

Analysis of Iranian Muslim Gay Profile Uploads in @Thequeermuslimproject Instagram Account

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Abstract

Instagram as a new media offering free and global seems to be a means of "escaping" from the real repression received by Saif, Danyal and Alireza as homosexual Muslims, from the social pressures and religious discourse that dominate Iran. This paper is about the analysis of representations by the three, who claim to be homosexual Muslims who grew up in Iran. The representations of the three were analyzed through their own self-photos and profile captions on the instagram account page of @thequeermuslimproject, an online community for Muslim queers, using the multimodal critical discourse analysis (CDA) method put forward by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, which is an analysis method used to analyze text in the form of images and writings. Research becomes interesting when the representations shown are not identical or different from each other despite growing up in the influence or dominance of the same discourse. Researchers summarize it into 3 major discourses found in the representations shown by the three, namely (a) the practice of coming out, (b) the dominance of heteronormative discourse, and (c) the politics of visibility.

Keywords: *homosexuality, Iran, Islam, gay, multimodality*

INTRODUCTION

Sexuality is still a big issue in today's society. In *Historie de la Sexualite*, Michel Foucault (1997) says, the development of the discourse on sexuality which is constantly changing indicates the importance of sexuality practices for a social life so that those in power such as religious leaders and the government feel they have to control it. The role of history, state, and religion are the main factors of change and development of the discourse on sexuality circulating in society. In the classical Greek-Roman period, sexuality was judged as the experience of desire and pleasure in itself. In contrast to medieval society, the discourse of sexuality is under the domination of the Church which defines sexuality as something

outside the human body (Kali, 2013). The body becomes a sinner, regardless of the soul and spiritual values. The desire for pleasure is interpreted as lust, which must be destroyed.

It is different again from the 19th century. The main issue in the 19th century was how the state managed and controlled the population to remain productive and stable. "...the future of a country depends not only on the number and quality of its citizens, not only on the institution of marriage and the institution of the family but on the way each member of society uses his or her sex" (Kali, 2013:77). In the 19th century, the discourse of sexuality was no longer considered taboo but became something that should be analyzed for the country's economic and political growth. The impact of the analysis carried out by experts concluded that heterosexuality is the "correct" sexual orientation. This then makes other sexual orientations become "the other" or "the other" and "being dominated" because they are outside the dominant discourse. The difference between dominant discourse and other dominated discourses, of course, creates a system of marking or stereotyping to establish heterosexual identity.

The stereotype attached to gay is influenced by the discourses circulating and formed in society. The discourse that is most often heard comes from religious experts, who interpret the prohibition of homosexual behavior in several verses in the holy book. This discourse that is continuously echoed has resulted in the stereotype of sinners for gays. In Islam in particular, in the Qur'an it is believed in Surah Al-A'raf verse 81 which reads, "Indeed you come to men to release your lust (for them), not to women, you are a people who transgress limits", is the attitude shown by Islam to gays. This verse tells the story of the Prophet Lut and the Sodomites of Gomorrah, who were punished by Allah for their sexual behavior.

In Islamic countries and countries where the majority of the population is Muslim, this discourse is very widely heard, one of which is Iran. Making Shia Islam the basis of the state seems to force Iran to impose criminal laws on gay people. By not separating the interests of the state and religion (Hidayat, 2014), Iran opens space for religious experts (Ulama) to participate in determining state regulations that apply in Iran, including regulating the sexuality of Iranian citizens. Under Article 235-236 of 2013 concerning tafkhiz, namely the punishment imposed on men who are proven to have placed their genitals between the thighs and or buttocks of another man, 100 lashes will be imposed and the death penalty if any of

them are not Muslims, articles 237 and articles 238-240 also contain criminal laws regarding homosexual behavior in other forms (Borozescu, 2021).

The Iranian government's repression of its citizens, especially gays, forces them to find other ways to find information, express themselves, and meet other gay people. Through Instagram and the @thequeermuslimproject community, Saif, Danyal, and Alireza can not only express themselves and share their experiences but also get support and “help” from other sexual minority individuals and groups. Although at the time @thequeermuslimproject uploaded a photo of themselves and the profile caption of Saif, Danyal, and Alireza, the three (no longer or currently) were not in Iran, the captions they wrote told their stories when they lived and became gay Muslims in Iran. Through negotiations carried out on the internet, especially through self-portraits and captions written by Saif, Danyal, and Alireza on the Instagram account page @thequeermuslimproject, the author tries to analyze what discourses influence the representation they display, as a gay Iranian Muslim.

DISCUSSION

Kress & Leeuwen (1996) used three elements to analyze the image, there are (a) the image act and the gaze, (b) size of frame and social distance, and (c) power and vertical angle. These three elements will later be used by the author to analyze the self-portraits and captions of Saif, Danyal, and Alireza.



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3

In the image act and the gaze category, Danyal (picture 1) and Saif (picture 2) made direct eye contact with the audience (interactive participants), in contrast to Alireza (picture 3) who did not look directly at the camera. What is done by Danyal and Saif is what Kress & Leeuwen (1996) calls demand. “...following Halliday (1985): the participant's gaze (and the gesture, if present) demands something from the viewer, demands that the viewer enters into some kind of imaginary relationship with him or her” (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996: 118).

In this category, Danyal and Saif as represented participants not only want to make contact or show closeness with interactive participants but also “ask” something to interactive participants. “in each case the image wants something from the viewers – wants them to do something (come closer, stay at a distance) or to form a pseudo-social bond of a particular kind with the represented participant” (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996: 118). In the caption of his photo, Danyal (picture 1) said, “...Our youth struggling with their identity need to see us, hear our stories, and understand that its okay to be Iranian and gay, Pakistanis and genderqueer, Arab and bisexual, and the list goes on” indicates that Danyal asked the interactive participants to also provide space for him and other queers to show themselves

and educate young people in other Muslim countries about sexual identity and orientation. While in the next sentence, "if you're one of these youth reading this. I want you to know that you're perfect, that you belong here, and that the future is ours" Danyal asked the interactive participants, especially queer Muslims, not to be humble and doubtful because of their identity.

Saif did the same thing (figure 2). The self-portrait displayed on the @thequeermuslimproject Instagram page shows the direct view of the interactive participant. Although different from Danyal who shows an expression with a smiling face, Saif's self-portrait is also included in the demand category. In contrast to what is shown by Alireza (picture 3). In the photo of herself uploaded on the Instagram page @thequeermuslimproject, Alireza takes her eyes off the camera. He deliberately did not look directly at the interactive participant. This shows that Alireza does not expect any reciprocity or interaction from interactive participants. He positions himself only as an object of spectacle, "here the viewer does not object, but the subject of the look and the represented participant is the object of the viewer's dispassionate scrutiny" (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996:119). Referring to Halliday (1985), Kress and Leeuwen (1996) call this gesture an offer, "it offers the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, objects of contemplation, impersonally, as though they were specimens in a display case" (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996:119).

This is supported by the gesture displayed by Alireza, namely folding his arms in front of his chest (arm-cross). In *The Nonverbal Dictionary of Gestures, Signs & Body Language Cues*, David Givens (2002) says that folding hands in front of the chest is a gesture that shows a defensive attitude, "U.S politics. Arm-crossing has been analyzed as a "classic defensive stance" in the April 11, 1988, Time magazine cover picture of Democratic presidential nomination hopeful Jesse Jackson..." (Givens, 2002:382). This gesture can also be interpreted as closing oneself, which can also be seen from the caption that accompanies Alireza's photo on the Instagram account page @thequeermuslimproject. Unlike Danyal (picture 1) and Saif (picture 2) who share their stories by telling their life experiences as queer Muslims, Alireza prefers to write down what things she can do to help the visibility of queer Muslims.

In their book, Kress and Leeuwen (1996) say that the following sentences are written by Alireza, “I believe art and its history can make a great change for our community. Sharing information about queer culture with the society in Iran (where there is a strong lack of information about queer culture)” and “is what I'm focusing on, in 2019” is a form of offer information and offer-goods-and-services, this further strengthens the point of view chosen by Alireza in the photo that accompanies these sentences. Kress and Leeuwen (1996) explain how producers produce photos and use the offer category in textbooks in Australia to describe Aboriginal people. The producer intends to portray the aboriginal tribes as others, as people who do not belong to the “us” category. With the offer category, the producer of this photo, namely Alireza herself, intends to separate the represented participants from the interactive participants. The sentence in the caption written by Alireza, "Being queer or not, being Muslim or not, just being an artist makes me responsible toward society and what it is suffering from" illustrates that he does not want to be known as queer or Muslim but as an artist.

In contrast to Danyal and Saif who explicitly said that they were queer Muslims, Alireza chose to use her professional identity to describe herself. This shows that taking pictures of the offer he did was a form of alienation to himself, both from other photos of himself uploaded by @thequeermuslimproject, as well as interactive participants, who may be queer Muslims or Muslims.

As in offer and demand, there are several categories in frame size, namely close up, medium shot, long shot, and so on, “and like the choice between the offer and the demand, the choice of distance can suggest different relations between represented participants and viewers” (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996:124). The distance created by the producer in the image also gives meaning to the image. Kress and Leeuwen (1996) categorize close-ups on the visible head to shoulders seen in the frame, as well as some other limbs in particular. Medium close shots show the upper body from head to waist and medium shots show the body from head to knees. While in the long-shot category, it shows the entire human body. The categories used by Kress and Leeuwen refer to manuals for film and television production, so the size reference uses the human body.

Social distance or social distance we apply in everyday life. People who have close relationships with us, such as family, for example, will apply close social distancing. Likewise,

with the relationships we have with other people, such as food vendors or cashiers in shopping centers, we will apply a fairly wide distance, "the distances people keep, then, depend on their social relations" (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996: 125). In Kress and Leeuwen (1996) near and far a distance is measured by how far we can touch the person, "...by whether or not certain distance allows us to smell or touch the other person, for instance, and by how much of the other person we can see with our peripheral (sixty-degree) vision" (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996:124). The category of close personal distance is, when the subject can touch another subject easily, according to Kress & Leeuwen, in this category, the subject has a very close personal relationship, if not, the action is an aggressive act. Meanwhile, according to Hall (1964) close personal distance as far as the subject can see the head and shoulders of other subjects.

Next is far personal distance, which is a position as far as two arms between the subject, and the subject can see the head to the waist of another subject (Hall, 1964). In this category, both subjects have a personal interest or are involved in a discussion. Then close social distance, which is the distance between two subjects who are not involved in any relationship, so that the subjects can see their body parts as a whole. Far social distance is the distance when a person can see the body of another subject as a whole and the circumstances around the subject (Hall, 1964). The last is the category of public distance, namely the distance that occurs between one subject and another subject that does not have any relationship (stranger). Social distance can also be applied to images, according to the size of the frame category expressed by Kress & Leeuwen. In Danyal's self-portrait, the visible body parts are the head to the shoulders and a little space above the head. Danyal's self-portrait (picture 1) is included in the close-up category, which indicates the producer (Danyal) wants and/or indicates a personal closeness with the interactive participant.

The social distance placed by Danyal is close personal distance, in this category, the represented participant indicates himself as a friend. Supported by gestures and gazes as well as captions, which were explained in the previous chapter, that Danyal does represent himself as a friend and expects interaction from interactive participants. Saif did the same thing. In the self-portrait (picture 2) displayed on the @thequeermuslimproject Instagram page, the producer (Saif) uses the close-up category in taking pictures. This indicates that there is a close relationship between the represented participant and the interactive participant.

Unlike Alireza. According to Kress & Leeuwen, Alireza's self-portrait (picture 3.8) displayed on the Instagram page @thequeermuslimproject is included in the medium shot category, namely in the frame showing body parts from head to waist and a little space above the head. Unlike the close-up, the medium shot implies that the producer (Alireza) does not want a personal relationship between the interactive participants and the represented participants. Alireza wants to be seen as someone else and does not want to be associated with interactive participants, or in the previous sub-chapter said to be an offer category, where she does not want and expect any reciprocity from interactive participants. Alireza only wants to present herself as another human being in the interactive participant's life, not as a "friend".

The last element used by Kress & Leeuwen (1996) is power and vertical angle. In Kress and Leeuwen (1996), angle represents the power relation that photo producers want to show. The self-photos of Danyal, Saif, and Alireza have 2 different shots, they are eye-level and high angle. Saif chose high angles in his self-portraits (figure 3.2), "...high angles tend to diminish the individual, to flatten him morally by reducing him to ground level, to render him as caught in an insurmountable determinism" (Martin, 1968 in Kress & Leeuwen, 1996: 140). A high angle implies that the represented participant feels "lower" than the interactive participant. If Saif intentionally produces a photo of himself with a high angle, it can be interpreted that Saif feels inferior to anyone who sees his photo on the Instagram page @thequeermuslimproject. Saif authorizes interactive participants over himself in the photo, "if a represented participant is seen from a high angle, then the relation between the interactive participants (the producer of the image, and hence also the viewer) and the represented participants is depicted as one in which the interactive participants has power over the represented participants" (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996: 140).

In this case, it can be said that Saif feels small, helpless, afraid, and feels dominated by others (interactive participant), "in contrast, a high-angle shot, where the camera is positioned above the eye-level of the actors, looking down, is taken to diminish the actor's status and establishes impotence and vulnerability" (Baranowski & Hecht, 2017:91). This can be attributed to the caption he wrote on a photo of himself, where he recounted his experience as a homosexual in Iran. In the following sentences "...when I came out to my family (as queer and a dancer) they shunned me and I had to flee to Egypt..." and "until today, nobody

in my family talks to me”, hints at the painful experience that Saif accept, shunned by the family is the impact of coming out.

It's different with Danyal (picture 1) and Alireza (picture 3) who choose to use eye level as the angle for taking selfies. Eye-level implies equality between interactive participants and represented participants, “...the picture is at eye level, then the point of view is one of equality and there is no power difference involved” (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996: 140), Danyal and Alireza imply that there is no power relation between them and the audience, both of them are faced with a neutral point of view, "it leads to a natural perspective perception, with observer and subject being on the same level" (Baranowski & Hecht, 2018:91). In a study conducted by Baranowski and Hecht (2018), taking pictures using an eye-level point of view can increase the trust of the audience. This is due to the sense of equality which is implied from the eye-level point of view. Similar to the previous sub-chapter, “our youth struggling with their identity need to see us, hear our stories, and understand that's it's okay to be Iranian and gay, Pakistanis and genderqueer, Arab and bisexual, and the list goes on” This sentence asks interactive participants to provide space for themselves and other queers to increase visibility and awareness of non-heterosexual orientation and non-normative gender identity.

To be able to fulfill this goal, Danyal needs trust in himself from interactive participants. Not much different from Alireza, in the caption he wrote in this sentence "I believe art and its history can make a great change for our community ..." not only intended for himself but Alireza also tries to give suggestions to interactive participants to believe that art and history can have a huge impact on LGBTQ+ life in the Middle East. Alireza needs the interactive participants' trust in him so that whatever Alireza does and says, the interactive participants will believe it, as indicated by the next sentence he wrote, “sharing information about queer culture with the society in Iran (where there is a strong lack of information about queer culture) in their mother tongue language (Persian) is what I'm focusing on”. Similar to Danyal, Alireza also has the same goal, namely to increase and spread awareness to many people, especially the Iranian people about queer, so Alireza needs trust from interactive participants. An eye-level point of view can help provide an interpretation of the equivalence between interactive participants and represented participants, "these conventions suggest that editing techniques and camera angle convey meaning and thus modify the interpretation of a given scene" (Baranowski & Hecht, 2018:91).

"Coming Out" Practice

The representation contained in the self-portrait of Saif (picture 2) and Danyal (picture 1) in the previous sub-chapter shows confidence in both of them, indicated by their chosen direction of view (demand) followed by the analysis of the written caption. In the caption he wrote, Saif and Danyal not only told about their life experiences but also came out. In accordance with the self-representation that they show, coming out requires courage and confidence. Admitting yourself as a homosexual in the midst of the dominance of heterosexual society is certainly not easy. Through the caption written by Saif, it can be seen that Saif came out by writing the sentence, "I was always attracted to men and bellydance and Nevertheless, I'm so proud and happy because I could finally get Al-Huriya' and nowadays, I heal hearts with my dancing all over the world". Come out not only to increase visibility for homosexuals but also as self-therapy. "Although I tried to deny it and crush it, destiny had it written in my life and led me there at every moment", this sentence shows that Saif previously experienced denial, before finally daring to admit to himself that he was homosexual and came out to other people.

The same thing happened to Danyal (picture 1), through the caption attached to his photo upload on the @thequeermuslimproject Instagram account page, Danyal told about his life as a Muslim homosexual in Iran. In the sentence "When I felt forced to face the reality that I may be gay", it is clear that Danyal also denied his sexual orientation. The tradition of coming out, or in Indonesian defined as coming out, is an act when someone admits he or she is a homosexual or other non-heterosexual orientation. Until now, coming out has become one of the "traditions" that must be carried out by homosexuals, "During those (post-Stonewall) times in which, if you hadn't come out of the closet, many gay men and lesbians felt you had somehow betrayed them, that you couldn't really "define yourself as gay, and that you had not accepted your gay identity" (Delaney, 1996:21).

Many homosexuals think that coming out is an important activity for their survival. Coming out is one way for homosexuals to gain visibility from their surroundings. In Iran, not all homosexuals choose to come out to other people. Through interviews conducted by Kjaran (2019) with homosexuals in Iran, they choose to use "masks" to cover their sexual orientation and gender expression to fit the dominant discourse in Iran. Using masks is not only to cover up their sexual orientation but also to protect themselves from the environment

and the bad stigma that is given to homosexuals. Even homosexuals also adopt heterosexual male behavior that is considered more masculine, such as growing a beard and having a deep voice.

"Coming out", of course, is not only influenced by individual desires but also cultural background and even where she lives. Often they choose to come out through social media or those closest to them that they trust, the same thing is done by Saif and Danyal. For Saif (picture 2) and Danyal (picture 1), social media is the safest place to acknowledge their sexual orientation which is considered "different", marked by the caption written by Danyal, "I'm beyond grateful to see how social media and the internet is allowing our community to shade their truth and be more visible, and I so wish I had this network when I was younger and elements about my identity". Through the technologies of the self-developed by Foucault, coming out is part of the confession or confession adapted from the atonement ritual performed by Christians. For Foucault, to come out means to give power to himself because he did an act of honesty. In our society, acting honestly or honestly has great value. So that when someone chooses to tell the truth about himself, it is as if he is free from sin, "in confession, the agency of domination does not live in the person that speaks, but in the one who questions and listens" (Besley, 2005:83).

"Coming out" is also a part of the technologies of the self because by confessing to many people about their sexual orientation which is considered different, strange, and scary, Saif and Danyal are no longer trapped in the discourse of heteronormativity domination, "technologies of the self can be conceptualized as practices that free individuals from the control of disciplinary practices and accordingly, lead to self-transformation" (Besley, 2005:84).

The Dominance of Heteronormativity Discourse

In the analysis of the image in the previous sub-chapter, it is known that Saif (figure 3.2) represents himself as a dominant figure, seen from the selection of the angle he uses, namely the high angle. This is stated in the caption he wrote in the sentence, "When I came out to my family (as a queer and a dancer) they shunned me and I had to flee to Egypt and there I lived my own bellydance dream (though I was almost deported)", Saif (figure 2). Judging from the sentence he wrote, it is alleged that one of the reasons why Saif received a negative response from his family was due to the hegemony of heteronormativity. The

hegemony of heteronormativity, not only affects the mindset and point of view of the individual but also affects the written and unwritten rules in the scale of government and social life of its citizens. Call it the punishment for those who are proven to be homosexual, starting from the whipping law to the death penalty. Isolation, discrimination to violence accepted by queers as a form of unwritten "rule" is another form due to the hegemony of heteronormativity.

After the revolution in Iran in 1979, everything was done to perpetuate the discourse of heteronormativity in accordance with the rules of Islam used by Iran as the basis of its government, also by involving the family as an agent of "morality enforcement". In Iranian culture, the family plays a very important role. The family is not just a group of blood individuals, but also becomes the "supervisor" and "owner" of our own body, "family becomes a greater force over the individual, controlling him/her" (Jafari, 2013: 73). In Iranian society, individual behavior can be judged as a representation of a family. Good in aspects of sexuality, morality, and economy (Karimi, 2017). The discourse of gender identity and sexuality in Iran is heavily influenced by religion and government, with heterosexual discourses predominating. As is well known, in heterosexual discourse, the role of women is considered unequal to the role of men. In homosexual relationships, the division of roles according to gender will be disrupted. Men who are identical to masculinity will perform domestic roles that are identical to femininity.

In the dominant tradition and discourse in Iran, this of course degrades the role of men and masculinity itself. Sexuality in Iranian society is forced to conform to the order of a "family". The Iranian government adopted this order and placed men at the top of the hierarchy. With a strong patriarchal system, masculinity plays an important role in regulating everything related to gender. Marriage becomes one of the ways to continue the discourse, by marrying women, men will not lose their privilege (Karimi, 2016). By becoming a homosexual, Saif is considered incapable of carrying out his role as a man.

The use of discourse and stigma by the Khomeini government to discipline the sexuality of the Iranian people is by committing "othering" or condoning homosexuality. Supported by religious discourse and westoxification to illustrate that homosexuality is not part of Islam and the indigenous people of Iran. So that discrimination can come even from the family itself, "disciplinary power is directed at the individual, it functions at the micro-

level, directed at the body and its subjugation to the dominant discourse" (Kjaraan, 2019: 41). For Foucault, what the Iranian government is doing to discipline the body is biopower, a combination of disciplinary power and biopolitics. Disciplinary power is about disciplining the body while biopolitics is about disciplining the entire population. Sexuality becomes an important thing in power because according to Foucault, sexuality is essential for every individual. So that when the state is able to discipline the body (sexuality) of its citizens, other elements can be easily controlled. Discipline on sexuality cannot be done by only one party but needs the help of other agents such as family, religion, and state. In his book, Foucault says:

"It's the body of society which becomes the new principle (of biopolitics) in the nineteenth century. It is this social body which needs to be protected, in a quasi-medical sense. In place of the rituals that served to restore the corporeal integrity of the monarch, remedies and therapeutic devices are employed such as segregation of the sick, the monitoring of contagions, the exclusion of delinquents" (Foucault, 1980:55)

The social bodies referred to by Foucault above are the bodies that are the biopolitical objects of the state, which aim to maintain the "safety" of the entire population from what is considered "different" or abnormal. From what Foucault expressed above, biopolitics divides the human body into 2 categories, namely worthy and unworthy. This division aims to make people's lives better and to increase productivity in order to achieve maximum benefits from state biopolitics (Kjaraan, 2019). Therefore, bodies that are considered a threat to productivity, whether due to age, sanity, race, health, or sexuality, can be eliminated so as not to interfere with future productivity increases. What Saif is experiencing is one of the efforts to maintain the productivity of the country through sexuality. Iranian biopolitics uses reproduction and control over sexuality to regulate the population so that it is the bodies of homosexuals that are considered unworthy because they are unable to participate in reproductive affairs and are considered incompatible with the existing health, cultural and religious discourse in Iran.

The discourse of heteronormativity is one of the discourses echoed in the Khomeini government to support Iranian biopolitics. All Iranians are expected to be heterosexual in order to facilitate reproduction to increase the country's productivity.

The Visibility Politics

The representation shown by Alireza (figure 3) in the previous chapter shows an attitude of self-exclusion. Alireza with the point of view not facing the audience and choosing

a medium shot as the size of the frame further strengthens the assumption of non-openness in himself. As suggested by Kress & Leeuwen (1996) that Alireza seems to offer himself to do something for the Muslim queer community, rather than build a personal relationship with interactive participants. This is shown by Alireza through the caption he wrote, "I believe art and its history can make a great change for our community; so documenting the issues of LGBTQ+ in the middle east and giving more visibility to them through my art is the priority to me, in this sentence Alireza shows how important it is for homosexuals to gain visibility. With sufficient visibility, homosexuals are not only able to demonstrate their existence but are also able to form other discourses beyond the discourse of heteronormativity. By showing society their whereabouts, homosexuals have the power to fight for the rights they have but are covered up by alienation efforts.

As Harvey Milk did in 1977 in San Francisco. When Milk served on the Board of Trustees, he helped queers gain their rights and opposed parties and rules that could potentially harm queers, one of which was by opposing the dismissal of teachers who proved to be homosexual in San Francisco at the time. Milk also fights for the rights of minority groups and women. This shows that with visibility, discrimination against minority groups will end. More and more homosexual representations in public spaces will slowly build trust from society, as well as remove the negative stigma that has been ingrained. As mentioned earlier, social media with its ease of access and freedom to create content makes it easy for individuals anytime and anywhere to create the content they want. Alireza and Danyal, for trying to increase the visibility of homosexuals in Iran, can be representations as well as create content related to homosexuality in Iran.

On Alireza's personal Instagram page account, for example (@alireza.shojaian) he uploaded homosexual paintings. Visibility, of course, will not occur if homosexuals remain silent without making any movement or change. With the alienation and dominance of heterosexual discourse, everyone will have the same assumptions about one's sexual orientation and identity. Homosexuals will be something strange and foreign due to the lack of information and representation of themselves, "The lack of cultural representation of queer Iranians and Iranian-Americans creates a false notion that homosexuals do not exist, particularly within the Iranian community" (Abdi & Gilder, 2016: 79). In accordance with the caption that Alireza wrote, with art, he will try to increase the visibility of homosexuals.

The confession made by Danyal, Saif, and Alireza via Instagram @thequeermuslimproject paved the way for other homosexuals in Iran to speak out. The more individuals who have a voice, the stronger their role in society. Not surprisingly, Alireza is keen to increase the visibility of homosexual groups in Iran.

With space restrictions for homosexuals, as well as discrimination and criminal punishment, gaining a place in society is what they want most. The visibility certainly makes it easier for homosexuals to get social and economic justice, with all efforts to eradicate homosexuality in Iran, providing information and educating the public about the existence of homosexuals is the main thing that needs to be done. The politics of visibility itself has been part of the struggle of queer groups in the west since 1990. By holding a parade called pride event, “Pride events not only bring LGBT people together to form a public identity and to build a visible community in a difficult social context. , but they also allow individuals to express this identity and provide hope for people who are still living in fear”(Stella, 2012: 1827). The parade seemed to give space for the queers to march together, without having to say anything, simply by participating in the event. Although of course, not all participants are queers, by participating can show their support for the visibility of queers, "pride events often also blur the boundaries between consumer practices and political claims since, while retaining a political message, they are increasingly conceived of as colorful street parties”(Stella, 2012: 1827).

Alireza (picture 3), Danyal (picture 1), and Saif (picture 2) with their courage to roam the Instagram account @thequeermuslimproject, not only in an effort to increase homosexual visibility in Iran but also to shape and fight the dominance of discourse in Iranian society, “By their increased visibility and inclusion... .have opportunities to shape their discourse of the university and thereby challenge the norms of heterosexuality” (Rhoads, 1996: 36). By resisting dominant discourse, homosexuals have the opportunity to change the situation, such as eliminating discriminatory rules. However, resistance performed by individuals can only be done if there is equality of status between subjects, —Butler agrees with Foucault that the individual is only able to resist relations of power from within those same relations (Kjaraan, 2019: 32), and only can be done if it remains within the prevailing norms in the society (Butler, 1993). Alireza, Danyal, and Saif are unlikely to protest and

demonstrate on the streets, but they can protest via Instagram social media without violating any rules and norms that apply in Iran.

The analysis of the caption above provides information that Danyal, Saif, and Alireza are not hegemonic by the same discourse despite living in the same country. However, of all the visible differences, there is a similarity between the three, that when @thequeermuslimproject uploaded their selfies and captions in 2019, the three were not in Iran. This the author knows through the Instagram account page and their personal social media. Through Danyal's personal Instagram and Twitter, @danyalotfi, it is known that at least 4-5 years ago (2014-2015) Danyal attended Western Washington University. Similarly with Alireza, through her personal Instagram account page, @alireza.shojaian, the author found out that Alireza currently lives in Paris to study at the Academie des Beaux Arts. The same thing happened to Saif, through his personal Instagram account page @ranialhuriya, the author found out that when the author wrote this thesis he was in Santiago, Chile, at least since 2014 when he uploaded his first poster containing information about the belly dance coaching class he ajar.

This suggests that Danyal, Saif, and Alireza both had the capital to leave Iran, or what Pierre Bourdieu called economic capital (1986). Referring to the definition expressed by Bourdieu, Danyal, Saif and Alireza have the freedom to speak about their sexual orientation because they have the economic capital to live in another country. So that they feel safer and calmer when talking about their sexual orientation when they are outside Iran because of course, they are free from the threat of punishment imposed by the Iranian state. It may be that it will be different if the three are still living in Iran.

CONCLUSION

The differences in representations shown by Danyal, Saif, and Alireza in the Instagram account page @thequeermuslimproject show the diversity of gay identities in Iran. But behind the diversity represented, the three are still influenced by western gay discourses, in which the economic capital they have, they use to go out of Iran, probably because they feel an affiliation between themselves and western gays. Other discourses that cover, such as gay discourse is an upper-middle-class lifestyle and or highly educated are also perpetuated by Saif, Danyal, and Alireza. Choosing secular countries such as France (Alireza moved to Paris),

America (Danyal moved to Washington), and Chile (Saif moved to Santiago) as their destination countries, shows that all three have the same view of western countries as a source of freedom. . This then shows that the diversity of representations shown by Danyal, Saif and Alireza returned to homogeneity when they left Iran. Danyal, Saif, and Alireza are no different from other gays who are still struggling in the same discourse, which is to consider western gays as a symbol of freedom.

The results of the above analyses show that Instagram, with its free and universal nature, can present heterogeneous figures of gay representation at the local level. But that representation turns homogeneous when associated with gay representation in a global realm influenced by western discourse. Gays who can present themselves on social media are often those who have the privilege. This may be what makes them dare to show themselves as gay on Instagram. The Instagram account page @thequeermuslimproject has not been able to create discourse or has not been able to be a container for gays who are outside the privileged gay discourse. The freedom that Instagram has is not a freedom that can be defined universally, but a freedom that is segmented between those who have privileges and those who do not. Not all individuals with internet access can feel the freedom that Instagram offers. Under such conditions, social media still cannot be a heterotopia for gay groups in the local realm.

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