Equality Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals, and Muslim Countries' Acceptance of LGBTQ

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an agenda designed by world leaders to reduce and protect the global world. The fifth of these goals is gender empowerment. Many narratives related to the rights of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community have often emerged, and the community has even experienced threats in several Islamic countries that still adhere to sharia law. This article aims to examine how the SDGs can influence Muslim countries' policies toward the acceptance of their domestic LGBTQ community. Using Samuel P. Huntington's Clash of Civilizations theory, this research employs Atlas.ti to qualitatively analyse data collected from many sources. This research finds that the fifth SDG cannot yet be fully incorporated into the policies of Muslim countries, i.e., those that have implemented sharia law. The SDGs are part of a Western globalist agenda that failed to take into account the different cultures and beliefs held around the world. Furthermore, the issues of cultural identity contained within the SDGs are far more sensitive than these goals' economic components. It is this sensitivity that has driven debate and conflict over the fifth SDG. The SDGs are ultimately unable to change deep-rooted policies, especially those rooted in the ideologies of nations that forbid LGBTQ.

Keywords: Equality agenda; LGBTQ; Muslim countries; Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), consisting of 15 goals and 169 targets that are planned to be met by 2030, provide a global action plan that has been agreed upon by world leaders. The fifth of these goals is gender equality, which is aimed to provide marginalized communities with equal opportunities in various aspects of life. One highlight of this goal is its applicability to the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community, an umbrella term that encompasses people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Since birth, many members of this community feel abandoned by their peers and experience discrimination because of their

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sexual and gender identity (Connecticut Clearinghouse, 2020)

Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women often experience various forms of violence and discrimination due to their sexuality and their sexual identity, which is considered "different" in the eyes of society (Correa, 2019). Likewise, as gender-based violence is often driven by a desire to punish people who do not conform to gender norms, men and non-binary people who deviate from these norms are also targeted (Stonewall, 2016). Although the term gender-based violence was first offered as a synonym for violence against women, O'Toole and Schiffman (1997) provide a broader definition. Gender-based violence is an offence committed by an individual, organisation, or person with a political orientation that is committed because of gender differences between them or sexual orientation in a social hierarchy that is still dominated by men. This definition is useful because it may not be limited to violence directed against women, but also include hostility towards other genders as well as the context of social inequality in which this hostility occurs (Collins, 2014).

Dealing with this issue requires a cautious approach: working with the entire community to address gender stereotypes while prioritizing support for LBT (Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) women, who are the most affected by gender-based discrimination and violence (Stonewall, 2016). This point is often underscored by equality activists. Likewise, the United Nations and its subsidiary organs (including the United Nations Development Programme) have strived to end violence and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. The UNDP

often encourages the inclusion of the LGBTQ community, including through partnerships with governments, community organisations, youth organisations, and various human rights activists (Soliman, 2015).

LGBTQ rights activists have made great progress in the international community, especially in non-Muslim countries. At the same time, however, the community continues to struggle for recognition and the most basic of human rights—such as the right to life—in the Muslim world. Laws protecting LGBTQ rights are mostly meaningless in Muslim countries, where Islamic law wields greater power than state law. Iran, for example, has executed 4,000 people since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Such application of the death penalty has been criticized strongly by Amnesty International, which condemns the death penalty except for criminals—as provided in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Dubagari, 2016).

Although some countries that follow a liberal system, such as the United States, have provided protection in the form of legal protection for the LGBTQ community. However, in fact, in the United States itself, discriminatory attitudes are still often encountered, which are based on sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, in the United States that often called a liberal country, not all states explicitly enforce legal protections for the LGBTQ community (Freedom For All Americans, 2021). In fact, discrimination still often happens. To be very specific in the health care and employment sectors. The Center for American Progress and several independent pollsters surveyed to see how the LGBTQ community lives, attitudes, and experiences in the United

States. The survey was conducted on 9 – 30 June 2020, in which this survey reached 1,528 adults from the LGBTQ community with a vulnerable age of 18 years and over. And from the survey results, it was found that 1 in 3 Americans from the LGBTQ community received discrimination during 2019. And 3 out of 5 transgender Americans received the same treatment.

The discriminatory treatment they experience has an impact on the economy and mentality of LGBTQ individuals. From the bad economic situation due to this discriminatory treatment, 3 out of 10 LGBTQ Americans have difficulty getting access to the health services they should get. Fifteen per cent of the American LGBTQ community reported that they would be better off delaying or even refusing to seek medical help because of the discrimination they experienced. And transgender people face a "unique" challenge to access their health services. In addition, the LGBTQ community has experienced mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic (Grunberg et al., 2020).

Several studies have carried out that the population of the LGBTQ community in almost all parts of the United States has difficulty in obtaining their health rights (Human Rights Watch, 2018). In addition, these LGBTQ communities also experience difficulties in meeting their daily needs. Because many of them experience discriminatory treatment from companies or insurance provider services. Due to this discrimination, many people from the LGBTQ community choose not to seek treatment for fear of being discriminated against. In fact, in the absence of applicable regulations, in this case, a federal law that stipulates the prohibition of

discrimination in health care regardless of identity orientation and gender identity leaves people from the LGBTQ community with no other way when the discrimination ends against them.

The American Cancer Society suggest that women from the LGBTQ community develop breast cancer at higher rates than heterosexual women. In addition, they also receive less attention in terms of health care, such as screening for colorectal, breast, and cervical cancer. Furthermore, many health insurers did not cover same-sex spouses until the Supreme Court legalized marriages (Simmon, 2018). In addition, according to Casey and Levesque (2018), many students in the United States experience discrimination during their studies; it is common, for example, for them to face discrimination and stigma when applying for college (Logan & Mann, 2018).

From these data, we can say that discrimination against the LGBTQ community does not occur only in Muslim countries; even countries with a liberal ideology, such as the United States, which has granted legal recognition to the LGBTQ community, still show high levels of discrimination. In Indonesia, such discriminatory practices are also common. Members of the LGBTQ community face stigma from their peers and even the government. This can be seen, for example, in the passage of regulations that discriminate against the LGBTQ community, as well as statements that promote conversion therapy—such as when the Public Relations Coordinator of the Bekasi City Ministry of Religion explicitly asked religious leaders and community leaders to bring members of

the LGBTQ community "back to normal human nature" (Warso & Aisyah, 2018).

Although many in the LGBTQ community experience persecution and violence, transgender individuals tend to experience higher levels of violence and discrimination than their lesbian, gay, or bisexual counterparts. This happens because transgender individuals tend to be more easily identified based on their outward appearance (Genia, 2019). This is a problem in both liberal nations and Muslim-majority ones.

Homosexuality is not a new phenomenon, even in the Muslim world. Historically in Morocco, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq, acts of homosexuality have been opposed, banned, and even condemned because it was considered a sin and moral disorder that brought disease and health problems (Qibtiyah, 2015). On the other hand, the United Nations has established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the MDGs and ensure just governance that could maintain and even improve the quality of life of the next generation. This programme supports LGBTQ peoples' fight for their rights. However, in the Muslim world, Islamic law is stronger than conventional law, which has resulted in significant debate (Kementerian PPN, 2021).

This research investigates the debate between human rights activists who vocally support equality and recognition for LGBTQ people and the policies of Muslim countries that implement religious law in their countries. Unlike earlier studies, the authors investigate the SDGs' capacity to influence the acceptance of the LGBTQ community in Muslim countries. We hope that this research can provide information on and map the complex issues that link

various identities. This provides a very significant reference for the latest socio-political literature.

Research Method

Empirical data were collected by the researchers through qualitative methods, referring to the framework provided by Sharon Ravitch (2020) in her "Research Design in Qualitative Research". First, the researchers chose the topic being studied, i.e., LGBTQ acceptance. Second, the researchers formulated the research goals, through which this research was expected to benefit academics and practitioners in the future. Next, the researcher purposed the research question. The major question that will be answered in this article is "Do the SDGs influence LGBTQ policies in Muslim countries?". Last, data relevant to the goals were obtained through side selection. This research will quote expert opinions and reports from selected countries in the discussion section.

In addition, to support the researchers in their study, Alan Bryman's grounded theory will be used. Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that uses systematic procedures to develop theories from the scientific arena. Grounded theory is a very important methodology for researchers in the contemporary era (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this research, grounded theory was used by the researchers after collecting data from journal sources, trusted news articles, and academic reports. Ideas or concept mapping are commonly used when triangulated data has been obtained.

Grounded theory plays a significant role in ensuring the neutrality of research, as it allows the researchers to use inductive

reasoning without an initial hypothesis. As such, instead of using an existing theoretical framework and then seeking data that supports the validity of the premise, the researchers collected data before applying the Clash of Civilizations theory during analysis. The grounded theory approach is a form of the scientific method because its work procedures are designed very carefully and meet the criteria for the scientific method (Khan, 2014).

Clash of Civilizations Theory

Samuel P. Huntington, in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remarking of Word Order,* argues that, following the end of the Cold War, the main source of conflict is no longer ideological and economic issues but cultural differences. During the Cold War, international conflicts occurred between ideologies such as Communism, fascism/Nazism, and liberal democracy. The defeat of fascism/Nazism exacerbated the conflict between the surviving ideologies (Huntington, 1993: 12). Likewise, with the end of the Cold War—which marked the collapse of the Communist ideology—the area of conflict expanded beyond the Western sphere. The conflict was informed by the conflict between Western and non-Western civilizations as well as between non-Western civilizations themselves. The people and governments of non-Western civilizations were no longer objects of history, as the targets of Western colonialism, but actors who shaped history together with those in the West (Huntington, 2004: 17).

Huntington suggests six main reasons why the clash of civilizations has become the main source of conflict in the post-Cold War era. Civilizations are differentiated by history, language, culture, tradition, and more importantly, religion. Religious differences refer to the differences in humans' view of their relationship with God, individuals and groups, citizens and the state, rights and obligations, freedom, etc. Differences do not necessarily lead to conflict, and conflict does not always mean the emergence of violence. However, over the centuries of recorded history, these differences have frequently given rise to the most violent and protracted conflicts. Huntington thus argued that the main source of conflict in the new world was not ideology, politics, or economics, but religion (Huntington, 1993: 25-40).

In the era of globalization, the world is seemingly getting smaller, and thus frictions between cultures and civilizations are getting stronger. In this case, the SDGs have been promoted as a universal agenda that must be legitimized by all countries, regardless of their religious or cultural background. Ironically, this globalist paradigm facilitates conflict between different cultures. In this research, SDG 5 is examined as promoting a culture of tolerance without taking into account beliefs (in this case, those held in Muslim countries) that do not accept the LGBTQ community or its practices.

The processes of economic modernisation and social change have uprooted people from their local identity and weakened the nation-state as the source of their identity. Religion is a common source of identity, with fundamentalist religious approaches

commonly identified with political activity, extremism, fanaticism, terrorism, and even anti-Americanism. It is this sense to which Huntington seems to be referring. Although it may be true that some religious communities are involved in radical religious politics, as noted by Esposito, fundamentalism works within an established order. The term itself is overburdened by Christian preconceptions and Western stereotypes, which also imply a monolithic threat that never existed (Binder, 1997).

The conflict of civilizations occurs due to the growing awareness of civilizations that are colliding with the Western world. The West is on the cusp of dealing with other cultures that wish to reshape the world through a process of de-Westernization. According to Huntington, this de-Westernization occurs among the elite, while the opposite process can be found among ordinary people. The emergence of various anti-Western ideologies can be attributed to the West's domination and its tendency to impose its will through the international political arena, especially in matters of democracy, human rights, and the environment.

Cultural characteristics are more markedly different than political and economic ones. As such, all countries can work hand-in-hand to achieve certain goals, though more sensitive ones—such as SDG 5, on gender equality—involve many beliefs, customs, and cultures, which cannot be equated. This research investigates how SDG 5 has provided a basis for many (non-violent) conflicts between Muslim and Western countries.

Gender Equality

The creation of a sustainable world must be complemented with the recognition of previously marginalised parties. Of the 17 SDGs and 169 targets, the concept of equality is among the most massive undertakings being carried out around the globe. Equality is a multidimensional concept, one that spans the political, cultural, social, and even economic realms. At the global level, the concept of equality is derived from several liberal objectives that require freedom and human rights. As the West has increased its dominance in the international order, this principle has become a universal one socialized in countries with diverse cultural characteristics—including Muslim ones.

Often, the concept of equality is associated with gender. In international relations, the concept of gender was originally identified with bias, using a point of view derived from the biological sciences. International understandings of gender have increasingly drifted away from the binary between men and women, putting greater emphasis instead on the ideas of masculinity and/or femininity (Arbain, Azizah, & Sari, 2015). Within this framework, non-binary people have a greater opportunity to assert themselves and make their voices heard. This is also in line with the concept of democracy, which prioritizes human rights and individual freedoms. Although methodological debates continue between researchers, the normative equivalence approach has found ground within the international community. With it, not only do multilateral institutions urge state entities to ratify the goal of equality—which includes gender plurality—but so do non-governmental actors whose voices massively influence the digital masses (FRA, 2020).

1. Dynamics of the LGBTQ Equality Movement in the Muslim World

As of writing, it can be said that LGBTQ activists have been unable to do much in Muslim countries, as they have not gained much recognition from their governments or peers. Many laws and regulations in Muslim countries prohibit LGBTQ marriage and activism. Rather, the LGBTQ community has frequently been depicted in such countries as violating the normative rules that guide humanity (Kreps, 2012). Likewise, members of the LGBTQ communities in Muslim countries continue to face high levels of discrimination, and thus they have great difficulty asserting their rights as citizens.

After the Arab Spring, it cannot be denied that LGBTQ movements have accelerated in the Middle East and other Muslim countries. These movements have wrought changes in the political, social, and even cultural sectors. Narratives about the rights of the LGBTQ community in Muslim countries have been increasingly heard (Needham, 2013). At the same time, resistance has grown. At least four Muslim countries have fairly large LGBTQ movements, namely; Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia (Girijashanker, 2018).

A. Jordan

Jordan legalized homosexuality in 1951 (van Doom, 2020). However, in the country, there are no community organizations or institutions engaged in promoting the rights of the LGBTQ community. Under Jordanian law, homosexuality itself is recognized on the condition that same-sex relations are consensual, and members of the LGBTQ community do not face fines or penalties under Jordanian criminal law. Several LGBTQ communities in Jordan have continued to strive for the formation of institutions that protect them.

The LGBTQ community in Jordan has been active through various initiatives, which come from individuals, communities, online media, and activists who are aggressively promoting their agenda through art and cultural performances. However, efforts to promote and establish legitimate organisations have faced opposition from the people there. Many LGBTQ activists in Jordan have faced threats of violence from individuals and parties who do not agree with their agenda. In addition, media coverage following the IDAHO (International Day Against Homophobia) incident posed significant hurdles for the LGBTQ community, as acts of hate speech became more commonplace.

Various efforts to establish organisations that accommodate the LGBTQ community continue to be pursued. However, various obstacles—including existing regulations—have resulted in these activists not finding common ground. For example, in 2009, a proposal to establish a community institution that works to support the rights of the LGBTQ community was immediately rejected by the Jordanian Ministry of Social

Development on the pretext that the establishment of this institution violated public morals and decency. Various efforts continue to be made, but none have been realized. In 2017, the Jordanian Minister of Home Affairs explicitly stated that LGBTQ organizations and activism were illegal and therefore not permitted (Girijashanker, 2018).

At the same time, Jordan has agreed to the SDG agenda. In 2015, Jordan released a document related to its views on the goals, titled "Jordan 2025: A National Vision and Strategy" (Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies, 2017). This document does include a discussion of SDG 5 on Gender. However, despite Jordan having decriminalized homosexual behaviour since 1951, the document does not deal with the activities of the LGBTQ community. Likewise, although women are involved in economic activities—at least to a point—there is little discussion of the economic activities undertaken by the LGBTQ community in Jordan.

B. Lebanon

LGBTQ activism emerged in Lebanon in the mid-1990s following the establishment of an online community. Since 2002, organisations have emerged that advocate for the LGBTQ community on the grounds that existing human rights organisations do not guarantee the community's rights. An LGBTQ organisation, named

Helem or "Dream", was established in Lebanon; however, the Lebanese government disapproved and rejected the organisation. A community organisation for LBTQ women was also sought, as they felt burdened by a lack of recognition and special space. This organisation, named Meem, was founded in 2007 by underground feminists who wanted to provide the community with legal, medical and psychological support. Since its founding, Helem since its founding in 2007 has advocated for the LGBTQ community in Lebanon. It has employed membership principles to become a community centre and major service provider for the LGBTQ community.

So how has the Lebanese community responded to the activities of the LGBTQ community in Lebanon? Members of the community still face repressive measures from the police and the Lebanese community. This has included, for example, a raid on Cinema Plaza in 2012, where as many as 36 men were arrested and subjected to forcible rectal examinations (Girijashanker, 2018). Today, the LGBTQ community in Lebanon continues to face a worrisome situation. They must conceal themselves from the Lebanese government, at least until it repeals Article 534 of the Criminal Code which expressly punishes same-sex relations (Younes, 2020). According to some members of the Lebanese LGBTQ community, the government should introduce more

laws that guarantee the community its rights, protect them from acts of violence, and ensure that their lives are free from fear and threats (Human Rights Watch, 2020)

Lebanon's view of the SDGs is quite clear, and in 2019 the country ranked 6th of the 21 countries in the Arab region in its application of the SDGs agenda. There is one interesting point: in its 2030 agenda for sustainable development, Lebanon prioritised six goals, one of them being "Improving social protection systems for all groups and overcoming inequality." Looking at the experiences of the Lebanese government and its interactions with the LGBTQ community, this is quite a shift. Does Lebanon truly desire to protect all groups, including the LGBTQ community, or is this priority just an agenda item?

C. Morocco

The LGBTQ community in Morocco faces clear legal and social problems. Article 489 of the Criminal Code, which threatens persons involved in same-sex relations with three years' imprisonment, is a major obstacle to the LGBTQ community in Morocco. Although this law does not explicitly mention transgender, law enforcement officials still equate gender identity with sexual orientation. Accordingly, the law has also been used to criminalise gender expressions and identities that do not conform to established

norms (OuthRight Action International, 2020).

LGBTQ community activism in Morocco began through movements outside of the country itself. The first community came from Spain, having been established in 2004 by a Moroccan citizen who was living in Spain. This organisation, named "Kif-Kif" (All the Same), was officially recognized by the Spanish government in 2008. Among its activities is the publication of a print media, called *Mithly*, which promotes LGBTQ rights to Moroccan readers. However, this magazine has received various criticisms from other media in Morocco; these include, for example, the magazine *Attajdid*, which is closely tied to the Islamic Justice and Development Party (Girijashanker, 2018)

The first organisation based in Morocco itself, Mouvent alternative pour les Libertes Individualelles (popularly known as the MALI Movement), was only formed in 2009. This organisation has engaged more in advocacy and providing education to the people of Morocco about the rights of the LGBTQ community. MALI is thought to have considerably affected the major media in Morocco through its aggressive campaign against articles that prohibit the existence of the LGBTQ community in Morocco.

One organization that has been quite successful in addressing bureaucratic problems within the Moroccan government is the UFL.

Officially founded in 2016, this feminist organisation has advocated for the rights of the LGBTQ community. In 2018, it became the first LGBTQ organisation to be recognised by the Moroccan government, following two years of negotiations.

Morocco is similar to the countries discussed above in that it has agreed to all of the SDGs, including the fifth goal regarding gender equality (Green Policy Platform, 2017). Indeed, although its national goals do not recognise the LGBTQ community as one involved in economic development, the recognition of one LGBTQ advocacy organisation can be said as a step toward realising the goal of empowering the LGBTQ community.

D. Tunisia

LGBTQ activism began secretly in Tunisia in the 1990s, before the revolution, when various feminist activists advocated for the gay community—which at that time still faced criminalization from the Tunisian government and people. It was not until 2002 that Tunisia's first LGBTQ organisation, Damj, was founded. At the same time, Damj has not limited its activities to LGBTQ activism; it also seeks to accommodate local people who have no place to live, providing what has become known as "dix neuf apartments".

Since the Tunisian revolution, various organisations have sought to advocate for the LGBTQ community in the country. These include, for example, Mawjoudin and Chouf—organisations with a feminist ideology that fight for the rights of women, especially LBT women. Many organisations have sought government recognition, identifying themselves as serving "sexual and gender minorities", but they have always failed. LGBTQ activism of the community in Tunisia reached its peak with the establishment of the Civil Collective for Individual Liberties in 2016, an umbrella organisation that included several advocacy organisations for the LGBTQ community (Girijashanker, 2018)

As with other countries, Tunisia has agreed with the SDGs and the points discussed therein. A UN human rights expert acknowledged the steps Tunisia has taken since the Revolution to advance equality and non-discrimination and urged the government to amend its laws to fully protect the human rights of LGBTQ people. Even so, it is believed that a social agreement exists between the government and the LGBTQ, wherein the latter remains hidden.

From these four countries, we can conclude that most Muslim countries have agreed with the fifth SDG regarding gender equality, but in implementing these goals governments have still practised discrimination and repressive attitudes. It is thus a major question as to whether these countries'

activities are indeed national goals or merely part of an agenda to keep pace with world developments.

2. The Formulation of Sustainable Development Goals by Western Countries

One of the principles proclaimed in the SDGs is universality. Referring to the complexity and transnationality of global phenomena, such as economic globalization, the term universal is no longer taboo. However, in the modern era, the word 'same' in the context of hegemony seems to be the dominant agenda that needs to be achieved by all entities. Another principle in global sustainable development is "leaving no one behind", which means moving forward in unison toward the same significant goal. Universality, or a structurally united world, will cause an imbalance of influence in the order. The United Nations, which was originally founded on the principle of equality between sovereign states as a platform to eliminate war, has now provided room for vertical flows for the sake of consistency in achieving this 'one' world.

In global history, the United States is the only nation-state to have ever become a hegemony in a unipolar structure, named after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. In its influence-spreading scheme, the United States often couches its activities using Western terms. Countries in Europe, which in the post-war period received a lot of relief funds, have also been sources of liberal reform and democratic nationalism. In this case, the United States and its Western allies have become the dominant component of the UN Security Council in permanent status.

In the official description of the SDGs, it is officially explained that the universality principle of this agenda was born from the Declaration of Human Rights—which has become part of the West's written norms. Due to the universality principle, human rights must apply to all individuals and countries without the barrier of cultural differences (especially beliefs). Sustainable development will succeed when all entities are committed to supporting and complying with them. In a softer framework, in the realm of sponsorship and funding facilities, the superpowers of the United States and the West are entities that have expressed the importance of a universal agenda that is full of benefits. Likewise, they have been the major actors in its implementation, serving as the most passionate parties in the promotion of universality (SDGF, 2016).

3. Policy Changes in Muslim Countries and LGBTQ Equality

Despite major changes in norms and laws on the issue of same-sex marriage as well as the rights of LGBTQ people around the world, public opinion on the acceptance of the community remains highly divided. This is because the Western concept of equality and universality has seeped through uncontrollable globalisation, thereby changing the minds of some people

and sparking debate. According to research data from the Pew Research Center, in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Ukraine, and Russia, only a few societies have supported the acceptance of homosexuality (Poushter & Kent, 2020).

In 2013, the Russian Federation adopted a new federal law that prohibits the depiction of non-traditional sexual relations in media accessible to minors. International media were quick to label the law an anti-gay propaganda law, identifying LGBTQ people as targets. Such prohibitions have been around for a long time and have been implemented in several Russian districts (Kerf, 2017). The recently passed law was presented as part of the government's efforts to protect traditional Russian values from the influence of western liberalism, which is seen as damaging the young generation of Russia (The Guardian, 2013). It is also cited as a means of undermining the universality of human rights, which is argued to undermine traditional values (Kerf, 2017).

In a survey conducted in several countries with sizable Muslim populations, acceptance of the LGBTQ community is very low (Poushter & Kent, 2020). Under Islamic law, those who commit sexual acts with persons of the same sex can be sentenced to death. Such law is applied in almost all Muslim countries (as well as countries with large Muslim populations), including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Yemen, Qatar, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, Northern Nigeria, Mauritania, and Southern Somalia, and

as well as the ISIS-controlled parts of Northern Iraq and Syria (Ali, 2016).

The question of legalising LGBTQ rights has been hotly debated within the international community. On 17 June 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council issued Resolution 17/19 on Human Rights in Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. It issued this resolution due to the UN's deep concern over reports of violence and discrimination against LGBTQ people. This resolution, perhaps, reaffirmed the imperative nature of implementing human rights for everyone, without discrimination of any kind (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013).

Activists and experts advancing the protection and promotion of LGBTQ rights around the world state that the suppression of the community has become a global phenomenon. Indeed, as highlighted in HRC Resolution 17/19, as well as in the Report of the High Commissioner and several other UN Committee reports, human rights violations are commonly experienced by the LGBTQ community. In 2011, it was noted that 76 nations had laws and criminal sanctions that provide consequences for individuals' sexual behaviour, sexual orientation, or gender identity; many of these laws have existed for a long time (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013).

Although human rights violations have been found in many countries, the Pew Research Center found that people in Western Europe and America are more supportive and accepting of the LGBTQ community, and even found that this support has increased from year to

year. Left-wing countries also tend to be more accepting and supportive of LGBTQ people (Poushter & Kent, 2020). Criticism and demonstrations against governments that reject LGBTQ rights have occurred in various parts of the world, especially in Muslim countries where people who practice same-sex relations face the death penalty. Such issues are quite sensitive for human rights enforcement.

As mentioned above, the LGBTQ community may face the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan, Iran, and Mauritania, as well as in southern Somalia and northern Nigeria, which have a majority Muslim population. Caning and stoning are also enforced in several other Muslim countries, such as Malaysia, Qatar, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Still other Islamic countries sentence perpetrators to life imprisonment. Even some of the most otherwise tolerant countries still punish and oppose LGBTQ people (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013). The World Economic Forum (2015) reports that more than 70 countries place legal obstacles to LGBTQ people, including Islamic countries. The existing data always represents the gaps and differences between enforcement in the West and the East with identity considerations.

Throughout history, culture, tradition, and religion have provided important guidance for everyday social life. Many religious scholars from the Abrahamic traditions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) have argued that homosexuality is unacceptable. Such religious prohibitions have become controversial among "humanitarian"

activists who support the LGBTQ community regardless of religious prohibitions. However, Islam is often described as extreme in its response to the LGBTQ community, as it provides the most serious punishments both in this world and in the hereafter. In Islamic thought, not only are LGBTQ rights not recognised but their very existence must be rejected (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013).

In the Muslim world, many states' laws are made and enforced using Sharia law. These laws contain both Islamic law and the law created for state decision-makers. Therefore, those found guilty of homosexuality in Saudi Arabia (for example) can be subject to sanctions such as caning, imprisonment, and the death penalty. In fact, Saudi Arabia has a legal entity that strictly oversees and enforces all Sharia laws in the country. Although the United Nations has determined that sexual orientation is a human right that must be protected, and thus included in the SDGs, the Government of Saudi Arabia has ordered all public schools— including universities—to ban homosexuality and intensely prohibit the spread of homosexual behaviours online (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013).

In its formulation, the SDGs have been approved by 193 UN member states, including Islamic countries. The purpose of establishing the SDGs is in-line with the goals of Islamic law, which emphasises sustainable economic growth and also includes prosperity in religion and life. The 5th SDG, which discusses gender equality and women's empowerment, is also in-line

with Islamic law, which requires equality and prohibits discrimination between human beings. Muslim countries also agreed with this agenda (Mukhtar, Zainol, & Jusoh, 2018).

However, it should be emphasised that Islam does not justify, recognise, or protect sexual behaviours deemed deviant (such as those of the LGBT community), as such acts are deemed to be against the will of God and nature. In Islam, humans are required to have the knowledge and ability needed to obtain their rights and carry out obligations. At this point, the SDGs and Islamic law both seek to encourage the elimination of discrimination against and exploitation of women by eliminating sexual violence (Mukhtar, Zainol, & Jusoh, 2018). With this consideration. Muslim countries that strictly enforce Sharia law seem to run contrary to the West's universal agenda to specifically recognize LGBTQ rights and make room for same-sex orientation.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is another country that has implemented a ban on same-sex sexual relations. Iranian law criminalises all homosexual acts and actively punishes homosexuals. Caning, stoning, and public executions are still actively carried out. In 2011, it was reported that numerous youths were executed on charges of unlawful acts, i.e., having same-sex relations, right after the implementation of the UN Resolution on the eradication of discrimination and violence against sexual minorities (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013). On the other hand, according to a report from OutRight Action International, the situation of lesbian rights in Iran is more complex (OutRight Action International, 2016).

In Afghanistan, homosexuality is considered a very serious crime that must be punished as proscribed by Sharia, i.e., through caning or stoning. Moreover, although the death penalty was officially abolished in 2010, local religious authorities have the right to impose the death penalty according to Islamic Sharia law. Pakistan also applies Sharia law through its Hudood regulation, which prescribes the consequences for all forms of extramarital relations, adultery, and same-sex relations. This regulation applies in local and Sharia courts. However, the death penalty in the regulation was only valid until 2009 (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013).

In Malaysia, LGBTQ people have been prosecuted by various religious authorities, with punishments ranging from fines and whipping to detention. Malaysia also has very strict regulations against cross-dressing. In 1983, a conference of religious leaders established a *fatwa* that prohibited Muslim surgeons from conducting all forms of sex-change surgery. The Middle East, North Africa, and the Gulf enforce similar laws. In the United Arab Emirates, same-sex relations could be punished through 2010. After that, a new sentence was imposed: ten years imprisonment. In Dubai, there is an article that stipulates that sodomites face up to fourteen years in prison (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013).

In some Muslim majority countries, some anti-LGBTQ laws have been abolished, even as Sharia law is

still practised among the people. For example, in Iraq, the death penalty was still prescribed for homosexuality as of 2003. In Indonesia, the LGBTQ community faces social sanctions and punishments (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2013). A survey by the Pew Research Center (2013) found that most residents in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt believe that homosexuality should be rejected (A.L., 2018).

Sharia law holds that homosexuality is prohibited in Islam. Under the laws of some Islamic countries, homosexual acts are considered a crime and can be punished with death. In late 2010, it was reported that a Saudi diplomat had openly admitted that he was gay and sought asylum in the United States. Following Sharia law, if he were to return to Saudi Arabia, he could be sentenced to death for openly stating that he is gay (Ahmadi, 2012). However, LGBTQ individuals who do not openly declare their sexual orientation are still tolerated by Sharia law in many Muslim countries.

Finally, some Muslim countries have loosened their rules and adopted Western ideas. These countries have often been identified as moderate Islamic countries. Moderate Islam is a very contextual term, as each region has a different context. This term was advanced during the Iranian Revolution in 1979 to describe Muslim countries that have adopted some Western ideals (Islam & Khatun, 2015).

Conclusion

In the end, it can be concluded that elements of SDG 5 will continue to face rejection because Islam provides strict and explicit guidelines related to same-sex relations that cannot be challenged. The international agenda, followed by a growing number of activists supporting LGBTQ rights, can ultimately be seen as a form of "disrespect" to Sharia law and its clear prohibitions. The SDGs are a universal agenda formulated by hegemonic countries from the West. Referring to Samuel Huntington's thesis, this is part of a process of Westernization, wherein different cultural identities and beliefs have been transmitted. From the Western perspective, countries that do not follow all points of development, especially in sensitive matters such as SDG 5, are intolerant or even fundamentalist. According to Huntington, such perceptions occur because countries are coming closer together even as differences between them result in conflict.

With this research, the writer hopes that the readers can see that different perspectives will always exist so long as civilization does. Traditional views will continue to be preserved even as some values fade in the face of Westernisation, particularly the rules of God as revealed in the Holy Book. Not all entities can abandon "traditional" beliefs to advance development, as in the West. The authors hope that this research can explain the complex differences between the East and West, which must be responded to and considered carefully. The ratification of the SDGs should aim to realise equal global welfare rather than homogenise the beliefs of diverse meta-geographic communities.

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