course of this study served not only to broaden the scope of the study, but more significantly to deepen the knowledge about the intersecting discrimination faced by various members of the LGBTQ+ community in each country. To assume that all members of the LGBTQ+ community are homogenous and faced with identical issues would be naïve. This study uncovered the social identities such as ethnicity, gender, religion race, sexual orientation, and gender identity overlap with one another at the intersection of various types of systematic discrimination that both oppress and advantage LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran, Turkey, and Egypt.

#### 6.1.1. Iran

The first case study revealed the significance of how interlocking systems of power affect those who are most marginalised in Iran. By applying an intersectional lens this study looked beyond people in Iran’s individual identities and rather focused on the points of intersection that their multiple identities create. On the one hand we find lesbian women in Iran who sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to heterosexual or cisgender women in the country, and sometimes they even share very similar experiences with gay men. However, they often experience double discrimination, the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of their gender as well as on the basis of their sexual orientation. In Iran, institutions of religion, family, and the state concur that women are wives and mothers, who ought to be submissive to the males in their families, which dictates the gender norms governing women in Iran.

On the other hand, there are men who identify as gay in Iran. These gay men face harsher consequences than lesbian women based merely on their sexual orientation. Although lesbian women and gay men in Iran can find themselves at the same social location as members of the same marginalised group, intersectionality encourages us to embrace the complexities of group-based politics by critically observing the differences in social location among those claiming membership in marginalised groups. Gay Iranian men experience discrimination differently depending on their intersecting identities such as “top”, “bottom”, “passive”, “active”, Muslim, non-Muslim, married and unmarried. The uniqueness and diversity of LGBTQ+ individuals’ experiences elaborated on in this chapter has demonstrated why it is paramount to not regard them as a single homogenous group, but rather to understand intersecting discriminations they face at certain intersections of their multiple identities which interlink and shape their experiences in several fields.

An intersectional framework encourages us to think critically about how oppression manifests in societies. Various types of discrimination such as state-sponsored discrimination, discrimination faced in public/media, familial discrimination, and structural discrimination are not independent from one another and should be viewed as interlocking systems of oppression. The Iranian government, via its state-sponsored homophobic rhetoric, has disguised its political regulation of trans bodies and gatekeeping to basic rights and freedoms as a façade of rights and financial support, which is nothing more than a way to provide itself with easier control in its system of suppression. Taking into consideration Iran’s criminalisation of same-sex relations and the proclamations by state officials that certain sexual identities are seen as a medial issue, the fact that it has the second highest number of SRSs around the world per year is a clear sign that the State privileges relations and attraction amongst men and women and violates a range of human rights by subjecting lesbian women and gay men to a variety of measures ranging from therapeutic treatments to SRSs. All this done with an aim to eradicate queer people.

In Iran, anyone who deviates from the system of sexual classification is labelled under the category of mental and social disorders. This social stigma together with the criminalisation of any homosexual conduct leaves LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran in a public space where information regarding or specifically relevant to minority sexual identities and gender identities is largely inaccessible. The government in Iran restricts

various media publications in order to suppress and censor discussion of issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity. When these topics are discussed in Iran's public spaces, however, the dialogue usually takes place in the form of derogatory speech that contributes to misconceptions and bigotry.

A common misconception would be that these LGBTQ+ members would be able to escape the discrimination they face in public and/or media by taking refuge at home. However, this is not the case, as many LGBTQ+ individuals find themselves at another intersection faced with a different form of discrimination. In Iran, LGBTQ+ individuals also face various types of abuse at the hands of their family members as a result of their sexual orientation and gender identity. They are, moreover, not afforded legal protection against abusive family members, as Iranian laws give parents extensive discretion in disciplining their children. Furthermore, filing a complaint against abusive parents or siblings could endanger LGBTQ individuals, making it very unlikely that such abuse gets reported. Iranian fathers in particular are shielded from legal responsibility when they abuse minor as well as non-minor children by means of Qisas.

At an additional intersection LGBTQ+ students in Iran are faced with various types of violence at educational level that can range from physical violence to verbal, sexual, or even psychological violence and is generally expressed via acts of bullying, intimidation, and repression by classmates, trainers, or other school staff. Many LGBTQ+ individuals in Iran indicate that primary school was one of the "most traumatic periods in their life". It is normally the first time many of them were exposed to the harsh realities of the outside world, where looking, acting, or feeling different generally leads to ridicule, harassment, and at times abuse suffered at the hands of their peers or even those who are expected to keep them safe at school.

It is evident from this chapter that the interconnectedness of gender and sexual orientation overlaps with systems and forms of discrimination which either create an advantage or disadvantage. These interconnected forms of oppression overlap and create LGBTQ+ individuals' struggle. Evidence suggests, however, that the protests that started following Amini's death in September 2022 has seriously undermined the Iranian regime and appears to have penetrated the bedrock of the Islamic Republic. Protests aimed at the Iranian Republic is not a new phenomenon, and the regime has experienced multiple waves of protests. Nevertheless, the demonstrations over

Amini's death are unique, as her death is seen as a symbol of the country's oppressive response to dissidents, or anyone regarded as a dissident. The acts of burning the hijab may not be unprecedented, but the extreme outcry across Iran is a remarkable moment of defiance by women trying to gain more autonomy. Because women collectively participated in an act of defiance, the debate surrounding women's rights in the country has forever been moved forward. During these protests, for brief moments, Iran has been subjected to defiance of women without hijabs and has experienced the imaginings once considered impossible becoming a reality for many. Furthermore, at the start of December 2022, the regime announced that it was reviewing the decades-old mandatory hijab law. Mohammed Jafar Motazeri, Iran's attorney general told journalists: "Both parliament and the judiciary are working (on the issue)" of whether the law needs any changes. This seems to indicate a possible change in the narrative of female rights and potentially offers an opportunity to change the discourse around LGBTQ+ rights as a whole in the country.

### **6.1.2. Turkey**

Turkey was a valuable case study due to its strategic location, which has earned it significant global significance. Although Turkey's culture is largely impacted by European values as a result of its geographical location, traditional Islamic values remain deeply ingrained in most of the social institutions of the country. The impact of these values on Turkish policymaking has resulted in further marginalisation, stigmatisation, and socially disadvantageous results for those who do not conform to the dominant hetero-normative gender norms and sexual identities. Although homosexuality is treated by Turkish law in a rather neutral way culturally, it remains a taboo subject in most areas of Turkish society, existing in a "don't ask, don't tell" setting. Homosexuality may not be illegal in Turkey, but it is generally seen as immoral and unnatural. Turkish legislation generally ignores the existence of LGBTQ+ individuals by not having distinct laws in favour of or against LGBTQ+ individuals.

By applying an intersectional lens to Turkey's case study, this chapter was able to critically analyse how oppression manifests in Turkish society. Social taxonomies of class, race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender discrimination are not independent of one another and thus need to be examined as intersectional. In predominantly Muslim societies such as Turkey, religion plays a much bigger intersecting role with gender and sexuality than in most Western societies, which results in alarming levels

of institutionalised discrimination. LGBTQ+ members around the world are faced with discrimination perpetuated by perpetrators from different religions, but an unfortunate reality is that numerous of the rights abuses take place within Muslim majority societies and under governments who go out of their way to ensure that LGBTQ+ rights are not guaranteed. LGBTQ+ Muslims occupy an intersectional location between social and political cultures, which results in them suffering oppression via this position. One of the leading discriminatory and marginalising tools used against LGBTQ+ Turkish Muslims or LGBTQ+ Muslims in general, is the rejection of their sexual identity and practices by interpretations of the Islam religion. Many conservative Muslim leaders argue that identifying as mutually LGBTQ+ and Muslim is forbidden. For many of the Muslim communities these identities are seen as mutually exclusive. This has been evident in Turkey. Religious leaders such as Turkey's top cleric, Erbaş, publicly condemned LGBTQ+ members and his views were justified by President Erdogan who tries to resonate with the strong nationalist and religious followers whose votes he has seemingly started to lose. LGBTQ+ individuals are not just stuck at the intersection of homophobia in Turkey, but they are also stuck at an intersection where they are the collateral damage of an attempt to revive polarising identity politics in the country.

The LGBTQ+ community in Turkey experiences an interconnectedness of socio-political categories that overlap with systems of discrimination or disadvantage on education, medical, military, government clampdowns, as well as discrimination against non-Turkish LGBTQ+ citizens. In the employment sector, discrimination against the Turkish LGBTQ+ community has been and continues to be widespread as they are not protected by the law. Many LGBTQ+ employees in the country hide their sexual orientation in an attempt to minimise the threat of discrimination. At another intersection many gay men especially are faced with various intersecting discriminations in Turkey which range from medical to military. The Turkish government has deployed a visible clampdown on any signs of homosexuality, such as the rainbow symbol, and restricted freedoms of expression, assembly, and association of LGBTQ+ people via pride bans and violently breaking up any attempt of a pride march, which violates their fundamental human rights. In addition, this chapter revealed that the dire situation faced by the LGBTQ+ community in Turkey impacts not only Turkish citizens but also extends to LGBTQ+ refugees that cross the

border into Turkey in pursuit of protection from violence and discrimination in their respective home countries.

### **6.1.3. Egypt**

Egypt has dominated international headlines and has attracted global attention as a serial LGBTQ+ rights offender throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Similarly, to Turkey, Egypt does not explicitly ban or criminalise homosexuality, but state security agencies target, criminalise, and imprison LGBTQ+ individuals. This chapter showed that the government does so via Law No. 10/1961 on the Combating of Prostitution which is selectively utilised to target individuals who conform to diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. LGBTQ+ members are faced with the same authoritarian policies with which many cisgender citizens are also faced. However, they face an additional struggle as the state and Egyptian society does not accept or respect their fundamental human rights. Same-sex couple dynamics in Egypt do not rest on heteronormative gender scripts or stereotypes, they entail unique risk factors and thus need an intersectional approach to analyse how various intersecting discriminations overlap and create their unique struggles.

The Egyptian state authorities have launched a systematic attack on the LGBTQ+ community which is fuelled by a social stigma in which homosexuality is regarded as a disease and indication of psychological disturbance. Looking at the situation of LGBTQ+ rights between 2001 and 2017, its evident that the majority of the LGBTQ+ crackdowns that took place under both the Mubarak regime and the Al-Sisi regime were mainly aimed at gay men in an attempt to reconstruct a homonormative and patriarchal society. Although men in Egypt are advantaged under the patriarchal system, it does not include all men. This advantage is limited to heterosexual men and does not include gay men. Structural intersectionality maintains that a person can be advantaged by a social category that enables socio-political or economic empowerment, while simultaneously being disadvantaged by belonging to other social categories that are sources of subordination. This is the case for gay men in Egypt. They might be advantaged under the patriarchal system because of their gender, but it is the same system which discriminates against them if they identify as gay and not a heterosexual man in Egypt.

The same patriarchal system that can be deemed advantageous to heterosexual men and disadvantageous to gay men also leaves women and lesbian women in particular at an intersection faced with double marginalisation. Although all LGBTQ+ individuals in Egypt face different types of discrimination, lesbian women in Egypt face a double discrimination as they are now not just seen as second-class citizens under the patriarchal system, but they are also seen as members of a group which poses the biggest threat to the ideals of “manhood” in the society. The case of Egypt revealed that transgender Egyptians are faced with oppression, marginalisation, and a hostile environment through state-sponsored homophobia, family, and societal discrimination. As a result of bureaucratic issues many transgender persons are left without the required medical treatment and facilities to undergo transition surgeries, which puts their lives at risk.

Even though homosexuality is not criminalised in the country, Egypt’s embargo on LGBTQ+ individuals is clearly evident in this chapter. The government and state authorities make use of various monitoring and tracking methods in order to entrap so-called dissidents across the country, all the while violating various rights protected under Chapter Three of the Egyptian Constitution.

## **6.2. Summary of overarching themes**

An important notion emphasised throughout this study has been that not all LGBTQ+ discrimination experiences are the same and some LGBTQ+ individuals experience more than one intersection. At the start of this study, it was made clear that most of the research on LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East has mainly focused on a single-axis framework such as violence against LGBTQ+ individuals. There have also not been a substantial number of publications on intersectionality and LGBTQ+ individuals in the Middle East. In an attempt to expand the literature, this study emerged in an effort to recognise the ways in which different social identities produce intersecting systems of privilege or oppression, and how these systems create different or similar lived experiences within a social context. Although the experiences of LGBTQ+ members in each case study differ and cannot be accepted as homogenous, after analysing their experiences a couple of overarching themes could be noted.

### **6.2.1. Systemic Discrimination**

As noted in Chapter One of this study, systemic discrimination takes on various forms and includes the the procedure, routines, and organisational culture of any organisation that, generally without intent, contributes to less favourable outcomes for minority groups than for the majority of the population. Various forms of intersecting systemic discrimination have been highlighted in this study, which all interlock within a matrix of domination.

One of the most obvious and evident forms of oppression throughout this study was the state-sponsored homophobic rhetoric of all three governments. Same-sex intimacy and gender non-conformity in all three countries are outlawed either legally or culturally, which in turn prevents LGBTQ+ individuals from expressing their identity and fosters a social climate that promotes rigid gender norms and gender inequalities. This rhetoric creates severe stigma and prejudice against LGBTQ+ members and in turn legitimised violence and discrimination by private individuals and state agents against any individual based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. This state-sponsored homophobic rhetoric pushes LGBTQ+ members to another intersection where they are faced with discrimination in public and the media. The homophobic state policies together with the social norms that stigmatise LGBTQ+ individuals leave them at a space where they are either not acknowledged or they are labelled under the category of mental and behavioural disorders. Public spaces have historically been known as the fighting ring for disadvantaged groups, as is the case in all three case studies.

Homosexuality and same-sex relations have, according to Dalacoura (2014), become a cultural battle ground, as the identification of heterosexuality with cultural authenticity in societies such as the Middle Eastern region is a distortion of the historical record. Dalacoura (2014) further explains that authoritarian governments and religious fundamentalists encourage and stir up public sentiment against LGBTQ+ individuals in an attempt to secure power. She claims: "Their authority is shored up by the call to protect an 'authentic' culture which, if it ever existed, has long ago been wiped out" (Dalacoura, 2014).

This sentiment has been demonstrated throughout this study and it was revealed how state-sponsored homophobia leads to another intersection of oppression for LGBTQ+

members at the hands of their families as well as the public. The wording of certain documents such as Iran's Circular Number 660 of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution which bans publications from crossing boundaries that may result in "anti-family propaganda" and "the weakening of family values", together with Egypt's Selçuk's comments that Erbaş's words "remind us of our religious values in order to protect our families and generations during Ramadan", and the Turkish government's justification for withdrawing from the 2011 Istanbul Convention on Women's rights based on the claim that the Convention "normalizes homosexuality – which is incompatible with Turkey's social and family values", all leave LGBTQ+ members at a vulnerable intersection. For many individuals a family is supposed to be your safe haven. In all three case studies, however, individuals were seen to shun their family members if they are part of the LGBTQ+ community. At this intersection many LGBTQ+ individuals experience violence and discrimination at the hands of family members in the form of verbal abuse, beatings, rape, and sexual assault.

### **6.2.2. Religion as a weapon**

In all three case studies, a continued theme was how social categories of gender and religion interrelate to create multifaceted types of inequality in society. Alamer (2022) is of the opinion that authoritarian Arab leaders frequently use "moral authority" as alternate for "democratic legitimacy", and the moral authority is exercised through regulating religion and subjugating women in these regions. Alamer (2022) further states: "If you are an Arab dictator and want moral legitimacy, but you do not want to derive it from Islam or gender, what is the most convenient source that fits your new secular, conservative agenda? Arguably, the answer is adopting anti-homosexuality and, to a lesser degree, anti-atheism discourse".

Religiosity adds to the legal and social oppression of those who do not conform to rigid gender norms in Iran, Turkey, and Egypt. The Iranian LGBQ+ community faces intersecting discriminations as the hierarchy of punishment derives from a gendered understanding of sexuality in the existing scriptures of religious texts which are used against them. Those who do not conform to the socially accepted gender norms are punished under provisions in the Islamic Penal Code that prohibits conducts deemed "religiously forbidden" (haram). In Turkey, furthermore, LGBQ+ individuals are vulnerable to oppression on the grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, if they fall outside the traditional religious (such as dogmatic views on

Islam) protections. Their oppression is a result of the patriarchal regime that punishes same-sex relations under Islamic beliefs. In Egypt, President Al-Sisi has adopted Mubarak's strategy of targeting LGBTQ+ individuals as a method of proving his religiously conservative credentials and getting rid of Islamist challenges.

### **6.2.3. The rainbow war**

One of the facts that became evident during the study was that the rainbow has become a cultural battleground. All three governments focused on in this study have visibly displayed clampdowns on all LGBTQ+ rights activism and freedom of expression especially with its attack on LGBTQ+ and rainbow-themed products. Over the years, rainbows have been the symbol of LGBTQ+ pride around the world with many using such items as a small symbolic protest or symbol of support.

At the start of the 2022 Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup in Qatar, which kicked off on 26 November 2022, the government of Qatar also visibly attacked all rainbow-themed products which many players, officials, and fans wanted to wear as a gesture of solidarity towards the LGBTQ+ community over Qatar's human rights record, particularly its laws and culture around same-sex relationships. It has been reported that at the start of the World Cup many fans and journalists were prevented from wearing rainbow-coloured clothing at the matches (BBC, 2022).

In addition, nine European nations (including Belgium, Denmark, Wales, England, Germany, and France) who joined the "*One Love*"<sup>13</sup> campaign asked FIFA for permission to wear the *One Love* armbands, but never received a response (Olley, 2022). Most of the nations signalled that they were prepared to defy the ban and pay a fine. However, 24 hours before England were to play their opening match against Iran, FIFA cracked down on teams who planned to wear the *One Love* armbands, threatening national team captains who defied FIFA's rules with, at minimum, a pre-emptive yellow card. FIFA went even further by rejecting Belgium's away kits which displayed the hashtag "Love" (George Miller, 2022). Qatar's actions has attracted numerous protests and much rancour, including from teams such as Germany whose players covered their mouths with their hands to suggest they had been gagged by FIFA. The photograph of this incident went viral (Ingle, S., and Steinberg, 2022).

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13 The One Love campaign was created with the aim of promoting inclusion and equality at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and beyond and aimed to send a message against discrimination of any kind as the eyes of the world fall on the global game (Olley, 2022).

Consequently, less than a week after the World Cup started, Qatar reportedly performed a swift U-turn on the rainbow flag ban as the host nation allegedly provided FIFA with assurance that supporters could enter stadiums wearing rainbow colours (Delaney, 2022).

#### **6.2.4. Women as a double marginalised group.**

A constant theme throughout all three chapters was the fact that women in Iran, Turkey, and Egypt were faced with double discrimination - first as women, and then as lesbians. Discrimination against lesbian women is more extreme with the intersection of gender and sexuality, which means that lesbian women are highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Iranian institutions of religion, family, and the state concur that women are wives and mothers who ought to be submissive to the males in their families. This ruling dictates the gender norms governing women in Iran. As a result, women are faced with restrictions of their rights and limitations to their autonomy throughout the processes of marriage, divorce, child custody, et cetera. This leaves lesbian women in Iran severely vulnerable with regard to the lack of impartial legislation identifying and criminalising rape independent of a heteronormative marriage relationship which could result in sexual abuse and gender-based violence. In 2021, as part of the Turkish government's war against the LGBTQ+ community, it became the first country to unilaterally withdraw from the 2021 Istanbul Convention on Women's rights. The decision serves as a major setback, showing a lack of political commitment to gender equality, without which there are massive obstacles to combatting domestic violence in Turkey and addressing its root causes.

In Egypt violence is a shapeshifting tool deeply entrenched in the society and utilised to reduce the influence of women, resulting in them being seen as mere individuals bereft of any identity, and opening the door to gender-based discrimination and violence against them. In all three case studies women, and lesbian women in particular, are faced with double discrimination as they are seen by the patriarchal system as second-class citizens. In addition, they are also seen as members of a group which poses the most significant threat to the ideals of "manhood" in the society. This "manhood" is regularly tended and celebrated in society whilst "womanhood" is mostly something that requires containment within the religious conservative

patriarchy of the society. This is because it is believed that a woman can bring shame to the family if she does not conform to the assigned gender roles. The legislative, religious, and social efforts in all three case studies perpetuate a culture of female silence and male complacency, which serves to solidify and uphold misogynistic attitudes.

### **6.3. Findings and Recommendations**

In a human rights context, LGBTQ+ individuals are faced with both common and distinct challenges. Although LGBTQ+ rights have progressed rapidly in Western societies since the 1970s, it has lagged in many countries within the MENA region. Moreover, while attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community around the world have recently become more tolerant, the MENA region continues to be the most resistant to change. What makes this worse is that homosexuality as a topic of discussion is shunned, which jeopardises advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights and any chance of change.

This study has shown that in Iran, Egypt, and Turkey human rights of LGBTQ+ individuals are sacrificed by governments who invoke threats to national security, public order, and morality. In these countries morality and public order are hijacked instead of preserved as security forces arbitrarily arrest people and, in many cases, subject them to life altering abuses while in detention. In this regard, LGBTQ+ individuals are deemed “outsiders” and have become quick and easy targets and scapegoats. Although this tactic is neither novel nor original, the governments in Iran, Egypt, and Turkey are seemingly buckling under genuine concerns regarding how they mishandle inflation, corruption, or the effects of climate change, and have thus turned to scapegoating unpopular social groups as a cynical strategy for self-preservation. This method seemingly reflects a move deeper into the trenches of authoritarianism which not only endangers LGBTQ+ individuals but also anyone and everyone seen as expressing dissent and who seek a democratic future for their country with no infringement of individuals’ rights.

#### **6.3.1. A changing of seasons**

This study has also demonstrated that despite the odds against the LGBTQ+ community in these countries, there are LGBTQ+ members who continue to resist the clampdowns, as well as LGBTQ+ groups who are in some part supported by allies from the outside. In this sense, although local popular opinion, local religious

institutions, and local cultural norms in Iran, Turkey, and Egypt continue to discourage LGBTQ+ communities in their countries from asserting their rights, there is growing pressure for expansion of LGBTQ+ rights in the MENA region. The pressure comes from external sources such as international human rights groups, foreign governments, expatriates, and the international community. A good example of this has been the rainbow incident at the world cup, where external sources pushed the Qatari government and eventually gained some reforms, albeit very little.

Another good example of such push back has been the latest protests in Iran, following Amini's death on 16 September 2022. Reuters (2022) reports that on 24 November 2022, the UN Rights Council voted to launch an independent investigation into Iran's deadly repression of the intensifying protests in Iran with speculated figures standing at 400 civilians killed, but real numbers likely to be much higher. It has been reported that the motion passed with 24 votes in favour, six opposed, and 16 countries abstained. The news was met with the cheers of activists amid the intensifying crackdown over recent weeks (Dudley, 2022).

In addition, McCarthy (2022) notes that more than half of Turkey's population is under the age of 30 - the Millennial Generation - and just over a fifth of the country's voting population consists of Generation Z. Turkey's experts are of the opinion that these two generations have an expanded view of LGBTQ+ rights and express more infuriation at the Erdogan administration than older voters typically do. According to the Turkish polling firm, Gezici, Generation Z voters (aged between 18 and 25) voiced in 2022 that they strongly oppose clampdowns on lifestyles, free expression, and the Media. There are indications that 80% of the Generation Z voters will not vote for the AKP, as they have grown up witnessing and experiencing rising discrimination and violence against religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities. Many of them have also participated in what have become yearly protests against the government (Altayli and Sevgili, 2022). Erdoğan is the only presidential leader most youth in Turkey have ever known, and because of his discriminatory social rhetoric and regressive economic policies, they have largely turned against him.

### **6.3.2. Recommendations for Governments**

The embargo against LGBTQ+ individuals explored in all three case studies revealed that Iran, Turkey, and Egypt directly threaten their own rule of law. Arrests made under

these crackdowns are completely arbitrary and violate their countries' own Constitutions as well as their obligations under international law.

In cases such as the current protests that are seen in Iran as well as the cases of Sareh and Choudbar, experts have called on Iran to repeal its death penalty, or at a minimum lessen the scope of its application to only criminal actions that fall under the scope of most of its serious crimes. Iranian authorities have an international obligation to guarantee that all human rights defenders in the country can conduct peaceful and legitimate activities without the fear of persecution or reprisals, including those who work with sensitive matters like sexual orientation and identity. While it is desirable for Iran to follow the general international practices of decriminalizing same-sex relations and eliminating the death penalty and flogging for consensual same-sex relations between adults, it may not be an easy or immediate task. For LGBTQ+ individuals to be fully equal in the eyes of the law and society the Iranian government will have to address the discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals both legally and practically. The Iranian regime would do well to forbid abuse, public harassment, and gender-based violence against LGBTQ+ individuals by security forces such as the Basij forces and to investigate and prosecute anyone who commit such actions. This includes but is not limited to abuse, harassment, torture, and sexual assault of LGBTQ+ individuals during detention. Although a challenging goal to achieve, the cessation of targeting and entrapment, which includes internet entrapment campaigns and home raids by security forces, against individuals suspected of being part of the LGBTQ+ community is essential.

It is recommended that the Iranian state accept their obligation to adopt an all-embracing legislation to rationalise legal sex change procedures and protect transgender individuals' rights to health, without imposing any GCS's or SRSs also called sex reassignment surgeries (SRSs) as a requirement for gender legal recognition. They also need to provide access to physical and psychological services for transgender individuals. This includes hormone therapy for individuals who have undergone SRSs.

It would be important for the Iranian government to consider outlawing conversion therapies, such as electric shock therapies and psychoactive medications. This study has revealed how important it is for the Iranian government to exercise due diligence

to avert, examine, and hold accountable surgeons who administer substandard or negligent SRS surgeries without informed consent or in reckless disregard of international standards of care for transgender individuals. It would be beneficial for Iran to reconsider all convictions and sentences against individuals for consensual same-sex relations or behaviour, and to release anyone who is currently serving a sentence for any of these convictions. Additionally, the Iranian government should promote freedom of expression and denounce the use of hate speech against individuals with diverse sexual orientations or gender identities. This is particularly important as hate speech has contributed to increased levels of domestic, political, and social violence against LGBTQ+ individuals in the country, as highlighted in the study.

While it would be ideal for the Turkish government to adopt measures on both national and local levels to combat discrimination and violence based on gender identity and sexual orientation, it may be difficult to achieve due to cultural and societal attitudes. Implementing effective measures to combat discrimination and violence based on gender identity and sexual orientation requires significant resources, funding, and political will, which may not be readily available in Turkey. The Turkish government may face opposition and pushback from conservative groups and individuals who oppose efforts to protect the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. Even with the adoption of measures, enforcement may be difficult due to corruption and lack of resources in some regions of Turkey.

While progress has been made in some areas, such as legal recognition of transgender individuals, discrimination and violence based on gender identity and sexual orientation continue to be major issues in Turkey. Without this, LGBTQ+ individuals in Turkey do not have effective protection and they are vulnerable to social exclusion. The Turkish state needs to define the terms 'public moral', 'obscenity', 'indecent', 'unnatural intercourse', and 'Turkish family structure', because without definitions for these vague terms, the LGBTQ+ members remain vulnerable and more likely to be found guilty even if they are not. Furthermore, the government in Turkey should stop the discriminatory implementation of public morality laws and ensure that the simple presence of homosexuality is not criminalised through those laws. It is unrealistic to expect that the government will immediately outlaw policies and practices that put LGBTQ+ individuals, such as the gay Iranian, at risk of harm. While it is

important to work towards eliminating discriminatory policies, changing cultural attitudes and deeply ingrained beliefs may take time. Furthermore, altering the military process to eliminate sexual orientation and gender identity-based exclusion from the armed forces may be a complex process that requires careful consideration and planning. Despite these challenges, it is important to continue advocating for the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and pushing for progress towards a more inclusive and accepting society.

It is recommended that the Turkish government endorse and ratify anti-discrimination and harassment policies in the workplace for LGBTQ+ individuals. The government should also outlaw conversion therapies including electric shock therapies and psychoactive medications. While it would be desirable for the Turkish authorities to endorse and encourage freedom of expression and outlaw hate speech against LGBTQ+ individuals, this may be difficult to achieve in practice. Cultural attitudes and deeply ingrained beliefs may make it challenging to shift societal norms and values. Additionally, vague and broad laws against 'indecentcy', 'exhibitionism', and 'offenses against public morality' may be difficult to repeal or amend, particularly if they have been used to target LGBTQ+ individuals in the past. Nonetheless, it is important for the Turkish state to take steps towards protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and addressing the issue of violence and discrimination against them. This may involve educating the public on the importance of diversity and inclusivity, as well as providing legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals who are targeted by hate speech or violence.

Taking into consideration the influx of refugees in the country, Turkey needs to adopt policies that protect refugees or asylum seekers from any discriminatory policies or practises on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender. The Turkish government should allow all asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants freedom of movement, and should not consign LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants to “satellite cities”, but rather allow them to reside in larger urban centres where they are less likely to be targeted based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The state should offer all LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants access to health services and medication on at least the same basis as other non-citizens in the country.

Moreover, the Turkish government should ensure freedom of assembly and association and safeguard the right to freedom of association without discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity and take measures to effectively protect defenders of the human rights of LGBTQ+ individuals against hostility and aggression to which they may be exposed. The government should warrant the participation of civil society, specifically that of LGBTQ+ organisations, in the development and discussion of the suggested initiatives and reforms.

In the case of Egypt, the Egyptian security forces should end the arrest, persecution, and trials based on sexual relations amongst consenting adults, including any behaviour that can be considered as homosexual behaviour or based on gender expression. They should also stop police surveillance of individuals based on their suspected homosexual conduct or their sexual orientation, including the keeping of lists of such persons. The practice of recruiting and using informers to help arrest such suspects is indefensible. The only way for security forces to be able to end this, is if President el-Sisi orders his government to end the practice of torture and other ill-treatment by security forces, including introducing a ban on the use of forced genital examinations.

It is advisable that the Egyptian government also endorse and ratify a law that protects LGBTQ+ individuals from being subjected to any type of homophobia, societal discrimination, and sexual harassment. The state is urged to review its current laws to eliminate ambiguous content and, if their inclusion is deemed necessary, to offer precise definitions of terms such as 'public morals', and 'obscenity'. Additionally, all criminal justice system officials must be encouraged to be trained on principles of human rights and non-discrimination, including those relating to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Moreover, the Egyptian Ministry of Interior and Health must ensure that the health and legal procedures for transgender individuals are conducted with the utmost ease and speed. This includes changing identity papers and working to end the use of conversion therapy which has no scientific basis. It is proposed that the Egyptian state take appropriate measures to prevent restrictions on the effective enjoyment of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly resulting from the abuse of legal or administrative provisions, for example on grounds of public health, public

morality, and public order. Another recommendation is that the government of Egypt enact a comprehensive non-discrimination law that contains specific protections against unequal treatment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in all areas of life. The government should warrant the participation of civil society, specifically that of LGBTQ+ organisations, in the development and discussion of such initiatives and reforms. Finally, if Egypt were to make any real progress on LGBTQ+ rights it must amend Law 10/1961 "On the Combating of Prostitution" to eliminate all references to "debauchery".

The recommendations presented are highly ambitious and considering the resistant stance of these governments towards reform, external support would be necessary to accelerate the process.

### **6.3.3. Recommendations for external sources**

International businesses and multinational corporations who are in partnership with Iran, Turkey, and Egypt should suspend support of these countries until the countries take effective steps to end the cycle of abuse and crackdown on LGBTQ+ rights, so that LGBTQ+ individuals can live freely in their countries. These international partners should publicly condemn the ill treatment of the LGBTQ+ community in all three these countries. Multinational corporations such as Skype, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube should endorse ratifications that ensure that technological development in these countries do not contribute to surveillance or persecution of vulnerable groups, such as LGBTQ+ members.

In addition, countries such as the United States that offer training programmes like the U.S Department of State's Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program should ensure that these training programmes contain a human rights component that includes issues of sexuality and sexual orientation in a way designed to eliminate prejudice and stigma. Diplomatic efforts by other countries with Iranian, Turkish, and Egyptian officials should be utilised to call on these countries to end their repression of LGBTQ+ human rights. There should also be assistance by the international community in the form of funding to various LGBTQ+ organisations in each of these three countries.

Human Rights Watch (2018) explains that LGBTQ+ activists in the MENA region have in recent years started to make use of international advocacy opportunities such as

the UNHRC's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process through which every country's human rights record is evaluated by fellow member states every four to five years. Although some governments have in the past rejected specific recommendations put forward, they attempted to assuage the human rights community using language that opens doors, intentionally or not. This has displayed the importance of international bodies such as the UN who should continue to advocate for change in the international human rights framework and the humanistic principles around the world.

Moreover, civil society and International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) can play a crucial role in promoting and protecting LGBTQ rights in Turkey, Iran, and Egypt. Local LGBTQ+ organizations in these three countries often lack the resources and support needed to effectively advocate for their rights. This is where global civil society and INGOs can step in. They can partner with local LGBTQ organizations, providing them with funding, training, and technical assistance to strengthen their capacity to advocate for change. By doing so, they can help these organizations amplify their voices and push for policy and legal reforms that promote LGBTQ rights. Furthermore, global civil society and INGOs can engage in public awareness campaigns to educate the general public and promote greater acceptance of LGBTQ individuals. They can use social media and other communication channels to spread messages of tolerance and inclusivity, helping to shift societal attitudes and perceptions. Finally, global civil society and INGOs can use their diplomatic influence to advocate for LGBTQ rights at the national and international levels. They can put pressure on governments to repeal discriminatory laws and policies and ensure that LGBTQ individuals are protected under the law. Overall, global civil society and INGOs can serve as powerful allies for the LGBTQ community in Turkey, Iran, and Egypt, helping to promote positive change and create more inclusive and equitable societies for all.

#### **6.4. Concluding Remarks and Future Research**

By applying an intersectional analysis to these case studies, this study has been able to recognise the ways in which different social identities produce intersecting systems of privilege or oppression, and how these systems create different lived experiences or common experiences within a social context in Iran, Turkey, and Egypt. Intersectional theory highlighted marginalised groups who may otherwise have been left out of development initiatives and has provided a more multifaceted comprehension of social life and social categories. This study has demonstrated how

LGBTQ+ communities in Iran, Turkey, and Egypt experience intersecting discriminations, and I personally believe that the only way these marginalised groups could see meaningful reforms would be to implement intersectional solutions. LGBTQ+ members, activists, and allies in these countries continue to fight for LGBTQ+ human rights, but they require more intervention from Western countries, international bodies, and multinational corporations. Due to the scope of this study, it was not possible to examine all the various ways in which the international community can assist with advancing LGBTQ+ rights. A further analysis could shed more light on this topic.

## Chapter 7: Bibliography

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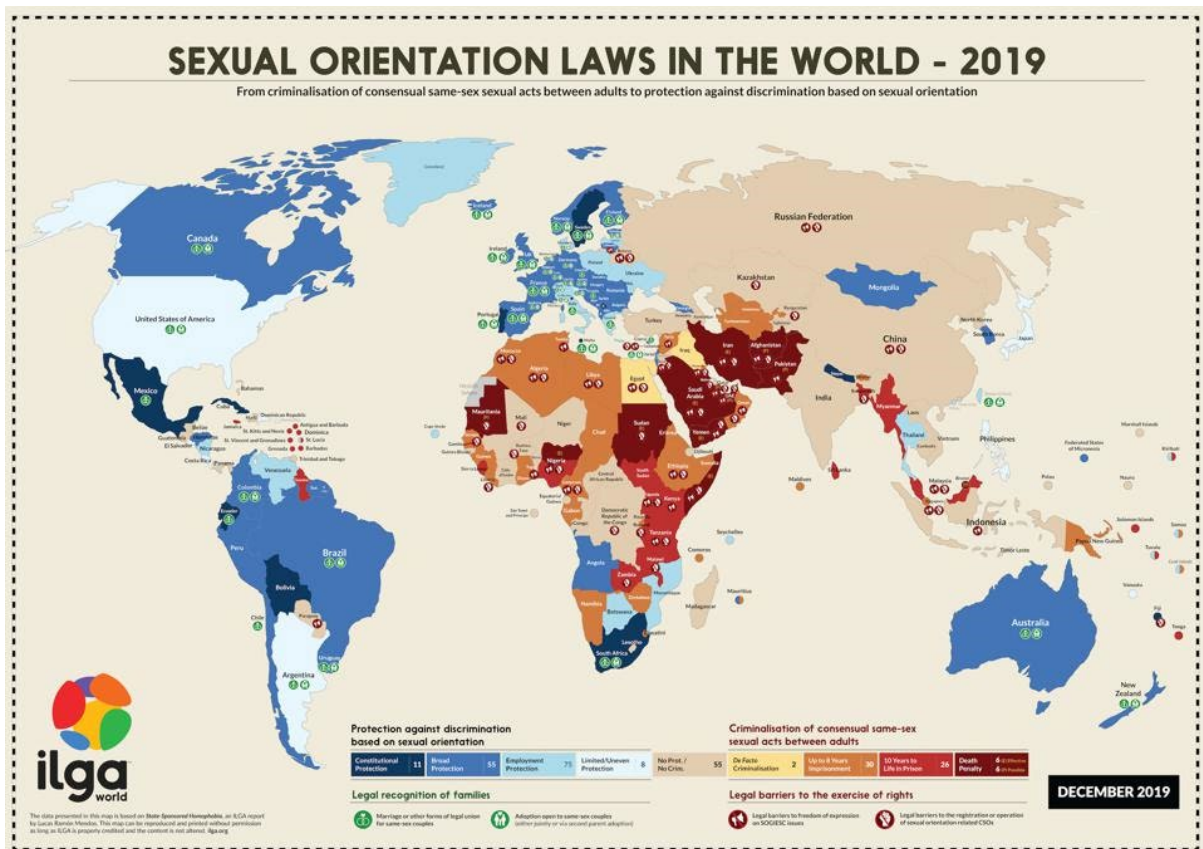
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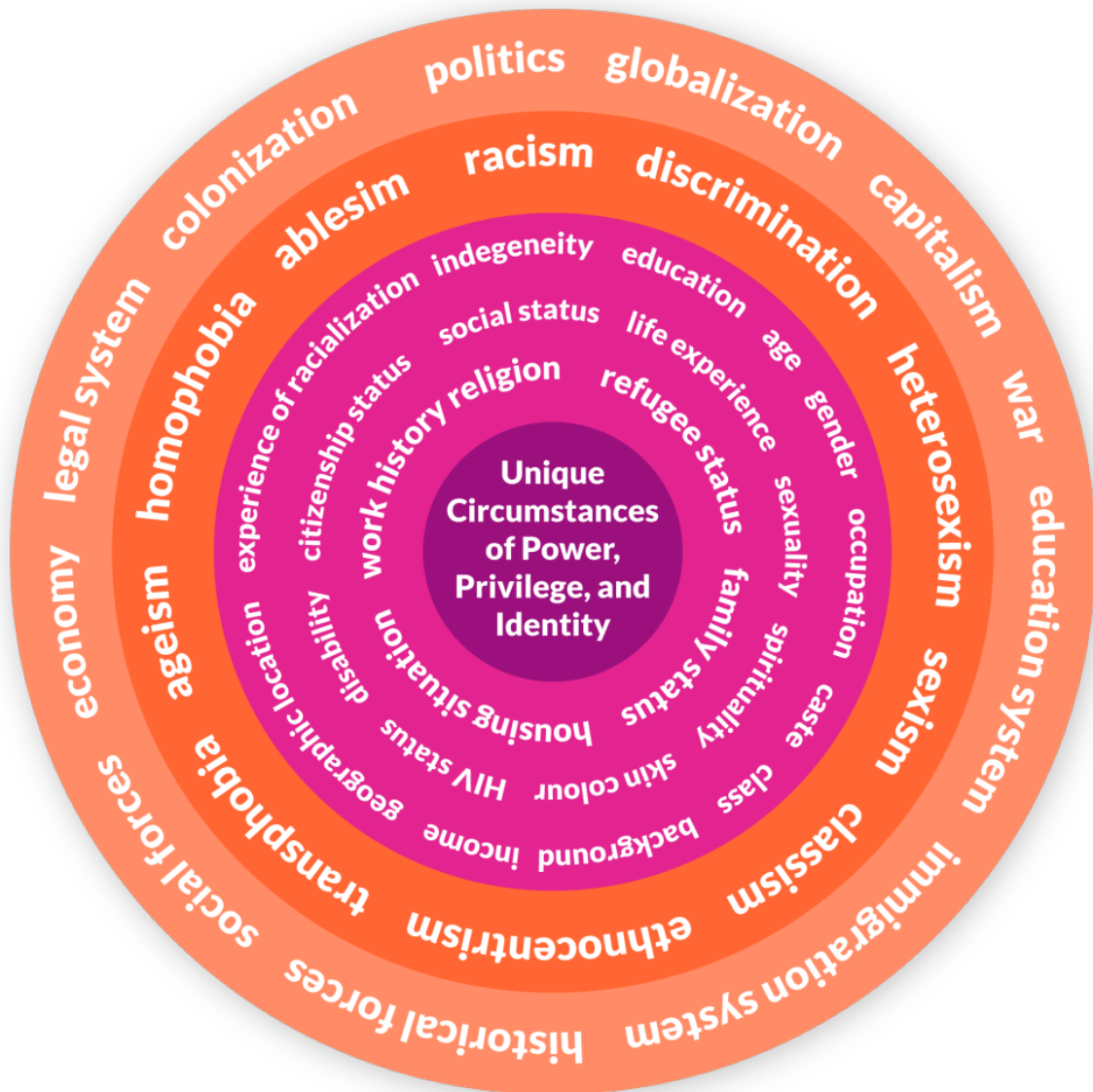
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# Appendix 1



ILGA (2021).

**Appendix 2**



Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (2009: 5).


### **Appendix 3**

*Table 8: types and frequency of violence reported in nuclear family*

Type of Violence	Frequency			
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
Verbal	6.95	13.19	20	23.91
Physical	7.82	8.69	22.17	39.13
Psychological (humiliation, insult)	6.95	6.52	23.42	30.34
Financial deprivation	3.91	10.86	10.43	16.95
Sexual	1.30	5.21	5.65	16.95
Neglect (e.g. forced labor, lack of support)	13.04	20	24.78	36.52
Control of social relations / Contact with friends	10	10.86	14.74	20.86
Threat to forced marriage	8.69	4.78	11.73	13.47
Deprivation of work	4.7	2.17	6.95	10
Deprivation of education	3.91	3.47	3.91	5.65

6.Rang.org. (2020: 17).

## Appendix 4



**SOL MEDYANIN İFTİRALARINA CEVABIMIZDIR**

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Alemlerin Rabbî olan Allah'ın hamd olsun. Salat ve selam onun Rasûlü'nedir. Ankara'da bir grup kardeşimiz tarafından gerçekleştirilen afiş çalışması kendi çıkarları doğrultusunda lanse eden sol medya gruplarına ve İslami kimliğini kaybeden zümrelere cevap vermek durumundayız.

İstanbul'da gerçekleştirilen "LGBT Onur Yürüşü"nü İslami değerleri yok saydığından ütü kardeşlerimiz mezkur afiş çalışmasını yapmıştır. Afişlerin üzerinde ise Rasûlullah'ın (s.a.v) hadis-i şerifi yer almıştır. Hadis-i şerifin metni ise şöyledir: "Lût kavminin çirkin işini yaparı görürseniz, faili de mef'ulü de öldürün." (Tirmizî, Hudud 24, Ebû Dâvud, Hudud 29)

Evet, afişte geçen söz İslam lideri Hz. Muhammed'e (s.a.v) aittir. Biz buna iman ediyoruz ve bundan dolayı gocunmuyoruz. Afişlerde geçen sözlerin Hz. Muhammed'e (s.a.v) ait olduğunu öğrenen eşcinseller ve LGBT sempatisenleri sosyal medya sayfalarımıza yazdıkları mesajlarda ve yorumlarda Hz. Muhammed'e (s.a.v) ve İslam dinine açıktan hakaret etmiştir. Sol Medya grupları ise afişlerde yer alan hadis-i şerifleri bizim sözümüz gibi lanse etmiş ve bizi hedef gösterme amacını gütmüştür. Bizler ise daha önceki açıklamamızda amacımızın mezkur işin İslam'daki hükmünü açıklamak ve İslam'ın kesinlikle bu işe müsaade etmediğini duyurmak olduğunu açıkladık. Sözümüzün arkasındayız.

İŞİD ile bağlantılı olduğumuz ise sol medya gruplarının iftirasından ibarettir. Genç İslami Müdafaa'nın İŞİD'le herhangi bir bağlantısı olmadığı gibi Allah'ın izniyle ileride olmayacaktır. İŞİD'i tekfirli ve zalim bir örgüt olarak görüyor. Suriye muhaliflerini Esad'a ve İŞİD'e karşı savaşında destekliyoruz. Son olarak Genç İslami Müdafaa'nın hedef alınmasını duyuran sol örgütlere ve "ibnelere" Al-i İmran Suresi'nin 173. ayetini hatırlatıyoruz; İnsanlar onlara: "Düşmanlarımız size karşı ordu topladı, onlardan korkun." dediklerinde, bu, onların imanını artırdı ve şöyle dediler: "Allah bize yeter. O ne güzel vekildir".

(Sanderson, 2015).