



Dualism of Iranian Homosexuality
-a way to dialogue

Ugnius Hervar Didziokas

Lokaverkefni til MA-gráðu í Mannfræði

Félagsvísindasvið



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Abstract

This thesis is about homosexuality in the Middle East in general, with a focus on the Islamic Republic of Iran. The purpose of this thesis is to show the reality of gay men in Iran (rather than lesbians, as the female world is closed in the Middle East and simply inaccessible to men), based on my field research in 2011 in the Iranian capital, Tehran. This uncovered a significant gay underground world which is simply invisible and inaccessible not only for locals but also for the international community. It deals with the problems of simply being gay or homosexual or MSM in an Islamic and patriarchal society where homosexuality is condemned and forbidden, not only by the authorities but also by a large percentage of the population, and it sheds light on the dual standards of homosexuality in Iran, where it is practiced by a notable percentage of the population but, at the same time, is punishable by death. Homosexuality is still a stigma in this part of the world, as it is based on the main principle of *do it, but don't talk about it*. The openness of the gay community in Iran is very limited and actually prevents people from even talking about it openly and “coming out of the closet”, such that homosexuality is viewed as an activity instead of an identity. This project is based on field research from different places in Tehran, where gay people gather, as well on conversations with six individuals who were randomly selected and who shared their experiences of being gay in over-Islamized society, including their daily lives, difficulties, and hopes for the future. It is about gay people and their ordinary lives, people who have uncommon problems in our modernized Western world. This thesis deals with gays being Muslims and their own realities, and it involves the politics of sex and gender in the Middle East (or the Muslim world), its history and its present impact on our current world, with a close focus on the Islamic Republic of Iran. The ideas presented look at conflicts, namely that the death penalty for homosexual behaviour meets the popularity of homosexuality among males who meet together, thereby creating the so-called *Dualism of Iranian Homosexuality*. The purpose of this thesis is to show the different sides of homosexuality and to support any further discussion by a breaking of the stigma of the subject in a non-Western world.

Útdráttur

Þessi ritgerð er um samkynhneigð í Mið-Austurlöndum almennt en með áherslu á Íslamska Lýðveldið Íran. Tilgangur þessarar ritgerðar er að sýna raunheim samkynhneigðra manna í Íran byggðan á eigin reynslu með viðtölum og vettvangsrannsóknnum í höfuðborginni Teheran 2011 sem afhjúpaði stóran undirheim homma, ósjáanlegan og óaðgengilegan ekki bara heimafólki heldur líka alþjóðasamlélaginu.

Ritgerðin tekur á vandamálum tengdum því að vera samkynhneigður í múslimsku feðraveldi þar sem samkynhneigð er bæði fordæmd og bönnuð ekki bara af yfirvöldum heldur einnig af stórum hluta almennings og varpar ljósi á tvöfalt siðgæði samkynhneigðra í Íran, þar sem kynhneigðin er stunduð af svo stórum hópi fólks þó dauðarefsing liggi við. Samkynhneigð er enn bannorð í þessum heimshluta en byggist á þeirri meginreglu að „gera það en ekki tala um það”. Sýnileiki samkynhneigðs samfélags er mjög takmarkaður í Íran vegna dauðarefsingarinnar og kemur í veg fyrir að fólk tali opinskátt um hana eða komi út úr skápnum einnig er hún einungis skilgreind sem ákveðin hegðun en ekki varanlegur lífstíll.

Þetta verkefni er byggt á vettvangsrannsóknnum frá mismunandi stöðum í Teheran þar sem samkynhneigðir koma saman og samtölum við sex einstaklinga valda af handahófi sem deila reynslu sinni af því að vera samkynhneigðir í Íslamsku samfélagi þeirra daglega lífi vandamálum og vonum um framtíðina. Þetta er um venjulegt fólk og þeirra venjulega líf en vandamál sem okkur í hinum vestræna heimi finnst óvenjuleg. Þessi ritgerð tekur á því að vera samkynhneigður múslimi og þeirra raunveruleika og þá pólitík er ríkir varðandi kyn og kynlíf í miðausturlöndum eða múslimskum heimi, sögu þeirra og áhrif á heim okkar í dag með áherslu á Íran þar sem mætast tvær ólíkar staðreindir: Dauðarefsing við samkynhneigð og vinsældir hennar meðal karlmanna sem skapar aftur hið tvöfalda siðgæði gagnvart samkynhneigð í Íran. Tilgangur þessarar ritgerðar er að sýna ólíkar hliðar samkynhneigðar og styðja frekari umræður með því að brjóta á „bannorðinu” í hinum óvestræna heimi.

Preface

Since my first visit to Iran in 2008, I was fascinated by the country and its people. I found out that the Lonely Planet guide was telling the absolute truth: don't believe the news on your TV, but rather believe the people over there. I was truly amazed as I have never before met a friendlier people than the Iranians - their hospitality was remarkable. While in Iran, then, I had wished to meet gay people such as myself in order to find a truth about homosexuality there, as the information coming from different sources was really misleading. Articles in the newspapers and reports on TV had only shown gay people being publicly hanged; meanwhile, by listening to the stories of those who had visited or locals, some continued to narrate the stories of an Iranian homosexual paradise, while others would tell of horror stories, and both myself and everyone else would get confused by this double picture of the Iranian gay life's reality. It was precisely this uncertainty which pushed me to find out by my myself about the situation of the gay community in Iran, which did not happen until my second visit to this country three years later, in 2011. I had heard before that it is not easy to meet any local men exhibiting homosexual behaviour; firstly because everyone has to be discreet as possible in the Islamic republic, and secondly because of the lack of gathering places, such as clubs and cafes. In general, clubs do not exist and coffee shops or houses for LGBTs might simply be described as "mission impossible". Homosexuality in the Islamic Republic of Iran is a serious crime and even more it is punishable by death, which not only exists in law but in reality too. The Iranian experience that I have sought on my own has shown me the existing gap between the law and reality. Islam plays a rather centrally important role as religious fundamentalism and the family is a core of life's standards. Social norms regarding sexuality in general and homosexuality are limited, but homosexuality is widespread among the masculine gender of different ages. The Iranian point of view of being gay is different from the Western point of view: it is a discreet and concentrated activity, but not identity. This thesis is not intended to criticize the Islamic government, and nor is it about gay rights in the Islamic republic; it is my personal research based on my own experiences and it is rationalized on my own collected facts and chosen theories. Even if the idea of meeting gay people in Iran sounds like a total absurdity, as no one simply gather together as a homosexual in the country, where the punishment for homosexuality is hanging, I am happy for my choice and what came out of it, as it has shown me that the core of the problem is not simple and it depends on many factors. The drama of the recorded reality of Iranian gays, shown through the lens of popular news

agencies or through the printed reports of recognized newspapers does correspond to the tragic truth, but it is only a small percentage of the whole Iranian picture of homosexuality and its participants, who despite of all the tragic elements and their reality, continue to live and love as other human beings. Recorded field notes together with this thesis do add variety and more experience in this tabooed field on understanding a thing like homosexuality, which could yet be interpreted completely differently in Western and Orient worlds. This research was neither a spying project of any kind nor was it aimed at supporting any foreign power or government; nor was it against any God, individual or religion; instead my main intention with this thesis was to collect facts and already existed by myself as well as to produce and welcome any discussions about the subject of homosexuality, which is lacking and seen as a big conspiracy in the Middle East and in Iran especially.

I would like to thank all of you who have helped me with this thesis and special thanks go to my advisor, Professor Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir for her belief in me and pushing support.

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1 Introduction

After I went to Iran for the first time in 2008, I could not stop thinking of writing my final Master thesis in Anthropology about homosexuality in the Middle East, particularly Iran. The idea which really began to disturb me since my visit to Iran was that of the contrary positions regarding homosexuality in Iran, where the official side (e.g. that of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad) claims that no homosexuals live in Iran, while the opposition, the Iranian Diaspora and various NGOs (e.g. IRQO, Afary and Amnesty International etc.) emphasize the importance of observing gay rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran along with the fact that the application of the death penalty for homosexual behaviour is real. Meanwhile, as Afary (2009) pointed out, in contemporary Iran finding a partner for a man with a car and an apartment is no problem at all and sometimes Iran was referred to as a homosexual paradise. When I got home, I started to read more regarding homosexuality in Iran. First, the very famous International Gay Guide *Spartacus* (2001) did “embrace me”, providing information about Iran: “According to the Islamic penal law, [Chapter 1, Art. 110] the punishment for sodomy is death.” However, instead of stopping me, it did the opposite thing: I got stubborn and intended to go to Iran again and to do research on my own which would help me to improve the information I already had and would help me to write a Master’s thesis. Indeed, a lack of information and the presence of stigma regarding homosexuality in the non-Western world (especially in the Islamic world and Africa) is huge and it became one of the few motivation points, namely to go and meet Iranian gay guys, to talk to them and to check the things out on my own. This was because I wanted to explore and discover what was hidden from my eyes and thereby introduce my collected knowledge in a simple manner to others and encourage them to continue to study the under-represented fields of Malinowski. Besides this, I became interested in the forbidden underground world, something that was under the table but widely practiced, though it carried a punishment of death for *the Dual system of Iranian homosexuality*: on the one side, it is banned but widely practiced, while on the other side, the Oriental activity of homosexuality took over a Western gay identity and by this created a clash of Civilizations. The Lonely Planet guide just encouraged me more, with its chapter on Iran in its Middle East guide:

You are going to Iran? Why? The misconceptions about Iran are so many and so misleading that the majority of the Western world sees it as a mysterious, dangerous wasteland full of hostile, crazy Arabs. How wrong they are. Iran is a fascinating mix of modern and ancient, of East and West, of the exotic and the mundane. It's far more developed than you'd imagine, and far less dangerous. And the people are Persians, not Arabs (Ham, Burke & Carillet 2006: 179).

I think many of us have or had exactly this image of Iran. I did, just before my visit to the country in 2008. When I was boarding the plane from Baku to Tehran, I was so paranoid that my hands were shaking. I was wearing very conservative clothes, starting with black trousers and finishing with a white, long sleeved shirt. I had a beard which I had been growing for six months and which was designed especially for my trip to Iran. When I asked myself the question why, the answer came easily: I was prejudiced against this country, because the news that we see and hear in Iceland and the rest of the Western world are negative towards Iran. This really had scared me, but I was not the only one. All of my surroundings, friends and neighbours were even more paranoid than I was myself. Some people, when they wished me a good trip, were saying it like they were doing so for the last time. I even got a feeling that they thought that the next time they would meet me would be to attend my own funeral in a zinc coffin, as there was no way that I was going to come back from Iran alive: for some people, Iran and Iraq were the same country and there was little I could do. I decided, eventually, that my final research for my MA thesis would be on homosexuality in Iran, regardless of the negative presuppositions of many around me. This decision was really difficult for me to make, as I had some concerns about safety issues in Iran following the latest demonstrations in Tehran in 2009 and all over the Middle East more recently (Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Syria, from where I was deported recently), and because of my chosen subject was and is a very sensitive topic of discussion in the Islamic Republic of Iran and therefore required extreme neutrality and caution on my part. Iran belongs to the list of the countries where homosexuality is punishable by death, together with African countries like Sudan and Nigeria, Somalia and Mauritania, and Saudi Arabia and Yemen in the Middle Eastern region. Half a year before travelling to Iran, I created several profiles on popular gay cruising websites, thereby establishing a connection between myself and my future research participants, who agreed to meet me or else to introduce me to somebody else. This in particular was the most important part of the research, because without the opening of the

door from the inside, I had no chance to open it at all. After all, the snowballing method that I applied worked perfectly and, later on. I conducted un-official interviews with six participants, met accidentally. All of the information provided by them, as well detailed facts important to this research, I carefully recorded in my Field Notes. This thesis has five different chapters, each of which argues over different subjects and the problems pertaining to them. However, taken together it structures the whole picture of the matter investigated: dualism of Iranian homosexuality. This thesis has five chapters. In the first chapter, the Introduction I argue about the main subjects and principles regarding the researched theme, where I introduce its structure. In the second chapter, I explore the still existing high levels of stigma in the Middle East and Africa. This chapter reviews the most important theories, used by me before, during and after conducting the research, where I introduce to the reader the Gay International of Massad, the Other's by Said, and where I argue about Foucault's impact on Iran, myself and my research, and where I believe the theoretical point of view connects together the theories and my field notes. The third chapter of this thesis is reserved for the methodology used to conduct this research and it argues about the ethical issues, so important in observing, so as to and finally present the participants and others involved in it. The fourth chapter is designed for the results and findings, which contain my collected data on the historical impact on homosexuality in this region, with a close focus on Iran, where the experience of homosexuality in ancient Persia built a bridge through the era of Shah Pahlavi into the Islamist regime of the Mullahs of the contemporary Islamic Republic of Iran. The section on homosexuality in the Middle East in the same chapter explores the differences between active and passive partners, engaged in the patterns of Islamic homosexualities, which differ so much from Western patterns; meanwhile the role exchange between religion, or Islam and homosexuality is very arguable, as religion is still so important and a valuable topic in the Muslim world, is presented in the section on Islam and homosexuality. The legal system of homosexuality at present in this country is debated in the same chapter and compared with neighbouring Muslim states. It shines light on the situation on gays in the pre-revolution period and further investigates imprisonment and death penalty cases in relation to (homo-) sexuality "crimes". Finally, the final chapter is reserved for my conclusions, where the results from all of the different chapters are summarize and evaluated.

Before my last visit to Iran I had a totally different picture about the country and its gay community. During my research into the Islamic Republic, over almost three weeks, I

learned a lot about the country and the locals, their self-image and dreams, expectations and problems; this thesis intends to answer the questions which had arisen in this paper. Even if this thesis is one of personal opinion and based on collected facts, it is not intended to be against any particular political system or person; nor does it accuse the present ruling circles of the continuation of the systematic punishment of homosexuals in any way; nor is it totally pro-gay or supportive of the idea of so-called Western Gay Internationalism, which is discussed in the fourth chapter. In my Field notes I had mentioned that unfortunately, but:

I do not dare to offer suggestions about gay life in smaller towns in Iran, as it supposed to be much more difficult, compared with the size of Tehran and people's ability to be invisible in it. In general, everyone here is basically being watched all the time and if someone falls off the horse of traditions and rules, it is noticed and reported to whomever it may concern; that's why a gay couple which was hanged in Iran in 2005, or why women who were stoned to death in public, were from the rural areas of Iran but not from the capital, Tehran. Even if I had heard about the manager of the hotel in one of the Iranian small towns, who practices homosexuality with tourists for the exchange of a free room, I didn't dare to go there and meet that person by myself, as rural areas are much more visible and difficult to hide in. Anyway, like everywhere in the world, there are different kinds of people and there are open-minded people in rural areas too (as one of the friends of Ali, who is straight, for example, but doesn't even know that Ali is homosexual) who might accept homosexuality. In particular, among young people it is more common, but I did not want to try because of my past experiences from my first time in Iran. The problem occurred when we stopped in one of the streets of Shiraz (not even so small a town) to talk to some students, and again it was the same question - we were asked about our sexuality and we had to say the truth for the first time, because we were gay and lesbian, travelling together. I will never forget the reaction of those students, as they have probably never before met a homosexual person who would be openly GAY. This really made me insecure as their curiosity about it was not getting over at all and soon we were surrounded by many people. That's why, in order to observe gay life in Tehran, to touch it and to live it by spending time with other homosexuals, is fair enough for me, because one should be remembered very well and cannot be forgotten: by the Islamic law of the Islamic Republic of Iran, homosexuality is punishable by death. And

always, I had to remember, that by getting involved in their lives, I agreed to their term and conditions and that this research was done in natural way without any pushing or fee. Because of my participation in their lives, this unofficial aspect and silence in my interviews will express my point of view, but without anyone being put in danger; everyone's names and the names of places were changed as well. (Field notes #10 and 8, recorded in Tehran on Monday, 29 and Friday 26 of August 2011)

2 Between Theory and Reality

In this chapter of the thesis, I will review some of the newly done studies and books which affected my own research and which have given me some inspiration for doing it. Indeed, I will stress the totally imperfect situation of LGBT rights in the regions of Africa and the improving Middle East. Obviously, many other Islamic countries and majority of African countries - as a rule - are, on the global scale, still countries where homosexuality remains completely taboo and the 21st Century's continuing stigma, where the punishments for male to male relationships often exceed many years of imprisonment.

2.1 Literature review

Lucy Ewins, in her newly published article, argues about how the proposed anti-human rights legislation exemplified by the Anti-Homosexuality Bill of 2009 in Uganda is about to pass through, which might have an influence on the country's economy: Sweden is ready to cut-off all of development aid from their side in case the bill becomes law and thereby violates internationally recognized human rights. Besides, the Anti-Homosexuality Bill emphasizes that the crime of being infected with HIV and of engaging in homosexuality repeatedly should be punished by death. Imprisonment should be imposed on everyone "who fails to report homosexual activity to the police within twenty-four hours... [----] Anybody who does not believe that homosexuality is a crime is a sympathizer" (Ewins 2011: 147). Anthony M. Salar together with Somda Kpagnane and Aurelie Domegoure in their research-based essay "Homosexuality and HIV in Africa: An Essay on Using Entertainment Education as a Vehicle for Stigma Reduction" published in *Sexuality & Culture* (2011) point out that HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa is confirmed as exclusively heterosexual and the presence of MSM (Men who have sex with men) is absolutely denied; so does homophobia, which is Africa's number one force in driving this epidemic and which responds to my primal theory of the Iranian dual homosexual system which is, from one side, denied and therefore homophobic, supporting a compulsory heterosexuality, but from the other side widely practiced and discreet and not always in a safe way, as the example of Hamam in Tehran shows, where no condoms and shampoo instead of lubrication was used. Samar (2011), in his

book review, argues on important issues such as “local efforts” throughout the Middle East in addressing human and civil rights inadequacies in various Muslim and Middle East states, such as Morocco and Iran. As Samar points out, Ilkkaracan is not only a co-founder of the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily rights in Muslim society, but is also representative of non-conforming sexualities in the Middle East, someone who understands and shows the differences between identities and cultures throughout the various countries’ LGBT people. In one of the chapters, it completes a portrait of Iranian post-revolutionary construction on gender and sexuality issues and, by this, supports further dialogue (Samar 2011). Jared McCormick, in his research on gay bears in Syria and Lebanon, explores this particular sexual subculture through the context of two demographics of men (bearded and fitting into hetero-normative spaces) and the ethnographic encounters of tourists (male) who have had travelled on tours with LebTour during the period 2007 – 2011; and local men in the Middle Eastern region, who are increasingly identifying themselves as bears: “this research hopes to complicate the oft-cited local/global bifurcation of sexuality. What become most interesting are the changing affinities, conceptions of rights, and aesthetics of desirability in the negotiations of the Middle East” (McCormick 2011), where not only a gay bear’s identity, but gay identity, remains a rarely discussable subject. In N. Tittler’s book review of “Other Russias: homosexuality and the crisis of post-Soviet identity” (2010) she describes Brian’s J. Baer’s groundbreaking study on the discourse surrounding homosexuality along with a reflection of post-Soviet identity from the late 1980s up to the present day’s Russian identity. By deploying geographical and historical frameworks, the author juxtaposes inherently Russian associations of the notion of homosexuality as a Western import (as in the Middle East) that is a modern threat to Russian male identity which has similarities with patriarchal Muslim men’s identity. Meanwhile, a joint study of qualitative research done by N. Subhi and S. Mohamad together with N. Sarnon and S. M. Hoesni (2011) has been completed on twenty homosexual respondents from the Brisbane City area, aged from their twenties up to fifty one-years-old, and where the topic of the potential conflict between homosexuality and Christianity faced by interviewees saw “the most common personal effects of conflict between Christianity and homosexuality identified included depression (68.8%), self-blame/guilt (37.5%), anxiety (31.3%), suicidal ideation (25%) and alienation (25%),” pointing out that any kind of religion - Islam included - affects personality and supports a conflict between homosexual individuals and their religion.

2.2 Theories and homosexuality in the Middle East's Iran

Theoretically, it was only in 1869 when the term homosexuality first appeared, but because it appeared in Great Britain, and not elsewhere, we can understand why the Middle East's response to the topic of Muslims and gays gets very *anti*; this is because of the ties between homosexuality and the term 'gay' which was basically invented by the West. The way in which we understand the word 'gay' and gay identity and its association with gay rights does not really exist in the Middle East; at least not in the way we understand it and see it. In this chapter, I will investigate the theoretical point of view of homosexuality in the Middle East. There are many theories and terms regarding Oriental homosexuality, and many conditions that play in the core game regarding issues of same sex attraction. One of them is of keeping up your "straight face" in front of your family and friends:

When I asked Namdar how it is to be gay in Iran, he simply responded to me that it is not easy. "You simply can't be yourself, as in Iranian society you need to act straight, everywhere and every time," he said... [----] in such societies gay people simply can't be gay as it is not offered... [----] Being gay as we understand it in our Western world is simply impossible in the Middle East, especially in such a conservative country as Iran. Namdar has explained me that most gays are not gays, but homosexual or with the experience of homosexual activity: MSM is a rule. The other choice is simply unknown... [----] he told me that every day of his life is a mask that he has to wear. At work, he needs to wear one, and at home while he is with his family, the other one. They are different, but the same in their purpose. (Field notes #2, recorded in Tehran on Sunday, 21 of August 2011)



Figure 1 Friends or partners?¹

Similar is the situation with status-defined homosexuality, which might be accepted and tolerated, but never “packed” into equal rights or an equivalent - for example, civil union or marriage - where adoption between two homosexuals would even be discussed. In the Middle East, stigma of homosexuality is less than in Africa, but it is similarly puritanical, since “demanding respect for identities based on homosexuality [demanding respect for being gay or lesbian] is completely unacceptable in any Islamic society” (Afary & Anderson 2005: 160), whether Arab or Iranian. One of the successes of the Iranian revolution’s Islamists, who like Foucault were opposed to Western imperialist/colonialist policies and rejected cultural/social modernity, was indeed not only in solving economic and political problems, but also in cultivating the public anger which helped the revolution to spread against the head of state and his immorality with his Swiss male friend, with whom he studied some time before; his

¹ Author’s photo taken in Iran.

continuing visits to the Shah on regular bases just increased public hostility against what was seen as Westernized homosexuality. The Iranian Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda (in office from 26 January 1965 until 7 August 1977) was said to be homosexual too; this might be tolerated if he had been married without flaunting such activity openly, but when elite men who are supposed to be nation's perfect exemplars demonstrate pro-Western attitudes, it makes the public burn with a shame and self-disrespect, being particularly influenced by hard-line religious mullahs and clerics who argue that "the West was branded as "immoral" for ostensibly two reasons - female nudity and open adult male homosexuality" (Afary & Anderson 2005: 161), which were well-practiced by the Pahlavi regime, especially with the unveiling of Iranian *femina* and public homosexuality together with other Western sins.

2.3 Gay Internationalism

A very interesting opinion towards homosexuality in the Arab World is presented by Joseph A. Massad, who points out in his book (which is dedicated to his mentor and close friend Edward Said) *Desiring Arabs* that homosexuals were a pure invention by the West which was introduced to the Middle East and which has today reached the "universalization" of "gay rights;" [----] produced mostly by white male European or American gay scholars "describing" and "explaining" what they call "homosexuality" in Arab and Muslim history to the present; and journalistic accounts of the lives of so-called "gays" (Massad 2007: 162), who follow the identical paths of Western imperialism and its re-orientation of desire: *The Gay International*. According to him, homosexuality in the West "is an identity that seeks social community and political rights, while the other [in the East] is one of many forms of sexual intimacy that seeks corporeal pleasure" (Reset Doc 2009). He argues further that ILGA and IGLHRC were founded originally in the USA (other Western European gay movements would be subsidiary copies or puppets) in order to "create a platform" for lesbians and gays and TS internationally - i.e. which would "impose a homosexual identity on those Arabs who entertain relations with people of their own sex" (Reset Doc 2009). He argues that homosexuals did not exist in Europe before the second half of the Nineteenth Century, or at least before a juridical and medical definition of such a form of behaviour. Later on, together with a colonial capital which expanded into a global system with one capital across the whole world, new forms of sexuality created new forms of sexual identities which became recognized institutionally (i.e. by ILGA, the Icelandic organization for LGBT Samtökin 78 and others) and, therefore, became a main core for clashes between two forms of sexualities: a

major and normalized (heterosexual) and a deviant other (homosexual). It is important to point out that many of his critics “have seen in his work the continuation, in the field of sexuality, of the ideas expressed by Edward Said in his famous *Orientalism*. This is an Orientalism of sexuality” (Reset Doc 2009). Furthermore, while different societies have different official socially (and judicially) accepted forms, the practitioners of different forms of sex together the sexual act itself will not necessarily be accepted and, therefore, will be penalized on those grounds which would be taken as a criminal act by the Gay International and, according to Massad:

The goal of the American and West European gay internationalists is to create a world in their own image. Their Leninist strategy is to be the vanguard party of the world masses who on their own cannot be trusted to bring about the institutionalization of the hetero-homo binary that would create gays and lesbians as well as straight men and women. This is why the Euro-American vanguard will lead “their” struggle to liberation” (Reset Doc 2009).

This liberation is, in his eyes, nothing else but an imperialistic project driven by Gay International white-based organizations who support movements/groups of *no existencia* through “epistemic and physical violence [which] they insist on inflicting on other peoples and societies in the name of liberation and in the name of reproducing a world in their own image” (Reset Doc 2009) and, therefore, are not completely “unlike racist white women who through US imperialism want to defend the women of Afghanistan or who want to define the nature of the difficulties faced by women in different non-US and non-European societies in accordance with the priorities of their segment of the white women’s movement” (Reset Doc 2009) and which will not achieve any remarkable goal before they fail to create, worldwide, a natural constituency of people (LGBT) “who identify as they do, which is why they must create such a constituency by insisting that all same sex practitioners must be assimilated into gayness, which would then create for them the constituency they need for their universalizing project” (Reset Doc 2009). Even if homosexuality and heterosexuality were produced in Western Europe (and in the United States) at the end of the Nineteenth Century just as Massad argues - and even further on his claims of not attacking homosexuality or same-sexuality in the West or the Middle East - he admits that his criticisms are rather based on Gay Internationalists *per se*” (Reset Doc 2009). In my own opinion, I think that this is a valuable

and interesting point of view, but arguable in many aspects because just as one Middle Eastern gay organization makes it clear, only oriental [non-Western] homosexuals can answer for themselves whether their identity is imported from the West or else adopt their own Middle Eastern identity, because just a century ago there were more individuals practicing homosexuality in the Middle East than there are in the West now and, besides, “Foucault was correct in his observation that Muslim societies have remained somewhat flexible on same-sex relations. But such a limited form of acceptance, which involves a total closeting, is not the same as the recognition sought by the modern gay and lesbian rights movement” (Afary & Anderson 2005: 139) which Massad probably would call the “Gay International”. What is common to the West and the East is the role change: *then and there* homosexuality had much in common; meanwhile the West was less aware of it. The East, *here and now*, is far behind that of the Western official conception of homosexuality and its adopting culture, however the question that is locked in my head was the quantity: how many of the gays that I have met in Iran have been afforded the free will to come out as *gay-identified* and having role models of their own in their places so as to officially develop this homosexual identity? To answer this question and to argue about it, to feel it and to understand it, I believe you have to carry with yourself an identity as a queer - in other words, to be a homosexual. All of the speculations of someone like Massad are, therefore, very doubtful, though again fascinating. His understanding of these subjects can be affected of the colonial impact of pity for the colonized where “sexuality and desire are analyzed in their capacity as mechanisms of collaboration with coloniality and as training in dependency” (Amar 2011: 52-53) and, furthermore, focusing on intellectual consummators of so-called *Orientalism* rather than on Western colonizers/producers. As Paul Amar points out, it confirms that:

Thus sexuality becomes at least as much a colonial suspect category as does race. And masculinity in this optic becomes a stand-in for either macho proletarian consciousness [often explicitly homophobic] or for the subaltern racialized, class-marked, false-consciousness sexuality... [---] But new trends in scholarship have generated alternative models for critical, anti-colonial scholarship that do take globalizing sexuality and liberalism seriously by focusing on public subjectivities and lived spaces, generating grounded case studies and engaging three-dimensional, located intersections of power (Amar 2011: 52-53).

The globalization of modernity (or the modernity of globalization) means the globalization of not only the Western part but also the Eastern-Oriental part too. The urbanization and modernization of the Middle East (which by 2020 will be 70% of whole population in the ME) has had a deep impact on sexual identity as well, which by today's standards does not have to be a compulsorily heterosexual and which causes a significant problem in today's Iran and in other neighbouring states; perfect examples are religious Saudi Arabia, secular Turkey and the segregated state of Lebanon. As with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Massad ignores the existence of a queer identity in one manner, while in another way the expression of the sexuality of such an identity through or without sexual acts, together with classification of this modern type of sexual identities, is confirmed by modern medicine. This "denial attempts to negate the fact that their formation is also a product of the highly urbanized capitalist mode of production that Iran is chasing after, and of which Massad is also – ironically – a prototypical product [in the category of exiled intellectuals]" (Reset Doc 2009). However, it is rather clear here - for now - that when we talk about homosexuality *here* [Western] and *there* [Eastern], in summary the same thing is not accepted and interpreted on the same level *here* and *there*. *Here*, we have developed a very strong queer identity which, since the Stonewall riots, has grown up and expanded into gay marriage/civil union today, accepted in more than 30 countries on the Western side. Meanwhile, *there*, "since the concept of same-sex relations does not exist in the Arab world, being "gay" is still considered to be sexual behaviour... [---]. Just because someone sleeps with a member of the same sex does not mean that someone is gay ... [---] it means that you are engaging in homosexual activity" (Massad 2007: 173). Moreover, before falling in love (which is very unlikely in most cases) with that person someone cannot be called *gay*. Sometimes, this sexual activity was simply so as sold to earn some money, like everywhere else in the world:

Many guys were standing by the road; some of them as Majid told me were selling themselves, just to get some money. The price would be around 1.500000 IRR - which is hardly \$50. One of his very well built up friends told him that he spends so much money in order to maintain his body in such a perfect shape that it takes up all of his income - that's why he needs to sell himself for money. (Field notes #8, recorded in Tehran on Friday, 26 of August 2011)

Faisal Alam, a founder of the *Al-Fatiha* Foundation for gay and lesbian Muslims in the USA points out that “Islam is 200 years behind Christianity in terms of progress on gay issues” (Massad 2007: 174) despite of the fact that Muslims are more tolerant regarding MSM (though also more discreet) and a high number of straight or bisexual guys in the Middle East and Iran suffer from so called “emergency homosexuality,” and meanwhile parents blame the mandatory sex segregation policies of the Islamic state which, together with the prohibition of pre-marital hetero sex, produce a *favourite sex playground* for European gay men. However, as reported by Khalid Duran, a Moroccan social scientist:

It is the passive ones who are gay and therefore at risk of human rights violations. Duran notes that Western “gays seeking active partners in North African countries usually do not realize that their local lovers are often motivated by a hostile attitude toward them as citizens of nations that had once been colonial masters. To sodomize a Westerner provides a kind of psychological relief for some people from among the former ‘subject races’ who now have a chance to take it out on their oppressors (Massad 2007: 177).

2.4. Foucault, Edward Said and *Other’s*

Although Iran “is not the product of imperial map-making” (Abrahamian 2008: 195) as it was never colonized by other Imperial powers, like Algeria and Morocco were, it suffered significantly from the impact of Western imperial interests so greatly welcomed by the Shah Pahlavi before the Islamic revolution, but later amended by Islamists. Together with the disqualification of the very same gayness that the Gay International was trying to legitimize since Islamic revolution and as with Foucault who almost disqualified himself from being gay, in the same way he understood and noted that, with regard to the history of Western homosexuality:

The discourse of power that produced and controlled “homosexuality” made “possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the

same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified (Massad 2007: 265).

Somehow, Foucault believed that the idyllic and absolute *other* of the East is more privileged than the modern and rational, expansionist West, and in his interview in 1982 he admitted that his “admiration for the Orient with a certain nostalgia for the aristocratic, ostensibly paternalistic system of taking care of one’s subordinates, which modernity had replaced with a callous form of individualism” (Afary & Anderson 2005: 18). Moreover, Foucault, in the Eastern discourse on sex valued silence especially, as Janet Afary points out, and his adornment of silence as a *way of having a relationship with people* together with romanticizing an exotic sexuality of the idealized *other* points out his *do it, but don’t talk about it* sexuality of silence, producing a so-called social dualism between West and East, is seen so much in the today’s Muslim society where “the Gay International’s fight is therefore not an epistemological one but rather a simple political struggle that divides the world into those who support and those who oppose “gay rights” (Massad 2007: 174). In other words: West and East, and can be classified simply as one example of Huntington’s The Clash of Civilizations. It is somehow absolutely clear that, today, the young generation of gay Muslims have a dilemma to solve: should the Western path be followed or an Islamic one. Despite the pressure of parents and the government, and their consideration of modern and impermissible sexual deviances, which were not considered as such some centuries ago (i.e. not only homosexuality but also anal intercourse with women or vaginal intercourse during menstruations), young people today have biggest great desire in Iran, Saudi Arabia and in Lebanon, and their desire is different from that which their parents believe and officials say they follow. It is neither a heterosexual nor a homosexual desire - nor even a bisexual one - because they have in common one thing, namely *a desire to be happy* without a necessary classification of being straight, gay or bi. However, this dream of a utopian Muslim world is far away. Many decades will pass until some of the goals of Muslim gays will be reached, but of course they will differ from country to country. Iran, which has reached some of these goals concerning the rights of homosexuals, has been regressing since 1979 and will continue to do so. Without the help of the government and public social tolerance in Iranian society, this will be impossible. Shirin Ebadi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 and is an active Muslim and the first woman-judge in Iran (who was appointed to that position under the Shah regime, but amended by the Khomeini regime), is loyal and continues to advise on the

separation (which was reached by Pahlavi before the revolution in 1979) between religion and the state. Accordingly, *We made the Revolution for Freedom, But Got Unfreedom* became a very popular Iranian slogan immediately after the revolution, along with the execution of the Islamic regime's opponents, such as those consuming alcohol and engaging in homosexual "perversions" and even of former Mojahedin accused of a lack of loyalty, began together with the compulsory veiling of all women in Iran. More comes when, in order "to unify his disciples further against the West, Khomeini issued his famous and unprecedented fatwa against Salman Rushdie" (Abrahamian 2008: 182). Unfortunately, the Iranian nation has gained, not exactly their desired revolution, but instead of the Parisian style it became a revolution of Islamic fundamentalism "as a form of "irreducible" opposition to Western modernity... [----] In terms of its social vision Islamism is far closer to fascism... [----] As Marx himself observed, there are number of social systems more oppressive than that of capitalism" (Afary & Anderson 2005: 171). The U.S.S.R. has warned the world in the event of the Islamic revolution which occurred in Iran, to Khomeini's response that "Islam," he proclaimed, "differs sharply from communism. Whereas we respect private property, communism advocates the sharing of all things – including wives and homosexuals" (Abrahamian 2008: 179). In other words, we can simply destroy those who, though not necessarily against us, are nonetheless not with us, just like the Nazis or Soviets were doing seventy years ago: "between February 1979 and June 1981, revolutionary courts had executed 497...[----] in the next four years from June 1981 until June 1985, revolutionary courts executed more than 8,000...[----] One final bloodletting came in 1988 ... [----] in four short weeks, special courts hanged more than 2,800" (Abrahamian 2008: 181). Former Islamists and brave journalists were the political prisoners of Tehran's death machine. Evin Prison, in one of his essays on Foucault, "The Prison-like Archipelago" has written:

In our society, nostalgic fundamentalists are happy to use postmodern thought in their attempts to reject modernity. They use postmodern criticism of rationality, individualism, fear of the future, and nostalgia for the past, as an intellectual resource for their own views. But we need to remember that postmodernists are uttering their ideas in more tolerant democratic societies, whereas our fundamentalists are applying these ideas to a society that has yet to experience rationalism, individualism, pluralism, human rights, freedom of expression, and so forth ... [Our] "Prison-Like Archipelago" is a police state that does not recognize human rights and destroys those

who think differently. Opposition to modernity stems from a certain “nostalgia” for the past... [----] Whether bad or good, postmodernism is born out of the Enlightenment. However, here [the Middle East] it is used to revive a tradition that existed prior to the Enlightenment” (Afary & Anderson 2005: 174).

As Edward Said mentioned in his book *Orientalism*, the Orient has proved to the Western world the co-existence of this same *other*, who is for us an outsider, presented as a human being but somehow less than human, “beyond the frontiers of intelligibility. As Farish A. Noor points out less than, or more than, or other than human, Muslims are often seen as being radically different. Much of this is due to our own introvertedness, born and bred in a climate of suspicion and frustration” (Safi 2010: 326). Even though Said argues that Orientalism does “not simply represent a considerable dimension of modern political, intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (Canadian Review of American Studies 1992: 127) within the patterns of a globalized modernity, we should understand that everyone, whether “us” or “them”, is a *mortal human being*, be it Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden [who used to be *us* but then became *them*], a creation of the same God and a reminder “that the other can and should be seen as our friend and potential ally as soon as hostilities cease. It is often stated that Islam is a religion of peace, and this is true” (Safi 2010: 324), as in general no Muslim has the right to torture his neighbour, to destroy someone’s property or to kill anyone who is different or disagrees with them. However, a popular Western prejudice regarding Islam as a religion as dogmatic and intolerant, unable to cope with and live in a multicultural and liberal present. Despite this, Orientalism is thus defined by Said as “a Western style for dominating and having authority over the Orient,” and meanwhile the Oriental responds by continuing to grow and expand the never ending clashes between *West* and *East*. The global *North* and global *South*, between the *First* and *Third* worlds, continue to move between these ideologies of different interpretations between *us* and *them*, which is an inescapable reality of modern post-coloniality *per se*. Unfortunately these clashes require the victims of thousands - if not millions - of innocent people all around the world, day by day. Those human beings are from different countries, social classes and of different sexes, ages, backgrounds and education. One of the punished groups - but created by the same God - are queers, gays, homosexuals and MSM (no matter what you call them), who became the victims of radical Islamists and who accidentally succeeded in their dogmatized revolution thirty years ago and overthrew the legal head of

state: the Shah of Iran. But those, who have died, did have something in common - they died for nothing (Afary & Anderson 2005):

One of the major problems faced by all movements for social change – be they pacifist or revolutionary in nature – is the difficulty that arises when the foundational revolutionary moment has passed. From then on, the revolution merely devours itself as the dialectics within it consumes more and more victims. This was the case for the French Revolution and it was for the Iranian Revolution that came nearly two centuries later.

In this chapter I have argued about the theoretical point of view, regarding homosexuality in the Middle East. In the end, it is clear that no matter which dogma we use for now, whether a Western or an Oriental one, the clashes between a Western concept of gay identity and an Oriental concept of gay activity will continue. Somewhat sarcastically, neither Massad's so-called Gay Internationalism nor Foucault's phrased silence - so valued in Eastern discourse - will help those who are divided by Iranian dual homosexual standards. This will continue the rejection of the bottom identity by the passive partner and the total ignorance of the active or top partner. The Iranian dilemma, so ignored by the authorities, will struggle in its hope to get recognized, but will follow for a long time its adopted principle of *do it, but don't talk about it*.

3 Research Design and Methods

Earlier in this thesis, the literature review shed light on various research and theories throughout the world. This chapter explains the qualitative methodology I have used in this study. I use mixed qualitative methods, including participant observation and some in-depth interviews. The participants were selected through a *key informant* using a snowballing method. It was difficult to find a gatekeeper and this was particularly important as the key informant is, as the name suggests, the door into the specific community which the researcher would like to observe. I used the participant observation method as a means to learn about homosexuality in Iran. I interacted with and observed the interactions of participants as well as conducting informal interviews with some of them. Participant observation is useful in research locations where the research subject is sensitive, such as in this study where homosexuality is considered to be criminal act and where research participants may put themselves at a high risk by talking to the researcher. This method involves the researcher observing people in social settings as a way of trying to learn about their behaviour and their beliefs. Selecting a research site involved a process of gaining access to participants and developing trust with them. Thus, the location of where I did the research was dependent on the participants whom I gained access to. In addition, *snowballing* occurs when one participant refers you to another, and this was used due to the sensitive nature of the topic and to ensure the safety of participants on ethical grounds, since much of the activities were considered illegal in Iran at the time of my observations.

3.1 Methodology

After my last visit to Iran in 2008, the idea of writing an MA thesis on the subject of homosexuality in Iran was born and stored inside me. Furthermore, it was neither approved nor disapproved of by the University of Iceland - but all the time it was bothering me until, finally, this idea was made into reality in August 2011, when I received my thirty day tourist visa which allowed me to enter Iran as a tourist, in order to perform my much debated research. However, a visa to Islamic Republic of Iran is good for 15 or – at most - 30 days, depending on the decision of the Iranian representative abroad as to every country

individually, as well as every applicant's citizenship. The validity of a visa is for a period of 3 months from the date of issue (Embassy of Iran, n.d.). However:

Israeli passport holders and anyone with evidence of a visit to Israel in their passport will not be able to get a visa to enter Iran... [----] In the Middle East, only Turkey, Egypt and Jordan recognize Israel – all other countries refuse to admit anyone whose passport has been tainted by evidence of a visit to the Jewish state (Ham, Burke & Carillet 2006: 248&353).

This research for my MA thesis, on which I have been working on since the beginning of 2011 (January 20), is based upon the daily lives of homosexual individuals in Iran (with a focus on Tehran, as being the easiest place in the whole of Iran to become invisible and not draw too much attention to oneself but to being a foreigner and gay), which I visited from August 20 to September 04, 2011, for a duration of almost three weeks; it depended upon these research conditions and the duration of my stay could not be extended for more than thirty days according to my visa, as issued by the Iranian governmental institutions. By visiting non-official gay places in Tehran, in which I could watch gays gathering in public places like popular parks or popular restaurants where many homosexual guys gather every Tuesday night (i.e. N Restaurant ² in Tehran) and by exploring the gay “night life” in Tehran by cruising a particular place which, because of the lack of gay clubs, is very popular with guys going there with cars round the square with the purpose of meeting other guys: Vali-e-Asr.³ Sometimes, guys even perform some action like kissing - in cars especially - according to my own experience, which I recorded in my field notes, in Tehran.

3.2 My Own Security and that of Others

For the purpose of security, I conducted all interviews without recording them on a digital recorder; these unofficial interviews - of six participants - were recorded as *Field Notes* within

² The real name of the restaurant is changed for security purposes.

³ The real name of the restaurant is changed for security purposes.

their daily, common surroundings, with a complete description of the field research and working conditions together numbered from nine to eleven and dated in order to understand the spirit and surroundings of the field work. Later on parts of the field notes that were used for this thesis were revised and, therefore, might differ slightly from the original ones recorded in Tehran. Those un-written interviews got me a deeper understanding of how an individual experiences and accepts his homosexuality in Iranian Islamic society, his reaction to existing taboos towards him, and his identity and continuation of living within a trapped major group with a straight patriarchal world bias. On the other hand, I shed more light on unofficial gay gathering places in Tehran that were available at the time and figured out what caused people go there, how they felt in those circumstances, and how those places and daily lives affected them and their personal identities, and their dreams and disappointments. On the global scale, it was an opportunity for Iran to look in the mirror and see a self-image regarding a minor group, such as GBT in this case. It draws a many-sided picture of Iran, and one that is not stereotyped and negative as we are used to seeing through our Americanized news about Iran in the Western world. For the interviewees, it was an opportunity to talk and express themselves and discuss their different experiences of belonging to a minority group. Some of the problems that I found in investigating my thesis, such as marriage arranged by parents for a homosexual child, are not discussed enough (if at all) in Islamic society and, therefore, every case of the participants, their feelings and opinions, was important not only on national level but also on an international one, since the lack of information about the Middle East remains huge. I should also mention that these experiences of talking to different people and of doing field research have given me a deeper and more understanding experience so as to finish my final MA thesis on Iranian gays, or at least men who engage in homosexuality or simply belong to MSM (men who have sex with men). Despite this:

All this non-predictability and not being sure how to behave made me feel stressed. After my realisation that I wanted to talk, and was not into sex, we decided to meet soon. He understood me very well and it was agreed that most guys here think of sex though, especially with foreigners. As he told me, he himself had two sexual partners, so there was no need to have a third one, or me. This made me calm down, especially after the last meeting with Namdar. (Field notes #3, recorded in Tehran on Monday, 22 of August 2011)

In their book, Steven J. Taylor and Robert Bogdan pointed out that best thing to do is to accept the circumstances of what I was into and the availability of the interviewers in different fields, as there is not much to choose from and, already, my choice was limited to those who spoke English language, as I wasn't speaking Farsi. I found it too risky to look for translator that I could rely on and my time was really limited, as I had only two to three weeks, not to mention my budget which was very limited too, as it was designed before arriving in Iran with cash, the only available option to pay, as no major credit or debit cards work in the Islamic Republic because of the USA's economic embargo. When the research method of snowballing had been chosen, it seemed to be the perfect method for collecting participants, not because it was "one of the easiest ways to build a pool of informants" (Taylor & Bogdan. 1998: 93), but because the other options were not really available. It was very difficult to get to know someone homosexual in Iran, simply because of the lack of trust: people were afraid of their own security and very few would trust someone coming in "without a recommendation" from the street. After making sure of my own safety and after talking to others, I decided not to take my digital recorder with me. The main reasons for my decision were security issues, concerning not only myself but others too. A voice recorder would simply become a proof of my actions and, if arrested, I could face serious problems, just as it had happened with an American student in Iran who was working on her Master's thesis (The Chronicle 2008). All of my interviews were done in an un-official way, each of them not exceeding an hour - a maximum of an hour and a half. Immediately, after the interviews were finished, they were written down and recorded in such way as to be complete by the analytical research method, as so-called detailed field notes, which were later revised in order to find and correct any discrepancies, and then numbered. It was hard work, as sometimes I was getting "home" to the hotel after field research at 4 o'clock in the morning, and having to spend the next 6 hours writing was laborious. Sometimes, I had no choice but to finish it the morning after, as I would simply fall asleep in front of my computer. However, the collection of field notes requires a steady self-discipline which is compulsory for the acquisition of good results, which should be recorded ASAP after observing Fife (2005) and Davies (1999). Sometimes, I got really scared, but I could not stop because for me it would mean to give up and back off - I continued everyday with what I was doing, but sometimes I was no longer sure if I was safe:

I really don't know why I have to make myself so paranoid, but I really do. Well, if I managed to organize myself for this trip to Iran, if I manage to find all of those contacts who helped me to get involved with the Iranian gay guys, why do I still consider it unsafe - because this is not safe if I compare it with Western standards? I was born in Soviet Union, where homosexuals were sentenced to three years of imprisonment, but three years was not a death sentence after all... [----] I will come back to that park tonight or tomorrow night and let's hope that this will be safe for me. (Field notes #3, recorded in Tehran on Monday, 22 of August 2011)

3.3 Ethical Issues of the Study

All of the names of the people involved were changed and, in order that I cannot be traced, I have changed some of the names of the places that I was involved in. In general, my number one rule was that when I would meet some guy, in order not to scare him so as to establish at least some trust, *I would not tell him that my intention to meet him was only because of my research*. Maybe it sounds naïve and maybe it is ethically questionable, but I do not agree with this point of view. First of all, because of security issue, the less that informants' know about me and my intentions in the Islamic Republic, the better was for him in case of arrest. Secondly, this subject is extremely sensitive in Iran and because the punishment for sodomy is death, not many people would open themselves up in order to talk with a stranger. After all, I had done my job by allowing people to tell me about the things that were important to them and the meanings that they wanted to attach to them by really paying an attention - but not thereby scaring them or causing them fear or self-consciousness in the best case scenario. However, many difficulties did appear during my attempts at communication:

The worst thing with Ramadan was that any consuming of liquids or food was forbidden during the day, which gave us no choice of sitting down somewhere, but just walking as it was some time after three o'clock. It was very difficult to start talking to a person that I had never met before. If my first few questions didn't surprise him, then after 15 minutes of our conversation he got suspicious that I was journalist... It got the point that I could not ask him anymore in the way I wanted, so instead I just let him lead the conversation, which was basically based on his interest

in me. He desperately wished to get me into his bed... (Field notes #2, recorded in Tehran on Sunday, 21 of August 2011)

Of course, if trust was established, by the end the real intention of my conversation could be revealed, just as had happened many times. Still, in some circumstances it could get annoying:

Before calling me he has sent me couple of sms messages asking of my height and weight, or my sexual position; questions which I disliked because, for me, it became very clear that these were questions of sexual attraction or interest, which were completely different from my own purpose in meeting. My intention was to talk and listen, that's all. I could have told him that I was doing this research but, put simply, I became afraid that by knowing the real purpose of my meeting with him, he would change his mind. Ali had warned me that even if my intention was not to have sex with him, I should not tell him this straight, as he would immediately lose his interest in meeting me. (Field notes #2, recorded in Tehran on Sunday, 21 of August 2011)

At no time could I be 100% sure that some particular guy who talked to me was not from the Basij undercover militia, which was a real possibility. It has variously been reported and estimated that there are at least 8 million "card-carrying" Basijis; 3 million of them active members (trained at military camps and used in domestic repression) and 5 million inactive members (individuals who received handouts and could be mobilized at election times if necessary) (Afary 2009). Therefore, I had to do the research with maximum precautions and a minimum of risk, because it could have been dangerous otherwise and the price paid for it was simply too high.

3.4 Methods

In order to make the reader understand how I got in contact with Iranian gays, I should first explain about the three most popular gay cruising websites that I used to find participants who would agree to meet me to talk, but not to have sex; that was how I found participants for my

research, creating several accounts half a year before travelling on the most popular Internet websites among gays worldwide, such as Manjam (very frequently cruised in the Middle East) Gaydar and Gay Romeo, in order to pre-arrange my visit to Iran by meeting local guys online, first, in Iceland, and then living in Iran, which later transpired to be a complete success. The trust that I gained before I arrived to Tehran did help me to further integrate into homosexual circles of the friends of friends, even though it was very difficult to establish this trust without knowing someone very well, as any person met online could simply be Basij: the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution (Global Security, n.d.). In other words, a secret agent of the people's militia pretending of being gay and arresting you when on the first date. However, I was lucky. Since 2008, I have had this crazy idea of coming back to Iran in order to meet Iranian queers and, later on, to write my MA thesis about the situation of GBT people in this part of the world, as I was completely fascinated by this country and their people, just like Foucault did in his own time: he was gay and he was in love with Iran. However, before my second trip, I had to "dig a big hole" regarding homosexuality in this country.. I had to re-evaluate my concept of homosexuality as it was too Western for Iran. I had also learned that not everyone wants or even can carry gay identity in Iran; instead, a choice is made for the activity of males with homosexual behaviour - or MSM - but not a gay identity, which is a Western concept. Manjam - as they advertise on their website - is a gay social network for dating, working and even travel, which connects people with like-minded people and, notably, expands their networks of friends; whether this true or not - I don't know - it really worked out for me in Iran at least. It is estimated that there are around 3.000 men in Tehran who have a Manjam account. Of course, the number of guys who practice homosexuality in such a big city should be bigger, but more than half of them are trying really hard to be discreet (Field notes #6, recorded in Tehran on Tuesday, 23 of August 2011). Gay Romeo is announcing itself to be popular worldwide, just like the other two (Manjam and Gaydar), with instant messaging and a socially-based network which is good for dating in the GBT community. The site was originally German - also known as Planet Romeo - and was established in 2002. According to their own database, it has around 6,740,000 registered profiles around the world and because the site is multilingual rather than only being available in English, it makes the site internationally popular and, indeed, I know more people who are gay and have a Gay Romeo profile than those who haven't. Finally, *Gaydar* claims to be a premier gay dating site which is free to chat and cruise, with over 6 million members worldwide from more than 140 countries, as the logo of the mentioned website was

advertising online. However, by the time of death of one of the co-founders in 2007, it had around 3.5 million users in 23 countries.

Indeed, my first visit had loosened my instinct towards self-defence, and my first advert on Gay Romeo on the Iranian market was too desperate, sounding like this: “A foreigner who will be in Iran on particular dates would like to meet local gays for conversations and friendly chat for his MA thesis about homosexuality in Iran.” The responses were impossible to believe, and many letters arrived into my private account. It was my first, and so I desired contacts from Iranian gays: finally it was possible to meet them, first on line, and then live in Iran for a couple of months, later on. It made me glad, because a connection between the two sides was established; however one letter got me worried, because it brought me back from pink clouds to the reality:

A friendly advice, be careful about your travel intentions

[That is clearly to investigate the state of homosexuals in Iran] since the policing system here is much more advanced, brutal and dangerous than what you may imagine! So, don't tell people your intentions first so easily unless you know them on a personal level or don't write them here for sure!

Hope you make the most out of it; (Kayvan, personal communication June, 2011)

I understood that even if I saw very modern dressed guys all over the place following my last visit, and even if many of them looked very gay (I had heard that the Iranian gay underground world was very large), I still had to remember where I was going to and what the law was with regard to me over there. When I responded to this guy and asked him what was on his mind, he advised me again, with another e-mail:

Not sure if I want to get into trouble since I've got plenty on my hands already; my recommendation to you would be to:

1. Delete this account on planet Romeo
2. Open a new one on manjam.com which is the dating website used by most Iranian LGBT individuals
3. Do not upload a photo of your face; a body picture is OK
4. You can openly say that you are a foreigner travelling to Iran on that website, which

will attract much attention and many people will contact you but do NOT reveal your real intentions of your travel to Iran, say it's a touring visit, to c the beauty of Iran and that sort of shit! If u r clever enough [sure u r!] U can still gather enough information for your thesis

5. Take it easy; just enjoy yourself! There are many gay foreigners coming to Iran each year, they date many guys, go to many parties, have sex with many sex gods [Iranians are crazy about European looking men] and enjoy Iranian hospitality! In short terms: come to Iran, do your thing but don't publicize about it just yet

6. And finally, u shouldn't worry much because the worst case scenario is that they expel u from the country, no big deal! (Kayvan, personal communication June, 2011)

After that, I decided to do what he had advised to for the sake of my own security, with the difference that I had changed my advert on Gay Romeo, instead of deleting it, and with the same advert on both Gaydar and the newly “backed” Manjam account. As such, my advert on all of those websites became one and the same without any visible intentions, and sounded something like this: *A foreigner, visiting Iran on particular dates is wishing to meet friendly local guys for conversation, chat etc.*

3.5 Participants

All of my participants were young, aged from 23 to 36-years-old. My participants and others involved in this research were as follows:

Kayvan

Kayvan is a young, twenty-three year old guy. I have spent a lot of time with him in Tehran, walking, going to the amusement park or drinking pomegranate juice in one of the very famous coffee houses, which is basically occupied by arty people, writers and other Iranian intelligentsia. He is a student at Tehran's Technology University, which I have tried to visit while with him but, because of my appearance (Western and with an eye brow piercing) this made it impossible. He has a boyfriend and belongs to the younger generation, which doesn't want to accept what's going on without knowing why. He is very rational and has a clear goal: after finishing his studies, he is doing everything he can to go on an exchange

student program to do his Master's degree, in Canada most likely. While I was in Iran, he was very busy with his TOEFL exam, which he didn't fail (I believe). He lives with his parents in Tehran's "Breiðholt".⁴ I met him on Gay Romeo half year before I went to Iran.

Jalil

Jalil is twenty-five. On the same day that we met he had delivered his final Master's thesis on urban engineering. He has studied on Kish Island, the place that is most liberal and free in the whole of this Islamic country. I met Jalil through Bahman, who is a friend of Kayvan. He spoke good English and the information that I got from him was productive. He was a B type, but had had a boyfriend for a couple of years, who was one of those T types, a bisexual guy who gets married to a woman later on. We met a couple of times for walking or driving or else had coffee in his apartment close to Northern Tehran, that part of the city where people with money are located.

Ali

Ali is a very nice guy in his early twenties, but already with a high level of education in civil engineering. I have met him on Gay Romeo and have spent many days talking to him about the situation in Iran and about my research. He lives in Esfahan, together with his parents. He is atheist. I have no idea what I would have done without him, as many of the contacts that I have met, I have met through him. He had informed me how to unlock most of the banned websites which are blocked in Iran. Unfortunately, we couldn't meet because of personal circumstances, but we had kept in contact through the phone and, many times, he encouraged me in what I was doing. He has a German boyfriend and it is most likely after his military service - which takes around two years - he will move to Germany.

Shahbaz

⁴ Breiðholt is a block's suburb in Reykjavik.

Shahbaz is twenty-nine-years-old, beautiful and a very kind guy. I met him accidentally on Manjam.com when I replied to his posted comment about love. Since then, we met couple of times in different places in Tehran for coffee and dinner, or for shopping with his other gay friends. Unlike many other gay guys, he lives in a very modern Western apartment on a top floor in the Northern part of the city, from where a beautiful panorama of Tehran at night can be experienced. He is some kind of a plant designer working mostly for his own company. His sister lives in the USA and his aunt in Canada. After around two months, when his immigration visa is ready, he will be moving to live with his aunt forever. He had a boyfriend, but they split because of him being unfaithful. His cousin knows that he is gay. He is a very brave guy and had participated in the Green Revolution in 2009 in Iran. He is supporting children who have cancer with his money. His comments and experiences shared with me on Iranian gay matters were very valuable to me.

Namdar

Namdar is twenty-seven. He lives with his parents and works at an office. No one knows that he is a gay, but many people suspect it. He is very obsessed about sex and I really had a problem communicating with him. Otherwise he is cute and calm when *not* HORNEY. Ali had warned me about the fact that he will not talk easily and that I would have to motivate him to talk all the time. He says that he has studied English literature as a major subject at some university but in my own and Ali's opinion he can't speak that fluently. However, Ali advised me to remember that all of the guys that I meet will primarily think of having of sex with me, which was a truth in my own opinion. So, in order to keep this research going, I could not reject the idea of having sex with them, or at least not telling them if I wanted sex in order to have more time to talk, which was the case once again. I met Namdar through Ali.

Majid

Majid is a very talkative, bold and sweet thirty-two year old guy, one of my favourites and who was 100% gay. He has travelled to Turkey and Thailand more than any other country, basically for fun and sex and, as far as I know, he has had sex more than all of us put together, with thousands of different guys. His obsession with muscular guys is great, and his love for body builders and big guys is without limits. He is a V type (Versatile in gay language means both bottom and top in sexual position) but with smaller guys he prefers to be top. He is really

reliable and caring, very cautious and kind, but thinks of sex and muscles too much and he knows it. I had met him through Ali too and we have spent a good deal of time together while driving and cruising the night streets of Tehran. It was him who made my research so productive and valuable. He works in a shop, I believe, and he lives with his mum.

Bahman

Bahman is somewhere in his thirties. I had met him accidentally through Kayvan, as they knew each other well. He is the dream of many gay guys. However, he is bisexual and one day I believe he will get engaged in a straight marriage. He spoke Farsi and very limited English, so in general we had very little understandable conversation. Nonetheless, I did enjoy his company. He smokes Winston Balanced Blue and is a shopkeeper. Usually, he works late and then goes cruising around all of the gay places in Tehran.

Noushzad

Noushzad is twenty-seven-years-old and is a boyfriend of Kayvan. He is an arty type, who could spend all of his time in the Contemporary Art museum of Tehran in order to draw or study paintings. He is very intelligent and omniscient too. He spoke English, but was very shy in doing so. He has a very beautiful and slim body, and many guys desired him. He has been very depressed because of the situation in Iran and he has tried to kill himself many times. He is not a typical Iranian gay who is in the closet. His brother knows about him and Kayvan, meanwhile his parents are always at work as shopkeepers. They wanted him to open a shop too, but he refused. He is not working, but he has studied before at the Tehran Art School. With the help of Kayvan, I got to know many interesting facts about gay reality in Iran.

Morad

Morad is twenty-nine but looks much older, I guess because of the constant sun. He is working in two jobs, one part-time at some insurance office and the other as a flight attendant at Iran Air. He has a fuck body, and many are jealous of him because of his desire and attraction to European guys. He lives together with his parents and, of course, no one at home or at work knows about his sexuality. He has a friend in Switzerland who is willing to help him to move there, but he is not sure because of the obligations and commitments he is

supposed to be aware of when moved. He travels a lot and, for him, this is necessary in order to get a drop of fresh air outside of the Islamic country. I met him on Manjam a couple of days before the arrival of my partner and our trip to Syria.

Hassan

Hassan is my age, thirty-six. I had met him on a Gaydar long before my trip to Iran. We have talked online and, after all this, I got his phone number. Just before leaving Iran, I managed to call him and arrange a meeting with him. We had a long, long walk and conversation about gay stuff in the Middle East, and in Iran especially. He is a specialist in food engineering and maintains food health for the public. He is very grown up and intelligent, with perfect English skills. He has lived and studied abroad in Japan. He lives with his mum but will be moving to Canada after his immigrant visa - for which he has been waiting for six years - is ready. He has no boyfriend at the moment, but he has been involved in many sexual affairs. He is doing self-supported research into how many bisexual/straight guys in Iran are involved in homosexual sexual relationships and why. He had asked me for assistance. To meet him and share my experiences with him was a very valuable thing.

Other participants:

Naser is a young guy who is twenty-eight-years-old. He has curly hair and was very large. He went with us for cruising one night, together with Majid. He didn't speak any English and so Majid had to translate all of our conversations. He is a student somewhere, living with his parents. He didn't have any influence on my research, because of the language barrier.

Omar, Sami, Saman and Farid

Omar, Sami, Saman and Farid were among those guys who wanted to meet for sex only at my place or else the hotel where I stayed. As I was not interested in that at all, we never met or had any further communication. Farid, the last one of these four recipients on Manjam never responded back to my sms, even though he wanted to or said he wanted to sms before our first meeting.

Mohamed

Mohamed is a friend of Ali, living in Tehran. He is gay and has a boyfriend. Unfortunately he had never responded to my sms and whenever I called him, which was many times, his phone was always switched off.

Baba

Baba was my host and friend in Iran. He was my younger brother and my father rolled into one while I was there. He is twenty-seven and is working at some place where the food, cleaning and storage are involved. I had met him together with my Icelandic friend for the first time in 2008, while he was our driver from the Iranian travel company. His dream is to come to Iceland. I'm very thankful to him for everything what he has done to me.

Sveta

Sveta is Baba's wife. She is just twenty-two and she has recently moved to Iran from Ukraine. She likes it there as she had finally gotten her freedom from her parents. She is getting used to the hijab and always trying to choose the most colourful one, just like many Iranian women. She has finished studying interior design at home, but she doesn't speak English. A very positive thing was that we could speak the Russian language together, as not everyone could understand us, even though Russian is quite popular in Iran.

Shrink Simin

Simin is an employee of one of the Iranian offices. She is around twenty-six and has a degree in psychology. We had spent a lot of time together and she has helped me to understand the Iranian psyche a lot, although her knowledge of homosexuality was almost equivalent to zero. She has a very beautiful sister. Her sister hates Iran in the way that it is. She really deserves a big THANK YOU!

Sasha

Sasha is my Russian friend, whom I met through Namdar and who is also the friend of Ali. He is in his thirties, has a boyfriend in Russia with who he has been, like me with my partner,

for ten years. He has a doctoral degree and is working at the Russian State University. This is his fourth trip to Iran - I'm grateful for his company while exploring and cruising gay places in Tehran with me.

Indeed, if this chapter has introduced us to the ethical issues of this thesis and has shown the methods used to achieve this particular research in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well it presenting its participants, the next chapter of this paper will argue the theoretical point of view on the issues of homosexuality, not only in Iran, but in the whole Middle East, since geographically and religiously it is identically related.

4 Results/Findings

This chapter will introduce to the readers the results and findings achieved during the research in different ways, as all of the parts, even if they are different, together affect each other (e.g. the historical impact of homosexuality puts light on the different periods in Iran and the legality or acceptance of homosexuality; meanwhile the section on homosexuality in the Middle East discusses the concept, the similarities and differences between the Western and Oriental worlds). Islam as a religion had a huge influence on homosexuality when it arrived in Iran and, therefore, it is important as a subject to include it in this chapter. The review of the legacy of homosexuality is discussed in the last paragraph and, altogether, it summarizes the whole picture presented in the conclusions. The investigation of these results/findings played an important role in my research, as it helped me to better understand today's situation in Iran and, indeed, affected my research, which is presented and summarized in the final chapter, which draws conclusions.

This research shows that the situation in today's Iran is far from perfect but not as bad as it could be. It is worse in Iraq (with killings of, e.g., emo-looking gays) or in Afghanistan. Furthermore, I discovered that history has had a deep impact on homosexuality in Iran, as pre-modern Persia enjoyed the "benefits of homosexuality" and Shah Pahlavi was very tolerant in comparison with the clerics of contemporary Iran. In the chapter on *Homosexuality in the Middle East* we can see that many gay and bisexual men have an obligation to become straight outside the walls of their own apartment in order to fit into Islamic society. To do this, they accept Eastern homosexual activities, at the same time dropping the West's concept of homosexual identity. By doing, this they support the double life standards, so well expressed in one of the stories collected by Afdhere Jama in his book *Illegal Citizens*, where he describes one Tehranian gay:

Who spends many hours of the night in the city's underground - an almost invisible parallel world where sex might be free or for a small fee, drugs and alcohol are plentiful, and where you might imagine being anywhere but in Iran. By day, however, Hossein assumes a conservative image that also oddly enough fits him perfectly.

Walking into any governmental building, he seems part of the elite. And that, he is: his father is a revered and powerful ayatollah (Jama 2008: 37).

Activity, but not passivity, takes this over by creating a huge problem in Iran's macho patriarchal society, and continually supporting prejudices towards stereotyped gay identity. On the other hand, I discovered that even if religion does play a very important role in the whole Islamic world, a no less important fact relates to the differences of religious interpretations of many debatable subjects, homosexuality included. It is hard to believe, but the identity of "transsexual" is recognized as different from gay or bisexual identities in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and very often plays a core part in the survival game with many gays adopting this identity. However, I believe that slowly, step by step, a modern *gay type* of homosexuality should appear in Iran as well, most likely from its neighbour, Turkey, where:

[The] Traditional distinction between "active" and receptive sexuality disappears, is found widely among urban, young, educated and middle-class homosexuals. Most gays in Turkey regard themselves as "real men," differentiating themselves from the so-called feminine homosexuals by adopting a male identity in the urban arena. They represent a new sexually conscious stratum of the homosexual population in society... [----] In contrast to Western experiences, gay politics in Turkey emerged within a "political party" (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 306).

Meanwhile, life will continue with the reality of its unreality in Iran as, in many other Muslim countries, many LGBT people will continue to practice the best rule learned through the years: to keep quiet and do it, but not to talk about it, without being seen in order not to confirm to being different. No public display of long hair (only women are allowed to have long hair), no tattoos (as only hooligans have them), no expression of sexuality, no alcohol, no drugs, no shorts or short sleeves; this over-Islamized policy creates a hypocritical lifestyle which denies a fact of human beings and - as I believe - it will collapse through the influence of the current Arabian renaissance. Iran, as with the rest of the Muslim world, will be not able to resist the isolationist approach of "cultural purity" so supported by the Islamic government; meanwhile, the fear of Westernism predicted by Massad and others simply cannot survive, as the adoption of everything that is Western "is also an exaggeration; Arabs adopt - and often adapt - whatever aspects they like but reject much else... [----] among those who favour

American products and culture, there was overwhelming opposition to American foreign policy” (Whitaker, 2006: 209).

The problem in Iran is not only a matter for gay people; it encompasses a much larger percentage of the Iranian population. Many people are not who they are or who they want to be... They dress up differently at home compared with when they go out; they listen to different music and watch different movies outside their house and inside it; and they talk differently and think differently when not at home too. This reality, available to many gay people in a country without any other possible choices or alternatives doesn't get any better, and the closing down of foreign representatives in the Iranian capital recently, the boycotting Iranian of the banking sector by Britain, of oil by France, is simply hammering one more nail into the coffin of isolation for all Iranians and gay people too. This prevailing situation strengthens an already confrontational dialogue between West and East, the clashes between secularised Western and Eastern religious militancy. Before dialogue can be reached (hopefully without Israeli's intervention and any further increasing of the oil price), a lottery will be played by many gay people without any knowledge of whether they are going to be caught by bad luck, have their lives saved or taken by death. Some of them - those who are educated and speak foreign languages - will leave the country for a better one; some of them, like the Iranian Queer activist Arsham Parsi, will continue to fight abroad against the Iranian stigma attached to homosexuality and work for the gay men and women left behind in his home country, who will continue to live in fear of being caught and executed (Colbourne 2010). Indeed, my findings in Iran do suggest that in the 21st Century Iran can no longer stay as isolated as it is now, even if the Islamic government is trying to do its best to close, block and forbid absurd misdemeanours with various penalties, starting with “easy crimes” (like listening to forbidden music or watching non-Islamic movies) and finishing with serious crimes (such as premarital sex or fornication and homosexuality, for which the penalties are stoning or execution by hanging). None of these crimes fit into the frame of modern society. If we consider that most of the Iranian population is under the age of thirty, this suggests that the modern point of view is taking over, but slowly, and that it is becoming a serious enemy of the pre-modern point of view, such as that propagated by the Islamists. Their perception and understanding of things is basically out of date. This supports the clashes between the modern population and the pre-modern government introduced by the Green Revolution, which began in 2009 but is not yet complete. Moreover, conversations recorded in the field

notes only confirm this. However, despite the strictness of the law and given how dangerous it is if caught, many homosexual men do enjoy themselves in being gay, with less attention to the possibility of being caught in Iran. The best example of this is Majid, who is pursuing his happiness under the conditions of radical Islam. At the end, the facts talk for us and clearly confirm the presence of dual standards in Iran:

And despite it all, he was happy. Happy of being there and talking to all those gay guys, happy to drive his mum's car with the Turkish music set on full power, as a symbol of being free and being gay. Happy and unhappy at the same time, as being gay in Iran is rather difficult. Just like most of the guys that I had met in this country, with Majid included, no one in their family knows that they are gay. One of Majid's brother's lives in Australia, and is very open-minded; but even to him he cannot come out. Once he was stopped by a police car at a cruising area late in the night and they took his papers. The questions were many, and all of them were continuing to ask "why": why are you driving here, why are you listening to this kind of music and why is it so high? When he wanted to talk to the police and touched the arm of one policeman accidentally, the policeman shouted at him and told him not to touch him, as he, Majid (by policeman's words), was dirty (all gay people, according to Islam, are dirty because of their sexual activity). When he continued to ask the policemen to return to him his papers, the policeman told him that he would take them to the Police Office and make a report. Majid got really scared and started to beg for his papers to be returned. He promised the policeman that he would never come back to this place and asked him not to punish him as he was already "punished" by God (gay people are considering to be sick in Iran and are believed "punished" by God by this sickness). He begged him for the papers as his mum was ill and for her to get to know the truth about her son would be the end of her and probably his life (N.B. he was driving her car, registered in her name). He was lucky, and after some time crying for mercy, he got his papers. Anyway, since then he continued to return to the same place, driving with the open window, talking to sexy guys and listening to the same Turkish music or Trance, with the Danish group Medina and Lady Gaga included. He explained to me that being gay here is somehow OK, as the police probably know anyway, have seen you on Manjam.com, have noticed your car at the gay places, etc. This will be OK, until you were caught in

sexual activity with the other man. That's why, each time he goes to Hamam with his first or second sexual partners, he is really afraid; afraid to get caught. But he has no choice. He lives with his mum, so there is no way he could invite someone home. He has some friends though who live alone or are partnered, but are renting as friends. Some of them would "safe" him, by letting him in, but there might not be so much privacy: in one case, some time ago, his friend Naser got fucked while Majid was watching them doing it live, as there was no other place for them to go. He said though, that he knows some other guys who rent their bed for one hour for 200.000 IRR (or \$20). This saves guys for now, but to build stable permanent relationships and future in those kinds of conditions is difficult [----]. Yesterday, just after meeting with Shahbaz and his five other gay friends for dinner (who themselves spoke very little English), I went to cruise with Majid as he invited me to have fun with him. After a short time driving, three police cars arrived and started to stop everyone who just looked suspicious or had their car parked. They took their driving license and issued an invitation for the drivers of suspected vehicles to visit an information centre at the Police Office, where they would have to give a statement for their behaviour: what have they been doing at the suspected gay place. After short while, we just have left that place in order not to be arrested; when, two days later, I visited the same place again, it was packed with Basij militia on motorbikes, who have a license to kill. This just showed, me once again, that to be gay in Iran is difficult and takes a lot of energy, precautions and effort from everyone. (Field notes #8 and #11, recorded in Tehran on Friday, 26 of August and 01 of September 2011)

4.1 The Historical Impact of Homosexuality

To better understand the subject of homosexuality in the Middle East and - particularly - in Iran, reference should be made to ancient Persia, because without the past there is no present. In this chapter, I will discuss the status of homosexuality on three different levels: first, in ancient Persia where being homosexual was completely tolerated; second, during the dynasty of the last Iranian Shah Pahlavi, where the treatment of homosexuality was below that of Western standards, but became acceptable; finally in the third section of this chapter, I will discuss the situation today - the post-revolutionary period - where it was banned and excluded

from the realm of social norms. In general, these three different stages of homosexuality and its development played an important role for today's LGBT community and its developing Western gay identity, despite the ignorance of such facts by the Iranian President, choosing activity over identity to explain the homosexual case of the Middle East.

4.1.1 Ancient Persia

Iran - or ancient Persia - as well as other Middle Eastern states has a deep experience and history of homosexual relationships based on Mediterranean-Muslim cultural practices and, despite Islamic law, it was always practiced, but with full discretion. Just like in other pre-modern cultures, Iran was not the exception and male homosexual relations were expected to be asymmetrical, involving people of different ages, classes or social status, usually with one partner assuming the conventions of masculine gender and the other one those feminine gender, but none of them were identified as homosexual; instead sexual relationships could be described by their position in sex itself, and indeed "the term status-defined homosexuality has been coined to distinguish these earlier norms concerning male homosexuality from those now predominant in the United States and the Western world" (Afary 2009: 79). Since the ancient Greco-Romans had assigned gender conventions and distinguishing between the adult lover, *erastes* who played an active role, and the male adolescent who played a passive role, *paidika*, these man/boy relationships clearly appear - as in the words of Foucault - like "reciprocal independence" and "true love" [as against the presumed false love of women] (Afary 2009: 79). Equally, the same patterns between active [*fa'el*] and passive [*maf'ul*] adolescent males *amrad* existed in ancient Persia and represented the same idea as that of the ancient Greeks, concerning love where it was not seen as being of two totally different behaviour types, as Foucault pointed out himself (Foucault 1985: 187). Those relationships (just like the Greek example) were once characterized by mentorship and courtship, i.e. teaching poetry and other literature, bodybuilding or the military preparation for future men, primarily. Secondly, they were supposed to end when the youth became an adult; sometimes vows were exchanged between men, in the name of brotherhood which concentrated not only on sex, but on the spiritual side as well, by a growing of affection and a display that the responsibilities between the adult partner and the youngster, in which the long courtship of the younger one was very important. As distinct from heterosexually-based courtships, which ended with marriage around the age of puberty, male and female homoerotic relations based on closeness and affection continued for longer, because this was a world where the holding

of hands, touching and kissing between the members of one's own sex were very common practices up until today. A lack of love between partners because of a pre-arranged marriage - usually by parents or older brothers - may explain the popularity of widespread relationships between the men (and women too), even in the contemporary Islamic Republic of Iran. But, in general, in ancient and medieval times - as well in the modern Muslim world - the adolescent (or preadolescent) boy would play a passive role in sex and he might be rewarded with gifts or money for the acceptance of his role until he would *outgrow* his passive status and would become an adult: this would mean that he would marry and have children and, therefore, shift from a *passive* into an *active* partner and, if maintaining a family, continuing his homosexual behaviour in a discreet manner (as it is very common in today's Iran), he would be considered "*hyper masculine*" because "dominant man who penetrated both women and boys was just as masculine as those who penetrated women" (Afary 2009: 86). However, if adult men seek submission as a passive (*ma' bun*) they will be considered to be ill, imperfect and deformed, or else effeminate and very close to being a woman. In this case, such a man - who is supposed to be masculine - would be suffering from a disease, described as the "loss of manliness" or the loss of "honour" which would fit badly into the medieval Muslim world, where a male-dominated model would get hurt by a woman's imperfection who hadn't got all the necessary male life attributes, as Afary points out. A *ma' bun* was considered to be someone who was between a man and a woman; a *mukhannat* - or an effeminate man, who very often was employed as entertainer - would wear women's clothes and, in the modern understanding, would be TS. In short, there were three labels of a passive partner accepted in medieval and early modern Iranian society: an *amrad* or adolescent (until he got a full beard, as this indicated his un-availability for submissive sex, just like in the Greek tradition where the youngster becomes unsuitable for a passive role with the appearance of the first hair on his face) who will later become an active partner; a *mab'un*, who did not become active for some reason; and a *mukhannat*, who is too feminine to behave as a "real" man. The Persian language is very rich in its expression of homoerotic relationships, explaining different stages of courtship, adoration, flirtation and position in sexual acts, both for active and passive partners, starting with *fa'el* [the doer], *gholam bareh* [lover of page], *jamal parast* [one who loves beautiful faces], *mab'un* and *maf'ul* [receiver], *now khat* [one with a budding moustache] and many more; at the same time, the most famous Persian poets were celebrating homosexual relationships between their kings, soldiers and slaves. Moreover, "when speaking of the beloved, the poets in most cases, but by no means all, used the masculine gender" (Khaleb 2005: 61).

Persian Sufi poetry portrays well-established, highly mystical and consciously erotic relationships between two males, so well expressed in their poetry between a master and disciple, where a *pir* [master] would mentor the *morid* [disciple] “on the path of unity with God.... becoming a Sufi meant pursuing a spiritual love... in the courtly *ghazal* poetry composed by many Sufi mystics, love was defined as an aristocratic diversion not suited to ordinary people” (Afary 2009: 96). In general, pre-modern Iranian society was very *homosexual per se*, at least in one way according to today’s conception, but very brutal in another, where social inequality based on status, age and class between lover [active] and beloved [passive] were extreme, as most of the boy concubines were slaves from Ethiopia, Armenia or Turkey and were automatically dependent on the elite class who owned them and could molest, castrate or even kill them. Despite of the fact that Islam was the official religion of Persia and regardless of the assumption that “the act of the people of Lot” was condemned by the Prophet as an obstruction of procreation, male houses for prostitution [*amrad khaneh*] were fully recognized, even up until the mid-Seventeenth Century. Public spaces such as bathhouses and coffeehouses were popular places for sexual encounters, as well as monasteries, taverns and seminaries, where men could freely practice homosexuality and “the most popular coffeehouses were the ones reputed to have the best looking boys, whose services customers could be purchased” (Afary 2009: 90-91). The situation would not change much over the next centuries, leaving a serious gap between the homoerotic practices, so popular in society, and the official version of the Qur’an which totally rebuked the *lavat*. Meanwhile the state concerned itself with distinguishing between legal and illegal homosexual acts: to bring a prostitute of any sex to a lower-middle-class home was illegal, but purchasing or hiring a boy as a servant (and more) among higher middle-class or elite homes was completely permissible. Consensual or semi-open pederasty was quietly tolerated at the end of the Eighteenth Century and the beginning of the Nineteenth Century in Iran, where the molestation and kidnapping of boys would be considered a crime, punished by imprisonment and flogging, but not by castration as before, where “all of the genitals of the perpetrator including his penis, would be cut off” (Afary 2009: 104).

4.1.2 The Pre-Revolutionary Period

Later on, with the beginning of the Twentieth Century and with the appearance of the Pahlavi dynasty in the ruling circles, as well as with the Russian revolution and its after effects and the appearance of modernity in Iran through migrant workers, merchants and Western

missionary schools and a Iranian elite going abroad, a new era of Iranian gender and sexual politics began. With the fact of the abolition of Shari'a law in Soviet Central Asia and the granting of new rights for women, the establishment of Persian Soviet Republic of Gilan in the Caspian region in 1920 had a big influence on all neighbouring countries, particularly on Iran and Turkey. Four years later, after signing the Russo-Persian treaty of friendship and gaining autonomy from Britain, with the creation of its first modern army which re-established central control over Gilan and the ratification of Reza Khan's modernization program, with the adoption of the Persian solar calendar instead of the Islamic lunar calendar, and with the requirement of birth certificates for everyone together with compulsory military service, had the effect of transforming the Qajar dynasty of Persia into the new Pahlavi dynasty. "In a little more than a decade, the Shah established a centralized state, unified the nation, and built a rudimentary economic structure" (Afary 2009: 144).

Legal reforms took place as well, and a more secular Penal and Civil Code replaced the Shari'a courts, the legal age of marriage changed from fifteen to eighteen for boys and from nine to fifteen for girls. Furthermore, in 1928 an order of the Shah was issued regarding "all urban Iranian men, except for properly credentialed clerics and theology students, to discard their cloaks and more traditional headgear in favour of European-style clothing; in January 1936, Reza Shah issued a formal decree ordering women to unveil" (Afary 2009: 156) under a project known as the Women Awakening. With Iranian modernization (and especially unveiling, where veiling can be seen as the opposite of Western clothing and mannerisms), a step-by-step process of the Westernization of the Islamic state of Iran was begun, and this was why opposition to the Shah and Westernization started to expand, because they were so unhappy about it - especially the religious hierarchies (i.e. clerics, mullahs etc.). The later would have a deep impact on the future of Iran. If Western norms became more and more favoured by the Iranian middle class, so there arrived one of the most popular attributes of modernism which was visited as often as possible: the cinema. The movie theatres grew up like the mushrooms after the rain - between the years 1930-31 the population of Tehran went to the movies more than a one million times, with around four hundred international movies shown each year in thirty four movie theatres, despite the warnings issued by clerics who opposed the state's encouragement to bring female relatives together to the cinema. Besides this, cinema was the clear symbol of Westernization, becoming one of the main gathering places for homosexuals in the era of the Shah Pahlavi, especially in the south and central Tehran:

For the deprived and the vast majority of the youth, especially the *pesar baz* [those inclined to relations with boys], the cinema was the best place where, with 10 *shahi*, they could buy a ticket and spend several hours in debauchery, touching, the kissing of this and that person, killing time and enjoying themselves (Afary 2009: 160).

The Pahlavi's dynasty had both a remarkable impact not only on new heterosexual norms, but on homosexual norms, which was negative rather than positive if we compare it to the heterosexual. The state did issue new laws against pederasty and male prostitution, with the result that male prostitutes became arrested more frequently than their women counterparts. The 1933 Penal Code passed through and encouraging a youth in *lavat* [sodomy] under the age of eighteen would result imprisonment for up to one year; the media were allowed to condemn homosexuality openly, despite of wide censorship by the state. Even if all of those changes decreased the visibility of the same-sex scene in Iran and it simply reflected the Western influence on gay rights in continental Europe and the USA - which was simply zero at that time - the Iranian homosexual environment stayed pretty much the same. As Ja'far Shahri describes, the picture of homoerotic relationships typical for that time was little changed from previous centuries:

As in the Nineteenth Century, a poor boy's adult lover was bound by many courtship rules, the most important one being to help his future... [---] Men of all social classes commonly employed a lower-class boy... [----] The boy could be much more, however. He could be "the motivation for one's living," and a person "without whom no one really had any desire to go to work (Afary 2009: 160-161).

Meanwhile the typical gay or same-sex scene based on the equality principle where man-to-man and not man-to-boy was involved, started to appear in the early period of the Pahlavi era and it began to reflect an early stage of a gay male cultures appearance, free of public opinion for the first time in Persia/Iran, where adult men of the same age could be involved:

There were many active men [*fa'el*] who made love to people of their own age, and many who remained passive [*maf'ul*] lovers of other men, though they themselves had a wife and several children. Here, relations were more companionate, though frequently one partner was much wealthier than the other. Adult male couples enjoyed each other's company in public without shame: "No one worried about the labels *fa'el* [active] or *maf'ul* [passive]. Male couples formed the vast majority of every male gathering, and few men appeared without a companion ... Some men never married and stayed with the beloved of their youth until they became old (Afary 2009: 160-161).

The acceptance and tolerance of a more modern gay lifestyle took some time to appear in the new Iranian society which was moving towards to the West's, and if many supported unveiling (some did believe that veiling was one of the positive factors supporting homosexuality in Iran) and women rights, even in divorce, then at the same time for Iranians - in order to become a modern nation - one of conditions was to abandon homosexual practices of all kinds and "to become European in appearance and in essence, in body and spirit." Only this would enable the nation to catch up with the West" (Afary 2009: 160-161). Those statements about the abandonment of any homosexual practices in order to become European were, I believe, if homophobic, were not dangerous; at that time it was similar to the normal tendency regarding homosexuality held worldwide. At the same time, we can argue too about the popular belief at that time that the boy in a same-sex relationship had no erotic feeling, which makes no sense at all. In short, before the revolution it was hard to be homosexual in Iran. As David Reed points out in his pre-revolutionary article about gays in Iran, he describes this minor public gay lifestyle which existed at that time, while the Shah was head of state. From one side, even if the SAVAK (National Intelligence and Security Organization of the Imperial State of Iran) did watch the public and if to be a queer in an Iran with only one gay bar in Tehran was rather frustrating, this so called lower-class habit was a punishable offence with severe jail sentences. On the other side, with hot and horny students in a beer bar close to Tehran University, or with mates "on the sidewalks of Shah Reza or Pahlavi Avenues.... [----] sex games in the massage rooms or private bath closet.... [----] would be hell for straights but heaven for gays" (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 64-66). More dangerous I believe was the statement of Khomeini who warned that the unveiling of women by the Shah had ruined female honour and caused the destruction of the family; it brought economic development and

industrialization, changing Iran into a corrupted and Westernized society (Afary 2009: 192). Later on, this society would clash with the Islamic Revolution, which would totally change not the only situation for gay people, but for many other members of this society as well.

4.1.3 The Post-Revolutionary Period

This situation changed drastically immediately after the Revolution, where the Islamist state had claimed homosexuality to be one of the crimes which deserved the death penalty and, as Hélène Kafi points out in her post-Revolution anthropological overview of the situation of gays in Iran, if during the last years of the Shah Pahlavi epoch, sex between men came closer and closer to the Western style and, as Janet Afary argues, if “in small, elite circles, there was also a gradual acceptance of the modern gay lifestyle by the 1970s” (Afary 2009: 287), then suddenly things become very bad for those who claimed to be queers. Homosexuality, a truly ancient practice, had become a crime under the regime of the mullahs and if “all Tehran had twaddle about the marriage of a painter and a musician in 1977, today it is out of the question to advertise one’s ‘abnormal and anti-Islamic’ likings... [----] is said that 100 to 200 homosexuals were executed in 1981/1982” (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 67-69). Sadly, Foucault who was a great fan of the Islamic Revolution and in fact naively believed that Islamists had approved of homosexuality in a *romantic oriental* way, suggested that the enjoyment of “oriental sex” should finally be celebrated. Today, in a modern Iran where homosexual relationships are considered to be a serious crime, thousands of gays (the total population of the IR of Iran is 77,891,220 as est. for July 2011 (CIA, n.d.), at least 2-10% should have a homosexual orientation) of different ages are trying to find *their ways of being* and legal acceptance *of being*. Meanwhile, covert bisexuality is increasingly accepted in today’s Islamic Republic - the clerics rule a society of homosocial spaces where sex-segregation is the *MUST*. This sex segregation, *however*, can be positive towards homosexuals. Besides:

According to an Iranian gay activist, before the revolution, homosexuals could meet only in elite hotels and bars. Now, finding a willing partner in a park is easy for a man who has a car and an apartment.... [----] The segregated institutions and public spaces of the Islamic Republic allowed for the revival and continuation of not just the homosocial expression of love but also covert homosexuality. Since kissing, hugging and holding hands are acceptable between men and women, covert homosexual

conduct and bisexuality are not so conspicuous. Some even called Iran a “homosexual paradise” (Afary 2009: 289).

Iran might look like a paradise for homosexuals, but it's a truth based on my own experience. However, this “paradise” is a pure fiction and anyone can be dazzled in this way. Along with me, for example, were a Swedish diplomat and even Foucault himself, who “have formed an impression that homosexual men enjoyed greater sexual freedom there than in France” (Afary 2005: 141). We simply become victims of *queer identity*, which is the perfection of being perfect and, since “queerness is an ideality.... In the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then* and *there*” usually becomes a *utopia* - we are simply cruising in it (Munoz 2009: 1). It is our founded space of *otherness* that we fancy so much and to what we want to belong, but the difficulty is that we cannot because it is simply neither *here* nor *there*. It is our dream, our moment that we wish to prolong in our cruising utopia and so finally enter Foucault's heterotopia. But the problem here is to see what actually lies behind this utopian paradise which is so false. Iran, today, ruled by a regime of clerics, is clearly one of the countries where homosexuality is seen as an activity and not an identity, and this activity is usually performed with discretion, because of the awareness of the death penalty, which is a real threat.

The image of a homosexual paradise in the Islamic Republic can be wrongly understood, just as Pamela Heller argues in her article about LGBT asylum seekers (Heller 2009: 297) where she comes up with an example of a lesbian who loses her job after a civil commitment to her partner. However, the court overrules her lawsuit for discrimination as she lost her job not for her lesbian *identity* but for her *conduct*. This caused a misinterpretation on the wrong grounds in the case of an Iranian gay asylum seeker in 1996 who was denied asylum on the grounds of his sexuality, with the explanation that this was an example of whereby in the mid-1990s the Iranian police simply started to ignore men who cruised in the well-known parks and alleys in order to find a sexual partner. Despite of lack of legal acceptance in Iranian law and public tolerance, the Swedes may have provided asylum had claimed that homosexuality in Iran was a very *acceptable cultural practice* and, according to the secret report which was published and then removed (most likely done by a Swedish gay diplomat, as many European state governments would send their gay diplomats to Iran instead of their married, straight counter parts, who would simply boycott/deny such diplomatic

assignments to Islamic countries). Through my collected information, at least one of the diplomats here in Tehran held huge parties, fully packed with gays, in his huge *Corps Diplomatique* apartment where a Western gay lifestyle is practiced freely, confirming that the diversity of homosexuality is significant and the gap between Islamic law and reality is even bigger (Field notes #8, recorded in Tehran on Friday, 26 of August 2011). According to one report:

The situation for homosexuals is that the risk of legal proceedings or harassment is utterly minimal so long as a homosexual relationship is handled in a discreet manner... The police and justice administration do not take active measures to investigate the existence of homosexuality, nor do they actively hunt homosexuals. All in all, the situation in actual practice in Iran is drastically different from the impression conveyed by the Shari'a-inspired Penal Code... [----] the situation in Iran is relatively tolerant, since homosexuality is by no means unusual in Iran. Certain "health clubs" in Tehran are known to be frequented by homosexuals. Furthermore, this is by no means unusual for openly homosexual persons in otherwise heterosexual, private circumstances like social events. Judging by appearances, diplomats with a homosexual orientation posted in Iran have not had any problems with getting in touch with "partners" in Iran. If anything, the situation is rather that homosexuals can conceal their orientation more easily in Iran than, e.g. in Sweden, as physical contact between men – embracing, cheek-kissing, handholding – is culturally accepted behaviour [and so in order to be punished] homosexual couples must behave without discretion, almost provocatively, in a public place (Afary 2009: 289-290).

And they really do get punished; most of those who managed to apply for asylum but get refused in Sweden or any other country do get punished and, if not sentenced to death like Ayaz Marhoni and Mahmoud Asgari for daring to live their life publicly (see the chapter The Legacy of [homosexual] Life in Iran), or dozens of others worldwide they get only a "few" (fourteen) years in prison, just like the Malawian couple imprisoned for 'unnatural acts' and 'gross indecency' when they got engaged traditionally (BBC 2010). Even if immigration policies in the Western world display prejudices against *the other*, and especially those from the Middle East, there is some good news about it: the UK Supreme Court recently ruled that two asylum seekers who were escaping prosecution in their own countries (Iran and

Cameroon) could remain in Great Britain because of their gender identity/sexual orientation, which put them at guaranteed risk of execution and/or imprisonment and, furthermore, instead of sending them back home (the No Going Back report had suggested that during four years, between 2005 and 2009, the Home Office had initially refused 98% of all gay or lesbian asylum claims) where they, as Court had ruled previously, “could conceal their sexuality” and henceforth “their situation could have been regarded as ‘reasonably tolerable’” (BBC 2010). Ultimately, we can only confirm that homosexuality was very popular in ancient Persia and widely practiced; that it was then semi-tolerated during the period of Shah Pahlavi until the Islamic Revolution, and then seriously persecuted by the Islamists under the new Islamic Republic of Iran after 1979. Together with this fact, we should admit that despite of all the prohibitions and enforcement by the clerics, as well as parents’ approval (i.e. regarding unmarried men and women or gays in the matter of love and sex), young Iranian people under thirty (who constitute more than 60% of the country’s seventy million people) continue to date semi-secretly or cruise not only in parks but also in cyberspace, which is highly controlled by the state. If some of the websites, however, are blocked or filtered, they can simply be un-blocked or un-filtered. Last summer, I continued to log onto Manjam.com, which is the most popular gay meeting place in Iran online. This worldwide Internet dating website is, of course, blocked in Iran, just like Facebook and Gaydar, and in order to use it you have to unblock it. I’m very thankful to Ali, who sent me all of the instructions on how to unblock it long before I left Iceland; according to Ali, in Iran methods have to be changed every week in order to connect to your desired website (Field notes “Tehran Total”, field notes #1, recorded in Tehran on Monday, 22 of August 2011). I have found similar instructions on a few free websites on the Internet, which suggest one of two available methods to unblock a website that has been blocked (Free Nuts 2011). The Iranian youth knows how to un-filter or un-block almost all of the popular websites and continues to use them as though nothing has happened. I have doubts that these young people will go and fight for the Islamic Republic if someone invades them, as happened with Iraq in 1980. I doubt that they will continue to be loyal to the government, which is trying to make them believe the truth that no one else believes: today I heard from an Iranian person that Iranian officials have explained to the Iranian public that the reason for unrest in Britain is caused by the public desire to overthrow its Queen. A comparative study of Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia in 2005 shows that nearly 70% of respondents favour personal choice for their spouse instead of a parental one, and that 50% these declare that love is more important to them than parental approval. Meanwhile, time goes by and in some social sectors among the cosmopolitan and

educated people in the capital's gay subculture, if even small and secret, it has appeared to advocate a modern gay lifestyle and is a result of today's modern and globalized World (and Westernized, if you want). For example, there are:

Tehran's huge parks with a lot of benches, dark alleys and open sky shop-restaurant, located just in the middle of the Park. It is surrounded with beautiful trees and a couple of fountains which begin to work in the evening. It's a park near a Theatre Saloon and the University of Arts in Tehran (the former Farah Pahlavi University). The sculpture in the park's fountains is gay-motivated and you can see very easily three big letters hidden behind one of the sculptures of the boys: G. A. Y. This is actually from the pre-revolution period. The park is located in a special place. Many embassies are nearby: the British and the Russian, the German, the Italian, and the Armenian, among others. There is a hotel exactly along one side of the park. From 6 a.m. to 12 p.m., you can sit there comfortably and many gays will sit there as well, especially during the night time (8 p.m. to 12 p.m.). There really are many gays and bisexuals, and many handsome guys who just come there for show-ups; many guys arrive by car to pick up other guys for sex; but there can be security agents, so one needs to be cautious, especially during the daytime. Many of those who come to the park are: married men who have no wife or whose wife is ill; unmarried straight guys who have no opportunity to have a relation with girls and so claim to be top; guys with infectious diseases... [----] also there are the Public Baths in Tehran, as Majid told me, where the lower class of guys with homosexual intentions gather on Thursday nights, where couples simply order a private cabin and do it, while others fuck their fellows with shampoo instead of lubricant, and without any protection. (Field notes #5, recorded in Tehran on Tuesday, 23 of August 2011)

Equally, without the recognition of the state or the public, the norms of homosexuality in Iran will continue to stay mainly discreet and *oriental*, as such. However, most of the young people do not remember the "oppressions" of the Shah and nor do they remember the horrible war with Iraq in the name of the Islamic Republic; therefore, they do not care about it, but rather what they do care about is clearly their happiness. With the restrictions on this and punishment for that, as well with a high unemployment rate (up to 25%), young educated people leave Iran - around 150,000 yearly (Pars Times, n.d.) - in order to have a better life. But, unfortunately:

Nor can you leave the country without having done military service, as you simply will not get a passport to do it. Similar to this is education. Every semester costs around \$1,000 and so, in order to do your post-graduate studies for example, abroad (and disappear from Iran forever), you will need to leave the state a deposit of up to \$15,000 as the promise that you will come back or to work for up to five years as your payback to the state. In addition, military service needs to be served after finishing your studies. One interesting fact that Kayvan told me about the military service was that, by law, you cannot serve in the Iranian military if you are gay. However, if you claim to be gay, you need to go through special check-up, by a professional shrink, who will determine your homosexuality; whether it is caused by your genes or by behaviour as a result of certain conditions in your childhood, etc. So, theoretically, in order to be able to avoid military service, in reality you need to be *vagina gay* or very feminine - fem gay in other words - otherwise your homosexuality is caused by the circumstances of your early childhood and it is not acceptable to avoid Iranian military service. On the other hand, by claiming to be gay, you officially allow the authorities to record you and monitor you in the future, which is not the best option and can even lead to your own execution. In general, being gay in Iran is unpopular, complicated and it is better not to discuss it. (Field notes #9, recorded in Tehran on Saturday, 27 of August 2011)

In this chapter I gave an overview of the situation concerning homosexuality in Persia/Iran since ancient times until the present. The situation between ancient times and today is very different. It is very clear that, just like in other parts of the world, pre-modern Persia had very strong homosocial traditions and homosexuality was widely acceptable and practiced with a high level of tolerance. After many centuries, it had changed and become less popular because of the religious influence and public condemnation of the so-called “act of the people of Lot.” Beginning with the modernization and industrialization of Iran from the beginning of the last century, and especially during the Pahlavi era, Iran developed a small gay scene, particularly before the fall of the Shah’s Regime. From this lower-class habit of homosexuality began to emerge an identity, shifting from activity, which would have continued like this if not for the Islamic Revolution. Today, homosexuality is instead seen as activity but not as a queer identity, mainly because of the confrontation between the Western and Oriental worlds. Moreover, it is a punishable offence and it is practiced on *do it but don’t talk about it*

principles. However, in current century, the basis that makes this out of date simply do not correspond with the reality:

Instead, as it is today, people and society are too involved in religion and traditions, and this vision of family matters based on a patriarchal model is too strong... A woman got raped here not a long time ago while she went shopping, as Shahbaz told me yesterday, to which one Mullah responded that they (women) shouldn't go shopping alone and that's why they get raped. This model of family values, laws and orders built up on an over-Islamized model is simply too old and has expired for the modern society of the 21st Century. (Field notes #10, recorded in Tehran on Monday, 29 of August 2011)

4.2 Homosexuality in the Middle East

To see homosexuality in the Middle East, we first have to examine the traditions and their influence on the perceptions and understanding of homosexuality as being “gender-defined” homosexuality. This is that kind of behaviour which can never be publicly acknowledged in many Islamic states because identity as such and subculture are uniquely modern, Western inventions (Murray & Roscoe 1997). Indeed it is necessary to focus on the segregation of the sexes, which plays a very important role in the Middle East and Muslim society, as there is a huge separation in the domestic sphere between men and women/children. This separation includes domination, declaring men to be the stronger sex, and, therefore, the more powerful in all aspects: intellectual, moral and physical, each of which separates them from women, children, slaves, transvestites and eunuchs (and discriminates against them as well), based upon “the right of men to penetrate and their duty to lie on top” (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 4). The other core problem investigated in this chapter are the fundamentalist family values, based on the idea that procreation *must be straight* and family-central apparatus, the control of its children, their lifestyles and social values, all of which are opposed to gay identity. In this chapter, I will talk about the differences between homosexuality in the West and homosexuality in the East and the discrepancies between the acceptance and understanding of the same term, which has become identity in the West but become activity in the East. The role of sex position - of being active or passive - has a totally different meaning in the West, where it is accepted as a part of queerness, but ignored in the East as the obvious admittance of being gay, for fear of playing as a passive partner.

4.2.1 A Western Identity, but an Eastern activity

In many Muslim societies, such as North Africa and Southwest Asia, homosexuals and homosexuality simply do not exist, as “there is no word for “homosexuality” – the concept is completely unfamiliar. There are no heterosexuals either... [---] it is self-evident that men like to penetrate all kinds of beings. It is understandable that some men prefer boys to women” (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 5). Indeed, it is very common for young boys to get fucked by adult men, especially if extra benefits are involved together with sex, like gifts, favours from a well-set man or even money, followed by the ancient model of the Greco-Roman world in which, according to Foucault, “it was the most natural activity, restoring men to the highest state of being” (Afary & Anderson 2005: 145). No one really cares if it is done discreetly, and later on the fuckee gets married and has children. *Do it but don't talk about it* is the Middle Eastern principle. Once a boy becomes sixteen, he must stop getting buggered by men, as it is not good for his reputation as a symbol of masculinity, or at least a man should never allow others to bugger him, as otherwise he loses his name forever and his honour too; if others know that he has been fucked, it will disrupt important social relationships, whereas to show that someone likes it will only increase the already existing stigma (Schmitt & Sofer 1992). Regardless, what is common among un-official gays (guys with homosexual desires in other words, but so-called “not gays”) of Oriental origin is that they can always play the same manoeuvre and be the innocent guy, which means that there is nothing going on and, even if everybody suspects it, he, the doer, will ignore it and not talk about it. Then, it is OK, “as long as nobody draws public attention to something everybody knows, one ignores what might disrupt important social relationships” (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 7). As I recall myself, when once in a park, a young guy tried it on with me and later on when his brother arrived and asked him what was he doing at the place where gay guys were cruising, his answer simply was *I'm having a conversation in here*. In other words, an adult man cannot be fucked, *that is the rule*, as being sodomized by other man and maybe to sodomize the same man is outside of understanding. It is simply outside of social norms, traditions and patriarchal family values, and those kinds of things are not talked about, simply making you less of a man, a prejudice that remains so lively in the Middle East today. Just like Arno Schmitt argues in his book *Sexuality and Eroticism among Males in Moslem Societies*:

There is no social role of male-wants-to-fuck-male-and-wants-to-get-fucked-by-another-male, it is neither a tolerated role nor a condemned role, neither a pitied role nor the role of a psychologically ill person, neither a nonconformist role nor a defiant one of a self-conscious minority... [----] So when a MAN gets fucked one forgets it or it was due to alcohol, or he pretends not to have enjoyed it (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 6).

My own point of view, based on my own experience and the theories I have studied, is that currently there is NO recognized Western-style homosexuality in the Middle East or Iran, such as we used to see and understand, perceive and accept. Before the Twentieth Century, the most visible and diverse homosexuality patterns were notable in northern Africa and south-western Asia, but not in north-western Europe/USA/Australia, as it is today. Of course, there are gay people in this region who do have a Western style of living (i.e. who have a long-term partner or boyfriend for many years, very understanding parents, and are self-employed etc.). They exist, of course, but I don't think that there are many who are able to have such a free and easily enjoyable (similar to the Western) lifestyle. Despite of this, many foreign gay men who come to Muslim countries do enjoy and fulfil their expectations and needs (including the sexual) with locals - e.g. "Foucault was excited by the culture he witnessed... [----] and what he regarded as the open homoeroticism... [----] moreover, in this admiration for the Mediterranean/Muslim world, Foucault avoided addressing the sexism or homophobia of these cultures" (Afary & Anderson 2005: 141). In opposition to gay identity, it is more common to be married, but to have a sexual (male) partner without telling anyone, simply to enjoy:

Well, his father is hoping that, just like all the fathers do here, he will get married one day. Very often, just to please his father, he says that this or some other girl is beautiful. This, of course, is to make his father relax and believe that everything is OK. The friends simply don't ask. They might know something or suspect it, but they don't ask. On the other hand, when we were entering that apartment building where his brother lives, we were obliged to be quiet and not to talk any about GAY crap in front of the neighbours. This perfectly confirms my idea of such a thing, that it

happens a lot, but that no one talks about it, even if they suspect something (Field notes #6, recorded in Tehran on Tuesday, 23 of August 2011).

In fact, many Muslims do have a homosexual experience with their friends or neighbours or else family members. This is not unnatural. This is just like Majid, one of my participants from Tehran, told me with his story. Once, when he was around fourteen, his cousin came to the place where his father worked, but His father was not there and Majid was waiting for him. His cousin simply fucked him in the toilet, because it was easy to do it, as he was a family member and the boy trusted him. Majid told me that it is common to get your first experience from a family member, most likely with one of your cousins. The next day, he was again waiting for his father outside of his office in the almost empty building, but this time a friend of his cousin arrived and tried to catch him for sexual pleasure. This time, Majid refused very insistently, as to be stamped once is to be stamped forever, like Gianni De Martino reports from Morocco:

Then there are the boys between 9 and 17, who get fucked by their cousins, teachers and neighbours, whether they like it or not [not necessarily by force, but by intimidation, by seduction, by the making of presents or as a 'natural right']. These boys are called *zamel*. By the age of 15 or 16, a *zamel* loses his admirers or he starts refusing advances: he becomes a 'man' - i.e., he fucks boys and courts girls. Those continuing to get fucked are called *hassas* (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 26).

Since then, Majid never lets any of his sexual partners fuck him first. This is an un-written rule that he follows because of his own experience with his cousin when he was a teenager, and this is how Middle Eastern society is. He forces/involves his fuck buddy into oral sex first, and then probably fucks him before letting him fuck Majid himself in order to secure his reputation so that if he meets the same guy accidentally in public, there no un-necessary left over, like: *look this is the guy I have fucked last week; he is the one who has been used anally...* Such an outlook will damage his reputation only if it becomes known publicly and "even the death penalty is less feared than disclosure before one's family and friends" (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 45). In this case, none of his sexual partners have anything to tell, because they too were engaged in anal penetration or oral action themselves:

From my conversation, it is clear that tips are exchanged about boys/young men/men who could be/are “fit.” Usually one cannot claim somebody for oneself... [--] This “informing” has as the consequence that some boys get a reputation of *zamel* [someone submitting to anal intercourse]. If a boy has this image, it will be most difficult for him to submit [i.e., mount] another from his own circle; he will be forced to fulfil the passive role until he goes outside his circle or gets married (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 20).

Furthermore, he should stop getting fucked as soon as possible and avoid it as much as he can “in order not to acquire a taste for it and thus become addicted. It is like an infectious disease: once infected it is difficult to get rid of it” (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 8). This is the fear that is “swallowing” many: “if I let him fuck me... [----] I’d probably like it and then I’d do it again, and then I’d be queer” (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 18). In other words, since ancient times the concept of penetrating men - the pathological logic of Middle Eastern society – has stayed the same up until the present: “boys, being not yet men, could be penetrated without losing their potential manliness, so long as they did not register pleasure in the act, which would suggest a pathology liable to continue into adulthood” (Afary 2009: 85). Once again, there is a very long history of the practice of homosexuality in the Middle East during the different ages, and it is still very common. However, it is the same in Morocco and Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and other Muslim countries:

The Western concept of “being” gay simply does not apply, despite the widespread prevalence of homosexuality. In place of the Western notion of homosexuality as a state of being, homosexuality is viewed as an activity which does not in any way “make” you “a homosexual”. It is this crucial distinction - between homosexuality as a state and homosexuality as an activity - that escapes those who look at sexual mores through pre-conceived models imported from elsewhere... [----] It suggests that homosexual activity is widespread in Pakistan but it is much more difficult to pin down as a category. Most of its practitioners, for example, tend to be married or eventually get married, and many of them continue to have both homosexual and heterosexual encounters as the occasion arises (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 36).

Therefore, where both partners define themselves as gay, B [bottom] and T [top] or V [versatile] is the recent modern conception, which has been developed and accepted in today's Western world but not in the Middle East or Africa - i.e. except for South Africa where homosexuality is legalized along Western norms, it has a huge post-colonial influence from the British-Dutch presence. Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe point out that there have been two modern homosexualities: the gender-variant/third gendered and the sexed being, represented by homosexual-based anatomical sex, regardless of who is more or less masculine or feminine. Basically, it identifies and builds the present Western gay sexual identity, which is simply undeveloped and novel in the modern Islamic world. However, the same identity is at least five decades old itself in the Western world, as:

The separation of gender variance and sexual object choice did not occur in medical-psychiatric discourse until the early Twentieth Century, and it did not become a widespread basis of self-identification until after the Second World War. Until that watershed, to be homosexual was to be a non-masculine man or a non-feminine woman, while [by convention at least] the "masculine" men and "feminine" women with whom one had sex were defined and defined themselves as "normal (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 7).

Many Muslim men do engage with and practice homosexual activity, but they never admit it. In front of their family and friends, they never talk about it but, if forced to, they do condemn it and oppose it because "they think it amounts to a man giving up masculinity to act like a woman, or involves a woman rebelling against her assigned gender to act like a man" (Kugle 2010: 234). The reality in Iran is, however, totally different from that of public opinion and its judgments. Because of the strict separation of the sexes (i.e. buses, airports and certain other public facilities which are separated among men and women) it is very common for men to hang out with men, and women with women. This is why no one will be surprised on the streets when in public two men walk hand in hand (it is very popular among soldiers) or hug and kiss one another. This is a way of expressing the highest level of friendship, which is reciprocal and in some cases does turn over into a sexual thing:

I was really happy to meet Kayvan and Noushzad: they looked so sweet and happy, always holding each other's hands, which is very normal in daily Iran: guys hold hands when walking if they are good friends, as do girls, so I guess this is very convenient for gay guys... [----] in the Western world, we would just appear to be a homosexual couple, but here we just look like very close masculine friends - possibly even homosexual - but no one really knows or needs to know about it, because even if we look so sweet walking hand in hand, no one will suspect our homosexuality: it is simply taboo in Iran and so it is simple but difficult at the same time. (Field notes #9, recorded in Tehran on Friday, 27 and Monday, 29 of August 2011)

However, once done, it is forgotten about and never talked about again: Foucault points out in his book *L' Usage du plaisir* that "in sexual relationships, you can penetrate or you are penetrated... [----] If you have friendship, it is difficult to have sexual relations" (Afary & Anderson 2005: 154). Just as Kayvan mentioned to me in Tehran, "sometimes you can get any guy you want to fuck with," no matter if he is straight or much younger than you, because he is in possession of a sexual need and, if you are too, then most likely both of you want to do it, as pre-marital relationships between men and women are strictly forbidden and highly monitored by the Morality police (The Economist 2010). Accordingly, the only possible sexual object would be a masculine representative standing next to you, just as Stephen O. Murray together with Will Roscoe argue in their essay collection in the book of Islamic homosexualities, that:

Every man in Iran is involved in male-to-male sex, because premarital [heterosexual] sex and sex outside marriage are not only a sin, but they are also very difficult [to find] while being gay and having a gay identity is a Western phenomenon. Iranian men act in a very cliché [d] male/female role. One is either the active or the passive partner, but all men are involved in male sex (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 18).

This is the reality in the Islamic Republic that I have discovered, as there was no one day that I would not get a verbal or visual (eye contact or gaze) invitation to have sex with someone. My partner, who came to visit me in Tehran, described it as a constant attention that leads to a direct invitation that he had never experienced before anywhere. That is why for

ages the Middle East was considered a paradise for MSM - legally or illegally it had always existed. Indeed, even from the religious point of view you are allowed to enter half a finger into your anus to clean it with water after defecation and possibly experience anal lust. Just one hundred years ago, the same anal lust, which could turn into the sexual deviance of a willingness to get fucked by other men, was understood as epidemic and socially deformed, sometimes called the disease of *ubnah*, caused by sperm which if:

Deposited in the anus produces infections that lead to an itch that requires penetration to alleviate it. The infection, however, can spread to the penis of the penetrator and then to his anus, rendering him also a passive homosexual... [----] *Ubnah* is not an incurable disease, but rather it “is one of the easiest diseases to treat and the closest to a cure”... [----] few medieval cures, basing themselves on Hippocrates and on a modern reference following 1925, include a dietary regimen with certain herbs and oils that can be combined and wrapped around a stick and then “inserted in the anus where [the afflicted man] rubs against it momentarily” and waits until it kills the germs (Massad 2007: 258-259).

One of the biggest differences between West and East [Oriental] is the demand for approval of gay identity *de jure* and respect, while the Oriental point of view is completely different because of traditional hetero-patriarchal family values, even if gay identity *de facto* exists. Understandably different, both in the Arab and Persian worlds, is the dependence on the family and a *must fulfil straight family role*. However:

As long as they do that, they are free to do whatever they want and this is not questioned. And, since nobody talks about homosexuality, they don't have to fear somebody is going to say this - or even think that this is about them. It's very strange to have men come up to you in bars and show you pictures of their kids and then say, “OK, let's go [have sex] now. To them, being gay is a sexual thing. It's not emotional. And the tiny minority who do see themselves as gay in the Western-sense - as loving men - are frustrated; they feel oppressed the most. The rest of the men are very comfortable. They think it's the best of all possible worlds. Since nobody recognizes homosexuality as even existing, they can get away with things we cannot get away

with here. But if you start talking about homosexuality, they get very uncomfortable (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 17-18).

4.2.2 Active or Passive: Who is Who in Different Worlds?

It is necessary to remember that sexuality in the Islamic world is wears an anti-modern and sometimes holy character - it is always pure or impure. Moreover, marriage [pure] and sex [impure] are separated, because marriage can be seen as a commercial and social transaction, while sex is an act of hygiene and a release of tension, undiluted and not followed by emotions and sentimentalism, where love and emotions are *non-grata*, after which the object of impurity [whoever got fucked] is more likely to be thrown “away like a dirty sheet - a quasi-magical source of contamination...[----] eliminating the fucked one after the act; he denies all importance of the act and declares it to be free of sentiment. At once, he rushes to the shower as if fulfilling the washing of Islamic ritual” (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 27). Another no less important lesson which should be learned is that of *role labels*. In the Muslim world, just like in the Hellenistic world, because of the modification of older behavioural patterns, to “play” an active or passive role in sex there was a big difference. Activity, but not passivity, was admitted as a masculine sign and, in *The Care of the Self*, in *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 3, Foucault emphasizes the relationship between masculinity and self-mastery: “the penis thus appears at the intersection of all those games of mastery: self-mastery” (Afary & Anderson 2005: 151-152). Similarly, Islam would disapprove “both of the active and the passive; but people tend to accept the *luti*, since he acts as a strong man subjugating a non-man...” in other worlds in the male-male sexual act, only buggering is committed and it is only between higher and lower, or *them* and *us*. This is simply because, for them you are, just like Gianni De Martino points out in his observations from Morocco:

Just a hole, just a possibility of quick enjoyment - no reason to take care...[----] in the eyes of the Oriental even many European male tourists appear to be feminine; their white, soft skin and polite urban behaviour make them less virile. To bugger ‘whites’ is especially psychologically attractive because, on the one hand, they represent the rich, strong, exploiting West and, on the other hand, they are strangers, i.e., weak and helpless (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 29).

Meanwhile, Foucault saw moderation go hand-in-hand with passivity coming from masculine-feminine opposition: “moderation is given an essentially masculine structure.... Immoderation derives from passivity that relates to its femininity” (Afary & Anderson 2005: 152). To get buggered is to admit of being immoderate or in a position of submission/weakness; to be a man of non-mastery and self-indulgence which would correspond with a man who could be called feminine, in this case: *the West*.

Most adult children in Iran live together with their parents and will do so until, finally, they get married. Very few Iranians can afford to live separately from their parents and, according to the *Lonely Planet*: “The monthly rent for a two bedroom flat is about US\$450. Compare that with the US\$120 a mid-ranking civil servant earns each month and you begin to understand why almost single people and many young couples still live with their parents” (Ham, Burke & Carillet 2006: 183). It was unheard of that children would live separately from their parents, but in our days it is more acceptable, at least in the capital Tehran. Parents devote themselves to their children who are grown up so much, that it would be considered pathological in the West. Moreover, the question of love is not important in the family’s eyes, because sometimes love has to be abandoned in the name of traditional family values, as your family hopes, because for them (and society) is not important if a couple loves each other or is satisfied sexually. What is important at the end is that they breed well. This was the case for one of the participants in this research - Jalil, whose boyfriend had abandoned him for a girl, despite their being in love with each other. His ex-boyfriend is going to get married according to the wishes of his parents:

He had boyfriend for three years until they split, because he was going to marry a girl, chosen by his father and family. The guy was getting 32 to be-years-old and active partners get married usually after some time playing with men (or boys), because most of them are bisexual and it’s their duty at the end to marry. Jalil told me that he was not the only one. He knows many gay guys who are tops - active (who do not call themselves gay) or bottoms - passive guys, who have to deal with the same problem. Around 80% had been left by their active partner and gone to marry a woman in Iran. It is not necessary that they were in love, but they got married because of the family and Muslim traditions. The active partner usually leaves his masculine passive partner because he has too, even if they are both in love. Jalil told me that

because of gender segregation in Muslim countries, society becomes very gay from the beginning. Many straight guys, because of the lack of availability in having a girlfriend and in order to gain access for sex with a feminine partner, choose bisexuality as the solution to the problem as to go for vacation and to hang with a masculine “friend” is much easier than with a girlfriend. No one will stop you or ask you any questions, as this is normal in Middle Eastern society, where guys hang with guys and girls with girls. It is OK for a guy to have sex with a guy if he only tends to be a top. To be a top is to preserve your own masculinity, to continue to fuck and not to get fucked, as only women can get fucked but not men, especially Muslim men. To get fucked for a man is to get lower, or to the same level or standard as is a woman’s level - that’s why top men or bisexual men are never blamed, because they simply belong to MSM (men who have sex with men) or men with homosexual behaviour and experiences; meanwhile bottom guys are the ones to blame for bringing this kind of behaviour or for letting top guys to do them... [----] Meanwhile we talked; Jalil was driving over and over again along the same spot that I drove with Bahman. It’s an alley Vali-e-Asr, close to N. Park⁵, the first and the most important gay cruising area. It is illuminated by big blue light bulbs and many cars pass by, going back and forward. The government, of course, knows what is going on here, just as they know about Manjam.com where Iranian gays meet, date and chat etc., as their computer IDs are registered and the government can monitor who is going on Manjam.com, where they live and so on. Jalil told me that at various times when he tried to get a better job or apply for farther education in Iran (like a Ph.D.) he was refused, because he is gay and they know it. To have a homosexual/gay with the highest education or being in some high position in a governmental office would be a big danger for the Iranian Islamic regime... [----] Of course the governmental institutions know what the guys are doing in N Park and its surroundings, which is perfect for cruising, and they are trying to do everything in order to stop them - i.e. the park is full of special Islamic police officers (who are not just a park police in their uniform) - who are dressed just like anyone else, but are from the secret police. Their simplest action is to arrest someone for being there and call his parents by letting them know that their child was arrested

⁵ The real name of the place is changed for security reasons.

at the gay place; this experience isn't so pleasurable, rather it is shameful, and therefore not everyone dares to cruise at N. park. Moreover, anyone can easily get robbed or even beaten up by anti-gay hooligans or Basij militia in some places. (Field notes #6, recorded in Tehran on Tuesday, 23 of August 2011)

In the case of someone's homosexuality, of which no-one is aware of, again it is ok if it is practiced, but only if it is kept private and discreet. Then, it will be tolerated:

The "moral" issues of two men having sex do not arise in and of themselves as they do in the West... [----] Pragmatic accommodations to individual tastes must of necessity be worked out discreetly.... [----] In most social situations, the direct discussion of homosexuality is strictly discouraged.... [----] In this environment, a homosexual sex is uninteresting since it neither creates children nor adds the potential of children to the family's resource base... [----] "Gay" implies a legitimisation of a relationship that runs counter to the family... [----] Unlike the fag-bashing response to same-sex relationships in the West, there is little such behaviour here" (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 277-278).

The roots of normal life run so deep in the blood and its traditions that any other way of life is impossible to imagine. The problem with this lifestyle is that this is not a model and nor it is a choice of life - it is the only way of life, recognized and accepted by Muslim society:

As Jalil pointed out, first of all, this is not a fault of today's Iranian government, but rather a fault of a society which can be changed only with some kind of Renaissance such as appeared after the Dark Ages in Europe, even though he agreed that if, before the revolution, the situation for LGBTs was difficult, it became much worse afterwards. The Western term GAY, just as I suggested, can hardly be used here. In the Middle East, and in Iran as well, it depends upon your role in bed, whether you are going to be stamped as gay or not. The difference with the Western world is such that even if you don't agree or are ready to come out of the closet, you will be taken out and marked as gay as if you were bottom. To my question about the

versatile role, Jalil responded that such a thing is rather uncommon here and that you become a *T* or a *B*, with *B* meaning that you are gay, something shameful and Western. Meanwhile *T* can be proof of a showing off of a man's super-masculinity, as he does not only women but men as well. (Field notes #6, recorded in Tehran on Tuesday, 23 of August 2011)

In this case, so many guys who happen to have a partner prefer not to make a commitment about their homosexuality, as this would just embarrass them and destroy their relationship by bringing shame to the family. That's why if two lovers are living together, first of all they have to "justify their intimacy": *I know him because he went to school with my brother, and he needed a place to stay, so we are living/renting together* (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 278). Otherwise, because of the lack of privacy, it is very difficult to maintain a relationship which is out of the norm for Islamic society. Nevertheless, Iran is (just like other Muslim countries) a very male-dominated and homosocial society and for guys to meet it is more than easy. Men can be found everywhere: in parks, baths, streets and shopping malls. All of them are potential places for a pick-up and a fuck if a private place is available, otherwise the public place has to be chosen very carefully. Majid told me that once he picked up a guy who wanted to have sex close to an embassy. His motivation was so that no policemen would ever get the idea to come and look for them having sex there. In some cases, the passive partner finds anal intercourse... [---] more acceptable than fellating the other man... [---] This is in part due to the special significance of rules of cleanliness that are a part of the Muslim tradition; the genitals are "unclean", hence it would be improper to suck or swallow semen or ejaculate (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 280). This is not a general rule, and many young guys in Iran do everything because Internet education concerning sex is widely available; it just shows the domination of the religious doctrine or *Islamic fundamentalism*, which limits the right to freedom of a Muslim because of his religion and, moreover, men's ability to be sexual in the way they choose. In other words, the psychology of homosexuality in Iran and the Middle East is - despite the tenderness, deep friendships and affection, holding hands when walking and kissing *being seen as a good thing*, it has nothing to do with *Western gayness* or *homosexuality*, as we have to remember that there [and not here]:

All sexual release is of the "pragmatic" variety, which assumes that the male [as a sexual animal] needs release before [or in addition to] marriage. Such needs are

frowned upon, but accepted. What is totally unacceptable is for those outlets to act as a long-term substitute for the duty to bear children, or for a special feeling to develop between two men that preclude marriage and the bearing of children (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 280).

In this chapter, I have been talking about homosexuality and its understanding and acceptance in two different worlds: the West and the East. Where the West supporting an individual's own choice of identity, by accepting it and, even more, expressing it, the Eastern model supports deeply rooted centrally-based fundamentalist family values and, without exception, the biological continuation of patriarchal family values where individual love is understandable only if it supports procreation. The same applies to sex, because it is not about individual pleasure, but rather about the prolongation of your biological family, which is everything. In Iran, just like in other Muslim countries, there is no social security or other Western form of benefits and, therefore, if it happened that someone became unemployed or sick, the family indeed becomes the only support. However, in case of gay sexuality, this is out of the question. Even more, one's ability to be taken back into the family is equivalent to zero. Of course, Persians are not Arabs, and this should be remembered (it is the biggest insult for a Persian to be called Arab or to name the *Persian Gulf* as the *Arab Gulf*), but in the case of homosexuality it occupies the same, non-Western model, which is very similar both in Iran and in other Middle East countries. Badruddin Khan notices in his anthropological research about gay life in Pakistan, which identifies with gay life in Iran that:

There is no "gay life" in Karachi, in the Western sense of the word: no bars, no newspapers, and few instances of lovers living together... [----] Pakistani society is based on very fundamentalist communal precepts, and the central institution is the biological family. The purpose of life, and its meaning, is rooted in loyalty to the family, procreation, protecting the family's honour and stature, and caring for its children and property. This results in lifestyles and social values that are not conducive to a gay identity (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 275-276).

4.3 Islam and Homosexuality

IN THE NAME OF GOD

THE COMPASSIONATE

THE MERCIFUL

Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe,

The Compassionate, the Merciful,

Sovereign of the Day of Judgment!

You alone we worship, and to You alone

We turn for help.

Guide us to the straight path,

The path of those, whom you have favoured,

Not of those who have incurred your wrath,

Nor of those who have gone astray (The Koran 2006: 9).

Many gays, homosexuals and MSM are confronting and dealing with the same problem, which is the disturbing their daily life by a lack of understanding or acceptance of their sexuality as it is. The question, which often remains unanswered (and if answered, then often with condemnation) is: “Does God really punish any individual, because of the desire to have sex with a member of the same sex; does the punishment have to lead to imprisonment or even be followed by lashes if not the death sentence, and later on burning in hell?” A similar question was (and still is) asked by their “brother” Christians, who were condemned and hated by the church in a similar way some decades ago. However, Muslim gay people are still, today, more religious in general than others and because their religion is not separated from the state since it has an explicit legal basis in the national law, much deeper problems have to be dealt with. In this chapter, I will talk about Islam, The Holy Script of the Qur’ān and Shari’a, the main Islamic law and the different interpretations of different religious jurists

in different regions affect Islam. This chapter will also investigate the close ties and clashes between Islam, as a religion, and homosexuality. The identity of TS will be mentioned in this chapter, because for the moment it is the only closed and possible identity available as a surrogate for the GBT community in Iran.

4.3.1 The Differences of Religious Approaches

There are three Muslim countries which officially accept male-to-male relationships as legal, according to the ILGA: Turkey, Jordan and Azerbaijan. Gays from other Islamic countries other than those three are behaving illegally and are unable to validate or value their identity as homosexual individuals; this is without even discussing gays from countries like Sudan and Nigeria, Somalia and Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Iran, where the punishment for sodomy is death (ILGA, n.d.). Because my main interest in this research was one of the countries where homosexuality is punished by death, namely the Islamic Republic of Iran, in this chapter the relationships between Islam and homosexuality are investigated. In addition, because Islam plays an important role in Iran, and it is a theocratic state both *de facto* and *de jure*, my aim is to discover both sides of Iran, first of all *on paper* or according to law, and second in its *reality*, which was grounded by the collected data and which showed the dual standards of the Islamic state. The reality does not match the law and, in most cases, it is the reverse.

Many gay Muslims are aware of being not merely humans, but rather also members of a minority (usually underground) group, which could alternatively be seen as a natural result of human diversity created by God's divinity and not therefore perverse, or else as something which has to be criminalized and punished. However, as implied by Shari'a law - which is shaped out of the Qur'an, the *ahadith* (plural of *hadith*) of the Prophet and the consensus of the jurists and the operations of legal reasoning - it does not correspond to the rapid changes of a globalized world under the impact of modernity scientific knowledge in fields of psychology, sociology and others has developed significantly since the ancient times. Later, the same *Shari'a* was allowed to compromise the ethics of the Qur'an and punish everyone who did not conform to those patriarchal norms, through conservative literal interpretations of Islam which still have their effect. For example, even in today's Saudi Arabia, women cannot cycle or drive a car even though the Qur'an declares the moral equality of men and women. Most of them - whose country is ruled by Islam - see homosexuality as an abomination and a

violation of the natural order intended by Allah for the whole mankind or as a form of Satan worship that threatens Islam (Kugle 2010: 30). To understand whether God really condemns and punishes homosexuality as the Iranian law does, we must look inside the Holy book of the Qur'an (which is the main argument of solidarity of those condemned and their belief in God, who is on their side and not that of those who believe that they are "gods" because of their own power and authority to punish the weak and oppressed who suffer, Kugle points out). Islamic liberation theology "talks about God" and works within Islamic traditions by supporting the oppressed and standing against the patriarchal and priestly elites who, for example, support male-dominated interpretations of the Holy script which very often are radical and conservative and which cannot satisfy every Muslim need, especially those who might have a different point of view or a different perception of their sexuality. An interpretation of the Qur'an requires proper interpreters but, being interpreted by humans, it does allow for misinterpretation by mistake or a desire to advance one's own benefit. Jim Wafer argues that in countries where Islam is the dominant religion, "equal rights for gays and lesbians are unlikely to be achieved by means of secular arguments that do not pay due respect to the sacred sources of Islamic culture, and what is sometimes "perceived as an attempt to impose the values of the former colonial powers" (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 87). Ironically, even if both Islam and Christianity did condemn homosexuality in their holy scripts, the legacy and heritage of the former colonial powers which created "*homophobia*, an ideology of hostility towards people who are homosexual, was produced by the Christian West. Homophobic influences in Arab cultures are relatively new, and many were introduced... from Western sources" (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 15). *Fiqh* if literally translated, means *understanding*, from which Muslim jurists (*fuqaha*) make their decisions upon which to base *Shari'a*, the Islamic law or Muslim custom. However, the law of God (the same *Shari'a*) was interpreted by different professionals (jurists or *fuqaha*) and that's why it has varied from region to region since then. The so called Maliki approach - after Malik ibn Anas and those who followed Imam's Maliki's motivation - later built the Maliki School of Law (which interprets *Law as Custom*) and his followers are the Sunni Muslims in North and West Africa, as are many Muslim immigrants in Europe. The other approaches accepted by the Sunni's, which are the majority of Muslims, were from schools of Law of *Hanafi* (*Law as Reasonable Analysis*), *Shafi'i* (*Law as Analogy*) and *Hanbali* (*Law as Dogma*). Meanwhile, among the Shi'a, *Jafari* is the common approach. The difference between these approaches are simply differences of interpretation of the *hadith* (which is considered to be the reported words of the Prophet Muhammad and are important because the Qur'an does not contain any

systematic legal code), as the reliance placed on *ahadith* (the plural of *hadith*) in general would differ, for example, between Hanafi's and Hanbali's:

The Hanafi school tends to be more wary of the *ahadith* than the other schools, with the result that its judgments are often more flexible. The Maliki School is also somewhat critical of the *ahadith*. On the other hand, the Shafii, Hanbali and Jafari schools – which generally produce the most conservative legal judgments – all rely heavily on the *ahadith* and... [----] can be criticized for reifying and idealizing tradition to such a degree that the corpus of *ahadith* is not subjected to rational analysis or content criticism (Whitaker 2006: 118).

When *ahadith* are not available, then a problem should be resolved differently: i.e., by the consensus of jurists on a particular ruling or issue (*ijma*) or else by *qiyas*, namely “analogical reasoning – used in Islamic jurisprudence to relate an authoritative ruling in a clear situation to an ambiguous situation, thereby making a new ruling” (Kugle 2010: 320). Anyway, the contents of some of reports can be very dubious because the authenticity of such reports are not 100% proven and might be dated after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. There is a clear confrontation between Muslims and *ahadith*, involving the issues “that did not exist in his lifetime: such as the Shi'a-Sunni schism, various theological 'heresies', and even the systematic collection of *hadith*. Reassessment of the authenticity of *hadith* reports is the key to legal and social reform among Muslims” (Kugle 2010: 119). Therefore, in essence, there is no any clear evidence in the Holy Script of the Prophet ever punishing same-sex acts, except *ahadith* where the jurisprudence might be argued, while on the other hand, to classify same-sex intercourse to a *hadd* crime would be difficult because in the Qur'an only “murder and highway robbery, theft and fornication between a man and a women, and a false accusation of fornication” are described as *hadd* crimes (Kugle 2010: 148). Later on, the particular crime was labelled as the act of the Tribe of Lot or sodomy and became distinct from heterosexual fornication or *zina* - illicit sexual intercourse between a man and woman. However, because the Tribe of Lot was originally punished by stoning by God (but for rape), this kind of punishment is very acceptable for many - though not all scholars - e.g. Hanafi jurists argue that anal sex between men can't be considered a *hadd* crime: “Hadd crimes, can only be those, specified in the Holy Book, therefore it is not permissible to add to any of the analogies.” The Hanafi point of view is such that any punishment of same-sex acts is a matter

for governments, and not for religious scholars to decide (Whitaker 2006). Meanwhile, Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, (a respectable Muslim elder from Medina) has had such a huge influence on Maliki that, according to his approach which is based on Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri, everyone committing the acts of Lot necessary: “to be stoned, whether he is married or unmarried... [---] this is the opinion upon which Maliki jurists base their decisions on same-sex intercourse. Notably, it does not involve any *hadith* attributed to the Prophet, but simply states what an esteemed elder of Medina said” (Kugle 2010: 146). Besides, there is a huge difference as to which interpretation is used, but the legal system of most Muslim states does not depend so much on *Shari’a*, as it seems to do: in some countries, it is *merely* a legal *source*, while in the others it is the *main object*; however, only one state officially follows the Islamic Law of *Shari’a* along the fundamental grounds influenced by the Hanbali Approach, and that is Saudi Arabia, which engages in a literal reading and interpretation of the Qur’an and *ahadith*; It is one of the few countries to execute gay men, in opposition to a hadith, attributed to the Prophet, which clearly states that only three cases can be punishable by death: post-marriage adultery, infidelity regarding Islam, and the murder of an innocent person; only Hanafi’s (around 45% of the Muslim population in total) view same-sex intercourse as a sin, but without any consideration of the possibility that this was the major crime against God. Meanwhile, Malikis and Shafi’is, Hanbalis and Shi’a Muslims of the Ja’fari school, have all urged that capital punishment by stoning to death for mature men who have engaged in penetrative intercourse should be implied (Kugle 2010). Today, Iran is one of those few Middle Eastern countries who execute homosexuals by implementing the death penalty because of the blind literal interpretation of the Qur’an. Indeed, this is not the one and the only facet that bothers Islamic scholars; left-handedness, like homosexuality, affects a minority of the population - or around 10% - leaving without explanation any reason as to what causes it, as it occurs naturally and without a choice:

Left-handedness, which some regard as an evil habit that is contrary to ‘the laws of Islam’... [---] Sheikh Munajid [a government-employed cleric in Saudi Arabia who was trained by the kingdom’s late grand mufti, Abd al-Aziz bin Baaz] continues in a familiar vein, citing various *ahadith*. Satan eats and drinks with his left hand, the sheikh says, and people who don’t eat and drink with their right hand are therefore emulating Satan.” Sheikh Munajid then provides the left-handed child’s relative with

the standard advice that Islamic scholars give for curing homosexuality, masturbation and a host of other personal 'problems' (Whitaker 2006: 144).

This is not the only example, as many similar ideas appear on Google on the Internet, especially from Muslim radicals who sees all gays as AIDS carriers and paedophiles, comparing homosexuality to alcoholism and drug addiction, which they see as eating society from the inside. Others, like the Islam City or Islam Online websites, which are the largest Muslim websites regarding Islamic law, are agitating for a cure of this "homo-sickness" by adopting the advice of local Imams. For example:

If a person has homosexual tendencies, he/she should keep them to himself/herself and not be outspoken about them with the general public. What Islam totally prohibits is the actual homosexual sexual acts, whether between gays or between lesbians. A Muslim who has sexual feelings towards another person of the same sex should at least do the following: 1. Ask God to help him/her to get rid of the feeling and overcome the problem, 2. Be patient and never get physically involved with a person other than his own wife [if he is a man] or her own husband [if she is a woman], 3. Seek medical advice to first diagnose the problem [whether physiological or psychological] and then correct it through appropriate means. 4. Seek religious help from a trusted and qualified Imam if deemed necessary. Thank you for asking, and God knows best (Whitaker 2006).

If this doesn't work and struggling against homosexuality does not meet with progress, different but "good" advice can be received from Islami City, where they explained that while indeed sinful, homosexuality is nothing else but a sexual act between two members of the same sex. However, if a homosexual person with homosexual intentions did manage to transform his desires into a struggle and somehow challenge to overcome it by physically not committing it, then Allah will reward him in full (IslamiCity 1997).

4.3.2 TS Surrogate Identity Rather than Homosexuality

It is very possible that your reward is going to be sex change operation if, in Iran - as one of the very well-known clerics of the Islamic republic who wrote his doctoral thesis on sex change operations based on Islamic law, Hojatulislam Kariminia claims - “the right of transsexuals to change their gender is a human right” (BBC, n.d.). It sounds sad that the rights of other humans like homosexuals were simply forgotten in this, God’s chosen country. In short, more than forty years ago, Ayatollah Khomeini wrote a book where he issued suggestions and solutions to sex change operations for transsexuals provided by an Islamic mode of science and, today over only the past twelve years, 320 operations have been done so far. However, the discussions are completely separate from any discussion regarding homosexuals as it is not related, because homosexuals are doing something against religion which is unnatural. According to the Kariminia cause “it is clearly stated in our Islamic law that such behaviour is not allowed because it disrupts the social order” (BBC, n.d.). Even if this looks positive for the transsexual community, the question still remains: how many homosexuals, who want to have peace and a sexual identity other than gay, who would prefer to get a family, community and a culture instead of being executed by hanging, would have chosen to change their own sex? And how many of those operations are done forcibly? This question, like certain others, will be not answered directly - not at least in the Islamic Republic of Iran - but it is suspected by many that:

For the legal and medical authorities, sex change surgeries are explicitly framed as a cure for a diseased abnormality, and on occasion they are proposed as a religio-legally sanctioned option for heteronormalizing people with same-sex desires or practices... [----] recent international media coverage of transexuality in Iran increasingly emphasizes the possibility that sex-reassignment surgery [SRS], as being performed coercively on Iranian homosexuals by a fundamentalist Islamic government (Najmabadi 2008).

Furthermore, Afsaneh Najmabadi points out in her article regarding transexuality that religio-legal prohibition of same-sex practices assumes transexuality as a legal alternative for gays and lesbians, which is adopted by religious-governmental institutions and is important

not only for religiously observant individuals, but also for relatively safe semi-public gay and lesbian social spaces. As an example, take one pre-op FtM (female-to-male transsexual) who explains: “once I was diagnosed as TS [transsexual] I started having sex with my girlfriend without feeling guilty” (Najmabadi 2008: 25). This is basically a non-worst option, as classical Islamic discourse has categorized every human as either masculine or feminine, with the exception that in the case of hermaphrodites it is difficult to decide who is what. In other words, every possible TS can claim of being outside of knowledge at present, in order to gain legal status - like, for example, in Vali-e-Asr where I have seen many TS while cruising with Majid and, according to him, transvestites do really good in this theocratic republic, as the state supports them and pays for sex change operation, as the only one available and possible way to cure it (Field notes #6, recorded in Tehran on Tuesday, 23 of August 2011). One guy, identifying himself as gay and looking for a safe sphere would describe himself as being not sure about himself and his identity, whether gay or TS, while attending a TS group session (at the Social Emergency Unit of Welfare organization). However, the admittance of being GID gives him a legal status, at least temporally, which is better than nothing or being caught by security forces. Until discovering who he is, and if further passing through filtering - as it is necessary to segregate real transsexuals apart from misguided or opportunist homosexuals for SRS - he can be safe (Najmabadi 2008). In many such cases, SRS can only be recommended - if not required - but it can be too expensive, even if supported by the government. Therefore, for any gay, with a possibility of being diagnosed as TS, there is a chance to continue to be who he is. However, for both transsexuals and gays pretending to be them, life is not so simple. Even if he gains official and legal status from the theocratic state, he will be probably be rejected by his own patriarchal family: “my child was meant to be the star of the family. I counted on him to be something other than this” (BBC, n.d.). As many post-operatives notice, they have to live multiple lives in order not to be excluded from the family, playing one gender at home and another at work. Sometimes they really need to move to another town or neighbourhood in order to avoid a shame of a new kin, as rejection by the family is real and loss of job or education is so too. This is not the worst case scenario, as many of them get serious threats to their life, first by the government in case of their homosexuality, second (or both) from their parents when they try to solve a problem by being at least governmentally legal. Many of them, actual and pretending TS commit suicide, if they don’t simply get killed by their father or grandfather: if this is done for the purpose of family honour, it is not considered a murder by Iranian law (Iran Human Rights 2008). Meanwhile, Iranian legal gender transitioning is not a simple path of gender bias, nor is it a solution for homosexuals in

Iran, as again the stigmatized and patriarchal society of the Islamic Republic will simply overthrow any individual of this kind, especially if it is MtF (Male-to-female) TS (real or fake), as the disparity of gender is very remarkable: to change from a man to a woman is more than a shame, it is simply to become lower than you were, because it is clear that culture in the Middle East associates women with passivity and, therefore, a male changing into a female for certain becomes stamped as a passive too in male same-sex practices. It is sad and ironical, but MtFs will “live forever under the sign of being *kunis* [literally meaning “anal”, but in Persian this connotes persons who are receptive of anal penetration], even though that is precisely what in many cases they are trying to disavow and move away from through sex change” (Najmabadi 2008: 31-32).

As this chapter has shown, the differences in the condemnation of homosexual behaviour strictly depend on the location of a particular Muslim state, a literal interpretation of Qur'an still is practiced in radical Islamic countries, where sodomy is punished by death despite the order of the Prophet Mohamed that only the crimes of adultery after marriage, infidelity regarding Islam and murder are punishable death. The other, more flexible Muslim states view same-sex intercourse as a sin, but do not consider this to be a major crime against God. Meanwhile, the Iranian dilemma of the false acceptance and use of TS identity is not the worst. Worse is that butch lesbians and effeminate gays fail in solving their sexual identity through “Islamic therapy”, because even in getting their new, desired sexual identity through becoming like the opposite sex and gaining a right to marry - becoming a *dream man* or a *dream women* - they get dismissed for being a “plastic surrogate” of a fake man/woman, as many post-operated TS admit. However, many gay guys do purchase their freedom in this way, keeping their gay identity instead of an activity, as well being left with freedom from persecution, even if only temporarily. At the same time, constant offences between Islam as a religion in fundamentalist countries and sensitive matters, like homosexuality in Iran or women's right to drive in Saudi Arabia, will only continue and indeed will amplify further until they explode.

4.4 The Legacy of (Homosexual) Life in Iran

For more than thirty years, the status of homosexuality in the territory of Iranian Persia has been marked as non-legal. The first Penal Code of the Islamic Republic was passed on October 12 1982, three years after the revolution, and based on *Shari'a*, the Law of Islam. It was not very different from a revised one in 1991, as the basics were the same: the punishment for sodomy is death. In this chapter, I investigate the Iranian legal system regarding homosexuality, where Islamic law is reviewed and compared among other Muslim states. Later on in this chapter, I argue about various facts collected by different NGO organizations, which show the Iranian reality and the amount of people convicted for different crimes and the number of executed Iranian and foreign (mostly Afghan) nationals.

4.4.1 The Punishment for Sodomy

Both the active and the passive sodomite [Article 140] must be put to death... [----] sodomy may also be proved by the testimony of four trustworthy Muslim men who must have seen the act... [----] the testimony of women, Jews and men of ill repute is not valid [Article 148]... [----] the rubbing of the penis between the thighs or buttocks without penetration [tafhid] shall be punished by 100 lashes for each person; but if the 'active' man is non-Muslim and the 'passive' man is Muslim, the non-Muslim will be condemned to death [Article 152]. Bringing together or putting into contact for *zina* or *liwat* shall be punished with 70 lashes for a man, 75 for a women and exile for a period determined by the judge [Articles 165-168].

Today, all Arab states excluding Lebanon declare Islam to be the religion of the State and *Shari'a* as being the core of the law of the Sate. However, because of their colonial past, many Islamic states have a legislative system influenced by the law of Western countries: e.g. modern Libyan Law has French, Egyptian and Italian influences; Kuwait, Qatar and Oman are influenced by Britain; Algeria, Egypt and Turkey – French. The so-called Napoleon Penal Code is very famous and was based on the principles of the French Revolution - it saw no

distinction between heterosexual and homosexual patterns of intercourse. Almost all Islamic states today punish sodomy and lesbianism by a fine or imprisonment with hard labour, depending on the country. In Libya, Article X of its Penal Code mentions that, for example, with regard to homosexuality a “Western ‘modern’ legal procedure must be followed, not the stricter *Šari’a* rules.” Meanwhile, the Lebanese Article nr. 534 only “makes sodomy punishable with imprisonment not exceeding one year,” but by way of contrast, in Saudi Arabia, “a non-Muslim who buggers a Muslim must always be stoned to death” (Schmitt & Sofer 1992: 131-146). It is no secret that the Islamic Penal Code of the IR of Iran killed thousands of homosexuals immediately after the 1979 Revolution, and it is continuing to kill many gays, as:

The International Lesbian and Gay Association [ILGA] estimated that from 1997 at least 800 Iranians were executed on charges of sodomy. Most were said to be paedophiles and murderers, despite the dubious veracity of such accusations. Others were political dissidents, falsely labelled as homosexuals. The number of people executed for engaging in consensual adult homosexual acts remains unclear (Afary 2009: 287).

Amnesty International suggests that offenders of sodomy were not always proven according to *Shari’a*, which requires the oral testimony of four eye witnesses (only trustworthy Muslims) that have seen the key hole entered by the key. A false accusation is punished by the law. Islamic law as based on the faith of Islam describes the role of eyewitnesses as an offence and the “police are not allowed to go in search of possible sinners, who can only be caught red-handed, and not behind the “veil of secrecy” of closed door. In a way, concealment is advised, because to disclose a dreadful sin would be a sin itself” (Murray & Roscoe 1997: 15). The reality, however, is very different and this part of Islamic law is equivalent to empty words as many homosexual individuals in the country disappear regularly (e.g.: kidnapping of the neighbours of Noushzad - a gay couple - who used to live in the same block as he still does:

He was right; he had 40 partners and had never got caught or got into trouble. But he was right only as he got lucky. As distinct from his experience, Kayvan

explained to me that gay life in Iran is a lottery. The Vikings lottery, which is played every Wednesday in Scandinavia and the Baltic States, explains it simply. Someone got lucky with winning a golden pot... The Iranian version on this lottery would be: who will be lucky not to get killed this Wednesday or Saturday? The facts come from the lips of an Iranian queer who lived in the same building block as two other gay guys who, six months ago, simply disappeared. Sometimes, someone gets unlucky and the secret police (the Basij Militia) begin to follow him. They do this until they are sure about him and, meanwhile, his every movement is recorded. They don't need to provide a warning to break into his house; they simply break in and do what they want or need to do. Those gay guys just disappeared. No one knows where they are today, as there is no information available on how many people get executed every day. They might be tortured or raped and locked away somewhere in one of the overfilled Iranian prisons or simply left for dead. (Field notes #9, recorded in Tehran on Friday, 27 of August 2011)

Unfortunately, this law is not only written, but in its function too and when crimes are judged by *Shari'a* - whether it be drug dealing or rape, kidnapping or armed robbery, or the crime of *lavat* (*liwat* in Arabic) - it will usually carry a death sentence. Since March 2011, 173 persons were executed via the death penalty (Inside of Iran 2011). More worrying is that reality is much crueller than the imagination would allow. Basij secret agents are sufficiently clever to lure someone into their traps, as happened with Amir, a 21-years-old guy from Shiraz, who was meeting men through gay chat rooms. Luckily, he was only sentenced to 175 lashes. Meanwhile, Mokhtar (24) and Ali from Gorgan were publicly hanged on November 13 2005, as the Tehran Daily reported (Whitaker 2006: 127). This marks just a little part of all the death sentences that Iranian clergy imposes on a regular basis but never reports (N.B.: many executions occur during Christmas and other Christian celebrations in order to draw away the attention of the West and many people wait for their trials for many years in domestic prisons for a possible crime that they have never committed). As I heard during my last visit to Iran, when I asked if they (the legislative system) could prove that those guys, the nineteen year old named



Figure 2 Ayaz Marhoni and Mahmoud Asgari just before hanging (ExecutedToday 2005).

Ayaz Marhoni and the eighteen year old named Mahmoud Asgari had been a couple who lived together, the answer I received was that no proof was needed. They had fabricated a case involving a thirteen-year-old teenage boy whom “they raped”. The couple, who lived openly as gay, has drawn too much attention for such a conservative and holy place - as they were from Mashad - and, therefore, in order to teach others, they had to be killed (IRIN 2005). Indeed, according to the International Gay Guide of Spartacus from 2011, on a page on Iran, the situation did improve if we compare it to an older report on Iran from 2001 (see the beginning of this thesis):

Homosexuality is illegal according to Article 110 of the Penal Code. The Deputy Attorney General of Iran declared in October 2008 that judicial authorities would put a moratorium on the death penalty for juveniles. The moratorium will take effect immediately, with plans to seek final parliamentary approval. A ban on juvenile execution would be an important human rights development for sexual minorities where often young Iranian men have been executed as juveniles after being charged with sodomy and other sexual crimes. This is a positive step towards improving human rights in Iran. Historically, Iranian courts have interpreted Article 49 of the Islamic Penal Code in a way that allows them to impose the death penalty on children. Although Article 49 states that children are not criminally liable, judges often use

existing laws to define the age of adulthood as 15 for boys and just 9 for girls. In June 2010, a prominent Iranian lawyer Mr. Mohammad Mostafii reported that there are about 100 young people in Iranian jails waiting to be executed for crimes they committed as juveniles. But a recent announcement by the judicial authorities defines juveniles as those under the age of 18, and says that the maximum penalty for all crimes committed by juveniles is life in prison, which can be reduced to 15 years in jail with parole. The change comes after significant opposition to the death penalty for minors was voiced in Iran itself. The Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi has been an outspoken critic of child executions, speaking up against this inhumane practice at national and international forums and presenting juvenile defendants in court (Spartacus 2011: 445).

Still, today, and despite the positive facts, in the contemporary Islamic Republic of Iran, the simple fact is that:

You can't trust anyone, not even your friend, as he can turn into your enemy and, as Hassan told me, the police are the last ones to trust here in Iran. Once, he was standing and waiting for a taxi outside a park. When the park guard asked why he was standing there, he just answered that it was none of his business, as he was standing outside the park territory. They got into an argument and Hassan called the police, who arrived after one hour. When he complained, they advised him to go to the station and write a complaint. When he did it in the police station, they accused him for the assault of the security guard, who was a governmental representative; moreover, the security guard had now seen him talk against the great leader of the Islamic Republic. After all, Hassan had to apologize and beg for forgiveness if he wanted this case to be dropped. This shows clearly how cases of accusation can be false and fabricated in the Islamic Republic, e.g. the case of two youngsters who were hanged publicly in Mashad in 2005 for living as openly gay, but officially for raping a boy... [----] The third case that Kayvan told me about was that of a guy who was tortured psychologically (as this sometimes works better) until they damaged his brain permanently by beating his head into the wall. Every gay guy of their age or older can tell a similar story, and so I guess that as you get older you experience more. Unfortunately, sometimes the brutality of the inhumane Iranian regime only increases

of chances of winning in the Iranian LOTTO of life or death... [----] That's why I would listen to his precautions, even if they were empty. Maybe there is nothing serious today in Iran as to being gay, many are, but somehow it warned me. Well, we could all admit that this was just my paranoia and fear, but was it only that? Why are people here whispering when talking, why do they always look around? Why, always, when I pronounce this word *gay* do they tell me to lower my voice, like it was a big and serious crime? (Field notes #11 and #9, recorded in Tehran on Thursday, 01 of September and on Saturday, 27 of August 2011)

Ironically, when I read news about gays being hanged and then when I see them dressed in tight sexy jeans and an XS (extra small) t-shirt in order to emphasize the importance of their sexuality, I can't stop thinking of this Iranian so-called *social dualism* which doesn't make any sense:

His tight jeans and violet shirt were totally non-Islamic, but as one girl told me: the government gives us more freedom before elections, which are supposed to be held soon. Anyway the moral police did exist and they have vans on the most important junctions of Tehran, Kayvan told me. They stop every person if they just suggest that his appearance does not fit the Islamic dress code or looks too *Lady Gaga: Western*. (Field notes #9, recorded in Tehran on Saturday, 27 of August 2011)

However, one really could suggest that this is the best way to express your own sexuality by dressing up and 'coming out', to protest against the death penalty in an oppressed country, which pretends to be a place of freedom and happiness based on the right "God's" ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

Dress code is one sure sign to other gay men of his sexuality. But, more importantly, it's a symbol of just how much the country has opened up for gay men in the past decade. These days, he says, gay men can be 'out' in the way they dress. If I wear a tight or flashy T-shirt, straight men just think I am trying to show off, he says, smiling. 'But other gay men know' (Whitaker 2006: 55).

This is just like my Gaydar (Daily Mail 2010) told me then in the park and in the restaurant that those guys were gay, and that this was the place where homosexuals gather and where I had to come back in order to make my research productive and valuable, such that:

I knew it immediately about their sexuality: they were dressed the same way I or someone else, who is homosexual, would dress. One guy, around my age was wearing a big, fancy watch, probably D&G or Diesel, while the other one, a bit younger than me, was dressed in a tight blue shirt and had a hardly noticeable pearl earring the size of nothing, but which was flashing in the light. Some of them were muscular, but all of them looked just sunny brown and gorgeous, absolutely similar to the Icelandic or any other nation's guys who would come to Barbara or Trúno: gay places in Reykjavik. (Field notes #8, recorded in Tehran on Friday, 26 of August 2011)

4.4.2 Facts that Talk



Figure 3 (Photo taken from Iran Human Rights 2012)

Amnesty International reports that the IR of Iran is second after China in terms of the number of executions of human beings in 2007 and 2008. In addition, up until August 25 in 2009, at least 318 were executed. At least 100 of them were executed immediately after the disputed presidential elections in 2009. Unsurprisingly, Iran executed at least eight juveniles in 2008, where “the age for criminal responsibility under Iranian law is set at 14 years and seven months for boys and eight years and nine months for girls, which is not only discriminatory but also low by international standards” (Amnesty International 2010). In its submission of its report to the Human Rights Committee on 17 October-4 November 2011, Amnesty International points to the case of Ayoub and Mosleh, who were awaiting execution in Piranshahr for taking part in and filming sexual acts between men; another case is that of three men, named “M. T.”, “T. T.” and “M. Ch.” who were executed under Articles 108 and 110 of the Iranian Penal Code for sodomy in Khuzestan province on 4 September 2011. However, no case of rape (fabricated or real) committed by them was reported (Amnesty International 2011). Another case, from 2006 in the city of Esfahan, suggests more than eighty people were arrested at a private party for immoral behaviour. According to the judge, they would be charged with the consumption of alcohol (which is forbidden by law and, if constant, punished by death) and homosexual conduct, *hamjensgarai* (wearing women’s clothes), when arrested. A year later, the Court of Esfahan found seventeen guilty of “facilitating immorality and sexual misconduct” and they were obliged to pay fines of 10 million to 50 million rials (equivalent to US\$1,000-5,000) while four of them received a sentence of 80 lashes for providing alcoholic drinks and drinking (Amnesty International 2011). I gathered information through my local informants during my visit in the Islamic Republic in August 2011, which confirms that:

The government can give whatever numbers of executed or imprisoned they like. The other case was with a guy from Shiraz that Kayvan met on Manjam. After some online conversations, he disappeared. Later on, he got to know that the same guy was arrested at some birthday party hosted by gay guys and crowded by gay people too. Many of them were locked up in prison for longer than for 48 hours, which is the limit under the Islamic Law. They were also tortured and raped, against the same Law. As one of my interviewers explained to me, the Islamic State would completely remove all homosexuals, just as they had done in the beginning, right after the Revolution, if they could. Unfortunately, this regime has too many problems on the

inside, which is eating away at them just like a cancer. (Field notes #9, recorded in Tehran on Friday, 27 of August 2011)

This report from Amnesty International indicates the case of the members of the Basij militia, where they were caught killing innocent people for suspected, but not convicted, crimes:

In Iran six members of the Basij militia were convicted of several murders in Kerman province from 2002 onwards. They had all watched a tape by a senior cleric, Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, who had issued a fatwa ruling that Muslims could kill a morally corrupt person if the law failed to confront that person. The six accused, all in their early 20s, described how they had taken their victims – two of whom were a married couple whom the killers suspected of having a relationship they considered illicit - outside the city after they had identified them. Then, they stoned them to death or drowned them in a pond by sitting on their chests. The defendants argued in court that they should not face *qesas* under the *mahdour al-damm* provision as they were following the directives of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi. In response to a request by the then Head of the judiciary for a clarification of the law, in 2004 the Supreme Leader replied that the “officers of the Disciplinary Force, Basij Forces and others who kill someone on purpose, and do this because they consider them to be persons whose blood may be shed with immunity [*mahdour al-damm*] or on the basis of preventing vice, their *qesas* [retaliation] verdict should be changed to the paying of blood money”. Initially sentenced to death for murder, their convictions were overturned by the Supreme Court in 2007 and the case was sent to the General Board of the Supreme Court, which sent it back to the Supreme Court in November 2009. In June 2011, the Head of the Kerman provincial judiciary said that the case was still open, although the last defendant had been released “on heavy bail” (Amnesty International 2011).

Another case of the arbitrariness of the Iranian authorities was reported by Amnesty International (2011) and appeared in 2009 when, at Mashhad International Airport, the Kyrgyz national Ulmaz Mamatkhanov was arrested on his way to Bishkek. He was subsequently found guilty of espionage and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. Other

sources suggest that he was tortured or otherwise forced to admit to the crime, leaving him without any primal consular assistance or access to a lawyer. Besides, I was personally warned by:

Hassan, who had told me that Iranians are not allowed to take pictures anywhere they want - even foreigners, can be asked to show their photos. Therefore, his advice was for me to send all of the pictures taken and all my written material to Iceland in order to keep it safe and to delete copies in my computer and my iPhone. Moreover, he had warned me that I should be very cautious with whom I talk to, as there is no knowing who is working for the secret services and who is not, as they are dressed like anyone else; however, the secret services knows who is staying in every hotel, as the hotel is obliged to send a copy of every guest's passport to their office, as Hassan's friend, who works as the hotel manager in one of the famous hotels, told him...[----] We have talked about gay people and their situation in the Middle East, but with Hassan we agreed not to say gay people, but rather G people, as someone could hear us. In addition, he had warned me that if anyone were to stop us on the street and ask us why we are walking together (Iranian and a foreigner), then we should answer that we have had met on the street and we are just talking together. I guess Hassan was much older than my other participants and, therefore, more careful. (Field notes #11, recorded in Tehran on Thursday, 01 of September 2011)

Consider the case of Ehsan, who got arrested in 2008 when he was 17-years-old, after some man had turned in a complaint against him and two others for attempting to rape him. According to the reports, it is suggested that he had been tortured for confessing the charges pressed against him, but that he then withdrew them later on in the court room where, after all, he was convicted of *lavat* and sentenced to death; one of the five judges of the court found him not guilty, but regardless of that fact and of the withdrawal of the allegations of the victim, he was enrolled onto death row as his death sentence was accepted by the Supreme Court of Tehran. Another story is that of Makwan Moloudzadeh, who was hanged on 4 December 2007 for committing the act of sodomy with three other boys when he was 13-years-old and who later had pressed charges against him. Later on, they withdrew them saying

that they had to lodge those complains because they were forced to do it. No further investigation of the false testimony was provided and despite of this fact he was sentenced to death just on the personal decision of the judge. When his conviction and sentence were approved, but somehow postponed by the Head of the Judiciary, Ayatollah Shahroudi for a review of the case, he was hanged three days later because of fault found with a verdict on the death sentence. His lawyer was not even informed about it, although it is required by IR Law. A girl, a 17-year-old [identified as Z.A.], was reported to have been killed by family member in Baneh in 2009 on 26 February in an honour killing for having same-sex relationships (Amnesty International 2011). Honour killings are still very common in Iran and, as a high ranking police officer confirmed, during the last seven months there had been at least fifty honour killings. However, “according to paragraph 220 of the Iranian Penal Code, if a father or grandfather [on the father’s side] kills his child or grandchild, he will not be convicted and punished for murder” (Iran Human Rights, 2008). The list can be longer and cases considered are just a few of many that somehow get recorded. But how many of them are not on the record? In a country where “God” is a DJ and the prisons are over-populated to three times their original capacity (235,000 rather than 85,000), the death penalty is maybe not the worst case scenario after all if compared with rape and torture or other cruel punishments such as amputation, where the opposite foot and hand are cut off in some cases of theft. At least twelve cases of amputation were recorded in 2010 for theft in some provinces of Iran. At the end of 2009, the head officer of the Iranian CID (Criminal Investigation Department), Asghar Jafari, claimed that Islamic punishments were very effective at reducing crime (up to 90%), especially the amputation of the hands of the thieves and “the law of *qesas* (retribution in kind) for intentionally causing injury, which allows the imposition of cruel punishments such as eye-blinding, although none is known to have been carried out in recent years, as injured parties usually accept compensation” (Amnesty International 2011). In addition, for such offences as enmity against God, the punishment is crucifixion, as allowed by the National Law. The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to lead the field among the most prolific countries in terms of the number of executions carried out each year. All the numbers of executions can only be supposed, as the Iranian authorities provide no official statistics on the death penalty. It may be acknowledged here that there are credible discrepancies between the number of people being executed understood in terms of the numbers collected by Amnesty International and the numbers provided by the Islamic authorities: 252 persons, while AI (Amnesty International) claims over 300, most of them being convicted for drug offences and many of them being foreign nationals (Afghans, at around 5,000) who were charged with

drugs offences and convicted to death (around 280) without a fair trial or right to appeal or even consular assistance. Meanwhile, two US nationals Josh Bauer and Shane Fattal were “only” sentenced to eight years by the Revolutionary Court, after two years of pre-trial detention. They were arrested for hiking along the Iranian-Iraqi border in 2009 and convicted “of “espionage” and” illegal entry”, during which they were denied adequate access to both their lawyer and consular assistance. During my visit to Iran, I clearly understood that any charges can be pressed against any individual (myself included) without any evidence or, if available, then most probably through fabricated evidence. One Iranian gay guy, whom I met in Tehran, told me:

Gay guys here are afraid of each other. They gather together, go to some places together, but they very seldom invite each other to their houses. This is for security reasons. No one needs to know where others live; and no one needs to meet another’s family, even if you are one of us... [----] This scared me a bit, again, and when the bell boy came with my washed trousers, which I delivered for washing in the early morning, I got a bit paranoid. This is exactly, I think, what the politics of the Iranian state want: to make everyone feel permanently in fear for their security and safety. (Field notes #8 and #11 recorded in Tehran on Friday, 26 of August and 01 September 2011)

Anyone in the Islamic Republic can be convicted of charges relating to national security, such as *acting against national security* or *spreading propaganda against the system*. This happened with the conviction of Ebrahim Mehrnehad (from the Baluch minority) and his brother Ya'qoub Mehrnehad, a journalist sentenced to death. In Iran, anyone could be charged with Audio-Visual crimes (Law since 2009 on Cyber Crimes) for accessing *Facebook* or *Gaydar*, which are just a few of the five million websites blocked or banned. The latest attempts of the Islamic government to curb the masses from browsing freely in cyber space, as reported by the IRQO, centre on the idea of creating a “Halal Internet”, which will strengthen the war between Iranian democracy activists, the USA and Islamic authorities. For gay people, this will simply mark the end of Internet communications (Iranian Queer Organization 2012). Nevertheless, the other crimes might include *apostasy from Islam*, as in the case of Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani, or the crime not being codified by law for the mere repeated consumption of alcohol is prosecuted with people being executed. Another crime, for

example, is that of *behaving homosexually*, though it does not fall under the criterion of serious crimes, recognized internationally under which death penalty might be applied, as Amnesty International continues to argue (2011). In the end, no matter what anyone will think or do or have to say, the regime of the Clerks/Mullah's of the Islamic Republic was/is used to do it their way, and if someone don't like it, they must keep quiet, since if not they will be sentenced just like the four (of thirty-two persons between 20 December 2010 and 1 January 2011) who were hanged for conviction of *Moharebeh* - war against God - in the second religious town of Qom (Iran Human Rights 2011). According to the IHR annual report, the highest number of executed people since the 1990s was reached in 2011, where 676 individuals lost their life following the enforcement of clerical authorities (Iran Human Rights 2012). As the Iranian Queer Organization (based in Canada and established by Arsham Parsi, who managed to escape Iran illegally through Turkey and then was granted asylum in Canada) informed us recently, "two young men who filmed themselves having sex have been sentenced to death by stoning in Iran, despite a moratorium signed between the European Union and Iran in 2002 to halt at least stoning as a punishment (Iran Human Rights 2008). The film was discovered on the mobiles of Ayub and Mosleh, 20 and 21-years-old, by agents of the Iranian regime in the Kurdistan city of Piranshahr (Iranian Queer Organization 2011). While the head of state, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad claimed with his very famous phrase that *there are No Homosexuals in Iran* (Mail Online 2007), my observation is that:

There are many homosexuals, all over Iran. Therefore, when the Iranian President Ahmadinejad says that they (Iranians) did not have them, he is completely wrong. In the evening, they (gay people) are cruising backwards and forwards, looking at everyone from top to bottom. They evaluate other guys for the night or maybe for a longer time. They investigate and research, as they are interested. They are drinking tea, smoking cigarettes, sending sms to people to make themselves look busy if police bother them with the question: why are they sitting there... [---] They look busy for the many eyes of the special agents and for themselves too... [----] As Sasha explained to me of his personal experience in Iran: if a Persian guy looks into someone's eyes for couple of seconds, then it is normal curiosity, but if this look is for more than five seconds, then it is simply lust and desire. In our case it was clearly the second. Many guys were interested in us. I felt completely undressed. Those black eyes have said

everything: this was really a 100% gay place, where homosexuals and gays, top and bottom, find each other. (Field notes #3 and #5, recorded in Tehran on Monday, 22 and Tuesday 23 of August 2011)

Meanwhile, the authorities' continue to block different kinds of websites, removing anti-Islamic blogs (over the past two year, 200 LGBT blogs were deleted) for one of the following reasons: by violating a server's code of rights, by a direct order of the Official Authorities, by posting immoral content, or by content contrary to the law of the country. Iran continues to hang and stone those whom "they don't have", or those who are a potential threat to Iranian Islam... Saghi Ghahraman, an Iranian writer and lesbian living in exile has noticed:

Living as a queer woman for over 50 years, a queer poet for over 20 years, and directing a LGBT advocacy organization over 5 years, I have been witness to the horror that the community in Iran goes through, every day, not only by way of murders and executions but in everyday life, of Not Living a simple, decent, dignified life which human beings deserve in the realm in the Age of Democracy and Human Rights. And I am not talking only about those of our children who are disadvantaged and deprived, but also about gay professors, TS engineers, lesbian and gay specialist medical doctors, gay and lesbian poets, writers, artists, journalists and more, of highly accomplished status, all working inside Iran, who are victims in the hand of a hostile set of laws, and are most vulnerable (Iranian Queer Organization 2011).

In this chapter, I reviewed the legal rights of the gay community in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which are practically non-existent. The death penalty is carried out regularly and applied not only to homosexual individuals, but to those consuming alcohol too, or those found guilty of apostasy from Islam or espionage. Facts collected by Amnesty International and Iran Human Rights and others show the brutality of the clerics' regime, which judges unilaterally anyone not fitting into Islamic frame of references, based on Khomeini's ideology. Despite daily monitoring, starting from the streets and finishing in cyberspace, the total denial of the LGBT community in the Islamic Republic of Iran by the authorities and the fear of being executed, the homosexual community will continue to cruise not only in parks

and streets, but on the Internet as well, even if a “Halal Internet” takes over the democratic means of browsing. There will spring up some other means to connect, just as my latest experience shows regarding the blocking of Facebook and Gaydar in this country. Ignoring the brutal methods of the Basij Militia and daily fear, many gay individuals, just like other democracy activists, will continue to love and to have sex, to think and express themselves in order to be who they want to be. But in Iran, daily caution is necessary:

Later on, he made him kiss his cock, meanwhile all of them (me included) were watching them and talking among us in order not to make any straight passer-by, suspicious of what was going on in that car on one of the streets of Tehran in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where homosexuality is punishable by law of death. (Field notes #8, recorded in Tehran on Friday, 26 of August 2011)

5 Conclusions

In summary, the following conclusions were made:

In light of the theoretical point of view regarding homosexuality in the Middle East, some facts speak for themselves. An expanding younger generation of contemporary gays in the Islamic Republic of Iran are most likely to support the so-called *otherness*, which might be translated and understood as the West in the Oriental world, especially by older and more conservative generations. The principle *do it but don't talk about it* is one of the basics of gay life in Iran, preferable and comfortable for many (especially married men), but not good enough for the younger Iranian gay generation, who do not remember the revolution, what caused it and what was the purpose of it. Young Iranians today lack an explanation of many behavioural patterns, such as premarital sex and veiling among women. Disqualification or the denial of the clear presence of homosexuality by the Islamic government in admitting human rights violations regarding sexuality are confronted by Gay International in an attempt to legalize homosexuality in Iran, and it will continue to do so. In regressing towards modernity over the last thirty years after Iranian Revolution, the obligatory heterosexual norms of behaviour and the *must* of procreation in Iranian patriarchal society makes open homosexuality and modern patterns based on the Western model impossible.

In the light of the historical impact of homosexuality in Iran, it is a fact that in comparison with ancient Persia, the situation has changed dramatically. Beforehand, homosexuality was practised openly by a majority of men, but today it is the subject of a shame taboo in society. Before the Revolution, people were much more tolerant towards homosexuals - they simply didn't care who was who. Today, Islamic politics are such that homosexuality is a shameful act and, if involved in it, no one should know about it, otherwise it means troubles (Field notes #11, recorded in Tehran on Thursday, 01 of September 2011). The situation of sexual minorities during the pre-Revolutionary era was, if bearable, changed into something unbearable with the Islamic Revolution. During the decades after the Revolution, many homosexuals were executed and continue to be executed today. There are no official gay places like during the Pahlavi era, and gays have to gather secretly. If positive

changes began in Iran in 1997 with the election of Muhammad Khatemi as President and his very liberal reputation, those changes were dismissed by the conservatives who succeeded in every election together with President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who pulled back many liberal political reforms. Since then, homosexuality continues to be practiced as an activity, but it is seldom admitted as an identity and so it must match common Islamic patterns.

In light of religion, if Islam tends to be a religion of equality, following a loving God, no one (including the clerical regime) has a right to judge, condemn or execute anyone because of his/her different sexual preferences, even if it is later justified by the “right” Islamic fundamental interpretation in the name of God. Thousands of homosexual Muslims deny this fact in silence, which simply proves that Iranians today live in society that condemns voluntary and free relationships between homosexual adults, but justifies secret paedophilia between family members or in seminaries, following the same common patterns of not volunteering for any discussions regarding contemporary homosexuality. In light of this social bias, Iran’s publicly admitted bias continues to support a compulsory heterosexual society with strictly patriarchal values. The situation will not change without any - at least underground - attempts to supported discussion and it will remain a closed circle where homosexuality will continue to be viewed as a transitional point of the same compulsory heterosexuality, based on pre-arranged marriage between members of the opposite sex by the same members of the patriarchal system.

In light of homosexuality in the Middle East and Iran, the difficulties that Iranian homosexuals are going through are not new in relation to gay rights, but the changes that are so desirable will be impossible without the support of the Iranian government, which has to either change or else adopt a more contemporary way of thinking. The chance of recognition by the authorities is a huge problem for Iranian homosexuals and it makes it difficult to come out to their family and friends by making such individuals illegal citizens (Jama 2008) who will probably be punished by the authorities or society:

One Iranian girl told me that as she knew, before she met me - *many gay, who were bottoms had problem to fuck, and that’s why they were gay*. Until her was explained (by me, foreigner gay) *that they (gay) had difficulties to fuck women, but not men and that’s why they are gay*; before open discussions about homosexuality will not get welcomed, Iranian society will not change. However this point of view (as it is today) is very comfortable for the radical Islamic point

of view, as it explains and fully confirms that being a gay is a sickness, but being a bottom gay is not only sickness, but as well is a sin and shame which needs to be punished by lashes, torture, rape and if continuing, death penalty by hanging in public. (Field notes #9, recorded in Tehran on Saturday, 27 of August 2011)

The young Iranian generation of today knows a lot about homosexuality from the Internet, with a high percentage of gays knowing everything about gay sexuality. However, the older generation keeps to a traditional point of view about homosexuality which considers it to be a sickness or abomination, with such an opinion supported by the government, viewing homosexuality as a Western parasite. My observations of gay life in Iran were concentrated on the capital, the best place to disappear and become invisible, which provided more possibilities and freedom when compared with the countryside. However, even those possibilities were limited or they depended on how they were socially classified: the lower or poorer classes will have no access to the Internet, i.e. to meet other guys or to have a free lifestyle, like renting alone, unlike some of my participants: Jalil, who could rent a flat alone, because of his good income as a civil engineer and Shahbaz, who is some kind of a plant designer (Field notes #10, recorded in Tehran on Monday, 29 of August 2011). To have gay relationships on Western grounds in Iran and most Middle Eastern countries is rather difficult, if not impossible. Every day is based on what people are allowed to say at work and what they are allowed to say at home to their family or else friends. The continuing stress and fear of this particular situation, makes every individual think twice before getting involved in a long-term homosexual relationship on the grounds of love, keeping them away from having a permanent partner, from being willing to find one or keep one. It is much more comfortable and easy to maintain a polygamous rather than a monogamous relationship. According to Hassan, most gay and bisexual men here were not looking for a stable partner, as it would cause a problem. It is much easier to have a sexual partner or two and to change them after some time. Most of the guys (just like in the case of Hassan with a soldier that he met once) will be interested in a short relationship on sexual grounds, as after a few months they get bored of the same partner and continue to look for a new one. Indeed, there are too many political prisoners in Tehran and the number is only increasing. The dissatisfaction against today's government gets larger and stronger every day, making the government simply incapable to removing everyone who is against them (with all Iranian homosexuals included) before it collapses in the near future, as no regime based on the death of human beings and

common citizens ever survives. This is my own experience, based on a Soviet country which is different from the Islamic state in terms of its propaganda, but similar in the sense that it threatens its citizens by imprisoning and executing them without paying any attention to their human rights or their choices, exercised by the free will of every individual. The situation will remain in a similar condition until it starts to change from the inside, just as Jalil pointed out. Namely:

None of the Iranian problems are in the government but rather they are in the society, which doesn't know how to change this government and has no power or strength to do it. He told me that everyone is just crying and complaining; that everyone is so unhappy and depressed - *but why me* - since why should they themselves do anything to feel better? I go to work or to university and that should be enough. The problem will not start to solve itself without every individual starting to understand that it begins with them... [----] I have to change my thinking and start to do something by myself in order to change this frozen society. Well, they tried to do it in 2009 just after the elections, where 3,000 were killed; unfortunately they were not strong enough and not many enough, again: *why me?* (Field notes #10, recorded in Tehran on Monday, 29 of August 2011)

In light of the legal status of the GBT community, various aspects of the data collected proved that Islamic governmental institutions are there to control many human's lives, which forms the core of the problem, regardless of any free will involved in adopting a gay identity. Instead, most of them become illegal citizens all over the Muslim world and, especially, in Iran. Because of the fear and danger to be revealed, the risk of death by execution exists in many cases, as that is the punishment for sodomy in the Islamic Republic of Iran (676 individuals were executed in Iran in 2011 for different crimes, as noted by Iran Human Right Annual Report). The Iranian LGBT community is very well hidden and it is almost impossible to be discovered by someone who is not gay and not much is known about homosexuality in Iran by the outside world. According to the *Shari'a* law, the supreme legacy of Iran, only an actual confession by four men who have observed a homosexual act can have any value as an accusation and real punishment; in reality only medical evidence of penetration is enough to punish homosexuals, either by lashing, hanging or stoning, depending sometimes on the "good" mood of the judge. Because frequent executions on the

charge of homosexuality continue on a regular basis, it has drawn the attention of the International Community: that is why, from being a pure homosexual felony, it has changed into a crime of rape on a homosexual basis, usually of the youth. If, at least in Western society, some time ago homosexuality was viewed as a tolerated perversion, in Iran the situation is much worse, as it is still viewed as a serious crime.

In general, until homosexuality is viewed as an identity instead of an activity (or both) which supports traditional Islamic sexuality, provided by the radical authorities, and until open public discussions are welcomed, the patterns of Iranian homosexuality will be based on the principle *do it, but don't talk about it*, and will apply according to differences of social class, where someone with a car and a flat will have no problem in being homosexual. Those facts only support my theory of the *Dualism of Iranian Homosexuality*, which will prosper as macho gays who play an active role in sex will refuse to recognize and accept the problems of passive gays as being their own problems, because of the simplicity of not identifying themselves as gay, but only engaging in homosexual activity, will prove the Islamic rule of playing: that it is an activity, not an identity, is a matter of fact. Some passive homosexuals prefer identity instead of activity and will borrow a TS identity which grants them at least temporary protection from the government. The patterns of dual homosexuality in Iran can be easily found, where discrepancies between *de facto* and *de jure* homosexualities are dinosaur-like. If, at least in Western society, some time ago homosexuality was viewed as a “tolerated perversion”, in the Iranian situation it is much worse, as it is still viewed as a serious crime. Until Iran somehow becomes more democratic, most gay people there will engage in an *activity* but not adopt an *identity*, and that's will be how they will save their masculinity from the disqualification caused by any non-reproductive sexual activity. In short, *do it but don't talk about it*, will help them to win a lottery ticket, which is so necessary for life maintenance in the Islamic Republic of Iran, instead of being executed. For some foreign gay visitors, this country will continue to be a “paradise”, while for some local gays it will remain a real hell. Finally, regardless of American NATO Imperialism, Marx was somehow right when he noted that there can be more oppressive regimes, than capitalism. At that time, he had no perception that communism, for example, could be identical to Islamic fundamentalism, which is close to Fascism. For me, all three of them are completely identical, as they failed the Foucaultian dream of utopia and the ideal. Instead, they have killed thousands of innocent people. Even though we, Westerners - or those from the Western point of view - do not have a right to judge other cultures, I am expressing myself from my own experience and the collected facts

of my very own queer position. However, in Iran dual life standards will continue to be very common:

We have switched on the TV and on the screen appeared not the depressing “Mullah TV” but rather the “regular” (Western standard) Persian TV ONE, sent from Germany or London I do believe, with Iranian women uncovered by hijab. It was so obvious that the Iranian lifestyle was so different if we would compare the inner and the outside world. Jalil told me that almost all Iranian people have such a lifestyle. What is seen in the streets, is not what is seen inside the houses, “otherwise how could we just survive here”, he asked me. We drank coffee and talked for a while about all kinds of music and Googoosh especially: the Iranian diva so loved by all and especially gays. This was the neutral subject to talk about. I have got this feeling that people were tired of talking about the situation in Iran, as nothing changes and it is much easier not to think... [----] the government, which started to take down satellite dishes, had found a new way of “preventing” people from hearing and seeing the other side of the Iranian regime. Namdar gave me very good example from the story of Oliver Twist, which most of us know well: he, Oliver grew up in an orphan house. He got food, he got clothes. He was very happy until he got to know the other truth: life can be different outside the orphan house. I think this is a very good example of the double standards of Iranian society today. On the other hand, regarding homosexuality, Iran has a long tradition of homosexuality, which can be found even in ancient Persian poetry, despite some modern Islamic scholars who deny this fact or twist it, very often referring the homosexuality of Persians to the bad habits of the ancient Greeks or Turks. (Field notes #2, recorded in Tehran on Sunday, 21 of August 2011)

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7 Appendix:

Abbreviations

GBT	Gay, Bisexual and Transgender men.
FtM	Female-to-Male Transsexual
GID	Gender Identity Disordered
IHR	Iran Human Rights
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay (Bisexual, Trans and Intersex) Association
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
IRQO	Iranian Queer Organization
LGBT	Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender men.
MSM	Men who have sex with men
MtF	Male-to-Female Transsexual
SRS	Sex-Reassignment Surgery
TS	Transsexual