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The Post-9/11 LGBTQ Human Rights Struggle in Egypt

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THE POST 9/11 LGBTQ HUMAN RIGHTS STRUGGLE IN EGYPT

BY DONNA HUAMAN

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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by

Donna Huaman

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The Post-9/11 LGBTQ Human Rights Struggle in Egypt

by

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Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the struggle for LGBTQ human rights has become a leading standard that depicts whether or not a state can be considered modern and progressive. Yet, while this new criterion seems to be supported by Global North states, other nations in other regions, like Egypt from the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) has criticized the international pressure to implement this standard as neo-imperialist and inauthentic to its Muslim-Arab culture. Egypt claims to be the universal Arab-Muslim voice for the MENA region and has become one of the greatest challengers to the international campaign for LGBTQ human rights since 2001. As a result, Westernized-homonationalist rhetoric has disseminated that blames Egypt's non-Western and Muslim cultural norms for the stagnation of LGBTQ human rights in the country. This thesis will focus on Egypt's LGBTQ human rights struggle, and what that means regarding international relations, to better understand this complex phenomenon. The first chapter will explore Egypt's colonial-era, state-formation, and religious viewpoint histories and how it is crucial to understand its history in order to debunk the political rhetoric that Egypt's impediment to LGBTQ rights progression is due to its Muslim-majority societal norms. Rather, it was Egypt's puritanical French and British colonizers that influenced legislative and

psychological attitudes to repress non-heteronormative sexual practices and identities and further conveyed over to the state's post-colonial constitution and public perception. The second chapter will focus on Egypt's state-sponsored LGBTQ crackdowns started by former President Mubarak and continued by incumbent President Al-Sisi a domestic public relations strategy I call "reverse-pinkwashing" in order to divert civil society's attention from its disillusionment with the government and instead shift focus on moral issues like LGBTQ visibility in Egypt. Lastly, the third chapter will explore Egypt's international relations, specifically, UN commitments, treatment of "Westernized" rights NGOs, and neoliberal international policies. Egypt's neoliberal foreign trade agreements with "pro-LGBTQ" states, like the United States, will show how, in fact, it is the Global North's turned blind-eye and appeasement of Egypt's LGBTQ human rights record that hinders LGBTQ rights development in Egypt.

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INTRODUCTION

On September 6th, 2018 India's supreme court decriminalized "gay sex." This reform is a significant victory for the international LGBTQ human rights struggle because India was the first out of many British-colonies whose homophobic-colonial legacy (sodomy laws) survived into the newly-liberalized anti-colonial constitutions of these nations (Pokemper, 2008, p.1). From a mainstream perspective, this is classified as progress, which is not wrong. India's geographical location along with its history as a former British colony should mean that there is hope for other post-colonial countries in that region and hemisphere to follow its example. However, the overturn of these laws comes *over a century* after it was first introduced. This means that the effects of Britain's institutional homophobic legacy were substantial (Pokemper, 2008). In fact, unlike India, for other former British colonies, like Egypt, the "LGBTQ-phobic" colonial legacy has evolved and even argued as authentic to the state.

Egypt belongs to a region known for its opposition of LGBTQ rights as human rights—The Middle East/North Africa (MENA). Arguably the leading outspoken voice for the resistance of LGBTQ human rights within this region is Egypt and is, therefore, the focus of this thesis. The Arab Republic of Egypt has dominated international news headlines and attracted global attention as a serial LGBTQ rights offender since the turn of the twenty-first century.

As a UN-member state, Egypt continues to "reassure" its commitment to international norms (i.e. human rights), yet, it has indiscreetly violated the rights of its LGBTQ persons for decades. While simultaneously maintaining alliances and relationships with Global North (UN-member) nations like the United States and France—which are some of the leading forces of the international LGBTQ human rights campaign. This thesis will focus on Egypt's LGBTQ human rights struggle, and what that means regarding international relations, to better understand this

complex yet unsurprising phenomenon. Using a critical theory lens, I will analyze colonial-era sodomy law influences, anti-West and politicized Islamist rhetoric, homonationalist reverse-pinkwashing efforts on and by Egypt, Egypt's state-sponsored homophobia LGBTQ crackdowns, the role of Global North and domestic rights-based NGOs, and Egypt's international relations and role in neoliberalism. This thesis will explore on the role of each factor and its effect on Egyptian and international LGBTQ human rights struggle. This struggle is used as a political tool for purposes other than improving the rights or lives of the LGBTQ Egyptian communities and tainted the overall international campaign. Overall, this research will offer a contribution to the field because it will specifically focus on the Egyptian state. I will analyze its current international political climate and unique international position and domestic turmoil under Al-Sisi and what that means for LGBTQ rights in Egypt. In contrast to other works that have included an examination of Egypt's past LGBTQ crackdowns, but mostly brief overview in comparison to the other Muslim-majority countries, this one includes the role of Egypt's recent "Rainbow Flag" crackdown and the role of native LGBTQ rights-based NGOs as well as Egypt's international neoliberal position. Additionally, this thesis will supplement and actualize analyses conducted by Nicola Pratt and Scott Long on the first of Egypt's serial LGBTQ crackdowns, as well as apply Jasbir Puar's homonationalist and pinkwashing perspective on Egypt.

My methodology will include an examination of historical and current reports provided by human rights' organizations, blogs and research by LGBTQ rights activists (i.e. Scott Long and Dalia Abdel Hamid), current news media relating to Egypt's crackdown, and literature and government reports on neoliberal financial and trade relations Western (i.e. the US) with Egypt. While direct dialogue with LGBTQ Egyptians and activists are not included in this thesis, reports conducted by rights organizations, like the Human Rights Watch (HRW), Egyptian Initiative for

Personal Rights (EIPR), and documentaries are essential because they include interviews with survivors of LGBTQ raids and activists. Furthermore, Scott Long's "Paper Bird" blog provides crucial insight on geopolitics that revolves around the state-sponsored crackdown. Lastly, analyzing government reports and current news media will provide information and background on what is an on-going anti-LGBTQ movement in Egypt to date.

The international LGBTQ human rights struggle, while still very exclusive, is also, arguably, one of the leading contemporary campaigns that is used by the "international community" (predominantly Western Superpower states) to decipher whether or not a state can be considered progressively-modern. This international struggle has been one of the most focused interest groups to receive significant support at the United Nations' level since the turn of the twenty-first century or post-9/11. Therefore, while this struggle has become the validation for "modernly-progressive" nations, history unravels a different narrative.

Chapter one "Religious-Colonial Influences, Anti-Imperialist State Formation, and LGBTQ history with Islam in Egypt," explores Egypt's colonial history and the institutional homophobic legacy both legally and psychologically that its colonizers France and Great Britain bestowed upon them. While "Western" superpowers have hegemony over the pro-LGBTQ rights international narrative in colonial times it was, in fact, their imperial puritanical Christian ideals that condemned pre-colonial Egypt's "licentious" sexual norms and criminalized non-heteronormative behavior and identities (Pokemper, 2008). Although vice practices (i.e. homosexuality and prostitution) were formally criminalized throughout the British Crown's occupation of Egypt, part of the Egyptian revolution motives was with Islamist-supported outrage of British-owned brothels and explicit same-sex practices by the colonizers (Whitaker, 2006). Through politicized Islamist anti-colonial arguments and the Egyptian revolution, the

homophobic colonial-influenced legacy was adopted as authentic to Egyptian society. Hence, when the post-colonial state wrote its constitution, it included British-influenced *prostitution and debauchery laws* that are used to this day to criminalize and dehumanize Egypt's LGBTQ population (Long, 2004a). Furthermore, while it was politicized Islam, that emphasized the need for these laws to pose as an "anti-colonial token," theological scholars such as Imam Mushin Hendricks, have analyzed Islam's relation to homosexuality to debunk the religious rhetoric and instead argue for a comprehensive perspective of queer Muslims. Egypt's colonial, state-formation, and religious attitude histories are essential to understand its current political climate against LGBTQ rights. This chapter will argue how, in fact, religious colonial influences set the tone for the post-colonial state's anti-LGBTQ stance. Moreover, on the contrary to homonationalist arguments, it is not that this non-Christian/Western country innately and culturally breeds homophobia and transphobia, rather it is as a result of colonial influences that significantly contributed to this anti-LGBTQ phenomenon.

The following chapter "Egypt's State-Sponsored 'Reverse-Pinkwashing' LGBTQ Crackdowns," focuses on Egypt's public relations (PR) strategy of "reverse-pinkwashing" through its serial state-sponsored LGBTQ crackdowns. While "pinkwashing" is the international PR strategy associated with Israel to divert attention away from its human rights violations of Palestinians with an emphasis on its "LGBTQ-friendly" environment (Puar & Mikdashi, 2012). "Reverse-pinkwashing," I argue, is the domestic tactic used by Egyptian governments to divert its civil society's attention from inner economic, social, international, and security turmoil and instead on its "priority" of the preservation of "Arab-Muslim" culturally-moral hygiene through sporadic LGBTQ crackdowns. The fabricated arguments and discrepancy of each case are prime examples of the state contradiction on its pious commitment and rather a distraction to contain

control of popular opinion. The purpose of this chapter is to show how these sporadic crackdowns are nothing more than a political tactic in order to contain control of Egyptian civil society in regards to the state turmoil (i.e. economic and state-security instability), and rather shift the public's attention on "moral" issues such as the "intruding" presence of non-homonormative identities and spaces in Egyptian society.

Whereas the second chapter focuses on Egypt's domestic policies in relations to LGBTQ rights, the third and last chapter "International Standards, LGBTQ NGOs (Domestic and Foreign), and Neoliberalism," focuses on Egypt's international relations, specifically, UN commitments, treatment of "Westernized" rights NGOs, and neoliberal international policies. Egypt's historical lineage of colonial-British homophobic legacy and current "reverse-pinkwashing" strategy, should be enough to debunk state-hinderance of LGBTQ rights in Egypt. The international community has a key role in why progress is so hard for this minority. As a UN-member state, Egypt committed to UN-accords that assured universal human rights. However, the UN's concession of state *reservations* makes these treaties counterproductive. Although, Egypt, along with other Muslim-majority states, have signed on to treaties ensuring rights for "all," these countries have been allowed to pose reservation on anything they deem "inauthentic" to their Muslim culture (i.e. rights for LGBTQ) (Mayer, 1996). These reservations have made it difficult for international human rights organizations to hold the Egyptian state accountable for its rights violations. Furthermore, the reservation precedent has fueled an orientalist and homonationalist rhetoric among "Western" rights NGOs and activists to misguidedly consider native rights activist and rights groups as monolithic and "LGBTQ-phobic" (Ghoshal, 2018).

Lastly, in an overall global context, LGBTQ rights, and human rights, in general, have become absentee international politics (Long, 2017). While Global superpower states like the US and France want to vocalize their support for the LGBTQ human rights campaign, it is counteractive when they maintain alliances with states, like Egypt, that have not just a horrendous LGBTQ rights, but human rights record overall. The world exists in a time when power and profit and “stability” of both is the main priority for government heads (Chomsky, 1999). Therefore, Egypt’s neoliberal transnational financial and arms trade relation with “pro-LGBTQ” countries is ultimately what this chapter will show the *key* ingredient to hinder the LGBTQ human rights movement in Egypt and universally.

CHAPTER ONE: RELIGIOUS-COLONIAL INFLUENCE, ANTI-IMPERIALIST STATE FORMATION, AND LGBTQ HISTORY WITH ISLAM IN EGYPT

Home to the Nile River, Egypt is conventionally known as one of the greatest civilizations of the world. During the colonial era, Egypt was a Euro-imperial attraction because of its geographical location and trading route possibilities. The French conqueror, Napoleon Bonaparte, was the first European to lead an expedition and invade Egypt in 1798 (El-Feki, 2013, p.15). The invasion triggered the start of Egypt's societal "self-consciousness" (El-Feki, 2013). This meant that when the French's colonization mission of "civilizing" was apparent to the Egyptian society, a sense of *cultural inferiority* arose. In particular, societal "tolerance" of non-heteronormative identities and practices and celebratory explicit writings on sex and sexualities were targeted. Egyptians, like Imam Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, admired French influence, for their puritanical condemnation of homosexuality (El-Feki, 2013, p.10). As El-Feki states, "As Arab intellectuals came to see themselves through foreign eyes, some historians argue, they also started to rewrite their own sexual history according to a European script. This re-writing gained pace with the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism[s]" (2013, p.16). Furthermore, the colonial times was the starting point for *formal* Egyptian rejection of rights for non-heteronormative identities and practices and later what would be known as the struggle for LGBTQ rights in Egypt.

To understand Egypt's current political climate around the issue of LGBTQ rights, it is essential to first understand its colonial history and anti-imperialist state formation in relation to this minority. In 2018, Egypt's, along with the MENA region, argument for lack of implementation of LGBTQ-friendly laws is *cultural relativism*. Cultural relativism has been said to mean that "Western" cultural and societal values, in this case, LGBTQ rights, cannot be forced

upon non-Western nations, like Egypt, because they do not share the same cultural, traditional, and religious values. Therefore, the international community and Global North countries must respect Egypt's reservations on LGBTQ rights or else be depicted as imposing and imperial. However, while the current Egyptian state argues that LGBTQ identities, practices, and rights are an "import of the West," this chapter will show how its domestic history shows otherwise. The origins and application of Egypt's debauchery and prostitution criminal laws, which are pretexts used to target queer communities, especially, will further discredit Egypt's mainstream argument of LGBTQ rights as "inauthentic." Lastly, a focus on the relationship between Islam and homosexuality will be explored to challenge the Islamist political opposition to LGBTQ rights in Egypt today.

British-Colonial Past

Although the French invasion is historically seen as a failure, it did construct something that became essential to Egypt and those interested in relations with the nation—the Suez Canal. The completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 made Egypt an important and desired transportation hub (CIA, 2018). Therefore, although France had failed in maintaining control over Egypt, the infamous imperial-power of Great Britain did not, and so in 1882 they invaded Egypt to protect their investments and have full control over the access of the Suez Canal (CIA, 2018). In 1914, after years of complete domination, Egypt was declared a British protectorate (Pratt, 2006, p.26).

After almost a decade as a British protectorate, Egypt was granted nominal independence in 1922. Of course, like any formally-colonized state, Egypt still struggled for "total" sovereignty for another thirty years. In the process, ironically unified by a collective *anti-colonial* sentiment and opposition to sexual immorality (i.e. homosexuality and prostitution) in Egyptian society, the Sunni-Islamist fundamentalist group of the Muslim Brotherhood was formed 1928 (El-Feki,

2013, p.16). One of their most influential members, Said Qutb, argued that for a sovereign Egypt and, “to guard against the contamination [sexual immorality], Muslim societies must go back to the ways of the founding fathers of Islam, the *salaf*—or rather, and interpretation, of the time of the Prophet (El-Feki, 2013, p.18). This argument was fueled by the fact that in this semi-colonial time, Egypt experienced notably aggressive actions taken by Western Christian missionaries to convert Egyptians to Christianity—most controversially, Egyptian Muslims (Baron, 2014). Baron recounts that some Christian missionaries provided Egyptians with social welfare services like schools and orphanages, sometimes in exchange for their conversion from Islam-to-Christianity (2014). This outraged the Egyptian-Muslim community and was seen as an explicit practice of imperialism on Egyptians, especially for Islamist groups.

In response, the Muslim Brotherhood created counter social-communal services in order to “protect” the Egyptian community from coerced Christian-conversion and instead promote Islam as Egypt’s *only* authentic religion. Furthermore, *The Orphan Scandal* studies how the “Muslim Brotherhood promised to rejuvenate Islam and fight the British [in Egypt]” (Baron, 2014, p.86). For the Muslim Brotherhood “rejuvenating” Islam in Egypt meant to follow a rigorous and inegalitarian interpretation of the religion. This meant condemning women and LGBTQ rights because of the “disparity” with the Islamic beliefs and traditions. However, both imperial France, Great Britain, and Islamist-fundamentalist groups’ agenda condemned non-heteronormative identities and practices. However, misguided preconceived depictions of each other’s societal norms (i.e. tolerance towards homosexuality and gender fluidity), fixed them against each other. As the colonial-era came to an end, stories flipped. While at first the French and British condemned Egyptian society for its licentious-sexual fluidity, *now* conservative

influential members in Egyptian society, like Islamists and state actors, blame the “West” for the presence of non-heteronormative identities and practices in Egyptian society.

Although the British Empire’s *physical* presence left the Egyptian state, its colonial-era penal codes, specifically its *sodomy laws*, remained and transitioned into the post-independent nation’s constitution. India is the most recent post-colonial country to decriminalize homosexuality, by annulling its British-influenced sodomy decree. Once, this significant milestone reached international headlines, news reports on the British Empire’s homophobic legacy resurfaced. Today, 71 countries still criminalize homosexuality and trans characteristics in some form, with more than half being former British colonies (Westcott, 2018). Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report early in the twenty-first century, explaining how the British justified the implementation of these sodomy laws. The British colonizers thought the native culture was “hyper-sexual” and therefore, failed as a society by not *punishing* “perverse sex,” like same-sex practices, enough (Pokemper, 2008, p.5). For the colonial-British, “outlawing homosexuality was a strict Victorian moral code, which defined any sexual activity not for procreation [same-sex intercourse] as taboo” (Han & O’Mahoney, 2018). Ironically, this same argument is now made by Egyptian conservative religious nationalists to “preserve” the status quo of heteronormativity.

Contrary to supposition, there was no *universal* anti-homosexuality law that the British Empire used. Instead, it was *individual* colonial administrators who implemented the first laws and then quickly dispersed it throughout its colonies from 1860 onwards (Westcott, 2018). Thus, it was not that the British Empire had a formal mission to universally eradicate homosexuality or trans identities and practices. Rather, it was *individual* colony-overseers that applied *their own interpretations* of Euro-Christian values into the colonies’ penal code. And so, an HRW report

notes that England and Wales decriminalized most same-sex conduct in 1967 (Pokemper, 2008). This came too late for most of its former colonies, however, which gained their independence (with sodomy laws still intact) in the 1950s and 1960s, like Egypt (Pokemper, 2008, p.8). One wonders *if* the decriminalization of homosexuality came earlier in the British Empire, before the colonial revolutions, would have it made a difference for the LGBTQ human rights movement and politics today? Perhaps.

Anti-Imperial Revolution and State Formation

Moreover, it seems as though post-British colonial nations *strategically* misrecollect that these laws were first integrated by the “West.” And rather, go as far as to claim these colonial-era anti-LGBTQ laws as culturally authentic and indigenous (Pokemper, 2008, p.8). ILGA’s “State-Sponsored Homophobia,” in 2017 report does not categorize Egypt as a country that legislatively criminalizes homosexuality, but does note that it uses other laws as pretexts to target LGBTQ people living under Egyptian rule. The report explains:

Sexual relations between consenting adult persons of the same sex in private are not prohibited in Egyptian law. However, as recorded the Law [10/1961] on Combating of Prostitution, and the law against debauchery have been used liberally to imprison gay men in recent years. (Carrol & Mendos, 2017, p.85)

These *prostitution* and *debauchery* laws are used as pretexts to entrap LGBTQ Egyptians and those living under its law. Historically, however, they were first used to combat brothels that were owned and benefitted by the British from the turn of the twentieth century (Whitaker, 2006, p.231). The popularity of these brothels by non-Egyptians mobilized Egyptian nationalist and fundamentalist groups, like the Muslim Brotherhood, to impose religious judgment on these vice businesses (Whitaker, 2006, p.231). This was yet another turning point for LGBTQ rights in

Egypt, as the Muslim Brotherhood succeeded in conflating prostitution and sexual perversion with Western norms to fuel anti-colonial religious sentiment. The irony that both the British Empire and the Egyptian state thought each other as the blame for *sexual deviancy* is remarkable. Conclusively both sides undisputedly fostered and continue to foster these “deviant” sexual practices, like homosexuality and gender-queerness. Yet, taking historical formal-credit for it is an issue that persists today.

In contrast to the 2017 ILGA report, human rights activist, Scott Long, does not hesitate to categorize Egypt under those countries that criminalize and target their LGBTQ communities. Long’s article states that, in spite of common belief and denial by the state, Egypt has criminalized male homosexuality for over 50 years (Long, 2004a, p.13). In fact, the first *fujur* (debauchery) cases were recorded in 1975 when the Egyptian Vice Squad broke into a private home and caught two men having sexual relations (Long, 2004a, p.14). However, distinct from current laws, only the *passive* partner was charged with *fujur* then. This report goes on to elaborate on Egypt’s Law on the combating prostitution. Known as

Law 10 of 1961. This provision punishes the ‘habitual’ practices of *fujur* and *di’ara* with up to three years imprisonment, plus fines. The Arabic term *di’ara* is generally understood to mean prostitution in the sense of commercial sex, while *fujur* is a much broader term (translated here as ‘debauchery’) encompassing a concept of sexual excess. (Long, 2004a, p.13)

The liberation from colonialism, created a rush to outlaw vice practices (i.e. homosexuality, gender fluidity, and prostitution), which were now depicted as “Western imports” by the new state (Long, 2004a, p.13). The fervent anti-imperial stance that post-colonial Egypt took against anything that resembled or was amplified (i.e. brothels and homosexuality) by foreign

influences, was significant due to their rigorous and despotic *foreign* control history (Pratt, 2006, p.6). A similar post-colonial history was shared with Syria, but not with developmental commodity states like oil-rich Saudi Arabia that escaped direct colonialism and did not explicitly take an anti-imperial stance for its state formation (Pratt, 2006, p.6).

As the newly post-colonial state adjusted, *di'ara* and *fujur* laws were employed onto society as vague codes of morality rather than secular fair laws (Long, 2004a, p.13-14). Therefore, *di'ara* was allocated to persecute women guilty of “immorality” (sex work), while *fujur* was assigned to men (Long, 2004a, p.14). *Fujur* is argued to “take a life of its own as courts and the criminal justice system determined what was immoral for males, and concentrated on homosexual conduct” (Long, 2004a, p.14). The expansion of the *fujur* decree would pave the way for the malicious LGBTQ crackdown that the Egyptian government has used to oppress these communities at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Additionally, the construction of the “Arab” ethnic identity contributed to the Egyptian independence struggle. Nicola Pratt found that “Arabism began as a cultural-linguistic movement in the early twentieth century and later became fused with nationalism in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism” (2006, p.16). Notably pointing out how in order for MENA colonies, like Egypt, to achieve independence they had to show they were capable of modernization. Pratt refers to this as *National Modernization* and defines it as:

the complete freedom from colonial domination-political, economic, and technological-
thereby enabling the new nation-state to participate in the international system on an
equal footing with the West. (2006, p.12)

What categorizes a state as nationally modern? The elimination of the “traditional” roles and practices of the working class, but most importantly showing an *increase in women’s visibility in*

the public sphere (Pratt, 2006, p.16). Together, all these factors contributed to an army coup and revolution to Egypt in 1952. Therefore, although, Islamist opinion took part in initiating a momentum for a popular anti-colonial and anti-West Egyptian revolution, at this point in time their conservative ideas on women's role and condemnation of LGBTQ identities did not necessarily transition into the national movement's agenda. Conservative (homophobic/transphobic and sexist) religious (Islamist) beliefs were not incorporated into the main societal-mold for the new post-colonial state and society. Rather an emphasis on a modern (western-like), *Arab* society. However, not without various British-influenced codes intact like its puritanical sodomy criminal law. Tacitly, the state would resurface these "morality codes" to create moral panics that would scapegoat LGBTQ communities to distract, contain, and silence regime-opposition at times when the state was in socioeconomic and violent turmoil.

Islam and Queerness

So far, this chapter has discussed the ways in which Victorian-Christian British colonial influence and anti-imperial sentiments in state formation are responsible for the target and criminalization of LGBTQ communities in Egypt to date. However, an overview of Islam—or better phrased—some of its Muslim followers' interpretations and use of the religion—must further be expanded on to see its contribution to Egypt's current anti-LGBTQ stance. The prominent discriminatory and marginalizing tool used against queer Egyptian Muslims, or queer Muslims in general, is the rejection of their queer identity and practices by interpretations of the Islam religion. Many conservative Muslim leaders argue that identifying as *mutually* LGBTQ and Muslim is forbidden. A majority of the Muslim communities see the identities as mutually exclusive. Scott Siraj al-Huqq Kugle's argues otherwise. His work emphasizes that regardless of the difference in *social* category (LGBTQ or non-LGBTQ), no Muslim is better than the other.

Kugle focuses on the concept of Islamic marriage, and offers three possibilities as why the Qur'an speaks specifically about heterosexual marriage: "because God intends only their [heteronormative] couplings, because only heterosexual couplings are the majority, therefore, God addresses the most common, or because only heterosexual couplings produce children" (2010, p.458-459). He uses these interpretation possibilities as a way to link neo-traditionalist Muslims' arguments of marriage only acceptable under a heterosexual and heteronormative context, as originally being rooted and *adopted* from Christians.

Kugle's argument contrasts Islamist fundamentalists teachings on the roots of Islam. He states that the idea that the only purpose of marital sex is for procreation is actually, "an argument that does not arise from within Islamic tradition itself, because most Muslims in the past did not limit the purpose of sexual pleasure to procreation even if they valued procreation highly" (2010, p.468). Ultimately, Kugle tries to argue that Islam has culturally-adopted imperial Christian beliefs throughout time and has *changed* by historical events. Unlike some religiously conservative, or fundamentalist, groups may argue, there is no Muslim community that practices a *historically-uninfluenced* form of Islam. Due to European hegemony, Christian colonizers extended their religious influence to Muslim-majority countries. Consequently, although various ideas seem to derive directly from the Qur'an, and are used to condemn homosexuality and trans identities, in fact, may be a misconception as a result of coerced imperialist beliefs and personal agendas by Islamist groups.

Supplementing the religious rhetoric that impedes progressive LGBTQ reform in a Muslim context, the documentary *A Jihad for Love*, shows the contemporary experience of LGBTQ Muslims and their sexual-religious identity struggle. Mushin Hendricks is presented as an openly-gay South African Imam, shown debating another Islamic scholar Mulana A.K.

Hoosen. Both imams, refer to the “Story of Lot,” as *the* critical text used to condemn homosexuality as a grave sin (DuBowski & Sharma, 2008). Hendricks argues that homosexuality is not condemned by this parable but instead condemns *rape, molestation, and lack of appropriate hospitality* (DuBowski & Sharma, 2008). He supports his argument by stating that the foreign “guests” who went to Sodom and Gomorrah were, in fact, guilty of molestation. This was an abomination that was committed for a long time in this city, but it was not referring to homosexuality but the rape of a male instead. Imam Hendricks goes on to say, “So Allah is not referring to the homosexual relationship, but he’s referring to a homosexual act, which was the molestation, taking the rights of another person away from him” (DuBowski & Sharma, 2008). Hoosen responds to Hendricks’s theory by contending that he is just *playing with semantics*. This puts into question the whole notion of whether or not the “Story of Lot” condemns homosexuality or not. Undeniably though, what Imam Hoosen fails to realize is that *interpretations* of sacred texts whether it be from the Qur’an or the Bible have always been argued between various religious interpreters to be a *play on semantics*. This debate shows that it is crucial for the progression of LGBTQ rights that the religious opposition realize that religious-beliefs rely on interpretations. Most interpretations are not universal and have been influenced in various ways throughout history. In the case of Egyptian Muslims, the influence comes from its colonial past and therefore should not be used to condemn non-heteronormative identities and practices because it is seen as “inauthentic.”

Chapter Conclusion

Imam Mushin Hendricks provides a pragmatic argument for the acceptance of queer Muslims in Muslim-majority societies. In his work, he points out that,

Terms such as homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality, by which modern society classifies human sexuality, are not used in the Quran. Nonetheless, a theme of sexuality, sexual permissibility and sexual prohibition pervades the Quran...It is important to recognise that this does not automatically imply condemnation of the latter [non-heterosexual sex] (2010, p.7).

And so this shows Imam Hendricks's extensive knowledge on Islam, the Qur'an, and its hadiths further aid the progression LGBTQ human rights movement in Muslim-majority countries and communities worldwide from a religious perspective.

Additionally, progressive religious voices like Hendricks's is a positive change for LGBTQ progression in Muslim-majority countries. World powers, and most importantly Egypt's significant former colonizer, the British Empire, has acknowledged the colonial-era damage it has contributed to the repression of LGBTQ rights onto its former colonies. Currently, out of forty-nine formally British administered countries, thirty-one still have the original colonial anti-LGBTQ legislation (Westcott, 2018). At the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting on April 17, 2018, PM Theresa May insisted Commonwealth nations to, "reform anti-gay legislation held over from British colonial rule" (Han & O'Mahoney, 2018). As Han and O'Mahoney state, the UK's prime minister's speech was just short of an apology for Britain's imperial legacy on anti-LGBT laws on its former colonies (2018). In her speech, she stated, "As the United Kingdom's prime minister, I deeply regret both the fact that such [homophobic and transphobic] laws were introduced and the legacy of discrimination, and death that persists today" (Han & O'Mahoney, 2018).

The emphasis on the British Empire's colonial-era past is significant because not only did it affect Egypt, but no other imperial power left such institutional legacy on the criminalization

of homosexuality and trans identities like this one (Han & O'Mahoney, 2018). While acknowledgment is a step forward, this legacy still contributes to the struggle LGBTQ Egyptians face today. Where unlike its pre-colonial past, now the state formally and explicitly discriminates against this marginalized minority. Egypt's complex history and religious clash with LGBTQ-tolerance is what makes it feasible to scapegoat this community with "morality crackdowns," to distract the public and further fuel anti-LGBTQ sentiment instead of focusing on state-failings. What is more is that this tactic is not particular to one administration. In fact, from the turn of the twenty-first century, from Mubarak to Al-Sisi, not only have LGBTQ communities been the victims of a state-sponsored crackdown, but they seem to be getting worst, as LGBTQ rights supporters gain momentum. The following chapter will elaborate on these LGBTQ-focused crackdowns.

CHAPTER TWO: EGYPT'S STATE-SPONSORED "REVERSE-PINKWASHING" LGBTQ CRACKDOWN

To date, the international struggle for gender, sexuality, characteristics and expression rights is not a new endeavor. At the United Nations level, reformist rights organizations have been advocating for the recognition and support for LGBTQ human rights for decades. In fact, in a post-9/11 world, Jasbir Puar made a compelling argument on how a nation's attitude and progression on LGBTQ rights is *the* contemporary global barometer to determine modern democracies and state exceptionalism (2007). A non-heterosexual native's new sense of inclusion in mainstream society, or sexual exceptionalism, can foster nationalistic sentiment for one's country (Puar, 2007, p.57). Furthermore, this phenomenon is known as *homonationalism* (Puar, 2007). Homonationalism has been used as a political Islamophobic and Arabophobic tool to discriminate against Muslim-majority states, for the lack of pro-LGBTQ legislation and recognition. Arguably, Egypt is the most vocal state within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region widely infamous for its anti-LGBTQ state-sponsored policies and practices. From the beginning of the twenty-first century to the present, Egypt has gone through an uprising, which ended a decades-long dictatorship, to its first elected Islamist president, and ultimately a military coup which left the country with yet another despotic leader. However, regardless of the type of leadership, it has had a *consistent pattern* of state-sponsored LGBTQ crackdowns.

The state of Egypt entered the twenty-first century as a dictatorship. Former "president" Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt since 1981. However, as the century continued, the Egyptian population became dissatisfied with its government as the economy and social status worsened for the majority (Long, 2004a, p.7). To contain public disapproval, in 2001 Mubarak's

administration initiated the first highly-publicized state-sponsored LGBTQ crackdown. While the Mubarak-era LGBTQ crackdown resurfaced anti-imperial sentiment, due to international criticism and homonationalist beliefs due to the current geopolitical climate with the “West” and the Arab region, it was not enough to amend Mubarak’s public approval ratings (Long, 2004a, p.7). Therefore, in 2011, with the progression of globalization and social media advancements, Egypt became one of the Arab nations to stage a revolution in the “Arab (African) Springs” era ousting Mubarak (Howard & Hussain, 2013, p.20-22). However, regardless of the revolution and the presidential election that proceeded, Al-Sisi’s coup disrupted the possibility of a more democratic Egypt (Ghoshal, 2018). Moreover, Egypt’s economic, social, and security climate has worsened under Al-Sisi. Unsurprisingly, he has adopted his predecessor, Mubarak’s, LGBTQ incriminating tactic to contain civil society opposition and “religious conservative credentials” (Ghoshal, 2018, p.14).

The continuation of state-sponsored LGBTQ crackdowns has alienated and hindered the advancement of LGBTQ rights and tolerance. For these reasons this chapter will focus on four significant cases: the Queen Boat raid, bathhouse raid, gay-marriage video scenario, and the rainbow-flag hunt. The state has targeted LGBTQ communities, and in some case by non-state actors as well, as a form of distraction from other severe problems within the country like its struggle with rebel insurgencies, unstable economy and welfare policies, rise in unemployment, and containment of criticism by Islamist fundamentalisms—a strategy which I refer to as “reverse-pinkwashing.” Pinkwashing serves as a state public relation (PR) strategy engineered-tacitly by conservative and capitalist entities to portray an image as LGBTQ rights-friendly to deflect international attention away from other human rights violations (i.e. “LGBTQ-friendly”

Israel's human rights violation of Palestinians) (Puar & Mikdashi, 2012). On the other hand, *reverse-pinkwashing* is a PR strategy mastered by the Egyptian regimes past and present.

Inherently, the Egyptian government aims to portray the idea that they abide by international standards (i.e. human rights) as a member of the UN. However, due to domestic leadership failure, the regime conducts LGBTQ crackdowns as a “reverse-pinkwashing” tactic to uphold political support and contain Islamist (anti-West) criticism. LGBTQ crackdowns distract and reestablish validation and faith on the government as LGBTQ-tolerance is seen as a foreign norm, which the government “cleanses” them from.

Reverse-pinkwashing is joined hand-in-hand with the sociological principles of *moral panics* to contain and control popular opinion. State-sponsored and heavily-publicized LGBTQ crackdowns are a solution said to be done in the name of preserving not only Egyptian but “Arab-authenticity” and “Islamic-moral hygiene” (Long, 2004a, p.1). Thus, these crackdowns can be described as “reverse-pinkwashing” because they create a binary within the state of Pro-LGBTQ rights, meaning “Western/imported” and Anti-LGBTQ rights meaning “Arab/Islamic.” Surely there is a myriad of ways Muslim-majority countries can remain *true* to their religious-cultural roots and ensure the protection of all human rights; however, as a government Egypt has failed. In response, Egypt's Global North alliances, and some prominent human rights groups, have turned a blind eye or done the minimal to denounce the human rights violations this country is committing on these specific groups.

Egypt, holding the role as *the* leading member within the MENA region, explicitly and actively against the advancement and recognition of LGBTQ autonomous identities and rights should be appalling. I argue this for a couple of reasons. First, within this so-called “Arab-Muslim” context, Egypt, is neither considered the most religious-conservative nor the most

religiously-liberal, like Saudi Arabia (extreme-conservative) and Lebanon (moderately-liberal) (Whitaker, 2006). Secondly, while the far-right countries like Saudi Arabia and even the “left-leaning,” like Lebanon under the MENA context, both *explicitly* outlaw homosexuality and non-heteronormative identities and practices, Egypt’s constitution does not (Carroll & Mendos, 2017). Therefore, it is interesting to see how a country that is considerably associated to fall somewhere in the middle of the MENA political spectrum, has acquired the record of having the biggest and most violent crackdown on its LGBTQ communities in the name of piety and authenticity. Lastly, Egypt was one of the countries that experienced a revolution in 2011 during the “Arab (African) Springs.” A revolution produced by the Egyptian people in hopes of a more democratic, economically-stable, and socially-progressive government (Ghoshal, 2018). Therefore, it is unexpected, as stated by many human rights activists, to see how the demands of the protests in Tahrir Square were not met, in this case in particular, with regards to human rights violations arising under what is now Al-Sisi’s (oppressive) Egypt.

State emphasis and extraordinary publicity on gender-nonconformists, trans identities, and *especially* male-homosexuality, conflating them to soft imperialism, a foreign invader, inauthentic, and outright *sin* help overlook the injustices and rights violations the government and non-state actors cynically-bestows upon these communities. Injustices include: unlawfully interfering with the right to privacy, police entrapment, arbitrary arrests, pseudo-scientific practices (*anal examinations*), lack of due process, sexual assault, and torture (Abdel Hamid, 2017). All these acts are condemned under UN conventions which have long been ratified by the Egyptian member-state. However, throughout the years succeeding post-9/11 all these practices have continued regardless of the head of state was and now is. The four state-operated anti-LGBTQ crackdowns display how under the framework of homonationalism and reverse-

pinkwashing aided with moral panics have almost-successfully completely scapegoat LGBTQ communities within its borders to validate the power of the government. And, most importantly, as a result, currently in Al-Sisi's Egypt, the impediment of LGBTQ human rights progression remains at a stagnate.

The Queen Boat Raid

Although it might now be debunked as Egypt's most infamous LGBTQ crackdown case, at the start of the new millennium, the 2001 Queen Boat raid is (was) known as the biggest state-sponsored target and attack on non-heteronormative people in the MENA region. Before the raid, the Queen Boat, a gay nightclub frequented by natives and foreigners on the Nile river, was well known although it was assumed to be a secret (Long, 2004a, p.2). In fact, there was an argument that the "gay community" in Cairo had protentional to expand with specific cafes and bars known to be frequented by the non-heteronormative people (Long, 2004a). The neighborhood knew that these were spaces where LGBTQ people socialized, however, as was the norm before the raid it was deemed a *private matter*, discreet and therefore unbothered.

This all changed on May 11, 2001, when without warrants or reasonable cause, the morality (vice) squad and state security investigations staged a decoy operation and raided the club after midnight, apprehending around three dozen people, *including* foreigners, women, and an underage youth (Jama, 2003; Long, 2004a). While for the most part all the foreigners were let go at the scene, and the women bailed out of the precinct, the rest remained in custody (Jama, 2003, p.2). Throughout several months, another group of men, not arrested at the Queen Boat, were linked to the crackdown and preliminarily charged with "contempt of religion" and "practice of habitual debauchery."

What made this case so unusual was that the 52 men detained and charged with *fujur*, or debauchery, a decree inconsistently defined by the state to meaning either (or all): habitual for-profit male prostitution, promiscuity from a man, or consensual sex between men (Long, 2004a). Additionally, the court charged them with “belonging to a blasphemous cult.” And although the first charge seemed the only apparent reason for the arrest according to the defendants, the latter one made no sense. However, HRW (2004a) discovered that this raid was theorized to be concocted by the state to connect it to the lead defendant of the case, Sherif Farhat. Contradicting mainstream knowledge, the 52 men, known as the *Cairo 52*, including the *lead* defendant were not all arrested at the club on May 11. Almost half were arrested on the streets, days and even weeks before the raid, through either entrapment with the help of confidential informants, and those associated with the Farhat (Long, 2004a, p.23-24).

According to Farhat’s family, his arbitrary arrest weeks before the raid by State Security was all conducted for unspecified revenge. Farhat was an engineer from a prominent well-established family in Egypt, and therefore targeted by the government to taint his reputation (Long, 2004a, p.22). Through interrogation, the state security concluded that Farhat was a “homosexual” with a cult and therefore called in the vice squad led by Taha Embaby to help find “followers” (other gay men) of Farhat (Long, 2004a, p.24). According to interviews conducted by HRW (2004a), it just so happened that the Queen Boat was chosen by the morality police to gather the rest of the men that could be poorly-tailored to be associated with the “cult.” Moreover, those arrested seemed to have been at the wrong place at the wrong time. The morality police knew that was a vulnerable group to manipulate feasibly.

The men detained were tortured, sexually assaulted, and exploited. They were treated as the worst thing that could enter the jail, solely because of their presumed sexuality and gender

identity. When questioned about belonging to a “satanic cult” and contempt of religion, most defendants were caught off guard and misled into opting out to *confessing* to “*habitual practice of debauchery*” thinking it would incur a lighter sentence (Long, 2004a, p.36). Furthermore, the Cairo 52 were forced to undergo, what is unobjectively condemned by UN standards, *anal examinations*. These exams were conducted more than a month into their detention when it seemed to be clear that there was no possibility to form a logical case around “contempt of religion” or “membership of an ungodly cult,” stated by a lawyer assigned to the case (Long, 2004a, p.41). Conclusively, the pseudo-scientific procedure conducted by the forensic doctors “found” that sixteen out of the 52 men were habitual practitioners of debauchery, or regularly practiced anal sex (Long, 2004a, p.41).

Bail was never allowed for the men awaiting trial. Resulting as a “field-day” for the press, mostly state-owned, as many went as far as exposing the full names, age, occupation, and workplace—putting at risk not only the reputation of the defendants but also that of their families, friends, and employers. The state allowed the press to take pictures of the detainees in their cells, contrary to families’ objections. All 52 men were grouped in their cells, with distinct white jumpsuits, and raided their cells of anything that could be used by to cover their faces when the press arrived, proof that the state wanted this case to be heavily-publicized (Long, 2004a, p.43). Some resulted in tearing a piece of their jumpsuits to cover-up— in a sense essentially veiling themselves, symbolically portraying their presumed effeminate identities (Pratt, 2007; Long, 2004a, p.43).

A verdict was reached by a federal court after close to more than half a year in detention. On November 14, 2001, twenty-nine of the men were acquitted while the other twenty-three were convicted of “habitual debauchery.” The key defendant, Sherif Farhat received the longest

sentence, with five years plus probation for both *fujur* and “contempt of religion” (Long, 2004a p.43). The other twenty-three were sentenced to two years plus probation, except one, the most “masculine-looking” one, who only received one year. Only a year after the raid and under international pressure, the Mubarak’s regime rescinded the verdicts of those charged with “habitual debauchery.” It was short-lived, however, as the same group was retried in 2003 and under new judgment receiving the maximum sentence of three years (Long, 2004a, p.46). Moreover, one could argue that the sentences were short and classified as misdemeanors. Yet, for the most part, the lives of these men would never be the same, and for some, their reputation seemed close to impossible to restore in Egypt.

Long’s research (2004a) shows that despite common belief, and denial by the state, Egypt has criminalized male homosexuality for over fifty years (p.14). Furthermore, in his “Trials of Culture: Sex and Security in Egypt,” report, he concludes this raid was essential under the twentieth-first century context because, “it made the specter of ‘homosexuality’ visible in Egypt and the [predominantly Muslim-Arab] region-while driving its actual lineaments and lives into complete concealment” (Long, 2004b, p.1). Not only did it make homosexuality publicly visible in the region, but it also sparked a state-sponsored moral panic, fueled by the media (Long, 2004b, p.3). Accordingly, while it is important to point out that this raid was not the first debauchery arrest, it certainly drew significant global attention to Egypt.

The Queen Boat raid put Egypt on the top of the list as one of the most hostile environments for LGBTQ individuals. The Global North and its rights organization used this as an opportunity to condemn the Egyptian state as repressing and “silencing of sexual discourse-deeply built into Arab societies, or Islam, or the developing world in general” (Long, 2004b, p.2). While the condemnation of the state-sponsored human rights violations was initiated with

good intention, ultimately it was conflated with the depiction of the “Arab-Muslim” culture and the MENA region as a monolith and unrefined. This raid and trial not only further fueled the “Clash of Civilizations” rhetoric under the pretext of homonationalism, but most importantly it served as a form of social control. This case initiated the “East,” and “West” homonationalist clash placing Egypt against the “LGBTQ-friendly” Global North. Long (2004b) argued, “Egypt’s government praised the [Queen Boat] prosecutions as defending ‘authentic’ culture. Authenticity had no truck with human rights” (p.1). The Cairo 52 trial was ongoing pre- and post-9/11 and at a time when globalization, racism, and Islamophobia were rising, signaling the rise of conflating non-Eurocentric identities, religions, and cultures. Moreover, under the gaze of mainstream rights organizations and the post-9/11 racist climate, Egypt came to symbolize every “Arab-Muslim” state under LGBTQ rights context, which now conflated to mean a regime that bred homophobia and transphobia and its proof was the Queen Boat raid. Moreover, this globally-publicized raid became the precedent for further LGBTQ crackdowns, which persist today. The Global North, specifically the United States, used these arguments to further validate the “war against terrorism,” as Joseph Massad (2002) points out.

Long’s (2004b) argument that the Egyptian government purposely staged this attack because “states experiencing their powerlessness...unable to influence geopolitics or control their own economics, they pursue the enemy within, in the secrecy of the individual and the reticence of intimate life” (p.7), supports this thesis. The Egyptian state constructed a moral panic around the issue of the “immorals” of Egypt—LGBTQ people. Erich Good and Nachman Ben-Yehuda (2009) define a moral panic as, “a threat this evil presumably poses is felt to represent a crisis for the society: something must be done about it, and that something must be done now; if steps are not taken immediately, or soon, we will suffer ever graver consequences”

(p.35). The sociologists categorize three main sources where a moral panic can be engineered either by the elite, interest groups, or grassroots model. Egypt's strategy of "reverse-pinkwashing" would fall under the elite model. As it is the state that has used the LGBTQ Egyptian moral panic for its agenda. Under the elite-engineered model as the Good and Ben-Yehuda (2009) explain,

the elite create moral panics for their benefit and purposes, to sustain control, and undertaking campaign to generate fear. Typically, this campaign is intended to divert attention away from the real problems in the society, whose solution would threaten or undermine the interests of the elite. (p. 62)

The Egyptian state is using its elite power and influence with an aim toward *social control* by transmitting homophobic and transphobic public sentiments as the main issue that is facing Egypt post-9/11. In a context where the state controls the media, for the most part, moral panics are essentially are extremely effective. Therefore, as the aphorism states "the media is the fourth (in)formal branch of government," the Egyptian media holds a tremendous amount of influence on the Egyptian public.

"Explaining Egypt's Targeting of Gays," Hossam Bahgat, a human rights activist, published this pro-LGBTQ rights article on July 23, 2001. Two days after the publication of this article, on July 25 Bahgat was discharged from his position at the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) (Bahgat, 2001). This article questioned the *true* motives for the Queen Boat raid and further promoted fear for other activists to speak out against the raid. Bahgat records the possible motives for this case drew so much attention from the media. As stated in the article, Taher Abul Nasr, one of the defense lawyers on the case, said, "this case involves religious beliefs and morality, two elements that have always succeed in keeping people engaged

for a long time” (Bahgat, 2001). As he also emphasizes, that the Queen Boat was *long known* as a gathering location for the Egyptian LGBTQ communities, it was a private sphere, that was made public for political purposes. Bahgat adds additional motives the government wanted to draw so much attention to this raid:

One motive is certainly to divert public attention from economic recession and the government’s liquidity crisis. According to official statistics, at least 23 million of Egypt’s 65 million people live under the poverty line. Last year, poor Egyptian watched their purchasing power sink due to [a] devaluation of the Egyptian pound...[and distracting] people while the government introduces additional sale taxes, despite private sector complaints about a severe drop in sales. (2001)

Further, the author goes on to explain how the *heavily-covered* case resembled a similar 1997 case where 78 teenagers were arrested for allegedly forming a “Satanic” cult” (Bahgat, 2001). The press did not seem to learn their lesson while being criticized for exposing the names and picture of the teenagers arrested, it did again with the 52 Queen Boat defendants, with some even being displayed on the front cover of newspapers (Bahgat, 2001).

It is clear here that the Egyptian media easily ignore and is not reprimanded by the state or the public for not following laws that restrict them from doing these kinds of reporting. If questioned, Massad (2002) argued, the state validated its practice by comparing themselves to the US’s implementation of the PATRIOT Act. As long as these practices were geared towards the right target, the “bad (gay) guys,” then the rest of the public need not worry. As stated in the article, Press Law 96/1996 and the Code of Ethics issued by the Egyptian Journalists’ Syndicate prohibits the publishing of any details concerning an ongoing investigation or trial (Bahgat, 2001). However, this was evidently ignored, and the state set no limits to what the press could

report (Bahgat, 2001). Furthermore, as Bahgat states, the relatives of the defendants did not stay silent, accusing the press of fabricating the whole story, which in part, at least making in regards of making it an exaggerated hot scandal, they were right. It is important to note that the state applies the law onto the press when it sees fit to its benefit.

The “Gay-wedding” Video

While the Queen Boat raid became the most conspicuous LGBTQ crackdown under Mubarak’s regime, it was not particular to this regime. After, the 2011 Egyptian revolution, the LGBTQ Egyptian crackdown proceeded under Al-Sisi’s presidential term. In “The Trap: Punishing Sexual Difference in Egypt,” report, sponsored by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), shows a four-year study spanning from October 2001 to November 2017 was conducted on how the LGBTQ crackdown had escalated in this time frame.

Under Al-Sisi, two significant anti-LGBTQ cases occurred at the initiation of his term. The first was the “gay wedding” of September 2014. This was a case in which a video of a “gay wedding” on the Nile was uploaded onto YouTube and eventually went viral. The short clip showed a group of men celebrating what appeared to be a wedding between two men, exchanging rings and kissing each other on the cheek (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.19). It reached the hands of “TV presenter, Tamer Amin, who aired parts of the video and called for the police to arrest those who appeared in the video because it advertised debauchery and vice” (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.19). All eight men who were featured in the video were “captured and charged with debauchery, incitement of debauchery, and publicizing materials that offend public decency and publishing a video that invites debauchery” (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.20).

Contrary to the Morality Police’s public statement on how they captured the eight men, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) interviewed a mutual friend of those arrested

and stated that the police's statement was far from the truth. In reality, instead of identifying all of them through a DVD-copy of the video as stated by the police, the police used their malicious common "snowball" method. The police arbitrarily arrested random, presumably gay men in Tahrir Square, blackmailing them until one finally led them to one of the men featured in the video, which then led to arresting them all (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.19).

Keep in mind that the only leading evidence they had on these eight men were their presences to a "gay wedding," no practice of habitual debauchery—nothing further. However, just like the Cairo 52 case, the prosecution subjected the eight men to humiliating anal examinations, which at this point was well established and conventionally condemned by the UN, under the committee of torture (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.31). Likewise to the Queen Boat trials, while initially being charged with multiple charges, most could not logically stick—in this case, the *practice* of habitual debauchery. Therefore the court could only find them culprit of *publicizing* and *advertising* debauchery, sentencing them to a year in prison (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.20).

While the defendants were sentenced to a year in prison, a majority of the press had already stopped reporting on the case. Many human rights groups found that the media tend to focus and densely cover LGBTQ crackdown cases only in the preliminary stages. Reporting heavily only until the defendants face trial and concocting misleading headlines implicating that the men were arrested because of their sexuality, instead of explaining the actual charges of *fujur*. The state benefits from this because it side-tracks the public, misinforming them to believe not only that homosexuality is illegal in Egypt, but also the extent of the "severity" of the "crime." The media focusing more on how the police caught these "deviants" instead of the sentences they could serve, or the fact that it is only a misdemeanor not felony helps preserve

praise for the state as the guardians of morality and culture. This encompasses a homonationalist attitude that Egyptian society is monolithic in culture and religion, when in fact, it is very diverse like any other nation. As a result, further containment and restored faith in the government, regardless of its shortfalls, is accomplished with this “reverse-pinkwashing” strategy.

The Ramses Bathhouse Case

The third significant case of the 2014 LGBTQ crackdown was the *Bab al-Bahr* bathhouse case. As with the previous example, the media played a role in scandalizing the case. In December 2017, four years after the Bathhouse raid, Egyptian TV personality Mona Iraqi posted on her program’s Facebook page her *unapologetic*-role in this case. Unlike Amin’s association with the “gay wedding” case, Iraqi was at the scene, reporting as the raid was in process.

In December 2014, the *Bab al-Bahr* Bathhouse in Ramses, a homosocial public place frequented by men, was raided (Abdel Hamid, 2017). What made this extremely humiliating for those arrested was that the morality police sent fifteen officers—as if a violent encounter was expected—accompanied by Mona Iraqi, who recorded the half-naked men in towels and verbally harassing them (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.20). The significance of this case was the extent to which the state allowed the press to go. This case took Egypt’s “reverse-pinkwashing” moral panics to another level. Not only were reports available to recap the raid, but actual footage was accessible to the general public. The recording showed Mona Iraqi narrating the raid and assaulting the men verbally, degrading them as “sexual deviants” (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.20).

In total twenty-six men were taken into custody, which included twenty-one visitors and five owners and staff. As they awaited trial, they were tortured and, as is routine for these crackdowns, forced to go through anal examinations (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.21). The visitors were charged with “practicing for-profit debauchery” or male-prostitution, and the owners and

staff were charged with “organizing events for debauchery” (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.20-21). The Vice Squad tried to make a case, stating that through one of their confidential informants they received information that *Bab al-Bahr* was known to be a place where men go to pay for sex with other men (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.20). So, with this information, they decided to raid the bathhouse. Once the raid initiated, as one officer states, they discovered an ongoing orgy. The officer paired each of the visitors, however with an odd number, he deemed three of them of having a threesome (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.22). The defense lawyer argued that the officer’s statement was ridiculous and illogical, specifically when it came to the pairing. The court agreed and acquitted the men, stating that it was unreasonable to assume the “pairs” proceeded in practicing “debauchery,” giving the officer enough time to decipher each pair in detail (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.22).

Moreover, while the Bathhouse men served no time, unfortunately, this was not the end of the LGBTQ crackdown under Al-Sisi, as anti-LGBTQ sentiment and targets of the Egyptian queer community continue until today. The Bathhouse raid is crucial because again it showed how much “freedom” the media is giving if it reports on issues the state *wants* it to focus on. Egypt is conventionally known as a threat to media freedom (RSF, 2017). Especially under Al-Sisi, draconian legislation targeting the media—restrictions such as obligating journalists to report on terrorism based only on official versions of the attacks, and prohibition of accessing the Sinai region by reporters and human rights defenders—all hinder media freedom (RSF, 2017). However, the bathhouse raid, and most importantly, Mona Iraqi’s role in the raid, proves the state’s hypocrisy. The fact that Iraqi was allowed to *physically* accompany and record the vice squad’s raid on half-naked men without *consent* is extraordinary. Unsurprisingly, Iraqi received no condemnation or consequences from the state. This is because the state benefitted from her

report. However, she did receive criticism from the media figures and other non-state actors (Abdel Hamid, 2017 p. 48). Her defense, however, was that she did this for the safety of the men, protecting them from exposure to HIV (Abdel Hamid, 2017, p.48). This claim brought questionable nuance to the justification of these raids as “HIV-prevention.” Furthermore, this *moral panic* instigated by a pro-state media figure served the state’s “reserve-pinkwashing” strategy now not only set them as the guardian of Egyptian moral, culture, religion, gender and sexuality, but health too. This new pretext helped overlook all the human rights and civil violations that the raid victims faced.

The Rainbow Flag Crackdown

Fast-forward to the end of October 2017, where Egypt, once again, did not fail to make international headlines with its LGBTQ crackdown, this time concertgoers were the *targets*. As Egyptian feminist and activist Mona Eltahawy documents in her *NY Times* article, “Why is the Egyptian Government So Afraid of a Rainbow Flag?” waves of arrest proceeded September 22, 2017, following a Mashrou' Leila concert. This Lebanese indie-rock band known for its queer music content, an openly-gay lead singer Hamed Sinno performed in Cairo (Eltahawy, 2017). Around 30,000 people attended the concert and pictures of concertgoers waving the rainbow (LGBTQ solidarity) flag were posted on social media (Davis, 2017). As seen from their previous roles in the crackdown, the Egyptian pro-state media got a hold of the pictures, reported on it, and *instigated* the government to find and arrest these “society-destabilizers” (Davis, 2017). There were *no* arrests on the day of the concert.

Instead, the Cairo Morality police used its ongoing entrapment operations on LGBTQ men until they captured a concertgoer. This young man was entrapped into thinking he was going on a date with a man he met through a gay dating app. However, the date was an

undercover cop. The young man was arrested, rushed through a trial with charges of “incitement and practice of debauchery,” and “sentenced to six years in prison and six years for probation” (Ghoshal, 2018, p.24). This turned out to be his fate regardless of no evidence that he was a “flag-waver” (Ghoshal, 2018, p.24). Through the same tactic and identification of concertgoers online posted pictures, in a matter of a month, 65 people were arrested for waving the rainbow flag at the concert (Ghoshal, 2018, p.25).

Interestingly but unfortunately, one of the 20 of the 65 detained who were pinned charges was a *woman*, Sara Hagazy. She along with others faced a more severe charge of “membership to an illegal organization” on top of “incitement of debauchery” (Davis, 2017; Arraf, 2018). Ironically, Egypt’s Islamist opposition is usually charged with the same former violation. This was similar to the charges the state tried to prosecute the Cairo 52 for, back in 2001. After, months of torture, sexual harassment, and anal examinations, some defendants, like Hagazy who was facing a maximum of a fifteen years sentence, was released (Arraf, 2018). However, the trauma that these survivors faced is inexcusable. Furthermore, the charges placed on Hagazy shows that the *debauchery* pretext was no longer aimed at men only.

The “rainbow-flag” raid is the most malicious form of “reverse-pinkwashing” conducted by the state to scapegoat its LGBTQ communities. As the details of the case disseminated throughout the nation, the state applied rigorous provisions to censor the media. Although, until now one can see how the media is to blame for instigating the raids, 2017 has shown that some media outlets have expanded their platform for LGBTQ activism (Ghoshal, 2018, p.2). Therefore, to contain this, the media regulatory body prohibited any pro-LGBTQ reporting, in addition to making it harder for foreign performers to obtain a permit (Davis, 2017). Eltahawy points out, how with there are obviously more crucial issues like the October 21st militant attack

that killed 59 police officers, yet Al-Sis's government wants to shift the public's focus on another major LGBTQ crackdown instead (2017). This is all part of the Al-Sisi's hidden agenda, the activist claims. According to Eltahawy, this is not just about a distraction from Egypt's crucial internal turmoil such as, "disastrous economic austerity policies, the insurgency in Sinai, [and] 60,000 political prisoners" but essentially the "conflation of security threat and a moral panic" (2017). Eltahawy's argument can be linked to Pratt's argument of the state policing not just conventional security threats, like terrorism, but also morality threats, which are depicted as a bigger threat because it "infects" the "normal" heteronormative body and sexuality.

Homonormativity, Neoliberalism, and the Four raids

"The Queen Boat Case in Egypt: Sexuality, National Security, and State Sovereignty," Nicola Pratt (2007), connects the Queen Boat raid to Egypt's *national security* rhetoric on domestic and foreign policy. This rhetoric can be applied to all the raids because each case opened an opportunity for the state to "'perform' a discourse of national security through which national sovereignty was (re)produced and political order was maintained" (2007, p.129). Furthermore, the persecution of the Cairo 52 set a new contemporary and public-supported precedent for post-9/11 Egypt. After this raid, the Egyptian government reserved the right to police the (*private*) gender and sexuality of its natives to conform to heterosexual and cisgender norms (Pratt, 2007, p.129).

Collectively, all the raids described here were conducted when Egypt was experiencing severe economic difficulties affecting the socioeconomic status of the majority in a myriad of ways. Drawing from Pratt's research, the crackdowns were conducted to reestablish a homonormative and patriarchal society. Post-independence Egypt opened the *public sphere* for Egyptian women, specifically in the work field. However, when unemployment is on the rise, for

men, research has shown that poverty tends to make them feel *emasculated* (Pratt, 2007, p.136). Therefore, the state aims to promulgate that regardless of being in a post-revolution Egypt, a woman's role is to be *dependent, domestic* and *feminine*, while the man's role is to be *independent, breadwinner*, and *masculine*—LGBTQ identities and lifestyles disrupted this for the state. So, according to the state, it is not that homosexuality or non-cisgender is an *Egyptian man's* genuine truth, rather a phase. A phase caused by feelings of emasculation from “socioeconomic instability.” Thus, the state's crackdown on these people acts as a service, they argue, to save them from this “emasculated” they are experiencing along with hindering its diffusion to the youth.

The privatization of the public institutions through neoliberal economic reforms in Egypt caused the increase in unemployment and consequently also meant a limitation on social welfare (Pratt, 2007, p.135). Therefore, state surveillance and policing of non-heteronormative men seemed a suitable way to support the political rhetoric that hegemonic patriarchal-households were in danger. Heteronormativity inherently places women dependent on men. As argued by Lisa Duggan (2012), marriage is promoted by the state because it takes responsibility for the social welfare of its people, mainly women, out of its hands for the most part. In order for this to happen *employed* men must want their spouse to be women since it is the only form of marriage lawfully allowed. While the government fails to improve the employment issue, it opts to campaign on the latter issue with its “reverse-pinkwashing” tactics. So if need be, moral panics, like the “gay wedding” video raid and the bathhouse raid will be used to install fear in communities and “closest” these different sexualities and genders. Also, what better way to validate these ideas than aligning them with religion, Islam, therefore see the success of “reverse-

pinkwashing.” Essentially conflation with “Egyptian-Muslim” masculinity and heteronormativity as the only possible status quo.

By now the Egyptian government, with help from the national media, is a master at making LGBTQ crackdowns into moral panics. It is strategic knowledge passed down by former regimes and embedded in Egyptian history. Periodic “morality crusades” or LGBTQ crackdowns are the key to Al-Sis’s regime to contain conservative Islamist dissent. Moreover, once again, another Egyptian regime has spruced up homophobic and transphobic moral panics as a political tool in order to maintain societal approval and control along with increasing legitimacy as a strong *heteronormative* regime. 65 people being arrested and at least 20 receiving prison sentences *should* be an outstanding rate for a country that does not *explicitly* have laws in place that make queer identities illegal (Eltahawy, 2017). Dalia Abdel Hamid’s (2017) report finds that,

In the period from October 2013 to March 2017, the total number of people arrested and prosecuted in such [debauchery] cases has reached 232 people- and average of 66 per year- a figure far exceeding the figure of 189 individuals, with an average of 14 people per year in the 13 years prior to the start of the crackdown (2000-2013). (p.6)

Continuing we will see how this might change, and make the existence and lives of LGBTQ Egyptians worst.

Chapter Conclusion

In contrast to the introduction and beginning chapter of this thesis, where several post-colonial countries have eradicated their colonial-influenced anti-homosexuality laws, Egypt’s latest Rainbow flag crackdown has fueled its legislators to do the quite opposite. The Alliance of Queer Egyptian Organization gives a recent and crucial update on what could possibly put into

question the future of LGBTQ Egyptian communities and Egyptian LGBTQ rights struggle at stake. Gathered from the organization's research, Reyad Abdulsatter Hassan is a parliament member belonging to the Free Egyptian political party. This is a political party that allegedly supports democratic principles, freedom of expression, and believes in *secular* politics (AQEO, 2017, p.2). However, on October 25, 2017, Hassan "proposed a new law to the Speaker of the House Ali Adel Aal Sayyed to criminalize homosexual relationships, incitement of homosexual relationships, advertising for homosexual parties or gatherings, also...went extreme criminalizing carrying symbols or signs of homosexuality" (AQEO, 2017, p. 2). Furthermore, this could mean that debauchery laws would no longer be necessary to target LGBTQ Egyptians, as this new law directly criminalizes their identities, practices, and expression. Additionally, any international doubt that Egypt formally criminalizes homosexuality and trans identities, since both are commonly conflated, would be put to rest if this law passes. As the overview states,

The Egyptian Party has 65 MPs, which is the largest number of party representatives in the Egyptian Parliament (11%). This reflects the possibility of passing the law... according to the new proposal draft 67 parliament members already signed (11%), giving that if (10%) of the members of the House presented a bill it will be referred to a specialized committee of the House to study and submit a report it to the House vote, according to the Egyptian constitution. (2017, p.3)

Conferring from this report the chances of this proposed law passing is significant; however, it is unconstitutional under the current 2014 Egyptian constitution and in violation of the international conventions ratified by Egypt (AQEO, 2017, p.3). The AQEO further explains how this proposed legislation would be in direct conflict with articles 53, 57, and 65 of the constitution,

which assures that all citizens are equal under the law, protects from discrimination and secures freedom of thought or opinion (2017, p.3).

Moreover, Egypt ratified the 1967 International Convent on Civil and Political Rights (AQEO, 2017). Therefore, not only would this law conflict domestically but it would also clash with international agreements, that Egypt is already infamously known for with its LGBTQ crackdown. However, according to ILGA's 2017 State-sponsored homophobia report, as a UN-member state Egypt, as well as all members, must go through what is called a Universal Period Review (UPR). This review is conducted in order to evaluate each country's human rights progress, providing recommendations where needed. While in theory, the UPR seems like an efficient tool for checks-and-balances, many of the MENA region countries reject, posing religious and cultural reservations, and or do the minimal in response to this review, referring to it as a "Western imposition." Furthermore, for Egypt, by not abiding by UN-rights norms, it further shows its commitment and validation to the "Arab-Muslim" religion and culture and practicing its reverse form of pinkwashing and rejection to homonationalism.

Hilary King applies Puar's notion of homonationalism and uses it to explain how the international human rights for LGBTQ rights is manipulated by its leaders, like the US government, to retain "Western" hegemony and disseminate neoliberalist ideals onto the so-called "backwards" region (2014). In essence, while this struggle started with good intentions, the Western-led movement has failed by reductively defining the LGBTQ communities and anti-LGBTQ rights nations as monoliths. This is also used by Egypt's, as one of the leaders of the anti-LGBTQ rights movement, counterargument deeming *all* LGBTQ rights supporters (activists, organizations, states) as Westernized neo-imperialists incompatible with their said homogenous "Arab-Muslim" culture.

The hegemonically-mainstream arguments both sides of the international LGBTQ rights binary (pro/anti) use to condemn one another is what is impeding the progression of a post-LGBTQ rights world. In a world where *wealth* and *power* are the top priorities for most, if not all, heads of governments, the preservation of human rights comes secondary. The paradox is that neoliberalism is now a well-established international trend that has taken campaigns like the LGBTQ rights as a mask. It is a mask, and not a genuine ally because for neoliberalism to succeed it most exploit and marginalize others for profit (King, 2014).

This is what the international human rights struggle has come to and moreover, which is why Egypt's LGBTQ crackdown has continued with no sufficiently-impactful condemnation by the international community. These four described cases show that, domestically, the fujur decree has, in fact, taken on a life of its own. The progression in severity of each case shows how the state is desensitizing itself from international criticism. Al-Sisi's regime has realized the low-risk they encounter with maintaining alliances with world powers that "promote" LGBTQ human rights, regardless of its crackdowns. This dynamic questions the prioritization of human rights in international state relations. The following chapter will elaborate further on this phenomenon.

CHAPTER THREE: INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS, LGBTQ NGOS (DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN), AND NEOLIBERALIST-IR'S ROLE?

As discussed in the previous chapters, sexuality and gender rights are denounced by the state of Egypt because of the presumed incompatibility with religion, culture, and society. The Muslim-majority state asserts that UN conventions and International standards (i.e. LGBTQ rights) were created and normalized under a “Western” context only not “Arab-Muslim.” However, human rights research, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ (UDHR) diverse drafting committee, proves otherwise (Tax, 2011). This politicized cultural relativist rhetoric is the key tool the state uses to impede the progression of LGBTQ rights.

This complex phenomenon cannot be solely blamed on Egypt’s domestic policy. The previous chapter focused on Egypt’s *domestic policy* on their LGBTQ-rights issue. This chapter will focus on the state’s international UN commitments, transnational alliances, and relations with domestic and international human rights NGOs. The first two factors interconnect and show how the lack of enforcement and rather focus on neoliberalist principles, trade relations, and terrorist-combat has overshadowed the significance of enforcing LGBTQ human rights. As for LGBTQ and rights-based groups’ relation to the state, their mission and protentional for intersectional collaborations and hindered and side-tracked by international relations and government agendas. Therefore, this chapter will show how Egypt’s *international policy* also contributes to the lack of domestic LGBTQ rights progression.

International Standards and Cultural Relativism

The conclusion of the Second World War led to the creation of the United Nations. While it was founded by imperial regimes, the United Nations was unique in that for the first time imperial/colonial states and post-colonial states could all gather under this new venue to discuss

issues, essentially as equals. However, the UN is just a venue; it is symbolic. The importance the UN is giving relies on the faith in which its member states allocates it. In a contemporary context, the United Nations, which symbolizes unity and commitment to human rights, development, and peace and security has been used for neoliberal goals (OHCHR, 2018).

Post-colonial countries, like Egypt, have criticized the UN goals and accords. The idea that there is such a thing as *universal* standards in regards to human rights has been contested widely in the MENA region. Part of the reason argued vocally by Egypt (as a Muslim-majority state), but just as harmful by self-proclaimed human rights advocates (NGOs or states) is a “cultural relativist” perspective. Cultural relativists deem international standards as “Western”—authored and imported, therefore incongruous to non-Western (or Judeo-Christian) societies (Mayer, 1996). However, research has discredited this perspective.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) is the symbolic foundation for the UN. However, “non-Westernized” countries like Egypt, do not adhere to many of its standards, arguing that it was tailored only form Western societies’ “norms.” It is a common misconception that Eleanor Roosevelt was the *sole* author of the UDHR. Roosevelt was the chair of the UDHR-drafting committee, nevertheless, there were other “non-Western” members and delegates that contributed to the drafting (Tax, 2011). Drafters such as Begum Ikramullah of Pakistan and Ricardo Alfaro (former president of Panama), contributed significantly to the declaration (Tax, 2011). Two of the most *important* drafters, according to Meredith Tax, were Hansa Mehta of India and Charles Malik of Lebanon (*an Arab/Muslim-Majority state*) (2011). With the exception of Roosevelt, all these drafters represented non-Western, post-colonial states. So one can argue that this declaration encompassed the essence of formally-colonized states, more than that of imperial powers. Additionally, Susan Waltz shows that Roosevelt, “supported

neither the text nor the substantive ideas that shaped the UDHR” (Tax, 2011). Perhaps because if fully enforced and applied universally, *neo-imperialism* and later what would link to *neoliberalism* would have not been possible under the framework of the UDHR. Currently, global superpowers like the United States, UK, Germany, and France dominate the international venue, however, the treaties and declaration themselves are neither molded solely by or for “Western” societies. Therefore, arguments to oppose “Westernized” UN standards, as done by Egypt, fall short.

Moreover, although there were initial objections to some of the articles within the UDHR, it was ultimately approved on by a majority of UN-member states. Most notably, Egypt’s Wahid Rifaat, accepted the language of marriage under Article 16 of the UDHR, noting that “marriage limitations based on race (as in the US) were more shocking to his country than limitations based on religion or nationality” (Tax, 2011). The UDHR along with other treaties like the 1966 International Convent on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) were some of the main international treaties Egypt ratified and committed to the UN it would follow. Because, as Andrew Clapham states, regardless of the many different definitions that “human rights” can be interpreted as, “the point is that human rights may serve to protect people from the tyranny of the majority” (2015, p.4).

Egypt committed to accept and implement these international standards in the twentieth century; however, it along with other Muslim-majority states known as the Organization of Islamic States, or now the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), posed *reservations* towards various articles from various treaties (Mayer, 1996, p.22). This was validated under a cultural relativist framework and in the name of “preserving” Islamic principles and Arab culture

against international pressure (Mayer, 1996). While a cultural relativist viewpoint is necessary when universal intentions are imperial, assuming, disruptive and imposing on the holistic majority of a state, Ann Elizabeth Mayer rather refers to the reservations committed by Egypt and the OIC as “Islamic Particularism” (1996, p.22). In particular, she uses CEDAW to reveal the paradox these reservations pose. Reservations on international treaties are permitted, “but the reservations are not supposed to be incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty or convention involved” (Mayer, 1996, p.24). Furthermore, the main objective of CEDAW is to “free women from systematic subordination because of sex” (Mayer, 1996, p.24). Rights advocates, feminist groups, and member-states have disapproved of countries like Egypt, for their reservations incompatibility with international treaties (Mayer, 1996, p.24). However, attempts to formally challenge these reservations at the UN-level are shut down with fear” to be depicted as “anti-Islamic” and incentive to cultural “norms.” The misguided cultural relativist viewpoint makes this possible.

The treaty-reservation controversy occurred right before the start the of the twenty-first century. This was a time when even now-deemed “progressive” countries like Belgium and Canada posed reservations on CEDAW (Mayer, 1996, p.25). Thus, women’s rights (mainly Western white middle-class) struggled to have their rights normalized under international standards. Consequently, the struggle for LGBTQ rights was nowhere near reaching an international platform yet. The UN’s accession “to the cultural relativist position on women’s rights in the Middle East, allowing parties to CEDAW to invoke Islam and their culture as the defense for their noncompliance with the terms of the convention,” became a historical *precedent* that later would impact the *effectiveness* of international standards in two significant ways (Mayer, 1996, p.25).

From Mayer's research, the irony of the cultural relativist argument is evident. While this approach argues that societies that are different from one another (ethnically, culturally, religiously, etc.) do not have the right to condemn each other's practices, in this case, the Global North seems to imply that "non-Western cultures are monolithic and immutable" (Mayer, 1996, p.26). The "Westernized" UN's tolerance of Muslim-majority nations' reservations, reproduces an orientalist and homonationalist viewpoint. Considering only diverse "Western" societies capability for adaptation and change for evolving progressive international standards like LGBTQ rights. While, on the other hand, the same cannot be expected from "Arab-Muslim" countries because they are *monolithically* religiously-conservative, rigid, and static societies. This argument is used to support the "War Against Terror" under the pretext of the (White) savior complex and homonationalism for the human rights of women and LGBTQ communities in these regions. While at the conclusion of the twentieth century, Global North countries appeased OIC countries' agreement reservations under the pretext of cultural relativism, further allowing the continuing of human rights oppression of women, LGBTQ communities, et cetera. Paradoxically, however, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the "progressive" North (specifically the United States) demonized these reservations to conveniently gather support for the "War on Terror."

This approach emphasizes that states should not be obliged to adopt customs and standards that are incompatible with their "traditions" or are "alien." While the first argument focuses on imperial states' viewpoint, this one focuses on that of the post-colonial state. If this orientalist approach really wants to oblige by what it preaches then "imported" innovations like the formation of a nation-state can be argued to be incompatible with non-Western countries. Historically, Mayer states, "Middle Eastern cultures have not been monolithic creations imposed

from above by the nation-state (the nation-state being a modern innovation recently borrowed from the West)” (1996, p.28). Under this context, historically, state-governments had no voice in forming pre-colonial MENA cultures, because this entity did not exist the way it does today. In fact, it was actually men and women within civil society that deciphered what consisted of Arab-Muslim cultures. Ultimately, there is no all-encompassing agreement on what pertains to Muslim-Arab culture and what does not. Post-colonial Egyptian regimes have argued to be the leading voice and defender of Egypt’s societal values, in response to international standards. This is unprecedented, however, because they constantly fail to be representative of popular opinion. Furthermore, when the state claims that Egypt’s culture does not accept non-heteronormative identities then it is the government’s voice that is unwanted, because who decides what is accepted in Egyptian society is its holistic population, not an arbitrary state.

Concluding from Mayer’s work, culture is ever evolving and changing with time. A nation-state that approaches human rights with a cultural relativist perspective falls under the stereotypical perception of Muslim-Arab culture and society as innately static. Nevertheless, contemporary international headlines on the human rights of LGBTQ communities, Egypt still abides by a cultural relativist viewpoint. A similar framework that was used to justify their reservation on the progression of women’s human rights, is being used by the Muslim-majority UN-member state to betray international standards and advancements of LGBTQ human rights. Instead, Egypt has risen as *the* Arab/Muslim international voice against LGBTQ human rights.

The Effects on NGOs (Domestic and Foreign)

Arguably, a little less than a decade ago research on NGOs, in particular, LGBTQ, or even just gay/lesbian, were scarce. Moreover, when focusing on the Arab (Muslim) regional (MENA) NGOs, locating and researching them was close to impossible. This is because before

the twenty-first century a public discourse on non-normative sexualities and genders were taboo and repressed by both state and non-state (Islamist) actors. It was in the best interest of these organizations to stay under the radar, especially in Egypt. While it is still be considered “deviant” to discuss LGBTQ rights in public platforms at times, with consistent government surveillance and targeting of activists, situations have improved for domestic LGBTQ rights groups in the MENA region as a whole, post-“Arab (African) Springs.”

To work and promote LGBTQ rights and even women’s rights is advocating for *secular* spaces and viewpoints. LGBTQ rights, as referred to in the previous section of this chapter is “incompatible and inauthentic” to Egypt’s Muslim-Arab culture. Scholar-activist, Anissa Helie, accurately shows how for non-heteronormative women,

Seek[ing] greater political expression and who advocate for a broad range of rights for all women often face baiting specifically about their identities, as they face persistent allegations designed to undermine their reputation or political effectiveness. Women who don’t have protection of husbands, families, or certain socio-economic status are exposed for criticism. They are told as not good Muslims...not good women...or called foreign agents of the West. (Rothschild, Long, & Fried, 2005, p.17)

Helie undertakes an intersectional lens, emphasizing the fact that women, in particular, non-heteronormative ones, face greater marginality not only outside their networks but inside as well.

Attacking an activist’s identity and characteristics or “lesbian-baiting” (for self-identified women), as Rothschild et al. (2005) refers to it, is a tactical strategy to deceive the Egyptian majority’s perception of these communities through religion and gender norms. It should come as no surprise that “women’s sexuality is regulated in societies and cultures all over the world” (Rothschild et al., 2005, p.31). I argue that when women and non-heteronormative men

collectively defy and challenge heteronormative standards, it is a sign for undemocratic states like Egypt, that they are “losing” control over their population. In Egypt, along with every society in the world, the government, religion, the media, and families or kinship are what regulate women’s sexuality (Rothschild et al., 2005, p.31). All these powers are amplified, by state-influence, against human rights advocates. Hence, this is why it is feasible for negative perceptions of NGOs and its members to exist.

On the other hand, what is often ignored or overlooked is the marginalization experienced by LGBTQ rights advocates under the rights groups’ umbrella. One can refer back to the Western second wave of feminism era when women’s rights groups were *explicitly* notorious for its member exclusivity. bell hooks avers, that during the second way of feminism (or women’s lib), many rejected the term “feminism” because it was conflated with lesbianism (hooks, 2015, p.25). Yes, the second wave is now decades past, and Western-dominated global feminism has become more inclusive, yet this former statement is still valid. Therefore, an intersectional framework in the “Westernized” human rights sphere is yet to be achieved.

Egyptian LGBTQ rights groups experienced and continue to experience similar marginalization. Firstly, it is important to clear up any confusion, while local rights groups were often deemed “Westernized,” they did have a significant presence in the country. However, under the context of the Queen Boat raid at the turn of the century, prominent human rights groups refused to speak up for LGBTQ rights. Hence, this is why they (NGOs) were omitted from dominate voices revolving the LGBTQ crackdown cases (besides the Rainbow Flag case) in the previous chapter. In particular, the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights’ (EOHR) secretary general publicized that he would not defend the Cairo 52, because of his homophobic sentiment (Bahgat, 2001). That an organization dedicated to human rights, would refuse to speak

up for a group whose human rights were blatantly violated under, not just international standards, but local as well, should come as a surprise. However, as a former member, Hossam Bahgat stated, it was in the best interest of the organization to “go with the flow” of the state.

Essentially, Bahgat points out that the EOHR was put in an awkward position. As he describes,

Activists (Egyptian) felt bound to take a stand, especially after international groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch issued statements condemning the Queen Boat arrests. But instead of playing the vanguard role in explaining the rights dimension of the case, most of them chose to go with the flow to avoid being attacked in the local press (2001).

What was even *more* alarming was that many rights advocates even vocalized their homophobic views to the press.

This situation was fundamental to the *dehumanization* of the LGBTQ communities within Egypt and the progression of their human rights. I argue this because it is one thing for civil-society outside the human rights network to discredit rights advocates’ stance. However, when its internal member-groups under the human rights sphere isolates and invalidates the human rights of LGBTQ communities it portrays them as unworthy of human rights. Basically, they are viewed to be as something *other* than human. Under this rhetoric, human rights are for *humans*, and at this point in time the rights community failed to uphold international standards for LGBTQ communities in Egypt.

Fortunately, to date, the situation has progressed for LGBTQ-oriented rights group in the MENA region, including Egypt. The 2011 revolution was crucial for the progression of Egyptian human rights in general. In particular, “the difference between the rainbow flag crackdown and the Queen Boat and Bathhouse crackdown was that activists were able to be more creative and

dynamic” (Ghoshal, 2018, p.2). A post-Arab Springs context opened opportunities to the LGBTQ communities, who prior to the “revolution” were stuck in the shadows. Many found motivation to participate *publicly* in LGBTQ rights activism and “for the first time left them with new tools for mobilization and alliance-building” (Ghoshal, 2018, p.14). Not only have human rights groups in Egypt become more inclusive, but even younger generations’ perception of gender and sexuality has shifted to a more progressive viewpoint as a result of the horrific sexual assault conducted during the 2011 revolution (Ghoshal, 2018, p.14). While circumstances under Al-Sisi are still dangerous and risky for LGBTQ activism, a post-Arab Spring context has given these rights groups hope for not only greater intersectional alliances but for a more progressive and egalitarian Egypt as a whole.

As stated in current research by the HRW, the *key* ingredient for human rights groups to promote progress in their work and in their home is by forming alliances. In the case of LGBTQ rights, which are not so different from other rights focus, is the need for its alliances and themselves to be *flexible*. MENA LGBTQ “activists across the region say that building alliances with feminist and human rights organizations do not happen spontaneously; it requires work and flexibility on all sides” (Ghoshal, 2018, p.36). This nuance is particular for LGBTQ rights groups because to be candid, regardless of coming from the “ West” (Judeo-Christian) or the “East” (Islamic & Judeo-Christian) or even “being” religious, *religion* has shaped most contemporary societies’ cultural beliefs and traditions. Moreover, the religious-conservative international agenda has made it part of its mission to contain the repression of gender and sexuality rights (Rothschild et al., 2005, p.51). Extreme conservative-Christian groups and states along with Islamist fundamentalist groups form a conventionally-unexpected alliance to suppress LGBTQ human rights, and intersectional human rights in general, in the international sphere (Helie,

2006). Therefore, the process of secularizing the internal-religious beliefs for some feminist and non-LGBTQ activists, along with also proceeding tolerance and patience by LGBTQ activists for those activists to come around requires flexibility. According to the HRW inclusion and visibility of regional LGBTQ rights group and support is increasing.

Furthermore, it is important to note that regardless of “Western” misconception, only recently intersectional work progress within the *mainstream* rights’ sphere is visible; local organizations in the MENA have wanted to do the same. Yet, elite international Western-dominated rights groups are part of the reason this progress has been hindered. According to Dr. El-Feki’s (2013) interview with Bahgat, now founder of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) (first Egyptian NGO to recognize LGBTQ rights), his main concern was how to contain the greater tolerance that the uprising (2011 Egyptian Revolution) seemed to bring to the LGBTQ community. Human rights became a major topic in Egypt during this time, with Western groups reaching out to Bahgat to work with him. However, as he points out, the majority of these groups’ main concern was “gay rights” (El-Feki, 2013, p.273). This for him, as an intersectional activist, would undermine the bigger picture he hoped for Egypt as a place where “recognizing and respecting personal freedom was across the board” (El-Feki, 2013, p.273). Moreover, on top of facing the challenges to do more intersectional work, regional and domestic rights groups within the Arab context wish to not be seen as one-dimensional internationally (Ghoshal, 2018, p. 2). They have more than “proven” (although, should not have to) that they are just as capable, and I argue even more progressive in their work as intersectional rights groups, which would never be expected to be done by Western groups who are “inherently progressive.”

It is crucial that the international community stop depicting these groups as incapable of advocating or understanding the concept for human rights, and instead focus more on what they can do to contribute to *their* agendas by holding their “developed” governments accountable for the hindrance of international progress. A HRW’s report conducted interviews with MENA LGBTQ activists showing their frustration with “one-dimensional international media coverage portraying the region as a black hole for LGBT rights. Such coverage fails to recognize the agency of LGBT activists from the region, or renders them completely invisible” (2018, p.2) even though LGBTQ activism and visibility increased after the 2011 revolution and effectively impacted young people’s thoughts on queer rights (Ghoshal, 2018, p.14). Additionally, unlike during the time of the Queen Boat case, human rights lawyers willing speak-up to defend LGBTQ people and advocate for the rights to privacy and decriminalization of LGBTQ-identities now (Ghoshal, 2018, p.26). This is all possible with the increasing visibility and platform given to Egyptian LGBTQ rights activists and groups in civil society.

Within recent contexts, more and more NGOs, specifically those in the Global North, attach their agendas in compliance with that of their home governments for economic stability and credibility (Long, 2017). However, as a Global North international LGBTQ rights activists himself, Long, emphasizes the need for right groups to “rediscover the language of anti-imperialism” because for years now rights-based NGOs have fallen prey to neoliberalist government agendas (2017). Along with this, Western LGBTQ-rights groups have a duty to retract themselves from the homonationalist and orientalist guise bestowed upon MENA rights groups to further support and acknowledge their agency.

International Relations and Neoliberalism’s Role

The “progressive” Global North like the United States, Germany, and France are depicted as neo-imperialist governments by post-colonial states like Egypt—while its (Global North) civil societies *uncritically* defend them as the watchdogs for holistic global human rights assurance. In fact, this phenomenon is more complex than mainstream awareness leads one to believe. Back home, both “LGBTQ human rights-warrior” states and “LGBTQ-rights neglecter” Egypt criticize each other for their lack of understanding of each other’s cultures, traditions, religions, and norms. However, relations amongst each other, in particular, the United States, have strengthened throughout the years. Egypt maintains a strong alliance with countries that claim to stand up for *universal* LGBTQ rights. This should raise critical questions.

This section concludes this chapter because it is *precisely* the role of Global North’s neoliberalist transnational relations with Egypt (and countries alike) that is the root for the continuous hinderance not just Egyptian but universal LGBTQ rights progression. To understand how the alliances are possible between countries with “opposing” ideologies a neoliberal context must be used. Neoliberalism started trending as *the* economic global principle towards the end of the Cold War. This ideology came hand-in-hand with globalization and governments such as the United States and Great Britain as its lead advocates.

Unlike his predecessor Nasser, after the 1973 war with Israel, Anwar Sadat became the first president to redirect Egyptian politics towards a more Western-friendly direction and winning the support of Egyptian elite and Western powers (Shehata, 2018). After his assassination, his successor, Hosni Mubarak, expanded and further institutionalized the (neo) liberalization and “Westernization” of the Egyptian regime (Shehata, 2018). As Shehata states,

Starting in the early 1990s, upon signing on to an economic reform and structural adjustment program with the IMF, the Mubarak regime undertook a privatization

program which led to a significant reduction in the size of the public sector and in the number of public sector employees...[he] also reduced government expenditures by reducing spending on essential social services such as education, healthcare, public transport, and housing as well as removing rent controls on agricultural land and on housing which had once protected the middle class. (2018)

These neoliberal policies ultimately steered civil society's increase in government dissatisfaction. In relation to LGBTQ politics, the dissatisfaction (fueled by Islamist fundamentalists) led to the modern state-sponsored LGBTQ crackdown initiated with the Queen Boat "moral panic" to deflect the population's attention from the government (as shown in chapter 2). While this tactic, possibly, deterred the Egyptian public's attention temporarily, ultimately, with lack of economic and social reform the 2011 collective revolution led to Mubarak's resignation (Shehata, 2018).

Egypt's neoliberal IMF agreement further expanded the struggling socioeconomic climate. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is a neoliberal international financial institution that is designed by and to benefit Global North governments and corporations financially, without holding accountability for the effects on vulnerable societies (i.e. Egypt) (Chomsky, 1999). According to Noam Chomsky, Global North superpowers like the United States and England, use their "power to bar independent development elsewhere" (1999, p.36). Therefore, for post-colonial states, like Egypt, their development is supposed to be "complementary" not "competitive" at the discretion of Global North superpower governments (Chomsky, 1999, p.36). Moreover, in a post-2011 revolution context, the Egyptian government now finds itself under the rule of a bureaucratic authoritarian government headed by Al-Sisi (Shehata, 2018). Al-Sisi's form of government appeals to Global North "democracies" because, in order for this type of

government to survive, it must “enjoy external support from transnational corporations and foreign powers that fear the rise of the lower classes” (Shehata, 2018). In 2016, after yet another severe social and economic crisis, Al-Sisi signed an agreement with the IMF, which is considered to be “the most ambitious attempt to date to dismantle the welfare state in Egypt” (Shehata, 2018).

While these international financial agreements are made to “aid” a state with financial struggles, it ultimately worsened situations for the general public, as the Egyptian pound devalued by more than half, which had been never seen before, and gasoline prices, utility bills and public transportation rose (Shehata, 2018). Consequently, due to this climate of public dissatisfaction that is now under Al-Sisi’s Egypt, we see the adoption from the previous regime’s tactic of scandalizing LGBTQ-crackdowns in order to maintain control over public opinions of the government. However, although the crackdowns persist, as seen in the previous section, the visibility, effectiveness, and mobilization of native LGBTQ-rights groups have progressed. Therefore, Al-Sisi’s administration is implementing more stern tactics to demobilize all oppositions like targeting civil society organizations with an *ironic* legislations that forbid them from receiving *foreign funding*. These foreign funds derive from the same nations that rely upon international financial agreements like that from the IMF. In essence, Al-Sisi argues that his government can receive foreign funding because it benefits both his relationship with foreign powers and cooperation and the Egyptian elite. However, Egyptian rights NGOs cannot receive foreign funding because it would be used for the progress of vulnerable communities within the Egyptian society and the general public as a whole, ultimately questioning his authority.

On the other hand, the role of countries where the “foreign funding” derives from must also be analyzed and held accountable as well. Taking a focus on the United States, since 2012

“the government spent \$41 million to promote LGBT rights globally and has supported LGBTQ causes and communities with a portion of \$700 million embarked for marginalized communities” (Deschamps & Singer, 2017, p.102). Funding might have decreased under incumbent President Trump due to his administration’s isolationist mission of “America First.” And, because of US’s budget cut of \$285 million to the 2018 UN budget (Lardreri, 2017). This cut was placed as a result of 120 nations condemning the Trump administration for asserting Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. The budget cut is both historic and should raise questions of the United States’ commitment for disseminating UN goals like universal human rights (specifically for non-heterosexuals). Moreover, while the United States has been one of the leading forces to advocate for global LGBTQ rights, the Trump administration has shed light on this paradoxical rhetoric.

The United Nations acting as the United States’ main forum to mold and try to export its (neoliberal) values and interests is a thing of the past (Chomsky, 1999, p.65). Since the expansion of global neoliberalism at the end of the twentieth century, international financial institutions—like the World Trade Organization, which Egypt is a member of—has become the new forum to “export American values” (Chomsky, 1999, p.65). Or in other words, secure US government and corporation financial profit. This trend persists today. Therefore, unlike mainstream knowledge leads us to believe, the Trump administration is not the first to deprioritize “global human rights,” rather has exposed the historic legacy of past administrations that have done the same.

The key difference between past administrations and the current US administration is implicitness over explicitness. Since the *1970s* the United States has had human-rights focused laws (Tate, 2011, p.340). The *Leahy law*, in particular, is a law that could support the United States argument of standing for global LGBTQ rights, if applied better. Under the Leahy Law,

Leahy vetting is a process through which the U.S. government vets foreign security forces nominated to receive assistance with funds appropriated in the Foreign Assistance Act or to the Department of Defense to ensure they have not committed gross human rights abuses (DOS, 2018).

Furthermore, if credible allegations find that certain units within the aided-state are guilty of human rights violation, US assistance must be withheld and can be resumed only when appropriate measures have been implemented to address the issues (DOS, 2018).

In theory, this law could be used to motivate and enforce LGBTQ-rights as a *priority* of the US onto Egypt, as it has become known as one of the most threatening environments for LGBTQ people. However, “since the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, the United States has provided Egypt with what now totals over \$40 million in military and \$30 billion in economic assistance...[to] further a strategic partnership and regional stability” (DOS, 2018). Egypt struggles with combating insurgents and terrorists, particularly in the Sinai region, however, both Al-Sisi and his Global North allies, like the US, have used this issue to overlook human rights issues. A congressionally mandated report by the US Department of State showed that Al-Sisi government blatantly suppressed fundamental freedoms in 2015 (expression, press, assembly and due process, etc.). It is safe to say that LGBTQ communities were some of the groups that were silenced and oppressed (HRW, 2015). However, “in March [2015] President Barack Obama resumed supplying military equipment to Egypt and announced that most military aid would continue, albeit with policy changes, to be implemented later, that would eliminate Egypt’s ability to buy on credit and more strictly define the uses of such aid” (HRW, 2015).

Conventionally, former President Obama was thought to be the US leading voice of LGBTQ egalitarianism with the hype over the “national legalization of same-sex marriage” under his

term. However, while his administration could have pushed for the implementation of Leahy vetting onto Egypt, the US government rather “often [signed off] national security waivers allowing funding to proceed despite Egypt’s human rights abuses” (Kadden, 2018).

As *progressive* human rights advocates argue, the way foreign governments can assist the development of LGBTQ rights in Egypt is by first stop overlooking the regime’s human rights abuses for “regional stability” and financial benefits, and instead, hold it accountable. In the case of the United States, legislation like the Leahy law can be used to hold Al-Sisi’s regime accountable not just on LGBTQ rights but all forms of intersectional human rights violations. In fact, although the Trump administration has become the leading voice of anti-LGBTQ progression domestically, in the summer of 2017 the government “withheld \$195 million aid to Egypt [for] its failed improvements on human rights record” (Kadden, 2018). While it is important to note that the funds were withheld with the likelihood of not targeting LGBTQ suppression but rather religious-groups suppression, as Vice Rresident Pence advocates. It is nonetheless, a step towards prioritizing holistic human rights in Egypt. Germany took notable steps as well. Towards the end of 2017, the German police canceled its counter-terrorism training session with the Egyptian Interior Ministry officers that included internet monitoring (Michalski, 2017). The German government supported their cancellation with the fear that the skills thought would be used to target other non-threatening groups, and Egypt using counter-terrorism as a pretext (Michalski, 2017). These other groups can be implied to include LGBTQ communities that have long been victims of cyber-entrapment at the hands of the Egyptian police (Abdel Hamid, 2017).

At the World Youth Forum in 2017, Al-Sisi expressed his idea of combatting terrorism as a human right and in fact he “and Egypt’s ruling elite seem to believe that terrorism cannot be

fought without crushing rights” (Magdi, 2017). While some incremental international actions have been taken to address Al-Sisi’s infamous human rights record, Egypt’s Western allies (France, US, and UK) seem to appease this political rhetoric (Magdi, 2017). Moreover, Amnesty International (AI) found video-evidence of Egypt using or intending to use US-made cluster bombs (2018). Cluster bombs are internationally banned because they are weapons that “inflict unimaginable suffering for years after” (AI, 2018). This would not be the first time that US-weapons were connected to Egyptian human rights violations. The US has been Egypt’s main arms supplier since the 1970s (AI, 2018). Furthermore, in 2017 and 2015 video evidence showed US-made bombs and fighter jets were used in air strikes that killed dozens of residents in the Sinai region (AI, 2018).

Additionally, France has also been criticized for its increase in arms deals with Egypt. Amnesty International acquired video, photo, and eyewitness evidence that French-made weapons were used against civilian protests. Most notably, French-made equipment was used to kill approximately 607 protestors and 8 police officers in the August 14, 2013 Rabaa al-Adawiya and Al-Nahda square massacre (Mada Masr, 2018). This protest, proceeded after the military coup, led by Al-Sisi, of the ouster of democratically-elected President Mohamed Morsi (Mada Masr, 2018). While the credible rights groups and even French officials have validated the claims of French-made weapons used for human rights violations, the French administrations since 2013 have denied these claims, and rather increasing their export of arms to Egypt to date (Mada Masr, 2018). This is proof of yet another “pro-LGBTQ” country from the Global North that prioritizes arms deals and economic profit over the human rights it claims to care for.

Chapter Conclusion

Global North nations are indirectly contributing to Egypt's human rights violations. While credible NGO-rights groups and government-agencies both domestic and foreign are shedding light on Egypt's human rights (specifically LGBTQ) atrocities and inaccuracies through research and evidence-gathering they are either being silenced, deflected, ignored or all. These findings can be used to refocus and remind both Global North nations and the Egyptian state of its international (i.e. UDHR) and domestic (i.e. US Leahy Law) commitment to the recognition and progress of *human rights for all*. However, in the current neoliberal international climate human rights are deprioritized in exchange for financial and geo- "stability," that neglects the well-being (socioeconomically) of civil societies *universally*. Moreover, while this is happening, vulnerable groups, such as Egyptian LGBTQ groups, are being stripped of their human rights as a political-rhetoric through state-sponsored crackdowns in order to distract the majority from the atrocities happening in the Sinai region. In what Long refers to the "age of scarcity" as the current climate, "exclusively moral arguments mean much less...[and] lives grow cheap, possessions precious" (2017). Queer necropolitics in hand with neoliberalism is becoming a significantly unchallenged norm at a time in which progress for LGBTQ communities, internationally, was said to be close. Indeed the international allies need to do more to contest this issue.

CONCLUSION

Incumbent President Al-Sisi's state policies on "security" and human rights, is reflecting the same patterns as his predecessor Mubarak and what ultimately led to his ousting (Magdi, 2017). What does this mean for LGBTQ and human rights in general? It is clear that the state of Egypt is on a path towards repeating a similar history of despotic leadership, however, far worse than the Mubarak era. In May 2017, the Al-Sisi administration enacted a repressive NGO law that further limited the operations civil society organizations, specifically targeting human rights groups (Najjar, 2017). An Aljazeera reporter stated that "it [the NGO Law] bans domestic and foreign groups from engaging in rights work or anything that can be said to harm national security, public order, public morals or public health" (Najjar, 2017). The new law adds obstacles for at least 47,000 NGOs, like LGBTQ rights groups, that already struggle in Egypt's monitored socio-political climate (Magdi, 2017). Not only that, but also they will be subjugated to state-administered security interventions and make it harder to receive foreign funding, with the creation of a new state agency, the National Authority for the Regulations of Non-Governmental Foreign Organizations (Magdi, 2017).

From a global standpoint, this affects non-Egyptian NGOs as well. In order to start operations in Egypt, "foreign NGOs will be required to pay up to \$16,500," in addition to undergoing a bureaucratic process of renewing permits continuously (Magdi, 2017). So, as of now, the state seems to be using all its power to suppress dissent, as rights groups are one of the state's biggest critics. To date, this new law makes a state-opposition platform, that LGBTQ human rights groups undertake, harder to prosper. Thus hindering rightful criticism to reach civil society and curtailing their right to a transparent government. In response to the current climate,

the Trump administration stated that it would “not put any pressure on Sisi to protect the rights of his citizens,” Sarah Yerkes of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Magdi, 2017).

As of November 2018, there have been at least 40 human rights advocates, lawyers, and political activists, some associated with the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms, arrested in less than a month (Aljazeera, 2018). Ironically, Islamists, like Aisha Khairat al-Shater daughter of a former Muslim Brotherhood leader, also fall under those that have been targeted and arrested by Al-Sisi’s government since his take over in 2013 (Aljazeera, 2018). While these two groups are ultimately those positioned against each other on LGBTQ rights, it is the government who keep them divided through religiously politicized LGBTQ crackdowns, blaming one another instead of the true culprit—the state. Nevertheless, part of civil society still supports Al-Sisi’s actions by reelecting him in March of 2018 under pretexts of his assurance of “security” for Egypt (Aljazeera, 2018). Therefore, for Egypt, as for many other societies, “security” for its population from threatening destabilizers (i.e. political terrorists, religious extremists, “Westernized immoral queers”) is more important than the assurance of human and civil rights.

Furthermore, if this is not enough proof of the *devaluation* of LGBTQ and human rights overall in Egypt’s domestic policies and actions, it is further motivated by its relation to the European Union. Aljazeera reporter Tafi Mhaka found that recently in a mid-September 2018 measure, led by the “racist far-right Italian government... is negotiating a deal with the Egyptian dictator to have his security forces up their policing of coastal waters and divert vessels carrying refugees to Egypt. In return...[for] financial support and high-profile visits from [EU] leaders” (2018). An EU deal with this despotic government further delegitimizes its moral authority it has over human rights. And with continuous efforts to limit and discredit rights groups’ dissent, the

chances of either state party to be held accountable or challenged for its efforts is slim. Not only that but if the “global state defenders of LGBTQ rights” are willing to overlook Egypt’s atrocious human rights record, then it is almost certain that Egypt’s LGBTQ communities can expect more state-sponsored crackdown in the future.

Lastly, as a “Western” LGBTQ rights supporter, my intentions with this thesis are to shed light not only on Egypt’s LGBTQ-rights issue and history but also how “Western” governments need to be held accountable for its participation in this phenomenon through colonialism, its “War on Terror,” and its neoliberal, neo-imperialist international relations with Egypt. Furthermore, not only is this thesis aimed at international human rights but I hope to have shown how it interlinks with domestic Western policies. World superpowers like the United States and the EU should not be the homonationalist-standard for LGBTQ rights progression when its domestic movements are yet to be fully inclusionary and egalitarian. Moreover, as there is yet to exist a “post-LGBTQ rights” or post-human rights society, no state should have the power to criticize another’s cultural or society as innately homophobic or transphobic, because these unreasonable fears *still* exist everywhere without exception. Rather, as I have shown here, historical references (i.e. colonial sodomy laws and politicized anti-West sentiments) should be considered when attempting to describe the current LGBTQ rights situations, like in Egypt, and universally learn from them to further progress the rights for this minority globally. With intersectional efforts *trending* first domestically than globally by rights groups and activists it is time for human rights to stop being absentee politics.

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