



July 2024

Beyond the Bars Within the Soul

The Realities of LGBTQIA+ Persons in Libya



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Abstract

This report touches on the severe persecution faced by LGBTQIA+ people in Libya, contextualizing their struggles within the country's historical and socio-political framework. It highlights how entrenched patriarchal norms and gendered structures foster a climate of social marginalization and targeted state oppression. The intersection of these factors is examined through documented cases and personal testimonies, revealing a pattern of systemic abuse, harassment, and scrutiny inflicted by both social environments and state supported militia groups. These groups employ militarized masculinity to justify violence and maintain power, targeting Queer and Trans folks under the guise of protecting societal values.

Additionally, the report addresses the dual challenges of erasure and visibility. It underscores how patriarchal and gendered structures further marginalize specific groups, such as Lesbians, Non-Binary folks perceived as women, Trans men, and Transmasculine people, leading to their active invisibilization. Conversely, it explores the perilous consequences of visibility for Queer men, Trans women, and Non-Binary people perceived as men, who face severe persecution when failing to conform to hegemonic masculinity. Through narratives like Malik, Omar, Amira, Khaled and Kareem's, the report illustrates the extreme consequences of societal and structural oppression. Ultimately, the report calls for imminent advocacy, international awareness, and concrete actions to support and protect LGBTQIA+ people in Libya

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1. Introduction and Contextualisation

In this introduction (Section A), we will explore how in Libya, the LGBTQIA+ community is currently facing severe human rights violations from militia and militarized groups, particularly in Tripoli, but not only. These attacks are conducted through arbitrary arrests, detentions and violations of human rights and bodily integrity through investigation, intimidation, confiscating personal belongings, verbal, and physical abuse. These violations frequently escalate to extreme acts such as rape and torture. Section B. delves into the legal and political environment which is shaped by governmental division and the influence of armed groups as well as Salafist conservative authorities. Section C. showcases the report's methodology and perspective taking an intersectional and decolonial standpoint to critically examine the historical, social, and political dynamics. It incorporates testimonies from affected Trans and Queer individuals and aiming to provide an experience-based knowledge to deepen understanding of the human rights violations faced by LGBTQIA+ folks in Libya.

A) Current situation (Malik & Mahmoud)

In September 2020, a group of gay men were arrested after visiting a cafe in Tripoli's central city, known in the LGBTQIA+ community as a hangout spot. They were detained by a militia group called Nasawi. Among those arrested were Malik and Mahmoud, who were held for hours. Malik told us that he went there with his friend to watch a football match. But out of nowhere, they were arrested arbitrarily, their phones were confiscated and searched for proof of 'homosexuality' and 'immorality'. During these investigations, Malik told us that he was also persistently questioned about other members of the LGBTQIA+ community. He was also asked if he knew about this cafe being often visited by homosexuals.

This has been a recurrent tactic used by militia groups to hunt for LGBTQIA+ individuals living in Libya. Queer people get arrested out of nowhere, their phones get confiscated, and usually their bodily integrity is violated. To justify these arbitrary arrests that are recognised

as human rights violations by the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), the accusations often lead to charges of homosexuality, immorality, feminism, and atheism.

Kun collected 10 stories from Queer and Trans people, both Libyan and non-Libyan, who experienced human rights violations at the hands of militia groups, primarily based in Tripoli but not exclusively. The individuals who shared their stories reported that these arrests were abrupt, based solely on suspicion or investigations stemming from previous arbitrary detentions. When legally justified¹. These actions were based on the Libyan Penal Code of 1953, specifically Article 407(4), which prohibits ‘illicit sexual intercourse,’ and Article 408(4), which addresses ‘indecent acts.’

Understanding and interpreting the application of these articles are challenging due to the current political instability in the country, which precludes the existence of an established rule of law. Consequently, the enforcement and interpretation of these laws depend heavily on the authority² in power. Therefore, studying the application of these laws and their impact on LGBTQIA+ people today is extremely difficult, as both illegitimate and legitimate armed forces frequently perpetrate attacks on Queer and Trans people. These forces conduct random checkpoints and ambushes in public spaces, as well as online and in people’s homes.

To better understand and analyze the situation of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Libya, it is essential to examine the political and social contexts that facilitate and support human rights violations within the framework of an active hunt and crackdown on the livelihoods of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Libya.

B). Legal and Political Landscape (Ashraf)

The Penal Code (articles 407 and 408) may have been more used as justification to persecute LGBTQIA+ folks in Libya before the uprising in 2011. But nowadays, multiple militia groups and forces have almost total power over the west of the country's political and social spheres. Therefore, the arrestations, forced disappearances and kidnappings are mostly

¹ Human Dignity Trust. “Libya.” Accessed June 25, 2024. <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/libya/>

² In this article, “authority” includes not only the government and its bodies exercising legitimate force but also any established militia group, as they exercise their power with total impunity and quasi-zero accountability. Some of these groups are supported and funded by the Government of National Unity.

motivated by pushing the use of extreme religious interpretation. Backed by the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the Sharia Research and Studies Council of the Fatwa House.

Libya today is divided between two governing regimes. In the west, the Government of National Unity (GNU), established in 2021 and led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, holds legitimate control over almost all of western Libya and is based in Tripoli. In contrast, the eastern and much of the southern regions are under the control of the Government of National Stability (GNS), which is affiliated with the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF). Both entities are vying for political and territorial authority, social recognition, and overall legitimacy. The GNU as well as the GNS are backed by a “myriad of militias and/or armed groups, operations with varying degrees of independence and frequently having their own command-and-control structures.”³

In this report, we will not delve too deeply into the political complexities and histories that began with the 2011 uprising and created today’s political context. However, having a comprehensive understanding of the political landscape is essential to grasp how the human rights violations (HRVs) against LGBTQIA+ individuals in Libya are directly linked to and funded by the governing authorities and influenced by Salafist religious conservatism.

The observation we can make is that in Libya, there is a gendered nationalism⁴ driven by an agenda that seeks to push religious interpretations to their extremes, within a backdrop of political unrest and corruption. As a concrete example of this context, the Libyan Sharia Research and Studies Council of the Fatwa House has decided to prohibit the use of the word ‘gender’ because it is believed to carry meanings that “contradict common human nature and the provisions of Islamic law, such as permitting perversion, homosexuality, destroying the family, and calling for changing Allah’s creation”⁵.

³ Amnesty International. In seconds everything changed: Justice and redress elusive for Derna flood survivors. Amnesty International, n.d. https://www.amnesty.be/IMG/pdf/libye_20240311_rapport.pdf

⁴ Gendered nationalism, in this sense, refers to the ways dominant and national identities, ideologies and practices are constructed and expressed through gendered norms and roles. This concept help us analyse the intersection of nationalism with gender, giving us an understanding on how gender relations and identities are integral to the formation of national identities and therefore policies and public discourse that reinforce gender inequalities and directly harm queer folks’ realities. Through gendered nationalism, governments and authorities usually reinforce national homophobia and transphobia. Ricarda Ameling expands thoroughly on this subject in her article “[Construction the National Body through Public Homophobia: A Discourse Analysis of Egyptian Media Coverage of the ‘Rainbow Flag Case’ in 2017](#)”

⁵ Abdulkader Assad, “Libya’s Sharia Research and Studies Council says using term gender is ‘Haram’,” The Libyan Observer, March 10, 2023 <https://www.libyanobserver.ly/news/libyas-sharia-research-and-studies-council-says-using-term-gender-haram>.

One of the first cases of these arrests, shared with Kun, dates back to 2013. Ashraf explained how he trusted a university colleague by revealing his homosexuality because he expected his friend to be gay as well. Then, one morning shortly after Ashraf revealed his sexual orientation to his friend, he arrived at the university in Tripoli to find a group of men dressed in civilian clothes from Rada DSF waiting for him. Rada DSF is one of the three biggest armed forces in Tripoli and is affiliated with the Western Government (GNU)⁶, also known as Deterrence. Ashraf was arrested and taken to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) affiliated with the Deterrence and Preventive Security Forces, where he was held the entire day, from 9 am to 8 pm.

Ashraf shared with Kun that, prior to his arrest and since the Revolution of 2011, he became increasingly aware of his sexuality, which left him in constant fear and vigilance due to the rising religious conservatism in the country. During the investigation, authorities discovered a song he had written and a condom in his wallet, which he believed were taken as evidence of homosexuality. Despite this, he was eventually released when no incriminating evidence was found on his phone. Ashraf mentioned that this experience terrified him to the extent that he immediately went home and deleted all dating apps and other platforms connecting him to queer individuals, in an effort to avoid further scrutiny or identification as gay.

It seems like the severity and cruelty of these arbitrary arrests have increased since Ashraf's arrest in 2013. During his arrest, Ashraf was threatened with an electric taser, although he did not report physical abuse or torture. He was released after one day of detention. This is, unfortunately, not the typical outcome of many of the stories shared with Kun Linya about arrested and enforced disappearances that were committed in later years (2022-2023). There is a frightening uptick in brutality and targeted tactics, making Libya a living hellscape for people who are forced to conceal their identity, be alert and wary at all times, or attempt to flee.

Leaving the country is never easy, especially for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who must abandon their jobs and restart their lives entirely in another country, facing challenges professionally, personally and administratively (asking for asylum, finding

⁶ Stephanie T. Williams, "Déjà Vu: The Trajectory of Libyan Armed Groups in 2024," January 16, 2024 <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/deja-vu-the-trajectory-of-libyan-armed-groups-in-2024/>

accommodations, etc.). This situation underscores the dire global human rights crisis in Libya today.

C). Report Methodology

a. Intersectional and decolonial perspective

This report critically examines the social and political dynamics that contribute to the human rights violations (HRV) highlighted in the 10 stories shared with Kun. It focuses on the current challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in Libya, drawing comparative insights from other South West Asian and North African (SWANA) countries. The surge in HRV in Libya's contemporary political landscape can be traced directly to the aftermath of the 2011 revolution. However, disregarding historical context undermines our ability to grasp the root causes of these issues.

Geopolitically, the SWANA region is intricately interconnected through shared language, media, and political influences, which result in reciprocal impacts across borders. Western imperialism⁷ shoulders significant responsibility for the prevalent homophobia and transphobia in the region today. As this report explores themes of religious conservatism, social intolerance, and the proliferation of militia groups in Libya, it is crucial to underscore that prejudices against LGBTQIA+ individuals are not innate to SWANA societies. It would be illusory and counterproductive to give into the dangerous rhetoric of the Arab Barbarian Man⁸ which stems from colonial, islamophobic and racist narratives. This rhetoric directly impacts LGBTQIA+ who are not only Queer but also Amazigh, Arab, and Kurd, and are directly harmed by such narratives. By highlighting and questioning these narratives, we can

⁷ The legacy of imperialism in the SWANA region, specifically Arab-speaking countries, is multifaceted, involving direct colonial rule and the imposition of Western norms and structures. These norms and structures were usually more restrictive than local construes and had long-lasting impacts, surviving even after the end of colonial rule and contributing to current legal and social attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals. Here are some sources that expand more on this: Joseph A. Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2001), 72. Mary Ann Tétreault, *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East: The British, the French and the Arabs* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 45. Fatma Müge Göçek, *Sexual Life in Ottoman Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 76.

⁸ This stereotype has its roots in Western discourse and media, it is also deployed by politicians whether it be during colonial era or current neocolonial contexts, to better understand how these stereotypes have shaped perceptions and politics towards Arabs and Muslims globally, please see: Jack G. Shahee, "'The Barbarian Arab': Western Stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1997): 34-48. Dina Matar, "Constructing the 'Barbarian Arab': The New Orientalism, Racialisation and Radicalisation," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 9 (2019): 1495-1515.

better understand how they contribute to the marginalization and persecution experienced by LGBTQIA+ communities in the region.

From a geopolitical standpoint, it is essential to acknowledge that colonial and neocolonial strategies have systematically introduced and perpetuated hostilities toward LGBTQIA+ individuals in the SWANA region. These tactics have influenced local laws, societal attitudes, and institutional practices, thereby exacerbating the challenges faced by marginalized communities. Understanding these historical and geopolitical dimensions is pivotal in advocating for inclusive policies and human rights protections across the SWANA region.

b. Experience based knowledge

This report addresses the complex issue of shedding light on human rights violations specifically targeting LGBTQ+ individuals. We delve into the structures within Libyan social and political spheres that render LGBTQIA+ individuals increasingly vulnerable. While we will not disclose all ten stories shared with us, we integrate narratives from each one of these individuals to better analyze the context. Emphasizing these shared stories helps us grasp the current situation, understand the roots of the problem, and explore potential actions. Through narrative analysis and discourse examination, we explore how these individuals perceive and internalize their experiences of discrimination and human rights violations. Additionally, we critically examine the national discourse and societal attitudes towards queer and transgender individuals in Libya.

The primary mission of Kun is to end all forms of discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community in Libya, support and empower the community through advocacy and networking with local and international organizations and networks and creating safe spaces for expression, research and training.. This report stands as a testament to our commitment to visibilizing and addressing the severe human rights violations in Libya, and it underscores the importance of pushing victims' narratives at the center of global advocacy against such pervasive injustices.

Kun was able to collect 10 testimonies of Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Non-Binary people whose lives were violently compromised. There is an imminent need to address this issue with focused and deliberate reflection and action. Therefore, Kun urges the international

community to collectively address how important it is to bring an end to this active hunt of Trans and Queer people in Libya.

Addressing the structural abuses against LGBTQIA+ individuals demands a thorough grasp of the intricate societal and historical landscape within the country. This isn't merely a task; it's a collective imperative led by those who have endured these injustices firsthand, offering unparalleled insight and wisdom. To fully grasp the realities faced by Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, and Non-Binary individuals, their voices must be elevated and heard, as they are frequently marginalized and persecuted.

Throughout this report, the experiences and stories of LGBTQIA+ individuals who live or have lived in Libya serve as vital components in providing a deeper understanding of the current situation. By highlighting these narratives, with an intersectional lens, we aim to illuminate, as much as possible, the complexities and nuances of their circumstances. This method thereby enables us to collectively find solutions. It is through this visibility and comprehensive examination of their realities that we can effectively address the historical and structural challenges and injustices faced by LGBTQIA+ folks in Libya.

2. Confluence of Social Marginalization and State Persecution: LGBTQIA+ Realities in Libya

Here we delve into the harrowing realities faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in Libya, where armed groups and state-affiliated bodies perpetuate severe human rights abuses under the guise of upholding religious and moral values. Section A. analyzes, with Malik and Aseel's testimonies, the emergence of groups like the Guardians of Virtue (GOF), how this environment instills a deep sense of fear and vigilance in Queer people's daily lives, and how these groups have created a systemic structure that perpetuates widespread persecution and insecurity. Meanwhile, Section B. examines, through Rami's lived experience, the historical and contemporary expressions of queerness in Libya, contrasted with the current environment of pervasive violence and persecution. These sections try to illuminate the profound challenges and systemic oppression confronting LGBTQIA+ communities in Libya today. Section C. explores how beyond just armed groups, societal norms and state inaction

contribute to a hostile environment for LGBTQIA+ folks. Kareem and Khaled's lived experiences portray widespread stigma and marginalization, where queer realities are equated with moral decay and Western influence. This social context enables militia groups to justify brutal tactics under the guise of preserving national and religious purity.

A). *Too much freedom & Guardians of Virtue: Analysis of the Dominant Agenda (Malik & Aseel)*

Libya appears to be one of the SWANA countries following an alarming pattern of having armed groups specifically targeting civil society by attacking, harassing, enforcing disappearance, torturing, and even sometimes killing individuals in cold blood, all under the guise of protecting or guarding God's and the dominant religion's values and virtues. This issue is not unique to Libya. In Lebanon, for instance, a far-right armed group calling themselves 'Soldiers of God'⁹ has been cracking down on LGBTQIA+ individuals, refugees, and immigrants, exploiting the country's unsettled political and historical turmoil to stir sectarian tensions.

In line with this disturbing pattern, on May 25th 2023, Libya's General Authority for Awqaf and Islamic Affairs (GAAIA) [released a decree](#) legalizing an "awareness programme" aimed at defending and upholding Islam's virtues. This programme is disturbing and frightening but not shocking considering the great influence the ultra conservative Madkhali-Salafists have gained in the country over the years. The constitutionality and political legitimacy of this program, as well as the authority of the GAAIA itself, have become subjects of controversy¹⁰, sparking discussions among journalists, critics, and activists in the media and on social media. This group has committed innumerable [well documented](#)¹¹ crimes against men,

⁹ Mohamed El Kari, "Lebanon: Far-Right Group 'Soldiers of God' is Exploiting the Country's Unsettled Past to Stir Sectarian Tensions," The Conversation, May 8, 2024, <https://theconversation.com/lebanon-far-right-group-soldiers-of-god-is-exploiting-the-countrys-unsettled-past-to-stir-sectarian-tensions-228805>

¹⁰ Dr Mustafa Fetouri, "Libya: Moderate Islamic Interpretations Under Threat as More Radicals Penetrate Government Institutions," Middle East Monitor, June 1, 2023, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230601-libya-moderate-islamic-interpretations-under-threat-as-more-radicals-penetrate-government-institutions/>

¹¹ Amnesty International, "Libya: Internal Security Agency Must End Abuses in the Name of 'Guarding Virtue'," ReliefWeb, June 15, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/libya/libya-internal-security-agency-must-end-abuses-name-guarding-virtue-enar>.

women and even children including continuous harassment, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances¹², physical abuse, torture and even murder.

The Guardians of Virtue (GOF) are merely a new face of this largely widespread and almost “normal” state of the country. They are linked directly to the Internal Security Agency (ISA) as members of the GOF are also in the ISA and report directly to it. These tactics are employed by multiple militia groups (who are a part of the GOF and ISA) whose mission is to suppress any attempts at freedom of thought, belief, or identity expression. The announcement by the Awqaf GAAIA was that the GOF are needed because Islamic and traditional social values are in need of protection against the many young Libyans who were deviating from the right path of Islamic virtue and that they are even being brainwashed to convert to Christianity. The Guardians of Virtue is just one of the armed groups in the landscape of at least dozens of powerful militias. The most influential ones are the Stability Support Apparatus (SSA), Misratah Counter Terrorism Force (CFT), Rada Special Deterrance Forces (SDF), 444 Brigade, Nawasi Brigade, Joint Operations Force (JOF), and 111 Brigade¹³.

These militia groups officially operate in the city to provide “security” but they often clash for rivalry and control over the city so there are often random war zones that erupt and harm/kill people. In 2023 alone, there have been 32 documented clashes¹⁴. One of the groups that are actively targeting LGBTQIA+ individuals as part of an anti-LGBT campaign is the Rada SDF which is also a part of the GOF, have members from the ISA and reports directly to it.

The alarming escalation of violence can be explained by examining the sequence of events following the arrest of individuals suspected to be LGBTQIA+ since 2020. Drawing from the timeline of Ashraf’s arrests in 2013, when Queer individuals are apprehended by armed groups (such as Rada SDF) in more recent years, it is highly likely that their phones are searched, they are subjected to physical assault and torture, and their chances of survival are minimal. Kun was able to collect stories of people who were able to get out, but given the

¹² Throughout this report, the terms ‘abduction’ and ‘enforced disappearances’ are used interchangeably because, from a legal standpoint, there is little distinction in how they are carried out by Libyan Militia Groups, such as Rada DSF, Guardians of Virtue, or other groups operating within the country, particularly in the capital city of Tripoli, in a manner that is both illegitimate and lacking any sort of accountability.

¹³ Addison Eming, “A Network of Insecurity and Violence: The Issue of Militias Operating in Libya,” Wilson Center, January 20, 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/network-insecurity-and-violence-issue-militias-operating-libya>.

¹⁴ Addison Eming, “A Network of Insecurity and Violence.”

violence and the cruelty, many likely did not survive. Identifying the exact onset of this acceleration is challenging, but one observation is that the few who have survived enforced disappearances either fortuitously escaped or have connections to individuals in positions of high political power.

The arbitrary arrests and detention of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Libya, particularly those perceived as effeminate men, are stark violations of human rights and undermine the principles of justice. These arrests often occur without legitimate legal grounds, targeting individuals solely based on their appearance or perceived sexual orientation. In a country where homosexuality is criminalized, these actions prevent accused individuals from accessing legal defenses and support from lawyers and activists. This practice not only perpetuates systemic discrimination but also categorically denies LGBTQIA+ individuals their fundamental rights to fairness and legal protection.

Another example shared by Malik vividly illustrates the arbitrary persecution faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in Libya. While hanging out at the beach with a friend, they were insulted, harassed and assaulted by a group of men who were visibly disturbed by their mere presence. This incident underscores the pervasive hostility and intolerance Queer people encounter in public spaces. Malik and his friend were arrested on the spot and held for hours. Malik described receiving homophobic insults, including being told that “real men are at war and you are here”. Malik was also threatened with murder. He believes that the individuals who detained them may not have been directly affiliated with a militia group but rather were waiting to "hand them over" until he managed to call an uncle who holds a high position in the state. His uncle was able to come and ensure protection and "re-education" for Malik and his friend, ultimately enabling their escape from the situation. This experience underscores the pervasive hostility and abuse towards LGBTQIA+ individuals in public spaces, characterized by the establishment of groups like the Guardians of Virtue (GOV), numerous campaigns targeting and detaining people, and public humiliation. During the period of 2021-2022 public humiliation carried out through the dissemination of videos and arbitrary accusations of immorality, homosexuality, atheism, Christianity, and other charges¹⁵. This is a clear tactic of intimidation through isolating any person or group of people who show signs

¹⁵ For more, see: Amnesty International. “Libya: The Internal Security Agency Intensifies Crackdown on Freedom of Expression.” March 2022. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/03/libya-the-internal-security-agency-intensifies-crackdown-on-freedom-of-expression/>

of resilience or challenging the authority of a militia-led state. Amnesty International has documented a pattern of publishing videos where individuals are coerced into confessing to being homosexual, atheist, or collaborators with Western secularists and other ‘immoral’ entities accused of ‘brainwashing’ youth. In March 2022, a Libyan LGBTQIA+ and feminist activist organization announced its closure following targeted actions by the ISA against several of its members.

These general attacks on civilians and local organizations reinforce the unquestionable authority established by the ISA, creating an environment that fosters persecution and random targeting of queer people, even by individuals who are not directly affiliated with militia groups. This environment leaves LGBTQIA+ individuals living in constant fear of simply existing in public spaces on a daily basis. Malik’s story of being subjected to militia tactics (such as abrupt insults that can escalate to assault, kidnapping and physical abuse) utilized by civilians against other civilians is not isolated. Aseel was also a victim of similar acts. While at a cafe with his boyfriend one afternoon, two of his boyfriend’s friends joined them. The four of them sat together, and when his boyfriend left, he assured Aseel that his friends would drop him off on their way. Aseel got into the car with them, but on the way, they started mocking him, discussing sexuality in an offensive and intimidating manner. Aseel was overcome with fear and became mute.

The perpetrators then took a detour and stopped in front of a warehouse. When Aseel tried to escape, they pushed him and physically assaulted him. Aseel told Kun that he managed to flee and found workers unloading a truck, where he sought their help. Initially hesitant due to fear of Aseel's appearance and his bloodied, scarred face, they eventually assisted him. Aseel’s lived experience illuminates how the ISA, funded directly and publicly by the GNU, has fostered an adversarial environment that enables and encourages the attacks faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals, not solely perpetrated by ground militia groups.

Malik, Aseel and many others who have shared their stories with Kun are keenly aware of the targeted persecution driven by deep-rooted cultural and religious stigmas. In response, they have forged solidarity and friendships within their community, actively warning each other about ongoing campaigns against LGBTQIA+ people. This mutual support fosters a sense of vigilance and caution among Queer people, who navigate their daily lives under constant threat.

This awareness instills a profound internalized fear, making them vigilant and cautious about any suspicion directed towards them. Many of the narratives shared with Kun underscore the constant struggle to regulate their behavior in attempts to evade persecution. However, it is crucial to emphasize that this vigilance does not shield them from harm, as the core problem lies not in the ability to hide their queerness. Rather, it stems from the systemic failure to protect their fundamental human rights and the severe homophobic and transphobic violence they endure.

The systemic nature of this persecution is evident as civilians adopt tactics developed by armed groups, including those affiliated with the ISA. Armed groups wield unchecked power to arbitrarily attack, abduct, and subject LGBTQIA+ individuals to physical and psychological torment. They often conduct invasive searches of personal devices to find evidence of homosexuality, perpetuating a climate of fear and insecurity. Militia groups, operating outside legal frameworks and lacking ethical standards or proper training, further exacerbate the situation. Their actions go largely unaccounted for, making it difficult to document and address human rights violations against marginalized communities. In this environment, armed groups wield unchecked authority to target and persecute homosexual individuals, transgender people, and anyone who dares to challenge or criticize prevailing norms and agendas.

B). Suspected Queerness Sufficient for Persecution (Rami)

In Libya, queer expressions of gender fluidity have taken many forms throughout the country's history. In one of his articles, Tazir¹⁶, a Libyan Queer writer, has highlighted the various forms of gender expression practiced before 2011, whether through art and culture (in the media, in music, during wedding celebrations¹⁷) or traditional and institutional roles (women whose place in society defied heteronormative gender roles¹⁸, women who were

¹⁶ Tazir is a Libyan writer and journalist from Libya who writes about Gender and sexual minorities. Find his writing here [Jeem Media Organisation](https://jeem.me/culture/570) and [Kun NGO Publications](#).

¹⁷ تازر, "ربانئة بأقراطٍ ومسناّتُ بنصينَ الخيام: التاريخ الكويري للجندر في ليبيا", جيم, 02/08/2021, <https://jeem.me/culture/570>

¹⁸ تازر, "ربانئة بأقراطٍ ومسناّتُ بنصينَ الخيام"

considered protectors of family members, in the army, or protectors of other queer people, specifically men and trans women¹⁹).

We cannot claim, per se, that queerness was tolerated and expressed freely. Honor crimes, alienation, abuse, and stigmatization efforts existed during Gaddafi's era, whether institutional or societal. Libyan society's national identity is centered around unified identities, some of which are being Muslim, heterosexual, cisgender. Anyone who deviates from these expected norms can find themselves vulnerable to abuse. However, we can definitely say that throughout Libya's history, manifestations of queerness have existed and can be considered as "forms of resilience from communities facing constant efforts of erasure and eradication²⁰".

But in today's context, it is nearly impossible to have any expression of queerness, with the Salafists having great influence, including groups like the Rada SDF and Nawasi armed groups. These extreme efforts to eradicate LGBTQIA+ existence remove any trace of queer presence from media platforms, celebration settings, and other public spaces. Anyone associated with queerness, whether visibly queer people or those close to or protective of a queer person, is exposed to violence. In one testimony, we were told that around September 2023, a Libyan Queer person escaped and went into hiding when the Internal Security Agency (ISA) had launched one of its campaigns to arrest Queer people, confiscate their phones, and search for contacts of other Queer individuals. After his escape, the ISA detained his brother until he surrendered himself.

Even though it intensified since 2011, the marginalization and abuse queer people go through in Libya did not begin during this period. Both Aseel and Malik shared with us that, prior to being targeted by armed groups and having their bodily integrity violated, they faced stigma and isolation from a young age. They endured constant questioning from peers, siblings, and colleagues about their behavior, often receiving homophobic and transphobic insults from family members, neighbors, and even friends. Aseel and Malik also revealed that they tried to conceal any signs of homosexuality or queerness not only before their encounters with armed groups but throughout their upbringing. However, the pervasive scrutiny they faced left them with no avenue for escape.

¹⁹ Tazir, "Protectors of the Queer Community," *Views*, Kun <https://kun-ly.net/protectors-of-the-queer-community/>

²⁰ Rough quotation from Ritaj Ibrahim, Queer journalist, activist and co-founder of Kun.

This environment makes it extremely difficult for LGBTQIA+ folks to exist safely in private or public spaces. In many countries of the SWANA region, Queer and Trans people can still find ways exist even if the countries and their governments are extremely homophobic and transphobic. For example, in Tunisia²¹ or in Lebanon²², Queer people can create underground communities, have access to cafes and other spaces to meet, organize, get out of isolation and find a sense of community. Being able to access spaces like this is extremely important for queer folks' mental health well-being and the possibility to engage in activism for LGBTQIA+ rights.

This is impossible to access today in Libya, any signs of queerness are scrutinized and immediately punished. Most, if not all, of the testimonies that were shared with Kun were testimonies of attacks based on suspicions and unfounded scrutiny. Rami, a Kurdish person has told Kun that, in the month of April 2023, as he was on the road between Tripoli and Benghazi with his Syrian friend to get a medical certificate done, he was stopped at a checkpoint. Rami believes that he and his friend were stopped by the Libyan army because they were dressed in uniforms and were armed. Rami and his friend were held for 4 hours and insulted and were extorted by having their phones stolen and paying 50 US dollars. He told us that they were insulted because of their appearance, more specifically his friend's eyebrows and the fact that he was wearing a diamond necklace.

It's important to note that Rami and his friend are not Libyan, which makes them more vulnerable due to widespread racism and the "purity" agenda promoted by Libyan armed groups and political figures. This issue also intersects with class. Some Libyan Queer folks who are arrested and withheld can leverage connections with political figures in high state positions to secure their release. However, non-Libyans in Libya, often find themselves in an even more precarious situation. They might be in the country unintentionally as part of their immigration journey, for work, or by mistake, without any local connections or references. This lack of connections leaves them with no recourse in the face of arbitrary detentions, making their situation even more difficult.

²¹ Béatrice St-Cyr-Leroux, "LGBTQIA+ Rights in Tunisia: Repressive Laws and Free Speech," UdeMNouvelles, January 18, 2024, <https://nouvelles.umontreal.ca/en/article/2024/01/18/lgbtqi-rights-in-tunisia-repressive-laws-and-free-speech/>.

²² "The Drag Queen Standing Up to Lebanon's LGBTIQ+ Crackdown," SBS Dateline, 08/06/2023 <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/dateline/article/the-drag-queen-standing-up-to-lebanons-lgbtiq-crackdown/tptzwx6v>.

Rami and his friend's situation highlights the compounded vulnerabilities faced by non-Libyan Queer individuals. The intersection of racism, class, and the lack of local institutional support structures creates a perilous environment where they are not only targeted for their queerness but also for their foreign status. The systemic racism and xenophobia perpetuated by armed groups and political figures in Libya exacerbate the dangers for non-Libyan Queer individuals, leaving them isolated and without the means to seek help or protection.

C). Queerphobia: Everyone's responsibility (Kareem and Khaled)

What's happening on the grounds in Libya is a systemic operation involving random checkpoints and ambushes, aimed at arresting and detaining LGBTQIA+ individuals, subjecting them to extreme forms of abuse and torture, confiscating their phones and searching for evidence of homosexuality, immorality, atheism, and feminism, among other perceived and unfounded offenses. Adding to the severity, these groups also scour the phones of those arrested or detained to identify and apprehend other Queer people who may be the arrested or detained individual's partner, friend or part of their network and community. Hence, we're not merely witnessing generalized human rights violations, but rather a targeted 'hunt'.

This targeted hunt is not only the responsibility of militia groups committing these acts but also of the GNU for funding these groups and failing to hold them accountable for their crimes. Additionally, civilians not affiliated with any authority also share responsibility. While heterosexual and cisgendered folks living in Libya are not the source of the political unrest or the general hostility faced by civil society as a whole, it is important to acknowledge their role in contributing to a hostile environment towards LGBTQIA+ individuals. This occurs through insults, alienation, stigmatization, and general animosity towards Queer and Trans people, who are consistently marginalized and rejected by family members, neighbors, schoolmates, teachers, and others. This is not to minimize the oppression experienced under militia rule, but rather to highlight how a gender nationalist and heterosexual society often capitulates to the moral panic instigated by authority figures, thereby encouraging the persecution and marginalization of LGBTQIA+ people.

Kareem a Queer Non-Binary person who's lived experience vividly illustrates these pervasive trials that Queer and Trans people encounter in this sense. Alongside enduring homophobic insults, Kareem faced discrimination from neighbors and family members who labeled them as 'fluid', a term laden with stigma and implying impurity or ill intentions. Kareem has found themselves thrust into a hostile environment early on. When they were in high school they were told, on multiple occasions, that they're *wearing makeup* and that they were *like a 'girl'*. On one occasion, 10 classmates assaulted Kareem and filmed the assault which subjected them to relentless online harassment. The cruelty extended beyond the school grounds, as even bus drivers joined in, spitting on them and hurling insults.

When Kareem started going to university, they understood very quickly that the harassment and terrorization would persist. They endured regular homophobic and transphobic insults and were once even threatened with murder because they were perceived as an effeminate man. This hostile environment permeated all aspects of Kareem's life, with everyone singling them out and reminding them of the constant danger that they faced.

The extent of anti-LGBTQIA+ they were subjected to became shockingly clear in February 2023 when a Libyan public Facebook page, dedicated to exposing people's intimacy and stirring scandals, posted pictures of Kareem expressing themselves in a feminine manner. Following this incident Kareem was plunged into a whirlwind of harassment and psychological anguish and whenever they walked down the street they were immediately identified, harassed, cursed and insulted.

These actions are bolstered by rigid and conservative views held by the general populace. It's common to hear statements implying that those who challenge the suffocating status quo are somehow deviant or violating divine values such as "*too much freedom is not good*" or "*We are in Libya and we all have to adhere to God's values and virtues*". However, such remarks are typically directed at individuals who peacefully express themselves, such as women challenging patriarchal norms²³. Accusations leveled against these individuals blur the lines between feminism, homosexuality, immorality, and atheism. Kareem, whose story we elaborated on above, was searched in their home in August 2023. Members of the Guardians

²³ Hana Farhat "The Status of Women Human Rights Defenders in Libya," Women Human Rights Defenders in the Middle East and North Africa, www.whrdSWANA.org.

of Virtue told their father that they were wanted for his sexual orientation and claimed that they were also atheist.

There's a glaring inconsistency in these prevailing arguments. These identities are not synonymous, yet they are lumped together in Libya as symbols of excessive freedom. Such freedom is deemed unacceptable because it deviates from the expected norm of the dominant Libyan identity. Kareem's ordeal perfectly encapsulates this reality. Alongside facing homophobic insults, Kareem has been labeled as 'fluid' by his family—a term laden with stigma suggesting deviation from societal norms and implying impurity or ill intentions. Kareem has endured a hostile environment, where his family warns him of scandal and questions his perceived feminine traits.

The pervasive hostility and persecution that Queer and Trans individuals face in Libya are not limited to disconnected and sudden actions by militia groups and oppressive authorities. These are profound prejudices and active torment demonstrated by family members, neighbors, and the general public create an environment ripe for extreme hostility. When civilians marginalize, harass, and ostracize anyone who's gender expression or sexual orientation doesn't conform to the general norm, they lay the groundwork for further abuses by armed factions. These everyday acts of physical and verbal abuse foster a climate of intolerance that militia groups exploit to justify their brutal tactics. It is fair to say that armed forces that control the country (superficially the west) have complete responsibility for their actions and everyone is under their siege, queer or not. But when queer individuals are continuously demeaned and dehumanized, there is a systemic marginalization that provides militia groups with both the rationale and the implicit support to carry out their ruthless campaigns of terror and abuse against LGBTQIA+ folks.

Khaled's story illustrates this vicious cycle of societal disdain and brutality that is reflected in these armed attacks. In another of the brutal attacks in 2023, Khaled put his car online to sell and had an appointment with someone who was interested. He went to the meeting that was scheduled in a public space. He went to meet the potential buyer with his friend only to discover it was an ambush fabricated by members of Rada SDF in civilian clothes. They were separated and taken away in different cars to be held for days. The pervasive stigma and persecution is always justified by efforts of alienation and vilification. These arrests are always motivated by the belief that Libya needs to be protected from Western intervention.

When LGBTQIA+ people are attacked, kidnapped, stigmatized, or harassed, it almost always involves accusations of being “Western agents” who aim to corrupt Libyan society and spread anti-Islamic immoral threats.

Khaled and his friend were ensnared and tortured by men from Rada SDF, he endured physical and verbal assault. Khaled and his friend were beaten and sexually humiliated and told repeatedly by the perpetrators “you’re the ones who ruined the country”. When Khalid was released, he tried to get treated at the hospital but it was very difficult and when he tried to contact the UN and document the violations he endured, his brother overheard him and threatened to tell Rada SDF on him if he does that, all while repeating to him the agenda that the UN “is inciting on Christianity” and that “Rada SDF is protecting them from Western intervention”

Khaled’s phone as well as his friends’ was searched while he was held with his friend, he has also shared with us that in May 2023, a group of his friends were arrested and a video of them was published on the militia’s official Facebook page of his friends confessing to homosexuality and atheism.

In this sense, freedom is understood as proximity with the West. It is understood as the danger of intervention and colonial Christianity. The individuals attacked, among which LGBTQIA+ people, represent this danger. This is the dominant agenda that participates and fosters the human rights abuses that people are subjected to. There are multiple documented cases of people who are arrested, then forced to confess, on camera, that they are agents of the west and that they are feminists, homosexuals and atheists.

3. Erasure and visibility: The Dual Challenges Faced by Queer Individuals in a militia-state context (Queer Perspective)

This part of the report touches upon several critical themes related to Queer and Transgender realities, specifically within the context of systemic oppression and marginalization. Section A. highlights the patriarchal and gendered political and social structures that further marginalise Queer folks, particularly Lesbians, Trans men, Transmasculine people and

Non-Binary folks perceived as women. Section B. examines, with the help of Amira's lived experience, how the strict norms of traditional masculinity suppress any expression of femininity among Queer people who are perceived as men (Trans women, Non-Binary people perceived as men and Queer men). Section C posits that through upholding a hegemonic masculinity, there is a reinforcement of patriarchal norms that exclude Queer and Trans people. Militia groups use militarized masculinity to justify violence and maintain power, targeting queer masculinity under the guise of protecting society's values.

A). Queerness in Libya: Between Scrutiny and Erasure (Omar)

The documented cases studied in this report do not include any lesbians or transmasculine folks. This can be attributed to several factors, some of which can be identified here. First, it may be a limitation of our survey and research methodology. Kun recognizes the need to highlight these testimonies in future studies to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the diverse experience within the Queer and Trans realities in Libya.

The second factor identified is the systemic effort to erase the existence of Queer individuals. In an extremely patriarchal and gendered society, women or individuals presumed to be women (Trans men, Non-Binary and Transmasculine people perceived as women) face restricted freedom of movement, continuous systemic harassment, domestic violence, and significant limitations in accessing services and public spaces. The invisibilization of Lesbians and Transmasculine individuals²⁴ is directly linked to the pervasive sexism and misogyny they encounter. Addressing both methodological challenges and structural marginalization is crucial to accurately capturing and representing their struggles.

However, being visible is not necessarily better. Kun interviewed Gay and Bisexual men, one Trans woman, and Non-Binary individuals who were perceived as men when they were persecuted. As detailed in the report, they shared instances of trying to conceal their differences but faced recurring scrutiny and constant suspicion. Non-normative masculinity or feminine expression is visibly perceived through the way individuals walk, talk, and occupy public spaces. This visibility also affects trans women and Non-Binary people

²⁴ Transmasculine and lesbian identities are not understood here as a unified reality but are studied together because queer individuals who are perceived as women can experience similar structural dynamics of marginalization.

perceived as men²⁵, as their gender non-normativity is stigmatized, leading to their social exclusion even when expressed subtly and cautiously.

The scrutiny and harassment come from surrounding communities including neighbors, family members, classmates, people they come across in the street, and even teachers. Omar, a Homosexual Non-Binary person, was so severely scrutinized by their family and neighbors that they were forced to marry. For instance, Omar shared that even though traditionally, marriage goes by age, the older sibling gets married first, Omar was forced to marry at a very young age before their older brother. Omar constantly heard homophobic and transphobic insults from their family members as well as their ex-wife, who went through Omar's phone looking for proof of homosexuality. Today, after the divorce, Omar cannot see their children due to a court order that gave full custody to the mother, who Omar suspects showed the judge phone screenshots of them talking to men. This tactic not only prevents Omar from taking legal action to see their children but also puts them in grave danger in a country where homosexuality is forbidden by law and targeted by state funded militia groups.

B). Obscurity and Violence: How Ignorance towards Trans issues fuels Violence against Trans people in Libya (Amira)

At this stage of the research, it is difficult to develop a general theoretical and concrete understanding of Trans people's realities in Libya. Building on this report's findings, we can suggest that accessing gender-affirming care and thus reaching social and medical transitioning is very difficult for Trans people living in Libya. Amira was the only Trans woman who Kun was able to reach during this survey. We will build on Amira's personal testimony to develop a working hypothesis.

The societal scrutiny faced by queer people, as described above, is intricately linked to the structural abuse inflicted by militias, armed forces, and societal persecution. Queer men and others perceived as men—including trans women, transfeminine individuals, and non-binary folks—are expected to strictly adhere to normative, traditional heterosexual masculinity. This scrutiny compels them to suppress any signs of femininity in speech, behavior, or lifestyle

²⁵ To gain a deeper understanding of the structural oppression faced by Trans and Queer people in the country, we are compelled to analyze it within a binary framework. However, it's important to acknowledge that this binary approach does not capture Queer people's actual identities and experiences.

and to hide their queerness to conform to narrow societal norms imposed on both Libyan and non-Libyan ‘men’ in the country. Those who fail to conform endure ongoing harassment, alongside blatant homophobia and transphobia, effectively erasing the realities of transness.

Amira, for instance, has experienced gender dysphoria since childhood and recognized her identity as a woman. However, it wasn’t until she accessed the internet and encountered representations from other countries that she realized trans women exist and that she wasn’t alone.

Amira was stigmatized for her feminine behavior and constantly pressured to change by her surrounding. For instance her father threatened her life if she didn’t comply. She also faced frequent homophobic insults. Amira’s testimony showcases how femininity is devalued and ridiculed, and how feminine people who are perceived as men are expected to behave in a traditional masculine way; otherwise, they are treated as traitors for their proximity to femininity. This sentiment reflects the belief that anyone perceived and expected to behave and talk as a ‘man’ but exhibiting feminine traits is considered ‘less of a man.’ Malik’s experience exemplifies this, as he was assaulted at the beach and told, “real men are at war, and you are here”.

Such societal expectations not only marginalize gay and bisexual men but also erase the visibility of trans and non-binary individuals entirely. The rigid division between what society expects masculinity and femininity to entail makes it extremely challenging for queer individuals to express their gender fluidity or trans identities freely.

Amira was recently detained for 20 days and subjected to extreme abuse in Bayda city, the capital of the Green Mountain. Security agents arbitrarily stopped her while she was entering her boyfriend’s car as he was picking her up at her University, claiming they were conducting routine checks and asked them to go with them to the Criminal Investigation Department. After refusing to unlock her phone for investigation Amira was coerced, through physical assault, into unlocking her phone. She was separated from her boyfriend and underwent brutal torture involving beatings, sexual humiliation and rape. During the ordeal, when forced to undress, the agents were shocked to find that her body did not fit their expectations of a cisgender man. They, then, called in a religious leader to “check” on her and explain her

situation. She was subjected to intrusive questions about her body, sexuality, and whether or not she was a sex worker. Amira was denied the right to call her mother when asked for it.

The actions of the security agents reveal a stark lack of understanding regarding the existence and experiences of Transgender folks. Many transgender people seek to undergo medical and social transitions, such as gender-affirming hormone therapy to align their physical characteristics with their gender identity, surgeries to affirm their gender, and legal changes to their identity documents. These transitions allow Trans people to live authentically and are crucial for their overall well-being .

The agents' lack of any familiarity of these realities not only demonstrates a failure to recognize transgender identities but also contributes to the escalation of violence against people like Amira. When confronted with someone who does not conform to their restricted understanding of gender norms and queerness, they responded with brutality and humiliation, reflecting deep-seated prejudice and a complete lack of recognition of transgender lives and rights.

C). Queer Masculinity vs ‘Libyan’ Masculinity: A Queer Perspective

The systemic violence that Queer folks live in Libya can be better understood through the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity. Coined by Raewyn Connell in 1987, this concept²⁶ addresses the notion that there is a dominant way in which a ‘man’ is expected to act, appear, and behave. It elucidates how behaviors and practices among both men and women uphold and perpetuate gender inequality and dominance over those who do not conform to the hegemonic masculine norm.

A set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organise society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men’s identity, men’s ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy. (Jewkes and Morrell 2012, 40)

²⁶ R.W. Connell, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829-859.

Hegemonic masculinity operates within socio-cultural contexts, which enables the dominance of certain masculin expressions over others. It does not mean that there is only one type of masculinity that is accepted, but it means that there is a patriarchal hierarchy where certain masculinities hold more authority. For instance, an immigrant man who comes from Sub-Saharan Africa living in Libya does not align with the prevailing notion of masculinity because of marginalization and discrimination he may receive due to his ethnic background and skin color, rendering him vulnerable to racist treatment.

*Masculinities are multiple, fluid and dynamic and hegemonic positions are **not the only masculinities available in a given society**. They may also be seen as positions that are occupied situationally, in that the position occupied, practices and values espoused in one context may be different from those of another. A core element of the construction of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality, and to a greater or lesser extent hegemonic masculinity is constructed as a **gender position that is as much 'not gay' as it is 'not female'**. (Hegemonic masculinity: combining theory and practice in gender interventions Rachel Jewkes, Robert Morrell, Jeff Hearn, Emma Ludqvist, David Blackbeard, Graham Lindegger, Michael Quayle, Yandisa Sikweyiya and Lucas Gottzén, 2015)*

In the Libyan context, upholding this hierarchy is a fundamental tool to keep armed groups in power. It is important to note that we are here talking about an airtight structure empowered by religious conservatism, false anti-colonial rhetoric and overall patriarchal norms and gendered nationalism. The enforced disappearances, tortures and entrapment efforts are not isolated incidents but vaster than the mere actions of armed men who attack Queer and Trans people.. This is a direct result of Libya's history and socio-cultural background. As established earlier in the report, the militia groups are not the only ones perpetrating this structured and airtight social and historical construction. An example of this is the accomplice masculinity²⁷, which is not exactly what enters the dominant masculinity (here, militia groups) but it supports and upholds it because of proximity. A perfect example of this is Khalid's brother who knew that by trying to document their case with the UN, Khalid is also challenging this very hierarchy and the established domination by the militia groups such as AIRadda'.

In the Libyan context, maintaining this hierarchy serves as a fundamental tool to sustain the power of armed groups. It's crucial to recognize that we are discussing a tightly integrated

²⁷ For further understanding of this subject, please refer to Mohamed Hani and Keith M. Brown (eds.), *Masculinities in the Arab World* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

structure reinforced by religious conservatism, distorted anti-colonial rhetoric, and pervasive patriarchal norms and gendered nationalism. The enforced disappearances, torture, and entrapment efforts are not isolated incidents but rather symptoms of a broader pattern stemming from Libya's historical and socio-cultural background. As previously outlined in this report, militia groups are not the sole perpetrators of this tightly knit social and historical construct. An illustration of this is accomplice masculinity, which, while not directly aligning with the dominant masculinity represented by militia groups, nevertheless supports and reinforces it due to its proximity. A clear example is Khalid's brother, who understood that Khalid's attempt to document their case with the UN challenged the existing hierarchy and the dominance imposed by militia groups such as Rafa SDF.

We can also delve into the concept of subordinate masculinity, which is particularly pertinent to understanding the experiences of both Queer men and Trans women. For a Queer man who exhibits traits traditionally associated with femininity, such as expressing emotions or interests stereotypically deemed feminine, not conform to the standards of hegemonic masculinity but rather embodies a form of subordinate masculinity. This form of masculinity encompasses a spectrum of identities, including being gay, effeminate, and, in some cases, transgender²⁸.

Hegemonic masculinity, characterized by its rigid adherence to traditional gender norms and the domination of masculine traits, functions by actively rejecting and marginalizing subordinate masculinity. It does so by stigmatizing and denigrating individuals who deviate from its prescribed norms, perpetuating discrimination and exclusion. For example, when individuals like Omar are criticized for displaying behaviors considered 'effeminate' or 'girly,' it serves as a deliberate attempt to delegitimize their identities and reinforce the idea that their queerness is unwelcome and deserving of scorn. This, in turn, exposes them to the risk of facing arbitrary and unjust homophobia and transphobia.

In the specific Libyan context, the violations highlighted in this report are deeply intertwined with the actions of militia and armed groups, who employ extreme violence in their efforts to

²⁸ Queer Masculinity in the SWANA region presents unique and complex challenges, to see more on this: Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Lahoucine Ouzgane (ed.), *Islamic Masculinities* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Anissa Helie and Homa Hoodfar (eds.), *Sexuality in Muslim Contexts: Restrictions and Resistance* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

erase and eradicate queer individuals from the country. These atrocities include arbitrary searches, enforced disappearances, torture, entrapment efforts, and even killings.

To better grasp this specific context, it's essential to consider the concept of militarized masculinity. This form of masculinity, which is a subset of hegemonic masculinity, holds significant sway in countries plagued by conflict and war. In Libya, the dominant form of masculinity can be characterized as martial or militarized²⁹, reflecting the pervasive influence of militaristic values and behaviors within society.

In militarized masculinity:

*Manhood is related to **toughness** as opposed to feminine qualities that were constructed as a support role [...]. Militarized masculinity can be considered as a form of hegemonic masculinity which is based on **dominating other people especially women and children and subordinate males** in a patriarchal gender setting is perceived to be largely male domain such as combat and rape ([Sanjukta Nath, 2022](#)).*

Militarized masculinity is a form of hegemonic masculinity that thrives on violence and extreme acts of abuse, justified by the notion that men commit these actions because **they are protectors**. The very existence of a military is based on the idea that it protects the country from external threats. This argument extends to extreme violence enforced by armed groups, which is portrayed as protective and necessary, masking the fact that it is an illusion. In reality, it is an effort to crush civil society, diversity, and multiple identities within Libyan society.

The agenda is this: militarized masculinity targets queer masculinity based on pure homophobia, transphobia, and hate crimes, under the guise of protecting a virtuous society from so-called western atheist agents, allegedly brainwashed by outsider influences such as the UN. Consequently, the ambush, kidnapping, and torture of queer people by armed groups are rationalized as the only means to protect Libyan society's culture and values.

This fictional agenda underpins most of the actions and efforts made by these armed groups. They believe the violence they exercise is necessary, that their existence and structures are

²⁹ For more on the complexities of militarized masculinity within the Middle East and North Africa region. Please see: Maya Mikdashi, "Militarized Masculinity and Post-colifichet Reconstruction in Lebanon," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*. J. Dana Stuster, "Militarized in Egypt and Libya: Youth, Islamist, and Resistance" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

indispensable, without this agenda there would be no meaning to the existence of these armed groups and to the power they withhold.

4. Conclusion

A) Established Patterns of targeted attacks and vicious campaign against Queer people in Libya

In this report, we were able to establish patterns that constitute chasing after any sign of queerness in Libya. Everyone is fair game if there is the smallest guilt of homosexuality. In this context we cannot talk about systemic abuse because it refers to rules, regulations, policies that are institutionalized. But we can talk about patterns, we can talk about the hunting of any person perceived as a homosexual man. We can also talk about an overall hostile and aggressive culture that facilitates this hunt of queer people, specifically gay men and queer and trans people perceived as men. We talk about hunting because first, they are under brutal scrutiny and cannot have any intimacy because exposure and threats are a part of the hostility that they receive continuously. (Example of neighbors exposing on cable) - they are harassed and arrested by the mere fact that they exist in the public space (Malik chilling at a cafe or at the beach). Then their phones are searched, their photos and private messages are investigated to establish 1- proof of homosexuality accusations and 2- to continue the hunt and find other queers who are in contact with the detained person. Then, repeat.

gay men, bisexual men, non-binary folks, and trans women are not only attacked but they are being specifically hunted by the Libyan authorities whether they be legitimate or illegitimate. The hunt goes through what happens when they are arrested. confiscating phones, searching through photos and private conversations for names of queer people who are in contact with those we are arrested.

B) The importance of Advocacy and bringing light to this issue

It is needless to say that the experiences shared in this report, as well as many that we may never hear of, are so extreme and despesperating. Yet, despite these challenges, articulating

the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in Libya is has never been more crucial than it is now that we have confirmed experiences that testify to the intensification of targeting and persecuting LGBTQIA+ campaign. It is essential to put into words the lived experiences of queer and trans people to not only visibilize their plight but also to challenge the pervasive stigma and taboo surrounding their existence. Moreover, documenting and publicizing these human rights abuses is a necessary step towards fostering accountability. By bringing these issues to light, we pave the way for adopting better policies to center the needs of the victims.

C) Recommendations

United Nations Bodies:

1. Establish an investigation body as follow up to FFM within the UN Human Rights Council to monitor and document human rights violations, including violations against LGBTQIA+ individuals in Libya.
2. Integrate LGBTQIA+ issues into the mandates of UN agencies operating in Libya, such as UNHCR, UNICEF, and UNDP through active consultation of local LGBTIQ+ communities and activists.
3. Provide training to UN staff in Libya on LGBTQIA+ rights and issues, focusing on sensitivity, non-discrimination, and protection measures.
4. Develop resources and toolkits for UN bodies to effectively support LGBTQIA+ communities in conflict zones.
5. Restrict funding and training for governmental institution based on upholding human rights.

States:

1. Condition bilateral aid and cooperation on the Libyan government's adherence to international human rights standards.
2. Provide expedited asylum procedures for LGBTQIA+ refugees fleeing persecution in Libya.
3. Increase resettlement quotas for LGBTQIA+ individuals from Libya and other high-risk countries.

4. Offer legal aid and support to Libyan LGBTQIA+ activists and organizations, helping them navigate international legal mechanisms.
5. Provide technical assistance for documenting human rights abuses and building cases for international tribunals.
6. Implement targeted sanctions against individuals and groups responsible for human rights abuses against LGBTQIA+ people in Libya.
7. Support international efforts to hold perpetrators accountable through mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court.
8. Fund and support local LGBTQIA+ organizations and initiatives, providing resources for advocacy, protection, and capacity building.

Donors:

1. Allocate funds specifically for humanitarian aid targeted at LGBTQIA+ individuals in Libya, including safe houses, medical care, and psychological support.
2. Support emergency evacuation programs for LGBTQIA+ people at imminent risk.
3. Invest in long-term programs that focus on economic empowerment, education, and mental health support for LGBTQIA+ communities in Libya.
4. Fund research projects that document the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Libya, providing a robust evidence base for advocacy and intervention.
5. Support the creation of databases and archives that preserve the testimonies and histories of LGBTQIA+ Libyans, ensuring their stories are not forgotten.

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Glossary

Intersectionality: A concept coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) which refers to the interconnected nature of social categorisation (race, class, gender, sexuality, handicap) as they apply to a person or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of marginalization or discrimination.

Queer: Originally a pejorative term, 'queer' has been reclaimed by the LGBTQIAca+ community as a term of self-identification. It can be used as an umbrella term that speaks to different realities of non-heterosexual orientations as well as non-cisgender gender identities. In this report, the word queer also refers to gender expressions that do not conform to the dominant patriarchal and binary social structure in Libya. In this report, the term Queer is used interchangeably with 'LGBTQIA+' and 'Trans and Queer'.

Trans: Short for transgender, Trans is an umbrella term used to describe a person whose gender identity or expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. This includes Trans women, Trans men, and Non-binary in a large spectrum of gender fluidity (Transfeminine, Transmasculine, Bigender, Two-Spirit, Agender, Genderfluid, etc.)

Gay: A sexual orientation that describes a person who is attracted to people of the same gender. This term is mostly used to describe a man who is attracted to other men.

Bisexual: A sexual orientation that describes someone who is attracted to people of different genders and gender expressions.

Lesbian: An adjective that describes the sexual orientation of women who are attracted to other women.

Transmasculine: Refers to individuals who were assigned female at birth but identify as masculine or as men, regardless of whether they have undergone medical or social transition.

Transfeminine: Refers to individuals who were assigned male at birth but identify as feminine or as women, regardless of whether they have undergone medical or social transition.

Masculinity: A set of attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with boys and men within a particular culture or society. Masculinity is often socially constructed and can vary across different contexts.