



**“You have to choose between habaar or duco”**

*A case study of Swedish Muslim Gay Men of Somali Origin*

BY

MUSTAFA AHMED

Master Thesis in Global Studies  
Department of Political Science  
Supervisor: Ted Svensson  
Examiner: Catarina Kinnvall  
Lund University  
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## **Abstract**

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin in Stockholm Sweden. A group that has not been specifically researched in the previous study within the Swedish context. The study demonstrates how various identities such as ethnicity, sexuality, religion and citizenship intersect with each other. The thesis highlights how these identities are negotiated and managed with family and relatives, in white spaces and gay scenes. Intersectionality is utilized as a theoretical framework which pays attention to the ways of which all forms of discrimination overlap and create a unique and distinct kind of oppression for a group of people. The specific approach is taken in this thesis is group-centred and intra-categorical complexity which aim to give voice to voiceless people to highlight their unique experiences to better understand inequality. A qualitative research methodology is adopted involving individual interviews with nine men. Given the intersecting identities of the participants who are Swedish, Somali, Muslim and gay men appear to have three dimensions such as religious, ethno-cultural and colour, integrated with a gay identity. First, this group of men do not disclose their sexuality with their family or relatives. Second, the findings of this research demonstrate that Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin face oppression from people with whom they share race, ethnicity and religious backgrounds because of their sexuality. Third, the group are discriminated against in the labour market because of their ethnicity and religion. Finally, the group experience oppression and racism from the gay scenes about their race and ethnicity. This research shows that race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and citizenship are not separate identities but build on each other and work together.

Keywords: *Intersectionality Theory, Swedish, Muslim, Somali, Gay Men, Oppression, Discrimination, Racism.*

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## Table of Contents

<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 RESEARCH PURPOSE</b>	<b>3</b>
1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	3
1.3 Thesis Outline	4
<b>2 BACKGROUND</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.1 HOMOSEXUALITY IN SOMALIA</b>	<b>5</b>
2.2 GAY, LESBIAN AND TRANSGENDER SOMALIS	6
<b>3 LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3.1 SOMALIS IN SWEDEN</b>	<b>7</b>
3.2 MUSLIM LGBTQ IN THE WEST	9
3.3 Somali Diaspora’s Attitudes Towards Homosexuality	12
<b>4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4.1 INTERSECTIONALITY</b>	<b>14</b>
4.2 INTERSECTIONALITY AS ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK	17
<b>5 RESEARCH METHODS</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>5.1 QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY</b>	<b>21</b>
5.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW	22
5.3 Research Design	23
5.4 Data Analysis	26
5.5 Limitation, Validity and Reliability	28
5.6 Ethical Consideration	30
5.7 Reflexivity	30
<b>6 ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>6.1 FAMILY RELATIONS</b>	<b>33</b>
6.2 PATRIARCHAL CULTURAL, MARRIAGE EXPECTATION AND SEXUAL SILENCE	35
6.3 Coming Out	38
6.4 Integration of Islam and Homosexuality	39
6.5 Discrimination, Threats and Physical Abuse	41
6.6 Racism in White Spaces	42
6.7 Racialization in the Gay Scene and Dating Websites	44
6.8 Replicating Heterosexual Gender Norms into Homosexual Relations	46
<b>7 DISCUSSION</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>8 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>54</b>

<b>9 BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>INTERVIEW GUIDE</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM</b>	<b>64</b>

## Abbreviations

LGBTQI	Lesbian gay bisexual transgender, queer and intersex
LGBT	Lesbian gay bisexual transgender
USD	United States dollar
USA	The United States of America
UK	United Kingdom
UN	The United Nations
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus

# 1 Introduction

Issues regarding homosexuality such as gay rights and discrimination are some of the most contested and controversial around the world. Human rights activists and politicians have brought Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) rights to prominence in the ongoing struggle to achieve equality within their own countries (Lee & Ostergard 2017, p. 38). In fact, in many countries LGBTQ people are facing more violence and repression than ever before. From Uganda's "Kill the Gays" law to Russia's anti-homosexual propaganda laws, not only those states are subjecting LGBTQ people to significant dangers, but also denying their existence (Lee & Ostergard 2017, p.38). Nonetheless, families, communities and authorities have subjected LGBTQ people to acts of intimidation, humiliation and brutal attacks. Thus, in many parts of the world, they have been beaten, stabbed, raped and illegally detained (Lee & Ostergard 2017, p.39).

Rahman and Valliani (2016) state that the existing research on LGBTQ Muslim's experiences and identities is limited to a small number both within the Muslim majority countries and Muslim minority populations in Western countries. They argue that this limitation testifies to the difficulties of researching a hidden population but also reminds us that LGBTQ Muslim identity remains a controversial social position. Thus, there is a contemporary discourse of fundamental cultural opposition between Islam and sexual diversity, whereas both Western political, religious/ethnic Muslim cultures and LGBTQ cultures use this framework of understanding to emphasise the assumption of mutual exclusivity between sexual diversity and Muslim cultures (Rahman and Valliani 2016).

Kehl (2019) explains how LGBTQ rights have become political makers of Western values such as gender equality, sexual liberation and tolerance. Several actors in many Western countries such as Sweden have shown concerns about communities of non-white and/or Muslim being LGBTQ-phobic, which according to them is an attack to Western values (Kehl 2019, p. 150-151). Kehl (2019) argues that this rhetoric is problematic as it puts non-white and/or Muslims LGBTQ in a precarious position, facing assumptions that being both LGBTQ and non-white and/or Muslims are mutually exclusive (p. 150-151).

Kehl (2019) provided an example of an attempt to teach the hateful other a lesson, non-white and/or Muslims, who are considered to be LGBTQ-phobic was a pride march, Järva Pride. The Pride was organized by the Swedish populist right in 2016 and 2017, which took place in the Northern outskirts of Stockholm a predominantly immigrant neighbourhood with a large Muslim population to portray it unsafe for LGBTQ people. These racialized areas 'förorten or orten' the suburb are often portrayed 'unswedish', chaotic, lawless and dangerous.

Kehl (2019) argues that there is an assumption here concerning 'Swedishness' as whiteness and LGBTQ friendly and externalising and othering communities racialized as non-white and/or Muslim which in itself complicates the intelligibility of being both LGBTQ and racialized non-white and/or Muslim in the Swedish context. Thus, Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin is a fundamental challenge to this assumption because it sheds light to those who are Muslim, non-white, Somali-Swedish and gay who exist at the intersection of apparently exclusive cultures. Collins and Bilge (2016) illustrate that ordinary people can draw upon intersectionality as an analytical tool as people acknowledge they need a better framework to grapple with the complex discriminations they face. This kind of research is limited and rarely explored in the current academic discourse which directly gives a voice to this specific group to share their lived experiences, instead of speaking about them. By using intersectionality as an analytical tool, it sheds light on the experiences of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin.

Rahman (2020) shows that there is a need to focus on the identity and experiences of LGBT Muslims as intersectional because it provides a theoretical and empirical corrective to the exclusive oppositional positioning of LGBT and Muslim. Nonetheless, queer Muslims experience their lives of ethno-religious, gendered, sexual, and racialized identities in a specific national and transnational context (Rahman 2020, p. 2). I am not here to engage with theological questions regarding the Quran, the Hadith (sayings of the prophet Mohamed), or the Sharia (laws) concerning homosexuality. Although they are important and impinge on people's perception of their sexuality, most of these debates are posed at a macro-level (Alvi and Zaidi 2019). This research focuses on the narratives of a small group of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin regarding their intersecting identities in Stockholm Sweden.



## **1.1 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to allow Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin from a micro level to highlight their lived experiences of being Swedish, Muslim, Somali and gay men in Stockholm Sweden. This study challenges the assumption that being both LGBTQ and non-white and/or Muslims are mutually exclusive. It shows that race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship and sexuality are not separate identities but build on each other and work together. This paper also aims to study how this group's intersectional identity overlap and create different relationships. This research applies group centred to give voice to voiceless people while highlighting their unique experiences to better understand inequalities (Windsong 2018, p.138).

## **1.2 Research Questions**

What are the subjective experiences of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin negotiating their intersecting identities?

- How does this group negotiate their sexuality in the face of their families and relatives?
- What kind of challenges do they face regarding their gay and Muslim identities?
- How do they negotiate their ethnic identity in Sweden?

## 1.3 Thesis Outline

The following chapter of the thesis is the background, the first section shows anti-homosexuality laws, stigma and discriminations against homosexuals in Somalia. The second section contains several narrative stories of gay, lesbian and transgender Somalis inside and outside of Somalia. The third chapter outlines the literature review which provides a detailed insight to the reader, it consists of three sections. The first section is about Somalis in Sweden which explains their ethnic and religious identities, but also their socio-economical condition. The second section contains a summary of previous researches on Muslim LGBTQ in the West, they emphasize the intersectionality of LGBTQ Muslim identity. The last section is about Somali diasporas' attitudes towards homosexuality.

The fourth chapter presents a theoretical framework which provides a deep understanding of intersectionality. The second part, it operationalizes an analytical framework by Minwalla et al. (2005) who demonstrate that Muslim identity appears to have three dimensions such as religious, ethno-cultural and colour, integrated with a gay identity. The fourth chapter is of methodology, it describes the methodological choices of the study, research design and data selection, limitation ethical consideration, and reflexivity. The execution of this study is based on qualitative method consisting of collected data through interviews. The fifth chapter at first presents an analysis of the empirical findings, the second part presents a comprehensive discussion, combining the analysis of the empiric findings with the theory and the previous parts of this research. Following part is the conclusion, and finally the bibliography.

## **2 Background**

### **2.1 Homosexuality in Somalia**

Somali law criminalises homosexuality and LGBTQ people are given no protection from discrimination and hate crimes (Christman 2016). Given the evidence of severe cultural stigmatisation of homosexuality in Somalia, it leaves homosexual Somalis at significant risk of lawful and violent discrimination and persecution. Homosexuality is often punished with lashing, being ostracized from families and communities and even death (Sida 2014, Christman 2016). Several reports claim that homosexuality or homosexuals do not exist in the minds of Somalis and the country is extremely dangerous for any homosexual and if their family or community becomes aware of it, it would put them at clear risk of prosecution and can result in honour killing or suicide (Christman 2016, Sida 2014).

Somalia's voting record of LGBTI issues at the United Nation reflects its poor treatment of LGBTI persons in Somalia. Somalis have twice voted against resolutions and declarations which ought to increase the protection of gay persons (Christman 2016). The United Nations Declaration on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity was passed in 2008 which requires that human rights apply equally to all human beings regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Somalia signed a counter statement in opposition to this declaration. According to Tania Reza, in 2013 eighteen-year-old Mohamed Ali Baashi was stoned to death outside of Mogadishu for an allegation of homosexuality. His charge of sodomy required stoning to death, as the judge said that Mohamed did what Muslims should not do and as a result, he will be stoned to death (Reza 2015, as cited in Christman 2016).

Somalia is one of the seven countries where the death penalty is imposed for homosexuality. Although Somalia's Penal Code does not punish homosexuality by death, Islamic courts in Southern Somalia use Sharia law, punishing homosexual acts with flogging or the death penalty (Christman 2016). For these reasons, many flee from their homes and the country to escape possible torture or death while others become accustomed to living double lives.

There have been reports of gangs of armed men searching the streets for people suspected of being LGBT. Although, few organizations are working on human rights and democracy, LGBTI people are discriminated against and marginalized with all aspects of the Somali society and have little opportunity to exercise their rights (Sida 2014).

## **2.2 Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Somalis**

A published book *Being queer and Somali* by Afdhere Jama (2015) recounts the narratives of twenty-seven gay, lesbian and transgender Somalis around the world. According to Jama (2015) being queer and Somali is being part of two different groups. Jama travelled around the world to meet Somali queers to tell their stories. Jama (2015) states that in the Somali community everywhere, Somali queers are seen as non-Somalis.

A young man named Abdi, a dance instructor, in Somalia, committed suicide at his dance studio, after his family decided to marry him to one of their relatives. Another young Somali man, a twenty-two years old Badal, in Bosaaso Somalia, growing up he was bullied, beaten and had been called names such as "lagaroon" incompetent by other children (Jama 2015). He was forced into an arranged marriage because his family had suspected that he was gay. A couple of days after the wedding, Badal confessed to his family that he was gay and he can not be married to that girl, instead, he wanted to be a celibate. He was taken to a sheikh who cures people of all sorts of spiritual and physical illness. After months of therapy which involved everything from the Quran being recited over him, beaten and forced to smell the smoke from the burning of all sorts of animal faeces. He realised that he was not going to change into heterosexual so he ran away to Mogadishu, the capital, with a help of a friend (Jama 2015).

A twenty-two years old Mo, was also forced to get married by his family. When he refused to go through with it, and in panic admitted to his sexuality. The family vowed to kill him if he does not get married. Because he was the oldest son and handling the family business, including six passenger-carrying busses, he sold two of the busses secretly and escaped to Nairobi, Kenya. In Nairobi, he paid five thousand USD to a Somali smuggler to send him to the United Kingdom (Jama 2015).

Abdi, Badal and Mo's stories are just a few of many unreported stories of Somali queers inside and outside of Somalia. For those reasons, many Somali LGBTQ individuals have to leave the country to the West to escape prosecution and forced marriage (Afdhere 2015). However, it appears when Somali LGBTQ arrive in the West, they can still face threats and discrimination by their family and Somali communities. Somali-Norwegian author Amal Aden who is a lesbian activist received more than 146 threat messages, including death threats, after she was seen in the Oslo Pride Parade in 2013 (Törnkvist 2013). Amal Aden told that the combination of being lesbian, Muslim and Somali is tough, which many ethnic Norwegians couldn't imagine (Törnkvist 2013).

### **3 Literature Review**

This intrinsic case study explores how Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin negotiate their intersecting identities. This chapter provides the existing literature on Somalis in Sweden, Muslim LGBTQ in the West and Somali diaspora's attitudes towards homosexuality. The first part includes Somali and Muslim identity and its impact on their lives. It also includes their socio-economical condition and cultural identity. The second part gives a comprehensive overview of the discussion about Muslim LGBTQ identity as a distinctive from Western LGBTQ identity. The last part provides a brief overview of Somali diaspora's attitudes towards homosexuality. The reason for the literature review is to help the reader to understand the background of the research problem and also to contribute to the analysis of the empirical findings of this research.

#### **3.1 Somalis in Sweden**

There are extensive researches on Somali migration to Sweden. The arrival of Somalis to Sweden began in the 1990s after the civil war broke out in Somalia but tremendously increased after 2006, only in 2010 more than 5500 Somalis applied for asylum in Sweden, coming from the southern part of Somalia (Wettergren & Wikström 2014, p. 571). Today, approximately, there are between 70, 000 to 83, 000 people of Somali origin in Sweden (Statistics Sweden 2019; Mohme 2017). Thus, making Somalis, the largest group of African origin and a fourth-largest group of Muslims, therefore Islam is the core of Somali identity as there is a claim that being Somali is synonymous with being Muslim (Mohme 2017, p. 241).

A study conducted by the Swedish government Framtidskommisionen (the government's Commission on the future) in which Somali immigrants are viewed as a vulnerable group. The report says it takes a longer period for Somalis to establish themselves in the labour market than other immigrant groups in Sweden (Carlson, Magnusson and Rönqvist 2012). Several integrative dilemmas confronting Somalis in Sweden, includes widespread unemployment, unsuitable education, residential segregation and institutional discrimination, noticeably in the labour market and housing sectors (Salat 2010). Mohme (2014) illustrates that Somali-Swedes are regarded as marginalized and more disadvantaged than other migrant groups in the country due to their socio-economic conditions, but also culture and religion. Somalis practice Islam, a faith that strengthened after migration and faith that the majority population in Sweden finds difficult to reconcile with values that are considered fundamental to modern society (Mohme, 2014). Svenberg, Mattsson and Skott (2009), argue that religion and faith conviction seem to constitute and inherently part of Somali-Swedish self-identity. Besides, according to Somalis in Sweden, the family acts as a safety net, tying people together and providing financial support to relatives (ibid).

Scuzzarello and Carlson (2019) have written *Young Somalis' social identity in Sweden and Britain*. It has been stated that young people of migrant descent in Sweden and the United Kingdom constantly negotiate their social identity with the society of settlement and to members of their same ethnic group. Group members can also derive a sense of identity and belonging from comparison with other in-group members. For example, family members and community elders are important groups as they instil in young people the values, customs and ideas of their ethnic, national or religious background, by creating symbolic boundaries that define the group. To young Somalis, Somalia is a spiritual and culture that provides them with deep-rooted identification and emotion. Young Somalis said that their parents have been very strict teaching them about their religion and culture, hoping for them to achieve authentic Muslim and Somali identity (Scuzzarello & Carlson 2019).

On contrary to the Western ideas of a family, Mohme (2014) explains that families in the Somali context include more relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and a very wide definition of cousins. Nevertheless, Mohme (2013), points out that family is also a construction which responsibilities are collective, for instance raising children. According to Mohme (2014), Somali children with the Somali background who misbehave or fail in their studies in Sweden can be sent to Somalia, where other members of their family take care of. Mohme's study discusses mobility patterns as a transnational practice among Somali-Swedish, where Somali culture, religion and authentic Somaliness are transferred to the children (Mohme 2014).

Sweden is one of the most secular countries in the world. Swedes view Somali-Swedes as the group that is culturally most distant (Mohme 2017, p. 241). Thus, some parents send their children to Muslim-Profiled Schools, as parents claim those schools offer better education and a sense of inclusion for their children, where being Muslim and black is acceptable, on contrary to their experience from public schools (Mohme 2017, p. 249-252).

The debate above indicates that Somali-Swedish as a group that is marginalized and disadvantaged for several reasons such as high unemployment, low education and institutional discrimination in the labour market and housing sectors. Also, Somalis seem to have difficulty adjusting to a society that is culturally and religiously very different from their society of origin.

### **3.2 Muslim LGBTQ in the West**

Previous studies on Muslim LGBTQ in the West, several scholars demonstrate that LGBTQ Muslims deal with homophobia, Islamophobia and racism (Rahman 2014, Minwalla et al. 2005). Even though, Muslim identity differs across culture and ethnicity; Islam is the core of Somali identity. The coming arguments from the scholars on this topic will be later examined and reflected upon in the analysis.

Kehl (2019) has written an article which explores racialized grids of intelligibility around gender identity and sexuality in the white Swedish LGBTQ contexts. The article analysis experiences shared on a Swedish-based Instagram account created as a separatist virtual space by and for LGBTQ people racialized as non-white and/or Muslim with around 4600 followers. By people

sharing their experiences of being LGBTQ and racialized as non-white and/ or Muslim, the purpose of the account was to provide a variety of stories for young people to identify with (Kehl 2019, p. 153). Positive representations of marginalized identities and the ability to claim identification with multiple social groups allows them to positively affirm their unique intersectional positioning within society. Hence, to a certain extent countering the negative social effects of occupying a stigmatized identity (Kehl 2019, p. 153).

In her analysis, Kehl (2019) talks about 'being the victim of the hateful other', where she discusses 'the rescue narrative' and 'the hateful other'. she states that there is an underlying assumption that LGBTQ people racialized as non-white and/ or Muslim are inherently negatively predisposed against LGBTQ identities and rights, as they are frequently asked 'what their parents think about their sexuality'. Kehl (2019) argued that the rescue narrative is a well-established practice of othering, as non-white and/or Muslim LGBTQ people, as in need of liberation and protection from their oppressive communities. The hateful other is linked with the rescue narrative, the assumption that the racialized and/or Muslim migrant perpetrating violence against LGBTQ people.

Kehl (2019) mentioned the notion of 'coming out', to oneself, but also coming out to others. Coming out as a norm in white Swedish LGBTQ circles that disregards different social aspects, making it hard to comply with, destroys family relations and impact on one's ability to travel back to their home countries of origin. While there is binary distinct between 'open' white LGBTQ person and the 'closeted' person racialized as non-white and/or Muslim. She also mentions that both hyper-sexualisation and de-sexualisation are central and long-standing narrative in the exoticification and externalization of bodies racialized as non-white in Western societies. Thus, LGBTQ people racialized as non-white and/or Muslim as objects of desire, pity or fascination by white LGBTQ people. The experience of LGBTQ contexts in Sweden being predominantly or even exclusively white means that the right kind of queer occupying these spaces is always already racialized as white (Kehl 2019)

Akachar (2015) who has done a study on gay Muslim identities in the Netherland, demonstrates that being Muslim is racialized as foreign and non-Dutch which produces a Muslim or gay binary owing to its possibilities in singling out the position in which oppositional identities meet (e.g.



gayness, religious, or race) in the identification of gay Moroccan and Turkish Muslims (Akachar 2015, p.181). The author argues that an intersectional analysis focusing on controversies of different among minorities, for instance, gays and Muslims in the Netherlands, serves to identify where patterns of privileges are reproduced, giving rise to hierarchical alignment that displays the relative privilege of one minority in comparison or at the expense of other minorities (Akachar 2015, p.183). Its also argued in the article that lived experiences of gay Muslims in the Netherlands could further contribute to the illustration of multiple processes of oppression and privilege, navigating between categories of sex, race and religion (Akachar 2015, p.184).

Rahman& Valliani (2016) in their research on the experiences of LGBT Muslims in Canada. they explained that cultural opposition between Muslims and the West is a key issue in the research from Muslim majority countries. The socio-political framework appears consistently in studies on minority population in the West and structures the key process of coming out. For instance, American-Iranian Khalida Saed discusses her mother's argument that her "coming out" was an illustration of her "Americanization" something that she acknowledges gave her the courage to develop a more public lesbian identity. LGBT Muslims are hesitant to disclose their sexuality as there are worried about negative reactions from their family and the wider community (Rahman& Valliani 2016). For many, "coming out" means doing so not just to one's immediate family members, but also the larger community. Coming out to one's family member inevitably leads to concerns over information spreading outwards to the wider community. Families typically do not want their matters discussed and critiqued, so the impetus is either to ignore a child's sexual identity altogether or to encourage them to remain discreet so to ensure mutual social security (Rahman& Valliani 2016).

Minwalla et al. (2005) in their study on identity experience among progressive gay Muslims in North America illustrate that fear of isolation from family and community is not by any means the sole factor hindering individuals from disclosing their sexuality. There seems to be considerable discomfort with the entire "coming out" process and its expected outcomes. Assumptions and expectations about what it means to be gay or lesbian might not work for people from Muslim backgrounds because familial ties and expectations, systems of negotiation and the place of religion in everyday life differ from contemporary Western cultures. For Muslim men, coming out

as gay in the West can be complicated by cultural differences. For instance, given the collective identity of the family in many non-Western cultures, it is important to consider the impact of coming out on the larger family unit, particularly female siblings and their potential for marriage (Minwalla et al. 2005).

Current researchers acknowledge that the examination of the lived experience of queer Muslims, particularly within the Western context, would be fruitful and informative if it takes seriously the intersection between religion, ethnicity and sexuality (Rahman 2010). Therefore, Rahman (2010) suggests that gay Muslims are located inside/outside because they are at an intersectional location in full measure, challenging both the category of Muslim, which subordinately located along with national identity, ethnic and often class hierarchies, and the category of gay, again located subordinately in the heterosexual matrix (ibid).

### **3.3 Somali Diaspora's Attitudes Towards Homosexuality**

There is very limited research on Somali LGBTQ in general. The main reason is that homosexuality is considered culturally and religiously unacceptable by Somalis. Reviewing the very few studies on the Somali diaspora's attitudes towards homosexuality will help us to understand more some of the challenges that Somali homosexuals face. It also provides us with some insights into what it means to be queer Somali Muslim, and it will later be examined in the analysis.

Hunt, Connor, Ciesinski, Abdi & Robinson (2018) have done a qualitative study on *Somali American female refugees discuss their attitudes towards homosexuality and the gay and lesbian community*. While many women in the study denied the existence of homosexuals in Somali and believed same-sex behaviour among Somalis developed only after migration to the USA. Very few told that they have heard of gay and lesbian people in Somalia. Anyway, the women maintained that someone who is gay or lesbian would not be welcome in the Somali community and their families would be ostracised by the larger community (Hunt, Connor, Ciesinski, Abdi & Robinson 2018). Women claim that Somali gays and lesbian face verbal insults, mockery and they are at risk of physical harm. The stigma around homosexuality forces gays and lesbians to conceal their sexuality to avoid family shame.

Hunt, Connor, Ciesinski, Abdi & Robinson (2018) illustrate several points. First, the hidden nature of homosexuality in the Somali culture perpetuates homophobia. Second, Muslims tend to be more tolerant of gays and lesbians that are not Muslim, less tolerant of those who are Muslims and least tolerant of those within the family unit. However, the authors of this study believe that future generations of Somali American youth will have a more progressive image of gays and lesbians. Moreover, it has been argued that numerous Muslim leaders advocate tolerance and acceptance of gays and lesbians which hopefully influence community norms towards homosexuals (Hunt, Connor, Ciesinski, Abdi & Robinson 2018).

Paul D. Saltz (2009) who has written an article called *The Queer Cause & the Culture Clash of East Meets West*, is about Somali students at Columbus State Community College in the US. The students showed homophobic behaviour towards LGBT. The first such incident occurred when an openly gay Muslim man came to the university campus to give a presentation, to speak about his coming out process and how he reconciled being gay with his Islamic faith. He also spoke about an organization he leads to help other Muslim LGBT individuals come to terms with their sexual identity and how it relates to their faith (Saltz 2009). The Somali students protested the presentation and even disrupted it, they claimed that the man did not give an accurate description of Islam and that he was blasphemous. Saltz (2009) says that although, it is quite ironic that these students who came to the United States fleeing an oppressive social system would attempt to restrain the flow of ideas in their new home. He also argues that the students' behaviour is merely acting to prevent the contamination of their faith by the movement of modernity (Saltz 2009).

The previous debate demonstrates the negative attitudes towards homosexuality by Somalis in the West, especially in the United States. While some Somalis deny the existence of Somali gays and lesbians, the hidden nature of homosexuality in the Somali culture perpetuates homophobia. Therefore, many Somali homosexuals conceal their sexuality to avoid potential risks and protect their family from ostracising by the Somali community.

## **4 Theoretical Framework**

Intersectionality has been chosen as a theoretical framework as intersectionality deals with race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship and ability. To be sure, this study aims to uncover the lived experiences of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin, with relation to their ethnic, religious, sexual identities and citizenship. My ontological stand is that there are multiple realities and not a single objective truth, while my epistemological stance is that knowledge needs to be interpreted to discover the underlying meaning. Therefore, this research is based on a constructivist approach. "Constructivist research is defined by an epistemological stance: that social knowledge is the active product of human "knowers," that knowledge is situated and relative, that it varies across people and their social groups, and that it is context-dependent" (Drisko & Maschi 2015, p.9).

It is further argued that multiple realities are depending on people's different interpretative constructs and categories (ibid). Several scholars suggest intersectionality is considered from a broad methodological viewpoint to actualize the concept as a heuristic methodological design program to be empirically adopted to specifically situated research questions (Ben 2018, p. 76-77). However, that is not what I am intending to do in this research, I am using intersectionality as a theoretical framework and analytical lenses to examine the lived experiences of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin.

### **4.1 Intersectionality**

Intersectionality suggests considering how certain identities are located within a 'matrix of domination', constructed at the intersections of social hierarchies (Collins 2000, cited in Rahman 2010, p. 938). "Intersectionality is the systematic study of how differences such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and other socio-political and cultural categories interrelate" (Fotopoulou 2012, p. 19). Thus, intersectionality is rooted in the work of feminist scholars who have shown evidence of how different identities and experiences articulate and integrate into complex and often unpredictable ways (Alvi and Zaidi 2019, p. 6). "Intersectionality has developed in gender studies

during the last two decades as an alternative framework to avoid monolithic perspective over particular forms of inequalities such as gender and class" (Ben 2018, p. 75).

Choo and Ferree (2010) identified three types of intersectional research: - (1) group centered, (2) process-centered, and (3) system-centered. First, group centered research purpose is to bring in the experiences of marginalized groups who have generally been absent from scholarly discussions. Second, process-centered research uses comparative analysis and a premise of rationality which demonstrates the context and comparisons of different intersections to better understand the structural and organizing processes of inequality. Third, system-centered research sees gender and race are essentially embedded in, working through determining organization (as cited in Windsong 2018, p.138).

McCall (2005) also identifies three approaches of intersectionality researchers use to manage complexity; anticategorical complexity, intracategorical complexity, and intercategorical complexity. The anticategorical complexity is not reducible to fixed categories, rather the goal is to deconstruct analytical categories. The intracategorical complexity approach reduces complexity focusing on particular social groups that highlight specific interaction. The intercategorical complexity approach examines relationships of inequalities among different social groups as the center of analysis to amplify these relationships (as cited in Windsong 2018, p.138). Given all of the three types of intersectionality approaches, the one that fits in my research is group centered research by Choo and Ferree, which is also similar to intracategorical complexity by McCall. Both group centered and intracategorical complexity aim was to give voice to voiceless people such as women of colour while highlighting their unique experiences to better understand inequality (Windsong 2018, p.138).

Rahman (2010) suggests understanding gay Muslims as intersectional identities which demonstrate identities and cultures as plural and overlap rather than being monolithic as mutually exclusive. Rahman (2020) states that conceptualising the queer Muslim as intersectional, we can think of the fact that their lives as a combination of ethno-religious, gendered, sexual and racialized identities in specific national and transnational contexts (p.2). Rahman (2020) contests the notion

of objective reality that all people experience in the same way, he argues that those who are oppressed experience the world differently than those who are privileged (p.2)

The review of previous researches on gay Muslim in the West suggest that using intersectionality theory, we can study and understand the lived experiences of this specific group who find themselves between homophobia and Islamophobia, between Western and Eastern culture. Intersectionality is useful as a way of mediating the tensions between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1296). Thus, the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality and religion only highlights the need to account for multiple identities when considering how the social world is constructed (Crenshaw 1991).

As mentioned previously, Rahman & Valliani (2016) the existing researches on LGBT Muslims illustrate that their experiences and identities are limited to a small number of small scale studies, both within Muslim majority countries and Muslim minority populations in Western countries. This limitation testifies to the difficulties of researching a hidden population but also reminds us that LGBT Muslim identity remains a controversial social position. Most of the evidence on this matter demonstrates that there is a contemporary discourse of fundamental culture opposition between sexual diversity and Islam, identifying the former with the West (Rahman & Valliani 2016). Moreover, both religious/ethnic Muslim cultures and Western political and LGBT cultures use this framework of understanding and thus reinforce mutual exclusivity between Muslim cultures and sexual diversity.

Rahman argues that queer theory's analysis of the instability of identity categories can be combined with intersectionality because the lived experiences or standpoint of LGBT Muslims illuminates their identities as always ontologically deferred from the dominant identity categories of gay and Muslim, and this ontological query is the central analytical contribution of queer theory (Rahman & Valliani 2016). The argument that claims intersectionality theories further contribute to more categories, to say categories such as race or gender is socially constructed, is to say that category has no significance in our world (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1296).

On the contrary, numerous continuing projects for subordinated people suggest the other way, one of the projects for which postmodern theories have been helpful thinking about how power is distributed among categories, where certain categories have power against others. A project that presumes that categories have meaning and consequences, and aiming to unveil the processes of subordination and the various ways those processes are experienced by people of whom are subordinated or privileged (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1296). The process of categorization is per se of power, but it is much more complicated and nuanced, however, subordinated people do participate sometimes even sabotaging the naming process in empowering ways, one needs only to think about the current transformation of "queer" to understand that categorization is not a one-way street (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1297).

## **4.2 Intersectionality as analytical framework**

Based on the theoretical approach, I underline the arguments made by intersectionality scholars, emphasizing the importance of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and citizenship in which identity perceptions emerge. Given the diversity of identity, I am using different themes deduced from intersectionality theory which allow me to study the complexity of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin as a multi-oppressed group. On one hand, Somalis as a group are marginalized due to their high unemployment rate and low education but also they are culturally distant from the mainstream Swedish culture. On the other hand, Somali gays face threats, discrimination and stigma by their own families and communities, which marginalize them even further.

Minwalla et al. (2005), conducted a study, exploring identity formation among gay Muslims who are a part of Al-Fatiha, a movement within Islam who advocates for the voices of LGBTQ Muslims in North America. By analysing the primary data of a small sample of six gay Muslim men in North America, using a coding approach characteristic grounded theory, three themes were generated. The authors explained that a Muslim identity appears three dimensions such as religious, ethno-cultural and colour, integrated with a gay identity. In my research, I am using a similar framework to Minwalla et al. (2005) and Ridler Carl (2018) which is presented below.

To start with religion, especially their participants' relationship with Allah, and different ways of coping with traditional interpretations of Qur'an's contamination of homosexuality. With this regard, it has been emphasised aspects of Islam that promote inclusion, peace, tolerance and justice, the participants of their study have reached a point of reclaiming and redefining their conceptualization of what it means to be gay Muslim (Minwalla et al. 2005, p. 118-124). Carl (2018) study on gay Arab Muslim men in the United Kingdom, explaining the intersection of sexuality and religion of that group's experience of a religious and culturally engendered homophobia has meant for many to have suffered cognitive dissonance, manifested in a feeling of depression, stress and unhappiness. Consequently, some have abandoned their religion completely, while the rest have preserved their religious and sexual identities and reduced experiences of dissonance (Carl 2018, p. 150-151). On an individual level, this aspect depends on one's perception of their religion and how they decide to reconcile their faith with their sexuality. This is a crucial point in my research since my participants are Muslims, it is important to understand their experiences of being Muslim and gay.

Second, East-West ethno-cultural comparisons, such as constructing gay identity, marriage expectations, difficulties of coming out, consequences of one's disclosing their sexuality. Gay Muslim men can experience great pressure from their families to marry heterosexually regardless of their sexual orientation. Given the collective identity of the family in many Eastern cultures, it is essential to consider the impact of one's revealing their sexuality to the larger family unit, which can impose serious consequences such as being disowned by their families or worst honour killing to restore family honour (Minwalla et al. 2005, p. 120-121). Carl (2018) stats that gay Arab Muslims value the close and good relationships that the family has provided them and are worried to lose that relationship if they break their silence, therefore they use strategies to pass as heterosexuals. When sexual silence has broken voluntarily or involuntarily, family responses can be extremely negative, however, not all families or family members react negatively. Some families can be supportive and maintain close and warm relations with their gay relatives, although sometimes harmonious family relationships are sustained through a mutual closeting of the topic after disclosure (Carl 2018, p. 188-189).



Third, colour dynamics such as racism and the impact on dating, dating preference and sexual behaviour. It has been shown that the colour dimension of a gay Muslim identity plays an essential role in social dynamics within the larger, predominantly white gay subculture of the West. Gay Muslims of colour living in the West experience exclusion, marginalization and oppression from gay social dynamics (Minwalla et al. 2005, p. 120-125). Carl (2018) demonstrate that Arab gay men, like a black male, have a complex relationship with white gay spaces. They are prized for their dark looks and stereotyped hyper-masculinity, hyper-sexuality, racial objectification, fetishisation, racism and Islamophobia (Carl 2018, p. 224-225).

### **The themes**

1. Ethnicity, Somalis are considered to share national identity such that almost every Somali speak the same language, came from the same ethnic background and shared the Islamic faith, there are, however, other minorities in Somalia such as the Bantu Jareer community and Yibir (Eno and Kusow 2014, p. 92). There is also a clan system in Somalia where every Somali belongs to a specific clan from a certain area of Somalia. The clan system appears to play an important role, offering comfort and security but also social control (Open Society Foundations 2014). Similarly, Sweden is a homogenous state, "people's homes" with a well developed democratic structure, where multiculturalism has been an official integration policy for over thirty years (Hedetoft 2006, p. 1). Within this section, I intend to evaluate the importance and position of the family, including extended family, ethnic and racial identity, Somaliness in Sweden and the importance of being Swedish, all in which I believe contribute to how people identify themselves.

2. Religion, Islam has a long and important history in Somalis, which has impacted highly on the identity of Somali people. Nearly all Somalis are Muslims, therefore Islamic identity is unsurprisingly essential for Somalis (Collet 2007, p. 138). On the other hand, Sweden has traditionally been a protestant country. In 1962 the principle of objectivity was introduced, separation of state and religion (Niemi 2018, p.184). In this section, the focus is on Islamic identity, one can not simply deny the importance of religion for some people's identity, regardless if they are practising Muslims, or not.

3. Gender, the gender inequality index for Somalia is 0,776, with 1 being complete inequality, which puts Somalia at the fourth-highest position globally (UNDP 2015). Whereas Sweden's value of gender inequality index was 0.040, which puts it at the second-lowest position globally in 2018 (Human rights development report 2019, p. 316). Looking at the gender inequality index, I can say that gender inequality is an issue for Somalia, while Sweden has achieved a higher score on this issue. Gender and sexuality can be related (Rahman 2014), with that keeping in mind, questions related to sexuality reveal gender roles and stereotypes. As far as intersectionality is concerned, gender may be relevant to a certain degree for this study, but it will not be the core of it.

4. Sexuality, the only acceptable sexual orientation in Somalia is heterosexuality, apart from it, all other sexual orientations are considered illegal (Christman 2016). As opposed to Somalia, Sweden allows same-sex marriage and protects LGBTQI individuals. In 1995, Sweden introduces policies of registered partnership to same-sex couples and in 2009, Sweden completed its process of granting same-sex couples marriage rights and adopting fully gender-neutral marriage legislation (Kolk and Andersson 2020, p. 152)

5. Citizenship is a contract between the state and the individuals to ensure that all citizens, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, culture and religious beliefs have access to basic rights as social welfare. Citizenship introduces a set of rights and obligations between the state and individuals (Strang & Ager, 2010). As the group in the focus of this study are Swedish citizens of Somali origin, different questions about belonging and inclusion or exclusion will be asked.

While wearing theoretical lenses of intersectionality, I study this specific group to share their lived experiences. Likewise, intersectionality accentuates attention to the relational nature of power and social categories, underlining that is not fixed, but rather fluctuating across time and space (Heidi M., Culham, Fletcher, and Reed 2019, p. 2). Social identity categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship are not distinct from one another, but intersect each other to produce explicit experiences of the chosen group, Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin. Intersectionality as an analytical tool recommends highly by scholars when people need better frameworks to grapple with the complex discrimination that they face (Collins and Bilge 2016, p. 12).

## **5 Research Methods**

### **5.1 Qualitative Case Study**

This qualitative case study aims to understand the lived experience of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin. I have chosen to use a qualitative method which involves the examination of nuanced connections, along with the social and contextual dimensions that give meaning to qualitative data (Roller 2019). The most important and central characteristic of qualitative research is the strive for viewing from the perspective of the people that are being studied (Bryman 2004). A qualitative study is conceptualized in a way to comprehend the context of the lived experiences of people and the meaning of their experiences (Alase 2017, p.10). According to John W. Creswell, "qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell 2014, p. 32).

The qualitative method suits the purpose of this research as it aims to understand the lived experiences of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin, which I argue would be difficult or rather complicated by using a quantitative method. Quantitative researchers are more concerned with proof that a natural phenomenon exists, and their studies thrive the use of a scientific method to identify facts, proffer explanations and make predictions based on these findings. A fact according to positivist considered to be a single objective reality that can be measured consistently (Haig 2018). From such a relativist perspective, truth is not a black and white entity but is subject to various interpretations as a social construct which rejects the concept of a single objective reality and proposes the existence of multiple realities that acknowledge the significance of subjective interpretation (Haig 2018). Most qualitative studies are case studies, as qualitative research is usually used in cases where the in-depth study of a phenomenon is required, as opposed to quantitative research in which a broad spectrum of examples can be gathered (Halperin & Heath, 2017). As evident from the previous discussions, Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin is the case study for this research.

## 5.2 Semi-Structured Interview

This type of interview generally involves a small number of interviews in which the interviewer uses a combination of structured questions, to obtain factual information, and unstructured questions to probe deeper into people's experiences. Interviewing is concerned with obtaining detailed, often specialized information from a single individual or a small number of individuals. However, the aim is not necessary to make generalization but to gain valid knowledge and understanding about what the person in question thinks (Halperin & Heath, 2017).

This was the first and primary method I use in this research to understand the lived experiences of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin. As stated previously by several scholars that Muslim LGBTQI individuals in the West deal with multi-layered oppression. This research aims to provide in-depth information related to participants' experiences and viewpoints of their intersectional identities (Mann 2016, p. 2). Semi-structured interviews provide a reassuring structure where there is no pressure to a predetermined script as it provides room for negotiation, discussion and expansion of the interviewee's responses, but there is also a chance to develop an equilibrium between the interviewer and the interviewee (Mann 2016, p. 91).

That being said, there are two main objections to a sudden rush to opt for semi-structured formats. The first is trying other options first such as unstructured or open formats before making the decision (Mann 2016, p. 91). In my case, due to the time limit of this research, and doing the interviews in Somali, solely unstructured interview questions, according to me, would increase the risk of not staying in the topic, while structured interviewing questions would not give room for additional information that might be important for the informants, therefore I believe these two types of interviewing would generate less relevance result than the semi-structured method (O'Reilly 2005, p. 116).

The second is that there is too rarely an account of the challenges and learning points in preparing for, undertaking and writing up such semi-structured interviews (Mann 2016, p. 91). With this view, I have to admit that I have learned a lot by doing this research. Conducting a semi-structured form of interviewing is recommended if the researcher has a clear focus on a specific topic. I had

an interview guideline and used a simple, yet concrete language so that it will be easier for the interviewees to correctly understand the questions. I had conducted a pilot, interview test, before carrying out the actual interviews. I tried to avoid leading questions and keep the participants to the relevant topic. I was flexible during the interviews by for example asking follow-up questions when it is needed (O'Reilly 2005).

### **5.3 Research Design**

The empirical material of this single case study was obtained from semi-structured interviews with the help of an interview guide that entailed in-depth questions, allowing open and broad discussions. My research design and sampling set out to assure variability in the ethnic/ citizenship, sexuality and religion to allow participants to address these specific questions from their lived experiences. The informants were chosen based on criteria of their sexuality, ethnic and religious identity. The reason I chose Sweden is after the United Kingdom, the second country in Europe which hosts a large number of Somalis, most of them living in urban areas compared with smaller towns and villages. For instance, in Stockholm, 50 per cent of Somalis born in Somalia have Swedish citizenship, with 30 per cent compared to Malmö (Open Society Foundation 2015). A part from Stockholm being the capital of Sweden, it also provides great job opportunities for many people, including Somalis, it has been estimated that 46 per cent of Somali men in Stockholm were employed in 2010, while the same year it was 22 per cent in Malmö (Carlson, Magnusson & Rönnqvist 2012, p. 26). Unlike other cities of Sweden, Stockholm is a diverse city and more tolerant towards LGBTQI people, it offers a variety of option from gay nightlife, cafes and bars than any other city in Sweden, therefore it attracts many LGBTQI individuals (Jakobsen 2014). Also having gatekeepers in Stockholm made it possible for me to conduct this research there.

The reason I decided to do this case study is the scarcity of research on Somali Muslim gay men in the West and the non-existence of this type of research in Sweden. The criteria that I used to select participants of this study was to be Somali, Swedish and gay men. However, it became clear later on, that almost all Somalis are Muslims as evidence from the previous studies mentioned earlier, that being Somali is synonymous as being Muslim. Also, due to the limited time of the

study, lack of contacts, financial restrictions and ongoing Covid-19 pandemic made difficult to include more participants from other cities of Sweden.

The interviewees consist of nine Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin, the informants were between 19 to 40, to avoid minors and ensure longer life experience. Also born or lived in Sweden means that they become Swedish citizens as later was confirmed by all the participants when they were asked about their nationality. A list of pronouns was provided to the participants (he, she or they) to choose their own preferred pronoun. The range of questions to the participants was divided into different sections and made sure to explain some of the questions that are related to intersectionality, concerning their sexuality and religion or ethnic and citizenship when thinking of their everyday lives. These types of questions are necessary to understand the complexity of identity. Sometimes it was hard for the participants to stay focused on this specific topic, therefore I politely tried to steer the questions back to the topic. To make sure that the interview questions were appropriate and understandable, I conducted a pilot interview before carrying out the actual interviews.

For this research, I used a purposive sampling method to find and select my informants with clear criteria at hand. Purpose sampling involves investigators using their experiment judgment to select respondents whom they select to be typical or the representative of the population of interest (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 277). The informative use of purposive sampling is relatively free of risk as long as there is no claim of transferability or generalization to a larger group with distinctive characteristics is implied (Drisko & Maschi 2015, p. 15). Therefore, I neither claim transferability nor generalization to a larger group than the specific group of this study.

All questions for the interviews can be found in appendix 1. Initially, all the informants were informed about the reason and the purpose of the research so they wouldn't feel confused or tricked in any way and they all accepted and signed a consent letter. I believe protecting the rights of all involved in the research process is extremely necessary, as the informants are a very vulnerable and marginalized who need extra protection (O'Reilly 2005, p. 62-63). The possibility to remain anonymous in my research was also offered and accepted by all of the informants. I got into contact with my informants through personal contacts who worked as gatekeepers in this study (O'Reilly

2005, p. 91). My gatekeepers were two gay men in the age span of 30 to 40 who have lived in Stockholm between 15 to 20 years. Since they know most of the Somali gay individuals because they arrange parties and dinners for their fellow Somali gay at birthdays and holiday. To provide support, especially to the younger Somali gay individuals who might struggle with their sexuality. After presenting my idea of researching Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin, they offered their support to be apart of the study and helped me find participants who might be interested in my topic, some of whom I knew.

Qualitative research requires a level of engagement between the interviewer and the interviewee, this promotes closeness, catharsis and allows the interviewer to probe and gain a richness from the responses given which are not available to the more structured forms of interviewing (Ellis 2016). Although, there are many advantages of being an insider by the interviewee, as it brings a high degree of knowledge to the research topic and context under investigation since the researcher has to be familiar with that specific culture and language. There are, however, issues of objectivity that need to be addressed (Mann 2016, p.73). It has been argued that an insider's identity is not necessarily fixed and the status of the researcher is negotiable. Hence, researcher's familiarity with the topic may facilitate an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions and interpretations of their lived experience, but they have to stay alert to avoid projecting their own experience and using it as the lens to view and understand participants' experience (Mann 2016, p.75).

Where interviews take place is important and reflects the nature of the questions being asked as well as the nature of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. Therefore, I asked my participants where they wished to be interviewed, a place of their choice, mostly at their homes because they either have their rented apartment or live in shared apartments. Privacy was my priority because I wanted my informants to freely express themselves and share their personal experiences without disruption. During the interviews, we always had "fika", sometimes with Somali "shaax" tea, coffee and some biscuits. Since my native language is Somali and the informants' mother language is Somali as well, their interview went flow and smooth. Understanding a society involves understanding its language and culture which I believe enabled me to understand the group more fully (O'Reilly 2005, p.54). Apart from Somali being the language conducted the interviews, I encouraged the participants to use other languages (Swedish,

English and Arabic) during the interview, as a means of succeeding in letting them express themselves due to their immigrant background (Mann 2016, p.75).

With the consent of my participants, I recorded all my interviews, because recording interviews allow for the totality of the interaction to be captured word for word. This prevents the researcher from forgetting something that was said. Not having to take notes, but instead to concentrate on what is being said (Ellis 2016). The actual interviews lasted ranging from 70 to 90 minutes, depending on how much each interviewee had to say. During the interview session, I tried to take as little notes as possible, to listen carefully to what they had to say because listening is what enables an in-depth interview to develop in collaboration with the participants (O'Reilly 2005, p.150).

## **5.4 Data Analysis**

To analyse the empiric data, I have chosen a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis as a set of techniques for the systematic analysis of texts of many kinds, addressing not only manifest content but also the themes and core ideas found in texts as primary content (Drisko & Maschi 2015). It aims to elicit meaning from the data and concludes with key findings. The qualitative content analysis assumes that it is possible to expose the meanings, motives and purposes embedded within the text. Qualitative content analysis may summarize large data sets and generate typologies of content related to the researcher's purposes and questions (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 346). Furthermore, it may involve data reduction through the analytic use of descriptive categories or themes. The goal of such studies is to identify and highlight the most relevant and meaningful passages of text (Drisko & Maschi 2015). The qualitative content analysis model is intended to build on the strength of other content analysis models while respecting context and latent communication (Drisko & Maschi 2015).

In general, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest five steps that need to be followed for analysing interviews which are, first to carefully read the whole interview to get a full sense of it, second to determine the natural meaning units. Third, restate the natural meaning unit as simple as possible, fourth to integrate the meaning units in terms of the specific purpose of the study, and fifth to tie



together essential non-redundant themes of the entire interview into a descriptive statement (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009 as cited in Mann 2016, p. 210). The first step of the process starts with transcribing the data into Somali from the recordings then translating them into English twice to confirm nothing was missed. I collaborated with my notes from the interviews to facilitate reflexivity and allows remembering special occasions from the interviews, that process builds awareness to the context and nuance which is essential in qualitative content analysis. Since there were some irrelevant pieces in the transcript, I had to pay much attention and edit to take away the unnecessary pieces.

The review was done multiple times to make sure that everything is written down and fully understood. I then classified codes, grouping them under a typical similarity. Although, it occurred few times that a code has more than one characteristic I had to decide to assign it to the one that it fits the best, as Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016) suggest if there are times when a code has attributes of more than one classification group, but it is assigned only to one that best fits (p. 105). When a group of codes are repeated in pattern ways in multiple ways, such as "the importance of family, racist language on dating applications, harassment for being black and Muslim" they have potential to become themes. Testing propositions and asking questions of similarities and differences between codes enables a researcher to use its intellectual judgment, to detect the themes (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove 2016, p. 105). Then, the data were integrated in a thematic manner of ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality and religion, where they have attached with the essential themes of the interviews into a descriptive statement in the analysis, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context (Mann 2016, p. 211).

Working with the qualitative data, on one hand, one has to become very familiar with the data set, immersion, such immersion in the data set provides a sense of the study as a whole and its part. On the other hand, conversely distance themselves from the data to avoid lack of critical approach towards data analysis (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove 2016, p. 106). It has been suggested a group discussion between researchers help explore various interpretations of the findings and provide evidence of conformability of the themes (ibid). For that reason, I had an academic friend who read the thesis and then we discussed it several times.

To sum-up, qualitative content analysis is most often used descriptively rather than to develop concepts and theory. The yield of qualitative content analysis is most often descriptive category and themes (Drisko & Maschi 2015). Thus, in this research, I began describing the complexity of identity, especially gay Muslims in the West, different from both gay and Muslim categories which illuminate the inconsistencies of apparently monolithic and oppositional cultures of East and West (Rahman 2010, p. 949). Given that, using intersectionality theory in this research allows deductive development of some of the codes, themes, such as ethnicity, sexuality, religion, citizenship. By having newly collected data which contains important ideas and perspectives that are discovered from the comments of the research participants where an inductive approach is utilized which entails linking the data and the theory dynamically between deduction and induction, their combination makes this research an abductive (Bryman 2012).

## **5.5 Limitation, Validity and Reliability**

This research is not without limitation, firstly, the data only accounts for nine participants from Stockholm Sweden, my ambition was to interview twelve to fifteen people. Due to crone pandemic spreading in Sweden, created fear and uncertainty, and thus, several interviews had to be cancelled both for my own sake and for the interviewees. Had the sample been slightly bigger, I would have been able to discuss the differences within the group. Secondly, other members of LGBTQI people were not part of the participant pool, which may have provided me with some more interesting data. Doing the case study in multiple cities in Sweden, only in Stockholm, may have added some more valuable aspects in the data, however, that would have required resources, connections and time, all of which I did not have. Although as a researcher, being an insider has helped establish and understand the data, my intersecting identity and insider-outsider status, may have influenced the data collection, and my interaction with the participants. The obvious limitation of this research is its generalization, it is any generalization only applied to the limited population of the study, and the result cannot be replicable or generalized onto other groups (Bryman, 2012).

Many qualitative researchers acknowledge multiple ways of knowing and multiple perspectives on a single identity. They usually search for other terms such as credibility and trustworthiness instead of validity, because qualitative research seeks to produce meaningful context rather than universally applicable. However, I am also of the opinion that my research has a high validity since I answered my research question directly through main interviews with Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin. It has been argued that "validity is also ensured when we are committed to our work, and to doing it thoughtfully and carefully; when we confront our prejudices and deal with them to avoid bias; and when we present the wider community with enough information to enable them to judge for themselves and to challenge our findings" (Hammersley 1998 as cited in O'Reilly 2005, p. 227). I asked my participants about ethnicity, sexuality, religiosity and their citizenship (O'Reilly 2005, p. 226). Since I have a relatively small amount of informants typical for qualitative research, my external validity should be lower, consequently, the results from my research can be hard to generalize across different social settings (Bryman 2012, p. 390).

Regarding reliability, my research cannot be replicable, because of the unique interactions that take place in the field, and the specific role as a researcher I had. The social constructionists argue that everyone has their account of the world and there is no way of judging between them (O'Reilly 2005, p. 227). However, it is possible to conduct a similar study by replicating at least with the same social role I had, the same research question and the same type of informants. For that same reason, my research gets high external reliability (Bryman 2012, p. 390). Since I documented the whole process of this research, starting from the sample selection to the analysis, complemented with the reflexivity section, I hope enough information has been provided to help the reader the credibility and validity of this research.

## **5.6 Ethical Consideration**

There are several important steps one has to take when conducting research which includes people, especially in my case dealing with a vulnerable group of people. My informants were informed both in written (see appendix 2) and orally the purpose of the study and their rights to anonymity and confidentiality. Since their participation was voluntary, they have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time without explaining their reasons. (World Health Organization, 2011). This information was given in Somali and all informants signed a letter of consent, in English, see appendix 2, of which they gave their consent before the interviews started. They were also informed that the reason I was recording our conversation was for me to transcribe them later, and the access to the recordings and the transcript will be limited to me. However, any summary interview content or direct quotations from the interview that are made available through publication will be anonymized so that they can not be identified, and any other information in the interview that could identify them is not revealed. Finally, to protect my own safety, I will erase my contact information from the Interview Consent Form, appendix 2, when publishing the thesis.

## **5.7 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is viewed as the process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's position, but acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome (Mann 2016, p. 15). These reflexive ways of thinking and acting are recommended, for critical thinking which in the long run improves the research and particularly the understanding of the results (O'Reilly 2005, p. 116).

Social researchers are a part of the world they study, not some sort of objective, that I am not a tool that completely objectively be able to research without influencing the informants or being influenced by them. (Being Somali and gay, Swedish and non-religious affiliated). I believe that being myself Somali and gay, allowed me to get close to my informants and gather more relevant data since this has made them more comfortable around me. Sometimes the questions were not just one way and some of the participants asked (e.g. my relationship status, how my family

response to my sexuality). I tried to answer their questions shortly, but reminding them constantly that the study is about their experience and not mine. I try to keep a balance, saying enough about myself to be alive and responsive but little enough to preserve the autonomy of the participant's words and to keep the focus of attention to their experience (Siedman 2006 as cited in Mann 2016).

I am aware of power relations in the process of knowledge production, I as a researcher of this study have the power to construct knowledge such as constructing interview guide, which has an impact on the result and outcome of this research (Kenway & McLeod 2010). The interviewees were guided to talk about and give answers to the questions I asked and not other questions that the interviewees may think are relevant. Moreover, the process of translating and interpreting data has again an impact on the outcome. During that process, sometimes they were Somali words that I struggled to find correct and accurate translation in English, such as "habaar ama duco". It roughly means that if one doesn't do what they are told to do by their parents, they are risking to be disowned.

## 6 Analysis of Empirical Findings

In this section, I present and analyse the findings from the interviews. The analytical tools that are used based on my operationalization variables and concepts are related to the main themes; ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender and citizenship (e.g. Family, the pressure to marry, sexual silence, coming out, integration of Islam and homosexuality, discrimination and threats and physical abuse, racism in white spaces, racism in gay scenes and dating websites). By maintaining long quotes, I try to give as much space as possible to the participants' own voices. The table below presents a profile of the participants to help the reader to understand their background, however, their ages will be 'x' to avoid any traces.

Sample profile by pseudonym, age, place of birth, sex, sexuality and proffered pronoun of respondents (n = 9).

Names	Age: 19-40	Place of birth	Sex	Sexuality	Pronoun
1- Caasow	x	Somalia	Male	Gay	He
2- Cabdi	x	Somalia	Male	Gay	He
3- Saalim3-	x	Somalia	Male	Gay	He
4- Towfiiq	x	Somalia	Male	Gay	He
5- Jaamac	x	Somalia	Male	Gay	He
6- Geedi	x	Somalia	Male	Gay	He
7- Daadir	x	Somalia	Male	Gay	He
8- Bubaa	x	Sweden	Male	Gay	He
9- Mohamed	x	Sweden	Male	Gay	He

## 6.1 Family Relations

Having examined the intersection of ethnic, sexual and religious identities of this group, the discussion broadens to examine Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin's relationships with their family and relatives. All the participants except two (born in Sweden) were born and raised in Somalia until they moved to Sweden as refugees or family reunification. For the participants, the concept of family doesn't only consist of immediate family but also extended family. Commonly, Somali family members become very involved in each other's lives. The main reason, according to the informants, is that family members provide support for each other at good and bad times. They all emphasized how greatly they listen to and respect their families. When they were asked how important is family to them, they replied that family is very important. Cabdi says that:

*“I have a big family, you know like any other Somali (laughing) some of my cousins live in Stockholm, so we hang out a lot, having your family around you is a blessing”*

Other participants also shared similar stories about how they highly value their families and have strong relationships with them. All the participants have some family members in Sweden, while the rest live in other countries, including Somalia. Mohamed says that:

*“I am the oldest child of my family, my dad died, I am my mother's right hand, we are very close, my younger siblings go to school, I can't imagine a life without my family, they mean everything to me”*

Nevertheless, all participants have visited Somalia after they had left, even those who were born in Sweden have been to Somalia for holidays. It is hard not to notice how the participants feel a strong connection with their family and relatives, providing financial support to those who are in need within the family. Bubaa says that:

*“We send money to our relatives every month, I used to think why the hell we have to send money when we don’t even have enough. I then visited Mogadishu<sup>1</sup>, and saw with my eyes how the money we send from here helps my cousins to eat and go to school, Alhamdulillah<sup>2</sup>”*

Maintaining a good relationship with one's family, also extended family appears to be very important to all of the participants. Somalis are family-oriented and collectivist society, as opposed to individualist society, family members take collective responsibility to financially support each other whenever one of them is in need. To support the participants' statement, Mohme (2014), shows that Somali family is not only defined in much broader terms than in the traditional nuclear Western family but a construction within which responsibility is collective. Given the Somali culture's emphasis on collectiveness and the family acts as a safety net and trying people together (Svenberg, Mattsson and Skott 2009). My argument is that it is not surprising the participants feel a strong connection with their families, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Moreover, in the participants' description of their experiences from their family and relatives, they explained that the elders in their family such as their parents, aunts and uncles have had extreme difficulties of adjusting life in Sweden. For example, learning Swedish and finding employment, therefore, the participants feel obliged to help and support their family in any way they can. The participants' claim confirms that Somalis are newly migrants to Sweden, they began to arrive in the 1990s (Wettergren& Wikström 2013, p. 571). For that reason, Somalis in Sweden, especially elders have difficulties of learning the Swedish language and finding employment which makes them vulnerable (Carlson, 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> The capital city of Somalia

<sup>2</sup> Praise be to God.



## 6.2 Patriarchal Cultural, Marriage Expectation and Sexual Silence

The participants have not told their families about their sexuality for the fear of losing them, getting disowned or even get killed. They claimed that if they tell their families about their sexuality, it will bring stigma and shame to the family and dissolve their relationships with them and the relatives. Jaamac says that:

*“I don’t want to disappoint my family, especially my parents, telling them that I am gay, ohh God, will give them a heart attack, it is not even an option for me”*

Another argument illustrated by several participants was as a Somali gay, one needs to act heterosexually, being masculine and hide any signs of femininity around families and relatives. The participants express their masculinity to prove that they are heterosexuals. They have to act heterosexual, be masculine, play sport, show less emotion and affection. Daadir says:

*“I can not show any sign of femininity around my family, I talk and walk like a straight<sup>3</sup> man, you know what I mean, not gayish like I do outside, otherwise I would be dead, I am from a very restricted family”*

According to Daadir, expressing masculinity around his family helps him to avoid any negative consequence associated with homosexuality. It is also confirmed by Saalim who says:

*“When I was about eight or ten years, my dad used to get angry at the way I walked, he said stop walking like a girl, you are a man, he forced me to play football even though I hated it, my mother didn’t seem bothered, but my dad had to make sure that I become a proper man, (laughing) all of his hard work was nothing, I am here and I am gay)*

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<sup>3</sup> Heterosexual man.

Hiding the participant's sexuality means acting heterosexual and not giving any feminine signs. Given the fact that Somalia being one of the countries that have the highest gender inequalities in the world (UNDP 2015). Somali culture operates under a patriarchal system with a high level of inequality between male and female (Hunt, Connor, Ciesinski, Abdi & Robinson 2018). Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) argue that hegemonic ideology is based on the assumption that masculinity is superior to femininity (cited in Reilly 2016, p.168), therefore the participants, feeling forced to hide their sexuality, they are unwillingly acting heterosexual and masculine.

Most of the participants told that they feel pressured to get married from their family, marriage to the opposite sex confirms for the family that their children are heterosexual. However, according to the participants, having a girlfriend in the Somali culture is also restricted because of their Islamic faith. Towfiq says:

*“I had a good friend, girl, my family though she was my girlfriend, so I had a serious talk with my dad who said, who is that girl you hang out with? I said she is my classmate, he then asked me if she was my girlfriend? I said, no she is just a good friend. He said, be careful don't forget that we are Muslims, we are not gaal<sup>4</sup>, if you want a girl, we can arrange a wife for you”*

When some of the parent's suspect that their children might be gay, they don't confront it with them because bringing up homosexuality considered taboo and shameful, instead parents pretend that their children are heterosexual in nature. Bubaa says:

*“I had a boyfriend, non-Somali, he used to come and stay with me at our house sometimes, I told my family he was my best friend, and my mother used to say he is a good guy, treated him like one of the family, until one day, she came into my room and saw us sleeping together in bed. Since that day, she says (I don't want that guy in my house anymore, I don't want you to hang out with him) she has started telling me now that I have to get married”*

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<sup>4</sup> Infidel

Caasow says:

*“I have never heard my family talk positively about homosexuality, when there is a pride in Stockholm, and the rainbow flags are all over the place, they say, that is the qaniis<sup>5</sup> flag, gaalo<sup>6</sup>, they believe all gays are gaalo<sup>7</sup>, it makes me sad and angry, I just keep silent and cry inside, I know they will never accept me if I tell them I am gay..... here you have your family that loves you but then if they find out you are gay, they would rather have you dead, life is hard as a Somali gay”*

Some of the participants are given the choice to bring a suitable girl to the family which means she has to be Somali. However, if they fail to do so, the families will arrange a girl for them, and it is hard to challenge their decision. For instance, Geedi has been offered to a distant cousin who lives in Somalia:

*“My family, specially my mom keeps pressuring me to marry my cousin who lives in Somalia, I refused but she keeps saying that, if you love me, you will marry her, she is your cousin and we know her, you have to choose between (habaar ama duco<sup>8</sup>). I don't know what to do, she makes me feel guilty,”*

There is a consensus from the participants on hiding their sexuality from their families is their best choice. When someone is asked to choose between "habaar or duco", they are given an ultimatum. To choose "duco" means that one accepts what has been offered to them while "habaar" means, if one refuses the offer and they will be rejected by the family.

The main reason for the participants to hide their sexuality from the families is linked to the fear of losing their families, and the risk of being disowned, not being able to visit Somalia and to some

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<sup>5</sup> fagget.

<sup>6</sup> Infidel

<sup>7</sup> Infidel.

<sup>8</sup> An ultimatum (either one accepts the offer and be praised for it, or rejects it and risks to be disowned).

extent get killed. Minwalla et al. (2005) argue, given the collective identity of families in many Eastern cultures, revealing sexuality to the larger family unit can impose serious threats, such as being disowned, lowliness and honour killings (p,120-121).

### 6.3 Coming Out

There were different opinions about 'coming out' from the participants. Some of the participants emphasized the pressure that had been put on by the broader LGBTQI individuals, assuming that every gay should be out and proud, Jaamac says:

*“I was at the Stockholm’s Pride, when an older lesbian lady asked me if I am out to my family, and I told her, no, she said ohhhh you have to come out, you can’t hide in the closet, you understand that right, your family has to accept you for who you are”*

When Caasawe was asked about his views on coming out

*“When someone asks me if I am out, I usually reply, I don’t see myself locked into a closet, I just hate that word, do you see straight people coming out? saying hey mom, by the way I am straight<sup>9</sup>. no, it should be the same for gays too,”*

Mohamed says:

*“What happens if I come out, what happens then, I can not be with my family, I can not be safe, I surely can be happy for a while, then what, what about if I get killed by my family or other Somalis, not everyone is as lucky as Sam Smith<sup>10</sup>, you know Somali gays get killed in Somalia, London and Toronto, it is not so different here in Sweden, if your family or other Somalis find out you are gay, they can kill you”*

The participants told that they are open about their sexuality to those whom they trust and feel comfortable with such as close friends. The participants are simply scared of the outcome, if they

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<sup>9</sup> Heterosexual.

<sup>10</sup> Sam Smith is an English singer and songwriter.

are publicly open with their sexualities, it can impose serious risks to their lives and also bring shame and guilt to their families. Also, the families would be ostracised by the larger communities, therefore it is hard for the participants to "come out" and be a part of their communities (Hunt, Connor, Ciesinski, Abdi & Robinson 2018).

## **6.4 Integration of Islam and Homosexuality**

Very high numbers of Somalis identify themselves as Muslims, therefore it is not surprising that Islam is identified as a central feature of Somali identity (Open Society Foundation 2015). Most of Somalis are Sunni Muslims who practice Islam daily. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, Islam rejects and disapproves any action of homosexuality, for that reason, many religious Muslims condemn homosexuality. Although, there are growing movements of progressive-minded Muslims, particularly in the Western world, who view Islam as an evolving religion that must adopt today's' modern world, most of Muslims still believe homosexuality is abnormal and immoral (Minwalla et al. 2005). I will not discuss the views of Islam on homosexuality as such, but simply discussing my participants' experience of their Islamic identity with relation to their sexuality.

To begin with, all the participants of this study, self identify as Muslims, however, only three, practice Islam in their everyday lives, which is praying five times a day, fasting in Ramadan, and even have done Hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. While the rest of the participants consider Islam as a part of their Somali identity as Geedi puts it this way:

*“I was born Muslim, all Somalis are born Muslim, you know all Somalis are Muslims, Sunnis<sup>11</sup>, it is just a part of our identity”*

The majority of the participants perceived Islam as it does not approve homosexuality, some of them reported that they felt shame and guilt when growing up because they heard about the story of Lut. It has been argued that the theological justification for Islam's rejection of homosexuality

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<sup>11</sup> A branch of the Muslim community.

appears in the story of Lut, that Lut received two angels from God, of which his neighbouring people demanded to meet, suggesting they should gang rape of the men. The subsequent destruction of the people of Lut, has traditionally been interpreted as contamination of their sexual practices (Minwalla et al. 2005, p. 118-114).

Based on the participants' perception of Islam, two of them perceive Islam as irreconcilable with their homosexual identity, but also knowing that they don't have a choice as they were born gay, living with stress and uncertainty. Cabdi says:

*“Islam forbids homosexuality, the Koran talks about Lut, I sometimes ask myself if I will go to hell, but I don't know, God created me this way, being gay I mean, I believe as long as you are a good person and believe in Allah<sup>12</sup>. He is merciful”*

Unlike the very few who feel their faith is irreconcilable with their sexuality, the rest of participants continue with their lives, without putting so much emphasis on Islam, therefore Islam is just a part of their Somali identity Caasaw says:

*“I don't think much about Islam, I am Muslim but I am also gay, keeping it law, so I enjoy my life, drinking, partying and having sex, I don't see anything wrong about that, (hahaha) maybe too much sex”*

In light of this, the participants' perception of Islam as a part of their social identity. Very high numbers of Somalis identify themselves as Muslims, therefore it is not surprising that Islam is identified as a central feature of Somali identity (Open Society Foundation 2015). The diversity answers from the participants demonstrate this matter is on an individual level, each participant has their own perception of their religion and how to reconcile their faith with their sexuality.

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<sup>12</sup> God

While some participants have shown internal struggles of feeling shame and guilt because of their perception of Islam about homosexuality, others seem to find their own way to peacefully reconcile their sexuality with their faith. In any case, they all believe that God created them homosexuals and they identify as Muslims, they have found their own ways to integrate their sexuality with their faith.

## **6.5 Discrimination, Threats and Physical Abuse**

All of the participants spoke about being discriminated against, harassed and threatened while some have even been physically abused. According to them, these homophobic behaviours and attacks were carried out by immigrants, including Somalis. Something that kept repeating in most of the interviews was that the participants are mostly fearful from their families first, then relatives, then Somalis and other immigrants in general. This is similar to "honour" which can be family honour, a group honour, honour is linked to culturally disseminated systems of socially defined rules and instructions for reputation gaining and maintaining (Carl 2018, p. 153-154). Jaamac says:

*“The other night, I was sitting on a metro here in Stockholm, two black guys from Cameroon were sitting next to me so we started chatting asking about where I come from and so on, then they were like which club are you going to? I said .... club, they said wait what, you are going to a gay club, you are a fag, I said so what, then they said, ohhh man can't you see how many girls are in Stockholm, you are African and Muslim, you can not be gay, they start shouting in French, I got scared and changed the seat”*

Jaamac's story illustrates an example of homophobic behaviours that many Somali gay men experience from people whom they share race, ethnicity or religion with. Towfiiw and Caasow also reported several incidents from Somalis, Towfiiq says:

*“After a night out, I took a taxi from a gay club to my home, the taxi driver happened to be Somali, he then had the nerve to ask me why I was in that club, I said listen, why were you parked outside of the club, when you knew it was a gay club, do you want money or not? when he*

*saw that I was angry, he said well, it is for your own and your family's benefit to not be gay, you are not gaal<sup>13</sup> brother, we are Muslims, do not be gay”*

Caasow:

*“I was with my friend, girl, walking on a street when two Somali guys started catcalling her, she said, shame on you, I am with my boyfriend, well they came and said, you mean this lady-boy is your boyfriend, gaalka<sup>14</sup>, one of them hit me twice in the face and they run. I reported the incident to the police but the police didn't find anything”*

It is fair to say that most of the participants take precautions as they manoeuvre around the city, to avoid any harm targeting them because of their sexuality. It has been argued that Muslims tend to be more tolerant of gays outside of the Muslim religion, less tolerant of those within the religion, and least tolerant of those within the family unit (Minwalla et al. 2005). Thus, that may explain the participants' experiences of violence coming from people with whom they share ethnicity, race and religion. Homosexuality has been repeatedly associated with 'gaal', non-Muslim and also as a 'choice' that one chooses to be gay. Therefore, I argue that the participants being black, Somali and Muslim at the same time makes them vulnerable to violence.

## **6.6 Racism in White Spaces**

The participants reported racism based on their race, being black, and towards their ethnicity, being Somali. To start with, all participants identified themselves as black and Somali, their view on the Swedish society was generally positive, enjoying the quality of life Sweden offers, including education and healthcare, but also the freedom to be who they are which is being gay. Also, they emphasised on the freedom to travel anywhere with the Swedish passport. However, they have reported various types of discrimination they encountered over time, from the authorities to the streets.

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<sup>13</sup> Infidel.

<sup>14</sup> Infidel.



Cabdi says:

*“I was at the airport in Gothenburg, came from Germany, when I suddenly being stopped by a police officer, asking a bunch of question and checking my luggage and my passport like I was hiding hash<sup>15</sup>, the police said it was a random selection (hahaha) ridiculous they only stopped me and an Arab guy, not as single white person”*

Two more participants shared similar incidents with the police searching them with connection to marijuana or hash, the participants argued that the police assume that black people deal with drugs. With relation to the police, one participant demonstrates that even though the police can be racist sometimes. However, he believes because of his sexual orientation, he is treated slightly better than heterosexual black man, that the police, in general, are sympathetic towards gay individuals. Saalim says:

*“I was stopped by the police while driving, I didn’t have my driving license with me and I thought this is it, after I told the police I forgot my license at home because I had to pick up my boyfriend really quick, he looked at me smiling and asked my personal security number (personnummer), and then said have a great evening, when we left my boyfriend said, the officer was nicer because we are a cute gay couple”*

It was also reported by the participants that there is racism on the labour market in Sweden, that it is hard for black people to find jobs and establish themselves in the labour market, Geedi says:

*“It is very hard to find a job in Stockholm, I have applied 100 jobs and not a single one gave me a chance for an interview, I have a bachelor in economics and I work as a care assistant, if I can not find a relevant job to my studies, I will just move to somewhere else”*

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<sup>15</sup> Drugs

Mohamed says:

*“After finishing gymnasium, two of my friends and I applied same job at a supermarket, they got the job but not me, I wonder if it was because of my name or I am black, I just don’t know, it was sad at the moment but now I got used to it”*

Geedi and Mohamed's statement but also other participant's views on the labour market is that, there is discrimination towards them because of their race, ethnicity and religion. Caasaw told that he had changed his first name which was typically Islamic name because he believes his name was associated with terrorism and he was stopped frequently at the airports, where he was asked questions. The participants' complex identity of being black and Muslim make them vulnerable.

## **6.7 Racialization in the Gay Scene and Dating Websites**

Several participants spoke about their experiences of gay clubs, bars and saunas. Most of them said that they were subjugated to a range of sexual stereotypes such as having a large penis, deviant and diseased. Mohamed says:

*“Almost every time I hit on a guy or a guy hits on me, they have to ask how big is my dick, it is such an obsession for white gays to assume every black guy has a huge dick, it has become the norm”*

Bubaa:

*“I met a white guy at the club, we hit off to the bathroom, then he said, you are safe right, you don’t have HIV, I said hell no, plus we are using condoms, after we had sex, we went out for a cigarette, then I asked why did you think I might have HIV, he said, don’t take me wrong but it is common for black guys to have HIV”*

Geedi:

*“I was drinking beer with a friend at a bar, a white guy comes and sat next to us, we just had a nice conversation, then the guy said (what is your status in this country), my friend said what status, never heard such term before, he said, no I mean your documents in Sweden, we just laughed and said we are illegal”*

The participants' experience of the gay scene, suggests that there are stereotypical prejudices towards black gay men in a white gay culture. Kehl (2019) illustrates that non-white and/or Muslim LGBTQ in Sweden are racialized and viewed as objects of desire, pity or fascination by white LGBTQ people. The participants' experience of racism in the gay scene demonstrate that although no one seems to question their sexuality within the gay scene, some white gay men seem to discriminate them based on their ethnicity. Thus, my argument is that the participants experience illustrates marginalisation and oppression because of their ethnic identity and immigrant background.

The participants reported racist language, used by other gay men from various dating applications, such as Grindr, Badoo and Gay Romeo. Daadir:

*“The was a white guy who texted me on Grindr, hey nigga, do you want fuck? I said don't call me that stupid, then he repeated it so I blocked and reported him to Grindr”*

Towfiq:

*“I have been called nigger, monkey, go back to Africa, you name it, they are sexually frustrated”*

Cabdi:

*“There was this Swedish guy who keeps sending me nude pictures, and eager to meet so I said I am not interested please stop sending nude pictures, he goes I can give you 1000 kr, I said still not interested, he said you are playing like an expensive nigger. he was sick”*

The participants being black gay men makes them a target on dating websites, they feel that they have been discriminated due to their skin, and also viewed as poor immigrants who need money to have sex with other men. When they refuse the offered money, they are subjugated to more racism. Minwalla et al. (2005) report gay Muslim of colour living in a white dominant culture experience exclusion, marginalization and oppression. In light of this, the participants' experience indicate that they are marginalised and oppressed by white gay men.

## **6.8 Replicating Heterosexual Gender Norms into Homosexual Relations**

Several participants have talked about their experience, dividing the gay men into tops or bottoms, although some mentioned the existence of versatile. The top is the one who penetrates, while the bottom is the one that has been penetrated and versatile is the one who both penetrates and been penetrated (Reilly 2016). Eight of the nine participants believe that being top has a better status than being bottom, being top usually entails that they are masculine, dominant, real men, and should be treated as such. While being bottom according to the participants, usually means feminine, girly, and have less status within the gay community. Casaawe:

*“If you are bottom<sup>16</sup>, even straight guys want to fuck you, and then ignore you when they see you on the streets, because you are gay”*

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<sup>16</sup> Someone who prefers the receptive role.

Towfiq:

*“I had a short relationship with an Arab guy, he wanted me to be his wife and take care of me (laughing), but he also said nobody can never find out about our relationship, not even my close friends, he was not even gay and had a girlfriend in another country”*

Bubaa:

*“When I tell others Somalis I am top<sup>17</sup>, they say “sister” you are more “naag<sup>18</sup>” than my mother, they don’t believe me, they think I am lying, not all tops are machos”*

The evidence above shows that gender norms are also practised in homosexual relations. Reilly (2016) states that gendered heterosexual norms about sexuality have pervaded gay men. The framework that is given to the tops in the homosexual relations are similar to men in heterosexual relationships as being masculine, dominant and viewed more powerful and therefore more valuable. While bottoms are given the same framework as women in heterosexual relations have as being more feminine, passive, sexually receptive, and viewed more vulnerable and therefore less valuable.

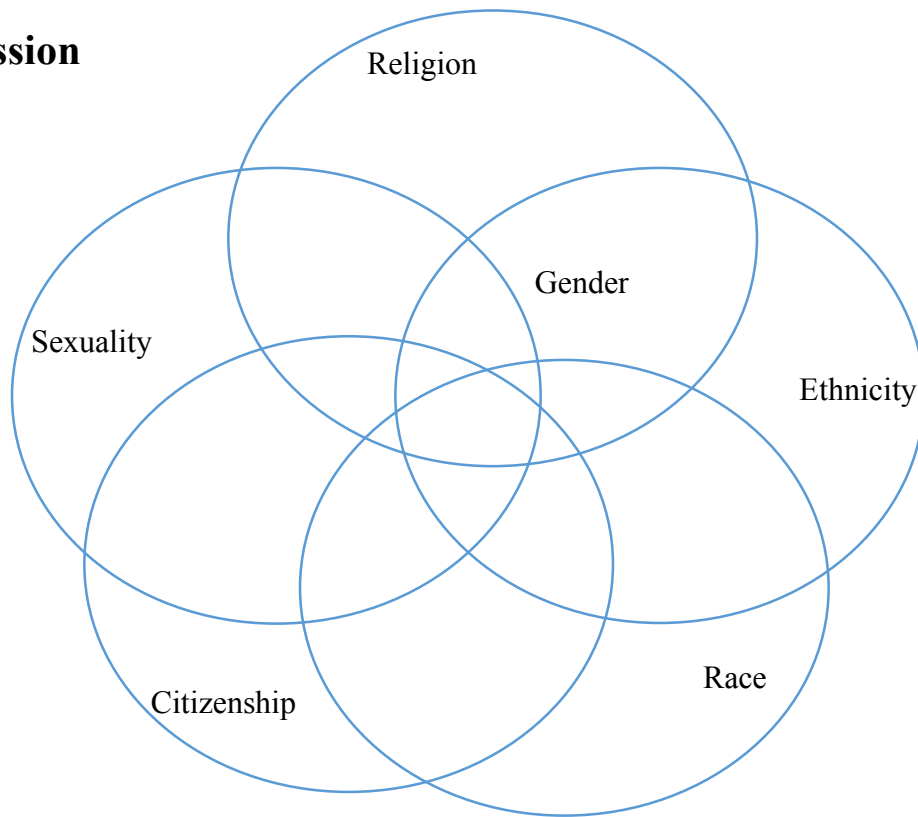
It is also worth mentioning that some of the participants have had relations with heterosexual men because according to those men being a bottom is what makes someone gay. As long as a man is penetrating another man, making them tops, can identify themselves heterosexual and therefore can even have a girlfriend on the side. Reilly (2016) illustrates that in some cultures among men who have sex with men, the bottom is considered gay while the top is considered straight (p.170).

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<sup>17</sup> The penetrator.

<sup>18</sup> Woman

## 7 Discussion



Intersectionality diagram

This case study of Swedish Muslims gay men of Somali origin provides a deep understanding of their intersectional identities as the findings illustrate that the participants are dealing with layers of oppression. The theoretical lenses I am wearing to analyse and discuss the findings are based on intersectionality theory. It is argued that "Intersectionality is the systematic study of how differences such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and other socio-political and cultural categories interrelate" (Fotopoulou 2012, p. 19). Using the intersectionality framework of both group centered and intracategorical complexity, I aim to give voice to my participants and highlight their unique experiences to better understand the inequalities that exist in their everyday lives. (Windsong 2018, p.138). Given the intersecting identities of the participants who are Swedish, Somali, Muslim and gay men, using analytical framework by Minwalla et al. (2005), it

is argued that Muslim identity appears to have three dimensions such as religious, ethno-cultural and colour, integrated with a gay identity.

As we have learned from previous sections above, according to the majority of Somalis, homosexuality doesn't exist in the minds of Somalis (Christman 2016, Sida 2014). Therefore, the participant's decision to hide their sexuality from their families and relatives is because of the strong connection they feel for their families and relatives. Given the family structure of Somalis as collectivist, as opposed to individualistic (Mohme 2013), it is not surprising that the participants have good relationships with their families and relatives. Thus, if the participants reveal their sexuality, not only are they shaming themselves but also disrupt their family's dignity and honour. Given the collective identity of a family in many Eastern cultures, such as Somalis, Minwalla et al. (2005) said that families can impose a range of serious threats to their gay family member, from disowning to honour killing, to restore family honour (p. 120-121). Rahman (2020) demonstrate that most LGBT Muslims do not want to reject their ethnic cultural identity, even if their family relationships are broken or strained, because they are aware that they cannot exist outside of their racialized ethnic identity in the Western contexts (p.2)

Somali identity being synonymous with Islam, Somali parent in Sweden, as elsewhere, are known to be very strict teaching their children about their religion and culture to achieve authentic Muslim and Somali identity (Scuzzarello & Carlson 2018). Also, the participant's perception of Islam as it forbids homosexuality, makes it even harder for them to consider talking about their sexuality with their family. Rahman and Valliani (2016) argue that LGBT Muslims are hesitant to disclose their sexuality because they are worried about the negative reaction from their family and the wider community. They also emphasise the absence of community support for LGBT individuals and their families, from either Western gay organisations or from within their ethnic communities. A linked issue is the understanding of public homosexual identity as a Western form of identity and lifestyle, a perception shared by Muslim communities (Rahman and Valliani 2016, p.75). In light of this, several participants articulated their family's perception of homosexuality as Western and non-Islamic, for that reason 'coming out' publicly as homosexual is a core concern for LGBTQ Muslims, including the participants of this study.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the participants have been encouraged by white LGBTQ individuals to come out to their families, to be out and proud. First, "coming out" should not be used as a universal framework for all LGBTQ people to live their authentic lives. Kehl (2019) argued that the process of coming out itself plays to the narrative around threats and protection to be included in the safety of gay-friendly liberal-secular Western communities. There is an assumption that non-white and/or Muslim LGBTQ people in Sweden have to liberate themselves from the oppressive structure of collective identities. Rahman (2014) criticizes Western queer politics of identity, suggesting the need to focus more on equality as a set of discursive and institutional resources, rather than as a teleological, pre-formed universal outcome based on Western experiences of coming out and Western forms of political engagement which are grounded in a Western essentialist understanding of Sexuality (ibid). I suggest the importance of creating more inclusive LGBTQ community, which takes into account other cultures, religions and ethnicities so to better understand the intersecting identity of non-white and/or Muslim LGBTQ people.

When the participants are told to come out to their families, they have been negated their freedom to personally decide for themselves. Kehl (2019) explains that to becoming intelligible as LGBTQ in a white, Western context, coming out has historically been used as a political strategy by activists in Europe and North America, seeking recognition by making the assistance of LGBTQ people publicly visible. Crenshaw (1991) criticizes identity politics, as she says it ignores the intragroup differences. She argues in the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities such as race and class (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1242). Similarly, my argument is contemporary queer politics have failed to consider intersectional identities such as LGBTQ Muslims. Given the stories of my participants, not only they will risk losing their families if they come out, but they will not be able to travel to their home country of origin as some parts of Somalia, the punishment for homosexuals is death (Sida 2014, Christman 2016).



The participants' stories concerning their sexuality, suggest that they are no less homosexuals just because they haven't revealed their sexuality to their family. They have to assess the risks they can face before disclosing their sexuality to anyone. The unique combination of the collective identity of Somali families, the concept of honour killing, emphasis on gender norms in the Somali culture, and the Islamic identity of Somalis. Kehl (2019) argued that queerness that both operationalises and persists through strategic silence might be seen as constructing, oppressing and backwards, instead of acknowledging the need to manage different social contexts (p.158). The stories of the participants demonstrate that there is a contemporary discourse of fundamental culture opposition between sexual diversity and Islam, identifying the former with the West (Rahman& Valliani 2016).

The participants spoke about discriminations in the labour market based on their race, ethnicity and faith. The intersecting identities of the participants make them vulnerable to layers of discrimination. The participants claim of racism by the police, that they are targeted because of their skin colour, being black, which they believe is associated with drugs and criminal acts. Some of the previous studies also confirmed that several dilemmas confronting Somalis in Sweden, includes widespread unemployment, unsuitable education, residential segregation and institutional discrimination noticeably in the labour market (Salat 2010).

Mohme (2013) argued that Somali-Swedes are marginalized and more disadvantaged than other migrant groups in the country due to their socio-economic conditions, but also culture and religion. She also states that Islam as a faith that the majority population in Sweden finds difficult to reconcile with values that are considered fundamental to modern society (Mohme 2013). In this context, by looking at the structures of certain intersecting identity as the consequence of the vehicle for vulnerability. Because of the participant's Islamic names, one participant said he was subjected to discriminations at airports, while other participants said because of their names they were discriminated in the labour market. These examples illustrate how patterns of subordination intersect in the participants' experience of multi-layered discrimination. Crenshaw (1991) explain intersectional subordination need to be intentionally produced, it is often the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment (p. 1249).

The participants have been subjected to violence because of their sexuality. They were told that they can not be gay and also Muslim, Somali and African. On one hand, the participant's belief that God created them the way they are, being gay. On the other hand, they are told by other Muslims that they can not be gay and Muslim. Thus, internally they wrestle with this notion that you can be both Muslim and gay, without feeling shame and guilt. However, it can be fairly argued that in terms of the monotheistic faiths, Islam is almost starting to birth a progressive line of thought that began back in the 1960s for Judaism and Christianity (Saltz 2009). The participants appear to hold onto their Islamic faith since there is not only one singular a historical understanding of Islam, it is their right to decide to be gay and Muslim. This indicated that the participants are at the intersecting point of sexuality, race, ethnicity and religion and therefore they face multi-layered discrimination and oppression (Crenshaw 1991, Fotopoulou 2012).

The sexual stereotypes and racist language that the participants face in gay scenes and dating. The findings demonstrate that Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin, have a complex relationship with white gay spaces, they are stereotyped and prized for their dark looks, objectified and fetishized. Thus, this further marginalizes the participants who have already been marginalized because of their sexuality. To support my findings, Kehl (2019) explains that non-white and/or Muslim LGBTQ individuals in Sweden are 'others' and exotified in both sexualised and non-sexualised ways. They are viewed as objects of desire, pity or fascination by white LGBTQ people. The participants' location at the intersecting of various hierarchies produced distinct experiences of oppression (Rahman& Valliani 2016). Intersectionality framework is used to pay attention to the ways of which all forms of discrimination overlap and create a unique and distinct kind of oppression for the participants who are subject to more forms of discrimination.

The experience of LGBTQ contexts in Sweden being predominantly or even exclusively white means that the right kind of queer occupying these spaces is always already racialized as white (Kehl 2019). Thus, the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality and religion only highlights the need to take into account for multiple identities when considering how the social world is constructed (Crenshaw 1991). Intersectionality is to help us understand the layers of oppression that some people face, in this case, within the LGBTQI community in Sweden, Swedish Muslims

gay men of Somali origin have made it clear that their intersectional identity matters, and because of that they have experienced multiple oppression both intentionally and unintentionally.

The intersections of gender and sexuality, some gay men 'top' are privileged while others 'bottom' are disfranchised. This point demonstrates how some gay men are subjugated to humiliation and bottom shaming. To support my argument, previous researches on gay relations have shown that heteronormativity expectations about gender and sex are reinforced within and among gay culture and society, which affects how gay men perceive how they should identify based on gendered characteristics (Reilly 2016, p.170). Thus, as gay relations are gendered, the combination of gender and sexuality, the identity of both gay and bottom, points out the need to account for multiple identities to unveil the process of subordination (Crenshaw 1991).

To conclude, Rahman argued that only using intersectionality theory we can then understand the lived experiences of LGBT Muslims identity (Rahman& Valliani 2016). To complicate this point, my participants have to combine several cases of action for their discrimination to be understood. First, they are discriminated and oppressed by other Somalis and immigrants because of their sexuality, subjected to violence when their sexuality is revealed voluntarily or involuntarily. However, despite the heteronormativity in Muslim communities, the participants do not reject their family and ethnic networks, as Rahman (2014) argues it is because of the need to remain close to an ethnic community in the face of wider racism and perhaps increasingly of Western cultural exclusion of Muslim (p. 110). Second, they are marginalised and discriminated in the labour market because of their race, black, ethnicity, Somali and faith, Islam. Third, they face racism and sexual stereotypes coming from other gay men towards their race, being black. Rahman (2014) reflects upon how his personal experiences drive from the difficulties of negotiating the social world where racism, Islamophobia and homophobia intersect. The participants of this study can be understood, as Rahman (2014) says "queer subjects who are negotiating their ontological deferment from coherent dominant identities, not able to easily live within specified categories and engaged in constant negotiations of their lived experiences at the intersections of identity" (Rahman 2014, p. 111).

For future researchers, a research concerning LGBTQ Somalis in Sweden or even in Scandinavia could be suggested to explore their lived experiences in terms of similarities and differences from a holistic perspective. To further challenge the assumption that one can not be Somali, Muslim and LGBTQ. Rahman (2014) states that gay Muslims as queer ontological intersectionality will allow for better understanding of appropriate strategies for achieving equality for all LGBT subjects, including Muslim and/or non-white LGBTQ who are leading 'impossible' lives.

## **8 Conclusion**

The study asked “What are the subjective experiences of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin negotiating their intersecting identities?”

- How does this group negotiate their sexuality in the face of their families and relatives?
- What kind of challenges do they face concerning their gay and Muslim identities?
- How do they negotiate their ethnic identity in Sweden?

By incorporating intersectionality, the thesis aims to explore the subjective experiences of Swedish Muslim gay men of Somali origin negotiating their intersectional identities such as (ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and citizenship). To begin with, when negotiating their sexual identity, the participants hide their sexuality from their families to maintain good relations with the families and relatives and also to protect the family honour. It is important to mention that the participants' families do not acknowledge homosexuality, it is seen immoral, unnatural and unacceptable. Homosexuality is associated with being "gaal" infidel, un-Islamic and Western for many Somalis, and a choice, that people choose to be homosexuals. Fear of being disowned, isolation, not being able to travel back to their homeland, and honour killing are some of the things that the participants are worried about if they reveal their sexuality or 'come out'. Coming out will not only hurt the participants but also their families will be ostracised by the larger Somali community.

The participants also face homophobic behaviours and attacks from other Somalis and immigrants with whom they share faith, ethnicity or race. Hiding their sexuality also means acting heterosexual, never giving any sign of being feminine or gay and embracing heteronormativity to protect themselves. First, it has been argued that there is a hidden nature of homosexuality in the

Somali culture which perpetuates homophobia. Second, Muslims tend to be less tolerant of those who are gay Muslims and least tolerant of those within the family unit. However, the participants are open with their sexuality to those whom they feel safe and comfortable with. Concerning religion, their perception of Islam differs among participants. Although, all participants see themselves as Muslims in an ethno-cultural sense, as being Somali is synonymous with being Muslim, there are some that Islam is a central part of their identity. In any case, most of the participants demonstrate internal struggles of reconciling their faith with their sexuality, as they perceive Islam condemns homosexuality, referencing the story of Lut. They are also told that they can not be gay and Muslim. Despite the internal struggle, the participants believe that God created them the way they are, therefore they can be both Muslim and gay.

The participants' general view of Sweden is positive. Sweden has been praised for its high quality of life, free education and health care, its protection of gay rights. The freedom to travel with a Swedish passport. However, the group also shared their experiences of racism, and discriminations in the labour market which they believed had something to do with their race/ethnicity and religion. In the case of racism, few of the participants, three, have experienced what they called racial profiling by the police. It was also reported by one participant that the police show more sympathy towards gay black men than heterosexual black men which are seen as an advantage. The participants claimed that there is discrimination towards blacks and Muslims in the labour market. Those who have gone to higher education claimed that they are discriminated against because they can not find qualified jobs that correspond to their education. While those who have finished gymnasium, high school, believe the reason they can not easily find jobs is because of their race, ethnicity and religion.

Everyday racism and racial stereotypes have also been said existing in the gay scene and the dating websites, coming from white gay men. Nigger and go back to Africa are some of the things that the participants are being told on Grindr, Badoo and Gay Romeo. Nonetheless, they have been offered money by other gay men to have sex, assuming they need money because they are immigrants. In the gay scene, such as gay bars, clubs and saunas, they experience racial stereotypes such as having a large penis, being dominant or diseased of HIV. Everyday racism and racial

stereotypes have been reported existing in the gay scene and on dating websites, coming from other gay men.

The findings also illustrate that heterosexual gender norms and stereotypes are existent in some homosexual relations. "Tops" are considered more masculine and dominant and viewed more powerful, while "bottoms" are seen feminine and sexually receptive and less powerful. Thus, it has also been demonstrated that for some "top" men believe being gay is being "bottom", therefore they define themselves heterosexual.

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# Appendix 1

## Interview Guide

### Biographical information

- 1- What is your name, age and place of birth?
- 2- What is your preference pronoun?
- 3- What is your nationality?
- 4- Can you give details about your education?
- 5- Can you give details about any employment you have had?
- 6- If born outside of Sweden. How long have you been living in Sweden?

### Questions related to family and ethnicity

- 1- How do you define yourself?
- 2- How do you identify yourself racially and/or ethnically?
- 3- Can you give details about your family?
- 4- Do you live with your family, alone or with someone else?
- 5- How important is your family to you?
- 6- What does it mean to you to be Somali?
- 7- What are your personal experiences of being Somali in Stockholm Sweden?
- 8- How do you feel about being Swedish citizen of Somali origin?
- 9- Have you encountered racism in your daily life? If so, can you tell me about what happened and how you felt?

### Questions about sexuality and religion

- 1- What do you identify yourself in terms of your sexual identity?
- 2- How important is the role of religion in your life?
- 3- How open are you with your sexuality?
- 4- Tell me about your personal experience of being Somali gay in Sweden?
- 5- What is your idea of “coming out”?
- 6- What are your personal experiences of being gay Muslim in Sweden?
- 7- Can you tell me about any gay relationships that you have had?

8- Do you think Muslim gay men experience difficulties than non-religious gay men to fit in the gay community in Stockholm? If the answer is yes, tell me about your experience?

9- What are your views on gay community in Stockholm?

10- Have you experienced racism on the gay scene? If so, can you describe what happened?

11- As questions are finished now, do you have any reflection on the questions, or is there anything you would like to add more?

## Appendix 2

### Interview Consent Form

I agree to participate in a research project led by Mustafa Ahmed that will be published by Lund University in Sweden. The purpose of this document is to specify the terms of my participation in the project through being interviewed.

1. I have been given sufficient information about this research project. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project has been explained to me and is clear.
2. My participation as an interviewee in this project is voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate.
3. participation involves being interviewed by a master's student from Lund University, Sweden. The interview will last approximately 70-90 minutes. I allow the researcher to take written notes during the interview. I also may allow the recording by audio of the interview. It is clear to me that in case I do not want the interview to be recorded, I am at any point of time fully entitled to withdraw from participation.
4. I have the right not answer any of the questions. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to withdraw from the interview. I also have the right to withdraw any answers provided during the interview until the study is published.
5. I have given the explicit guarantees that, if I wish so, the researcher will not identify me by name or function in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. In all cases subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies at the EUI (Data Protection Policy).
6. I have read and understood the points and statements of this form. I have had all my question answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
7. I have been given a copy of this consent form co-signed by the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ Participant's Signature and Date

\_\_\_\_\_ Researcher's Signature and Date