"This is Existential Exclusion": Experiences of Gay Arab-Palestinian Men from Traditional Communities in Israel

# Abstract

Arab-Palestinian gay men (APGM) in Israel are a sexual minority and a national-ethnic-religious minority group. This locates APGM in the nexus of multiple marginal positions both in their local communities and in Israeli society, placing them at risk of social exclusion. Despite the perilous situation of Arab LGBTQ population around the world, social work research in this area is sparse. This study aims to reduce this gap by employing an intersectional lens to examine social exclusion and inclusion of APGM. We applied purposive and snowball sampling for interviews (N=20) and a focus group (N=8) with APGM living in traditional-rural communities in Israel. The study findings reveal that participants experience numerus forms exclusion in three major life spheres: In the family and local community participants face rejection, banishment, and physical harm; In the organizational sphere participant's interaction with education, employment and business organizations were fraught with various forms of discrimination and aggression; in the social sphere participants experiences were diverse as they situated their identities with regard to Arab-Palestinian or Israeli-Jewish main stream and LGBTQ+ groups. We draw on intersectionality theory and Muslim feminist and queer scholarship to discuss the study findings and suggest implications for research, policy, and practice.

Key Words: LGBTQ, intersectionality, social minority, social exclusion, social inclusion, Arab-Muslim communities

# Introduction

Social workers serve individuals and communities that occupy multiple minority positions. However, social work studies regarding LGBTQ+ are limited and few relate to Arab LGBTQ+ population (Kahn, 2015; Nothurfter & Nagy, 2016). This may be a consequence of the taboo concerning the discussion of sexuality and LGBTQ+ in particular, in traditional Arab/Muslim communities (Alessi, Kahn & Chatterji, 2016; Hamdi, Lachhed & Anderson, 2018; Ikozler and Szymanski, 2014). The scant studies concerning Arab LGBTQ individuals focused on religious or cultural groups either in majority religious Muslim countries (Aydin & Ozeren, 2019; Hamdi et al., 2018) or in Western countries in which they had an immigrant or refugee status (Akachar, 2015; Alessi et al., 2020; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2013; Kahn, 2015). Considering the gaps in research and the rising number of refugees from Islamic societies fleeing to Western host countries, there is a need to expend social work knowledge in this area (Kahn, 2015).

This study aims to explore social exclusion and inclusion of Arab-Palestinian Gay men (APGM) in Israel. APGM are at the intersection of multiple minority positions as a religiously diverse, ethnic, social, and national minority group as well as a sexual minority group. The study of APGM, can add to social work knowledge about LGBTQ+ from group that are considered social minorities. Specifically, it can contribute to reduce the gap regarding Arab LGBTQ+ individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. We apply an intersectional lens, which addresses the ways in which socially marginalized identities merge to create multiple forms of oppression that impact the experiences of individuals and social groups (Crenshaw, 1989; Simien, 2007). Used as a theoretical and methodological framework to understand racialized sexual minorities, intersectionality can serve to "highlight the unique lived reality of those whose experiences are immeasurable and invisible in most research and whose needs are neglected in society" (Ghabrial, 2017 pp. 53).

The current study is a part of an exploratory research project aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the social situation of APGM in Israel. This part of the study was guided by two research questions: (1) How do APGM describe their daily social experiences; (2) What is the impact of these experiences on social inclusion. This article begins with an introduction of theoretical framework and the intersecting social positions of APGM. We then present the methodology and study findings. Lastly, we draw on contemporary Muslim intersectional queer and feminist literature to discuss them.

**Theoretical Approach – Intersectionality**

Intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s as a heuristic term to focus attention on "the dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics" (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013 p. 787). Like other major theoretical perspectives, intersectionality is not a unified theory but a range of theoretical and conceptual tools (Yuval-Davis, 2015). Originating within Black Feminist studies, intersectionality explained how the multiple identities of Black Women position them in different levels of inequality with respect to hierarchical social systems. Rather than looking different manifestations of inequality separately, intersectionality theory examines the combination of socially marginalised identities that dynamically intersect and how they exacerbate discrimination and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 2015). Since intersectionality theory captures a complex and dynamic relationship of multiple identities, it acknowledges that certain identities may be advantageous to an individual while they continue to suffer from oppression due to others. This generates a unique set of threats and opportunities that produce outcomes that reflect social advantages or disadvantages depending on context (Abu-Ras, Suárez & Breiwish, 2021).

Over the past four decades the intersectionality has proved useful as a theoretical approach and a methodological guide for analysis in a range of disciplines such as, law, sociology, gender studies and social work (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). Studies have applied intersectional theory to understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals who are also a part of other socially marginalized identities. Several studies demonstrated that LGBTQ+ individuals who are also People of Color (POC), or considered a part of an ethnic or religious minority often face racism and discrimination in the context of the society they live in, while facing heterosexism within their ethno-racial communities. For example, Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne & Marin (2001) found that as overlapping members of sexual and ethnic minority groups in the U.S.A, gay and bisexual Latino men have been affected by homophobia, poverty, and racial discrimination. This oppression prevented their full and fair participation in family life and the gay community and limited educational and professional opportunities. In Canada, Crichlow (2004) found that African-Caribbean Christian culture poses many obstacles for gay men, who face exclusion from churches, families, and communities.

More recently, scholars applied intersectionality to analyze the experiences of Muslim gay men (Abu-Ras, Suárez & Breiwish, 2021; Ghabrial, 2017; Rahman, 2010). Rachman (2010) suggests that intersectionality is relevant to the analysis of Islamic culture and gender/sexual equality for three reasons: first, because it demonstrates that cultures and identities are plural and overlap, second, because intersectionality turns our attention to the standpoint of the oppressed and focuses their knowledge. Lastly, an intersectional analysis has implications for the assumption of equality as a universal desired outcome. Since gay Muslim identities fundamentally challenge cultural oppositions, they occupy an intersectional social location, caught in the nexus of oppression between cultural and political Islamophobia and homophobia. Scholars therefore call for intersectionally framed empirical research concerning the lived experiences of gay Muslim men (Akachar, 2015; Rachman, 2010).

In Western societies, empirical studies have shown that LGBTQ+ Muslims face multiple forms of discrimination and oppression that may result in social exclusion in areas such as: education, employment, religious congregations, family belonging and community ties in both their native communities and the LGBTQ+ community in general. Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010; 2014) found that British Muslim gay men fear rejection and ostracization from their religious communities often causing them to deny or reconstruct their gay identity. Findings about the experiences of Middle Eastern gay men in the U.S.A suggest coming out to their families and ethnic communities was perceived as dangerous and concerning (Ikzler & Szymanski, 2014). Alessi, et al, (2020) found that LGBTQ+ refugees who migrated from Islamic societies to Austria and the Netherlands encountered covert or overt discrimination and Islamophobia from the host community and the mainstream LGBTQ+ community, while also facing discrimination based on their sexual and gender identity from other refugees. Their intersecting positions compromised their ability to receive services needed to facilitate social inclusion in the receiving societies. Although in some respects, the situation of APGM is similar to that of the study population in former research, the Israeli context situates them in specific social minority positions.

## At the intersection – Arab-Palestinian Gay Men in Israel

APGMs multiple marginalized identities position them at different levels of inequality with respect to various social systems. Any attempt to untangle the complexity of inequalities involves exploring numerus positions that APGMs simultaneously hold with respect to an ever-changing social dynamic, while an intersectional framework considers that these inequalities interact to create unique forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Rahman, 2010). With this caveat in mind, we briefly present two main social positions that APGM hold, that may elucidate the marginalization of : the Arab-Palestinian minority position, and the sexual minority position.

### Arab-Palestinian minority position

The Arab-Palestinian society in Israel is an ethno-national indigenous minority group of about two million people (21%) of the country's citizens, which is comprised of Muslims (85%), Christians (7%), and Druze (8%) (Israel CBS, 2020). Arab citizens of Israel maintain a complex and conflictual identity in that they are Palestinian-Arabs as well as citizens of the State of Israel, which is perceived by its majority as the Jewish nation state (Jamal, 2018; Samooha, 2019). This national affiliation often causes the state to treat them as a hostile minority, a demographic threat, or a fifth column (Ghanem & Rouhana. 2001). The Palestinian-Israeli conflict also casts a shadow over the political, social, and economic position of the Arab minority in Israel, which is reflected in its inability to achieve equality in civil rights or in the realization of its collective-national identity (Haidar, 2018).

In 2018 Israel enacted the highly debated "Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People". Although some view it as largely declarative in nature, it established the inferior status of Arab citizens of Israel by defining the right to national self-determination as unique to its Jewish citizens. This emphasized to Arab citizens that they are, in the eyes of the state, exclusively a socio-economic and cultural group without collective national rights (Jamal, 2018). This law also changed the legal status of the Arabic language from an official language to a language with a 'special status', thereby undermining another central component of the collective identity of Arab society in Israel (Jabareen, 2018; Zeedan, 2020).

Most Arab-Palestinians live in the Israeli geographic and social periphery, in small villages or towns (Endeweld, et al. 2019). Decades of marginalization by Israeli governments and the failure to develop infrastructure have led to poor economic, educational, health, and social conditions (Weiss, 2019). Although they are afforded full citizenship rights de jure, Arab communities suffer from deficient infrastructure, insufficient services and lacking public transportation (Baron-Epel et al., 2007). Arab-Palestinians are the most vulnerable group to poverty and recent data shows that 45% of Arab families lived below the poverty line compared to 13% of Jewish families (Endeweld et al., 2019; Gal, 2017). Despite gradual progress, the Arab-Palestinian population continues to face inequality in education, labor-market discrimination, and lack of quality employment opportunities, especially for women (Khattab & Miaari, 2013).

### Sexual minority position

Like most countries around the world, the LGBTQ+ population in Israel continues to struggle for social justice. Nevertheless, since the 1980's there has been substantial progress in the procurement of legal rights and social inclusion (Pizmony-Levi, Shilo & Pinhasi, 2009). In the past decade surrogacy for same-sex parents was legally enacted, educational programs are delivered in schools and public welfare and health services in many areas now offer expert services for the LGBTQ+ community. However, this progress is primarily concentrated in Jewish majority areas. Although Tel-Aviv, arguably the country's modern cultural and business center, is considered by some a global LGBTQ+ heaven, there is growing critique of the exclusion of social minority groups and especially of Queer Palestinians (Atshan,2020; Kama & Ram, 2020).

In Arab-Palestinian society, like most conservative and religious social groups, the discourse regarding sexuality and gender is contested, especially with regard to same-sex activity, which is illegal throughout most Middle East and North African countries. The two major patriarchal religions that comprise the Middle Eastern Arab population, Christianity and Islam, view procreation as the only legitimate reason for sexual relations (Kreps, 2012). Intimate relationship between men and women cannot exist outside of marriage in Arab society, therefore any such relationship is considered adultery resulting in social penalties (Sherif-Trask, 2006). Based on religious, moral, and legal attitudes, heteronormativity is deeply rooted in Arab culture and same-sex relationships are considered a sinful abomination (Atshan, 2020). This is reflected in the lack of language to appropriately describe a sexual minority. There is no generally accepted equivalent to the word "gay" in Arabic, and no direct reference to such sexuality (Atshan, 2020; Kreps, 2012).

The Arab-Palestinian society in Israel is dynamic and heterogeneous. Although it has undergone many socioeconomic and political changes in recent decades, it is mostly traditional-conservative and is characterized by collectivist, patriarchal values that prioritize family and community. The traditional family structure established hierarchical power relations based on age and gender, while parental socialization encourages self-sacrifice, discipline, conformity, and obedience to authority (Dwairy & Achoui, 2010; Haj-Yahia, 2019). Most Arab-Palestinian parents expect to guide their child's major life decisions such as career, place of residence and choice of marriage partner (Dwairy, 2006).

Men face specific obstacles with respect to traditional gender rolls. As the patriarchal leaders, men are expected to merry, carry the family name, care for its continuity, and accept responsibility for the family property and dependent relatives (Haj-Yahia, 2003). The traditional expended family system (Hamulla) is maintained through proximal living arrangements and intensive family connections. This collective familial system provides support and protection to its members, while expecting their commitment, emotional and practical assistance, this creates a shared sense of success or failure as a result family member's actions and choices (Abu-Baker & Dwairy, 2003). When a family member acts in a socially unacceptable way, the nuclear family can be blamed, and shame may be imposed on the extended family with the expectation that it assumes responsibility for the actions of its members (Haj-Yahia & Sadan, 2008). Considering Arab-Palestinian religious norms, family tradition and cultural values, an individual's identification as gay may impact the entire family, labeling it as deviant, compromise the family honor, and impose social penalties. The multiple minority positions that APGM occupy puts them at risk of social exclusion in various aspects of life. To understand the social situation of APGM, we explored two research questions: (1) How do study participants describe their social experiences; (2) How do these experiences impact them in major life spheres.

**Methods**

This qualitative study employed purposive and snowball sampling (Stern & Porr, 2017; Patton, 2002) for semi-structured interviews (N=20) and a focus group (N=8). Eligible study participants had to be adult Arab-Palestinian men; citizens of Israel who self-identify as gay. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at [removed for blind review].

Most APGM hide their sexuality to avoid negative consequences. To reach the silenced voices of APGM, the research team engaged in a recruitment process that included online enrolment as well as reaching out to Arab-Palestinian LGBTQ+ advocates. Through these preliminary connections, additional participants were recruited via "snowball" sampling (Stern & Porr, 2017). We aimed to include participants from diverse groups (Patton, 2002). The final sample included Muslim (N=12), Christian (N=7) and Druze (N=1) participants aged 19-39 from diverse residential status (Arab-Palestinian villages, Jewish and mixed cities), mostly from Israel's geographic periphery, and socioeconomic background.

Before each interview, a research team member presented the study, explained the procedure and promised confidentiality on the phone. At the beginning of each interview this was reiterated, and study participants signed a consent form containing information about the study and their rights. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences. Most interviews were conducted in Arabic and then transcribed and translated to Hebrew and English. Interviews were conducted in person in secure venues for participants and lasted 60-90 minutes. The interview guide consisted of open-ended question that prompted participants to describe 1) how they identify with respect to different minority positions; 2) their social interactions within local community and other parts of Israeli society; 3) the effects these experiences have on their daily lives.

ATLAS TI software was employed to analyse the data in a constructivist grounded theory approach, which promotes deep understanding of social, political, and experiential realities and is especially suitable for social justice research that recovers marginalized voices (Charmaz, 2000; Creswell, 2009). For data analysis, research team members read the transcripts carefully separately and applied open coding to the data units. Then, the team met to re-read the interviews, discussed coding, and identified emergent themes (Charmaz, 2000) and patterns (Creswell, 2009). The ongoing dialogue between team members helped clarify data, allowed deeper reflexivity, and consideration of diverging interpretations with respect to gender, culture, and language. The Data were then converted into major categories that reflect study participant's experiences in three life spheres: the family and community sphere, the organizational sphere, and the social sphere. Finally, to enhance research credibility, the main findings were communicated to a focus group (N=8) of study participants as a form of member checking (Padgett, 2016). As we discussed the main findings and reviewed remaining questions, participants were also informed of the study progress.

The research team was diverse and included women and men who are Arab-Palestinian (of several religions) and Jewish, some self-identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community and others as allies. The team members worked together through the different stages of the research process, sharing knowledge, and lived experiences to inform the study.

**Findings**

**Family and local community sphere: Experiences close to home**

This theme refers to study participant's experiences with nuclear and extended family (Hamulla) as well as with local community. Most study participants were initially rejected by parents, siblings, or extended family members when their sexual orientation came to be known. This manifested in various ways, which can be placed on a continuum between subtle forms of rejection to severe emotional and physical violence. In the following example, a participant that hid his sexuality, described the rejection he experienced when his parents found out:

*[My parents realised] only when the rumour spread in the village, but it's like they reject it. Every year I find myself reminding them that I'm gay when they ask: 'when will you get married? When will you bring us a grandchild".*

In this case, parents and other family members did not exclude the participant but disregarded his non-conforming sexuality, with the expectation that he perform traditional heteronormative masculine duties. For most study participants, however, family responses were intolerant. In this example, a participant described his mother's reaction in a similar situation:

*"My mother… picked me up and started to hit me in the car to extract information and find out if I had shared this with anyone. She didn’t accept this at all and was very [verbally] aggressive".*

This mother's response underscores the impact of a non-conforming sexual orientation not only on her son's life, but on that of the entire family. Families may therefore publicly ostracize their son, as another participant described:

*In my neighbourhood there were families that their boys came out. These families published an ad in the local newspaper and in other [public] places in the village announcing that their child is "dead" and renounced him from the family.*

For several study participants family exclusion involved physical violence. In the following example a participant, who lived in hiding at the time of the interview, described what occurred after family members discovered his sexual orientation:

*"My cousin called and said my brother is coming to pick me up soon. I was very happy. But when he came another cousin was also in the car. They told me to come in, but I felt something wrong… so I told my brother that I'll take a bus. He started hollering at me to get in the car. When I turned away, I felt a hard blow to my head and fell on the sidewalk. My cousin started hitting me and my brother just sat there in the car and did nothing. Luckily someone passed by and yelled at him to stop and called the police, so they fled. They left me with my face and clothes covered in blood. I passed out. Then an ambulance took me to hospital.*

This participant did not return to his village and moved to a predominantly Jewish city. Despite his injuries, he did not report this to authorities:

*When the police came to question me [in the emergency room], I said nothing. If I tell them, it's my brother, and they arrest him - I'm dead tomorrow. It's been a year and I'm still terrified".*

The shame and stigma associated with being gay is such that even parents who wish to accept their children, face scrutiny from extended family and local community. Therefore, study participants fear the negative impact on their entire family:

*For now, my parents know that I'm gay so I'm not afraid* ***of*** *them I'm afraid* ***for*** *them… I know they live in a society that won't accept me and blame them for them for the situation?... this is kind of a dangerous society.*

Since the entire family of gay men risks penalties from local community, participants protect the family honour and preserve its social status by hiding their sexuality. The fear for family members is substantiated by experiences of others in the community, one participant recalled: "*Once they burnt down the family home of a boy when neighbours found out he was gay. It's hard. And I don’t want anyone threatening my family because of me".* Another participant said: "*Bad things happen every day. I'm very worried because there are violent people that can do really bad things to people just because they are Jews or Arabs or straight or gay".*

Although most participant's experienced family and community exclusion, in some cases parents actively supported their son, as in this case:

*A year ago, a photo of me and a guy circulated. I know my parents don’t accept this at all. But still, when my extended family opposed, my father and mother supported me. Because whatever happens, parents won't give up on their child.*

Contrasting former descriptions, in this case, parents opposed family and community. This implies that family and community exclusion can be moderated by the effects of his parental public support.

**The Organizational Sphere: Experiences at School and Work**

This theme refers to participant's experiences with respect to organizational settings. All study participants experienced implicit or explicit exclusion in the context of education, employment and business organizations that were vital to inclusion. For most participants excluding experiences started as early as school. A participant described his experience in class: *"A student started to harass me… then he came with his friend, and they did stuff to me together and even told other students"*. He did not elaborate about what "stuff" was done to him but continued to convey the school's implicit support for his exclusion: *"I was upset that the school didn’t intervene or try to help me with this. When students made fun of me in front of the teachers or the principal, they were simply silent. They did nothing".* These words reflect the participant's disappointment at the school that used its power to silently reaffirm his social exclusion. Such experiences may explain why most study participants did not relay on school support. In a case where help was expected, it was denied:

*I had a cool school counsellor. She supported me from the beginning. But when I shared this with her, she said that since this is a Christian school, it's important to keep this quiet so that I won't get hurt. So that's what I did till graduation.*

Trust and support initially permitted a teenager facing many problems at home and school, to confide with his counsellor. However, this participant received a clear message that gay sexuality is different than other issues and could not be tolerated. Admittedly, this may have been the counsellor's well-meaning attempt to keep him safe in a homophobic organizational environment. However it effectively confirmed his social exclusion. In other cases, the school staff actively facilitated exclusion, as in this example:

*When I was in the ninth grade a counsellor approached me and started asking uncomfortable question like "are you gay?", "Do you like men?", "Are you attracted to men?". I said "no" because I was afraid they would expel me or tell my family and other students. He threatened me and said that if I am gay, I would need therapy. That this is unnatural and these "sorts of people" are not wanted in school.*

Here, the organization initiated a pre-emptive step to prevent the expression of gay identity. This may have been a defining moment for this participant ("I'll never forget it") which infused shame and fear for future social interactions ("threatened me"). In the context of rural traditional communities, organizational exclusion overlapped with family-community exclusion, as this case: *"My aunt was a school counsellor. She had family fights with my mom, so she used this and started to tell everybody in my family that I'm gay, that I'm different".* In rural Arab villages, educational opportunities are limited, and it is very common that most residents are related to two or three large families. Since being gay or simply being related to a gay person may result in social penalties, the misuse of power at the organizational level may prove detrimental. Later in life, study participants encountered exclusion in work and business organizations. This business owner explained why he keeps a heteronormative apearence:

*It's sad but that’s how it is in our community… if they know no one would give me contracts. I'd go out of business… It's not like the Jews have more gays than we do. There are a lot of gay Arabs, but they are being intimidated just like me!*

This participant referenced discrimination in the local business community, implying that this might not have been the case in a predominantly Jewish area. However, others experienced exclusion with organizations in Jewish and mixed cities. In this example, a participant described workplace discrimination in a mixed city:

*They knew I was Arab… and had me come for an interview and training… I felt uncomfortable as soon as I entered… It was how the other employees stared and how the manager looked and talked to me. I realized that even if I do a good job, they won’t hire me because they could see I was gay… A few days later the manager called and said I didn’t get the job. She was Jewish by the way.*

The emphasis on the manager's Jewish identity may suggest an undelivered expectation that a Jewish organization would be more inclusive of gay men. However, being both Arab and gay at the same time created new forms of oppression. A participant that worked as a teacher in a Jewish town described this experience:

*I had a conversation with the supervisor in which I said I was gay. She reacted harshly. She said they could barely stomach me being Arab and that being also gay is too much. That I shouldn’t dare tell the kids or put any ideas in their heads. I was shocked. I couldn't believe an educator would say something like this.*

This explicit message illustrates how organizations can create new forms of discrimination and exclusion due to APGM multiple minority positions. Study participants, although initially surprised, gleaned from these experiences that their identity must be hidden if they wished to be included in school, work and the business market.

**The Social sphere: Experiences of informal relationships**

This theme relates to study participant's experiences in relationships with friends, peers, and social groups. All participants interacted with friends and colleagues from Arab-Palestinian as well as Jewish society. Some described their experience in relationships with Jewish-Israelis as inclusive. One participant said: "Most of my friends at university are Jewish and not Arab. We have very close and respectful relationships". Another participant described similar experiences: "I get warmer treatment from Jewish society. My friends love me, care for me and are supportive… I don't get this from Arab society".

Inclusion of sexual minorities in larger Israeli cities causes some APGM to leave their communities as this participant described: "There are daily collisions between being Arab-Palestinian and being gay. It's hard. For most gay Arab man, it is easier to run away to Tel-Aviv. Life is simpler there and you get everything". Indeed, in some cases participants appreciated the freedom and support they received from Jewish peers, preferring it to excluding experiences in their local communities. However, inclusion in predominantly Jewish areas that are considered liberal, can also be complex and conditional as a study participant described:

*"They make you feel like you come from a primitive place, and they're here to save you… they had awful questions and stigmas. They would say stuff like -'How can you be Arab* ***and*** *gay at the same time?'… 'You have such high self-awareness'… If you just live as a gay person without the baggage of being Arab-Palestinian, they will absolutely accept you, but if you carry your national baggage, you're not".*

In these exchanges LGBTQ+ inclusion was imbued with stigmatisation of Arab-Palestinians. Such microaggressions in daily social experiences suggest that even in what is often considered Western-liberal areas, APGM face social exclusion. Having lived in Tel-Aviv, he said: "I can't judge my friends. They just had to escape a minority that wouldn't accept them. But the majority also excludes them. It's like they say - give up your identity and we'll partially accept you". The excluding dynamic creates a process in which family and community exclusion drives some APGM to Jewish cities, while a new location creates different forms of exclusion. Some degree of inclusion thus requires that APGM relinquish aspects of their culture and ethnicity and adopt Western ideas, associated with the Jewish majority. Several study participants tied this process to the famous Tel-Aviv pride parade: "I think that the LGBTQ+ community, both Arabs and Jews, shouldn’t take part in the pride parade in a country that occupies other people and promotes oppression". Others agree, but still experience it as inclusive: "Society is complicated, but generally speaking there is acceptance… The pride parade, is one of the best in the world. I know Israel uses it politically, but I still participate in it". Despite diverse experiences, participants acknowledged that inclusion into Israeli LGBTQ+ society means putting aside Arab-Palestinian political and national affiliation. For some, this also means forsaking religious and cultural norms: "It's not just the political difference, it's also a cultural difference between me and the people I live with, which cannot be bridged!" This participant sees Israeli LGBTQ+ society, as unrespectable and promiscuous: "Why do you have to get naked and dance in your underwear to get freedom… Many homosexuals display themselves pornographically, which only intensifies our exclusion". His words reflect a rejection of Western forms of self-expression, considered inappropriate in his Arab culture.

In social interactions with Arab-Palestinians, study participants felt excluded because they were gay. One participant said: "My social circle reminds me that I'm Palestinian, and I can't say that I'm not. But when an official Palestinian country is established - will I have the right to exist? For now, the answer is uncertain". Another participant said: "(they) say wait till after the occupation is over, we'll deal with the homophobia… But, for me, this is existential exclusion. They don't accept my existence". Thus, relationships with Arab-Palestinians are conditioned on compliance to heteronormative tradition and prioritizing the collective national struggle. An Arab-Palestinian activist, told of a tragic event that highlighted the impact of multiple forms of exclusion:

*Several months ago, my friend hung herself! She was an Arab trans-woman. Her family didn't come to bury her and refused to even pay last respects! We had to bury her in an unmarked grave in a Jewish cemetery to honour her! You get that?!"*

This activist described with grief the lengths to which he went to secure his friend's burial. He was relied on his connections to both Arab-Palestinian and Jewish activist groups to do so, and spoke of his hope of a joint struggle: *"I don’t think the LGBTQ struggle should be separate. A Palestinian should fight for the Israeli and vis versa".* In his daily activism he encounters conflicting responses: "*...Sometimes [Arab-Palestinian friends] see me as an amazing leader and sometime as the whore of the Jews. It's a split I don’t believe in".*

The "split" he described illuminates the social space APGM hold - caught between Western, predominantly Israeli-Jewish society and Arab-Palestinian society. APGM participants are thus excluded from each social circle, and also from the spaces that attempt to bridge between them.

**Discussion**

This study aims to explore social exclusion and inclusion of APGM in Israel through an intersectional lens, by focusing on participant's experiences and the way they impact APGM in various life spheres. The findings show participants experiences in three main life spheres: the family-community sphere, the organizational sphere, and the social sphere. In the family and community participants faced rejection from parents and other family members as well as risk of banishment or physical violence. These findings support previous research regarding the impact of the social taboo of gay sexuality in traditional and religious communities, and specifically in Muslim and other Middle Eastern families (Alessi et al., 2020; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2014). However, the findings suggest that this is not always the case, as despite initial rejection, not all parents severed family ties, and sometimes even advocated for their son's inclusion, at the cost of confronting family and community norms. In the organizational sphere, the findings show that participants faced discrimination and exclusion from school, work, and business. These institutions have a are vital impact on social inclusion (Authors own). Exclusion of Arab-Palestinian Israeli citizens from education and labor market opportunities has been identified in former research (Khattab & Miaari, 2013; Weiss, 2019), and LGBTQ+ discrimination is also still prevalent in many countries, including Israel (Kama & Ram, 2020). The current findings suggest that, for APGM, these two forms of discrimination intersect to propel exacerbated forms of exclusion. Since education and work opportunities are limited for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, exposure to homophobia in local schools and businesses deepens the impact of exclusion on APGM. Although some participants expected homophobia would be less ubiquitous in predominantly Jewish or mixed organizations, the findings show that this was not often the case. On the contrary, being both Arab and gay, was presented by employers as a liability. In the social sphere, while some participants generally experienced relationships with Jewish friends and colleagues as inclusive due to the acceptance of diverse sexualities, others pointed to the excluding experiences that reaffirmed their minority position in predominantly Jewish spaces and within Israeli LGBTQ+ society. Still others distanced themselves from hegemonic Israeli LGBTQ+ culture, which they experienced as culturally excluding in that its Western-style expression disregards Arab-Palestinian tradition. Social relationships with Arab-Palestinians presented a mirror image that respected APGM's national-political and cultural positions but demanded heteronormativity and put the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights far behind the struggle for Palestinian rights, if at all. These findings correspond with critique of Israel's "pinkwashing" as well as critique of homophobia in Palestinian society (Atshan,2020; Kama & Ram, 2020).

Intersectionality examines how gender interwinds with race, ethnicity, and other socially marginalised identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 2015). This study implies that for APGM, multiple minority positions do not only intersect - they can clash. APGM do not compare with patriarchy, cultural traditions, religious Muslim, Christian of Druze decree or the local community's norms. Nor are their identities accepted by heteronormative or LGBTQ+ Jewish-Israeli society. APGM are faced with what can be described as 'hyper-exclusion'. This hyper form of exclusion is intensified in the sense that it is: a) widespread both in local communities and in Jewish-Israeli heteronormative and LGBTQ+ society; b) manifested in major life spheres that could have otherwise supported social inclusion such as work and education; c) holds severe implications that may lead to extreme violence or death; d) constantly evolving, fuelled by national and political conflicts and a clash of ideologies that split between multiple identity positions.

To promote social justice for APGM, a wider and nuanced intersectional approach for social work research is needed. Rachman (2010) suggests that a more rigorous application of intersectionality for LGBTO+ studies must appreciate difference within oppressed identity categories and think of how identities are constituted. We draw on contemporary Muslim feminist and queer scholarship to suggest the incorporation of religion and contested nationality to the intersectional matrix. Chaturvedi (2021) argues that feminism, the origin of intersectional thought, remains a concept rooted in "Westphalian ideas of a democratic states with human rights and secular practices" (p.10). She points to the lack of attention to religious identity among intersectional scholars and activists except for the condemnation of religious based discrimination. The promotion of liberal ideology, secularism and democracy distances individuals from illiberal societies that cannot relate to these ideas (Chaturvedi, 2021). As our findings illustrate, this was the case for participants who did not accept at least some pillars of Western LGBTQ+ ideology and felt that they deepened their exclusion and distanced them from tradition. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is yet another area where APGM minority positions clash. We argue that national identity should not be examined separately, but studied in combination with other minority positions to better understand how it exacerbates social exclusion based on gender and sexuality. This intersection has recently been explored in a few studies. Ashqar-Sharary & Abu-Rabia-Queder (2022) found that Muslim women activists in Israel are challenged by a combination of religious patriarchy and colonial power structures that align to block gender equality reform. In an autoethnographic study that critically engages with the queer Palestinian solidarity movement, Atshan (2020) coined the term: "ethnohetronormativity" to describe the reality of life as "racialized queer subjects experiencing interwind oppression from dual systems of ethnocracy on one hand and heteronormativity and toxic masculinity on the other" (p. 10). More empirical social work research is needed to expand the understanding of these clashing positions and promote support LGBTQ+ individuals that occupy them.

This study has implications for research, education and policy in Western-democratic countries. Rachman (2010) posits that "There is a political and cultural power in simply rendering visible intersectional social locations, particularly when doing so challenges oppositional discourses" (p. 949). Social work research and education has the power to promote such visibility. An anti-oppressive social work perspective requires traditional institutions and practices to identify their shortcomings and promote social change (Dominelli, 1996). Rachman (2010) rejects notions that see Muslim values as inherently gendered and patriarchal to such a degree that they clash with core values of Western-democratic cultures. This suggests that welfare organizations must actively support LGBTQ+ individuals from Arab and Muslim culture to promote inclusion within traditional communities as well as in the context of Western-democratic society. Welfare systems that support Arab Muslim individuals of all religions, must work to identify community and organizational mechanisms that exclude LGBTQ+ individuals, disregard or other 'gay’ and ‘Muslim’ identities. Finally, Atshan (2020) sets a vision of queer Israeli-Palestinian solidarity in contrasting ethnohetronormativity woven into both societies. Social workers in Israel and in other areas of social or national conflict, often work across boundaries to support diverse communities (Authors own) and are uniquely positioned to highlights both the oppression and the hope that this vision instils.

**Study Limitations**

This qualitative study has limitations due to the number of participants and the specific social setting of in which it was conducted. Keeping in mind that societies are in change, this exploratory research captures the social situation at a certain time. Further research in other social, political, and institutional contexts is needed to explore the situation.

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