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Advocating for the Rights of Sexual Minorities within a Sectarian System: The Case of Postwar Lebanon

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ABSTRACT

Despite the tolerant attitude towards same sex desire and homoerotism in pre-colonial Arab/Islamic societies, postcolonial Arab countries, unanimously condemn homosexuality. It is argued that this rejection resulted from multilayered elements such as Western colonialism and the patriarchal foundations of religious societies. With respect to Lebanon, an additional element needs to be considered: its consociational political system. In Lebanon, it is believed that the only way to ensure peace and stability is to provide political and institutional representation to the sectarian communities under a sectarian power-sharing governing framework. This sectarian system, where politics and religion are intertwined, imposes a patriarchal model of life where the only acceptable standard or norm is heterosexuality, thus legitimizing the oppression of society's segments that do not subscribe to the patriarchal system. The blend of patriarchy and sectarianism marginalizes and discriminates against sexual minorities. This thesis shows how political sectarianism, in addition to a fragmented LGBTIQ+ community, the communitarian/minority discourse used by LGBTIQ+ NGOs and a penal code that criminalizes "unnatural-sex", all hinder the advancement of the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals. Given the low probability to find an alternative to the sectarian system, the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is obliged to navigate this system by implementing a number of strategies: moving away from identity politics, implementing an intersectional approach to include LGBTIQ+ issues in a broader social movement, and establishing alliances with political factions.

Keywords: Sectarianism, Postwar Lebanon, Gender, Human rights, Advocacy, Civil society, Homosexuality, LGBTIQ+, Identity politics, Intersectionality.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to shed light on how advocacy groups that focus on the rights of sexual minorities operate within the Lebanese sectarian context. Using two such groups as case studies, it examines their 1) origins and history, 2) the sectarian context within which they emerged, 3) the demands that they are pushing for, 4) the challenges they are facing and 5) the strategies they are required to deploy to navigate the Lebanese sectarian system. The two main groups that are chosen for the study are: 1) the Arab Foundation for Freedoms & Equality (AFE) and 2) the Middle East and North Africa Organization for Services, Advocacy, Integration & Capacity Building (MOSAIC).

A sectarian community is defined as an individual group structured along common elements - such as religion, cultural traditions, historical background, or perceptions - which separate it from other communities. Sectarianism is based on inherited beliefs against the 'other' and it turns diversity into conflict. However, sectarianism, as a general concept, can neither be generalized nor used to explain the several sectarian communities that exist in the world. For this reason, it is important, before moving forward with this research, to address, albeit briefly, the Lebanese sectarian political system. Political Sectarianism is defined by Maya Mikdashi as "a secular, modern, and temporal political system, based on Ottoman and French colonial technology of rule, that produces differentiated citizenship according to sex and sect, and protects elite interests (Political Sectarianism, 2014)."

Nevertheless, "sectarian communities are not politically monolithic actors and they generally hold multiple identities: they may equally be divided along class, religion, or ideological lines (Saouli, 2019)." A Lebanese Sunni, for instance, holds more than one identity, being simultaneously Sunni, Muslim, Arab, and Lebanese. Each of these identities could be politically lobbied or mobilized, and so is done when actors "draw together credible stories from available cultural materials, create we-they boundaries,

activate both stories and boundaries as a function of current political circumstances, and maneuver to suppress competing models (Tilly, 2006).” In Lebanon, “a confessional/sectarian power-sharing system allocates political and administrative functions to the major religious sects, assuring them political representation in the parliament, government and public institutions (Salloukh et al., 2015).” Under this consociational system, individuals are treated primarily based on their confessional identity, an identity that is believed to be imposed on them. Moreover, their political loyalty is “often directed to the political/religious elite rather than state institutions and symbols (Salloukh et al., 2015).”

It is argued that “Lebanese consociationalism is deployed instrumentally by sectarian/political elites bent on reproducing sectarian identities and obviating the emergence of alternative, trans-sectarian or non-sectarian modes of political mobilization (Nagle, 2017).” Moreover, institutions of the Lebanese state have been intentionally adapted “by the sectarian/political elite to reproduce sectarian subjects and modes of mobilization, resulting in immobilism and domestic and external contests (Salloukh et al., 2015).” As argued by Saouli (2019), “the country’s corporate consociational power-sharing system set the country in a political path which made its reversal or removal difficult, and Lebanese sectarian/political elites have worked to preserve it.” However, what maintain this sectarian system? Is it just because people are sectarian? Or is it also because the system provides benefits for those sectarian individuals? The system itself encourages people to become sectarian but, how it accommodates those who refuse to be defined by their sectarian identities, those who have been exposed to ideas that do not fit neatly this sectarian agenda? “Power-sharing is premised on the belief that the only way to ensure peace, stability, and democracy is to bring the elites from divided communities into a shared governing framework (Agarin et. al, 2018),” yet, in consociations there is always a risk in excluding “de-facto” and other “non-aligned” or minorities, referred to by Timofi Agarin as ‘the Others’ (Agarin et. al, 2018).

Social identities might not be fixed. Instead, they could be shaped, controlled, and restricted by internal and external elements such as ruling classes, socioeconomic

factors, and foreign influences. This is potentially true in Lebanon, where the absentia of a strong state, a divided political society, and a privileged geopolitical location, lead to an influence from regional and international powers. Therefore, sects and identities can be, respectively, problematized and malleable; 'the Others' in the Lebanese society is a growing segment that is acquiring more complicated and complexed identities, and it is a segment that does not fit within the sectarian status-quo. Some of these people, who can be sectarian in certain ways, are pushing for an agenda that is clearly not sectarian.

A non-sectarian agenda is being fostered by a societal fiber comprised of a diverse civil society, active grassroots movements, and a big number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, it could be argued that in order to advance a non-sectarian agenda, civil society might be required to move away from rigid sectarian identities and avoid following what the sectarian leaders demand; the idea is not to comply with the sectarian system but to challenge it. Many questions arise here: How the latter can be achieved without entirely rejecting the system? How can the civil society challenge, or even subvert, the sectarian system? How is it able to make the system less sectarian and open spaces for individuals who are interested in certain issues that do not have to do with sects? Increasingly, although Lebanon is a traditional society, its citizens are being exposed to new ideas globally, and globally there have been movements to provide voices for 'the Others'.

Ever more, Lebanese see how in other countries relegated groups are not marginalized anymore, and they start to wonder why we should be marginalized. Lebanese civil society is trying to achieve a way of thinking that transcends the sectarian device and to reach a way to coming together around non-sectarian issues. In the post-war era, and particularly in the last years, new groups, as mentioned lines above, did emerge pursuing agendas based on new politics: environmental issues, waste management, anti-corruption policies, clean governance, etc., and the more recent of these groups, are those fighting for the rights of sexual minorities. What the latter are dealing with is even more sensitive than what the other groups deal with, because it, somehow, challenges, not only the traditional core, but the patriarchal system, a system that tries to have a clearer differentiation between masculine and feminine. This system imposes, not just

sectarian identities, but a rigid gendered identity. For this reason, the challenges these groups face are even more serious than challenges faced by the other groups.

Research on power-sharing mostly focusses on the effects of the societal cleavages that consociations accommodate in the polity, while leaving non-ethnic social groups marginalized and disempowered. These groups include, among others, sexual minorities. As explained by Rollins (2011), "sex and sexuality are part of a hierarchical value system that serves as the basis for other form of social, economic, and political power and subtends all other institutions from marriage to families, communities, states and international organizations." Biopolitics is a concept developed by Michel Foucault, by which states regulate sex and reproduction, key control elements of citizenship and population. Therefore, it is perceived that sexuality has to be controlled by the state or by the communal leaders in order to maintain the "reproductive heterosexual model of life".

Diane Richardson (2017), a professor of Sociology at Newcastle University in the UK, argues "that the connection between sexuality and citizenship is subordinated to the connection between citizenship and reproduction: the non-reproductivity of same sex unions and, therefore, their failure to contribute fully to society is the reason for the historical exclusions of lesbians and gay men from full recognition (Richardson, 2017)." Richardson adds that "in deeply divided societies where a consociational system is employed, rights are not conferred through the state but are governed through a person's relationship with her or his local community or through kin relationships (Richardson, 2017)." As a proof of this, in Lebanon, personal status laws including marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance is controlled not by the state but by ethnoreligious groups. This could be historically traced back to the 1926 Lebanese Constitution which awarded sectarianism a privileged place in private and public life.

Back then, the French mandatory authorities continued this process by promulgating Decree No. 60 L.R. which gives the recognized 18 official sects in Lebanon the right to create and manage their own religious courts and to follow their own personal status and family laws (*Qanun al-Ahwal al-Shakhsiya)* (Salloukh et al., 2015). Therefore, every religious sect in Lebanon controls the personal status of their individuals, imposing a

patriarchal mode of life where the only acceptable standard or norm is heterosexuality, or having sexual relations with the opposite sex; albeit still within socially accepted norms. As a consequence, the religious leaders of these groups legitimize the oppression of sexual minorities since they pose a threat to the "heteronormativity" or hegemonic masculinity by which the Lebanese society is based.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the deeply entrenched sectarian system is impacting the political organization related to the controversial issue of the rights of sexual minorities; or what it is commonly referred to as LBGTIQ+ community, and to enhance our knowledge on the work of LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups in Lebanon. More specifically, the thesis asks three key and overlapping questions. First, what are the principal advocacy groups in Lebanon that push the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community in terms of origins, organization, agenda and relations with the state and with civil society? Second, how these non-sectarian NGOs face a challenging environment in navigating a sectarian system and how their apolitical approach, in addition to other drawbacks, has hindered their effectiveness? And third, what strategies these groups are required to adopt to improve their advocacy within this sectarian system?

While there has been a growing number of studies on civil society in Lebanon, and particularly on segments like women groups, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), refugees, environmental groups, etc., groups advocating for the rights of sexual minorities have not been thoroughly examined as part of this analysis. However, these groups are part of the Lebanese civil society and their demands, their strategies, and their interactions with the sectarian system deserve to be studied. This is in order to enhance our understanding on civil society in Lebanon.

The thesis will be organized in four chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter (introduction) introduces the subject matter, its significance as far as Lebanon and the Arab region. The chapter also includes the methodology deployed to gather and analyze the pertinent information.

The second chapter provides an overview of the sectarian system in Lebanon. It examines how the sectarian system impacts civil society, impedes the emergence of non-

sectarian movements, while perpetuating itself. This chapter is of critical importance, because the sectarian system defines so much about the Lebanese structure, since it impacts everything else in Lebanon, and limits the freedom of non-sectarian groups.

The third chapter is about advocacy groups in general, with a particular emphasis on groups advocating for the rights of sexual minorities. It identifies the main groups advocating for these rights, sheds light on their organization and funding, discusses their agendas, and sheds light on the multiple challenges they are facing.

The fourth chapter unpacks how these groups are negotiating with the sectarian system in Lebanon, how they are trying to operate, to organize, and to advance their agenda within this sectarian system, in addition to the required strategies these groups are required to implement in order to improve their advocacy efforts. The conclusion sums up the thesis' main findings, while underscoring the role of LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups within Lebanon's civil society.

1.1 Methodology

The methodology follows a cross-sectional research design and online semi-structured interviews were conducted in Lebanon between March and April 2020 with one main representative of each social organization chosen for the purpose of this research (AFE and MOSAIC), in addition to four activists (opinion shapers) who have been campaigning for the rights of sexual minorities and who tend to belong to NGOs (see Appendix A). The reason of selecting AFE and MOSAIC as case studies is because they have not been studied in another scholarly research about the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement. Moreover, the logic behind the size of the study population (the sample) is the limitations in terms of time, funding and human resources. The qualitative data collected resulted from the examination of the variables (persons interviewed) at a single point in time and it is restored in the personal laptop of the researcher who is the only person who has access to it. In this way the confidentiality of the data is assured.

Ethical issues are very critical in this research project since we are dealing with a sensitive and vulnerable topic and population. The researcher has the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Lebanese American University and the informed consent from each interviewee was obtained directly from the researcher through the semi-structured interviews.

The interviews covered a range of topics such as views on the societal conception of homosexuality in Lebanon, the legal status of the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ community, the current situation of LGBTIQ+ activism movement and the challenges that it is facing, the impact of political sectarianism in advocacy, and the reforms needed to render more effective the work of LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups in the country (see Appendix B).

It is important to clarify that this is not a study on the population concerning personal and private aspects such as sexual and/or gender identity, but on activists who advocate for certain rights and push for certain agenda. The study will explore the professional motivations for working within civil society and the strategies they use to advocate for the rights of sexual minorities. The anonymity and confidentiality of all interviewees will be fully maintained throughout the periods of data collection. Moreover, and to smooth the reading of this thesis, the interviewees are assigned with fictitious names (see Appendix A).

Chapter Two

Political Sectarianism

This chapter provides an overview of the Lebanese sectarian system, and its impact on the government as well as the civil society groups' functioning and interventions. The first part addresses the foundation of the current political Lebanese system, the major scholarly debates on Lebanese sectarianism, and the mechanisms through which the sectarian system perpetuates itself and impedes the emergence of non-sectarian movements. This will be followed by a description of the civil society landscape in Lebanon. The aim of this chapter is to lay out the context in which non-sectarian groups, particularly those advocating for the rights of sexual minorities, navigate and operate, for the purposes of understanding their strategies and agendas.

2.1 Sectarianism "*Libanaise"*

The diversity in the Arab states' governing systems (presidential republics, absolute or constitutional monarchies, confessional democracy, parliamentary democracy, among others) reflects different realities. One particular case is Lebanon, a country that is defined as one of the most "liberal" Arab countries, but also one with the most divided society. Since Lebanon is based on a corporate sectarian power-sharing political system, sectarianism becomes a crucial concept to be explained to understand the country's political system.

Lebanese sectarian political system dates back to 1839. It was the result of a number of overlapping events that occurred in Mount Lebanon: a rebellion of commoners against the feudal system, the implementation of Ottoman restructurings, and the need of the European to interfere in the politics of the Ottoman Empire (Salloukh et al., 2015). A new social order, based on the conception that religious communities are monolithic, was established when Ottoman and European powers divided Mount Lebanon in two

unbalanced districts along Druze and Maronite religious lines, which years later led to class and sectarian bloody tensions between these two communities (Salloukh et al., 2015). Consequently, on June 9, 1881 a sectarian representation model was institutionalized under the "Mount Lebanon's administrative council consisting of four Maronite members, three Druze, two Greek Orthodox, one Greek Catholic, one Sunni Muslim, and one Shi'a Muslim" (Ziadeh, 2006).

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and under the French Mandate, the Greater Lebanon was born on September 1, 1920, comprising of the Mount Lebanon region and the Muslim territorial surroundings, adding a substantial Muslim population. This ended the demographic preponderance once enjoyed by the Maronites in Mount Lebanon and created overlapped and contradictory national identities: Lebanese Nationalism and Arab nationalism, in addition to different political, economic, societal, and ideological ideas. Therefore, a power-sharing formula was required to mediate these competing visions (Salloukh et al., 2015).

Lebanon "is a parliamentary republic and its political system is based on the allocation of parliamentary seats, high political offices, and senior administrative positions among the country's 18 recognized religious communities" (Traboulsi, 2007). A confessional system secure political and administrative functions to the recognized sects; such a system was rigidly institutionalized by the National Pact in 1943, when the country became independent from the French Mandate administration. The pact was "an unwritten agreement between President Bishara al-Khuri, a major figure in the political elite of the Maronites representing the Christians in general, and Prime Minister Riad al-Sulh, a Sunni leader representing the Muslims" (Kingston, 2013). The 1943 National Pact allocated political power along confessional lines : "stipulated that the President must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament a Shi'i Muslim; and divide seats in parliament according to a 6-to-5 ratio of Christian to Muslims" (Traboulsi, 2007).

The weak foundations of this composition, adding to changes in the internal and regional balance of forces, led to a 15 years civil war (1975-1990) that ended after an agreement between the main contesters at the Saudi city of Ta'if. This power-sharing agreement,

called Ta'if Accord, accommodates the different Lebanese sectarian communities and assures them political representation in the parliament, government and public institutions. Specifically, the Ta'if Accord stipulated an equal representation of Christians and Muslims in the parliament, reduced the authority of the Maronite president, and made the Prime Minister responsible to the legislature. Since then, the confessional system has been reinforced allowing sectarian communities to have power over almost every sector in the country, influencing, based on their own interests, the economy, the educational system, the political life, the social affairs, human rights policies, among others.

The several abovementioned power-sharing arrangements – whether those dating to the Mount Lebanon experience or the independent and later postwar Lebanon – "served to entrench sectarian identities and dynamics in the political mobilization" (Salloukh et al., 2015). The sectarian system, the influence of the sectarian leaders and their veto power, limit the maneuver of both, the Lebanese state and the civil society and impede the implementation of proper policies regarding main issues such as the economy, environment, social development, etc., negatively impacting the proper development of the country.

The issue of sectarianism and its effects on the country's political system "have been part of a broad debate among supporters and detractors of the system: while the Lebanese constitution of 1926, the National Pact of 1943 and the Ta'if Accord of 1989 called for the abolition of the confessional system, Lebanese political events and actors have shown a total inability to reform it" (Di Peri, 2016). Many scholars have tackled sectarianism from different perspectives using different arguments; they try to elaborate on the functioning of the system, how is able to reproduce, adapt and renew itself, its resilience and the way it adapts to changing local, regional, and international conditions.

In "*The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon"*, the authors analyze sectarianism from a Foucauldian perspective (Di Peri, 2016). Salloukh and his colleagues (2015) argue that "sectarianism in Lebanon cannot be separated from the domestic or regional context. Locally, the weakness of the Lebanese state has allowed the sectarian system to exploit the state as a tool for its perpetuation and consolidation, placing the State's fiscal

policies at the service of the economic elites and their class' interests. This leaves the country open to external influences, making the 'state system' easily manipulated and outmaneuvered" (Di Peri, 2016). On the other hand, Ussama Makdisi (2000) define sectarianism "as the product of a series of processes through which a kind of religious identity is politicized, even secularized, as part of an obvious struggle for power," and Paul Kingston (2013), unlike the Orientalist/primordialist focus of much of the literature on sectarianism, assumes that "sectarianism has been 'constructed' and 'produced' by various socioeconomic and political factors."

2.2 Lebanese Civil Society

As a consequence of the entrenchment of sectarianism, Salloukh and his colleagues (2015) argue that "identities in Lebanon are shaped primarily by confessional and sectarian affiliations; political mobilization and individual loyalty are often directed to the sect and its political or religious elite rather than state institutions and symbols." Lebanese corporate consociational power-sharing system intentionally shape state institutions to reproduce sectarian subjects and modes of mobilization (Salloukh et al., 2015). In Lebanon, as argued by Saouli (2019), "the consociational system set the country in a political path which made its reversal or removal difficult, and Lebanese elites have worked to preserve it." Furthermore, Citing Bassel Salloukh and his colleagues (2015), it is argued that "Lebanese consociationalism is deployed instrumentally by sectarian/political elites bent on reproducing sectarian identities and obviating the emergence of alternative, transectarian or non-sectarian modes of political mobilization" (Nagle, 2017).

The system itself encourages people to become sectarian but, how it accommodates those who refuse to be defined by their sectarian identities, those who have been exposed to ideas that do not fit neatly this sectarian agenda? Despite the pervasive influence of the sectarian system, and how powerful and entrenched is in Lebanon, it has always been challenged by parties and groups that were not sectarian and that have

pushed for non-sectarian schemas. These parties and groups have attracted individuals and members of society who do not have a rigid sectarian identity.

Lebanon's political parties "have represented a wide spectrum of political, communal, and ideological platforms reflecting the diverse political landscape, although few were able to overcome the confessional barrier" (El Khazen, 2003). Some of the exceptions were secular-oriented and nationalist parties like the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). The LCP was officially funded on 24 October 1924 and "is one of the few Lebanese parties that have affiliations throughout different sects and regions" ("Lebanese Communist Party", n.d.). Meanwhile, the SSNP was founded in 1932 as a party that "advocates the establishment of a Syrian nation state (Syrian nationalism), and the formation of Greater Syria, which spans the Fertile Crescent, including present day Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Cyprus, Sinai, southeastern Turkey, based on geographical and the common history people within the boundaries share" ("Lebanese Communist Party", n.d.). In Lebanon, it has been considered one of the fewest secular political movement in the country's contemporary history ("Syrian Social Nationalist Party", n.d.). El Khazen (2003) explains that in the 1960s and 1970s, "both were modern parties in terms of the functions they performed in and outside parliament and in policy issues they pursued." However, they transformed themselves into militia forces during the 1975 civil war. Even after the end of the war, they have not been able to recover from the negative militia image they acquired. Lately "they operate as interest groups seeking political power and representation, while being detached from concerns that preoccupy the general public: governance, freedom of expression, human rights, and foreign policy" (El Khazen, 2003).

Nevertheless, not only political parties were mobilized beyond sectarian boundaries. During the 1950s and 1960s, the labor movement in Lebanon, along with teachers and students, became increasingly mobilized, demanding for amendments in the labor code, wage increase, the establishment of a social security fund, among others (Union Movement in Lebanon, 2016): "in 1958, the General Confederation of Labor in Lebanon (GCL) was established, being a vociferous proponent of far-reaching socio-economic

reforms. Thus, its incorporation into the sectorial/political elite's clientelist patronage networks was imperative to prevent the emergence of alternative, class-based, and cross-sectarian modes of political subjectification and mobilization. However, the wave of collective action was abruptly halted by the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, and after the war, the GCL was consequently incorporated into the ensemble of institutional and discursive practices that uphold the sectarian system" (Salloukh et al., 2015).

The post-civil war era has also witnessed efforts by civil society groups to organize around matters related to the environment, human rights, political corruption, etc., challenging the main foundations of the existing sectarian political arrangement and raising the level of awareness and political mobilization of citizens. In 2015, amid a political deadlock, electricity cuts, water shortages, a trash crisis, the Syrian refugee's crisis and the postponing of the parliamentary elections, a series of protests erupted in the country. The several groups and social movements that participated named themselves "You Stink", known afterwards as 'al-Hirak' (the movement). Protests brought to the street "a large spectrum of social groups and individuals such as queer, feminist, leftist and environmentalists, first-time participants in protests, and residents from marginalized neighborhoods of the city" (Khneisser, 2017).

Several of these groups also included "ideological" party affiliates such as the LCP, The People's Movement, Iraq's Baath Party, SSNP, among others. The 'al-Hirak' succeeded in mobilizing diverse societal groups by framing the garbage crisis as a consequence of political and sectarian corruption. Although the garbage crisis was also an environmental crisis, "it was framed purely in political terms and as such garnered support from anti-system and anti-sectarian activists in Lebanon across a broad spectrum of networks" (Geha, 2018). However, al-Hirak lost momentum and support within few months and it did not achieve their goals.

Relationships between "the state and civil society organizations in the country, and the freedom of action of the latter, are directly linked to the social, political and economic development of the state" (Haddad, 2016). Geha (2019) argues that "anti-sectarian protests and attempts to reform and change the sectarian power-sharing system have

faced multiplicity of challenges in Lebanon and they are simultaneously undermined by the sectarian characteristics of the political and welfare system."

Lebanese civil society is considered one of the most dynamic within the Middle East region. It pushes for political reforms; it critiques the resilience of sectarianism and confessionalism; and it calls for the protection of civil liberties. However, to what extent can this civil society make contributions to the strengthening of non-sectarian agendas within a fragmented state?

Within weak states, as it is the case of Lebanon, political institutions are generally resistant to change. Institutions are an opportunity for sectarian elites to build their own informal and clientelist networks: "this was possible in Lebanon by the institutionalization of the militia entities that participated in the civil war, undermining in this way the consolidation of secular-oriented, nonsectarian networks within Lebanon's civil society" (Kingston, 2013). These institutionalized sectarian entities fulfill an array of functions that are supposed to be dealt by the Lebanese state (Geha, 2018), giving them political and economic power over the members of their sectarian communities. The consequence of this is "a modern socio-economic and political power that produces and reproduces sectarian actors and enacts laws and bureaucratic practices that contribute to fragment, besiege and co-opt civil society actors" (Salloukh et al., 2015).

"A civil society that nurtures associational life independently from the state is one of the main pillars of a liberal democracy" (Al Hindy et al., 2018). However, differing conceptions of the civil society, and the absence of precise definitions of the latter, exist in research pertaining this issue. Civil society in Lebanon is understood as a synonymous with the associative sector, which includes NGOs and community-based and family-and confession-based organizations, which provide services typically offered by state institutions. Both play an increasingly important role in economic, social and political life and their actions are associated either to a specific service or developmental project, to advocacy campaigns aiming at change and improvement of institutions and the political system, or a mix of both approaches, such as structures aiming to help

domestic workers or to defend homosexuals, or environmental associations (Unraveling Civil Society, 2018).

In the last years, there has been an increase in the number of mobilizations in Lebanon: campaigns concerning violence against women, garbage crisis, trade unions, rights of domestic workers, among others. Moreover, during the 2018 legislative elections, there was even an attempt to turn these movements into political ones. Although Lebanese "civil society" develops in proportion to deficiencies of the State, "it remains hampered by the grip of sectarian structures and clientelist practices, struggling to fully take shape in a political system that remains dominated by family and clan allegiances" (Unraveling Civil Society, 2018).

Regardless of the constraints and limitations that the sectarian system creates, the Lebanese civil society has been able to develop, contributing in various settings across the country. The efforts of advocacy movements produced significant reforms: the introduction of new norms, the formulation of new laws, and the inclusion of civil society actors within policy institutions, among others. However, several studies on the civil society in Lebanon agree these gains have been difficult to sustain and have failed to translate into fundamental changes in institutional practices. Moreover, they refer to the lack of effectiveness of the collective mobilizations regarding their alternative initiatives, advocacy activities, and their holding the State to account. The following are some of the scholar arguments explaining the reasons of such failure.

In her book *Civil Society and Political Reform in Lebanon and Libya: Transition and Constraint*, Carmen Geha (2016) argues that "the legacy of colonialism and a weak state based on a communal power-sharing system are elements that hinder the influence of civil society in bringing change in the country." The power-sharing system created "rigid and unyielding commitment to institutions that simply bolsters the power of local confessional authorities, the *zu'ama*" (Geha, 2016). Moreover, she argues that "despite the key role of civil society organizations in political transitions during the 2011 Arab uprisings, the rise of violent extremism in the Arab region and part of Europe has led to a belief that civil society is not able to promote democracy and counter the spread of

violence, particularly when civil society promotion in the region has been frequently interconnected to Western geopolitical interests" (Geha, 2018).

Meanwhile, Kingston places his argument in three different theoretical frameworks: The first framework is associated to historical institutionalism of the Lebanese sectarian democracy, a "model that produces circuits of path-dependence and creates powerful obstacle to change, especially for civil society" (Di Peri, 2016).

The second framework surrounds the dynamics of civil society and its compromised autonomy; instead of being separated from the state, parts of the Lebanese civil society profit from opportunities presented by the sectarian status quo and also reproduce the sectarian model over time. Kingston (2013) attributes this to two factors: "the weakness and the fragmentation of the Lebanese state and the skills that actors of civil society deploy in taking advantage of their formal and informal networks to have privileged access to the state, its resources and power."

The third and last framework is about the creation, by the same sectarian elite, of a counter-hegemonic power through "associative networks" (Kingston, 2013). These networks include "members chosen and co-opted by the elite and members of civil society that escape from the 'sectarian hegemony'" (Di Peri, 2016). Although the networks are depicted as forces countering the sectarian influence, they are, from the backside, controlled by the sectarian elite.

Therefore, it can be argued that the Lebanese sectarian/political elite ended up, through their colonization of the civil society sectors, besieging NGOs and reproducing them in its own image (Salloukh et al., 2015). It also "offered enough incentives for some association leaders to advance their personal and organization's interests rather than promote real structure change of the sectarian system" (Salloukh et al., 2015). The question whether the LGBTIQ+ NGOs' governance system is reproducing the sectarian model will be answered in the coming chapters.

In addition to Geha, Kingston, and Salloukh, other scholars argue that the only way civil society is able to instigate policy changes is when three internal/external factors are present, as long as their prepositions do not threaten the interests of the sectarian ruling

parties: 1) an international interest and willingness to exert pressure on the Lebanese Government; 2) political and/or personal interest by the political parties over a certain cause, in order to appear as reformers and rights advocates; and 3) credibility, professionalism, and readiness of NGOs that have built proper networks to seize upon an opportunity and push for tangible results (Al Hindy et al., 2018).

However, this sectarian power sharing system can also bring some opportunities. Although Geha finds that power-sharing tends to hinder a proper development of the civil society sector, "an ineffective associational sector is both a symptom of weak states and power-sharing agreements, though it can also be an enabler of these two dimensions. A strong and influential, nationally active civil society might prompt a process of reconstruction of strong state institutions and could either be part of power-sharing agreements or maintain a strong oversight role regarding such agreements." Ultimately, El-Chameli (2018), concludes that "state weakness can contribute to increasing the influence of civil society groups."

2.3 Sexual Minorities in Lebanon

John Nagle (2017) claim that "consociationalism as the main power-sharing strategy for divided societies may bring either peacebuilding solutions or exacerbate ethnic divisions in the countries where this type of policy is applied." Scholarly studies on power-sharing mostly focuses on the dynamism of the societal cleavages that consociations accommodate in the polity while leaving non-ethnic social groups marginalized and disempowered (Nagle, 2017). These groups include, among others, sexual minorities.

Rollins (2011) argues that "sex and sexuality are part of a hierarchical value system that serves as the basis for other form of social, economic, and political power and subtends all other institutions from marriage to families, communities, states and international organizations." Biopolitics is a concept developed by Michel Foucault, by which states regulate sex and reproduction, key control elements of citizenship and population. Therefore, "it is perceived that sexuality has to be controlled by the state or by the

communal leaders in order to maintain the 'reproductive heterosexual model of life'" (Richardson, 2017). Diane Richardson, a professor of Sociology at Newcastle University in the UK, argues that "the connection between sexuality and citizenship is subordinated to the connection between citizenship and reproduction. The non-reproductivity of same sex unions and, therefore, their failure to contribute fully to society is the reason for the historical exclusions of lesbians and gay men from full recognition" (Richardson, 2017).

"In deeply divided societies where a consociational system is employed, rights are not conferred through the state but are governed through a person's relationship with her or his local community or through kin relationships" (Richardson, 2017). The 1926 Lebanese constitution "was written before extensive provisions of judicial bodies became common, which is why there are no special provisions on how the judiciary should be organized; the country's regular court system is still based on the Napoleonic code established in 1804, also known as the French civil code" (Arab Political Systems). Moreover, the French mandatory authorities back then promulgated Decree No. 60 L.R. which gives the recognized 18 official sects in Lebanon the right to create and manage their own religious courts and to follow their own personal status and family laws (*Qanun al-Ahwal al-Shakhsiya)* (Salloukh et al., 2015).

Eighteen religious sects are officially recognized in Lebanon with fifteen corresponding personal status courts. These courts implement their own confessional laws with jurisdiction over areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption. This has awarded sectarianism a privileged place in private and public life.

Socio-political identification and recognition of Lebanese are formed by three diverse and overlapped categories: personal status *(madhhab)*, sect *(ta'ifa)* and religion (Mikdashi, 2014). In the logic of Lebanese state, a sect is defined by Mikdashi (2014) "as both a historical and a political community and a citizen is recognized as belonging to a particular sect according to a much wider set of criteria than that of personal status." Mikdashi complements that "the state's recognition of a citizen's sectarian affiliation may not be the same as 1) what the citizen identifies herself, 2) what society recognizes her as, 3) what political party she votes for or leads, or 4) her religious beliefs and practices" (Mikdashi, 2014). This might be an example of how a sectarian identity can

be problematized, debunking the primordialist approach arguing that sectarian identities are historically entrenched in society. Sectarian identities in Lebanon are instrumentally used based on personal interests: this is illustrated in the great number of conversions among the political and economic elite (Mikdashi, 2014).

Therefore, every religious sect in Lebanon controls the personal status of its members, imposing a patriarchal mode of life where the only acceptable standard or norm is heterosexuality, or having sexual relations with the opposite sex; albeit still within socially accepted norms. As a consequence, the religious leaders of these groups legitimize the oppression of women and sexual minorities (although it is not the same level of oppression; Lebanese laws recognize the rights of women but not those of sexual minorities) since they pose a threat to the "heteronormativity" or hegemonic masculinity by which the Lebanese society is based (Nagle, 2016). Further elaboration on the position of religious establishments in Lebanon regarding sexual minorities will be elaborated in the next chapter.

One key aspect of power sharing is cultural and communal autonomy, where rights are only awarded to the main sectarian groups. This has led some LGBTIQ+ social movements to create a kind of "groupness" or a unified and homogeneous public identity (Nagle, 2016), forming a private sphere where individuals enjoy a kind of freedom without public and state intervention. Whereas political sectarianism constrains the emergence and the work of LGBTIQ+ social movements, it often presents opportunities for change where some segments of society become more tolerant towards individuals that do not comply with the standard and conservative heterosexual mode of life. However, "these spaces are only permitted by the sectarian elite when it serves its own interests, as evident in legalizing a private sphere of gay commercial night-time establishments and entertainment venues across Beirut with the purpose of incentive the tourist sector" explains Makarem (2011). Nevertheless, "this comes with negative consequences: only privileged and middle-class men, with individual autonomy and purchasing power, have access to this private sphere, resulting in the marginalization of other members of the community such as lesbians, working-class gay men and transsexuals" (Nagle, 2016).

While there have been several studies on sectarianism in Lebanon and its implications on the economy and politics, as well as society at large (Clark and Salloukh, 2013), little has been said on how it impacts the rights of sexual minorities. One of the recent studies related to LGBTIQ+ activism in Lebanon have demonstrated that power-sharing do make available opportunities for non-sectarian forms of mobilization. The study was undergone by John Nagle, by which he argues that three main strategies have been used by Lebanese sexual minority activists in order to cross-cut sectarian cleavages, promote LGBTIQ+ rights and plural identities and provide alternatives to sectarian communalism: The first strategy is called "hegemonic compliance", in which advocacy groups reproduce the sectarian logic; they visualize the power-sharing system as a reflection of primordial and unchanging ethnic identities, thus legitimating the authority of sectarian elites and reinforcing power-sharing. The second strategy is named "constructive engagement" where non-sectarian movements take advantage of opportunities presented by the system to push for reforms. The last one, "active resistance" is a radical protest and challenge against the negative consequences of sectarianism (Nagle, 2017).

Moreover, other scholars argue that "the ability of social movements to change policies is affected by the context properties of the political system – the so-called 'political opportunity structure'" (Hildebrant, 2015). Sidney Tarrow (2011) "differentiates four dimensions of the political opportunity structure: access to political institutions, presence of elite allies, stability of political alignments and cleavages between elites" (Hildebrant, 2015). In a similar pattern, John Nagle has listed three non-sectarian movement challenges in order to promote social change: "the creation of intercommunal networks, the fostering of a public sphere of debate and challenging the programmed uses of segregated people."

Despite of the above, Nagle and Fakhoury (2018) argue that "the status of LGBTIQ+ communities within Lebanon's sectarian model is fraught with difficulty: the model undermines the expression of alternative sociocultural cleavages and it nurtures adversarial feelings toward sexual minorities as a consequence of the patriarchal conception of society and family life." Therefore, the goal of the LGBTIQ+ community

is “to decouple citizenship and lawmaking from the grip of religious authorities” (Nagle and Fakhoury, 2018), and “regularize the status of the community’ members, affirm their presence and increase their visibility” (El Khawaja, 2018). However, it is claimed that the fragmented spectrum of the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ community and the lack of common mobilization strategies leave little shared space for maneuver. Moreover, while “some groupings advocate for legal reforms, others argue that only a secular system in which politics is delinked from sectarianism could serve their cause” (Nagle and Fakhoury, 2018). Furthermore, there is a difference regarding the strategy to implement. Would it be a Western or a more local type of advocacy? Some local activists say that “Western-style activism may indeed attract dangerous attention” (The Economist, 2018), thus seek to counter the western and non-traditional narrative and increase rentability in order to achieve acceptance (El Khawaja, 2018).

However, grassroots campaigns conducted by local NGOs, exposure to Western culture and institutions, and globalization, do seem to have an effect in Lebanon. The last decade has witnessed groundbreaking court rulings refusing to criminalize homosexuality “on the ground that the penal code, which punishes ‘unnatural sex’ with up to one year in prison, does not apply to consensual same-sex relations” (El Khawaja, 2018). In addition to this, for the first time in Lebanese electoral history, nearly 100 candidates promoted gay rights and called for the decriminalization of homosexuality in the campaign of the 2018 Lebanese elections. Most of them were part of the “Koullouna Watani” independent list, the country’s largest coalition of civil society members which comprised 66 candidates (from this list, only one candidate, Paulette Siragan Yaghobian - a well-known journalist - won a parliamentary seat), and the rest belonged to one of the country’s oldest and traditional political parties, the Kataeb Party of Lebanon. However, it is argued that this endorsement from the Kataeb Party seemed to be a *Pinkwashing* strategy only to cater a different public and gain more votes rather than really supporting and encouraging proper legal reforms for the protection of sexual minorities (Qiblawi, 2018).

Until recently, it seemed that there were no sufficient efforts to find an alternative to the dominant political sectarian system. However, Lebanon has made achievements and

progress in building trans-sectarian or non-sectarian identities. There are always groups that challenge the sectarian status-quo, voices organizing on a non-sectarian basis and adopting non-sectarian agendas. Despite the fact that they operate in a system that is not friendly to new politics, non-sectarian groups can still navigate and get few things done.

This chapter presented a brief overview of how sectarianism has been institutionalized in Lebanon throughout its history. From the establishment of Mount Lebanon's administrative council under the rule of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the nineteenth-century, the creation of Greater Lebanon under the French Mandate in 1920 and the National Pact that subsequently led to the independence of the country in 1943, to the implementation of the Ta'if Accord than ended the civil war in 1989, Lebanon's socio-political composition has been based on multiple corporate consociational power-sharing arrangements in order to accommodate the country's sects and religious communities. Two perspectives try to explain the origins and the perpetuation of the sectarian system in Lebanon: once primordialist that claims that individuals have rigid and unmalleable religious and sectarian identities, and the other constructivist that argues that identities are socially constructed by socio-economic driven factors and the intervention of external geopolitical interests. Irrespective of the latter and that the Lebanese constitution, the National Pact, and the Ta'if Accord stipulate an end of the confessional system, the reality is that sectarian identities and dynamics have been further entrenched, constraining the emergence of non-sectarian social and political movements.

Despite the above, the Lebanese confessional system is constantly being challenged by groups that define themselves as non-sectarian and the civil society has been the context where those groups have been more active. The efforts of the civil society in Lebanon led to the implementation of reformed norms and laws and to the emergence of new advocacy movements. Either during the withdrawal of the Syrian presence in 2005, the Arab uprisings in 2011, or the massive protests in 2015, those movements have pushed for agendas that have transcended sectarian-confessional discourses and identities and have included new politics topics such as governance, environment, gender-based violence, and particularly, those related to the rights of sexual minorities. Recently, in

October 2019, a new wave of massive protests erupted, not only in Beirut, but in other important cities across the country, where protesters from different religious and class backgrounds called for social and economic reforms, including the halt of political corruption, the overthrown of the sectarian system, and fair tax and financial policies causing the resignation of the government led by the Prime Minister Saad Hariri. The difference between these new mass demonstrations and those occurred years ago is the decentralization of the protests, the non-sectarian nature of the movement, and the strong presence of women and LGBTIQ+ people. While politics in Lebanon has long been subject to patriarchal standards, gender and sexual-minorities marginalized groups have taken active and visible roles in the protests.

The following chapter delves into civil society groups advocating for the rights of sexual minorities, their historical background, how they emerged, the agenda they are promoting, how they are organized within the Lebanese sectarian system and the challenges they are facing, in addition to a brief social and legal situational description of the LGBTIQ+ community in Lebanon.

Chapter Three

The LGBTIQ+ Movement in Lebanon: An Overview

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement in Lebanon. The chapter commences by offering a historical background on the overlapping concepts of homoeroticism and homosexuality in the precolonial Arab world. It then traces the evolution of these notions under colonialism. This is then followed by a brief description on the two antagonistic global approaches on human rights, and an overview of the associational life in Lebanon, an introduction to the most important LGBTIQ+ initiatives, platforms, and organizations operating in the country, including an overview of the two main LGBTIQ+ organizations that are chosen as case studies for this thesis: the Arab Foundation for Freedoms & Equality (AFE) and the Organization for Services, Advocacy, Integration & Capacity Building (MOSAIC).The chapter will conclude by elaborating on the challenges the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement in Lebanon is facing and the legal situation of its LGBTIQ+ community. These topics were obtained by published scholar and informative material and personal interviews conducted with several activists (See Appendix A and Appendix B).

3.1 Homosexuality: A Western imposed identity

Medieval Western writers documented the tolerance of Islam and the Arab World towards sexual practices same-sex attracted individuals. Although Islam, and specifically the Quran, explicitly condemns homosexual acts (Schmidtke, 1999) and sodomy - known in Arabic as *liwāṭ* -, expressing love for a beardless boy in verse was not considered to be forbidden (Anderson, 2015). A variety of sources, such as narrative romances, poetry, *adab* literature[1], and legal land medical literature, proved the

[1] Islamic literary genre distinguished by its broad humanitarian concerns.

frequency of homoerotic practices in the Arab world: "mutual attraction between males was unanimously viewed to be perfectly natural and normal" (Schmidtke, 1999).

Schmidtke (1999) argues that "homoerotic poetry was widely considered part of a 'refined sensibility' in the Muslim World," and was referred to it as *"ghazal al-mudhakkar"* or "love poetry in the masculine" (Anderson, 2015). For instance, "Rumi and Hafiz[2] wrote about men in loving and affectionate terms, and Abu Nuwas Al-Hasan ibn Hani Al-Hakimi[3] wrote lewd verses about same-sex desire" (A.L., 2018). The next poem titled *"Love in Bloom"* is an example of his work on this genre:

> "… I die of love for him, perfect in every way, Lost in the strains of wafting music. My eyes are fixed upon his delightful body and I do not wonder at his beauty. His waist is a sapling, his face a moon, and loveliness rolls off his rosy cheek I die of love for you, but keep this secret: The tie that binds us is an unbreakable rope. How much time did your creation take O angel? So what! All I want is to sing your praises."

In the same way, Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulsi (d. 1731), a Sunni Muslim scholar and Sufi, wrote about same-sex desire, and the following is an excerpt from one of his poems:

> "… My heart is tossed high and low by a yearning that knows no bounds! Woe! Woe unto me from the languid glance of one so young and delicate! He's a radiant moon if he appears; a succulent branch if he sways. He looks with a gazelle's eyes, but fills my heart with fear and trembling" (El-Rouayheb, 2005).

Homoerotism in the pre-colonial Arabic-Islamic society was a topic widely studied by Khaled El-Rouayheb, a researcher of Arabic-Islamic intellectual history. In his book *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, El-Rouayheb claims that

[2] Poets of the 13th and 14th century who lived in what is now called Iran.
[3] A poet from Baghdad simply known as Abu Nuwas, d. 814 AD

"Arabs in the pre-modern era considered homosexuality (or homoerotism as same-sex encounters were named during that period), as an aggregate of acts that anyone could do, rather than an identity" (El-Rouayheb, 2005). In this regard, Anderson (2015) explains that "same-sex partners in the pre-colonial Arabic-Islamic society did not consider themselves 'gay' or 'homosexual,' but merely thought of it as something they *did*, rather than something that they *were*." However, a new understanding of sexual identity and same-sex desire started to be shaped in the Arab World during Western colonization. In fact, the postcolonial era "saw the gradual disappearance of homoerotic poetry that was prevalent during the rule of the Islamic empires" (El-Rouayheb, 2005). The reason is that this openness in the Arab World towards same-sex desire clashed with the concept of homosexuality in nineteenth century Europe, where same-sex desire and encounters were banned, and even criminalized, because they were considered destabilizing factors to the ideal family-oriented society. It is worth mentioning that back then, "the family institution came to be a center of discursive power for the purpose of forming a labor force that would support the developing economy on the wake of the Industrial Revolution, thus sexuality became a category of identity to be controlled" (Anderson, 2015).

In this regard, the French historian and philosopher Paul-Michel Foucault[4] was a pioneer in the study of sexuality as a concept that was, and still is, socially controlled by ruling powers. In his book *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, Foucault defines a self - a person - as "a 'socially constructed fiction,' a product of discourses and societal constructions that limit, police, and produce all aspects of identity." Foucault also created a concept called "incitement to discourse", by which through medicine, media, culture, and politics, sexuality can be classified, pathologized, and controlled (Foucault, 1978). This led to the advance of a new interdisciplinary field between human biology and politics in social theory. This field is known as Biopolitics, which refers to the intervention of disciplinary and political technologies in controlling and managing individuals in particular, and social life in general. This concept was critical in research about homosexuality/homoerotism in the Arab world.

[4] Generally known as Michel Foucalt

Citing the influence of Western colonialism and Foucault's concepts of "incitement to discourse" and Biopolitics, Joseph Massad, an Associate Professor of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History at Columbia University, elaborates on what he considers a socially constructed concept of homosexuality during Colonial rule in the Arabic-Islamic world. in his book *Desiring Arabs*, Massad claims that "a 'gay identity' was, and still is, a Western invention imposed on Arabs; an invention based on Western sexual norms" (Anderson, 2015). Massad (2007) explains that "this control over sexuality was used by Western colonialism to maintain its hegemony over the Arab World, shaming Arabs about their sexuality and making them anxious about whether this understanding of sexuality is compatible with modernity." Consequentially, the Arab World and the West began to question each other's values, including those related to sexuality and values that the West considered as a demonstration of the "backward" nature of Arabic society. This Western obsession with homosexuality in the Arab World continues in the present day but in an opposite way: The West is still considering Arabs as a regressive society, not because of their acceptance towards same-sex desire as the West used to claim during colonization, but because of Arab's criminalization on homosexuality. Anderson (2015) argues that "y arguing that the Arab World is 'backward' due to its construction of same-sex desire, the West is able to construct itself as a 'progressive' and a 'tolerant' society and better than those over whom it seeks hegemony."

In contemporary Arab history, "Western interventions in the Middle East within the geopolitics of war on terror, democratization and humanitarianism are a manifestation of the continued deployment of these differences to further geopolitical interests in the region (Alqaisiya, 2020)." Alqaisiya (2020) explains that "sexuality is key in the production of such West/East binarism upon which rests the utilization of the queer's official story, as imagined and maintained within the West." The most recent expression of such Western intervention is the global campaign launched in 2019 by US President Donald Trump's administration to challenge the criminalization of homosexuality: "the campaign, led by the highest-profile openly gay person in the Trump administration, Ambassador Richard Grill, emerged amid efforts to mobilize European opinion and UN institutions against the Iranian regime, which, as Grill stated allows 'barbaric public executions' and flogging to death of homosexuals" (Alqaisiya, 2020).

Nevertheless, and based on scholarly arguments, it does seem that Western colonialism had an impact in shaping a new social imaginary regarding sexual identities in the Arab World which is evident in the way the modern Middle East approaches the subject in comparison to the pre-colonial times. A survey by Pew Research Centre in 2013 found out "that most people in the region believe homosexuality should be rejected," in Lebanon specifically, the rejection rate mounts up to 80%.

Furthermore, in a study developed in Lebanon in 2015 by AFE, 82.2% of respondents "viewed homosexuals as a threat to the traditional family and 66.3% perceived homosexuality to be a threat to society" (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). What has changed since then? If the same-sex desire was socially accepted, why are the homosexuals in the Arab World nowadays are oppressed and prosecuted? Is it because homosexuality started to be considered a Western imposed identity? Is it because homosexuality does not fit the idealized patriarchal mode of life the modern Arab society is based upon? The argument on the rejection of homosexuality by Arabs as Western constructed is shared by several Lebanese LGBTIQ+ activists, including Dalia: "the main social and cultural reason behind societal negative views about homosexuality is the social structures in MENA that were impacted by almost two hundred years of colonialism; this societal understanding on homosexuality is hard to change (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). In addition to the effects of colonialism, the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism and the so called Neo-traditional Islamism, which view homosexuality as a Western lifestyle introduced by colonial powers, also played a major role in shaping a social rejection of homosexuality. Facts of this rejection are elaborated in the next paragraphs.

3.2 Neo-traditional and Fundamentalist Islamism

In addition to the influence of Western colonialism in the socially constructed idea of homosexuality, there is historical evidence suggesting that, from an early period, "Islam and classical tradition of Islamic theology and jurisprudence were founded and implemented on patriarchal social structures and authorities" (Kugle and Hunt, 2012).

Contemporary Muslim communities with a patriarchal inheritance are limiting the advancing of progressist ideas such as human rights for non-traditional social groups and/or sexual minorities. Neo-traditional Muslim authorities are seeking public recognition via discourses that consider "conventional masculinity as natural, traditional, moral and politically necessary to protect Muslim communities against Western domination" (Kugle and Hunt, 2012): "patriarchal societies visualize masculinity as critical in the creation process of a national state. Therefore, non-conforming sexual orientations and identities are seen as concepts that challenge the ideal religious masculine patriarchy" (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020).

One of most prominent advocator of the Neo-traditional Islamist discursive trending is Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Islamic scholar member of the Islamic Brotherhood (*al-ikhwan al-Muslimin*) and director of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (Yusuf al-Qaradawi, n.d.): "Shaykh al-Qaradawi is respected by Sunni communities internationally and especially among Muslim minorities in Europe and he hosts a TV programme on Al Jazeera in Arabic called *al-Shari'a wa'l-Hayat* (Sharia and Life) " (Kugle and Hunt, 2012). In one of the episodes aired in 2006, al-Qaradawi spoke out against homosexuality: "people who practice *liwaat* (sodomy) and *sihaaq* (lesbian activity) should be punished like fornicators (the punishment is lashing) but their harm is less when not done in public" (Memritv, n.d.). However, "al-Qaradawi's pronouncements on the programme do not constitute a fatwa and he dismiss scientific research on homosexuality as merely a reflection of Western cultural attitudes" (Kugle and Hunt, 2012).

In addition to the stance of Islamist scholars against homosexuality, other Islamist militant groups have violently attacked homosexuals. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, "a terrorist militant group following a fundamentalist, Salafi jihadist doctrine of Sunni Islam" (Al-Ibrahim, 2014) gained global prominence in early 2014 when declared itself a worldwide caliphate. It spread in Iraq and Syria and "was believed to be operational in 18 different countries around the world" (Islamic State, 2018). In areas under its control, ISIS fighters have issued edicts according to the *shari'a* against homosexuals (Tharoor, 2016), punishing them with death (Islamic State, 2014).

According to the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, "ISIS executed at least 17 men in Syria and Iraq accused of indecent behavior, sodomy and adultery between June 2014 and March 2015" (Reid, 2015).

Based on the above, religious ideologies, many of them with a clear stance against sexual and gender diversity, are believed to negatively impact the spiritual and the political life of individuals, in addition to strongly shape state institutions and social norms (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020). In this regard, Lebanon is not an exception in the Arab community. The negative societal and cultural views on homosexuality in this country is also influenced by concepts such as patriarchy and masculinity: "homosexuality is considered a challenge to the patriarchal and reproductive mode of life that the Lebanese sectarian regime relies on… anything that might put in danger both, the family institution and patriarchy, is religiously, socially and politically attacked and refused" (Hayat, personal communication, April 2020).

In Lebanon, "religious authorities have been largely unanimous in their condemnation of homosexuals, and Lebanese media outlets have frequently featured them to present their views on the subject of homosexuality, equating their opinions with that of medical doctors and psychologists" (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). Based on a study undergone by AFE in 2015 (previously referenced in chapter three), more than 80% of surveyed participants found "homosexuality to be both immoral as well as sinful, with similar numbers also affirming that religious books condemned homosexuality" (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). This might reflect a solid connection between religion and morality, and the influence of religious scriptures in shaping the Lebanese social imagery on homosexuality. Furthermore, each religious sect in Lebanon reacts to homosexuality in different ways. Sometimes this reaction comes through physical violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals (mainly in the outskirts of Beirut and other traditional Lebanese regions such as Tripoli, Bekaa or the South) or through psychological and/or symbolical violence (usually within cosmopolitan zones in Beirut) (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020). However, "the levels of negative opinions about homosexuality differs across religious affiliation, with Sunnis and Shi'ites together perceiveing homosexuality as immoral significantly

more than Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics all together" (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015).

In the effort to suppress homosexuals, Islamist scholars and militant groups contradict the Islamic tradition they purportedly defend; a tradition that was, as elaborated in the beginning of this chapter, permissible with homoerotic and same-sex sexual desires. These have been topics for scholarly discussions and some of them are tackled in this thesis. Regardless of the outcomes of these debates, a fact is clear: homosexuality in the Arab region, Lebanon included, is strongly condemned and homosexuals are persecuted under legal frameworks that marginalize them. Based on this reality, activism on issues related to the rights of sexual minorities started to arise in some Arab countries, being Lebanon a precedent in this case.

Several operational LGBTIQ+ groups and organizations in Arab countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Oman, and particularly Lebanon, are "working on issues including homophobic and transphobic violence, decriminalization, forced anal testing, legal aid, HIV prevention, gender equality, media training, digital security, and outreach through the arts" (Audacity in Adversity, 2018). However, "the concept of homosexuality seems to preclude LGBTIQ+ rights activism and it is yet not clear if this activism come from a new indigenous and local understanding of sexual identity or it is the result of imposition of Western sexual norms" (Anderson, 2015). The following section will shed light on the legal framework of human rights in general, the two contended visions on human rights advocacy, and an introduction to the associational landscape in Lebanon.

3.3 Universalism or Cultural Relativism

On 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by consensus (Cerna, 1994). It is defined as "a milestone document in the history of human rights and by which everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other

opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (UN, n.d.). Whereas the global community agree that human rights should be framed within the international law, a debate over the scope of human rights remains questioned. One dimension of this debate concerns the universal versus relative nature of rights. During the post-World War II era, the period in which international human rights regime emerged, "there was an underlying assumption that human rights are universal; this is to say, founders of the human rights regime believed that a single standard should apply across the globe, transcending cultural, social, and political lines" (Lau, 2004). However, one question has been asked: are human rights universal or should be culturally relative?

Beyond questioning if anything in the multicultural and multipolar world is truly universal, "the issue of whether human rights is an essentially Western concept – ignoring the very different cultural, economic, and political realities of other parts of the world – cannot simply be dismissed" (Tharoor, 1999-2000). Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this has been the main concern in academic and intellectual debates regarding human rights. 'Universalists' argue that "the enforcement of human rights principles are applicable on a global scale and that human rights are 'universal' rights in the sense that they are held 'universally' by all human beings" (Donelly, 2007). On the other hand, "cultural relativists believe that the advocacy of human rights should take into consideration cultural and local contexts" (Le, 2016).

As a consequence of the above, the international community is mainly divided in two blocks: The Global North (mainly Western countries) and the Global South (mainly post-colonial countries). The former believes in the concept of universalism, by which human rights can be achieved regardless of the local context of the states involved. By contrast, the Global South advocates for a regional implementation approach of international human rights models without the influence of external forces, adding that "the creation of a regional rights arrangement provides for its participants an accelerated acceptance in the region of a catalogue on international human rights norms" (Cerna, 1994).

In the Arab world, as part of the Global South, most human rights principles are perceived "as a Western Orientalist imposition and do not reflect the culture of the

region" (Kollman & Waites, 2009). Arab countries have targeted certain human rights in particular, especially those related to sexual orientation rights (Lau, 2004), arguing that human rights as laid out in some international covenants are alien to its social and cultural context. This has been an excuse to constantly violate some of the human rights principles, particularly those related to sexual minorities (Kollman & Waites, 2009). However, this argument might contradict the fact that same-sex desire and acts in the pre-colonial Arabic-Islamic society was culturally accepted. After the secularization of Western civilizations, "the emergence of a liberal attitude towards sex in modern times is perceived by modern Muslim societies as an indication of the growing decadence of the West; any attempt to form a movement for gay rights in the Islamic world is seen as yet another symptom of 'Westernization'" (Schmidtke, 1999).

Based on the above reality, most LGBTIQ+ activism in the Arab world has employed different strategies to protect the rights of the community's individuals. Since homosexuality is perceived by Arab states as imported from the West and is against the social nature of Arab culture, "LGBTIQ+ social movements organizations have made an emphasis beyond the concept of 'human rights' and distanced themselves from the global, namely Western, LGBTIQ+ community in order to challenge social structures of oppression" (Kollman & Waites, 2009). In other words, some social movement organizations are working towards the "indigenization" (Tharoor, 1999-2000) of LGBTIQ+ rights, by taking into consideration the culture, tradition, and history of each Arab country. However, before delving into the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement, it is imperative to describe how the associational life works in Lebanon.

3.4 Lebanese Associational Landscape

The political/sectarian landscape that emerged after the Lebanese civil war led communal organizations and rights-based NGOs to step in and fill the vacuum left by the weakness of the Lebanese state, providing some basic healthcare and educational services to tackle the socio-economic adversities (Salloukh et al., 2015): "the sectarian elite created alliances with these civil society organizations to free itself and the state

from the weight of providing meaningful services to their communities and to divest political opposition away from those sectors of society that did not subscribe to sectarian affiliations" (Salloukh et al, 2015).

The rapid growth of the NGO community led many rights-based associations to emerge as well, particularly those related to women and the LGBT community. Those groups promoted a more inclusionary discourse towards marginalized groups, the provision of legal protection, the adoption of non-discriminatory laws, and the provision of primary social services that were supposed to be the responsibility of the state. Consequently, "rights-based NGOs focused on different aspects of legal discrimination instead of challenging the sectarian system" (Zalzal, 1997).

Associational life in Lebanon is guaranteed through the 1909 Ottoman Law of Associations, by Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution and by international conventions to which Lebanon is a signatory state (Salloukh et al., 2015). However, "foreign associations, youth and sports associations, labor unions, cooperatives, and syndicates are not subject to these norms and regulations; instead, they are regulated by a set of restrictive laws making them subject to a 'pre-authorization' system" (UNDP, 2009).

In order for an association to exist, it has to get the approval of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, "rendering civic engagement as a security-based rather than a rights-based activity" (Salloukh et al., 2015). NGOs' leaders have to inform the Ministry of Interior of the founding of their organization by submitting an Information Letter which includes the address of the association, a statement of its goals, and the names and titles of the administrative committee (Mokarzel, 2011). The Ministry then provides the founders with a receipt named 'ilm wa khabar', allowing them to operate legally and normally. However, "associations denied with an 'ilm wa khabar' are not allowed to open a bank account, seek funding, or practice any activities" (Anderson, 2015).

After the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, the international community injected big amounts of aid money to the civil and associational sector. However, "instead of empowering sustainable projects and reclaiming the right of freedom and

social justice, the rights-based community focused on themes for which there is already an abundance of aid money and catered for donor agendas, mainly with an emphasis on humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, or more traditional social development, agendas that were not aimed to challenge and contest Lebanese political sectarianism" (al-Hrawi and Menassa, 2002).

In 2011, echoing the slogans chanted during the Arab Spring in countries like Tunisia and Egypt, thousands of Lebanese took the streets to protest against the sectarian system (Thousands protest, 2011). However, none of the NGO leaders mobilized their associations to partake in the demonstrations; "NGO activists participated in these popular protests as individuals rather than as representatives of their own association" (Salloukh et al., 2015). In fact, NGOs are criticized "for not taking an active role in campaigns for the reform of the sectarian system and for lacking a common platform, reflecting the associational community's fragmentation" (Nagle and Fakhoury, 2018). This flaw is still a feature of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement as it will be elaborated later in this chapter.

This feature, it is argued, "serves the sectarian/political elite's determination to caricature this community as one constantly divided internally and unable to work collectively" (Salloukh et al., 2015). The following pages will show whether the above explained reality extrapolates to the LGBTIQ+ organizations in Lebanon. However, before elaborating on the status and the challenges of the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement, a brief historical description will be given on the several organizations and initiatives that are advocating for the rights of sexual minorities in Lebanon.

3.5 Beyond HELEM: Lebanese LGBTIQ+ NGOs

The Middle East is known for its conservatism, "but with its lively and vigorous nightlife and more liberal habits, Beirut has long been hailed as a relative haven for the region's LGBTIQ+ community, though not without challenges" (Fearless drag queens, 2019). Homosexuals are often "stigmatized and penalized across the Arab World and

same-sex desire may be viewed as a perverse behavior or as a symptom of mental illness" (Dabaghi et al., 2008). Despite this, several NGOs and support groups are known to function openly in some Middle East countries, and Lebanon was the cornerstone in this regard. In 1998, in response to homosexual oppression and an increased Internet access, Lebanese people who identified themselves as LGBTIQ+ started to forge links and connect with each other. Internet played an important role in initiating a first contact between diverse activists and individuals who consider themselves LGBTIQ+, in making acquaintances for sex and politics and in organizing groups in an anonymous manner. Such is the case of the Gay Lebanon forum and mailing list, and the underground social support group called Club Free, being the latter the platform for the creation in 2004 of an NGO named *Hurriyat Khassa* (Private Liberties).

3.5.1 Hurriyat Khassa

The membership of *Hurriyat Khassa* comprised a number of independent lawyers, artists and journalists who were active on the human rights field. They led a successful campaign against the failed attempt of the Lebanese government to amend Article 534 of the Penal Code and make it less ambiguous: "the amendment was supposed to include both gays and lesbians by using the terms *liwat* and *souhaq,* both used derogatorily to denote male-male and female-female sex respectively" (Makarem, 2011). That same year, "some members of *Hurriyat Khassa* sent an official 'notification of assembly' to the Lebanese Ministry of the Interior for a new NGO called HELEM[5], an acronym that spells the Arabic word for 'Dream'" (Anderson, 2015), becoming the first LGBTIQ+ advocacy group in the Arab world.

[5] "An acronym for *Himaya Lubnaniya lil Mithliyeen wal Mithliyat* (Lebanese Protection of Homosexuals)"

3.5.2 HELEM

HELEM was founded in Beirut, Lebanon in 2004 with the purpose of improving the legal and social situation of LGBTIQ+ and MSM[6] individuals. HELEM currently "advocates for the annulment of article 534 of the Lebanese penal code, which outlaws 'sexual relation contrary to nature'" (Salloukh et al., 2015) and offers legal and social support services to the LGBTIQ+ community. Although HELEM's main emphasis was to concentrate on LGBTIQ+ issues, "coming to existence during an anti-imperialist movement fueled by the US invasion to Iraq led the NGO to adopt an anti-sectarian, anti-racist, and anti-xenophobic position from its beginning and to include marginalized communities in its social work" (Makarem, 2011). HELEM's mission is to "lead a peaceful struggle for the liberation of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgendered (LGBT) and other persons with non-conforming sexuality or gender identity in Lebanon from all sorts of violations of civil, political, economic, social, or cultural rights" (Fattal et. al, 2018). It also implements "HIV awareness and prevention outreach projects in collaboration with the National AIDS Control Program, other NGOs and United Nations agencies" (Dabaghi et al., 2008).

Although HELEM presented its information letter to the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, the latter denied the association from the *'ilm wa khabar'*, leaving the organization with no official government backing: "the Ministry considered HELEM's file as 'shameful' because it demands the elimination of Article 534 of the penal code

[6] "Males who have sex with Males"

that criminalizes 'sexual intercourse contrary to nature'" (Salloukh et al., 2015). However, according to Lebanese law, an NGO "has legal status if they have not received a negative reply from the Ministry of the Interior within two months of submitting the official Information Letter" (Anderson, 2015). This is how HELEM became 'legal', although without being able to open a bank account, to take on legal cases, or to apply for funding (Salloukh et al., 2015).

HELEM is configured of a general assembly composed of all its active members, and a board of representatives elected by the general assembly. Its activities include "community outreach, social activities for the LGBTIQ+ community, the developing of support groups, research and development, publications and organizing the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT)" (Dabaghi et al., 2008). During the July 2006 War in Lebanon, HELEM's premises were used for refugee relief work: "this offer was covered by the media and played a role in projecting a positive image of Helem among the community" (Dabaghi et al., 2008). However, the first public collective appearance of HELEM was during the iconic 'Laique Pride' march organized in Lebanon in 2010: "the aim of the mobilization was to create awareness of the growing Lebanese secular movement while demanding a separation between religion and politics" (Smith, 2010).

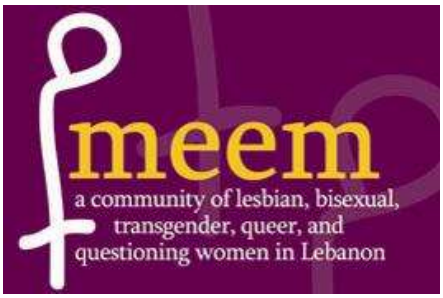
HELEM is considered the cornerstone in the development and growth of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement in Lebanon. However, it has been criticized from different sides. Although being a Lebanese NGO, "HELEM is also registered in Montreal, Canada and has support branches in Australia, France, and the United States. The first official financing came in late 2005 from the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice" (Dabaghi et al., 2008), a foundation based in New York dedicated to funding LGBTIQ+ organizations worldwide. It also receives "financial support from NGO funding agencies, local and private donors and support groups: The International HIV/AIDS Alliance, the Dutch Embassy, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Front Line, the Ford Foundation, and the Heartland Alliance" (Anderson, 2015). The fact that most of the NGO's funding come from the Global North led Joseph Massad (2009) to accuse HELEM of serving the agenda of its Western donors. In this regard, HELEM "was

critiqued for being a group seeking to pose essentially 'Western' notions of universal homosexual identity and homophobia into the Middle East," a critique mainly outlined by Joseph Massad (2009), and covered in previous pages of this research (Nagle, 2018). According to Dabaghi et al. (2008), "HELEM receives its funding from non-governmental donors and does not accept funds through which a donor imposes their own projects." This contradicts the opinion of other Lebanese activists, as seen in the next chapter of this thesis.

Hamdan (2015) argues that "the organization did nevertheless distance itself from the global LGBTIQ+ movement, fostering a mobilization concerned with more local and regional issues such as patriarchy, racism, sectarianism, heteronormativity, Zionism, classism, etc." However, HELEM decided not to take an active role in the 'campaign of reforms' proposed by the Lebanese NGO community following the 2011 demonstrations against the sectarian system, arguing that they did not endorse the organization's demands (Salloukh et al., 2015). The strategy of not directly confronting the sectarian system is also implemented by others Lebanese NGOs, as shown in the interviews conducted for this thesis and highlighted in the upcoming chapter.

HELEM has also been criticized for reproducing 'hegemonic masculinity' and fragmenting the organization on a gender axis (Nagle, 2018). HELEM's "low number of women-oriented and women-led activities and the limited representation of women in its decision-making positions generated frustration on women activists within the organization" (HELEM, 2015). This group of women, known as "Helem Girls," decided to form their own movement called "Meem," a new support group for homosexual women (Nagle, 2018).

3.5.3 Meem



In 2006, three ex female members of HELEM formed a private mailing list for women only, being the precedent for the formation of a group called Meem[7] (Anderson, 2015). They held regular low-profile meetings and discussions in Beirut and provided psychological counseling to queer Lebanese women and several transgendered people (Meem, 2009): "Meem was set up to engage in feminist and queer politics, which refused to articulate fixed identity-based approaches to gender and sexuality" (Nagle, 2018). In 2009 they released the book *Bareed Mista3jil*[8], which is a series of stories by members about their lives, and details the history of LGBTIQ+ activism in Lebanon (Anderson, 2015). Although Meem no longer exists as a group, its members merged to *Nasawiya* (feminism in Lebanese Arabic), a feminist group that addresses the concerns of all women that live in Lebanon.

[7] "*Majmouat Mou'azarat al Mar'a al Mithliyya* (support group for homosexual women)"
[8] "Express Mail"

3.5.4 Proud Lebanon

Proud Lebanon is another LGBTIQ+ organization in Lebanon, co-founded in 2013 by Bertho Makso, who holds a degree in History of arts and archeology from the Lebanese University and is an ex independent travel tour agent (Bertho Makso, n.d.) for Lebanon and Syria catering for Arab and European gay man. As a consequence of the war in Syria, his market in that country disappeared and some Syrian gay male refugees in Lebanon started contacting him for help. Makso decided then to start a pre-project within HELEM called Whisper, which was supposed to help those refugees. However, the project wasn't fully implemented (personal communication, 2019) and instead, a new NGO was founded by him.

This new NGO was called Proud Lebanon, a non-profit civil society group that works to achieve protection, empowerment and equality of marginalized groups, mainly the LGBTIQ+ community (Proud Lebanon, n.d.). It initially provided assistance and support to LGBTIQ+ refugees from Syria, offering them courses in English, computer literacy, sewing, photography, and hairdressing (Proud Lebanon, n.d.). Then, it expanded to include LGBTIQ+ rights and HIV awareness campaigns (Anderson, 2015). Proud Lebanon services include legal assistance, psychological counseling, medical assistance, among others (Proud Lebanon, n.d.). It is worth mentioning that Bertho Makso has been investigated since 2015 on the grounds of facilitating male prostitution between Lebanon, Turkey, and earlier in Syria, using and threatening Syrian gay male refugees.

Until now no conclusive results have been drawn out from the investigation (personal communication, 2019).

3.5.5 Marsa

A study undergone in 2010, "73% of surveyed physicians believed that homosexuality is a disease and only 50% were willing to 'tend the medical needs' of a homosexual patient" (Abdessamad & Fattal, 2014). In addition to this, "sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE), commonly known as conversion therapy, are still prevalent in Lebanon, having mental health professionals speaking favorably about them publicly on TV" (Lebanese Medical Association, 2013). Despite de efforts to improve LGBTIQ+ health, such as the work done by HELEM and the Ministry of Health's National AIDS Program to tackle HIV infection, the gap in access to health care for members of the LGBTIQ+ community remains very large (Abdessamad & Fattal, 2014).

In order to fill this gap, Marsa Sexual Health Center[9] was officially funded on 2011 by three activists: Ayman Assi, Georges Azzi and Nizar El Kinge and is currently organized by eight board members and eighteen staff members (Marsa, n.d.). It is registered in the Ministry of Interior as a nongovernmental organization (Marsa, n.d.). It is considered "the first sexual health center in Lebanon offering comprehensive primary and secondary health-care services in an LGBT-affirmative environment" (Abdessamad & Fattal, 2014). It provides comprehensive, primary and secondary healthcare services with a multidisciplinary team with a focus on women, vulnerable groups, and

[9] "*Markaz Alsaha Aljinsiya"*

economically disadvantaged populations. Their services include: “voluntary counseling and testing for HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and Syphilis; medical consultations and treatment for symptoms related to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs); PAP smear service for women for early detection of cervical cancer; psychosocial counselling for sex, sexuality, People Living with HIV, couples therapy, etc.; and awareness campaigns regarding sexuality” (Marsa, n.d.).

3.5.6 LebMASH

The work done by Marsa, although groundbreaking, was not enough to cover the significant health care needs of the LGBTIQ+ community. For this reason, “a group of Lebanese health-care professionals came together in September 2012 to create the Lebanese Medical Association for Sexual Health (LebMASH) ” (Abdessamad & Fattal, 2014). LebMASH aims “at advancing sexual and reproductive health for all individuals, with particular focus on LGBT and other marginalized populations in Lebanon (LebMASH, n.d.).” Some of the NGO’s objectives are: “promote research in sexual health, provide sexual health to LGBT individuals, promote discursive material in the media and among the public on issues related to sexual health, influencing and changing policies and legislations to protect health rights of LGBT, and eliminate discrimination and harmful practices in healthcare that impact LGBT individuals” (LebMASH, n.d.).

LebMASH has conducted several groundbreaking activities: “it gave the first lecture about LGBT health to medical students at the American University of Beirut, it worked

closely with the Lebanese Psychiatric Society and the Lebanese Psychological Association to come out with historic position statements in May 2013 reaffirming that homosexuality is not a disease and does not require any treatment, and it has collaborated with the two major academic medical centers in Lebanon—American University of Beirut Medical Center and Université Saint Joseph—to offer multiple seminars on LGBT health care" (Fattal, et al., 2018). Moreover, LebMASH is committed to make more scientific literature available in Arabic.

3.5.7 Haven for Artists

Haven for Artists is an NGO based in Beirut that intersects arts and activism, whether through academic research or artistic productions, in order to impact change in different levels (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020) and is aimed "to endorse, encourage and expose the modern underground art scene of Lebanon and the Middle East" (Haven, n.d.). The NGO is comprised of a team of all women, who are either LGBTIQ+ or identify themselves with the LGBTIQ+ cause, working on women rights and ensuring the progression of LGBTIQ+ rights within the Lebanese social structure and throughout the MENA region (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020).

According to Dalia, one of the NGOs members interviewed by the researcher, the activists and artists of the NGO believe that their mission it not only about pushing for legal reforms but impacting change in the social understanding of LGBTIQ+ issues (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020): "we believe that is not only a fight against legislation, because even if I change the law, our social structures will still criminalize

me." Haven for Artists "runs a multitude of programs and activities such as gatherings, exhibitions, events, the Haven House workshops, and an innovative artist-in-residency program" (Haven, n.d.).

3.5.8 The A Project

As part of new initiatives in Lebanon, The A Project (*mashrou'u alef*) is an intersectional alternative aimed to create platforms for the advancing of an inclusive "political discourse around sexual, reproductive, and mental health, and for seeking alternatives to counteract medical patriarchy's restrictive and reductive approaches towards women and gender non-conforming people in Lebanon" (The A Project, n.d.). It is part of the Global South advocacy movement, creating a local queer resistance framework and distancing themselves from international identity politics and neo-liberal labels.

This initiative considers that policy and law reforms are insufficient to counter taboos, social norms, legal frameworks and law enforcement mechanisms, and dominant patriarchal discourse in Lebanon that subjugate and discriminate women and sexual minorities. The A project is committed to the following activities: "a hotline that provides information on various topics related to sexual and reproductive health, abortion, HIV, contraceptive choices, sexual orientations, gender identities, violence, safety and pleasure; the creation of solidarity groups based on the hotline callers' requests and needs where they can meet and discuss their concerns among others with

similar concerns; the implementation of workshops in reproductive and sexual health and rights; and the production of multimedia and documentation" (The A Project, n.d.).

3.5.9 Beirut Pride

Gay or LGBTIQ+ Pride is a number of events, "ranging from solemn to carnivalesque, that are typically held during LGBTIQ+ Pride Month around the world, for the purpose of commemorating a turning point in a country's LGBTIQ+ history" (Belonsky, 2007). Pride celebrations or commemorations originated after a "series of spontaneous and violent demonstrations by members of the gay community against the police raid that began in June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Manhattan, New York City: these demonstrations spurred the international gay rights movement, resulting in countless cultural, legal, political, and social evolutions, including the decriminalization of homosexuality in dozens of nations" (Belonsky, 2007).

In 2017, Lebanon became the first Arab country in organizing a gay pride, an initiative sponsored by Beirut Pride. Beirut Pride is a collaborative gathering founded in August 2016 by Hadi Damien and entirely running by Lebanese volunteers with no political affiliations (Beirut Pride, n.d.). Although not being considered an NGO, "it is an initiative that advocates for the decriminalization of homosexuality in Lebanon, for an unbiased approach to preconceived ideas, and for the promotion of self-affirmation and

dignity through social awareness activities and the contribution of local human rights NGOs" (Beirut Pride, n.d.). Beirut Pride takes place around May in the framework of IDAHOT[10], in several licensed and legal venues, mostly in Beirut. Its programs include "a series of talk, discussions, get-togethers, projections, performances, workshops, parties and collaborations- all of them open to public" (Beirut Pride, n.d.).

The first pride celebration organized in the Arab world took place in May 14-21, 2017 and it drew four thousand people who attended workshops, seminars, talks, gatherings, parties, concerts and screenings. The second celebration was scheduled May 12-20, 2018 and it was supposed to feature a brunch in the honor of the parents of LGBTIQ+ children, the announcements of the Corporate Pledge, the Beirut Grand Drag Queen Ball, as well as the launching of a podcast, the launching of a magazine, a gender-fluidity fashion show, workshops, parties, talks and performances. However, as explained in previous pages, the event was cancelled after the intervention of the police (Beirut Pride, n.d.) and the founder of Beirut Pride, Hadi Damien, was arrested (Kinan, personal communication, April 2020).

There is a belief that "Pride events around the world represent the acceptance of society of LGBT communities; however, the importance of the parade rests not in its actual occurrence but rather in what it represents to the LGBT community and advocacy efforts overall" (Weller, 2018). Nevertheless, Pride events in Lebanon are considered by many Lebanese, including LGBTIQ+ activists, as a portrayal of a Western type of advocacy that does not reflect the local context of the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ community. "Beirut Pride scares me…the only way LGBTIQ+ individuals have seen pride is through western ideas. Instead of having to attend parades, which is the way the youth only understands it, we should step back and find our way to be pride" (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020).

Dalia considers that by mimicking the Western approach, a strong rejection from the Lebanese community will persist, and this will lead to a demoralization of LGBTIQ+ individuals (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). The Beirut Pride retaliates this argument by affirming that "it is not a westernized, imported platform, as its programme

[10] "International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia"

and initiatives are local and reflect on the specificities and intricacies of the Lebanese complex social fabrics" (Beirut Pride, n.d.).

The previous organizations/projects are an example of a fostered activism in Lebanon that shape and develop new ideas on a number of discursive fields and inspire new initiatives around concepts of sexuality, mental health, and legal protection for marginalized and unprivileged communities such as women and LGBTIQ+. However, they are not the only ones; several other LGBTIQ+ NGOs exist as well and they are included in the following section of this chapter, tackling how they are organized, their leadership, aims, activities, and agendas. The two NGOs chosen to be the case studies of this thesis are the Arab Foundation for Freedoms & Equality (AFE) and the Organization for Services, Advocacy, Integration & Capacity Building (MOSAIC).

3.5.10 AFE

The Arab Foundation for Freedoms & Equality (AFE) is a non-governmental organization founded in Beirut in 2009 (AFE, personal communication, March 2020). It is officially registered with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities. Its mission "is to encourage and support sexual health, sexuality gender and bodily rights movements, not only in Lebanon, but in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as well, through capacity building, knowledge production, protection and advocacy" (AFE, personal communication, March 2020). AFE is composed by 24 staff members from five different nationalities across two departments: The Head Quarters are based in Beirut, Lebanon; whereas the Advocacy department in Algeria. The highest governing entity in the foundation is its board of trustees comprised of five experts on gender and bodily

rights from across the MENA region (See Figure 1) (AFE, personal communication, March 2020).

The foundation has also created seven programs: Gender & Body rights Media Center (GAB), Gender & Sexuality Resource Center (GSRC), M-Coalition, Regional Advocacy, Safety First, Social Change Program (SCP), and Tayf (See Figure 2) (AFE, n.d.), in addition to a new one named Queer Women Network. Created in 2019, this entity is led by women and it programs strictly for LGBT women in the MENA region. It is currently in its pilot phase. Although it is part of AFE, this network is independent from AFE's management and decision making (AFE, personal communication, March 2020).

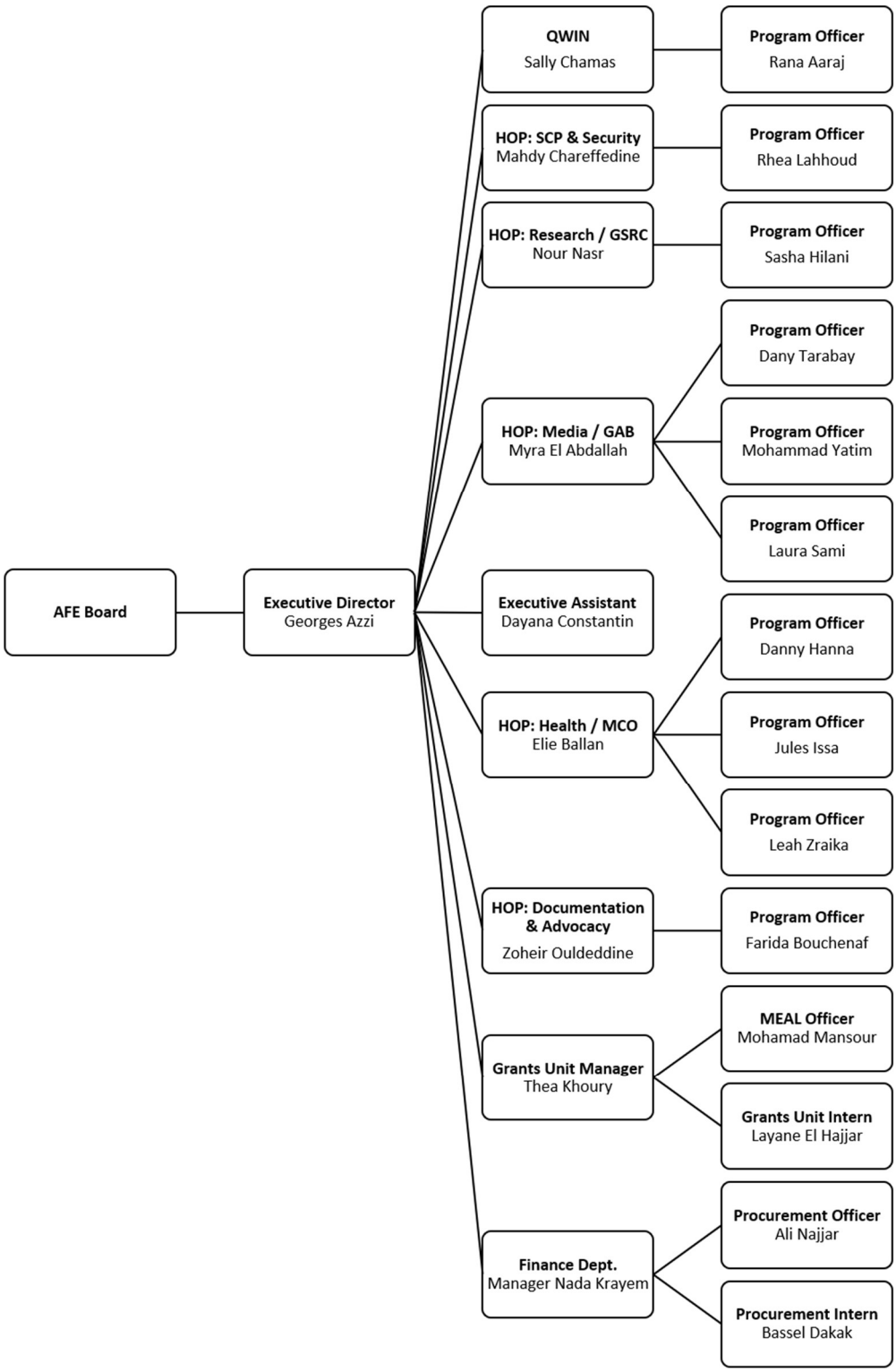


Figure 1 – AFE organization. AFE Personal Communication (2020, March 11).

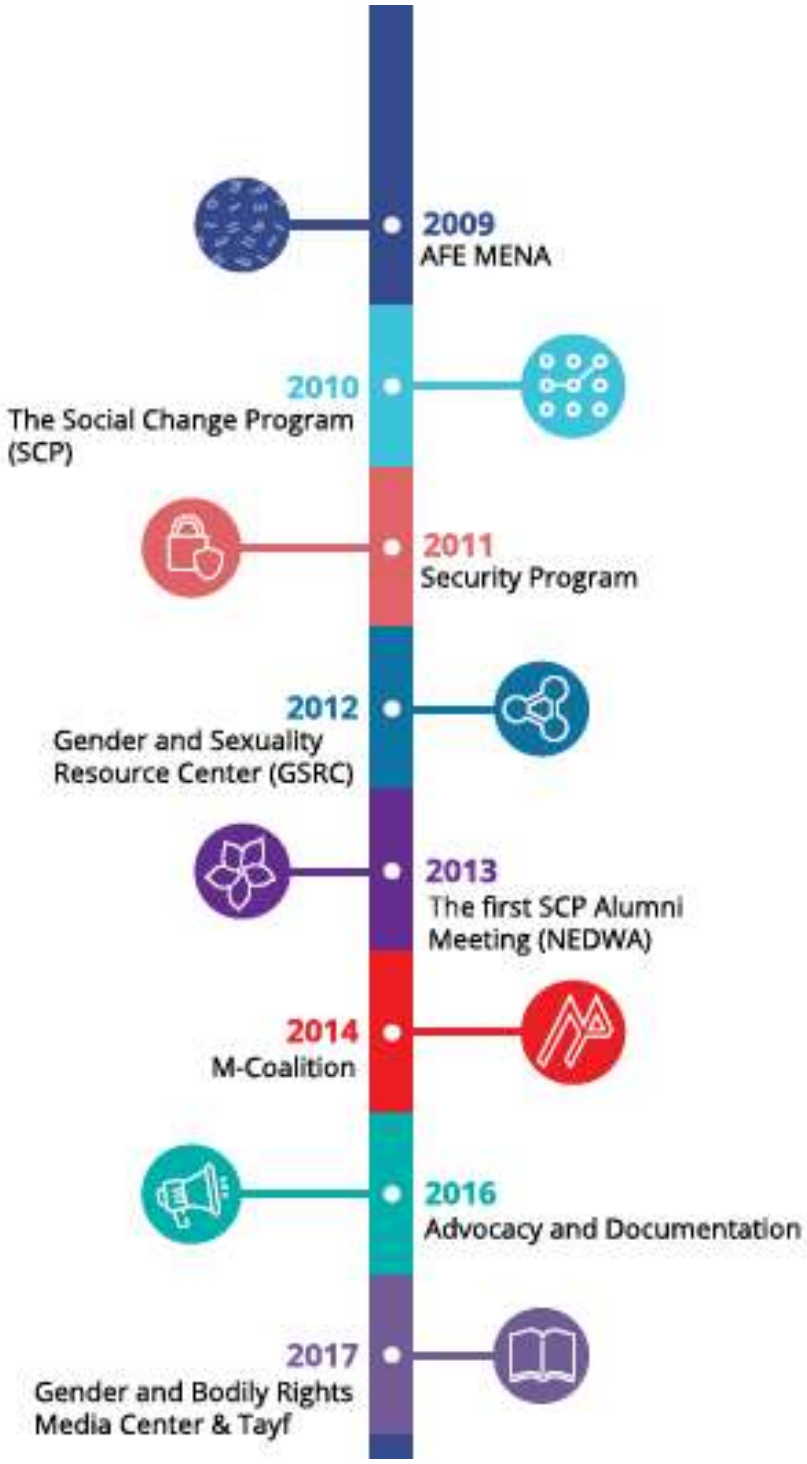


Figure 2 – AFE programs. AFE Personal Communication (2020, March 11).

The GAB media center is the media department of AFE which provides training for journalists from the MENA region on how to properly cover gender and sexuality topics, including LGBTIQ+ issues, gender-based violence and ethical reporting. It also helps LGBTIQ+ activists to improve the representation of their advocacy in the media (AFE, n.d.). The program also aims to build alliances between activists and media channels for a better and a more respectful coverage of LGBT issues.

This program is operated in parallel to AFE's research program (GSRC), which works to offset the shortage of data from the region on human rights' violations and capacity building elements (AFE, personal communication, March 11, 2020). The GSRC was created to "fill the lack of gender and sexuality knowledge in Arabic. It is considered an information hub that brings together practitioners, activists, academics, and professionals, with an emphasis on material produced in Arabic" (AFE, n.d.).

M-Coalition is a regional network that was founded in 2014, and merged with AFE in 2019, becoming AFE's health program. Its objective is "to respond to the growing prevalence of HIV and other health needs such as mental health, harm reduction and physical wellbeing faced by gays, bisexuals, queers, lesbians, trans and non-binary people in the MENA region" (AFE, n.d.). The M-Coalition also "strives to involve members on the LGBT community and people living with HIV at all levels of its strategy, policy development and implementation, and internal governing processes" (AFE, personal communication, March 2020).

One of the peculiarities of AFE is its advocacy efforts, not only in Lebanon, but in the MENA region. Through its Social Change Program, AFE organizes and implements an educational program for the strengthening of activists' capacities (AFE, personal communication, March 2020). The Advocacy and Documentation Program at AFE builds the capacity of local activists in order to increase visibility and develop advocacy skills to support them in their gender and sexuality programming: "this program is currently designing several tools and manuals for advocacy and for documentation in Arabic to develop advocacy skills, increase accessibility and bridge the gap in limitation of resources and it impacts over 500 persons in the MENA region annually" (AFE, n.d.).

Safety First is a security program developed by AFE to help LGBTIQ+ activists under threat "to escape danger by moving to safer cities, management of risks, securing funds for immediate services (assignment of lawyers and checking into hospitals) and their relocation until it is safe for them to return to their homes in cases of extreme violent threats" (AFE, n.d.). The other program of AFE, the SCP, is a yearlong program "that aims to provide individuals, groups and/or organization in the MENA region with both and practical trainings in the area of gender and sexuality applying it to social change" (AFE, n.d.).

Last but not least, *Tayf*[11] is a community center based on "a program that started out in the nineties in the United States to respond to the growing rates of new HIV infections specifically among young gay, bisexual and other MSM" (AFE, personal communication, March 2020). The program, that was adapted to the Lebanese culture, "aims at educating young MSM on sexual health, prevention and community building values" (AFE, n.d.). Tayf now is centered on 4 main elements: "1. The community center (the premises where young MSM and their friends can come to spend time and hang out); 2. The core group (group of volunteers who meet on a weekly basis); 3. The outreach (information the volunteers learn and discover are encouraged to be shared with the community); 4. Below the Belt – BTB (health awareness sessions organized in a monthly basis that include condoms, PEP and PREP, HIV and STI testing, etc.) " (AFE, n.d.).

AFE envisions societies "where gender and sexual health and rights, as well as mental bodily integrity are promoted, recognized and respected" (AFE, personal communication, March 2020). The foundation has a team comprised of experienced activists engaged in the sphere of human rights and in the fight against oppression. AFE is also responsible of organizing NEDWA[12], a "biennial conference for LGBT activists from the MENA region, for the purpose of capacity building, brainstorming and development of LGBT initiatives and to create the opportunity for individuals from around the region and working on the region to connect and build relationships and

[11] "Spectrum light"
[12] "Networking, Exchange, Development, Wellness and Achievements"

explore partnerships" (AFE, personal communication, March 2020). The conference "aims to tackle thematic areas under the banner of gender and sexuality to highlight new research and bring to the forefront new topics areas and the latest debates both in academia and from the field" (AFE, n.d.).

3.5.11 MOSAIC

The second case study is MOSAIC, the MENA Organization for Services, Advocacy, Integration & Capacity Building. Motivated by the lack of services regarding LGBTIQ+ and refugee communities, particularly on male survivors of sexual assault, this NGO came to existence in 2014 by three legal and health experts: Charbel Maydaa[13], Nayla Geagea[14], and Pascal Kolakez[15]. They started with an advisory board composed of experts in the field of human rights and with an initial funding from the Norwegian Embassy. MOSAIC provides comprehensive mental health and legal services for LGBTIQ+ and marginalized groups in Lebanon. It also does research and advocates for policy reform, builds knowledge and capacities on SOGI[16] and engages the societies in

[13] Former director of MOSAIC, LGBTIQ+ activist since 2004, alternate co-chair of International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Asia since 2017, and researcher and co-investigator at the UK Research and Innovation Global Challenges Research Fund (UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice and Security hub).
[14] Lawyer, legal consultant, researcher, and political activist.
[15] Psychotherapist and mental health advisor.
[16] "Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity"

the fight against human rights violations, especially against sexual minorities' rights violations. The NGO also introduces "more inclusive approaches in the fight against homophobia and inspires the way communities and states interact with LGBTIQ+ communities" (MOSAICMENA, n.d.).

Even though MOSAIC is considered an NGO, it is registered in the Ministry of the Interior as a non-profit civil company, operating legally and, unlike HELEM, without any restriction. It includes nine advisory board members, and seven staff members, in addition to one active member for its MOSAIC Youth Program (mYP). Nowadays MOSAIC receives funding from several European embassies and international organizations such as UNOCHA, Hivos, Sigrid Rausing Trust, among others (MOSAICMENA, n.d.).

MOSAIC aims to reduce social stigma and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ host and refugee communities by awareness programs on SOGI issues, capacity building activities and the production and contextualized Information, Educational and Communication (IEC) materials, both in Arabic and English. The organization also calls for the cancellation of Article 534 of Lebanese Penal Code and has lawyers to follow up on cases of LGBTIQ+ persons arrested under this article. In this regard, 20 focal points throughout Lebanon have been trained to detect, monitor and report human rights violations. MOSAIC also provides LGBTIQ+ refugees in Lebanon with legal advice and assistance related to asylum and resettlement procedures. Their services target mainly low-income LGBTIQ+, LGBTIQ+ persons in detention, migrants, and refugees, among other vulnerable groups (MOSAICMENA, n.d.).

MOSAIC provides a number of sustainable services for LGBTIQ+ individuals: sensitive mental health and individual psychosocial support, support groups and counselling for family members of LGBTIQ+ individuals, round-the-clock helpline, drama therapy, life skills sessions, training on clinical management for rape cases for male survivors of sexual assaults, and protection and legal aid.

Two years ago, they launched a new program called MOSAIC Youth Program (mYP). The program aims to work with and target the young people in order to build their

capacities to become advocacy ambassadors and change-makers in their own wider communities: “it is a voluntary program that includes individuals who aspire to be human rights activists and helps in creating more cohesion, awareness, and safe spaces in environments where social and gender conflicts still persist” (MOSAIC, personal communication, March 2020).

In MOSAIC, they believe that the main challenges towards achieving gender equality in Lebanon are sectarianism, the limited participation of women in the political decision-making process, and the involvement of religious institutions in personal status matters such as marriage, abortion, marital rape, violence against women, etc. (MOSAICMENA, n.d.).

In addition to the NGOs and platforms/initiatives mentioned throughout this chapter, some organizations reach broader fields that include, but are not limited to, the needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals. For example, “SIDC-*Soins Infirmiers et Developpement Communautaire* (Nursing and Community Development) describes its mission as focusing on appropriate care and policy development targeting drug users, HIV positive individuals, and others who are vulnerable, and Skoun, the Lebanese Addictions Center, strives to change public policy on drugs and addiction and is known to provide culturally competent drug treatment to LGBT individuals struggling with substance use disorders” (Fattal et al., 2018). The following two sections will explore the status of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement in Lebanon and the challenges it is facing.

3.6 LGBTIQ+ Advocacy in the Arab World: the Lebanese case

With its long conflictive history and religious and ethnic diversity, the Middle East is considered the most complex regions to study within the field of international relations. However, “there is one topic thar rarely, if ever, is discussed and that is the status of the LGBTIQ+ communities in the region” (Weller, 2018). Although there is a growing jurisprudence in the international level related to the implementation of human rights law pertaining to sexual minorities, worldwide, and more precisely in the Arab region,

"people are still subject to persistent human rights violations because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity" (O'Flaherty and Fisher, 2008). On 26 March 2007, as an "outcome of an international meeting of human rights groups in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in November 2006, the Yogyakarta Principles on the application of International Human Rights Laws in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity were launched" (Yogyakarta Principles, n.d.). The Principles are intended as "a coherent and comprehensive identification of the obligation of States to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of all persons regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity" (O'Flaherty and Fisher, 2008), filling a gap in this matter. A similar high-profile document is the Declaration of Montreal, published in the framework of the International Conference on LGBT Human Rights of 2006 (Declaration of Montreal, n.d.). Nevertheless, more than 80 countries, Lebanon included, "still maintain laws that make same-sex consensual relations between adults a criminal offence and few legally binding provisions protecting LGBTIQ+ people exist in international relations" (Yogyakarta Principles, n.d.).

LGBTIQ+ West movements "have increasingly defined themselves as global, seeking to organize across borders and lobby intergovernmental organizations" (Kollman & Waites, 2009 citing Adam *at al.* 1999, Altman 2001, Binnie 2004) and LGBTIQ+ rights demands are increasingly being included in political discourse in many countries. However, the 'global' nature of the LGBTIQ+ movement has encountered resistance in the Arab activism context. Despite the assertion from most of LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups of the regional and contextualized nature of the activism in the Arab world, there isn't a clear compact community working together with common strategies towards the advocacy of human rights for sexual minorities. What is the situation of the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ advocacy spectrum?

In the past decade, Lebanon has witnessed significant developments with respect to advocacy for LGBTIQ+ persons. These developments "have taken place due to the interplay between civil societies' entities, including NGOs and professional organizations, and to a lesser extent due to the contributions of academic centers and targeted government programs" (Fattal at al., 2018). However, because of the fact that

"sexuality is tightly regulated by the religious elite and their patriarchal allies in order to maintain a heterosexual model of life" (Salloukh et al., 2015), the difficult situation of LGBTIQ+ communities within Lebanon's sectarian model is expected to continue. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, the reaction of Lebanese society toward homosexuality is linked with "a social order that forces people into confessional identities based on classifications imposed by the Ottomans and the pressure from European imperialism in the nineteenth century" (Makarem, 2011). This confessional social imagery led both, religion and political sectarianism to act as obstacles between citizens and the state, undermining the emergence of alternative sociocultural cleavages. Furthermore, it encourages confrontational reactions toward sexual minorities influenced by societal conceptions such as family and patriarchy. In fact, homosexuality "is considered a symbolic challenge to the religious and patriarchal kinship structures that are essential for the reproduction of a sectarian hegemonic system" (Salloukh et al., 2015).

Therefore, one of the main challenges the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is facing is the influence of political sectarianism on the social rejection of homosexuality. The sectarian system where politics and religion are interlayered, has contributed to shaping the negative reactions of society towards LGBTIQ+ individuals. Religion by itself does not shape negative views on homosexuality but rather the influence of religion in politics: "it is the highly politicized identity of the individual, which is directly linked with a specific religious sect, that manipulates the negative conception of homosexuality" (Farid, personal communication, April 2020).

Lebanon, as discussed in the previous chapters, is based on confessional/sectarian power sharing system where the political sectarian elite and the religious establishment cooperate with each other to maintain a patriarchal social model, which is directly linked to kinship and masculinity. One way to sustain this system is by fostering societal norms pertaining marriage, family, and reproduction. Since this patriarchal social structure is only possible through heterosexual relationships, anything that does not comply with the latter is considered deviant. This argument is used by most of the activists interviewed in this thesis (see Appendix A) to explain the reasons of such rejection.

According to Ghadi, although the Lebanese state is considered weak, its strength comes from its capacity to shape the personality and the social imagery that is projected on the citizens (personal communication, April 2020). This religious/political cooperation negatively impacts the social and political life of individuals, shapes state institutions, and constraints the emergence of alternative and/or non-conforming sexual identities and orientations that challenge Lebanese masculine patriarchy.

Therefore, the main reason behind the rejection of homosexuality, which is seen as an element that puts in danger both the family institution (reproduction) and patriarchy (masculinity), is not only the religious beliefs of individuals but also the political manhood identity: "it is not about religion but about masculinity. It is not because I am Christian or Muslim and my religion doesn't agree with homosexuality, but it is because homosexuals are not masculine enough" says Farid (personal communication, April 2020). AFE illustrates this through the incident with the Lebanese band *Mashrou' Leyla* in Byblos in 2019: "The attacks against the vocalist Hammed Sinno and his sexual identity were politically motivated and religiously mobilized by the Free Patriotic Movement. Political parties take advantage of religious institutions, and vice versa, to politically mobilize individuals to advance certain agendas using homosexuality as a tool" (Farid, personal communication, April 2020).

MOSAIC also acknowledges the impact of the patriarchal political system in the levels of social acceptance of homosexuality: "when approaching homosexuals, people usually misinterpret sexual orientation with gender identity and think that a man whose gender expression does not fit his gender identity is considered less masculine" (Murad, personal communication, April 2020). In this regard, Ghadi also agrees with the lack of social understanding of the difference between gender and sexuality: "patriarchal societies get lost in whether they are confronting either gender identities or, instead, non-masculine societal expressions" (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020). This suggests that Lebanese society is more disapproving if men deviate from the perceived masculine norm.

Hayat figuratively compares the stability of political sectarianism to that of a house of cards: "once you remove a card, the whole structure collapses. Kinship and patriarchy

are critical elements for the survival of the sectarian elite. Therefore, any non-conforming political, social, gender or sexual identity might compromise the foundations of the political sectarian structure" (personal communication, April 2020). Based on the above, Dalia acknowledges that sectarianism is adversely impacting the work of LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups: "I don't think we would have needed to work that hard if sectarianism didn't exist…it (sectarianism) oblige us to lobby not only the federal system but all the layers underneath it…we work twice as hard" (personal communication, April 2020). Similarly, Kinan argues that as the Lebanese state and its institutions are weakened, the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement has to reach out to all 18 sects rather than reach out to one body/state institution: "it is doing the same work 18 times" (Kinan, personal communication, April 2020).

While Farid also acknowledges the problematic issue of political sectarianism, he argues that its negative effects are more inflicted in the societal level rather than in the advocacy movement: "religion, through its sectarian counterparts, influences the negative reaction of citizens towards homosexuality" (personal communication, April 2020). As a consequence of the non-conforming aspect of homosexuality to the patriarchal social norms, the sectarian elite has always tried to confront the LGBTIQ+ community. According to AFE, the initial strategy of the sectarian elite was to directly attack and infiltrate LGBTIQ+ NGOs (Farid, personal communication, April 2020). However, nowadays the strategy is different: "the elite creates parallel NGOs that advance similar rights but with a clear political alignment with the traditional sectarian political elite" (Farid, personal communication, April 2020). Additionally, Kinan argues that LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement does not operate in vacuum, therefore, it cannot operate outside the sectarian system: "the Lebanese system that governs us is sectarian, and we definitely assimilated this sectarianism, which we reproduce in various proportions and frequency" (Kinan, personal communication, April 2020).

Having most of the interviewees acknowledged the constraining aspect of political sectarianism in advancing LGBTIQ+ rights, the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement faces the dilemma of either challenge the sectarian system or navigate it. Some scholarly research, such as those conducted by John Nagle (2018), argues that the LGBTIQ+

advocacy movement in Lebanon either reproduces the sectarian model, navigates the system by taking advantage of its weak elements, or directly confront and challenge political sectarianism (this was widely elaborated in the previous chapter). Either by navigating or by challenging the system, the activists interviewed in this thesis recognize the need to contest political sectarianism while admitting the differed strategies used by the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement to advance its agendas and to lessen the negative impact of sectarianism.

In this regard, LGBTIQ+ groups have participated in protests demanding for alternative citizenship identities in Lebanon, although sometimes differing on the means of mobilization. Furthermore, there is a difference regarding the type of advocacy strategy to implement: either a Western or a more local type of advocacy. Some local activists say that "Western-style activism may indeed attract dangerous attention" (A.L., 2018), thus seeking "to counter the western and non-traditional narrative become imperative to achieve acceptance" (El Khawaja, 2018). There is a need to bring in, not only at the level of society in general, but also within the advocacy movement, the understanding that homosexuality, historically, is not a Western concept: "I am not Queer because I like Western people. If our societies explain to us our actual history, we would understand that this was something quite ok and even accepted before colonization, and it existed for a very long time. Our conservative societies believe that this is a Western concept and that we have chosen to be homosexuals" (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). Dalia adds: "No one chooses their sexuality. If we did, I don't think any of us would want to live in Lebanon and be LGBTIQ+; a lot of people may decide not to in order to avoid the pain and the scrutiny…nobody would go through this. The more we try to push the barriers, the more genuine our feeling is" (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020).

Nevertheless, it is difficult to counteract the Western influence within the societal movement in the Arab world, including Lebanon. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, one of the tactics used by the United States and other Western powers in the Middle East, beside military intervention, has been, what some foreign-policy scholars called, "smart power" strategies. Among those strategies, "there is the

funding of local non-governmental organizations, with the purpose of affecting political change and producing a favorable political order" (Nagel & Staeheli, 2015). To what extent are those "smart power" strategies affect the way Lebanese LGBTIQ+ NGOs advocate for the rights of sexual minorities? The actual funding of Lebanese NGOs, particularly LGBTIQ+ NGOs, mainly comes from international (Western) donors, and this is affecting the advocacy work in the MENA region: "The international funding is limited to the donor's goals and agendas, which are framed within a Western understanding of our societies. Our approach is different from one of the Global North" (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). To what extent are the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ NGOs able to distant themselves from the Western discursive in order to apply a more local/indigenous advocacy policy? Although these questions go beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to shed light on this type of topics in order to incentive further research on this matter.

Regardless of the implementation of either a Western or an indigenous advocacy approach, the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement agrees "that eradicating political sectarianism and patriarchy is a precondition to expanding their rights; therefore, the goal of LGBTIQ+ advocacy movements is to decouple citizenship and lawmaking from the grip of religious authorities" (Nagle and Fakhoury, 2018) and "to normalize individuals of the LGBTIQ+ individuals by affirming their presence and increasing their visibility" (El Khawaja, 2018).

In addition to the constraining element of political sectarianism and based on scholarly material and the findings of the interviews conducted for this thesis, it can be argued that the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is facing several other challenges that are believed to constraint the advance of the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community. Those challenges will be elaborated in the following section.

3.7 Challenges: beyond Political Sectarianism

This section will tackle the different challenges that the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is facing. These challenges are the nonexistence of an own Arabic language and material to identify LGBTIQ+ issues, a fragmented advocacy movement, a depoliticized advocacy approach of some LGBTIQ+ NGOs, the influence of Lebanese media in shaping negative societal and cultural views of homosexuality, and last but not least, a lack of proper legal protection of LGBTIQ+ individuals.

3.7.1 What does it mean to be Queer in Arabic?

Rich as it may be, the Arabic language has no valid references for queer identities, "neither as a sexual practice, nor as an identifying pronoun, while the global modern world has constructed many" (Jaber, 2018). Therefore, "it is argued that the lack of queer language is an active and conscious power of oppressing LGBTIQ+ individuals and limiting its space for development" (Jaber, 2018). "Most of the concepts being used by members of the community are taken out from Western conceptions and from the Global North. Therefore, the creation of an indigenous language that represents the Arab LGBTIQ+ is mandatory" (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020).

Despite the wealth of research conducted about the MENA region, few resources are published in Arabic, and most of the produced resources about the region remain within the academic realm, rarely intersecting with, collaborating with, or informing practitioner/activist experience. In this regard, AFE created a program that tackles the gap that exists in the MENA region regarding knowledge on gender and sexuality in Arabic. The Gender and Sexuality Resource Center (GSCR) addresses this gap creating an alternative site of knowledge production with an activist-oriented vision. The program brings together practitioners, activists, academics, and professionals, with a firm emphasis on material produced in Arabic (AFE, n.d.). Several reports and publications were published by AFE in Arabic such as a "Guide for Service Providers on

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity", "Addressing Sexual Harassment at Work in Lebanon", "Towards a Safer Workplace", etc. (AFE, n.d.).

Another example is the NGO "Haven for Artists", which conducts research on Arab history pertaining to homosexuality. The NGO's work is made accessible to people through art: visual repertoire, LGBTIQ+ poetry, etc. However, the creation of this type of material is not enough to fill the gap of knowledge that exists, not only in the general population, but also within the LGBTIQ+ community. It is imperative to properly inform members of the community about the work done by local LGBTIQ+ activists: "this type of information is required to be easily accessible in order for LGBTIQ+ individuals, and particularly youth activists, to understand their own path, their own language, their own cultural differences with the West, the differences between the Global North and the Global South" (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). Dalia adds that it is mandatory to create an understanding of who the Lebanese activists are and for how long they have been advocating, an understanding of the Arab region and what is to be a Queer Arab, and to change the rhetoric the West have on us and the uncivilized elements the West projects on us (personal communication, April 2020).

3.7.2 "We, Lebanese, are fragmented"

Another weak point of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is its fragmentation. It is claimed that "the fragmented spectrum of the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ community and the divisions over mobilization tactics hamper the solidification of a shared space of contention" (Nagle and Fakhoury, 2018): "instead of creating a compact social movement, they (members of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement) ended up funding dozens of NGOs" (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020). Moreover, while some groupings advocate for legal reforms, others argue "that only a secular system in which politics is delinked from sectarianism could serve their cause" (Nagle and Fakhoury, 2018): "advocating for legal reforms is not enough. Current NGOs are tackling, each in their own way, specific issues such as legality, sexual health, training, advocacy, etc.,

instead of pushing collectively for a deep change in the sectarian social structure" (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020).

However, there are different opinions regarding the causes of such fragmentation. According to AFE, the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is not unified in several aspects because it is a reflection of the fragmented Lebanese society: "it is normal to find different political views within the movement. Despite the differences, the major NGOs are working together even if they do not share the same political ideas" (Farid, personal communication, April 2020). However, Farid do acknowledge that some elements in the movement uses this fragmentation to advance their own particular political agendas and interests, adversely impacting the movement (Farid, personal communication, April 2020).

Similarly, Dalia argues that this fragmentation is caused by the many visions and goals of the advocacy movement: "it is normal to have a fragmented advocacy movement because humans always have different opinions and different goals. At the end we are a representation of the fragmented Lebanese society and we, Lebanese, are ethically and morally different" (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). Despite this fragmentation, Dalia adds that the advocacy movement is bridging out their different point of works and missions toward accomplishing the most important goal which is freedom: "Freedom is not for anyone of us to design but is for every single of us to design. Your freedom is different from mine, the freedoms of cisgender[17] women are different from those of lesbian women. Rights are layered, and our aim is to deconstruct these layers in order to accomplish our goal which is freedom" (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020).

In the same line of thought, Kinan acknowledges that diversity in advocacy is crucial to represent the needs and aspirations of the various orientations of LGBTIQ+ individuals (Kinan, personal communication, April 2020), however, rather than establishing a hierarchy among the forms of advocacy, LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement shall

[17] "Cisgender is a term used to refer to people whose gender identity and expression matches the biological sex they were assigned when they were born (McIntyre, n.d.)."

coordinate the efforts at-hand and ensure pressure is exerted on many levels to move forward (Kinan, personal communication, April 2020).

Meanwhile, MOSAIC affirms that this fragmentation is caused by several elements such as diverse visions on how advocacy should be channeled, lack of solidarity among members of the community, influence of political interests and the need to monopolize certain causes: "the movement, to certain extent, is fragmented… some sections of the movement believe that some progress have been achieved therefore they conduct their advocacy towards others causes, and some of them are still stuck in an old type of advocacy which limits them in progressing new ideas" (Murad, personal communication, April 2020). He adds that "some groups want to be more in the limelight than others, which creates a kind of monopoly on particular campaigns and sometimes several NGOs work in the same case, each by its own, duplicating the work and making it less efficient" (personal communication, April 2020).

An additional reason of the fragmentation is the intersectionality of its individuals and the different rights being advocating for: "by nature, the community is diverse…there are gays, lesbians, queers, trans, intersex, etc. and this creates conflicts within the movement… some people don't want to get involved with any of the NGOs because they don't share or believe in their policies, in their mission, etc. " (Murad, personal communication, April 2020). MOSAIC also adds that as the result of the influence of the gay male in the movement, some segments have merged with other movements: "LBQ and trans women see the feminist movement as more inclusive and that they are able to achieve their rights by being feminists…they created their own movement by merging with the feminist collective Nasawiya" (Murad, personal communication, April 2020).

Despite the fragmentation of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement and the differences and contradictions within the community, several NGOs are establishing networks and alliances with local and international organizations. In this regard, last year the community saw the formation of coalition of a group of organizations entitled the Lebanese Coalition for LGBTIQ+ rights comprised by MOSAIC, AFE, HELEM, Marsa, LebMASH, and Seeds, which celebrates monthly basis meetings to advance their agendas (Murad, personal communication, April 2020).

3.7.3 "We are apolitical"

Hayat argues that the major defect the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is its narrow and/or apolitical identity, sometimes leaning more towards rightist ideals. It is important to acknowledge that the Lebanese society is politically mobilized and each individual, including LGBTIQ+, does belong to a specific political identity. In order for those individuals to sense a kind of connection with the advocacy movement, the latter should foster political and wider alliances inside and outside the community. She adds that the lack of clear political views and identities within the movement limits its work and goals: "our main goal has become to provide services and some kind of security and freedom for privileged LGBTIQ+ individuals, while ignoring those who are non-conformed with the current political identity of a specific NGO or those who are unprivileged because of their socioeconomic status and/or geographical location" (personal communication, April 2020). Hayat says that this type of freedom is only enjoyed either in private spaces, spaces that people can afford with money, by having privileged connections, or by adhering to a specific political identity that a person might not be conformed with (personal communication, April 2020).

Ghadi also admit that an apolitical identity is a disadvantage: "We always tend to take a step back when it comes to actively engage in political alliance and in political discursive practices. We are refusing to politically confront religion and sectarianism" (personal communication, April 2020). According to Ghadi, this apolitical identity of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is not allowing the creation of a more compact and intersectional social movement that could challenge the sectarian system; instead, this apolitical feature led to the creation of dozens of NGOs.

He also adds that in the beginning of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement in Lebanon, HELEM had an intersectional approach that could have led to broaden its support base and to include the LGBTIQ+ cause within a wider rights framework. However, HELEM shifted its approach to one of identity politics which specifically focuses on the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals: "We had the opportunity to be more politically engaged during the Lebanese-Israeli war in 2006, when HELEM participated in relief campaigns in

collaboration with Samidoun[18] and other leftist movements, and it offered its premises as an administrative center for refugee relief work" (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020). HELEM's initiative received a constructive media coverage which helped to project a positive image of the NGO within Lebanese society (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020). Ghadi critiques the current advocacy movement for being immersed in the gender identity debate (identity politics), which is diverging the movement from what it should be its main purpose: rights.

Despite the existence of LGBTIQ+ NGOs and groups in Lebanon (mainly in Beirut), it is argued that their work is aimed to build a counter-reaction to the cancellation of a specific LGBTIQ+ event (BeirutPride, n.d.), or triggered when there is violence against some LGBTIQ+ individuals (Hayat, personal communication, April 2020). Moreover, some activists believe that instead of outreaching wider communities, LGBTIQ+ structural NGOs are operating within limited and specialized spheres and using a minority discourse, which crystalize identity politics: "the communitarian approach puts people in a closed-community mindset, favoring the prejudice of "gays being a sect" and of "gays being secretive therefore partaking in a criminal activity"… additionally, identity politics isolates us from society and boxes us in specific cases" (Kinan, personal communication, April 2020). Moreover, Ghadi adds that "their (NGOs) professionalism is mostly output-driven-how many studies do we conduct, how many reports do we publish- instead of being action-driven-reaching other social segments and making their work more accessible to the public in general" (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020). There is criticism from within the LGBTIQ+ community directed at the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement for not building any single relationship with political factions and power elites at the parliament or in the public sector, although many of them are willing to include in their agendas the issue of LGBTIQ+ rights.

During the electoral campaign in 2018, the Kataeb Party demanded in its electoral program the annulment of the laws criminalizing homosexuality (Nabad2018, n.d.) and Nicolas Chammas, economist and General Secretary of the Lebanese Economic Organizations and the President of the Beirut Traders Association (Nicolas Chammas,

[18] "Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network"

n.d.) wrote in his electoral program called for the protection of religious, racial, sexual and social minorities (Beirutpride, n.d.). Other politicians as Gilbert Doumit, Massoud Achkar and Roger Choueiri also publicly opined on social media and on television their favorable positions on the rights of homosexuals (Beirutpride, n.d.). Those who criticizes the lack of political involvement argue that without making alliances inside and outside the LGBTIQ+ movement, it is not possible to advance the file pertaining the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Disagreeing with the abovementioned opinions, AFE considers that an apolitical identity is beneficial for the movement. While Farid admits that LGBTIQ+ individuals have their own political identity and that persons withing the advocacy movement might have either a leftist or a rightist political inclination, he considers beneficial not to make any alliances with the political-sectarian elite in order not to be framed within a specific political/sectarian faction, which might create a division within the LGBTIQ+ community. “It is important to be careful how to navigate the sectarian system. The Kataeb (Party) and the Lebanese Forces (Party) offered their support for the LGBTIQ+ cause but we refused for two reasons: first there is no general support for the LGBTIQ+ cause within the parliament and second we don’t want to be linked to traditional parties in order not to create within the community a political discourse that might lead to its division” (Farid, personal communication, April 2020). Farid also declares that an additional reason for not establishing alliances with traditional political parties is because of their historical militia background and their participation in the civil war (personal communication, April 2020).

Additionally, Haven for Artists avoids adhering to a politics identity approach and uses the its name to challenge the sectarian system: “Haven for Artists is not directly involved in challenging the sectarian system. For example, we were not visible as an NGO in the popular protests of October 2019 because it does not make sense for an art NGO to be in the middle of the *thawra* (revolution) demanding to overthrow the sectarian system” (Dalia, personal interview, 2020, April 4). However, Dalia does admit that members of Haven for Artists, including her, participated in the popular protests as individuals and by personal initiative (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020).

3.7.4 The Role of the Media

The media also plays a negative role in shaping how people react to the concept of homosexuality (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020) through a wrongful media depiction of LGBTIQ+ realities and the use of incorrect idioms and expressions (Kinan, personal communication, April 2020). For decades, whenever homosexuals were arrested in Lebanon, the media reported the issue by linking it to *shuzuz* (deviation) elements such as satanism or drugs: "the media incentive the rejection to homosexuals…the media considers homosexuality as a taboo and as something hidden that does not need to be exposed" (Murad, personal communication, April 2020). Moreover, the Lebanese media lacks a proper language when addresses homosexual individuals: "the media usually considers homosexuals as survivors from rape and the whole coverage is about how the person was raped and how it did happen" (Murad, personal communication, April 2020). Murad also argues that this trend created by the media is used by some LGBTIQ+ individuals to achieve some levels of acceptance within the society: "these people could use the argument of being victims of rape as an excuse of becoming homosexuals… look, I am homosexual because I was raped so please accept me" (personal communication, April 2020).

In order to ameliorate the above situation, AFE implements media literacy activities under its Gender & Body Rights Media Center (GAB) program, aimed to develop a more respectful media coverage and representation of LGBTIQ+ and SOGIE[19] issues in the MENA region. It does so by building alliances with local and regional media channels and by providing training to journalists (AFE, personal communication, March 2020). In this regard, AFE considers that as result of the NGO's efforts and the visibility of LGBTIQ+ individuals, that the social understanding of homosexuality has changed: "the majority of Lebanese no longer see homosexuality as something hidden or obscure" says Farid (personal interview, 2020, April 10.) In fact, most of the surveyed in 2015 agreed that they would not take any negative action against homosexuals, and 70% of them are even against the legislations that criminalizes homosexuality (Nasr & Zeidan,

[19] "Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression."

2015). Additionally, “38,1% of respondents agreed that homosexuality should be legal even though it is immoral, which shows that the view of homosexuality as a sinful element should not extend to legislation or punitive measures against homosexuals” (Nasr & Zeidan, 2015). Therefore, the disapproval of the use of violent or penal actions against homosexuals might be seen as promising developments towards a more just society. An insight on the legal status of the LGBTIQ+ community will be elaborated in the next section.

3.7.5 Legal Framework: Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code

According to AFE and MOSAIC (Murad, personal communication, April 2020), one of the main challenges faced by the LGBTIQ+ community and advocacy movement is the lack of legal protection of LGBTIQ+ individuals. Before elaborating on the legal status of the LGBTIQ+ community in Lebanon and its developments, an introduction to the legal framework will be given.

Lebanon is signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, among others, of the two main covenants that were formed after it: “the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), often referred to as the ‘International Bill of Human Rights’” (Human Rights in Lebanon, 2016). Additionally, in 1991, “ratifying major changes to their constitution regarding the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Lebanon agreed to uphold the Charter of the United Nations, which enshrine freedom of sexuality, speech, and the right to a fair trial” (Weller, 2018).

Nevertheless, it constantly violates international law in many levels, particularly in those that pertain sexual minorities: Lebanese authorities “prosecute individuals for peaceful speech and opinion, detainees continue to report torture by security forces, civilians are still tried in military courts, women still face discrimination under 15 separate religion-based personal status laws, security forces persecute individuals based on gender and sexual preferences and shut down LGBTIQ+ events, among others” (Lebanon, 2018, May 6). Anti-homosexual legislation started to be implemented in the Arab World as the

result of Foucault's "incitement to discourse" and "paired with the expansion of the power structure of the government and the transition from pre-modernism to the creation of modern states" (Anderson, 2015).

During the French Mandate in Lebanon, specifically on 1 March 1943, the Lebanese Penal Code was enacted, a law mostly influenced by French law, and a mixture of Ottoman legal principles and Islamic law. While homosexuality is not literally illegal under the Lebanese constitution, Article 534 of the Lebanese penal code forbids sexual relations that are "contradicting the laws of nature," that could be sentenced to up to a year in prison. While the interpretation of "laws of nature" is unclear, this article has widely been used to criminalize and prosecute LGBTIQ+ identifying individuals and people who do not adhere to "mainstream" sexual orientations and gender identities. Although the word "homosexuality" is not explicitly mentioned in the law, but instead the phrase "unnatural acts of sex", the article is ambiguous enough to be used for penalizing LGBTIQ+ individuals: "it creates a scope of violence against them, a direct violation to their rights and an increase in the number of arrests" (LGBTQ in Lebanon, 2017) and "it goes in tandem with agendas of the political and religious elite who want to maintain control over a conservative society" (Makarem, 2015). Moreover, "this vague law leaves the interpretation of the law up to the personal bias of the judge" (Weller, 2018).

Enforcement of the law had been varied as the interpretation has changed. For instance, in 2002, during a theft investigation in a house, police found two women having sexual relations and "charged them both with the crime of sodomy regardless of the original case" (Two Lesbians Arrested, 2002). Police have also raided LGBT spaces, including saunas and clubs, using the Article has a broad tool for arrest. For instance, when, a gay-friendly club in Dekwaneh, a suburb north of Beirut, was raided, several "were arrested and forced to undress in the municipal headquarters, where they were then photographed naked" (Marwan, 2013).

The prosecutions on Article 534 are activated if one, or more, of the following criteria is met: 1) personal accusations usually submitted by a person acquainted with the defendant, by the partner or even by the one of the parents; 2) names (who are

summoned, investigated and prosecuted) given by a detained person, and with whom the latter has had same-sex relationships; 3) people caught red-handed (in the act) usually in public spaces; 4) based on intelligence information; and 5) based on private data (chats, pictures, files) contained on the mobile phone of the detained person (Article 534 Guide, n.d.).

The way to corroborate the evidence is conducted through different procedures: 1) a medical examination on the detained person (anal examination or also known as forensic test), a method that is considered by both, the Lebanese Ministry of Justice and the Lebanese College of Physicians, as a human rights violation and a torture method; 2) by confessions of the detained person and testimonies of relatives and neighbors; 3) or personal evidence gathered from the mobile phone of the detained person, in addition to a set of indicators that the judge may consider to be evidence of accusation (pornographic films, condoms, bad reputation, etc.) (Article 534 Guide, n.d.).

Lebanon has witnessed various attacks on freedom of speech, freedom of choice, and the right to convene in the last years. Human Rights Watch, "a nonprofit, nongovernmental human rights organization that was established in 1978, and known for its accurate fact-finding, impartial reporting, and targeted advocacy in partnership with local human rights groups" (HRW, n.d.), complains about the interference of the Lebanese Security Forces in events related to human rights of sexual minorities. This fueled by a radical position of Lebanese religious leaders regarding the topic of sexual minorities and the LGBTIQ+ movement.

The following are examples about the influence of religion in the context of LGBTIQ+ events. In 2014, 28 people who were accused of being gay or legally speaking of "sexual intercourse contrary to nature" (based on article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code) were arrested in a Turkish bathhouse in Beirut (Lebanese State after LGBT community, 2014). In 2016, plans for an LGBTIQ+ rights meeting with artists and journalists were abandoned after coming under pressure from Christian religious authorities (Moussaoui, 2017). In May 2017, Beirut became the first Arab capital in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to host a Pride week. However, some venues received threats from religious groups, particularly from The Association of Muslim Scholars, and some

events faced local opposition (El Khawaja, 2018). Based on a 2017 survey by ILGA[20], religion and culture are often cited when rejecting the LGBTIQ+ community on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity and in an earlier survey, 42 percent of those surveyed across Asia agreed with the statement that same sex desire is a Western import (El Khawaja, 2018). This coincides with the declarations in 2017 of the leader of the Lebanese Islamist political group Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, by which he accuses "the West of exporting homosexuality to the Islamic world, echoing Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei's warning a year before of 'ravaging moral decay' from the West" (A.L., 2018). The efforts for LGBTIQ+ rights in Lebanon is eliciting more of a response from religious authorities, including a conference held in May 2017 titled 'Homosexuality: Illness and Treatment' organized by the Orthodox Patriarchate in Tripoli (Walden, 2017).

On May 14, 2018, one of the events of the second edition of The Beirut Pride, the first pride initiative in the Arab world, was raided by the police. Following the dissemination of a homophobic, sensational, fabricated program that was attributed to Beirut Pride (Beirut Pride, n.d.), the organizer, "Hadi Damien, was arrested, and the general prosecutor of Beirut ordered the suspension of the scheduled activities" (Kinan, personal communication, April 2020).

In September 2018, the *Direction Générale de la Sûreté Générale*[21] attempted to shut down the annual AFE NEDWA[22] conference, which has been held in Lebanon since 2013. The intervention resulted in a travel ban on all participants (AFE, personal communication, March 2020). It is believed that the interference of the General Security was triggered by the public statements of the Muslim Scholars Association accusing NEDWA's organizers of promoting debauchery, homosexuality and drug abuse. The reaction from these religious groups "pushed for government institutions to force the cancellation of multiple LGBTIQ+ focused festivities and activist, demonstrating the influence of religion and culture in the Lebanese society" (Lebanon vs. Security Forces,

[20] "International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association."
[21] The General Security Directorate, one of the Lebanese security forces.
[22] "Networking, Exchange, Developments, Wellness, and Achievement."

2018). For security concerns, NEDWA 2019 was implemented in Cyprus and hosted 200 participants (AFE, personal communication, March 2020).

Moreover, in 2019, the gay dating application *Grindr* was blocked by public telecommunication authorities and a concert for the local band Mashrou' Leyla was cancelled due to Christian religious authorities taking offense because of lyrics they felt disregarded their beliefs. However, this goes beyond the lyrics and it is directly linked to the sexual orientation of one of the band's members, Hamed Sinno, who is openly gay and advocates for LGBTIQ+ rights in the Middle East. AFE, as part of a social movement which coordinated public awareness events against the events mentioned in this paragraph, and in coordination with 10 other NGOs, submitted a legal complaint against those who incite to hatred and threatened to attack the concert of Mashrou' Leyla and a complaint to the state council against the decision of the Ministry of Telecommunication to ban *Grindr* (AFE, personal communication, March 2020).

Despite the constrains that the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ community is facing, grassroots movements and activists are leading collective action at many levels, prompting a positive effect somehow. While not yet repealed, momentum has been growing against the law within the legal system in Lebanon. Between 2007 and 2017, "judges of lower courts refused to criminalize homosexuality on the ground that the penal code, which punishes 'unnatural sex' with up to one year in prison, does not apply to consensual same-sex relations" (El Khawaja, 2018). On July 12, 2018, a district court of appeal in Lebanon issued a groundbreaking ruling refusing to prosecute gay and transgender people who were arrested in a suburb of Beirut in 2015, arguing that consensual sex between people of the same sex is not unlawful: "consensual sex between adults of the same sex cannot be considered 'unnatural' as long as it does not violate morality and ethics, for instance, when it is seen or heard by others, or performed in a public place, or involving a minor who must be protected" (From the Americas to the Far East, 2018).

In 2019, "a military court in Lebanon cleared four military personnel of charges of committing sexual acts 'contrary to nature' and declined to issue warrants for their arrest; the judge argued that 'sodomy is not punishable by law' as the country's penal code did not specify what 'kind of relationship can be considered contrary to nature'"

(Al Jazeera, 2019). Moreover, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, for the first time in Lebanese electoral history, nearly 100 candidates, most of them part of the civil society, promoted gay rights in the electoral campaign of the 2018 Lebanese elections, calling for the decriminalization of homosexuality (Qiblawi, 2018). Can these court rulings and facts be considered as precedents towards a better legal protection of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Lebanon?

There are divergent opinions within the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement about the court rulings and their effects, although most of the activists consider them to constitute progress. According to Dalia, the number of judges standing against Article 534 and ruling that homosexuality is not unnatural is a positive step in shaping a new social understanding in the matter but more work is needed: “I still get arrested and treated inhumanely. I am beaten, threatened, mentally and physically abused. LGBTIQ+ individuals want, even before reaching the judge at the court, to be properly treated and with dignity” (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). Ghadi considers that there has been shift in how arrests are being done: “Instead of cisgender gay men, MSM or LGB in general, now arrests are more against transgender and intersexual individuals” (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020). This shift, in addition to the military court rule in 2019 and the state sponsored HIV Program, could be a signal of some level of acceptance in the state establishment, according to Ghadi (personal communication, April 2020).

In a similar stream of thought, Hayat consider those court rules as a positive step, although not strong enough towards a deep reform of the Lebanese penal code: “for sure those court rules will encourage other judges to treat and prosecute people in a different (positive) manner. However, it is too soon to consider those rules a definite step towards annulling article 534 and other articles used to prosecute LGBTIQ+ individuals, or even incentive a complete reform of the Lebanese penal code” (Hayat, personal communication, April 2020).

Despite the slight improvement in the legal status of LGB individuals and the advance at the judiciary level in regard to court rulings decriminalizing against homosexuality, the law enforcement process before reaching the judge is still long and difficult: “if you get

arrested in Tripoli or in any other conservative neighborhood or geographical region, you will be treated inhumanly, you will be physically attacked, your family will be notified, and you will get transferred to Hbeish Police Station in Ras Beirut. This process takes between 4 and 5 days before reaching the judge and most of the detainees are not able to handle it" (Farid, personal communication, April 2020). Moreover, the court rulings have only occurred within Beirut and Mount Lebanon, which depicts a difference in how the law is being enforced in those two regions compared to other Lebanese geographical areas: "most of the rulings, although ground breaking, are centralized within a certain geographic area - Mount Lebanon and Beirut -, excluding conservative regions such as Tripoli, Bekaa, Tyre or Sidon…this shows different realities" (Murad, personal communication, April 2020). Similarly, Ghadi highlights this issue: "there have been some positive signs and advance in certain rights as the result of the court rules pertaining Article 534, but only within the confinement of Beirut…other Lebanese regions are not being benefited by these trend towards more rules decriminalizing homosexuality" (personal communication, April 2020).

In addition to the geographical aspect, arrests are still being made based on socioeconomic grounds: underprivileged LGBTIQ+ individuals and/or those living in poor and remote areas face discriminatory treatment from the state security agencies, being trans individuals those who are mostly marginalized and prosecuted. Law enforcement is also open to the consideration of police officers and judges based on their own social background (Farid and Murad, personal communication, April 2020) and influenced by other elements such as gender identity (Trans individuals are the most affected), the socioeconomic situation of the individual (privileged people have a better treatment), the connections that a person may have with a particular NGO, and physical appearance (age, masculinity levels, clothes, etc.) (Hayat and Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020): "at the end, the way police officers or judges react is influenced by their own social and cultural backgrounds and how they personally visualize the society… they take into consideration the socioeconomic status of the arrested through their clothes, the geographical area where the detention occurred, to which family belongs, etc. " (Hayat, personal communication, April 2020).

Although the precolonial Arab society was tolerant towards homoerotism and homosexuality, as documented in a variety of literature sources, sexual encounters between same-sex individuals was seen as an aggregate of acts, rather than an identity. The nineteenth century Western society, particularly during the flourishing of the Industrial Revolution, considered sexuality as an element to be controlled in order to maintain a family-oriented social order. During the colonialist process, this idea clashed with the openness of the Arabs concerning sex, resulting in the rejection of same-sex desire and the imposition of a new homosexual identity; these practices were seen as a reflection of the "backward" nature of Arabic society. Nowadays, this conception of homosexuality, which is considered a Western imposition, is used by a large percentage of the Arab population to reject homosexuals. Thus, LGBTIQ+ people are subject to persistent human rights violations and systemic oppression, while legal frameworks and law enforcement mechanisms go in line to the schemas of the sectarian/political elite that is keen to maintain a grip on a conservative society.

Despite the fact that the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement has not been able to advance a shared challenging strategy, that they are divided over mobilization tactics and the type of reforms they are advocating for, a number of grassroots movements and associative platforms are flourishing and organizing to effect change at the local, national and regional level. Those groups are mobilizing support over multiple agendas, including those related to the protection and the human rights of marginalized communities, such as women and LGBTIQ+ individuals. The next chapter will continue to reflect on the findings of the series of interviews conducted with representatives and activists mentioned in the first chapter in order to shed light the strategies they are using to navigate the patriarchal and sectarian political system of Lebanon.

Chapter Four

The Need for a Breakthrough

The previous chapter argues that social and cultural negative views of homosexuality in Lebanon are not only motivated by the religious background of the individuals, but are also a result of joint discursive politics based on religion and political sectarianism. The chapter also explains that aside from political sectarianism and the influence of Western colonialism in the creation of a social fiber that rejects homosexuality, the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is facing additional challenges such as the communal and identity politics approach that restricts the work of the advocacy movement and fosters its isolation, the lack of a proper Arab language and material to define LGBTIQ+ issues and concepts, the absence of historical awareness on same-sex interactions which existed in pre-colonial times, and the lack of legal protection of LGBTIQ+ individuals, among others.

Therefore, this chapter aims to explore some of the main required recommendations and reforms to better navigate the sectarian system, and to strengthen the work of LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement in Lebanon taking into consideration the issues that were raised in the interviews conducted with the activists who are selected for this research (see Appendix A). However, before elaborating on this topic, it is important to highlight the service-oriented approach of the current LGBTIQ+ NGOs which, in the opinion of some of the concerned activists, is limiting the work of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement, while others consider it critical to advance LGBTIQ+ advocacy.

4.1 “Advocacy is to reform, not to provide services”

Another critique of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is the transformation of NGOs into service providers, which is argued to be one of the strategies used by the sectarian elite to limit the advocacy efforts of the LGBTIQ+ community. However, it is also

viewed as a consequence of the failure of the Lebanese state to provide social services to its citizens. One example of this strategy is the inclusion of HELEM, in addition to MARSA later on, in the National AIDS Control Program sponsored by the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health which provides HIV medical-tests to LGBTIQ+ individuals. Thus, those NGOs became the "invisible partners" of the Lebanese state in the fight against HIV (Salloukh et al., 2015).

According to Hayat, due to this strategy NGOs need to coordinate with state institutions in order for the NGOs to be able to sustain themselves, which indirectly creates a scope of dependency with the sectarian system (personal communication, April 2020). Hayat adds saying that the advocacy movement is failing to challenge the sectarian system because of different reasons, being one of them the shift from activism to services: "They are only tackling specific issues such as sheltering, protection, counselling, sexual and mental health, etc., instead of advancing bigger efforts in advocacy" (personal communication, April 2020). Instead of directly coopt the movement, the sectarian elite has managed to convert NGOs into providers of services which the state has failed to provide: "This is not the activism that is being required…this is taking us to nowhere…activism is not only being part of an NGO or by providing services, but also to demand reforms" (Hayat, personal communication, April 2020).

AFE retaliates the opinions which claim all NGOs are service oriented. AFE, for example, works more on research, training, and advocacy rather than offering services. However, AFE adds that services are important part of advocacy because they create a bond between LGBTIQ+ individuals and the movement: "this bond facilitates the individuals of the community to get mobilized over the LGBTIQ+ causes and such type of services are not offered by state institutions" (Farid, personal interview, 2020, April 10).

MOSAIC supports AFE's opinion arguing that service provisions are an important part of advocacy and necessary when the Lebanese state does not provide them: "there is no proper access to health and legal services for LGBTIQ+ people…most of the time LGBTIQ+ are afraid of the possible homophobic or transphobic attitude that the service provider might have towards them-they might out them, break the confidentiality, etc.-

… this creates on LGBTIQ+ individuals a fear that led to minimize the access to such services" (Murad, personal communication, April 2020).

4.2 What is needed for a Breakthrough?

Having in mind the hindering effects of political sectarianism on the advancement of the rights of sexual minorities, the need to reform the sectarian system is expected to remain. However, some activists are pessimistic regarding the possibility of reforming the sectarian system. According to Ghadi, the Lebanese political regime cannot be reformed since the influence of religion and the sectarian nature of the political landscape are legally stipulated in the Constitution: "this element minimizes the possibility of any structural change in the country" (personal interview, 2020, April 6).

Even if the political system is reformed, what are the possible alternatives? Would a secular system be an adequate alternative? There are disagreements among the activists regarding the possibility of a secular state. While some activists believe that secularism is a prerequisite to advance the rights of sexual minorities, others claim that having a secular state does not necessarily lead to improvement in the situation of LGBTIQ+ individuals: "a secular system would not be enough… some countries are secular but still repressive on homosexuals… even if secularity is implemented, we might still have parliamentary forces that might be conservative" (Farid, personal communication, April 2020). In a similar pattern, Kinan believes that a secular system will not necessarily solve the national problems if political concerns are not addressed: "the LGBTIQ+ movement can secure consistent wins the moment it organizes itself, independently from the form of governance, be it sectarian or not…the Lebanese problems are not religion-based but based on politics" (personal communication, April 2020).

However, Hayat believes that secularity would slightly improve the conditions of the LGBTIQ+ community: "sectarianism is not the only force affecting LGBTIQ+ individuals… the sexual orientation and/or the gender identity of a person constitutes a small part of their self while other aspects are to be also considered like the

socioeconomic status of the person, class issues, regionalism, kinship, etc. ” (personal communication, April 2020).

One of the activists commented that an LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement would not be required nor would it be existed in a secular system” (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020). The activist also argues that as long as the civil society still accepts to work within the actual legal framework, it is indirectly accepting and conforming with the sectarian system, making the latter difficult to challenge (personal interview, 2020, April 6). The said activist also depicts to what extent religion influences social behavior of individuals in both civil and secular society groups: “during the Laic Pride in 2012, 2 gays kissed each other publicly. This triggered a reaction within the organizers based on what could be the response of the religious authorities if they saw this” (personal interview, 2020, April 6). According to Ghadi, this shows the obedience that persists within the advocacy movement towards the religious grip.

Based on the above, it seems that there is no alternative to the sectarian system, or at least it is too early to visualize a structural change in the Lebanese society keeping the work of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement challenged by the political and sectarian elite. However, after the outbreak of the Lebanese “October revolution” in 2019, where hundreds of thousands of citizens protested across Lebanon calling to overthrow the established political order, a glance of hope emerged within the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement. One of the peculiarity of the recent popular protests was of the significant visibility of LGBTIQ+ individuals: “we are becoming more visible in the streets and on the walls of the city, instead of being in private of safe spaces…the great amount of Queer graffiti in the streets of Beirut is a clear signal of overcoming the barriers of communication among Lebanese” (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). “We are convinced that there is an alternative to the sectarian system and a majority of Lebanese support this…this is one of the reasons of the visibility of LGBTIQ+ individuals during the protests which started in October 2019” (Farid, personal communication, April 2020). Murad seconded this argument: “there were Queer people in the front lines of the revolution and a lot of LGBTIQ+ graffiti were painted in Beirut’s walls…this mainstreams LGBTIQ+ issues… this will have a great impact in

creating a new social mindset and will show us as individuals with political consciousness who are not only identified with sex" (personal communication, April 2020).

Because of LGBTIQ+ visibility in public spheres, a new social awareness is expected to happen. This could potentially promote structural social changes. Once the social imagery of the citizen changes, the citizen-state relation could possibly change: "The way Lebanese are communicating with each other is changing and it is becoming more active. At the end, the relation of the state with its citizens is shaped by the reflection of the society's beliefs…once a new social imagery starts to be formed, politicians will start to adapt their agendas to the new social understanding the citizens created" (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). In a similar thought, Farid believes that there should be more work and cooperation with media for developing awareness campaigns on issues pertaining the LGBTIQ+ cause in order to shape a new social understanding: "either laws reform societies, or the other way around…in Lebanon, the society will reform the law" (personal communication, April 2020).

However, this LGBTIQ+ visibility along with the will to find an alternative to the sectarian system should be accompanied with several reforms and initiatives by the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement. Despite how the movement is fragmented and the number of challenges it is facing, the activists interviewed in this thesis agreed on some strategies.

According to Farid, the sectarian system could be challenged by creating a constructive engagement with a wider social movement, instead of framing advocacy efforts only to LGBTIQ+ rights: "we need to support other social segments that are pushing for a change… the challenge of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is to include LGBTIQ+ rights within a wider political and social discourse that comprises civil and individual rights, freedom of speech, socioeconomic rights, etc. " (personal communication, April 2020). Farid acknowledges that the aim of the sectarian elite is to isolate the LGBTIQ+ community. For this reason, "the LGBTIQ+ movement needs to build alliances with groups from outside its community in order to get support from the civil society and the media. This will make the movement more visible and will lessen the negative effects of

sectarianism" (personal communication, April 2020). In this regard, AFE became part of an initiative framed under a wider scope of civil and human rights called the Lebanese Coalition for Freedom of Speech (Farid, personal communication, April 2020).

In the same context, Dalia says: "we can be more effective by creating intersectional collaboration between LGBTIQ+ and other advocacy movements, and working together for progressing rights" (personal communication, April 2020). However, and according to Dalia, there should also be a bond between LGBTIQ+ individuals, LGBTIQ+ NGOs and activists: "there should be more transparency among us, be more acknowledgeable of our reality, and make all our studies and reports accessible to all the community" (personal communication, April 2020).

This is similarly addressed by Hayat: "The Lebanese civil society has been reluctant in publicly advocating for LGBTIQ+ rights. Despite the fact that LGBTIQ+ NGOs have been flourishing since 2001, they have been the only associational groups advocating for this type of rights…instead of creating a compact social movement, we ended up founding dozens of NGOs…a unified civil society is mandatory" (personal communication, April 2020). Hayat argues that the advance of human and political rights should go in tandem with advocating for social and economic rights: "if LGBTIQ+ individuals are not economically stable and independent, it is hard for them to adopt a specific identity, identity that might help creating a deeper connection with the LGBTIQ+ community. An NGO cannot achieve this by its own" (personal communication, April 2020).

Moreover, according to Hayat, in order to advance LGBTIQ+ rights, advocacy should not be limited only to the work of NGOs, but also in cooperation with individual activists and grassroots movements: "there is a monopoly from the NGOs in the advocacy movement…the only accepted way to advance activism is either by having an NGO or being part of one and this constraints the efforts of advocacy because an NGO is always limited to its donor's agenda" (personal communication, April 2020). Ghadi also agrees with the constraining element of NGOs funding: "the type of funding they (NGOs) are receiving is conditioning their efforts and activities…the international understanding of what an NGO should be does not work in Lebanon" (personal

communication, April 2020). AFE acknowledges the difficult in implementing an internationally model of advocacy, which pushes them to create a local and indigenous strategy that is adapted to the Lebanese reality: “the global definition of advocacy is not easily implemented in Lebanese because there is a lack of normal channels to implement proper policies” (Farid, personal communication, April 2020).

In addition to a broader integration with members of the civil society and the creation of a more compact social movement through alliances with organizations working on freedom of expression, women’s right, right to health, and/or others human rights issues, reforming the legal framework is essential to improve the situation for LBTQ+ rights. All the activists interviewed in this research agreed on the necessity to reform the laws that criminalize sexual minorities and to cancel Article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code. However, the activists are conscious on the difficulty of changing existing laws because of religion and its influence in politics. According to Hayat “legal reforms are slow and complicated as the result of the influence of the sectarian elite and the religious establishment” (Hayat, personal communication, April 2020) and Ghadi adds that “the religious influence at the state level cannot be challenged without a secular and a civil legal framework” (Ghadi, personal communication, April 2020).

Along the same line, Dalia believes that even if a legal reform is achieved at the federal level, it will not have an impact on the religious courts that are in charge of the personal status laws in Lebanon: “without a secular system, where state is not influenced by religion, legal reforms are hard to implement because the government and the civil society have then to lobby and convince the 18 recognized sects about the need for such reforms” (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). Murad seconded this by saying that although Article 534 has to be annulled, in the ground it is almost impossible, and gives the following recommendation: “what we can do is to cooperate with the judges to have more court rules that decriminalize homosexuality” (Murad, personal communication, April 2020).

In this scenario, AFE and MOSAIC agree on a common strategy which is to incentive more judges to deliver brave and solid judgements that refuse to criminalize homosexuality, setting a precedent for others judges to build on. In this regard, AFE

believes that the ambiguity of Article 534 could work in favor of bringing similar court rules (Farid, personal communication, April 2020). According to Farid, there are two possible solutions for the prosecution of LGBTIQ+ individuals under Article 534: either working at the judiciary level to make the Article completely irrelevant or pushing for amendment or annulment in the Lebanese parliament. For Farid, the latter is the least feasible scenario because there is not enough support at the political level, and even though some political parties have offered their support for LGBTIQ+ causes, they might be risking to lose some of their political allies: "in doing so, there is a risk in triggering a reaction from the Parliament that lead to the reform of the Article in a way that makes it less ambiguous and target instead the LGBTIQ+ segment" (Farid, personal communication, April 2020). AFE and MOSAIC argues that it is easier to create a trend among judges to ignore the article, which has already been happening lately based on the decrease in number of detentions under Article 534: "usually judges when they want to rule, they take into consideration precedents of similar judicial cases and their judgements are usually similar to previous ones… this creates a trend and a network of judges that do not consider homosexuality as a crime" (Murad, personal communication, April 2020).

Despite the rejection from political sectarianism to non-heterosexual and non-conforming gender and sexual identities, and the difficulty to reform the confessional-sectarian system, the massive social movement that emerged in October 2019 presented an opportunity to the civil society, and in particular to the LGBTIQ+ community: "we are starting to be more politically involved and we are becoming experts in many levels, which makes us socially aware of our context and aware that a change is needed and is possible to achieve" (Dalia, personal communication, April 2020). The social movement brought together people of different sects and backgrounds, and LGBTIQ+ concerns were publicly addressed within broader political and socioeconomic demands. Moreover, the protests could potentially normalize the existence of LGBTIQ+ individuals and make their advocacy movement more visible.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

While history and literature show a relaxed attitude and acceptance towards same sex desire and homoerotism in the pre-colonial Arab/Islamic societies, postcolonial Arab countries unanimously condemn homosexuality. This shift gradually occurred as a consequence of the Foucauldian influence of Western colonialism and its need to control different aspects of society, such as sexuality, in order to implement its hegemony on the region. Furthermore, the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalists and Neo-traditional Islamists, who view homosexuality as a Western lifestyle introduced by colonial powers, also played a role in fostering a rejection of homosexuals at the societal level. These two factors, in addition to the Lebanese confessional political system, are impeding the development of a proper LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement in the country.

Lebanon, since its inception, is based on a power-sharing system that secures political and administrative representation to the 18 recognized sectarian communities. The weak foundations of this system and the influence of regional and global powers, allow sectarian communities to influence national policies based on their own interests and to interfere in the state-citizen relationship. As Bassel F. Salloukh and his colleagues (2015) argue, "identities are shaped primarily by confessional and sectarian affiliations and political mobilization are often directed to the sect and its political or religious elite rather than state institutions and symbols."

This sectarian system, where politics and religion are interlinked, imposes a patriarchal model of life where the only acceptable standard or norm is heterosexuality, legitimizing the oppression of society's segments that do not subscribe to the patriarchal system, being sexual minorities one of the most marginalized.

In spite of the above, the LGBTIQ+ community in Lebanon came together and established many organizations to advocate for its rights. While the interviewed activists

unanimously agreed on the constraining elements of political sectarianism and the influence of religion on politics, some other challenges were also visualized.

The Interviews conducted with activists campaigning for sexual minorities rights in Lebanon and the two case studies done on LGBTIQ+ NGOs, clearly shows how political sectarianism impact social and cultural hostile views on homosexuality, which in turn constraints the acceptance of LGBTIQ+ individuals. However, the interviews also highlighted other challenges that go beyond sectarianism which are reasons of discord among LGBTIQ+ activists, although some of them are more important than others for the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement to achieve some of the rights it is demanding.

The first challenge, which could be considered not as relevant as the others, is the absence of solid references and literature written in Arabic on LGBTIQ+ related issues. In this regard, many initiatives were launched by several organizations to address this shortfall in the existing literature:

1. "The Gender and Sexuality Resource Center" under "the Arab Foundation for Freedoms & Equality (AFE)" has dedicated one of its programs, to undertake researches and publish reports in Arabic on LGBT+ related subjects,

2. "Haven for Artists" makes available researches on homosexuality in the Arab world through art,

3. The "Middle East and North Africa Organization for Services, Advocacy, Integration & Capacity Building" (MOSAIC) emphasizes the publication of its research and reports in Arabic.

However, more work needs to be done to achieve the required goal. These informative materials should be made accessible, not only to the LGBTIQ+ community, but also to the general Public, along with the integration of proper sexual education courses in the national curriculum. Moreover, more cooperation is required among LGBTIQ+ NGOs, to make youth activists more aware of their own path, away from the hegemony of globalized identities that do not reflect local multiplicities.

An additional challenge, which is directly connected to the diverse structure of the LGBTIQ+ community, is the fragmentation of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement in Lebanon. AFE and MOSAIC, along with the other activists, agree on this point, although they disagree on the underlying reasons. AFE believes that this reality is an expression of the fragmented Lebanese society and a natural consequence of having a great number of persons working together. Meanwhile, MOSAIC attributes this feature to 1) the diverse spectrum of the LGBTIQ+ community, where the various orientations of individuals need to represent their needs and aspirations by pushing for certain agendas and rights depending on the context of each own's reality, and to 2) the lack of solidarity among members of the community. Despite acknowledging the existence of a fragmentation, the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement witnessed the creation of the Lebanese Coalition for LGBTIQ+ rights, which comprises several LGBTIQ+ NGOs, including AFE and MOSAIC, with the aim to coordinate their efforts.

The third challenge, and one of the most critical, is the apolitical approach and the implementation of identity politics of most of the LGBTIQ+ NGOs. This challenge is organically connected to the institutional and biopolitical practices of the sectarian system that are meant to preclude the emergence of alternative sectarian identities, and one which most of the interviewed activists were concerned about. They argue that NGOs, instead of establishing alliances with political allies and developing an intersectional approach by participating in wider political and social causes, they are focusing their work on either counter-reacting to the cancellation of specific LGBTIQ+ events or acting as a buffer when there is violence against some LGBTIQ+ individuals.

While acknowledging the existence of multiple political affiliation within the LGBTIQ+ community, AFE claims that an apolitical approach is positive as it prevents divisions in the advocacy movement. Moreover, AFE's representative argues that political alliances with parliamentary factions are not recommended since they represent traditional parties that are linked with a negative civil war militia image. However, the majority of the activists who took part in the interviews argue that this apolitical approach will contribute neither to advance the advocacy for LGBTIQ+ rights nor to challenge the sectarian system.

In addition to the apolitical stance of the advocacy movement, the latter is critiqued for being departed from an intersectional framework which might contribute to broaden the support base of the LGBTIQ+ movement. Some of the activists claimed that NGOs are currently immersed in an identity politics approach where their only concern is to plight for the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals instead of applying an intersectional strategy where the LGBTIQ+ cause could be included in a wider set of political, socioeconomic and human rights. AFE, while initially considered as an NGO linked to identity politics (policies based on sexual and gender identities) with a focus on LGBTIQ+ advocacy, is starting to admit the need to shift towards intersectionality. MOSAIC's work is already based on an intersectional approach, which includes, not only the LGBTIQ+ segment, but also other marginalized communities such as Palestinian and Syrian refugees, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identities.

The last two challenges are the role played by the media and the lack of legal protection for LGBTIQ+ individuals. For decades, the media, with the influence of the religious establishment, has approached homosexuality as a deviation from socially accepted practices and often link it to social ills or immoral activities such as satanism or drugs. This has kept the topic in the dark and make it as taboo. To address these challenges, AFE has implemented a training program for journalists and built alliances with media outlets in the MENA region to improve the coverage on SOGIE issues and assure a respectful representation of LGBTIQ+ individuals. This will help developing a better LGBTIQ+ visibility in public spheres and institutions.

With regards to the legal protection of LGBTIQ+ individuals, the Lebanese Penal Code, in its Article 534, penalizes "unnatural-sex" with a sentence of up to one year in prison. The ambiguity of the article has been used to prosecute LGBTIQ+ individuals, but it has also served some judges to refuse to criminalize homosexuality. Between 2007 and 2019, several groundbreaking civil and military court rulings declined to convict LGBTIQ+ individuals by arguing that consensual sex between same-sex people is not illegal. All the interviewees agreed on the positive aspect of the rulings but disagreed on whether this will set a precedent towards annulling Article 534. Some activists claim that those rulings have helped in creating a shift in the type of arrests from sexual

orientation (cisgender gay men, MSM or LGB) to gender-based identities (trans individuals) while others believe that this will encourage other judges to take as precedent the previous rulings in favor of decriminalizing homosexuality. All the activists agree on the need of a reform of the Lebanese Penal Code or the annulling of Article 534, however this is not probable to occur anytime soon.

Despite the positive court rulings, the law is still being enforced in detrimental of LGBTIQ+ individuals and it is open to many considerations such as the personal background of both the police officers and the judges, the geographic location of the arrest, the socioeconomic levels of the detained or to gender and physical expressions of the person. AFE and MOSAIC agree on a common strategy to lobby at the judiciary system level to create a trend among judges to ignore the article and to use previous court rulings as precedent for future judicial statements.

Ultimately, the current Lebanese political system needs to be reformed, although the probability of this is yet to be seen. Moreover, there is no clear alternative to the sectarian system and whether this alternative could serve the interests of the LGBTIQ+ community. Until then, the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is required to implement a number of strategies in order to improve its work within the confinements of the sectarian political structure. The activists that participated in this research highlighted some recommended actions.

The first recommendation is for the NGOs to shift away from being service providers to a more advocacy-approach. Several activists agree that implementing a service-based approach is binding as it creates a scope of dependency with both, the sectarian system and the donors' agendas. However, AFE and MOSAIC claim that the service approach is important for two main reasons: first because LGBTIQ+ NGOs are filling the gap resulting from the failure of the Lebanese state in providing specific type of services (mainly health and mental services) to the LGBTIQ+ community, and second, these services create a type of bond between the advocacy movement and the LGBTIQ+ individuals that might help in creating a sense of belonging between them.

An additional and important recommendation is the need for a constructive engagement with a more general social movement and the implementation of an intersectional approach, where LGBTIQ+ rights could be framed within a wider advocacy movement. According to most of the activists, the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement needs to include the LGBTIQ+ rights topic within broader political and social discourses that comprises civil and individual rights, freedom of speech, socioeconomic rights, etc. This would help the LGBTIQ+ community from being isolated. This intersectional approach should occur both inside and outside the LGBTIQ+ spectrum. Also, more cooperation and integration are needed between LGBTIQ+ activism and other civil society organizations and grassroots movements working on freedom of expression, women's right, right to health, and/or others rights-related issues.

The scenario seems full of obstacles but improvements, although slow, are happening. During the course of this thesis, a massive social movement emerged in October 2019 motivated by a severe socioeconomic crisis. Protesters took the streets of several Lebanese regions demanding structural reforms to ameliorate the standard of living of the citizens and to overthrow the sectarian political system. These protests differ from previous social mobilizations by their decentralized and non-sectarian nature. This is considered a fertile ground to foster a new public sphere where several segments of society come together to demand a deep restructuring of the political life in the country. The LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement is required to take advantage of this public sphere to make LGBTIQ+ individuals and their rights more visible and to help shaping a new social fiber that accepts them as fellows who deserve acceptance, respect and freedom. This intersectional effort should be accompanied with an approach away from communitarianism and identity politics, a better coordination within the advocacy movement, and more direct access to state institutions through political alliances.

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APPENDIX A

Study population: Interviewees' (fictious) Identity and their Activism Background

#	Fictious name	NGO	Professional background
1	Farid	AFE	A long career in gay activism and one of the first members of the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement. He is currently part of the NGOs HELEM, MARSA, and AFE.
2	Murad	MOSAIC	He has been an activist for almost 10 years, with a focus on sexual and mental health within the LGBTIQ+ community. He has volunteered in SIDC (Soins Infirmiers et Developpement Communautaire), and currently member of MOSAIC.
3	Dalia	Heaven for Artists	Cultural and LGBTIQ+ activist with a long trajectory in the LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement. Currently member of the NGO Heaven for Artists.
4	Ghadi	N/A	Activist for marginalized communities, refugees, economic development and LGBTIQ+. He used to be part of HELEM. Currently he does not belong to any NGO.
5	Hayat	N/A	She was a board member in HELEM, part of the feminism activism as part of *Sawt el Neswa* initiative and ex-member of the NGO KAFA (enough). Currently she does not belong to any NGO.
6	Kinan	N/A	Active member in the Lebanese LGBTIQ+ advocacy movement. Further information will not be disclosed in order to maintain his anonymity.

APPENDIX B

Semi-structured Interview Questionnaire

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

The following list of questions is aimed to contribute to the thesis *"Advocating for the Rights of Sexual Minorities within a Sectarian System: The case of Postwar Lebanon"*.

CATEGORY 1:

Background information about the NGO

1) Provide a brief historical description of the organization you represent.
2) How are you organized? (Structure, members, staff, departments, etc.)
3) How is your legal status? (*elem u khabar)*
4) What are the main demands of your NGO?
5) Summarize the advocacy activities and/or strategies, campaigns that your NGO engages in.

CATEGORY 2:

Views on the legal status of the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon and towards homosexuality

6) What in your review are the main social and cultural reasons behind societal negative views about homosexuality?
7) Identify, in your view, the major challenges the Lebanese LGBTQ+ community is facing.
8) How could you best characterize the legal-situational status of the LGBTQ+ advocacy movement in Lebanon?
9) Is the LGBTQ+ advocacy movement in Lebanon fragmented? If yes, do you agree that this fragmentation adversely impacts the LGBTQ+ advocacy movement?
10) There have been a number of court rules refusing to criminalize homosexuality... Does this constitute a precedent towards annulling article 534 of the Lebanese Penal Code which criminalizes homosexual acts?

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CATEGORY 3:

Impact of the sectarian system on advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community

11) What in your view are the principal forces/factors that are constraining the LGBTQ+ advocacy movement?
12) How are these advocacy groups responding to these challenges?
13) In your view, does the Lebanese sectarian (confessional) system adversely impact the work of LGBTQ+ advocacy groups?
14) How can the work of advocacy groups be rendered more effective within the confines of this sectarian system?
15) To what extent can LGBTQ+ advocacy groups challenge the Lebanese sectarian system or at least ameliorate its effects on the LGBTQ+ community?
16) There is research arguing that civil society groups are coopted by the sectarian system. Does this cooptation apply to LGBTQ+ advocacy groups or do they operate outside the sectarian system?
17) What reforms are needed to enhance the legal, economic and social rights of the LGBTQ+ community in Lebanon?
18) Would you agree that the LGBTQ+ movement would be a major beneficiary of the transition to a secular society and civil state?

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