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Norbert Elias' Figuration on Formation of Identities after Forced Migration: Narratives of LGBT Refugees

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Abstract Sexuality has wended a historical path as a subject of social research in general and as a unit of analysis in migration studies in specific. Whereas gender has been stereotypically brought forward as females, until recent years sexuality has been linked to the scope of heterosexual reproduction and family life. However, there is a large gap in migration literature regarding LGBT refugees. To fill this gap, the present study was an attempt with the help of the Norbert Elias' established and outsider figuration theoretical frameworks analyses the formation of identity in post migration stage of queer migrants coming from the country of Iran where the issue of sexual orientation sits always into heteronormative gender identities. In the current research, twelve individuals participated. They were living all in the Nordrhein-Westfalen state of Germany during the last five years and had applied for asylum upon their arrival on the ground that returning to their country would lead to persecution on account of sexual orientation. The participants answered questions of semi-structured and flexible interviews. For the data analysis, I employed open coding as well as thematic analysis techniques. The results showed that sexual identity interacts with the other aspects of the participants' identities and with their positioning process. That is to say, intersection of various identities in various social relational contexts ends to constant tensions of exclusion and belonging.

Keywords Queer refugee, Insider and outsider, Power status, Integration, Iran

1. Introduction

During the past two decades, refugees and asylum have become highly politicized figures and topics because in most Western nation-states providing asylum and refugee protection has led to admitting and re-settling refugees into national territories and endowing upon them access to the rights that were previously restricted to citizens and native inhabitants of the nation-states. To make the matters worse, the arrival of refugees has also become a racial issue in the post -9/11 era during which the politics and rhetoric of war on terror, dispersed through negative media representations, have further racialized and marginalized the Middle Eastern migrants and ethnic minorities as threats to national security and social cohesion.

In contrast to the 1980s and 1990s when the majority of refugees in the Western world were from the former Soviet Union countries, and thus of European background, the new wave anti-refugee rhetoric concerns the non-white non-European asylum seekers who are readily available for stigmatization and exclusion.To misrepresent and associate the refugees and migrants with various social ills and inequalities, right-wing politicians often resurrect the past socio-political controversies around the settlement and integration of Middle Eastern and North African migrants in European countries as well as the terrorist attacks in the United States and Western Europe. Several polls conducted in North American and European countries, notably a 2016 Pew Research Center poll conducted in Europe, show that a majority of respondents see refugees not only as burdens on the social welfare systems but also as potential risk factors who increase the likelihood of terrorist attacks [1]. Providing protection, re-settlement, and integration rights and services become even more controversial once the statistics reveal that currently, the majority of refugees arriving in the West are from a small number of nations in the Middle East and Africa. Queer refugees with Iranian background are among these groups of Middle Eastern refugees who have been forced to seek asylum in Western countries. The Islamic laws in Iran neither recognize nor permit non-cisgender individuals. Consequently, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons are perpetually vulnerable to punishment or murder because of their non-heteronormative sexual orientation. Germany as a prominent Western country, is a favored traditional migration destination for Iranian LGBT migrants seeking the independence and emancipation they have previously lacked. However, the new existence in Germany is not without its obstacles. After being recognized as a Convention refugee, and upon re-settlement and arrival to

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the host country, most refugees and immigrant populations address the integration challenges and fulfill their new life opportunities by seeking recourse to the resources of the social groups to which they are most closely tied [2], [3] and [4]. These social groups, if well-established as in the case of ethnic or religious groups, may facilitate the integration of the newcomers by sharing information on housing, employment, and access to services in addition to providing access to community resources. Ethnic communities and religious groups may thus complement state-provided services that target the integration of refugees and immigrants [5]. Yet, despite the ground-breaking legal actions in support of LGBTs rights and the services provided for the resettlement and integration of refugees in Germany, there is a noticeable lack of research on the daily lives of LGBT Iranian refugees in Germany. To address this issue, this study concerns the identity formation of LGBT Iranian refugees in the post migration phase. Using Norbert Elias' notion of the established and outsider figuration, I will analyze the ways through which the identities of LGBT Iranian refugees are shaped and reshaped through interactions with the established social groups of immigrants and locals.

1.1. Research Question

How are insider and outsider statuses of LGBT Iranian refugees constructed at the intersection between religious, national, sexual and refugee identities during their settlement in Germany?

1.2. Migration and Sexuality

Sexuality has wended a historical path as a subject of social research in general and as a unit of analysis in migration studies in specific. Whereas gender has been stereotypically brought forward as females, until recent years sexuality has been linked to the scope of heterosexual reproduction and family life. Furthermore, sexuality has been immersed in such concepts and rubrics as gender roles, morals, deviance and pathology [6]. In this context, therefore, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender migration (LGBT) also referred to as sexual migration, eliminates the strict emphasis on economic motivations that dominate mainstream migration accounts on why persons decide to relocate or migrate, and so draws attention to the significance of sexuality in the life goals of LGBTs [7]. As a matter of fact, the decision to migrate may develop from the desire to pursue an emotional relationship with a foreign national to a plea to explore his or her sexuality or sexual identity transformation. Sexual migration may also take place as a need for more hospitable environs as well as a search for sexual equality [7]. Sexual migration may even occur as a result of people´s necessity to make a move critical for avoiding persecution or prosecution in their country of origin based on their sexual behavior or identity. Homosexuality, for example, is illegal in 85 countries worldwide and is punished by death in eight countries, and few other countries impose extended prison in terms of homosexual behavior, actual or perceived [8]. Thus, one might think that migration trajectories of sexual migrants are identified by a passage from oppression to liberation. By immigrating, many LGBTs do indeed experience new security and freedom [9], [10]. Nevertheless, the immigration experiences of LGBTs in host countries are considerably intricate, indicating more economic, social and identity implications that reflect the reconfiguration of lived inequalities, rather than complete liberation [11] and [12].

As [24] states, sexual minority migrants face abundant psychological, economic, interpersonal/communicative and cultural challenges. According to [27], the process of immigration for LGBT migrants can occur more painfully and discriminatory compared with non-sexual minority immigrants [13]. [35] reports that LGBT forced migrants have experienced numerous forms of victimization like psychological abuse, blackmail, shunning, and pressure to attend a conversation therapy session, corrective rape and physical and sexual assault. [2] study reveals that LGBT forced migrants suffered severe and prolonged verbal, physical, and sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence and that this abuse occurred at home, in school and in the community. Another research reported that lesbian and bisexual women are more vulnerable to experience discrimination involving their intersection identities [14], [15].

Yet, despite various risk factors and challenges lesbian, gay, and bisexual immigrants encounter, scholarly works on different aspects of experiences of immigrants who self-identify as LGBT is relatively scarce. Moreover, the great portion of the existing literature has been produced by U.S. scholars and so attention has been given to the LGBTs who migrate to the U.S. Regarding the experiences of transgender forced migrants, they are more dramatic than the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual forced migrants. This group of sexual migrants not only experiences the same violence and discrimination as LGBTs, but also they may have difficulty accessing appropriate health care. In fact, gender-nonconforming individuals may be at increased risk of dissemination if their physical appearance does not correspond to the gender indicated on their identity documents [15]. According to a study conducted by [36], LGBT immigrants are in a double jeopardy as a double minority, being exposed to the risk factors of both immigrants and LGBT persons. This double minority status forms a dilemma when family, community and religion which usually function as the major factors protect mental well-being of newly arrived immigrants, become main risk factors for rejection and discrimination as a result of their sexual orientation [16]. Language and culture simultaneously and with racism inside mainstream LGBT groups, prohibit LGBT immigrants from getting integrated into the local LGBT community, relentlessly having to deny some aspects of their identities and emphasize others [17]. In a study, [24] recruited 911 Latino gay men from three U.S. cities. The participants reported experiences of discrimination based on their skin color, and ethnicity within and outside the gay community. In one of the few works conducted by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexuals, Trans and Intersex Association [18] attitudes of peoples towards LGBTQs from Middle East

countries were analyzed. In this research, participants of six countries namely Iran, Iraq, Israel, Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia submitted their opinions electronically. A total number of 3634 Iranians took part. The results showed that 50% of participants in Iran believe that those who were born with a biologically different sexuality and do cross-dress should have equal rights, compared with the global average score of 59% and 48% in the other five Middle Eastern countries. The Iranian Queer Organization (IRQO) in association with the [39] did a study on the lived experiences of 34 Iranian transsexual refugees in Turkey and Canada. The interviewees stated that they had experiences of social exclusion, social discrimination and harassment at work or in school. They were also suppressed by their families since the early years of childhood or immediately after disclosure of their sexual orientation.

In sum, focus on the lived experiences of LGBT refugee and asylum seekers draws the attention to the way in which cross-border mobilities re-inscribe heterosexuality, regulates homosexual expression, and reduce the bodies and identities of those who dare to cross (invisibly). It will also show how citizenship and asylum regimes regulate homosexual expression in stereotyped and gendered ways (visibly) and how these processes are contested in cross-border mobilities [19].

1.3. Integration, Belonging and Migrants-Natives Relations

In sociology, the relation between immigrants and natives has traditionally been conceptualized as a matter of cultural adaptation. This conceptualization has been informed by normative ideas about whether immigrant populations, described as conglomerates of ethnic groups, should retain their perceived cultural distinctiveness. On one hand, classical assimilation theory has favored and predicted the ceasing of *ethnic difference*, perceived not as a relational phenomenon but as an attribute of immigrant groups. On the other hand, cultural pluralism has challenged assimilationist expectations of the dissolution of *ethnic difference* and has called for equal recognition of the cultural expressions of immigrant groups. Both theories, as well as the more recent literature on integration, social cohesion and diversity, have been rightfully criticized for essentializing culture as a property of ethnic groups [29]. This problem has been partly overcome by transnationalism and the literature on hybridity and diaspora [22]. Deploying a constructionist perspective, these theoretical approaches introduce and emphasize individual and collective choice. They emphasize that immigrants develop their sense of identity and community through a syncretism of cultural elements from the countries of origin and settlement and beyond. Claiming that immigrants are able to live to a certain degree in more than one *social world* at once. Scholars of transnationalism and diasporic hybridity have argued for the need to move beyond the nation-state as the basic unit of analysis. In so doing, they have shifted research attention away from the adaptation of sharply differentiated and bounded ethnic groups in the national mainstream; and they have also turned attention to alternative contemporary political projects of belonging and identification.

Yet moving beyond the nation-state and conceiving culture in more processual terms is not sufficient to fully grasp the dynamics which characterize immigrant–native relations [32].

As [29] argues, although approaches to hybridity have admittedly helped deconstruct the supposed fixed nature of identity and culture that is so prominent in racialized discourse, they have also in certain cases functioned unintentionally to gloss over existing hierarchies and hegemonic practices. This is especially true in the study of immigrant–native figurations. First, constructions of identity should be always understood as the practical product of the interaction of on-going processes of self-identification and external categorization [21] Immigrants, commonly under the scrutiny of the *receiving society*, are not picking and choosing from among multiple cultures and identities in a voluntaristic manner, free of external forces. An interactional and relational perspective is thus necessary to assess the relative significance of processes of external categorization in their construction of culture and identity [32].

Second, and related to the [32] previous point, immigrant–native relations are not solely mediated by cultural differentiations. They are also embedded in a power configuration whereby immigrants, especially when of low-class standing, are subordinate categories whose *difference* is questioned and devalued. This configuration unfolds through an unequal power struggle over native society's classifications about who may be a national, and perceptions about how immigrants should behave in order to qualify as members of the nation [32]. Those classifications and ideologies are not only macro-structural forces produced through the workings of state institutions and formalized by *state officials actions*, but equally are enacted and contested through the everyday practices of *ordinary people* in different fields of social life Following [5] on the neglected, less visible, banal expressions of nationalism, an increasing number of scholars are studying nationalism as a major, though largely unconscious, ideological force in the contemporary world. Focusing on the everyday practices of *ordinary people* in different fields of social life, rather than top-down processes that formed Billig's original focus, they highlight the workings and paradoxes of the everyday reproduction of nationalism. Several of those scholars [3] have paid particular attention to migration and its role in that respect. Immigrants' presence in European states as well as the gradual acknowledgement that *they are here to stay* has led to increasingly heated discussions on the question as to what it is to be German, Dutch, English, Norwegian, etc. The answers to such questions do not usually challenge received ideas about nationhood; they are rather used to reassemble the national self through discourses that are ultimately entangled with imaginaries of alterity: "we are what they are not" or "we are not what they are" [32]. In this fashion the threatened image of the national self (threatened in the sense that becomes the object of discussion) remains mystified and thus secure.

At the same time, it becomes a weapon of social closure and privilege monopolization ([17]. As such it constructs a social hierarchy granting differential access to economic and cultural capital and to symbolic resources. It is through a very similar mechanism that native citizens ascribe to themselves a dominant position to their group vis-a-vis migrants. They impose a national order [26] and [27] – similar in its function and logic to the racial order [25] – in which they claim a dominant position. Their dominant position rests in their ability to present themselves as the standard by which the others have to be judged. Legitimatizing their claims by appeal to the widely held nationalist viewpoint, a viewpoint also shared by different immigrant categories, they gain the authority to intervene successfully in the lives and conditions of existence of those they construct, through their categorizations, as national outsiders [32].

2. Theoretical Frameworks

2.1. The Established and Outsider Model: Power, Belonging and Social Exclusion Frameworks

Elias and Scotson's *established–outsiders* model derives from their study of Winston Parva, a community in England comprising a core neighborhood and two settlements that had formed around it at later phases. This community manifested a sharp division between the older and the newer group of residents. The older residents closed ranks against the newcomers and stigmatized them as people of less worth. Interestingly, the two groups did not differ in terms of nationality, religion, ethnic descent, or class background. Their detailed study of the relations between these groups led Elias and Scotson to develop the *established–outsider figuration*: a theoretical model of group relations and stigmatization which, they claimed, could be applied to a wide range of unequal group relations [32]. The established–outsiders model explains social closure and stigmatization, together with its reverse process, that of collective self-praise, as outcomes of an uneven balance of power and the tensions inherent in it. It illustrates how power differences between groups permit the creation of polarized status distinctions between the group charisma claimed by the *established*, and the complementary communal disgrace that they attribute to the *outsiders* [32]. Speaking about power in the abstract is insufficient, [12] rightly argued that power is not a thing which individuals or collectivities possess. Power is, by definition, relational; it needs to be conceptualized as a fluctuating, yet structural characteristic embedded in all human relations. The question in established–outsider figurations is how to determine the particular positions of power that the established monopolize, and through which they are able to denigrate the outsiders and secure a positive image of themselves. Elias and Scotson argued that, in Winston Parva, the conditions of the power imbalance were rooted in the established group's social cohesion, which in turn resulted from its age. The older residents had developed a stock of common memories, attachments, and dislikes through interaction, and were bound by a cohesive network of kinship ties. According to [32] although the newcomers had hardly any intention of attacking the old residents, their arrival was experienced by them as a threat to their established way of life. Their defensiveness in the face of what they perceived as an attack set in motion the mechanism of established and outsider relations. The ability of the established to control flows of communication permitted them to construct and maintain a positive community identity in opposition to the newcomers. Through the workings of *praise and blame gossip* they built their collective self-image by reference to their 'best' members and attributed to the outsider group as a whole the 'bad' characteristics of that group's anomic minority [12]. Wholesale rejection of the newcomers and taboos against closer contact with them made outsiders emotionally experience their lack of power as a sign of human inferiority. This had a paralyzing effect, undermining their potential to react against and reverse, or at least adjust, the local power ratio [12].

3. Methodology

[25] indicate, research with gays and lesbians has undertaken several stages of development from a) the traditional model and b) the modernizing model in which research became more humane and a tool for modernist democratization and so social reform. In this view, the deviant homosexuality becomes humanized. Finally, there is the last stage of the postmodern approach wherein researchers take a more active, reflexive and reflective role. Moreover, the reflexive research method which is represented by [25] is the result of the rise of gay and lesbian movement in the late 1960s in association with new understandings of homosexuality and consequentially appearance of a new research direction [33]. For that reason and as I aimed to provide the rare voices of queer migrants with opportunities to share their narratives and experiences with the wider audiences, I picked out and utilized the reflexive status in my research. I followed the postmodernist approach in doing research with the LGBT participants, assuming that the study of queer migrants and their post-migration stories should take a humanistic, flexible and normalized form.

3.1. Data Collection

Regarding the current status of the literature, and the exploratory nature of the project, the researcher selected a qualitative approach to gather the main body of data that is more appropriate than a quantitative one [9] and [30]. The advantage of using qualitative research methods in exploratory research is the use of open-ended and flexible questions and probing that allow participants to respond in their own words and to explain their opinions instead of forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods [13]. Moreover, qualitative research methods (here, semi-structured interview) provide a unique chance to become

acquainted with under-explored and less visible topics and in the case of research on identity formation and social in/exclusion lived experiences of LGBT refugees.

3.2. Recruitment and Sample Size

For sampling of LGBT populations, researchers face with a number of challenges particularly when they explore experiences of this less visible minority community. In other words, sampling becomes rough as LGBTs are among social groups that are known as hard to reach, resistant to definition and further subject to discrimination and social isolation [37]. Martin and [25] argue that random sampling of the LGBT population is hard to achieve because there is no conceivable sampling frame for them, whereas according to [19], obtaining a representative samples of LGBT population is impossible. The reason is because of lack of a clear-cut definition of what or who is LGBT. Moreover, [16] present another reason. They claim that difficulty in finding a proper sampling method can be also due to the fact that many LGBTs may choose not to identify themselves as such. Traditionally, in LGBT and queer studies, the samples are drawn from LGBT organizations, readers of LGBT research works, customers of LGBT businesses as well as LGBT peoples receiving health and social care services [14] [15] and [17].

Consequently, results obtained from these studies with purposive samples cannot be widely generalized [29], whereas in results gained from quantitative or survey designed studies of sexual behaviors are comparably more generalizable [41] and [42]. On the other hand, [6] claims that other sampling methods like random sampling consist of such complex and costly methods as two-stage telephone survey designs and Random Digit Dialling techniques. As [6] points out, the appropriate sampling methods in LGBT studies remarkably depend upon variables like purpose of research, funding source, timeframe, and subject. Nevertheless, using different sampling methods may increase the chance of making a more diverse research population. Accordingly, the present research used a purposive snowball sampling strategy. Participants´ demographic features (e.g. sexual identity, age, country of origin, and the length of stay in Germany) were taken into account in order to examine the impact of these features on formation of identities. To begin the recruitment process, I made the preliminary contacts with all LGBT asylum/refugee-support organizations based in NRW state. Most of these organizations neglected contacts, and those that did not suggested contacting a different organization. Finally, the researcher received responses from one of the recommended organizations, namely the cologne-based Rubicon Baraka. Rubicon Baraka is a leading organization that provides a wide range of social and cultural programs for LGBT groups of all nationalities living in NRW state as sexual refugees/asylum seekers. As heterosexual people can freely attend the weekly programs, I had the chance to interact with LGBT members.

Initially, I presented myself in some meetings held by Baraka where I could find and get to know a few LGBT Iranian refugees. Two individuals self-identified as gay men agreed to participate in the study. They then introduced me to some of their LGBT friends who were not members of Baraka. Later, I contacted them via Facebook and Instagram since new participants preferred to know me individually before they take part personally in the research. However, in the first six months of the study, only four more LGBT Iranian refugees agreed to participate in the study. The process of finding further participants willing to take part in the study took more time than expected. The issue of trust was the biggest challenge in my study because LGBT groups are among the most hidden groups an even more so because these groups come from a Middle Eastern country like Iran, considering the current socio- cultural and political contexts. I had to allocate a considerable amount of time and efforts to make them trust me. The process of recruiting participants proceeded slowly as most of the time people introduced to me declined the contact and were not willing to introduce others. Therefore, I had to refer to Rubicon Baraka frequently to seek communications with other members. Nonetheless, after one year and a half, a sufficient number of interviewees had been found as I achieved theoretical saturation, i.e. persistent collection and analysis of data up to the point where the theoretical saturation is obtained (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

3.3. Procedure

The participants answered semi-structured and flexible questions interviews. The questions were designed about formation of identity of LGBT Iranian refugees. Although, the respondents knew English language well, the interviews were done in their mother tongue, Persian language (Farsi), because they stated they can express their experiences much better in Farsi than in English. Also, since the consent was received earlier, the interviews content were tape-recorded and transcribed in Farsi and later the interview transcripts were translated into English for research reliability.

3.4. Data Analysis

This research employs open coding as well as thematic analysis techniques. Using the open coding technique, I created preliminary labels for chunks of data that summarized the narratives. According to [38] the early stage of coding is unlimited as the researcher has not made the decision about the scope and quality of categories to be defined and so the analysis has not yet entered the coding procedure. For that reason, the researcher has the possibility to take into account the meanings of words, statements, phrases and even larger chunks of conversation units equally. In the second stage, I used thematic analysis in order to identify themes. As [3] proposes, thematic analysis is adopted for identifying, analyzing and highlighting existing patterns and themes within data. This means, the goal of thematic analysis technique is to recognize patterns and themes of living or behavior. I started categorizing the themes emerged from the initial codes while I moved back through the documents I had collected. For each original narrative, I developed

themes of descriptive statement personally. Then, I prepared a list of the original themes that were discovered from the data and later classified them as principal topics of the research. Using this categorization, I began writing the final analysis of the themes.

4. Findings

Throughout the interviews several narrative patterns were recognized, echoing the issues discussed in the review of literature section. According to the account of identity construction, the interviewees highlighted in their interviews, how their different identities are shaped and reshaped in the context of migration and interaction with other immigrants and the locals. The informants declared in various occasions the interdependency of sexual orientation and other involving religious, national and refugee identities. Using these evidence, therefore, the researcher could find the mechanisms through which queer refugees position themselves and are positioned and judged morally by the established groups of immigrants and natives in the host society.

4.1. Sexual, Religious, National and Refugee Identities

Across the sample, the most prominent aspect of identity that all interviewees reported was religious identity. Participants described their families hold Islamic religious values but not that much radical. The way they narrated the religiosity of their families and the status of religion in their home country showed distancing from radical and traditional Islamic values.

Participants consider a place for their country of origin in opposition to Islamic values that can be interpreted as negative including fundamentalism, child marriage, polygamy, Islamic legal guardian and practicing Muslims as opposed to Muslims with weak religious identities. Through their conscious rejection of these possibly negative affiliations, participants make a boundary between what they are (*non-radical we*) vs what they are not (*radical they*).

In this Ethnicity-Islam figuration, respondents position themselves as an established culture vis-a vis the Islamic radical culture as anomic. For this group, Islamic values are asserted outsider due to the historical, cultural and national superiority of Iran over centuries. By this act of stigmatization, participants exclude Islam and feel no sense of belonging to it justifying that Islam is a threat to their established group identity and group charisma. Othering process of Islamic values, therefore, makes managing and maintenance of their national identification and national belonging promising. Although, some respondents remarkably rejected their identification as a Muslim, instances of alternate religious identity of Zoroastrianism were identified. Historically, Zoroastrianism was the primary religion of the Persian Empire prior to the Muslim conquest of Persia (Iran) in 651AD and it is one of the world's oldest continuously practiced religions. Nowadays, Zoroastrians are the oldest religious community of Iran.

> *I never wanted to be another person except an Iranian... we have had a long historical record… many neighborhood countries in Middle-East have records of ancient Iran… there are unfortunately radical Muslim countries and groups around Iran ...yes (Shahab, 30 year- old gay).*

> *We have never had something like compulsory rejection of drinking alcohol in our history…peoples in Iran do not refuse to drink wine (Razin, 31year-old male transgender).*

Although, some respondents remarkably rejected their identification as a Muslim, instances of alternate religious identity of Zoroastrianism were identified. Historically, Zoroastrianism was the primary religion of the Persian Empire prior to the Muslim conquest of Persia (Iran) in 651AD and it is one of the world's oldest continuously practiced religions. Nowadays, Zoroastrians are the oldest religious community of Iran. Zoroastrianism is not uniform in theological and philosophical thought, especially with historical and modern influences having a significant impact on individual and local beliefs, practices, values and vocabulary, sometimes merging with tradition and in other cases displacing it. Modern Zoroastrianism, however, tends to divide itself into either Reformist or Traditionalist camps with various smaller movements arising. Zoroastrianism's core teachings include a) Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds, b) Charity is a way of maintaining one's soul and to spread happiness, c) The spiritual equality and duty of the genders, d) Being good for the sake of goodness and without the hope of reward. The conflicting relationship between Islam and Zoroastrianism is due to many reasons. One major factor is the dominance of Islamic extremist groups in the Middle East, which is also where the majority of the Zoroastrian population live. These extremists act brutally towards other religions and establish laws that restrict other religions from coexisting with them. Another factor is racial tension between Parsi people and other races in the Middle East and South Asia. The Parsi people are mainly associated with Iran, which can be problematic to people who have a stigma towards Iranians, such as Iraqis and Syrians since they are at conflict with Iran. Zoroastrians also have a strained relationship with Muslims due to their conflicting views of who God is. Muslims believe that Allah is an all-powerful whose reign extends forever. Zoroastrians believe that Ahura Mazda is all-powerful as well, but has a rival named Angra Mainyu who is equal in power and is a force of evil.

Participants described their Zoroastrianism religious identity as follows:

> *I was born as Muslim, but I did not live as a Muslim. I never saw myself like a Muslim. I attach myself in my heart to the holly Zarathustra the ancient Persian prophet (Shaya, 31 year-old gay).*

> *Being called a Muslim had made me several bad feelings. My faith in Zarathustra is endless. (Mehrdad, 26-year-old male bisexual).*

Accordingly, in this section when the two respondents use never and endless, the two religious identifications become irreconcilable. This shows a dichotomy of positive versus negative that may function to support their decisions to accept one and to reject the other instead of integration or categorization. Additionally, the continuity motive of creation of identity when they say never saw like a Muslim and my faith in Zarathustra is endless are aspects of their identity that have remained untouched during passage of time. As [40] put it, this continuity works to strengthen collective ties and collective self-esteem and thus creates self-verifying feedback. This is vital to the process of identity formation of insider and identifying with the Zoroastrianism.

However, for these individuals holding Zoroastrianism religious identity, their experiences with traditional Zoroastrian temples have not always been positive as they were rejected from temples trying to convert in their country of origin. Nonetheless, when they were welcomed by a liberal reformist Zoroastrians temple in Germany, they described their feelings as:

Since then I am feeling like a person having no internalized homophobia. Now, I am a real and practiced Zoroastrian (Shaya, 31 year-old gay).

They helped me to find my way out of all dark moments. I am my true self now… it is my savior, but these old Muslims do not understand it (Mehrdad, 26 year-old male bisexual).

This acceptance in the reformist Zoroastrians temple in Germany more likely has merged the additional incentive of belonging into their religious identity, which could clarify the reason they refer to *I am a real and practiced Zoroastrian* and *my savior*.

As mentioned earlier, belonging plays a fundamental role in human experience and influences considerably the way we relate to others. Lacking this sense of belonging to Zoroastrianism due to rejection from temples in their home country, the LGBT individuals realized that it would be difficult for them to keep their religious identity because other identity motives including self- esteem and efficacy, were also influenced. Considering the conflict between their religious identity and their gay and bisexual identities, participants seem to have managed to preserve these different identities long enough over time in order to integrate them once they were no longer having to choose between them.

The relationship between the religious identity and refugee identity of Shaya and Mehrdad was also questioned. The two emphasized frequently that they identify themselves with being a refugee while they were criticized harshly and interacted negatively for their religious identity and conversion to Zoroastrianism by other members of refugee community. They described their situations saying *among many practiced Muslims I am the black sheep* and *they do not shake hand with me and do not call my name.* By stigmatizing and othering these informants, a group of established refugees attempts to exclude them as their religious identity seems to be a threat to the group cohesion, attitudes, norms and behaviors.

As the established believes in the religious rightness of Islam and Islamic culture. In this way, the two participants do not feel they belong to the community and experience lower self-esteem because they are positioned by the established as much outsider. According to Elias and Scotson these dynamics of exclusion are an inherent part of an established-outsider -figuration [12].

Therefore, in the case of these two respondents, the established-outsider figuration has shown to be not geographically bounded as it works transnationally across Germany and Iran. Moreover, the two LGBT individuals encounter with additional moral judgments of the heterosexual Muslim refugees about being bad and not deserving to be included in their community. For the established group of immigrants, the different religious and sexual identity of the queer informants require devaluation because their sexual orientation and religious believes are not embodied within the particular behavioral and belief systems defined by the established group (undeserving outsider).

When ask me why you fled your country? I just say, to save my life…to have a better life… they answer me then, we understand … most of the times they invite me to their parties…we talk together for ours (Shaya, 31 year-old gay).

Hitherto, when participants put their refugee identity into words, some other group of the cohesive refugee community aborts the process of outsidering (the term used by Petintseva, 2015). This is more likely because of shared feelings and experiences of being a refugee which complies with norms and values of the established and the group positions the two respondents as much insider. This exemplifies that the process of identity formation is fluid and context dependent as various identities of individuals may bring them multiple statuses of insider and outsider in their inter- group relationships at the same time.

I have devoted myself to helping other refugees. We need each other´s help… but what I see instead, they always remember me as sissy (Shaya, 31 year-old gay).

I help other refugees… I am kind to them… I do not judge them, but they never forget to tell me I am part of a LGBT community and deviant (Mehrdad, 26 year-old male bisexual).

Participants further statements show their desire to separate their refugee and LGBT identities, which simultaneously challenges them how to present their identities. In fact, in this occasion Shaya and Mehrdad use the motive of meaning when helping other refugees trying to strengthen their refugee identity as it is not reinforced by feelings of belonging or self-esteem. Additionally, the use of the insulting words "sissy" and "deviant" indicates that not only other refugees identify them different, but this difference is also negative because their sexual orientation is subjectively and morally judged by the established refugee community as a threat to the norms and attitudes of the which may threaten the group cohesion. The group perceptions of symbolic threats of the

LGBT participants originate from the collective deterministic attitudes of heterosexuality and heteronormativity which make them stigmatize and exclude the LGBT refugees from the community. Hence, lower feelings of belonging, as well as sense of less worthy and inferior individuals experienced through discriminatory behaviors of the established contradict the positive effect of distinctiveness motive on formation of identity (undeserving outsider).

In this context, unlike the Refugee-Zoroastrian figuration in which the refugee identity augmented individual self-esteem of participants thanks to their belonging to the larger refugee community, the refugee identity in the Refugee-LGBT figuration led informants to experience exclusion as the established group has stigma towards the sexual orientation. Apparently, it is interesting to see that while the refugee community positions these two individuals as "bad boys" in relation to their sexual identity in much outsider status, in another context these same individuals are not *purely* excluded from the established group, and they preserve their interactions with members of the group and receive much insider status in the hierarchy of power status, despite the fact that they are converted to other taboo religion.

Integration of Identities is likely to happen as it seems while interactions with members of refugee community encompasses conflicts, interactions with non-refugee identity holders can be confirming towards the integration of being a LGBT and a refugee, simultaneously. When participants evaluate how to present their identity to the Germans, they take prescriptive measures. According to the definition of deserving and undeserving refugee provided by [7], there exists large differences between acceptable and unacceptable asylum seekers. Asylum seekers who are more likely to get a job, have more consistent testimonies, suffer from vulnerabilities and who are Christian, rather than Muslim, are regarded as more deserving. Likewise, participants expect that presenting one or the other identities will receive negative reactions, whereas combination of identities protect them not only from that feedback but generate also quite opposite responses.

Interviewees reported their experiences of being judged by the German locals:

> *When I introduce myself to people as a refugee, I see how different I am. But, when I add other word, you know, the other me, a gay refugee or a homosexual refugee, I am feeling better. (Shaya, 31 year-old gay).*

> *If they hear I am refugee, German natives take a distance from me … later, when I say to them, I am a LGBT refugee, it becomes a game changer (Mehrdad, 26-year-old male bisexual).*

> *In first meetings, I always say to Germans that I am refugee… I see that their behavior changes, but when I add I am a transgender and a refugee they get closer to me and treat me softly … I have not seen this elsewhere (Razin,31-year-old male transgender).*

> *I have talked to many German locals… they ask me, why am I in Germany? are you here because of war? and I just answer them, I am a lesbian, a LGBT person… just this…then they welcomed me warmly saying no bad words (Sara, 28 year-old lesbian).*

In view of that, this group of vulnerable and needy LGBT refugees seems to be considered "deserving" of support by the locals. For the established German groups, the "deserving" refugees do not appear to pose symbolic threats to the values, norms or other collective characteristics nor realistic threats to in-group economy, health, politics, safety and well-being. This is the reason that while the individual self-esteem of participants may be threatened by reactions of other refugees towards their LGBT identity, it is strengthened in form of increased status after being recognized by German population.

Thus, this diversity in how the participants opt to hide or highlight different aspects of their identities indicates the notion of identity as adaptable and context dependent [11] Bearing this in mind, one can see how reflexive exchanges, identity motives, and intersection of these categorizations with the LGBT identity impact how the participants define themselves.

Rejection of religious identity in favor of queer identity was reported by other participants, however. They described that while they grew up in Islamic contexts, they found a clear irreconcilability between their religious identity and LGBT identity. So, unlike the participants who addressed conflict with religious institutions, some interviewees identified the source of conflict in religious doctrine:

> *When you read the core texts of Islam, it is not surprising to see that it talks with a harsh language against homosexuality (Hamid, 35-year-old gay).*

> *Same-sex love and marriage shape Islamic texts red lines. Nobody is allowed to even think or criticize these red lines. You want to pass these lines, you will be knocked out by Islamic principles (Ahmad, 33-year-old gay).*

> *In eyes of Islam, you should be a male or a female only. What if I am both or neither of them? Islam clearly bans you what not to be (Hesam, 30-year-old male transgender).*

This mismatch results in the rejection of participants' religious identity to accommodate their LGBT identity. Subsequently, while some interviewees continued compartmentalization for as long as it took to be able to integrate their religious identity, some others found it impossible to maintain both their religious identity or queer identity. This incompatibility impacts motives of formation of identity. The self-esteem of these participants may be essentially endangered by negative messages leading them to question their LGBT identity, whereas their sense of belonging to Islam was challenged by what they define as Islam's antagonism towards homosexuality and transsexuality and therefore themselves. In case of the Islam-LGBT figuration, these interviewees did not report a complete separation from the religion as a whole. Although they assert Islamic teachings as hostile to their group identity of LGBT,

participants claim that Islam may shift its position only under certain conditions of tolerance or acceptance of homosexuality and transsexuality. This is perhaps because of the future benefits of group cohesion and values. They exclude Islamic teachings individually, nevertheless, place a room for any liberally reformed version of Islam to the advantage of the collective culture.

4.2. Discussion

Using the Elias and Scotson's established-outsider figuration analysis of the ways through which multiple identities are created and shifted and so the power status is changed in inter-group and interpersonal relationships in this project reveals that how sexual identity interacts with the other aspects of the participants' identities and with their positioning process. That is to say, intersection of various identities in various social relational contexts ends to constant tensions of exclusion and belonging. For some participants, the interaction between their queer identity and religious identity led them to reject their Islamic identity and when placed in an ethnic context they tried to lessen the negative impact of identity threat through ignoring their national identity and getting closer to identities that are more supporting their LGBT identity. Based on Eliasian's viewpoints, the inter- group tensions between individuals together and with institutions like religion and state made the queer immigrants to maintain the status of their LGBT identity to the loss of their national and religious identities.

In the hierarchy of status, the LGBT group identity bestowed outsider positions to Islam and through integrating queer identity and a new ethnic identity (German), they increased their individual and collective self-esteem and belonging. However, for some others the relationship between queer identity and religious identity was conflicting and required them to compartmentalize their LGBT identity with Zoroastrianism religious identity. These individuals experienced many hardships in this process, but their continuity motive was that much strong to keep this distinction of identities dynamic until arriving in Germany where they obtained additional motive of belonging and could resolve the clash between being queer and Zoroastrian as this new religious identity did not contradict with the LGBT group identity and attitudes. As a result, soon no separation and exclusion of identities was needed, they became integrated. The relationship between refugee identity and LGBT identity of these participants was also opposing in a way that when entered into larger refugee community, their statuses shifted from insider to outsider and vice-versa. To empower their sense of belonging and self-esteem and to shift power unbalances while interacting with the established refugee and German communities, the individuals experienced instantaneous exclusion and inclusion. In one occasion, the refugee identity supported them to feel belonging as they shared similar background with the older refugee community whereas in other ingroup communications they encountered exclusion.

5. Final Remarks

In exploring the experiences of migrants of various groups, factors such as identity, social inclusion and exclusion play a significant role. These variables become more important when migrants are forced to immigrate to seek safety and escape persecution. As [4] and [5] put it, by immigrating, many LGBTs do indeed experience new security and freedom. Therefore, in order to study these experiences scientifically, the present project was an attempt to demonstrate that queer migrants, not only encounter with similar difficulties as other asylum seekers and refugees, but their experiences are influenced by having a sense of attachment to different groups of migrants. For this purpose, I examined in the first place how participants manage the multiple intersections of their identities while putting the queer identity at the center. The analysis revealed that interviewees adopt a variety of processes namely integrating, compartmentalizing and rejecting particular aspects of their identities over time. The results therefore confirmed the assumption that identity is shaped through fluid, dynamic, and continuously developing processes during the passage of time. In sum, the current project does not claim to generalize the results to the larger population of queer asylees and refugees around the world or in Germany. However, it attempted to shed light on the untold stories of LGBT Iranian individuals that can have implications for organizations which work with sexually forced migrants coming from less studied regions such as Middle East. Moreover, the results of the present research can be used by volunteers and staff who are in contact with LGBT persons.

5.1. Strength and Limitations

Like other studies in this field, the present research undertook some limitations. The project was limited to the time and resources available. Although this project was conducted in Germany aiming at locating participants from various LGBT communities around Germany, yet difficulty in reaching the potential subjects restricted the study to be performed in the North- Rhine Westphalia state in Western Germany. Moreover, the selection of participants was limited to those having requested for asylum and their application was accepted as an LGBT refugee. The age of participants and the length of their stay in Germany were further limitations of the research as the researcher hypothesized that within a specific age range and duration of stay, the narratives of lived experiences would be more reliable. The issue of trust and hard- to- find showed by LGBT persons limited the project to ethical aspects of privacy, safety and vulnerability. There are evidences that LGBT refugees and asylees are very suspicious and cautious about the places they go or individuals they reveal their identities to. This became more intense and tough in my work as LGBT persons coming from Iran are under the double risks of being identified by the political regime and to be killed by the radical Muslim authorities. Considering these life risks, those organizations that support queer migrants overlook or banned any direct contacts with their

members. Therefore, finding a proper sample of participants was strictly challenging. Nonetheless, the main advantage of the current study was that I could collect samples up to the point of saturation in data collection achieved. This should be seen as a considerable accomplishment in regard to doing research about such inaccessible and hard- to- reach groups of refugees. The second strong point of the project is that fortunately all interviewees attended the interview sessions fully and the data were collected using participants' mother tongue as their preferred language. Finally, it is important to mention that each of transgender participants in this study was self- identified as a male or female transgender. Therefore, the findings of this project should not be used about other trans /non-binary individuals. The results of this study were specific to LGBT Iranian refugees in Germany. Those LGBT Iranian persons born in Germany or other European countries would likely have different lived experiences than the samples in this project.

5.2. Future Research

In view of the dearth of research conducted on the lived experiences of queer migrants, it is recommended that future studies explore wider range of topics relevant to this group of immigrants. The initial step can begin from exploring experiences of intersexual and asexual refugees. The success stories of these immigrants as well as their challenges during the migration process would definitely be an asset to the existing body of literature on sexual migration. Another interesting topic is the role of family support before and after the migration process of the LGBT individual. There are few studies that have examined the factors that affect the family support after the queer person migrates particularly in relation to transgender and transsexual persons. Another stimulating topic is about formation of friendship between cis-gender and non cis- gender persons. The studies on social ties of LGBT individuals with heterosexuals are still limited. In this research, the majority of samples reported weak Islamic believes and practices, and few others reported that they have no Islamic believes. Therefore, further studies may explore the role of strong religiosity of LGBT migrants in intersections of their identities as well as exclusion and inclusion experiences.

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