

Contextualizing the Experiences and Intersections of Queer Migrants

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This research delves into the intersectionalities of queer experiences. Spotlighting non-Western, non-Eurocentric experiences is a necessity for re-framing how queer people are identified nationally and internationally. The reasons why queer people have fled or relocated from their home countries is put into context by differentiating between (illegal) migrants, immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees. The three contexts scrutinized are international human rights law, the span of violence across the world, and the intersectionality of violence and identity against queer bodies. This research digs into the question of how queer persecution has affected queer migration across the world. Besides studying current systems in place to hinder queer migrant people, this paper also emphasizes personal stories. For balance, my research also uses storytelling to share the voice of people such as Saleem, a gay man from Amman, who speaks on the ownership of queer Arab bodies and why he opted to leave his home in Jordan – which was for reasons other than fear of governmental persecution. Moving the paper forward, I include ways to create a better climate for queer inclusivity and community, including current projects, organizations, and initiatives that involve undocumented queer migrants, queer non-Western people, and so on.

Purpose + Proximity

The main question this paper seeks to explore is how queer persecution has affected queer migration across the world. I review information to discover this in three contexts: international human rights law, the intersectionality of violence against queer people, and the span of violence across countries worldwide. What I found is that queer persecution leads to forced queer migration. In 80 countries, it's a crime to be gay; in ten countries homosexuality is punishable by death (Bearak & Cameron, 2014). Viewing the world through a different lens is important in order to understand

anxieties that queer people face regarding murder and persecution. So first of all, what qualifies as queer? A few decades ago, “queer” was used as a derogatory term to refer to people who were lesbian, gay, bisexual, Trans, and otherwise. Queer was used as a pejorative term for all those whose sexualities and/or genders deviated from the heterosexual, patriarchal understandings of identity, attraction and recognition. I use queer to refer to all diverse sexualities and genders that are produced through the intersectionality of practices, identities, and institutions in all cultures (Jordan, 2009, p. 18). Queer refers to all who do not act as solely heterosexual, as well as those who are not cisgender, one who is not Trans or genderqueer. This research delves into issues surrounding the lesbian, gay, bisexual, Trans, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) communities, as well as men who have sex with men and women who have sex with women but who do not identify as gay. The term queer is used as a catchall for these cases.

This paper hits on three main areas: international law and queer migration, queer law and violence, and finally, solutions. The background of this paper overviews current international human rights laws and possible protections and loopholes in legality. This section also looks into the narratives of how people identify themselves and the pattern that can be identified within queer migration. How people identify themselves is part of the main thought of explaining queer intersectionality, and part of this is the violence faced by migrants via manifestations of detainment, deportation, harassment and injustice from law enforcement, and state-wide laws directed towards feeding queer prejudices. Next, the section “Queer Violence Worldwide” gives the reader direct occurrences of violence against queer people in states and countries around the world. The institutional violence described has provoked more queer people to be uprooted from their homes or communities. Yet to balance the negative effects governments have enacted against queer bodies, this section also mentions more affirming perspective from non-Western societies. Going along with affirming stories, in this section the story of Saleem Haddad surfaces, as well as the story of Diane Rodriguez – one who has chosen to leave their

country and one who has chosen to stay in their country. The final section of my paper considers recommendations and conclusions. In this final piece, solutions include a no borders concept, deterring queer deportations, and increasing queer inclusivity. It ends on a note of showing diverse organizations that work directly with undocumented queer migrants, as well as queer migrants of color, to showcase their identities and to continue sharing their stories and experiences.

Background

Around the world, some countries have the ability to degrade, imprison, and torture people who have sexual orientations or gender identities that counteract the norm – that is, the heteronormative norm. Queer identities in some cultures are usually those that clash with or are offensive to the societal norms in place. According to a 2015 United Nations resolution report, almost 80 countries have laws to support queer persecution. Of those, eight countries have instituted the death penalty for homosexual conduct, including Saudi Arabia (United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2015, p. 13).

Amnesty International USA supports the need to protect human rights of queer people, especially those living in countries where they are routinely persecuted, tortured, and degraded. Referencing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Amnesty states that “Human rights abuses based on sexual orientation or gender can include violation of the rights of the child; the infliction of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment (Article 5); arbitrary detention on grounds of identity or beliefs (Article 9); the restriction of freedom of association (Article 20) and the denial of the basic rights of due process” (Amnesty International USA, n.d.).

International human rights law is an important – but limited – tool for combatting these abuses, as many can equate to torturous conditions for less-than-heterosexual people around the world. Sir Nigel Rodley, former UN Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on the question of torture, addresses the content and meaning of “sexual minorities” and related terms and suggests how those

identities may relate to other categories recognized as particularly prone to torture. He argues: “Torture is an extreme but widespread means for regulating sexuality, and reinforcing gender norms” (quoted in Gupta, 2005, p. 277). The formal regulation of decrying alternative sexualities is produced in a legal framework to be upheld by brutal police regulation of public and private behavior (Gupta, 2005, p. 277, 299). Yet one downside for non-Western states upholding international human rights law and frameworks such as the UDHR is that many non-Western states have not signed on to them. Even within the United States of America – one of the wealthiest, most prominent Western nations – the government has failed to sign on to and comply with a number of “standard” human rights. Also, many Western powers drafted and adopted laws without any input from non-Western states. Their voices and cultures are not accounted for, and this has caused a great pushback against many rights norms and Western-supported ideals, including the UDHR.

The narratives of Western and non-Western cultures are also different. In Western countries, the idea of having rights, independence, and solidarity is important. Niche groups congregate and support one another to showcase pride and demand involvement and nondiscrimination. This is something that rings hollow in some collectivist and non-Western societies. The Western cultural lens on narratives of queer sexual and gender identities are all unique to how Westerners create a cultural identity to be bound to. Jordan (2009) points out that “the refugee system, implicitly and explicitly, evaluates applicants against expected trajectories of refugee flight and against Western narratives of LGBT identities...yet, the migration trajectories and identity accounts of queer refugees may not meet these expectations” (p. 3). In many other cultures, sexuality is private. What is done in private is not showcased in public, it is not advocated for, and it is not professed. Westerners may view this as being in the closet and/or being oppressed, but for other cultures this is just their functionality for interaction. Queer people in a culture which demonizes homosexuality could be fine with being “proper” in public as long as their private life is not interfered with. In some cases, the climate for advocacy to change this

situation is nonexistent are incredibly weak. Adding on to this, it is usually frowned upon when Western “saviors” appear to unleash pride and voice sexuality for those they view to be in an oppressive culture. This is counterproductive to helping any queer non-Westerner because they do not want to be ostracized from their community or family, especially if they do not identify with the “gay pride” of Westerners in the first place. In this aspect, sexuality should be welcomed and supported, but never forced or demanded.

Queer migration is crucial in understanding the different identities and injuries that can be enacted on migrant queer bodies. Queer migration is described as the movement of individuals within countries or across borders who do not fit in to dominant categories of heterosexual migrants (Mirhandy, 2011, p.55). The problems that queer people can face include homelessness, employment discrimination and/or denial, housing discrimination and/or denial, detainment, deportation, harassment and neglect from healthcare services, harassment and injustice from law enforcement, state-wide laws directed towards feeding transphobic prejudices, and more. With this violence, there is usually multiple intersections that an individual has, and all of these intersections can usually be discriminated against. Queer immigration gate-keeping is an occurrence described as the construction of a system that keeps out undesirables; in the United States, the concept of "desirables" in the immigration context is parallel to that of U.S. society in general. People of color, low-income people, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, people with infectious diseases, criminals, people with mental illness, and people without formal education “are marginalized in our society whether or not they are immigrants” (Gehi, 2009, p. 318). Gehi (2009) outlines the various intersections and identities of a migrant that can and will be discriminated against. The primary discrimination being that in society, and the secondary discrimination being those migrants who are trying to enter into the society. Countries try to shut out those who are poor, who are disabled, who are non-white, who are queer, and

so forth because these identities are already frowned upon internally, and that needs to be addressed in order to progress immigration laws.

Related to the idea of undesirables, there is a great stress placed on intersectionality when a queer identity has to do with gender. Trans and gender nonconforming people face a plethora of discrimination, persecution, and violence in cultures that assert dichotomous, opposing genders and norms for those genders. For example, a state of emergency has been called regarding Trans women: A Trans woman is slain every 29 hours, yet they make up less than 1 percent of the world's population (Busey, 2015). This number only accounts for reported killings, and only accounts for those reported who were correctly identified as Trans. To establish a basis of language, Trans explains people whose sex assigned at birth is not congruent with their identity. The sanctity of gender fluidity is being violated within varying levels of overt aggressive acts, such as murder, as well as micro-aggressions. Chad Griffin, president of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, brings to the forefront the overt violence and terror incited against Trans women, and particularly Trans women of color. He stated in a press release with the Trans People of Color Coalition (TPOCC) that 2015 has yielded the highest rate of homicide for Trans women of color. "At least 21 people – nearly all of them Transgender women of color – have lost their lives to violence. At a time when transgender people are finally gaining visibility and activists are forcing our country to confront systemic violence against people of color, transgender women of color are facing an epidemic of violence that occurs at the intersections of racism, sexism and transphobia – issues that advocates can no longer afford to address separately" (quoted in Human Rights Campaign, 2015).

Aside from local gains for communities, an important aspect of change comes from domestic legal reform – an important tool for fighting government repression. In Thailand, the Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558 was enacted in 2015 criminalizing discrimination against queer people by including sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity as protected categories. That makes it the first law to explicitly

mentioning homosexuals. The law stipulates that unfair discrimination to a male, female, or “a person who has a sexual expression different from that person’s original sex” will be criminalized, with the exception of education, religion, and the public interest (Mitsunaga, 2014, p. 1; Human Rights Watch, 2015). Also, the United Nations has been involved in “behind-the-scenes diplomacy” to give positive pressure for legislative reform, resulting in the number of countries that support protecting the human rights of queer people from being violated rising from 32 to 85 (Gera, 2016). Yet there is a difference between supporting varying sexualities and genders and demanding cultural support for varying sexualities and genders; the latter can easily be frowned upon, and receives pushback from some non-Western actors. Legal reform is an important step for combatting official discrimination, however. Jordan (2009) explains that “official persecution creates the means for abuses of power by police – and others in authority. Portrayals of homophobic violence instill fear, and this fear becomes embodied-constraining movement, enforcing social isolation, and fueling mistrust of others and self” (p. 171). Proposed laws in the U.S. states of Nevada (see Kellaway, 2015b), Texas, Minnesota, and Kentucky, Florida, and Missouri, for instance, would bar Trans citizens from using bathrooms aligned with their gender identities (Jordan, 2009).

Violence and discrimination against Trans people highlights the need for human rights protection. Between Jan. 1, 2013 and Mar. 31, 2014 the lives of at least 594 people in the Western Hemisphere were lost due to hate crimes (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2014). Evidence shows that gay men and transgender women were the groups most susceptible to lose their lives to anti-LGBT violence, rather than suffer from non-lethal violent acts to their integrity. Of the 594 murders, almost half of the victims were Trans women of color, and of this population 80 percent of all killed were 35 years of age or younger. Violence against Trans individuals, particularly Trans women, is the result of a combination of factors: exclusion, discrimination and violence within the family, schools, and society at large; lack of recognition of their gender identity; involvement in occupations that puts

them at a higher risk for violence; and high criminalization (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2014). For these reasons, many Trans women and other activists recently jumped to action to declare a state of emergency on their lives from their mere existence (Rawles, 2015). In Argentina, a country that now allows residents to self-identify their gender on official documents, the government used to have a standard protocol mirroring many other countries, including the United States. This protocol made individuals with an incorrect name and/or gender on identification cards and documents receive a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria and attend a court hearing in order to make official changes (Schmall, 2012).

Within the United States, some of the routes to achieving legal migration status are: marriage, asylum, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Each of these options include barriers, as well as potential outcomes. Marriage entails either both partners living in the United States or the partners being separated. If both partners are in the U.S. and they entered without inspection, they are ineligible; if they live in a place where there is no access to marriage, there is a threat of deportation; and if they live in a state which allows marriage, only then could they obtain a green card (permanent residency status). For asylum seekers, missed filing deadlines, being unable to prove fears of persecution, backlogs and court delays, and other factors can all put someone at risk of deportation. DACA can be an impossible path if an applicant is too old or is convicted of a crime of survival (Immigration Equality, 2014). The last point is especially important when dealing with LGBT who risk deportation; their risk of being hurt or assaulted increases due to non-heteronormative identities, but self-defense in these cases would be ruled as grounds for deportation. Notably, DACA has been made more accessible for those lower income migrants needing protection. The National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) saw room for opportunity to help queer immigrants with the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, passed by U.S. President Barack Obama on June 15, 2012. The program allowed undocumented young adults, called DREAMers, who came to the U.S. as children to apply for work

permits and relief from deportation. Many young people could not pay the application fee to apply due to employment discrimination and a family lack of income. NCLR collaborated with several other organizations and raised \$100,000 to fund nearly 200 LGBT DREAMers for the \$465 fee needed in order to apply and qualify (National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2016, p. 1). This fundraising and support relieves some of the strain that migrants with multiple marginalized identities usually have to deal with alone.

Part of the problem with migration, and especially in the case of illegal migrants, is the governmental targeting that can occur with detainment in jail-like conditions. Queer migrants are trying to escape persecution and mistreatment in their own countries, only to be thwarted with the same degradation in their new country. The Federation of LGBT Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander Organizations (NQAPIA) released a fact sheet on current immigration and deportation issues in the United States:

For the last two decades, the federal government has been pursuing an enforcement-first approach to immigration that prioritizes mandatory detention and deportation. The Obama administration is no exception: President Obama has deported more than 2 million individuals, and this number continues to rise. In November 2014, President Obama announced an Executive Order that expands relief beyond DACA to provide nearly 5 million people administrative relief from deportation....Even with this relief, millions of families will be left out and still face separation and deportation. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has intensified raids in immigrant communities, deporting thousands of community members, some of whom qualify for relief. (Federation of LGBT Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander Organizations, 2015, p. 1).

The United States Immigration and Customs enforcement (ICE) has acknowledged the vulnerability of queer populations in the United States, as well as their susceptibility to mistreatment in detention centers; however, this has led to increased use of solitary confinement as a solution. The National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) works with immigrants and LGBT rights by giving client representation, policy change advocacy, building coalitions across the community. The Center shared that “ICE released new guidance on detaining transgender immigrants. NIJC and a coalition of immigrant

and LGBT rights advocates welcomed these long-overdue developments but called on ICE to truly protect LGBTQ individuals by ending the policy to detain them” (2015, p. 1). Adding to that, NIJC stated that the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) ruled that detaining women and children who are seeking asylum constituted as an inappropriate use of resources, and NIJC asserted that queer individuals should be given the same dignity (2015, p. 1). Isolation removes individuals from their support systems and from connections which makes their usage as a catchall for trying to dignify queer people obsolete as well as counter-productive to their protection and well-being.

The National Immigration Justice Center (2015) outlined three major shortcomings within current detention procedures, which I quote here at length:

1. **“LGBTQ asylum seekers remain at risk:** ICE’s new guidance focuses on transgender immigrants, who face a one in three chance of sexual assault within 12 months of incarceration, according federal surveys. Yet, the need for protection of lesbian, gay, and bisexual immigrants—who also are frequently asylum-seekers fleeing rape and torture and also face shockingly high levels of abuse in detention centers—is not addressed.
2. **“Continued use of solitary confinement:** The guidance instructs detention facilities to more consistently identify transgender people, calls for more staff training, and allows for the possibility that some transgender women will be housed alongside other women instead of with men. But, the guidance permits the use of segregated units akin to solitary confinement as part of the screening process.
3. **“Lack of adequate implementation policies:** The policy requires detention facilities to refer to transgender individuals using their preferred pronouns, instructs officials to inquire about preferred first names, and includes guidance on who may conduct a pat down or strip search. This guidance is significant in that it begins to afford transgender individuals the basic dignity to which they are entitled, but it does not provide sufficient detail about the

steps that DHS will take to address and prevent the very real risk of sexual abuse that transgender individuals will still face in detention” (p. 1).

Immigration Equality (2016) interviewed their detention staff attorney, Clement Lee, about the normalization of deportation for incoming queer migrants fleeing incarceration and brutality in their home countries. “I’ve had trans women who fled Honduras, who fled El Salvador, tell me about being raped and being beat up. But the part where they truly break down is when they tell me about arriving in the U.S. and getting stuck in a tiny room in immigration detention,” said Lee (quoted in Immigration Equality, 2016). The increased policing of undocumented immigrants begins a cycle of ultimately becoming a prisoner when the individual was trying to flee imprisonment for their targeted identity in the first place. The duration of holding a deportee should be 45 days, including their court hearing and decision, but instead the usual time for being held captive is at least six months, and ranges indefinitely over years (Immigration Equality, 2016).

Solitary confinement is often viewed as a punishment, but ICE claims it is inflicted upon Trans women as a means to protect them. For example, Marichuy Leal Gamino, 24, is a Mexican Trans woman who was raped while in ICE detention, then placed in solitary confinement by officials (Kellaway, 2015a). Sharita Gruberg (2015) also highlighted incidents with ICE with insufficient responses to Trans women; rather than placing them in women’s facilities, ICE gave them three options – remaining in their current detention facility, moving to solitary confinement, or moving to a segregated facility for gay, bisexual, and Transgender (GBT) inmates (see also Attanasio, 2015). Trans women and genderqueer people are routinely targeted by law enforcers acting upon prejudice and assuming they are criminals in the justice system. There are no fair trials for transphobia (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2014). The Federation of LGBT Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander

Organizations (NQAPIA) shared a campaign named “#Not1More” to spotlight Nicoll Hernandez-Polanco, a currently detained Trans woman, as well as all other detained immigrant Trans women:

Nicoll Hernandez-Polanco, a transgender woman from Guatemala, is currently being detained in the all-male wing of ICE’s Florence Service Processing Detention Facility in Florence, Arizona. Nicoll came to the United States seeking asylum in October 2014 because she was the target of violent attacks, constant harassment, and discrimination in her country of origin. Unfortunately, at the hands of ICE, Nicoll is now being subjected to the same treatment she seeks protection from. In her first month in detention, Nicoll was patted down 6-8 times a day by male guards, who Nicoll reported would grope her breasts and buttocks, make offensive sexual comments and gestures, and sometimes pull her hair. In addition to physically harassing Nicoll, ICE staff routinely verbally abuse her (Federation of LGBT Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander Organizations, 2016).

The most apparent problem with these “solutions” for ensuring individual safety is that they all still support the persecution and targeting of queer migrant people, who are already a marginalized and vulnerable group. Gruberg (2015) reports that a study conducted by the University of California at Irvine found that 67 percent of non-heterosexual prison inmates reported sexual assaults, compared with 2 percent of heterosexual inmates. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics found that roughly 40 percent of transgender inmates are sexually assaulted, compared with 4 percent of all federal inmates (Gruberg, 2015, p. 1). The 34,000 beds that ICE has the opportunity to fill daily perpetuates their arbitrary quota, and thus queer immigrants will continue to be targeted and abused within detention facilities (Gruberg, 2015).

Queer Violence Worldwide

The fervor of queer progress and empowerment in the United States and other Western countries represents one end of a spectrum of rights, passages, and prohibitions. For residents of increasingly liberal and individualistic societies, the strides of marriage equality and non-discrimination acts have been huge victories. Yet this progress has not been global in scope. LUSH Cosmetics, a corporation that regularly advocates for social justice issues, asserts that “there is no country in the world

where lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender people have full equality – 2.8 billion people live in countries where living openly means sacrificing your family, freedom, safety or dignity” (Lush, n.d.). On the contrary, the other side of the queer freedom scale houses those countries that have made identities that are not heteronormative unnatural and illegal, like in Iran where homosexuality is punishable by death (Bearak & Cameron, 2014). Violence against queer people is consistently more brutal than actions for other hate crimes. Saudi Arabia sentences men to 2,600 lashes over two years for wearing clothes of the opposite sex, deemed “deviant sexual behavior” (Gupta, 2005, p. 280). Currently no fewer than 80 countries criminalize same-sex acts of gender-deviant behavior – five have the death penalty for gay men, while four have the same for gay women (Jordan, 2009). The death penalty is still enforced by Sharia law in a number of countries, most reports coming from Afghanistan and Iran. Virtually all aspects of a Muslim's life are governed by Sharia – worship, commerce, marriage, and penal codes (Gupta, 2005).

Viewing the world through a queer lens is important for understanding the anxieties that queer people experience. In 80 countries, it’s a crime to be gay; in ten countries homosexuality is punishable by death (Bearak & Cameron, 2014). CNN interviewed Anneke Meerkotter, director of a literature center in South Africa, who pointed out an important distinction of law in a country where consensual same-sex activity is still criminalized even when queer marriage and LGBT promotions remain legal:

In November 2014, Botswana High Court held that the refusal to register a local LGBT organization amounted to a violation of the rights to equal protection of the law, freedom of expression and freedom of association. This decision was significant, as the court emphasized that the penal code offenses that criminalize consensual sexual activity do not criminalize homosexuality, nor do they criminalize advocacy for the reform of these laws (CNN, 2015).

Given this evidence, government-run violence against queer bodies is apparent. An important note is that not every state counts as the sole aggressor; non-state actors engage in violence, abuse, and ill treatment of sexual minorities throughout the world (Gupta, 2005). In countries such as Nigeria and Russia, community members feel compelled to persecute queer people as a means of justice and moral

uprightness. With state-wide laws creating a nest of support for violence and reprimand towards queer individuals, people who are not appointed take their own initiatives at community policing. Policing at this level leads to impunity for human rights abuses, neglect for reparations, and a gauntlet for sustained prosecution against queer people that is justified by law (United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2015). CNN shared Pew Research's findings on this issue: "The strongest support for acceptance of homosexuality came in Europe – especially Spain (88% believe it should be accepted) and Germany (87%) – and Latin America. In the Middle East and Africa, in contrast, clear majorities in all but one nation believed homosexuality should not be accepted, including South Africa, where same-sex marriage is legal" (CNN, 2015).

There is a range that exists among prejudices and violent patterns facing the LGBT community worldwide. Leaders are able to implement and carry out targeted attacks on queer people in their country by using venomous language as a vehicle. Leaders are able to make their countries treat homophobia as a crucial branding of their culture. The forced normalization of heterosexuality creates hang-ups in advocacy work to help endangered queer individuals. Recently, Russia has tightened anti-gay laws including its "promotion" to minors under 18, and violence against queer people is silently applauded among many residents (Al Jazeera, 2015). In May 2013, a homosexual man from southern Russia was tortured to death in a hate crime; his skull was smashed with a stone and he was sexually assaulted with beer bottles (McCormick, 2013b). In Russia, queer minors are being tortured and forcibly outed on the Internet as a result of the recent anti-gay laws passed by President Vladimir Putin (Saner, 2013). Joseph McCormick (2013a) reports that gay teenagers aged 12-16 have been lured to meetings on the promise of a date, then tortured to come out by a Russian neo-Nazi group. Alex Bulygin, 19, was a victim who committed suicide once his sexuality was mainstreamed. An extremist was quoted by saying that they would kill homosexuals if it were legal, but on that basis solely have they spared the lives of queer minors. He also reported that there has been no intervention by the police about these

attacks, despite the growing number of victims and the quickly flourishing similar online neo-Nazi communities across Russia (McCormick, 2013a).

Over half of Africa's countries are also quite resistant to embracing or acknowledging the plight and lives of queer Africans. Many African countries already deem homosexuality as illegal, however there is now a positive trend of violent acts targeted to queer people because of draconian anti-gay laws being passed (Saner, 2013). It is important to note that the legality of same-sex acts between individuals is not a determining factor of who will risk being persecuted by their countries for their identity and attraction. President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe rallied to never accept homosexuality, as that would be accepting practices of the Europeans, and he also claimed that homosexuals were "worse than pigs, goats and birds" (quoted in Manayiti, 2013). Gambian President Yahya Jammeh threatened to slit the throats of men in his country if he discovered they were gay (Tharoor, 2015).

In some other countries, however, violence is not nearly as common. Argentina currently has the most liberal rules for changing gender in the world. This is because they allow people to alter their gender on official documents without first needing to receive a psychiatric diagnosis or surgery. Also, the laws for public and private medical practitioners stipulate that they must provide free hormone therapy or gender confirmation surgery for all who want it – including people under the age of 18 (Schmall, 2012). Harper Jean Tobin, the policy counsel for the National Center for Transgender Equality, supported these measures because "hormonal and surgical treatment for transgender people will now be freely available, thus, the law reflects the principle that individuals should control both their own identities and their own bodies, and should neither have unwanted medical procedures imposed on them nor have medically necessary ones denied (Tobin et al., 2012). In other places, however, public opinion often does not fit with official policy. A Pew research study showed that nearly three-quarters of the Philippines population support homosexual people being accepted by society, but the realistic situation of queer people includes discrimination in education systems, as well as in the workplace.

Violence against gay men and transgender women is haunting to individuals under that identity, and stigma and bullying is still a problem among queer youth in the Philippines (CNN, 2015). On the other hand, Thailand is acknowledged as one of the most tolerant countries in Asia regarding queer individuals, allowing freedom for sex work, same-sex activity, and more. *The Bangkok Post* identified Thailand as a haven for queer tourist couples, but the reality for locals is that the law and what is acceptable in public is not nearly as liberal (Yongcharoenchai, 2013).

Queer people of color are the main focus of much of this paper, given that those who are in oppressive societies toward non-heterosexual people are quite often non-white people. People of color experience a range of distinct cultures and societal rights and wrongs. An important standpoint that needs to be mentioned at this point is that of the researcher, myself. I identify as a queer person of color, and I am a Black American. I have been raised on Western ideas and culture, however, so with this piece I want to incorporate the other stories and perspectives often left out of the literature due to imperialism and censorship. Raised in the United States, I also do not share the experience of being someone that has migrated to another country. With this perspective, I saw great importance in incorporating stories of those who are actually living through the situation I have researched. There is only so much an outsider can give as an objective perspective on a culture. Criticizing a culture is also a grey area, and it is not my place to give one solution to complex problems. I believe that the use of storytelling shows the solutions others have to various problems within their society. Showcasing non-Westerners and immigrants gives abstract research a human face with a perspective that I cannot truly understand, but certainly cannot and should not disregard.

Consider some of the stories of people who experienced these issues firsthand. One case involves Diane Rodriguez (n.d.), a Trans woman of color from Ecuador. There are no recognized queer or Trans rights in her country, and when she came out to her mother she endured conversion therapy and was forced to throw away all feminine clothing. Rodriguez began living a double life, putting her energy

into political work to advance Trans and queer rights for her country. Despite her various encounters of sexual, physical, and emotional brutality, Rodriguez chose to stay in Ecuador and fight for those like her to be able to exist (see: Rodriguez, n.d.) Another notable voice is that of Saleem Haddad (2016), a queer Arab man. He lived in Iraq, a place where homosexuality is illegal and socially unacceptable. His reason for migrating from his hometown was not solely fear of persecution, however. He notes that other intersections of his life led him to the decision to uproot from his community and move to Europe. I quote him at length here:

Who owns queer Arab bodies? Is it the authoritarian regimes who trample on queer bodies for moral legitimacy, the jihadists who burnish their religious credentials by tossing these bodies off the highest towers, the western human rights groups who enforce their own narratives to 'save' these bodies, the anti-imperialist academics who argue that these bodies are naively adopting colonialist discourses, the neoconservatives who shake dead queer bodies in front of their constituents to justify wars and occupations, or the rich who dictate the line between sexual freedom and public morality?

As a queer person in the Arab world, everywhere you turn someone wants to use your body, your story, or your life for their own purposes. A few months after my boyfriend broke up with me, I decided to move to Europe.

I did not leave the Middle East because anyone was going to kill me.

I left because I wanted a western passport that would allow me to travel without having to book visa appointments months in advance, without having to prepare income statements and letters from employers and hotel bookings and return tickets. I left because I wanted a passport that would give me protection, a passport that would raise the value of my life in the global hierarchy. I left because I felt that the region was knee-deep in frustration and hopelessness, that things were going to collapse, and that with my Arab passport I would have nowhere to go. I left because I knew enough to know that the world does not care about Arab and Muslim bodies washing up on the shores of the Mediterranean.

I left because I was tired of finding ways to justify why I had to keep my gay identity hidden, and I felt that my sexuality was becoming yet another weapon that could be used against me: if someone developed a personal vendetta against me; if I spoke out of line; if I engaged in the wrong kind of politics; if I was not a good citizen who shut up and took it. I left because my sexuality had become yet another knife held against my throat. Here are other knives held against people's throats: Being a refugee on a boat in the Mediterranean. Being a black man in the U.S. Being a Palestinian in Israel. Being a woman pretty much anywhere" (Haddad, 2016).

An important aspect of Haddad's perspective are the other intersectionalities that he acknowledges. This includes state of emergency regarding the death of refugees crossing the

Mediterranean, the escalating murder of Black bodies in the United States, the institutionalized murder and violence against Palestinians in Israel, and the structural inequality and violence against women in nearly every country and territory around the world (Fleming, 2015; Leon, 2015; Abdullah, 2014). The reality for people of color is that there is already one overarching identity working against them, and the contexts of other marginalized identities they may have only intensify the discrimination they face within their society.

Recommendations + Conclusions

There are a number of policies on the table that policy makers and government officials should implement and respect. Immigration Equality is an organization that aids asylum seekers, detainees, undocumented immigrants, and families at risk of deportation due to current immigration laws. Immigration Equality outlines eight necessary policy changes in order to deter LGBT deportations and manipulation as supported by law. They suggest stopping the deportation of queer immigrants, repealing the deadline for filing asylum, including immigrants in administrative relief and immigration reform, improving conditions in immigrant detention (jail), increasing the use of alternatives to detention, decreasing asylum backlogs by hiring appropriate number of officials, recognizing families to include those without access to marriage equality, and utilizing group-based protection mechanisms for queer people trapped abroad (Immigration Equality, 2016). This organization recognizes the barriers of families and queer individuals within a system that has double standards of prosecution for those who have more than one endangered identity.

Solutions being discussed include queer migrant justice strategies, which is a “no borders” concept for queer migrants. Melissa White (2014) explores queer migrant justice strategies within a nation-state context. She supports working towards a no borders concept when it comes to queer migrants. A Canadian organization that is directly impacting this population now is the Rainbow Refugee

Committee (RRC). The RRC is an organization to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, Trans, queer and HIV-positive refugee claimants and migrants who have relocated to avoid stigma with sexuality and gender defying or offending norms (Jordan, 2009). Jordan (2009) notes that refugees resettling in Canada recount surviving by dis/avowing desires, distancing/taking on identities, avoiding/seeking out others, and conformity/escaping (p. 2). A major identifiable hindrance in cross-cultural identification and understanding is the language people use or may not use to identify themselves.

Another solution is merely queer inclusivity – sharing stories, creating spaces like various conferences and projects, active learning to reduce teaching while in need or over-teaching and supporting other people . The Visibility Project (n.d.) is a portrait and video collection dedicated to the Queer Asian American Women & Trans* community and it breaks barriers through powerful imagery and storytelling. The Brown Boi Project (n.d.) works to build leadership, economic self-sufficiency, and health of young masculine of center womyn, Trans men, and queer/straight men of color – pipelining them into the social justice movement. They describe their project as a diverse and broad community, driven by a commitment to racial justice, gender justice, and transforming our privilege of masculinity into a tool for social change. They prioritize support that improves the lives of masculine of center womyn, queer, and Trans people of people of color; work that transforms the lives of women and girls; and introduces new alliances and tools for challenging racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia across our communities. The Dari Project (n.d.) works to document and share the life stories of queer people of Korean decent by bridging communities, families, and faith. Dari means both bridge and legs in Korean, and symbolizes their wish to build ties in the community. National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (n.d.) is a federation of South Asian, Southeast Asian, and pacific islander organizations to build local organizations, grassroots organize, develop leadership, and challenge homophobia, racism, and anti-immigrant bias. Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project (n.d.) amplifies the voices of Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer, Transgender women and gender non-conforming people of color, diaspora,

and other racial and ethnic minorities around the world. They use their space for art, music, film, books, and media created for and by queer women of color (and gender non-conforming people of color), including news, opinions, interviews, and more.

Two other noteworthy organizations include Trikone (n.d.), which ties to a Desi LGBTQ helpline and offers a supportive, empowering, and non-judgmental environment where LGBTQ South Asians and their allies can meet, make connections, and proudly promote awareness and acceptance of their sexual identity. Shades of Yellow (SOY) (n.d.) is the first and only Hmong Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) nonprofit organization in the world that works to provide support, education, advocacy, and leadership development to Hmong/Asian Pacific Islander (HAPI) LGBTQ and allies. SOY is made up of a diverse group of community members, constituents, and allies and they work to cultivate a community of empowered HAPI LGBTQ and allies to challenge what we've known and ignite positive cultural and social change. Their vision is a world where Hmong LGBTQ and allies are liberated and celebrated for who they are. It is a coalition to build across difference and support equity for queers. One of the coolest projects is the UndocuQueer Movement which is a network of queer undocumented immigrant activists organizing for the rights of undocumented youth and their families. The activists of UndocuQueer came to the U.S. as infants or children.

Social media and social projects that surround people of similar identities make for a much more approachable and supportive climate. Queer people of color supporting each other is more satisfying than trying to leverage support for black lives with white oppressors. Every niche group that forms creates a doorway or haven that others may seek refuge with, or not. Nish Gera (2016) comments that “countries cannot wall themselves off from change. Progress will eventually reach all parts...the backlash is already evident in Russia, parts of Africa and Eastern Europe, where politicians are proposing draconian new restrictions and painting LGBT people as a threat to children and society.” Advocates will

do well to remember that backlash is natural but fleeting; the positive impacts of this activism for the rights of queer migrants will endure.

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