ACTIVE AGENCY OR PASSIVE AGENT?

SECURITIZING LGBT+ ACTIVISM AND ITS TRANSNATIONAL INFLUENCES IN 21ST CENTURY IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this thesis is to analyze how men who have sex with men (MSM) and women who have sex with women (WSW) in Iraq attempt to securitize by performing a speech act that leads to the implantation of extraordinary measures against their existential threat. According to the critique of Sarah Bertrand on securitization theory, subaltern groups are unable to securitize due to their voice being silenced in addition to them being represented by other groups. This study scrutinizes Bertrand's critique by taking an LGBT+ perspective on securitization theory. First, the histories and contemporary circumstances of Iraqi MSM and WSW are divulged to provide a thorough understanding of their current state of affairs. Subsequently, the activism of IraQueer, Iraq's only local LGBT+ organization, is studied by employing a discourse analysis and conducting interviews to uncover their attempts at securitization and the potential challenges they encounter. The findings of this study suggest that, although their speech act is still ignored or distorted, IraQueer is not represented by transnational Euro-American organizations or their discourse. The Iraqi MSM and WSW maintain agency and are purely aided by these organizations and their corresponding discourse. Moreover, voicing the concerns of their constituency is the raison d'etre of IraQueer. It can be expected that a favorable environment for a successful securitizing move can be created if the dominant negative discourse on Iraqi MSM and WSW is reshaped by consistent LGBT+ advocacy and education.

Key Words: Securitization Theory, Queer Theory, Subaltern, LGBT+ Activism, Iraqi LGBT+ Community, Iraq

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BRCC	Ba'ath Regional Command Collection
COC	*Cultuur en Ontspannings Centrum* (Center for Culture and Recreation)
CPA	Coalitions Provisional Authority
CS	Copenhagen School
ILGA	International Lesbian and Gay Association
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Pansexual, Genderqueer, Queer, Intersexed, Agender, Asexual, and Ally
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSM	Men who have Sex with Men
OAI	OutRight Action International
OWFI	Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq
SHC	Scientific-Humanitarian Committee
SOGIE	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression
WSW	Women who have Sex with Women

CHAPTER 1 – SETTING THE STAGE

INTRODUCTION

"One of the most serious things that caused this epidemic to spread is legalization [of same-sex marriage]. Hence, I call on all governments to repeal this law immediately and without delay."[1] On 28 March 2020, Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr shared this message via Twitter in response to the outbreak of the novel COVID-19 epidemic that was sweeping through Iraq and other parts of the world. Al-Sadr is the political and spiritual leader of the Sadrist Integrity Party, which dominates the nationalist Sairoon electoral coalition, currently holding 54 of the 329 seats in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. Not even a month later, al-Sadr slammed the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Pansexual, Genderqueer, Queer, Intersexed, Agender, Asexual, and Ally (LGBT+) community again when the European Union mission and the British and Canadian embassies located in Baghdad raised the LGBT+ flag in commemoration of the International Day Against Homophobia. In his comments, al-Sadr stated described the LGBT+ community as "psychos who are mentally sick". To make amendments, the Shia cleric demanded "Islamic" flags to be raised at the mission and embassies. However, on this occasion, al-Sadr was publicly supported by Hadi al-Amiri, the head of the Badr Organizations and the Fatah Alliance which is the second-largest electoral coalition in Iraq and currently holds 48 seats. Al-Amiri asserted that raising the LGBT+ flag in Iraq was an "outrageous [...] act that violates the customs, traditions and ethics of Iraqi society."[2]

The rhetoric used by these two influential Iraqi politicians and heads of paramilitary organizations is just one example of the many hardships that the Iraqi LGBT+ community has to face on a daily basis. Those that identify with a non-normative sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (SOGIE) in Iraq are threatened and discriminated against by religious paramilitary groups, government officials, media channels, tribes, civil servants, employers, and even their family members.[3] According to a study conducted between 2015 and 2018, 96% of the

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[1] "Coronavirus: Iraqis criticise Muqtada al-Sadr for same-sex marriage claims," Middle East Eye, last modified March 30, 2020, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-iraq-muqtda-sadr-covid-19-same-sex-marriage
[2] "Iraqi leaders Sadr and Amiri bash gay pride," The Jerusalem Post, last modified May 18, 2020, https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iraqi-leaders-sadr-and-amiri-bash-gay-pride-flag-raising-ceremony-628421
[3] This list is non-exhaustive.

LGBT+ people in Iraq faced verbal and/or physical violence.[4] Moreover, the LGBT+ community in Iraq has faced multiple organized killing campaigns directed at self-proclaimed or perceived "queer" individuals since 2003. The perpetrators of these campaigns have been and are still enjoying impunity. Nevertheless, the plight of the LGBT+ people is often ignored by government officials even though it is not illegal in Iraq to identify with any SOGIE. Worse yet, members of the LGBT+ community are regularly prosecuted under the guise of damaging "public honor."[5] Public honor knows no clear definition in Iraq which opens it up for interpretation to any judge that presides over a case and can therefore be used to prosecute anyone that identifies with or is perceived as having a nonconforming SOGIE.

In response to this repugnant reality, organizations began to mobilize and advocate for the Iraqi LGBT+ community after the fall of the Ba'athist Party in 2003. In the early stages, it was near impossible for any organizations that focused on LGBT+ advocacy to get a foothold in Iraq due to a far-reaching anti LGBT+ stance. Therefore, groups that engaged in LGBT+ activism in Iraq were organizations whose advocacy intersected with LGBT+ activism, such as established national and transnational women's organizations or transnational LGBT+ organizations which operated outside of Iraq. The Iraqi LGBT+ community experienced a watershed moment when Iraq's first and only LGBT+ human rights organization IraQueer was founded in 2015. Although not officially recognized by the Iraqi government, IraQueer gained recognition among the international community, assisted many Iraqi LGBT+ individuals, and produced a copious amount of reports and submissions in cooperation with national and international organizations.

The relatively recent emergence of this local LGBT+ organization allows us to undertake an unprecedented study on LGBT+ activism within Iraq. IraQueer represents the mobilization of the Iraqi LGBT+ community. Subsequently, studying this organization's philosophy, strategies, and discourse enables us to extrapolate knowledge on how a repressed subaltern identity group that grapples with insecurity and widespread maltreatment attempts to bring about lasting social and political change. Moreover, this study also allows us to delve deeper into the intricate interplay between local and transnational LGBT+ activism, which, as will be explained below, has been criticized for its neo-colonial characteristics, specifically in the Arab world. Because the core

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[4] IraQueer, *Fighting for the Right to Live. The State of LGBT+ Human Rights in Iraq* (IraQueer, 2018), 7.
[5] Iraqi National Assembly, Iraqi Penal Code, Law No. 111, 1969, articles 403, 430, 431.

objective of IraQueer is to guarantee security for its constituency, it is possible to place the study in a security studies framework. Studying the dynamic between IraQueer and transnational organizations will illuminate the role and influence of transnational organization within the security process that IraQueer pursues. The remainder of this chapter will provide the outline of this thesis. In the following paragraphs, LGBT+ activism in a Euro-American setting and the Arab world will be discussed. Thereafter, securitization theory, the theoretical foundation of this thesis, will be explained and situated within the Iraqi LGBT+ context. The final part of this chapter will consist of the research question and chosen methodology.

LGBT+ ACTIVISM AND THE STONEWALL MODEL

The first overtly political organization which advocated for LGBT+ rights was the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee (SHC), founded in 1897 by the German Magnus Hirschfeld. Hirschfeld argued for the decriminalization of homosexuality because he believed that gay and lesbian people constituted a 'third sex' which meant their sexual attraction was essentialist rather than a choice. It was not until the First World War that the SHC was spiritually succeeded by small homosexual social groups spread across Europe. These social groups eventually led to the emergence of new organizations after the Second World War, such as COC Netherlands which is still active to this day. Through the 1950s and 1960s, small homosexual communities began to develop and spread throughout Europe and North America. The contemporary gay and lesbian social movement grew out of the turbulent 1960s when growing sexual freedoms and social movements led to the emergence of a radical gay movement. In Italy and France, the rebirth of feminism and student movements in 1968 saw the rise of a gay and lesbian movement. Another watershed moment for the movement, also quoted as the beginning of the gay and lesbian movement, were the riots following the raid on the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in 1969. In the years following 1968/69, the movement started to spread to countries outside of Europe and North America.[6] The globalization of the gay and lesbian movements eventually led to a proliferation of transnational LGBT+ organizations and networks. The first transnational LGBT+ movement, the International Gay (later Lesbian and Gay) Association (ILGA), was founded in 1978. It was from this moment

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[6] Dennis Altman, "Globalization and the International Gay/Lesbian Movement," in *Handbook of Lesbian & Gay Studies*, ed. Diane Richardson and Steven Seidman (London: SAGE, 2002), 416-417.

that organizations and networks began to argue for a universal homosexual identity, a claim they substantiated with a human rights framework.[7]

These supposed universal homosexual identities are part of the Euro-American "Stonewall model" of sexuality, identity, and liberation. The Stonewall model built on the belief that same-sex sexuality, which translated to the binary categories of gay, lesbian, bi, et al, is a key aspect of one's identity with the "coming out" narrative as a pivotal moment within the identity formation.[8] The subjectivity that is created through this model is based on autonomy and a specific language of rights that prioritizes the individual and calls for assimilation that requires a distinct social acceptance.[9] This aforementioned language of rights alludes predominantly to a human rights discourse, a cosmopolitan argumentation that flows from the desire to be "who we are". Furthermore, as argued by Stijn Deklerck, Stonewallian LGBT+ activism tends to present activism as inseparable from protests and activists with radical reformers.[10]

According to Carl Stychin, the Stonewall model has transcended its cultural and historical roots and has become the global paradigm of sexual identity and activism. However, he noted that the model did not take into account the complex and multifaceted dynamics of sexual identity outside of their defined cultural areas.[11] As argued by Dennis Altman, the Western gay and lesbian movement was born within conditions of affluence and a liberal democracy that made it possible to develop a particular politics around sexuality. However, these sexual politics may not be compatible with other countries where the basic structure of political life is inherently different.[12] Altman's statement on the incompatibility of the Stonewall model is also mirrored in the counterarguments formed against a human rights discourse provided by Stychin. Stychin argues that in response to the cosmopolitan argument of human rights, a communitarian counterargument is often formed that speaks to the preservation of a particular community.[13] Stychin draws here on

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[7] Altman, "Globalization," 421.
[8] Carl F. Stychin, "Same-Sex Sexualities and the Globalization of Human Rights Discourse," *McGill Law Journal* 49, (2004): 954.
[9] Robert Philips, ""And I am Also Gay" : Illiberal Pragmatics, Neoliberal Homonormativity and LGBT Activism in Singapore," *Anthropologica* 56 (2014): 48.
[10] Stijn Deklerck, "Chinese LGBT+ Activism – playing, organizing, and playful resistance," in *China's youth cultures and collective spaces: creativity, sociality, identity and resistance*, ed. Vanessa Frangville and Gwennaël Gaffric (Milton: Routledge, 2019), 151-152.
[11] Stychin, "Same-Sex Sexualities," 954.
[12] Altman, "Globalization," 422.
[13] Stychin, "Same-Sex Sexualities," 955.

Benedict Anderson's famous concept of "imagined communities" to explain the resistance to universal human rights. [14] Where human rights underscore sameness and universality, communitarian arguments argue for difference, specificity, and community. An example of a communitarian argument can be found in the anti-LGBT+ sentiment propagated by Ugandan President Museveni. Museveni described non-conforming SOGIE as a Western colonial relic that could destroy Ugandan family units and destabilize the nation.[15] As can be seen, Museveni framed the LGBT+ community as infringing upon the foundation of Ugandan society, thus undermining its unique existence as a community.

Instead of one uniform identity, Peter Jackson argued that due to globalization and the proliferation of transnational LGBT+ activism, a hybrid identity influenced by both national agency and foreign influences was formed.[16] Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel contended that the concepts of "gay" and "lesbian" became the foremost terminologies applied by mobilized LGBT+ members globally. However, that did not entail that these terms enjoyed a single international identity or culture. Similarities in activities, symbols, language and so forth did not imply that the sexual cultures behind them could be carelessly mashed together to create a uniform monolithic identity. Country specific elements remained prevalent despite, or maybe better because of, ever-growing globalization.[17]

Stychin distinguished three strategies that local LGBT+ activists adopted that ascribed to this hybrid identity and were used to navigate the murky waters of cosmopolitism and communitarianism arguments. First, to challenge the idea of a sexually pure nation, activists turned to local histories and retold the story with the inclusion of non-conforming sexual orientations. The objective of this strategy was to change the historical narrative so the LGBT+ community could not be cast as a sexually deviant and polluting force that soiled an otherwise sexually pure state. Second, activists employed rhetoric that was theoretically grounded in the idea that there were intersecting and overlapping identities present in one person. This strategy was a reaction to

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[14] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016)

[15] "Uganda President: Homosexuals are Disgusting," CNN World, last modified February 25, 2014, https://edition.cnn.com/2014/02/24/world/africa/uganda-homosexuality-interview/index.html

[16] Peter A. Jackson, "Capitalism and Global Queering: National Markets, Parallels among Sexual Cultures, and multiple Queer Modernities," *Glq: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, no. 3 (2009): 386-387.

[17] Barry Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak, Andr Krouwel, *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 344-348.

the rhetoric that LGBT+ people did not belong to a particular society. It challenged the notion that there is a monolithic, one-dimensional identity within a state. By accentuating the citizenship of a state in combination with a non-conforming SOGIE, the communitarian argument that LGBT+ people were an "other" not deserving of political and cultural recognition, protection, and consideration was problematized. Lastly, a human rights framework was cast as a fundamental part of the community in which the activists operationalized their advocacy. By employing this rhetoric, the activists framed human rights as part of the self-constitution of a community.[18]

Examples to illustrate Stychin's strategies are found within Singapore and Russia. First, as demonstrated by Robert Philips, LGBT+ activism in Singapore exhibited a revised version of the Stonewall model. Singaporean thought and ideology are heavily influenced by Confucianism and the country has a strong authoritative government that prohibits same-sex sexual relations. Therefore, the LGBT+ community embraced the meaning of LGBT+ subjectivity that took a different approach than the Stonewall model by focusing on maintaining social balance. Although LGBT+ symbolism and language were still adopted, LGBT+ activism in Singapore was focused on projecting an image of "sameness." An example was the activism of the Singaporean LGBT+ organization Pink Dot. In promotional material for their events, familial values that took precedence over an LGBT+ identity were emphasized. According to LGBT+ Singaporeans, one of the objectives behind their LGBT+ activism was to become a fully recognized citizen of Singapore without having to sacrifice their LGBT+ identity.[19] The example of LGBT+ activism in Singapore challenged the radical Stonewallian notion of assimilation and rights in favor of a more harmonious approach that is based on acquiring full citizenship while also claiming an LGBT+ identity. By claiming a Singaporean identity first they paved the way for negotiations of rights because they situate themselves already within the framework of the state instead of being branded outsiders and having to negotiate from the outside. Thus, this example portrays the strategy of using intersecting and overlapping identities to reject the notion that a state consists of one uniform identity.

Second, in contemporary Russia, coming out and increasing visibility is a very dangerous endeavor for the Russian LGBT+ community or activists due to the increased importance of

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[18] Stychin, "Same-Sex Sexualities," 958-960.
[19] Philips, ""And I am Also Gay,"" 50-52.

"traditional values" within Russian society and politics, and the homophobia emanating therefrom.[20] Alexander Kondakov found that Russian LGBT+ activists who advocated for equality within Russia for the LGBT+ community relied on the concept of universal human rights discourse to assert that everybody in Russia had certain inalienable rights. Organizations framed human rights as an integral part of Russian society.[21] This is an example of Stychin's third strategy which boils down to the Russian LGBT+ community deserving protection and equal treatment because Russia signed multiple human rights treaties and therefore these rights are an essential part of Russian society.

NEO-COLONIAL LGBT+ ACTIVISM IN THE ARAB WORLD?

In his famous book *Desiring Arabs,* Joseph Massad warned about the influence of the 'Gay International' in the Arab world. Massad coined this term to refer to transnational LGBT+ organizations that adhered to the Stonewall model of LGBT+ activism such as the International Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) and OutRight Action International (OAI). Massad made two assertions regarding the Gay International. First, the Gay International practiced a form of cultural imperialism by imposing a Western ontology on gay Arab subjects. According to this claim, the Gay International produced identities such as gay and lesbian while neglecting to take into account Arab indigenous forms of sexual subjectivity. Through inciting their binary discourse on LGBT+ rights and identities, the Gay International would create a dichotomy whereby one either supported or opposed them without being able to question their epistemology. Concerning the Muslim world, this translated to the modern West fighting for the rights of the Arabs, whose Orientalist representation translated to a repression of sexual freedoms. In other words, propagation of the Gay International discourse is part of Western encroachment on Arab and Muslim cultures. Second, the demand for sexual identification in Western terminology, or "coming out", renders sexual minorities extremely visible and thus invites governmental and societal repression in Arabic countries.[22]

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[20] Radzhana Buyantueva, "LGBT Rights Activism and Homophobia in Russia," *Journal of Homosexuality* 65, no. 4 (2018): 456.
[21] Alexander Kondakov, "Resisting the Silence: The Use of Tolerance and Equality Arguments by Gay and Lesbian Activist Groups in Russia," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 28, no. 3 (2013): 423-424.
[22] Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 363-383.

There are scholars that interrogate Massad′s notion of conformism to Western same-sex discourse. Rahul Rao questions the lack of agency and subjectivity of Arabs who appropriated and reworked Western identities in their process of sexual self-determination. Massad considered these individuals an unrepresentative small group located mostly in urban areas and identified them as native informants to Western activists.[23] Understandably, this notion was loaded with colonial connotations of indigenous elites betraying their people and collaborating with colonizing power. Rao states that it was reductionist to argue that appropriation of Western culture was the motivation for this type of identification instead of deep dissatisfaction with the ′traditional′ sexual ontology. Instead, Rao argued that identity politics was an essential element of LGBT+ activism across the globe.[24] It was imperative to find and work with terminology that connects the constituency of the social movement. Otherwise, organizations risk losing their ties with their constituency.

Rao did argue that LGBT+ activism could exhibit neo-colonial tendencies. An example is the implementation of Euro-American LGBT+ rights as a denominator for modernity. To substantiate his argument, Rao referred to Spivak′s reading on colonial feminism of "white men saving brown women from brown men", and stated that LGBT+ rights advocacy could swiftly transform into a "white homosexuals saving brown homosexuals from brown homophobes" narrative. [25] This ties in with Massad′s assertion that Western subjects supported the idea that gay subjects in the Arab world whose sexual freedom was supposedly repressed needed to be rescued. To reach a greater level of understanding of the underlying motive of this gay rescue narrative, we can turn to Jasbir Puar′s concept of homonationalism. Puar built on Lisa Duggan′s concept of ′homonormativity,′ which referred to gay subjects ensnared in politics that did not contest heteronormative assumptions and institutions "while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."[26] In her work, Puar argued that the Orientalist evocation of the ′terrorist′ by the US government created a divide between US national gays from racial and sexual ′others.′ This highlighted a collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism generated by the rhetoric of patriotic inclusion of queer subjects.[27] In other

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[23] Massad, Desiring¸ 377-378.
[24] R. Rao, *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 176.
[25] R. Rao, "Queer Questions," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16, no. 2 (2014): 211.
[26] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? : Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 50.
[27] Jasbir Puar, "Mapping US Homonormativities," *Gender, Place & Culture* 13 no. 1 (2006): 67-68.

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words, Puar's homonationalism asserted that certain gay subjectivities, those of the white gay male, were recognized and included by the state on the one hand. On the other hand, the 'repressed' Middle Eastern homosexual other was being neglected and locked out of the universal gay ideal. Through perpetual reiteration of this discourse by political actors, homosexuals in the US tried to find inclusion in the heteronormative society by shifting focus from them to the Oriental homosexual that supposedly needed saving.

Puar's study was based on the US, however, Jin Haritaworn demonstrated that homonationalism was also conspicuous in Europe. Haritaworn's research showed that within the context of European debates on national identity and multiculturalism, the United Kingdom and Germany were signifiers of homonationalism in Europe. Because gay rights joined women's rights as a new indication of modernity and were central to the European identity, white people were able to press for the liberation of gay Muslims from the 'barbaric and backward' society that the Arab world was perceived as. Concurrently, Europe and the European identity is erasing its homophobic past and markets itself as perpetually pro-gay and lesbian. Accordingly, because European countries were pink-washing their histories, they could also justify their Islamophobia and neo-imperialism by arguing they are saving "repressed" and "backward" gay Muslims.[28]

Few studies are geared toward or make mention of LGBT+ activism in Iraq specifically. Nevertheless, Cécile Génot's work on the relationship between international and local NGOs in Iraq between 2003 and 2010 provides us with an excellent starting point. According to Génot, during the emergence of Iraqi civil society in 2003, it was necessary to set up a remote partnership between international and local NGOs due to the deteriorated security situation. The international NGO was based partly or entirely outside of Iraq while the local organization was present on the ground. The rationale behind this system was that the Iraqis faced fewer insecurities and were aware of local customs, traditions, and norms. In terms of activism, international NGO often took the lead in resource mobilization, international advocacy, administrative backstopping, and project

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[28] Jin Haritaworn, "Gay Imperialism: Gender and Sexuality Discourse in the 'War on Terror,'" In *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/raciality*, ed. Adi Kuntsman and Esperanza Miyake (York: Raw Nerve Books, 2008), 16-18.

conceptualization. In contrast, the local NGO was only responsible for the operational aspects of the projects and was otherwise not included in any decision.[29]

Although Génot′s study was mostly based on humanitarian NGOs, there are a few parallels to be drawn between her study and the Iraqi LGBT+ NGO sector. The threatening security situation described by Génot is also an obstacle for LGBT+ NGOs in Iraq. As described by Oula Kadhum, mobilization of the LGBT+ community in Iraq is outright denied. Consequently, LGBT+ activists who do not hide their identity are strong-armed into hiding or forced to live outside of Iraq.[30] Furthermore, the unequal relationship between local and international NGOs is paralleled with LGBT+ organizations in Iraq. The description of Génot shares similarities with Massad′s notion of the Gay International wherein the local NGOs do not have a seat at the table. This is presumably a shared problem because fledgling NGOs in Iraq often lack resources and capital to lobby for an equal partnership. IraQueer is a prime example of a fledgling NGO as it was founded in 2015. As expressed by Yifat Susskind, the executive director of women′s organization MADRA, the LGBT+ Iraqis do not have resources and capital yet because they do not enjoy a full-scale social movement per se. However, they are started to organize themselves.[31]

As can be seen above, although the literature on Euro-American LGBT+ activism is comparatively well expanded upon, the literature on LGBT+ activism in the Arab world, and more specifically Iraq, is sorely lacking. Therefore, this study will fill in this gap and provide a much-needed case study for the alleged neo-colonialism tendencies in contemporary partnerships between local and international LGBT+ organizations. In this regard, IraQueer will function as an excellent case study to research Iraqi LGBT+ activism and reveal the influences of transnational LGBT+ organizations.

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[29] Cécile Génot, International NGOs in Iraq. 35-43.

[30] Oula Kadhum, "Ethno-Sectarianism in Iraq, Diaspora Positionality and Political Transnationalism," *Global Networks* 19 no. 2 (2018): 171.

[31] Jillian Schwedler, ""ISIS is One Piece of the Puzzle": Sheltering Women and Girls in Iraq and Syria," *Middle East Report* no. 276 (2015): 26.

SECURITIZATION THEORY

Due to the fact that IraQueer is first and foremost advocating for the security of its constituency, we can appeal to securitization theory as a tool to analyze Iraqi LGBT+ activism. Securitization theory, first coined by the Copenhagen School (CS) in 1993, will be the theoretical foundation of this essay. This theory provides a model, consisting of five components, which enables one to analyze a security issue, such as the Iraqi LGBT+ right to live. According to the securitization theory model, the first component, the *referent object*, is the element that has justifiable value and thus should be protected from existential threats. Second, the *securitizing actor* is the actor who articulates that the referent object is existentially threatened and aims to convince an audience that this is the case. This speech act, or the articulation of an existential threat, is also called the *securitizing move*. The securitizing actor, the audience and all those involved are also called the *functional actors*. All functional actors are involved in the securitization process and can influence its outcome. If an issue is successfully securitized, *extraordinary measures* are being undertaken to deal with the existential threat. When the threat has been subdued, or the referent object is no longer deemed worth protecting, a process of de-securitization will be necessary to seize the extraordinary measures.[32]

The fight of the Iraqi LGBT+ community fits seamlessly within the securitization theory framework. Presently, the Iraqi LGBT+ community is fighting for their right to live. Thus, they as an identity group are a referent object that is endangered by an existential threat. The existential threat is composed of the insecurities the Iraqi LGBT+ community are faced with in regard to their mental and physical well-being. The securitizing actors in this situation are the LGBT+ organizations that actively advocate on behalf of the Iraqi LGBT+ community. Through activism, or the securitizing move, these organizations attempt to address and convince the Iraqi government and the international community, or the functional actors, that extraordinary measures need to be implemented. These measures will end the impunity of those who commit the egregious abuses and safety and security for this identity group will be ensured.

Securitization theory has been criticized by various scholars concerning the securitization process of marginalized groups. According to Natalie Hudson, the model that securitization theory

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[32] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner, 2013), 33-42.

offers neglects certain aspects, such as gender, that play an integral part in security issues and the process of securitization.[33] Heidi Hudson argues that the CS pushes women and gender to the margins by differentiating between international and social security. The CS alleges that gender falls within the dimension of social security because it deals with individuals rather than collective security which is not the focus of securitization theory. According to Hudson, this argumentation reinforces the dominant 'malestream' thinking on security and universalizes it.[34] The role of gender in security studies has been a frequently discussed subject since the works of Enloe (1990) and Tickner (1992) entered the fray after which they increased the use of race, class and gender lenses within international relations theory.[35]

Lena Hansen offers two accounts of how gender is absent in securitization theory. Her first account contends that there is a problem of silence. This *security as silence* problem advances a case wherein a potential subject has no, or limited, opportunity to speak about its security problem, thus effectively barring the subject from performing a securitizing move. Hansen refers to the Pakistani honor killings in which the women who were subjected to the killings could not voice their concerns because that could impede their security.[36] The second problem Hansen proposes, the problem of *subsuming society*, demonstrates the dilemma of differentiating gender from other collective identities such as ethnic, religious and national identities. Hansen contends that according to securitization theory, the referent object needs to be demarked. Although it is easy to identify a referent object by a religious or political identity-group, gender is different because it appears inseparable from religious or political security. Hansen refers again to the Pakistani honor killings to illustrate her point. She argues that the Pakistani case highlights the gender insecurity because of the inter-linkage with national, state and religious security. It is problematic to articulate gender insecurity in this instance because specific gender norms are inherently linked to religion. Articulating these insecurities would confront the religious community as a whole.[37] Concurrently,

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[33] N. Hudson, "Securitizing Women's Rights and Gender Equality," *Journal of Human Rights* 8, no. 1 (2009): 57
[34] Heidi Hudson, "'Doing' Security As Though Humans Matter: A Feminist Perspective on Gender and the Politics of Human Security," *Security Dialogue* 36, no. 2 (2005): 160.
[35] Sandra Mcevoy, "Queering Security Studies in Northern Ireland: Problem, Practice, and Practitioner," in *Sexualities in World Politics: How LGBTQ Claims Shape International Relations*, ed. Manuela Lavinas Picq and Markus Thiel (New York: Routledge, 2015), 142.
[36] Lene Hansen, "The Little Mermaid's Silent Security Dilemma and the Absence of Gender in the Copenhagen School," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000): 294-295.
[37] Hansen, "The Little Mermaid's," (2000), 297-299.

these two problems proposed by Hansen are not only relevant for gender identity-groups but can be applied to all marginalized identity-groups in security studies.

Sarah Bertrand builds on the silence problem described by Hansen that is encountered by marginalized groups. Bertrand asserts that the subaltern cannot securitize because of two problems within securitization theory. First, marginalized groups are excluded from security because they are silenced through three mechanisms: locutionary silencing, illocutionary disablement or illocutionary frustration. Thus, they are unable to speak, they are not listened to, or they are not understood. Second, because marginalized identity groups are not able to raise their voice themselves, they are often spoken for by others. However, the marginalized group risks being re-presented by these others which often are unable to reproduce exact motivations, wishes or desires truthfully.[38]

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

It is this critique, brought forth by Bertrand, that forms the crux of this thesis because the problems she poses should also present themselves for an LGBT+ community that attempts to securitize. If we follow Bertrand′s thesis, the Iraqi LGBT+ community should be silenced by their environment, as well as represented by other organizations when they attempt to securitize. However, the literature on LGBT+ activism suggests that those local LGBT+ organizations have found strategies to cope with silence and representation. Therefore, Bertrand′s argument will be scrutinized to analyze to what extent it will hold in the context of LGBT+ activism.

Because a study on every identity group within the umbrella term LGBT+ is beyond the scope of this thesis, this study will limit itself to men who have sex with men (MSM) and women who have sex with women (WSW). I am aware of the fact that using generalizing categories and terms will erase the nuances and specifics of these diverse groups. However, this study cannot continue without the terminology of the group that is studied. I wanted to eschew identity-based terminology, such as ″homosexuals″, ″lesbians″, and ″queer″, because of the two following reasons. First, the exact definition of these labels is inconsistent, and its meaning differs across time and geographic regions. Second, to provide a clear and coherent picture of MSM and WSW,

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[38] Sarah Bertrand, "Can the Subaltern Securitize? Postcolonial Perspectives on Securitization Theory and Its Critics," *European Journal of International Security* 3, no. 3 (2018): 283-290.

we have to delve into their histories. The analytical interpretive tools that identity-based terminology offers does not truthfully mirror experiences, because sexual relations among men and women were not always treated as an identity, especially in combination with the contemporary connotations that accompany these terms presently. I decided to utilize a practice-based terminology that can be traced back and is still part of the contemporary 'homosexual' and 'lesbian' experience, although I am aware that it excludes those who practice same-sex love without a sexual aspect. This crystallizes in the following research question: **how do Iraqi MSM and WSW attempt to securitize through activism that takes into account transnational forces in the 21st century?**

The study will be an addition to the literature for two reasons. First, as described earlier, within the growing body of literature on LGBT+ activism, the Middle East is still vastly underrepresented. Consequently, there are very few studies on the contemporary LGBT+ community and activism in Iraq that do not stem from LGBT+ or affiliated organizations, although the circumstances of the Iraqi LGBT+ community are poignant. We can extrapolate from this observation that the LGBT+ community in Iraq does not enjoy the attention it deserves academically or by society at large. Therefore, this study will provide an addition to that body of literature and hopefully pave the way for more research and attention. Second, securitization theory has never been applied to analyze LGBT+ advocacy. This study will shed a light on the relevance to apply this theory when studying repressed subaltern groups and, in addition, it will also provide us with an opportunity to test most recent arguments and approaches on the operationalization and critique of this theory by means of a unique case study.

As discussed above, I apply securitization theory to analyze how the LGBT+ community of Iraq operationalizes its activism and how Bertrand's silence and 'spoken for' problems fit within this approach. To answer the question of how IraQueer attempts to securitize, we need to discern their attempts at speech acts and uncover the transnational influences therein. Both aspects can be identified by carrying out a discourse analysis and conducting semi-structured interviews. Multiple reports and documents of IraQueer have been subjected to a discourse analysis to examine how IraQueer attempts to perform speech acts to contest and transfigure dominant discursive practices in Iraq. The discourse analysis was complemented by interviews with spokespersons of IraQueer and COC Netherlands. COC Netherlands, a Dutch transnational LGBT+ organization, is a partner

of IraQueer and was chosen for this study because its approaches to partnerships with local organization were accessible and I was able to interview a representative. The reports published by IraQueer provided me with the necessary information regarding their approach to LGBT+ activism in Iraq. The semi-structured interviews granted me the opportunity to address specific questions concerning the pitfalls of the Iraqi LGBT+ community's securitization and allowed me to incorporate this subaltern group's voice more truthfully. Moreover, interviewing IraQueer and COC Netherlands allowed me to examine the nexus of local and transnational LGBT+ activism in Iraq and helped me identify discrepancies and similarities in the discourse and discursive practices of both IraQueer and COC Netherlands.

The interviews consisted of three segments that each deal with a dimension of the research question. The first segment grants the interviewee the opportunity to tell their story and experiences based on broad questions without an immediate connection to theory, although the questions naturally stem from theoretical considerations. The narrative that this segment provides is imperative because it is the starting point for the interview and the segments that follow. The consecutive segment is geared towards more in-depth answers that relate to the topic. By drawing on the answers provided earlier, this segment was used to ask questions to nuance the story of the interviewee and shift into questions that are more specific to the research question. The concluding segment is used to inquire about theory-driven questions. It was within this segment that I directly asked the interviewee questions concerning local and transnational LGBT+ activism and their corresponding considerations.[39]

In the following chapter, the history and contemporary circumstances of Iraqi MSM and WSW will be provided to lay bare the historical intricacies of these identity groups. It is impossible to fully grasp the motives and methods of the IraQueer without first understanding the historical context that shaped the modern MSM and WSW experience as well as the contemporary challenges they face. In the third chapter, the activism of IraQueer will be placed in a security framework. Their attempt at securitization will be discussed alongside the influence of COC

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[39] Anne Galletta and William E Cross, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication. Qualitative Studies in Psychology*, (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 45-52.

Netherlands. The concluding final chapter will contain a summary, an answer to the research question, and the discussion.

Chapter 2 – MSM and WSW in Iraq

Before we can make sense of the circumstances of MSM and WSW in Iraq and begin with an analysis of their activism, we have to dig into an overview of the histories of these groups across different periods within the geographic area that stretches contemporary Iraq. From the Mesopotamian era until the rule of the Ba′athist regime, there are ample references of same-sex relations to be found in surviving literary, medical, religious, and judicial texts. Most of these sources predominantly describe intimate relations among men. The reason being the patriarchal nature of these societies in which masculinity was tied to a strong and powerful social position. Because men took up a social space located in the limelight, they often became the linchpin within written texts. Moreover, same-sex sexual relations among men was inextricably linked with gender identity and expression. Therefore, it was exigent to write about same-sex relations among men as it was directly linked with social standing. Nevertheless, several medieval literary and medical texts subsisted that made references to WSW which provide us with an insight into their historical roots. These historical texts will be described and analyzed in the following paragraphs, which will shed light on the unique development they experienced. This development is imperative to discuss, as it will provide us with a better understanding of the contemporary challenges Iraqi MSM and WSW face, as well as the strategies and decisions of those who advocate on behalf of these groups.

MESOPOTAMIA AND THE MIDDLE AGES (PRE-1500 CE)

From Mesopotamian sources, we can distil that love and sexual relations among men were prevalent during this period. These relations were mostly grounded in social stratification. Anal intercourse was allowed, provided that the penetrating partner had intercourse with someone below his social status as to preserve his masculinity, and consequently, his social renown.

A Mesopotamian source that made references to MSM was the omen compendium *Summa Alu* or *If a City is Situated on a Height*. From the hundred and twenty clay tablets that were recovered, four omens spoke about male same-sex intercourse.[40] Two of these omens divulged that sexual intercourse with those who fulfilled an official function in the public arena and who were part of

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[40] Ann Kessler Guinan, "Auguries of Hegemony: The Sex Omens of Mesopotamia," *Gender & History* 9, no. 3 (November 1997): 462.

a lower class in the social hierarchy represented power and social dominance. In contrast, a third omen dictated that intercourse with a male part of your household, thus within the private sphere, would not bring prosperity. It is assumed that anal intercourse in the private sphere could allude to enjoying the act instead of reinforcing ones social power which was looked down upon.[41] Another revelation of the omens was that sodomizing a citizen from your social standing was considered an egregious offense. A situation where a male citizen penetrated another male citizen that shared his class was publicly understood as shaming him and stripping him of his citizenship.[42] Finally, the Middle Assyrian Laws disclose that male prostitution, which generally referred to men adopting the passive role in anal intercourse in exchange for money and services, was considered an offense because of the aforementioned stigma that rested on the passive partner during anal intercourse.[43]

The lion's share of references to MSM within Medieval literature is to be found in classical Arabic love poetry. From these poems, we can discern a transformation concerning same-sex sexual relations among men where the focus shifted from exclusively directed at social status to a genuine loving relationship between men. However, there were still rigid social norms in place that regulated the relationship which was still intrinsically linked to gender identity and expression. Furthermore, medieval texts also refer to WSW and suggest that sexual relations among women were accepted and normalized to an extent. However, due to the scarcity of these surviving texts, it is impossible to verify this hypothesis.

Arabic love poetry was a male affair and generally addressed a male audience. After the Arab world experienced the expansion of Islam and the Arab conquests of the seventh century, poems exclusively about (homoerotic) love started to circulate in Syria and Iraq.[44] From these 'beard' poems, we learned that the Mesopotamian notion of masculinity tied to social status was still prevalent. However, a notable discontinuation to earlier practices was the genuine love that was described in the poems and the normalization of anal penetration based on this love. Adult men,

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[41] Guinan, "Auguries," 469.

[42] Jerold S. Cooper, "Buddies in Babylonia: Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and Mesopotamian Homosexuality," in *Hidden in Secret Places: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobson*, ed Tzvi Abusch (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 84-85.

[43] Martti Nissinen, "Are There Homosexuals in Mesopotamian Literature?," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, no. 1 (2010):76.

[44] Thomas Bauer, "Male-Male Love in classical Arabic Poetry," in *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 108-112.

the masculine party, were allowed to romanticize and sexualize beardless youths, the feminine party. They could engage in sexual and love relationships in the public and private sphere provided the adult men took on the role of the active partner in sexual intercourse. When the younger man reached adulthood, it was expected the couple ended their affair after which their relationship would transform from a love relationship into a pure friendship.[45]

As mentioned above, Arabic love poetry was seldom centred on WSW. To study Arab WSW in Medieval times, we have to redirect our attention to medical discourse and literary tradition.[46] Sexual relations among women was considered a medical category, albeit not a deviant one. The famous 9th-century Muslim philosopher al-Kindi described that female same-sex sexual relations were necessary because the labia generated heat that could only be reduced through friction and orgasm with another woman. Another explanation for this "condition" was that same-sex desire was caused by mothers consuming certain foods during their pregnancy.[47] Furthermore, the first recorded surviving erotic encounter between two women was documented in the *Encyclopaedia of Pleasure* in the 10th century. The fact that this literary piece circulated throughout the Islamicate world attested to the notion that female same-sex desire and eroticism was not merely considered a medical condition or a sexual practice. Besides this famous story, there are a substantial amount of examples of female same-sex love and desire to be found in Arabic literary history. Within these texts, the women who practiced same-sex love and desire were said to have meetings and led schools where they taught other women how to best achieve pleasure.[48]

OTTOMAN EMPIRE (1500 CE – 1918 CE)

During the Ottoman reign, sexual relations among men retained their social and power relations. However, during this period sodomy was also used as a revenge to shame someone that has impeded on one's honor. This form of sodomy was void of any sexual desire and was entirely practical. In contrast, those who enjoyed fulfilling a receptive role during anal intercourse became

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[45] Bauer, "Male-Male," 112-113.
[46] Sahar Amer, "Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women," *Journal of History of Sexuality* 18, no. 2 (2009): 221.
[47] Amer, "Medieval," 215-217.
[48] Amer, "Medieval," 221-223.

pathologized and these men received the name *Mukhannath* during early Ottoman rule. [49] Nevertheless, both the active partner and the passive partner could receive punishment for their transgression by the account of the four Islamic schools that governed Islamic law within the Ottoman Empire. However, the *Mukhannath* often received a harsher punishment due to their pathologized nature. It must be noted that within the teachings of every school, sexual intercourse between women was considered an independent transgression that called for a less harsh punishment since there was no penetration. [50]

Anal intercourse was discussed and judged within all four acknowledged Sunni schools of law within the Ottoman Empire. Three out of the four official schools, the Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools, were present in the area that stretches modern-day Iraq. Although not formally recognized by the Ottoman Empire as an official school, the Imami Shi'ite School also had a large following in the area and was therefore influential in its laws and administration of justice. The Sunni Hanafi school had a unique view on anal intercourse as they did not consider sodomy a form of fornication and was thus considered a minor sin. The Shafi'i and Hanbali school did consider anal intercourse a type of fornication and therefore punished the transgression as a major sin. Punishments for major sins of the Sunni schools included harsh corporal punishments such as whiplashes. Sexual relations among men which not included sodomy was considered a minor sin by all three Sunni schools. The Shi'ite Imami School punished those who committed sodomy, between two men or between a man or a woman, harsher than the other schools and always prescribed the death penalty for both partners. The School considered sexual relations that did not include sodomy a major sin but not punishable by death. However, it is assumed that men and women could safely practice sexual relations in private. It is only when the relationship became public that those who partook in same-sex sexual relations would be punished. [51]

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[49] Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 14-15.
[50] El-Rouayheb, "Before homosexuality," 137.
[51] El-Rouayheb, "Before homosexuality," 118-122.

COLONIAL ERA AND BA'ATHIST REGIME (1918 CE -2003 CE)

During the late 19th century, attitudes towards sexual relations among men and women slowly began to change due to an emerging European influence. The impact of the West was undeniable, be it their intellectual and imperial impact or the arrival of Western administrators, missionaries and young Muslims returning from a European education. The encroachment of Western powers in the Arab world ushered into a process of heterosexualization that repressed and destroyed all references to same-sex love and desire within political institutions, cultural production sites, and religious sects. This process reached its apex in the 20th century when the republican discourse of sexuality was successful in ascribing hedonism and all other forms of non-normative sexualities to the failed Ottoman Empire, tainting same-sex love and desire.[52] However, homosexuality was not criminalized within the borders of Iraq. When the British forces eventually occupied Iraq, they drew up the penal code that became known as the Baghdad Penal Code of 1919 in which sodomy without consent or with a child below 15 years of age was considered a criminal activity.[53] During the mandate period of the United Kingdom of Iraq and after its independence in 1932, the Baghdad Penal Code remained active.[54] It wasn't until 1969 that the Ba'ath Regime replaced the Baghdad Penal Code with the present Iraqi Penal Code. Notably, the Iraqi Penal Code of 1969 also did not criminalize homosexuality or consensual sodomy.

The exact viewpoint of Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath Party on MSM and WSW is still shrouded in obscurity due to their absence in the Ba'athist texts. Presumably, due to negligence and the abuse these groups of people in all likelihood faced by Hussein's violent regime, there are few historical sources available that make mention of these two groups. However, it is possible to receive some degree of insight into these identity groups during the Ba'athist regime by scrutinizing the party's cultural politics. The regime of Saddam Hussein (1979-2003) can best be characterized as pragmatic and flexible which was aided by the fact that the Ba'ath party's ideology did not possess a clear set of principles and ideas. The foundation of the party was creating a strong unified Arab nation that stayed free of the shackles of colonialism. Hussein was able to bend the

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[52] Abdulhamit Arvas, "From the Pervert, Back to the Beloved: Homosexuality and Ottoman Literary History," in The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature, ed. E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 157-158.

[53] Iraqi Penal Code 1919, Part III – Offences Agains Persons and Property, Chapter XXIII Article 232.

[54] Enze Han and Joseph O'Mahoney, "British Colonialism and the Criminalization of Homosexuality," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 27, no. 2 (2014): 268-270.

Ba'ath philosophy to his will and he did not hesitate to adjust his policies, even if that meant turning on his previously stated beliefs and opinions. According to documents of the Ba'ath Regional Command Collection (BRCC), the ruling organ of the Ba'ath party, Saddam needed large scale support from all levels of government and Iraqi society to stay in power.[55] Therefore, Hussein and the party were committed to attracting large numbers of supporters to reinforce the legitimacy of Ba'ath rule, preserve the party's position of power, and bolster Saddam's popularity.[56]

The totalitarian Ba'ath party sought to transform society's existing culture into a culture of politics. The political system extended to all strata of society, destroying the boundaries between the private and public sphere by imbuing the personal with a political character.[57] This political culture was enforced through the use of violence, which led to the creation of a 'Republic of Fear.' The totalitarian strategy that was applied by Saddam consisted of coercing and drawing out support from his citizens and removing institutional and social elements in society that refused to be converted. The ultimate goal of this strategy was to turn every citizen into an active supporter of the regime through means of violence and installing unconditional loyalty to the party and Hussein himself. This process, also described as Ba'athification by historian Aaron Faust, sought to make Ba'athist ideology a fundamental element of Iraqi individual and collective identity.[58]

Although Ba'athification of Iraqi society was accompanied by excessive violence, the party also adopted a reward system. One of the groups that experienced this reward system were Iraqi women. Throughout the 1970s, Hussein rejected tribal views and granted equal rights for women which also was a focal point of the Ba'athist party in the late 1960s. Girls attending primary education, secondary education, and university rose sharply during this period which led to a considerable amount of women pursuing various professions.[59] Some of the most notable rights were outlawing forced marriages as well as the right for women to divorce their husband. Although these reforms improved the situation for women in Iraq considerably, BRCC documents reveal that throughout Saddam's presidency, this attitude was mostly pragmatic and paternalistic and

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[55] Aaron Faust, *The Ba'thification of Iraq : Saddam Hussein's Totalitarianism* (New York: University of Texas Press, 2016), 4.

[56] Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party : Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6-8.

[57] Faust, *The Ba'thification*, 52.

[58] Faust, *The Ba'thification*, 8-9.

[59] Sassoon, *Saddam*, 253-254.

enabled the regime to manifest its influence within this group. When in the late 1980s and early 1990s the country was hit by the Gulf Wars devastation and resulting faltering economy, these social and legal reforms were largely reversed. To retain popular support among his subjects, Saddam was forced to fall back on tribal and religious values, which meant a setback for Iraqi women. This conservative overhaul meant that women had to return to the household to care for the future generation.[60]

Unfortunately, besides a few short anecdotal interviews with Iraqi MSM, not much research has been conducted on MSM and WSW during the Ba′athist period. The Iraqi penal code of 1969 did not explicitly prohibit same-sex love and sexual relations. However, MSM would occasionally be prosecuted under the guise of "indecent behavior."[61] Based on the interviews, it can be assumed that MSM and WSW enjoyed more private and public freedom during periods of secularism and anti-tribalism within the Ba′ath Regime. Gay nightlife in Iraq flourished before the start of the Gulf War. During the start of the Gulf War, which saw a proliferation in conservatism, the 1969 indecency laws were increasingly enforced to prosecute MSM and WSW. However, MSM and WSW supposedly were still accepted in the private sphere.[62] In the late 1990s, MSM and WSW were gradually more prosecuted, tortured, and killed. Especially when their love and sexual relations were discovered by their family or tribe.[63]

Until more research is conducted on the position of MSM and WSW during the Ba′athist period, we have to speculate on why these groups were not specifically targeted by the regime. The process of heterosexualization introduced during the colonial era would suggest a widespread aversion to these groups. A preliminary conclusion can be drawn out of two facets of the Ba′athist rule. First of all, one of the ideological pillars of the Ba′ath party was the unification of the Iraqi people and the rejection of the colonial powers. Hence, a discontinuation or open rejection of heterosexualization, a process introduced by colonial powers, would fit aptly within Ba′ath operations. Furthermore, the primary objective of Saddam was to bind as many of his citizens to his party and himself. Keeping in mind his pragmatic approach to acquiring the support of Iraqi

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[60] Faust, *The Ba'thification*, 123-125.

[61] Brian Whitaker, *Unspeakable Love Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East* (London: SAQI, 2006), 15.

[62] "Gays Living in the Shadows of New Iraq," New York Times, last modified December 18, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/18/world/middleeast/18baghdad.html

[63] *Out of Iraq: A Love Story*, directed by Chris McKim and Eva Orner, featuring Btoo Allami and Nayyef Hrebid (World of Wonder, 2016) documentary.

women, his fairly tolerable stance on MSM and WSW could partly be explained by his desire to bind them to his rule when he had no reason to antagonize them. MSM and WSW only began to be systematically prosecuted when Hussein had to fall back on tribal and religious groups for popular support.

AFTER THE US INVASION (POST-2003 CE)

After the US invaded Iraq, toppled the Saddam regime, and installed the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), MSM and WSW were confronted with yet more violence and discrimination due to the power vacuum that was left behind. Formerly repressed Shi'ite paramilitary organizations began to gain ground and insecurities for MSM and WSW began to rise. A report by the Human Dignity Trust described the circumstances as followed: "Iraq is illustrative of latent homophobia within a society being acted upon after the collapse of state apparatus, thus allowing groups with anti-LGBT sentiments or ideology to act with impunity."[64] Furthermore, after the invasion, many Iraqis gained access to the internet and Western media for the first time which subsequently led to MSM and WSW catching the public eye. Because of this concurrence, many Iraqis began to equate homosexuality with Western influences and went as far as to argue that these groups being an export product from the West and indigenously foreign to Iraq.[65]

Two organizations that tried to fill the power vacuum and participated in systematic killings of MSM and WSW were the Badr Organization and the Sadrist Movement. The Badr Organization, a Shi'ite political party and a paramilitary organization affiliated with the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council engaged in death-squad killings and other human rights abuses since 2004. A report by Human Right Watch stated that there was no definitive evidence that the organization specifically targeted men who were suspected of homosexual conduct, however, their name has been mentioned by several of the interviewees about the killings. According to multiple reports, the Badr Organization worked on behalf of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani is an independent religious scholar who is widely regarded as one of the highest-ranking clerics within the Shi'a sect. Although there is no evidence for a corollary, a killing campaign

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[64] Human Dignity Trust, *Criminalising Homosexuality and LGBT Rights in Times of Conflict, Violence and Natural Disasters* (Human Dignity Trust, 2014), 7.

[65] IGLHRC, MADRE and OWFI, *We're Here: Iraqi LGBT People's Account of Violence and Rights Abuse* (2014), 1.

against real or perceived homosexuals in 2005 has been attributed to al-Sistani. In late 2005, the Grand Ayatollah posted a *fatwa*, an answer from a qualified religious scholar on an inquiry about Islamic law, which declared that the judgement for sodomy was "the worst kind of death."[66]

Founded in 2003, the Sadrist Movement is a Shi'a Islam nationalist Iraqi political party that promoted an anti-imperialist agenda and argued for a combination of religious laws and tribal customs. Leader of the Sadrist movement Muqtada al-Sadr established the Mahdi Army to dispense aid and provide protection to Shi'ite Iraqis in the Baghdad slums after the city's fall in 2003 by US forces. In 2004, the Mahdi Army revolted against the occupational forces in several Iraq cities after the CPA closed his newspaper al-Hawza. This led to months of violence between the Mahdi Army and the CPA. In late 2004, the movement ceased violent activities against the CPA due to great losses and began to establish themselves as a political actor within the Iraq political system.[67] However, the Mahdi Army was not immediately disbanded and according to witnesses, the Army started to track down and systematically kill real or perceived homosexuals in Baghdad from 2004 until 2005.[68]

Another killing campaign swept across the nation in 2009, specifically targeting effeminate men and those suspected of homosexual conduct. This crusade was mostly focused on Baghdad, but blood also spilled in various other cities including Kirkuk, Najaf and Basra. The campaign was said to have been organized and executed by the Mahdi Army and its splinter militias such as *Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq* (League of the Righteous).[69] It became clear that MSM and WSW were a common target for these paramilitary groups, a choice they defended by invoking morality. They claimed to uphold the traditional values and fight against the feminization of society.[70] According to Achim Rohde, this reasoning can be traced back to the erosion of the Iraqi state and the normalization of violence after a long period of war, embargos, and internal strife. The emergence of a "culture of war" also saw the veneration of the male soldier-hero which was considered an ideal form of masculinity. Any deviation from this ideal would result in marginalization and

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[66] Human Rights Watch, "*They Want Us Exterminated" Murder, Torture, Sexual Orientation and Gender in Iraq (2009)*, 47-48.
[67] M.J. Godwin, "Political inclusion in unstable contexts: Muqtada al-Sadr and Iraq's Sadrist Movement," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5, no. 3 (2012): 448-450.
[68] Human Rights Watch, "*They Want Us*," 49-50.
[69] Human Rights Watch, "*They Want Us*," 3.
[70] Human Rights Watch, "*They Want Us*," 35-36.

delegitimization in Iraqi society.[71] Oula Kadhum argues that in this violent and masculinized context, sexuality is perceived as a threat and therefore subjected to control, dominance, and collective identity. Iraqi homosexual men and women are at an intersection in regard to their sexuality, heteronormativity, ethno-sectarianism, and patriarchal gender norms which resulted in a site of oppression.[72]

Many believed that the 2009 killings also served political aims. After the Mahdi Army disbanded itself in 2007 and started to blend in Iraqi cities after refusing to confront the US army, they lost respect in the eyes of many of their Shi'ite followers. The 2009 campaign would serve to regain lost respect.[73] Another legitimization of the 2009 killing campaigns came from the Iraqi tribes. As discussed before, the Ba'athist regime relied on religious and tribal support after the Gulf War. It was during this period that tribal customs were partially translated into national law which culminated in the enshrinement of honor killings in the Iraqi penal code. Paragraph 128 of the code stated that "[...] the commission of an offence with honorable motives or in response to the unjustified and serious provocation of a victim of an offence is considered a mitigating excuse."[74] Honor was often interpreted as sexual purity, hence this provision often took the form of violence against women in general as well as MSM and WSW who were considered sexual impure. Moreover, honor for men and women was also considered identifying and presenting as masculine and feminine respectively. MSM and WSW did not adhere to the traditional interpretation of honor and therefore could be subjected to honor killings according to tribal custom.

Killing campaigns rekindled in 2012, 2014, and 2017 with the League of the Righteous suspected as the main perpetrator. In 2012, this para-military group posted flyers in the Sadr City neighbourhood of Baghdad containing lists of young men who they identified as gay or 'emo' and demanding them to change their ways or face death. The term emo, meaning emotional, has been invoked to mean men who dress in black close-fitting clothes, listen to rock music, and cut their hair in unconventional ways as this is often seen as the externalization of Western influences.[75]

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[71] Achim Rohde, "Gays, Cross- Dressers, and Emos: Nonnormative Masculinities in Militarized Iraq," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12, no. 3 (2016): 443.

[72] Oula Kadhum, "Ethno-Sectarianism in Iraq, Diaspora Positionality and Political Transnationalism," *Global Networks* 19 no. 2 (2018): 171-172.

[73] Human Rights Watch, *They Want Us*, 39.

[74] Iraqi National Assembly, Iraqi Penal Code, Law No. 111, 1969, article 128.

[75] IraQueer and OutRight Action International, *Dying to be Free: LGBT Human Rights Violations in Iraq* (2015), 4.

Two years after the attacks of 2012, the League of the Righteous spread lists around Baghdad with names and neighbourhoods of 24 wanted individuals of which 23 were accused of the 'crime' of homosexuality and the other man accused of the 'crime' of having long hair. During this campaign, the League attacked and killed multiple Iraqi citizens whose name was listed on the list but they also targeted men who they perceived as homosexual. These lists were also spread throughout the Baghdad and its surrounding cities in 2017 and contained the names of citizens which were threatened to be killed. The 2017 campaign would eventually claim a total of 220 lives.[76] The reason for these flare-ups remained unclear but it is speculated that it was a form of social control by non-state actors. For example, the League re-emerged forcefully in 2014 when the government of al-Maliki was no longer able to sustain law and order.[77]

The rise of Daesh in Iraq also resulted in a shocking deterioration of the living conditions of MSM and WSW. Since the establishment of a caliphate in June 2014, Daesh implemented a morality code for its controlled territory. According to the Daesh interpretation of the Hadith, men and women were expected to dress and behave conform to their gender and sex. Additionally, sodomy was punishable by death, for both the active and the passive party.[78] From 2014 until 2017, Daesh has been responsible for hunting down and killing more than 30 LGBT+ Iraqi citizens. Hundreds of thousands of refugees, including MSM and WSW, sought refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan from the Islamic state. However, MSM and WSM were only marginally better off in Iraqi Kurdistan than in other parts of Iraq. They enjoyed more security but the Kurdish autonomous government in northern Iraq showed no interest in improving circumstances for this group.[79]

CONTEMPORARY CIRCUMSTANCES

Besides the constant threat of military organizations, MSM and WSW commonly face insecurities within their families and tribes. Especially in Southern Iraq, extended family members often express violent behaviour when they expect their direct relatives identify a non-conforming SOGIE and may force them into therapy to protect the family honor. When a family discovers that one of their female family members has a relationship or sexual relations with another female, they

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[76] IraQueer, *Fighting for the Right to Live: The State of LGBT+ Human Rights in Iraq* (2018), 6.
[77] OWFI, IGLHRC and MADRE, *When Coming Out is a Death Sentence: Persecution of LGBT Iraqis*, 5-7.
[78] OWFI, IGLHRC and MADRE, *When Coming Out*, 4-5.
[79] OWFI, IGLHRC and MADRE, *When Coming Out*, 8.

are often forced into heterosexual marriages, although this is prohibited within the Iraqi Penal Code. Nevertheless, these practices go undisturbed because the government favors harmony over protection.[80]

Because the Iraqi government adopted this approach, MSM and WSM are unable to turn to the state for protection. Neither the Kurdish nor the central Iraqi government institutions offer any legal, financial, or physical protection against communal or para-militaristic discrimination and harassment. In 2010, the government of Iraq rejected the UN's Universal Periodic Review recommendation of investigating all allegations of persecution based on gender and sexual orientation. Moreover, former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki stated in an interview that homosexuals are not being protected in Iraq because of different habits and customs.[81] In an interview on the Iraqi network channel Al Sharqiya in 2020, Bahaa al-Din, spokesperson for the State of Law Coalition, one of the most influential coalitions in the Iraqi parliament, was asked about his perspective on LGBT+ issues within Iraq. Al-Din spoke about the deviant nature of homosexuality and argued it is an unnatural thought that goes against prevalent Iraqi Islamic teaching. Moreover, he stated that homosexuality would destroy traditional Iraqi Islamic values, norms, and ideas and replace them with their own. Although the constitution and Iraqi law should protect all its citizens, al-Din reasons that the law does not protect these immoral thoughts and those who belong to this group should be punished accordingly.[82]

The discourse that emanates from the Iraqi government reveals that those that identify with a non-conforming SOGIE are not considered part of Iraqi society. Their citizenship is questioned because of their SOGIE and government officials argue that they should therefore be treated distinctly from "real" Iraqi citizens under the law. Nevertheless, a ministerial-level LGBT Committee to combat anti-LGBT discrimination in Iraq was created in 2012. Regrettably, the Committee has not produced any public reports or policy results. The main achievement of this committee was its attempt to make government officials aware of sexual orientation and gender identity and their corresponding issues in Iraqi society and their obligation to protect every Iraqi citizen under the Iraqi jurisdiction.[83]

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[80] IraQueer, *Fighting*, 14.
[81] IraQueer and OutRight Action International, *Dying*, 8.
[82] Amir Ashour, interview by host Sharqiya News, May 28, 2020.
[83] OWFI, IGLHRC and MADRE, *When*, 10-11.

In addition to the latent homophobia of government officials, the Iraqi justice system and law enforcement are generally unfair, inefficient, and corrupt. As stated before, homosexuality is not illegal and therefore not punishable under the Iraqi penal code. Instead, public honor is often invoked to prosecute MSM and WSW. Articles 403, 430, and 431 of the Iraqi penal code stipulate that any individual that damages public honor should be fined or imprisoned.[84] Public honor has no clear definition in the Iraqi juridical system and is therefore based on interpretation.[85] Furthermore, MSM and WSW have been disproportionally affected by hate crimes committed by state security forces. State security forces have been hybrid forces that consisted of Iraq state forces and sectarian Shi'ite militias.[86] Besides the failure to protect MSM and WSW from physical and mental harm, state forces actively participate in the abuse by verbally and sexually assaulting these vulnerable groups.[87]

Another important aspect to consider is the role of the media in shaping the discourse around LGBT+ people. According to a study about LGBT+ coverage in Iraqi media, 89% of the LGBT+ respondents stated that Iraqi media has negatively influenced how they perceive their queer identities[88] By using language and relaying inaccurate information about queer people, the media is responsible for perpetuating discriminatory beliefs against MSM and WSW. Traditional media such as TV, newspapers and magazines do not shy away from using words such as "faggot" and "abnormal" and invite guests who talk about LGBT+ topics although they have no background that qualifies them to speak about the subject.[89] During coverage of LGBT+ topics on tv, a medium

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[84] **Paragraph 403**: "Any person who produces, imports, publishes, possesses, obtains or translates a book, printed or other written material, drawing, picture, film, symbol or other thing that violates the *public integrity or decency* with intent to exploit or distribute such material is punishable […]"
Paragraph 430: "Any person who threatens another with the commission of a felony against his person or property or against the person or property of others or with the imputation to him of certain *dishonorable matters* or with the revelation of such matters and such threat is accompanied by a demand or charge to carry out or refrain from carrying out an act or is intended to be so accompanied is punishable [...]"
Paragraph 431: "Any person who threatens another with the commission of a felony against his person or property or against the person and property of others or with the imputation to him of certain *dishonorable or disrespectful matters* or with the revelation of such matters in circumstances other than those mentioned in Article 430 is punishable […]"
[85] IraQueer, *Know Your Rights: LGBT+ Individuals Guide to Knowing their Legal Rights in Iraq and under the International Human Rights Law*, 5.
[86] OWFI, IGLHRC and MADRE, *When*, 8-9.
[87] IraQueer and Outright Action International, *Dying*, 6.
[88] IraQueer, *Biased: Iraqi Media and the Spread of Anti-LGBT+ Rhetoric* (2020), 6.
[89] IraQueer, *Fighting*, 13.

92% of the Iraqis rely on for their news, a study conducted between 2012 and 2020 found that 95% of the words used to describe the LGBT+ community were discriminatory slurs.[90]

Due to their desperate situation, many MSM and WSW Iraqis are left with no alternative than to leave their country. Most of them are forced to flee without time to prepare and therefore have to leave their documents and other important valuables behind. When the host country or the United Nations Refugee Agency ask for proof of the harassment, abuse, and discrimination they faced in their home country, MSM and WSW asylum seekers have to convince the asylum officer of the extreme duress they had to live under without any documentation or proof. When asylum officers reject the asylum claim and the asylum seeker is barred from working in the host country, they often stay within the host country illegally and find a job as a sex worker which brings a lot of danger to their lives.[91]

As can be seen, the Iraqi MSM and WSW face unique challenges that have their roots in most of the rich and extensive history of Iraq. Although same-sex sexual relations were prevalent in the Iraqi region before the arrival of colonial powers, their arrival marked a clear turning point. Before the Colonial Era, MSM and WSW seemed to enjoy more social acceptance, although they were regulated by strict social norms. The Colonial Era heralded a process of heterosexualization while also introducing the region to the identity-based definition of homosexuality. It was after this turning point that MSM and WSW systematically began to face widespread discrimination and abuse. A logical inference of the simultaneous introduction of colonial powers and homosexuality in the Arab world was the aversion against MSM and WSW in Iraqi society. As seen in the introduction and the historical overview, a common argument applied by influential Iraqi figures against the Iraqi LGBT+ community is that LGBT+ members do not belong within the Iraqi society due to inherent values, norms, and traditions. They are characterized as an undesired import "product" from Western states. However, this overview proofs that MSM and WSW were present in and part of Iraqi society for the last millennia.

In terms of securitization, the historical context defined above provides the national arena wherein IraQueer is forced to perform its speech act. It becomes clear that MSM and WSW in Iraq

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[90] IraQueer, *Biased*, 12.
[91] IraQueer, MADRE and OutRight Action International, *Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Iraq* (2019), 7.

since 2003 are faced with an existential threat which validates any possible attempt to securitize. In order to successfully securitize, they need to convince the Iraqi government that the Iraqi LGBT+ community should enjoy protection in accordance with the law. In turn, the Iraqi government should facilitate extraordinary measures that protect these vulnerable identity groups. However, their speech act risks being impeded by many actors within Iraqi society such as state officials themselves, the media, religious groups, and paramilitary organizations. These actors ignore or actively obstruct any call for help of the LGBT+ community. Nevertheless, these deplorable conditions can also be designated as the reason why a local LGBT+ organization such as IraQueer was needed and eventually formed. One of the primary objectives of an organization which represents a group that is existentially threatened is to speak about insecurities and advocate for the safety of their constituency which is not guaranteed by default. It can be argued that a key reason for the existence of an organization such as IraQueer is to keep attempting to perform a speech act until their constituency enjoys a basic form of security.

The fact that an LGBT+ organization in Iraq has to work in such a hostile environment can also be appointed as a primary motivator as to why they engage in partnerships with other organizations on the local, regional, or international level. As discussed above, due to the hostility the LGBT+ community is faced with, the speech act of an organization as IraQueer will likely be ignored or distorted. Partnerships with other organizations and entities could substantiate their speech act by providing political and financial resources in the local but also the international arena. The next chapter will further elaborate on the securitization attempts of IraQueer and the influence of COC Netherlands in this process.

CHAPTER 3 – LGBT+ ACTIVISM IN IRAQ

IRAQUEER

IraQueer is a grassroots human rights civil society organization that brands itself as Iraq's first national LGBT+ organization. The NGO was founded by Amir Ashour in 2015. The story of why Ashour established an LGBT+ human rights organization in Iraq reflects the precarious circumstances many Iraqi LGBT+ people are forced to cope with. During a speech at the 2019 One Young World Summit, he shared a segment of the road he travelled. "I [...] have been introduced to reasons why I should hate my sexual orientation before I even knew what it meant to be gay. I was told that being Iraqi and being gay was not compatible. I was detained and threatened by both Kurdish and Arabic governments in Iraq. By armed groups and even friends, which forced me to leave Iraq and become a refugee."[92] After he fled to Sweden, he started the online platform of volunteers IraQueer that would eventually grow into a full-fledged human rights NGO. According to Ashour, it was time for an organization that was dedicated to them and led by them.[93]Although he is unable to return to Iraq due to safety concerns, his associates are working from inside the country, albeit anonymously.

According to their vision statement, IraQueer envisions an Iraq "where the LGBT+ individuals are recognized, protected, and have equal rights to every other citizen in the country."[94] In their mission statement they specify that they want "[t]o empower Iraqi LGBT+ individuals through raising the awareness level amongst and about LGBT+ persons in the Iraqi society, and to advocate for LGBT+ rights in Iraq."[95] This empowerment takes the form of three distinct pillars that IraQueer uses to focus its efforts: education, advocacy and direct services. The first pillar, education, is the foundation on which IraQueer was initially built. Before Ashour and his colleagues began to publish educational resources, it was difficult to find reliable information on LGBT+ topics for Iraqi citizens. There were few Arabic resources available from other countries but these were not translated to Iraqi Arab. Moreover, none of these sources were available in Kurdish.[96] Thus, IraQueer began to publish guides and information about LGBT+ topics with the

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[92] Amir Ashour, Speech One Young World Summit (2019).
[93] Spokesperson IraQueer, interview by Mats Stegeman, July 9, 2020, Interview.
[94] "Who are we?," IraQueer, accessed July 31, 2020, https://www.iraqueer.org/about.html
[95] "Who are we?," IraQueer, accessed July 31, 2020, https://www.iraqueer.org/about.html
[96] Spokesperson IraQueer, interview by Mats Stegeman, July 9, 2020, interview.

intent to provide information about taboo or obscure subjects such as LGBT+ health, safety, and sexuality. This led to the development of multiple guides among which a security guide, a sexual health guide, and a legal guide. IraQueer also provided sensitivity workshops for businesses, other non-profits, and government officials. Furthermore, the organization released a storybook that told the stories of multiple LGBT+ Iraqis in order to emphasize that Iraq does have LGBT+ people within its community, something that is denied by politicians and religious leaders. At present, the organization tries to reach a broad audience through a plethora of media and communication channels and convey reliable information concerning LGBT+ topics in general and specifically for Iraq. All of their forms of communication are shared in Iraqi Arabic, Kurdish, and English.

IraQueer's second pillar, advocacy, takes a two-pronged approach. On one hand, IraQueer produces reports and sends submissions to national and international platforms. By adopting a process of documentation early on in their process, IraQueer was able to draft reports that provided detailed descriptions of the circumstances with which the Iraqi LGBT+ community were confronted. An example is the shadow reports submitted to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Iraq's Universal Periodic Review where the absence of LGBT+ issues are emphasized and their contemporary challenges are described. These reports always include a list of recommendations for the Iraqi government and the international community to improve the conditions for LGBT+ people. On the other hand, Ashour attends interviews, conferences, and United Nations meetings to speak about his activism and advocate on behalf of the Iraqi LGBT+ community. Under their final pillar, direct services, IraQueer provides direct services to LGBT+ Iraqis in terms of safe housing, supporting asylum seekers and providing legal advice.[97] These are the most vulnerable projects IraQueer provides because if any details regarding this project are leaked, it could put members of the organization and those who make use of these services in grave danger.[98]

IraQueer is barred from registering within the Iraqi Office of NGOs of the General Secretariat of the Iraqi Council Minister because many Iraqi politicians consider the organization and its practices illegal.[99] Therefore, IraQueer is forced to collaborate with non-public institutions. Nevertheless, from an early stage, IraQueer collaborated with various national, regional,

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[97] "Direct Services," IraQueer, accessed July 31, 2020, https://www.iraqueer.org/direct-services.html
[98] Spokesperson IraQueer, interview by Mats Stegeman, July 9, 2020, interview
[99] Amir Ashour, interview by host Sharqiya News, May 28, 2020.

international NGOs and entities. Some of the organizations that IraQueer has collaborated with are OutRight Action International, MADRE Mission, Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), COC Netherlands, and the Dutch government. Other collaborations cannot be disclosed by IraQueer because it would infringe upon the safety of these organizations. OutRight Action International and COC Netherlands are both transnational organizations that have been active in Iraq an extended period before the foundation of IraQueer. MADRE Mission and OWFI, both women's organizations, also advocated on behalf of the LGBT+ community. Women's organizations often also take on LGBT+ issues due to their overlapping constituency and objective.[100] It was in cooperation with these organizations that IraQueer was able to publish most of the reports they have produced.

In terms of securitization, the existence of a grassroots LGBT+ organization such as IraQueer reflects the inconsistencies of Bertrand's argument concerning silence. Bertrand argues that marginalized groups are unable to securitize partly due to them being silenced, ignored, or their message being contorted. However, the core concept of IraQueer is to keep raising the needs of the Iraqi LGBT+ organization, while attempting to reduce the neglect and contortion of their message within the national and international arenas respectively. It can be argued that one of the primary objectives of IraQueer is to keep performing a securitizing move until the securitization process has been successful.

IRAQUEER AND THE STONEWALL MODEL

To reiterate Bertrand's critique, marginalized groups are unable to securitize their existential threat due to being unheard and represented by other organizations. One element of this representation in LGBT+ activism can be the appropriation of the Euro-American Stonewall model. However, the conditions for this particular model may not be suited for the community. This discourse is allegedly forced upon local organizations by transnational LGBT+ organizations. However, as argued by Rao, using a shared terminology is also necessary to find solidarity within the national and international LGBT+ community.[101]

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[100] Spokesperson COC Netherlands, interview by Mats Stegeman, July 3, 2020, interview.
[101] Rao, *Third World*, 176.

Amir Ashour and another spokesperson of IraQueer stated that the priority in the short run is to hold those who commit atrocities against the Iraqi LGBT+ community accountable. Killing campaigns are still part of everyday reality and the organizers of the killing campaigns and perpetrators from Daesh still roam free. In the long run, the objective is to create a safe place for the Iraqi LGBT+ community where their rights, freedoms, responsibilities, and duties can be freely enjoyed.[102] Thus, the main priority of IraQueer is to ensure security for its constituency. The terminological aspect of the Stonewall model has been used in this regard to find national and international solidarity for their constituency. During an interview with a spokesperson of IraQueer, they stated: "[t]he language that we use, we are not creating identities that did not exist. We are not importing anything but I think by now, there needs to be some sort of a global language when it comes to the issue. It is a global issue and there needs to be a consensus between everyone who is working on these issues. You have to consider the local context and this is something that we respect. There is a plus and our name that says Queer, and I think a queer identity could be anything. And that's our approach, partly it's for us to join the global movement."[103] Hence, the identity-based terminology that is associated with a Euro-American discourse is used in this instance to create a national and international sense of community that may be difficult to achieve otherwise.

Furthermore, as argued by Adam, Duyvendak and Krouwel, these identities can be ascribed a different definition depending on the group that applies them. Correspondently, IraQueer does not adhere to a there clear cut definition of these identity terms. This means that the Stonewall terminology can both fulfill the role of creating a sense of community and still fit within the local sexual subjectivity of Iraq. Lastly, it is also imperative for IraQueer to use terminology that is grounded in sound scientific and social research to change the hegemonic discourse on LGBT+ people. Slurs such as "faggot," "sinner," and "mentally ill" are still often used to describe the LGBT+ community in Iraqi media. These descriptors hurt the mental health of those who identify with a non-conform SOGIE and casts social aspersion on this identity group.[104] By adopting the LGBT+ terminology, Iraqi LGBT+ individuals are not stigmatized as deviants by default and the

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[102] Spokesperson IraQueer, interview by Mats Stegeman, July 9, 2020, interview.
[103] Spokesperson IraQueer, interview by Mats Stegeman, July 9, 2020, interview.
[104] IraQueer, *Biased*, 6.

diffusion of this terminology aides them to seek out reliable resources concerning non-conforming SOGIE.

In terms of their claims, IraQueer is also forced to find a middle ground between cosmopolitism and communitarianism arguments. As seen throughout this thesis, influential political and religious figures within Iraq claim that LGBT+ have no place within Iraqi society because they do not fit in with their values, norms and traditions. Therefore, IraQueer has to argue for universality with the global LGBT+ movement on the one hand, but also the position of the Iraqi LGBT+ community within the broader Iraqi community on the other hand as to not alienate themselves. According to their publications, IraQueer applies two of the three strategies found by Stychin to reach this middle ground. First, IraQueer argues that members of the LGBT+ community are Iraqi citizens and therefore deserving of legal protection and recourse. A 2018 report states that "[u]nder the Iraqi constitution, the government of Iraq is obliged to protect every citizen's rights. Among many rights, the right to life, privacy, and freedom are all ensured to all Iraqis regardless of their background."[105] Within their recommendations, IraQueer argues that LGBT+ people should enjoy the same recognition, protection, and treatment that all Iraqi citizens are legally obliged to.[106] This form of advocacy alludes to a strategy wherein LGBT+ Iraqis are intersectionally constructed as Iraqi citizens as well as LGBT+.

Second, IraQueer argues that human rights are an essential part of Iraqi society and legal structure. Therefore, those rights should be protected and enforced for every Iraqi citizen. IraQueer urges the international community "[...] to advocate for the human rights of queer individuals by pressuring the Iraqi government to protect the lives of LGBT+ citizens and supporting LGBT+ asylum seekers who flee countries like Iraq where their lives are in danger. Recognizing these crimes serves to not only protect the LGBT+ community's right to life and to be who they are, but it is also a recognition of their humanity which is no different to any other group."[107] This quote underlines the pivotal position that human rights take within the strategy of IraQueer. Consequently, most of the arguments proposed by IraQueer are based in a human rights frame. To illustrate this point, we can turn our attention to the shadow report submitted by IraQueer and

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[105] IraQueer, *Fighting*, 19.
[106] IraQueer, MADRE and OutRight Action International, *Violence*, 1-7.
[107] IraQueer, *Fighting*, 8.

OutRight Action International in response to the Fifth Periodic Report of the Republic of Iraq submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The report titled *Dying to be Free: LGBT Human Rights Violations in Iraq* is a collection of ICCPR violations committed by the Iraqi state against LGBT+ individuals. In multiple instances, the reader is reminded that the Iraqi government is obliged under the ICCPR to stop discrimination and violence against LGBT+ people.[108] The Iraqi state is continually reminded that it is legally obliged to protect the human rights of all its citizens under international human rights law.[109]

Thus, within IraQueer's advocacy, we can see a strong sense for ensuring security for their constituency. However, instead of putting on an antagonistic cloak to demand protection, a practice ascribed to the Stonewall Model, IraQueer opts for finding middle ground while appealing to both the global community and the local community. They do not uniformly adopt the Stonewall Model in order to be noticed within the international arena of LGBT+ activism, as argued by Massad. Instead, they appropriated the aspects of the model they deemed relevant and necessary for their work while dismissing certain parts that did not fit within their approach. Therefore, it can be argued that IraQueer does not fall within the trap of representation in terms of adopting a specific discourse. They form their own voice that suits their needs and are thus not represented by a Euro-American discourse in a potential securitization process.

PARTNERSHIP WITH COC NETHERLANDS

Since their founding in 2015, IraQueer has collaborated with many international LGBT+ organizations. An important partner for IraQueer is COC Netherlands. The Dutch *Cultuur en Ontspannings Centrum* (COC) was founded in 1946 and is the world's oldest operating LGBTI organization.[110] It knows a federal structure consisting of 20 local associations. Their advocacy is geared toward supporting the LGBTI movement on national and international levels through funding, capacity building, and making use of their vast network.[111] Since 2016, COC Netherlands and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs entered into a partnership to strengthen LGBTI

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[108] IraQueer, OutRight Action International, *Dying*.
[109] IraQueer, *Fighting;* IraQueer, MADRE and OutRight Action International, *Violence*.
[110] COC Netherlands applies the term LGBTI to identify their constituency.
[111] "About Us," COC Netherlands – International, accessed July 31, 2020, https://international.coc.nl/about-us/

communities, lobbying, and advocacy activities in, among other regions, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This partnership, aptly titled Partnership for Rights, Inclusivity, Diversity, and Equality (PRIDE), is substantiated by COC′s Theory of Change, which is an elaborate basic working model that is aimed to bring about social change. Central in this model is the local context, after which the model is adapted to suit specific needs.[112]

COC′s Theory of Change is a perfect example of their inside-out philosophy, which is based on supporting "coalitions of LGBTI people in their efforts to bring change from within their community."[113] The Theory knows five steps: Empowered LGBTI, Strong LGBTI Community, Capable LGBTI CBOs, Mobilized LGBTI Movement, and Global Human Rights Movement. The first step is based on individual LGBTI people who begin to take action against their marginalization. This should result in a strong and tight LGBTI community. Subsequently, these communities can mobilize themselves and establish capable LGBTI organizations. The penultimate step is the collaboration between these different LGBTI organizations which will result in a diverse movement. Lastly, the movement will be able to hold governments accountable when they violate or fail to uphold international human rights treaties and agreements.[114]

The Theory is also the model that is applied by COC Netherlands when partnering with groups and organizations within the MENA region. According to an interview with a spokesperson of COC, they take on a supportive role within Iraq specifically. Before COC takes any action within the region of MENA, they contact their network on the ground to receive intelligence about how to effectively go about their support and advocacy, while never losing the local context out of sight. In their cooperation with IraQueer, they provided mostly funding but it is possible that other resources of COC, such as their network or knowledge, were also shared.[115]As can be observed, the philosophy of COC is already a direct contradiction against the notion that established Euro-American LGBT+ organizations attempt to force their discourse and practices on grassroots LGBT+ organizations without taking into account cultural and political particularities.

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[112] "Our Vision," COC Netherlands – International, accessed July 31, 2020, https://international.coc.nl/theory-of-change/

[113] "About Us," COC Netherlands – International, accessed July 31, 2020, https://international.coc.nl/about-us/

[114] "Working Towards Diverse and Inclusive Societies in Which LGBTI are able to Participate to their full Potential," COC Netherlands – International, accessed July 31, 2020, https://international.coc.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/merged.pdf

[115] Spokesperson COC Netherlands, interview by Mats Stegeman, July 3, 2020, interview.

COC Netherlands is aware of the importance of taking the voices of the community and those who represent them seriously and take that as the basis for their support and advocacy. They do not project themselves as the forerunner within the domain of LGBT+ rights and social change but instead to opt for a bottom-up approach.

This approach and philosophy are also reflected in the disposition of IraQueer towards international partnerships. A spokesperson of IraQueer stated: "We work for the community. [...] That translates across to our projects. We don't compromise our projects because that is not what the funder wants. Of course, there always has to be some modifications. You change something here, you change something there, but do not forget that we started as volunteers with no funding and I personally believe that we still have maintained that integrity in the sense that we do the projects that we want to do. We help in the ways we want to help. Our partners are aware of that. We are living in the context and eventually, we live [in the field]. That is the vision that they also have. The project must come from us and needs to be implemented by us. And of course, them being in a better position when it comes to rights and freedoms, sometimes they leverage our work. They leverage our projects. But ultimately, the projects are by us and for us."[116] Thus, IraQueer holds full autonomy within its projects and advocacy and is assisted by other organizations. Furthermore, the spokesperson rightly pointed out that they also choose who to collaborate with. If an organization does not uphold the same values or approach, they will not be inclined to form a partnership with said organization.[117]

Thus, IraQueer's partnership with COC Netherlands is another argument against Bertrand's notion of representation of marginalized groups. Following the theory of Bertrand, IraQueer should be represented by transnational LGBT+ organizations to be heard by their audience. However, the partnership between IraQueer and COC Netherlands allude to an equal partnership wherein the needs and wishes of the local constituency are foregrounded. COC's transnational activism within the MENA region is anchored within an inside-out approach where they initially take the backseat and attempt to assist rather than to take the lead in their advocacy. Simultaneously, IraQueer maintains its autonomy and agency by deciding who to partner with and what projects are important for the Iraqi LGBT+ community. Thus, there is no evidence that point

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[116] Spokesperson IraQueer, interview by Mats Stegeman, July 9, 2020, interview.
[117] Spokesperson IraQueer, interview by Mats Stegeman, July 9, 2020, interview.

towards the Iraqi LGBT+ community being represented by other actors and being unable to truthfully share their needs and wishes.

CONCLUSION

To reiterate, the histories of MSM and WSW in Iraq stretch thousands of years. Sources from the Mesopotamian era already discussed same-sex relations and suggested a relation between social status, anal intercourse, and masculinity. During the Middle Ages, love relations between men began to be normalized in the form of beard poems. Surviving texts of this period also allude to a certain normalization of sexual relations among women. The Ottoman period saw a rise of pathologizing of the passive partner in anal intercourse which often led to increased punishment by the ruling schools of law. Nevertheless, both the active and the passive partner received some form of punishment when it was discovered they partook in anal intercourse. However, although the three acknowledged schools would punish anal intercourse, it was only the Shi'ite Imami School that sentenced both parties to the death penalty. Women often received a lesser punishment because there was no penetration involved during their sexual relations. The late 19th century ushered in the colonial era as well as a process of heterosexualization. It is unclear if this process continued during the Ba'ath period because of a lack of sources. The scant literature on MSM and WSW in this period hint toward relative tolerance of these identity groups. It is interpreted this tolerance was possible because of the rejection of former imperial notions and because of the regime's need to bind as many citizens to its rule as possible. However, circumstances for MSM and WSW quickly deteriorated since the start of the Gulf Wars due to the resurgence of tribal and religious norms, values, and traditions. The circumstances became even worse after the US invasion of 2003. The power vacuum left behind by the Ba'ath regime preluded a period of a chaotic scramble for power by Shi'ite paramilitary organizations. This led to multiple killing campaigns and even worse discrimination. Furthermore, besides these organizations, MSM and WSW also face insecurities by family and tribe members, the state, and the media.

It is within this context that Iraqi MSM and WSW are forced to mobilize and advocate for LGBT+ rights. A corollary of this mobilization was the establishment of Amir Ashour's LGBT+ human rights organization IraQueer. Through education, advocacy, and direct services, IraQueer attempts to protect and improve the lives of its constituency. Within their activism, IraQueer adopts part of the Euro-American Stonewall model of LGBT+ activism. The NGO makes use of the binary-based identity terminology and they posit their advocacy in a human rights framework.

Nevertheless, IraQueer is forced to find a middle ground between these 'universal' arguments and communitarian arguments to circumvent alienation in Iraq. Therefore, they reworked the Stonewall Model to fit their circumstances through two strategies. First, IraQueer argues that being part of the LGBT+ community does not exclude someone from being an Iraqi citizen. Thus, the intersectionality between the two identities is emphasized to argue that members of the LGBT+ are part of the community as well possess other identities and therefore deserve equal rights. Second, human rights are framed as an essential part of Iraqi society. By referring to international treaties signed by Iraq, IraQueer accentuates Iraq's obligation to protect the human rights of all Iraqis. Furthermore, when the collaboration between IraQueer and COC Netherlands is analyzed, it becomes clear that IraQueer and their constituency are foregrounded in these partnerships. They retain autonomy and choose the directions for the projects. This coincides with the approach of COC Netherlands which entails bringing about social change from the inside out instead of imposing a discourse without a second thought.

Taking all of the above into account, we can provide an answer to the research question posed in the introduction. According to Sarah Bertrand, marginalized groups are unable to securitize due to being silenced as well as being represented by other actors that speak on their behalf. In this study, it has been proven that Bertrand's argument does not hold for the Iraqi MSM and WSW. First, although many Iraqis in all strata of society still choose not to listen to the message of IraQueer or purposefully twist the message, the raison d'etre of the organization is to voice the concerns of the LGBT+ community. Their purpose is to break the silence and form the voice of the marginalized. Although it will take some time before they are able to successfully securitize, the fact that an organization such as IraQueer exists and is steadily growing means that the first silence problem of Bertrand does not persist for this case study. Iraqi MSM and WSW are constantly voicing their concerns until they are heard.

Second, the biggest hurdle for LGBT+ activism in the Arab world is the representation by Euro-American LGBT+ organizations and discourse. During this study, it has become clear that Iraqi MSM and WSW are not being represented by other organizations or a dominant discourse but adhere to a 'for us, by us' mentality. Indeed, IraQueer consciously chooses its approach to activism and makes decisions based on the direct needs of the Iraqi LGBT+ community. In this endeavor, they do not shy away from appropriating elements of the Stonewall model when

constructing their approach. Moreover, IraQueer's partnership with COC Netherlands highlights that Euro-American organizations do not carelessly impose their activism on local initiatives. Instead, as seen in the example of COC Netherlands, they deliberately assume an inside-out approach that is geared toward supporting these initiatives.

To conclude, Iraqi MSM and WSW constantly strive towards breaking the silence or removing the contortion of their speech act while being aware of and acting on the threat of representation by Euro-American organizations and their corresponding discourse. These findings suggest that it will be possible for the Iraqi MSM and WSW to securitize through activism in the future. However, the pervasive negative discourse on MSM and WSW in Iraqi society indicates that LGBT+ groups first have to change the prevailing negative ideas and assumptions on MSM and WSW before they can convince its audience to take extraordinary actions. Yet, if this discourse can be reshaped, for example through persistent advocacy and education, a favorable environment for a successful securitizing move by Iraqi MSM and WSW can be created.

Naturally, there have been limitations for this thesis that need to be addressed. First of all, I cannot write nor read Iraqi Arabic, which meant I was confined to base this study on sources that were published in English or translated, although there were ample of these sources available. However, the aim of this research was not to provide an overarching study on the Iraqi LGBT+ community, LGBT+ activism, or marginalized groups in securitization theory but to provide a first step which will hopefully result in further exploration of the interconnectedness of these subjects. Hence, I recommend more research to be done on this complex and multifaceted topic, also because of the limited scope of this thesis. Future research could include a broader scope by including other identity groups, incorporating Iraqi Arabic sources, speaking with more LGBT+ organizations, and accommodating more experiences of members of the Iraqi LGBT+ community. Moreover, the connection between LGBT+ advocacy and securitization theory should be critically analyzed in different contexts which hopefully will result in a better understanding of this form of securitization. Hopefully, future research will aid LGBT+ organizations across the globe to successfully ensure safety and security for their constituency because everybody should be able to partake in these freedoms, regardless of any identity aspect.

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