

The sociology of religious values among homosexuals in Algeria

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the complex interrelations between religious values and the lived experiences of homosexual individuals in Algeria, a society predominantly shaped by Islamic traditions. It presents a theoretical framework grounded in sociological and religious studies, analyzing how Algerian homosexuals negotiate the reconciliation of their sexual orientation with their religious beliefs. The research explores the societal and cultural factors that inform these individuals' understandings of faith, morality, and identity. By employing diverse theoretical perspectives, the article seeks to illuminate the distinctive challenges faced by homosexuals in Algeria as they navigate the often-contradictory demands of their religious and sexual identities. The results contribute to a broader comprehension of religious sociology in the context of sexual minorities in conservative societies.

Keywords

Religion, religious values, homosexuality, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ), identity conflict

1- Introduction

In Algeria, as in many predominantly Muslim countries, homosexuality is a very sensitive and stigmatized subject, often considered taboo. The societal landscape is deeply rooted in traditional values that emphasize family honor, impose rigid gender roles and respect religious norms. These cultural dynamics create a framework that systematically marginalizes or condemns non-heterosexual identities. In this socio-cultural space, the present research aims to study how individuals navigate and express their sexual identities in a society that largely repudiates them. Religion, in particular Islam, significantly shapes individual behavior and social norms in Algeria. In this context, Islam transcends personal belief; it comprehensive social and moral framework that informs legal structures, cultural practices and community life. The societal attachment to Islamic values generates a dichotomy for homosexual people, who find themselves in a position of reconciling their sexual identities with the religious doctrines that traditionally doctrines homosexuality. Therefore, religious values exert a profound influence on the lives of all individuals, including those who identify as homosexuals, although these values being subject to variations

depending on the social and cultural contexts in which individuals operate. The main objective of this research is the theoretical examination of the tensions that arise between religious values and homosexual identities in Algeria.

2-Literature Review

2-1-The religion:

Religion is a polysemous concept that does not have a unanimous definition. Yves Lambert refers to the 'Tower of Babel' (**Assivon, 2024**) to address cultural diversity and communication between communities. This metaphor highlights the enrichments and challenges posed by linguistic and cultural diversity, emphasizing the importance of listening and dialogue to promote understanding and social cohesion.

Moreover, Clifford Geertz defines religion as a system of symbols that evokes strong motivations and dispositions in individuals, shaping their conceptions of existence and presenting them as real (**Assivon, 2024**). In this sense, religion provides meaning and helps individuals understand their experiences within a specific global order.

Additionally, John Milton Yinger describes religion as "a system of beliefs and practices that

helps a group address the ultimate problems of human life." Existential questions such as suffering and death are realities that people face, and religion offers ideologies to manage these challenges (Assivon, 2024).

From a sociological perspective, Jean-Paul William describes religion as a principle of social efficacy (Assivon, 2024). This principle has historically attracted people's attention, making religion a significant social phenomenon. What accounts for this prominent status? Is it the feeling of belonging to shared values and beliefs?

Furthermore, man, as a metaphysical being, maintains an intimate relationship with the transcendent, making religion a fundamental dimension of human existence rather than a purely individual experience. As noted by Bergson, human societies have always included religion (Bergson, 1932).

Finally, Sigmund Freud identifies three functions of religion: a theoretical function that satisfies curiosity and conflicts with science; a psychological function that alleviates fear and provides comfort in times of difficulty; and a moral and political function that establishes rules for believers (Sigmund, 1936).

Religion is a complex and multifaceted concept that plays a crucial role in human life, both individually and collectively. It offers answers to existential questions while fostering social cohesion through dialogue and mutual understanding.

2 - 2 -The values:

The concept of values has raised many ambiguities, as researchers often use their ideological and cognitive references to approach it. Firstly, we can categorize these trends into two main perspectives. The first views values as absolute moral standards that dictate behavior, attitudes, and tendencies. This perspective defines values as standards possessing legitimacy and effectiveness, serving as rules for awareness and behavior, and providing meaningful goals for individuals and groups.

On the other hand, the second view considers values as collective preferences linked to strong feelings, emphasizing their practical functions. According to this perspective, values guide

individual and collective judgments, opinions, choices, and actions (Rachik & autres , 2007).

In the field of sociology, we tend to adopt the second definition, as it aligns with the nature of sociological research that allows for the measurement of values. Indeed, this approach distances itself from moral discourses influenced by theological traditions, which can shift the researcher's role from an observer to an advocate. Guy Rocher asserts that values are specific to each society, shaped by historical conditions, and are relative. He also notes that values carry an emotional charge, contributing to their relative stability over time and explaining the resistance to change within societies (Rocher, 1969). Furthermore, he states that values guide behavior and attitudes among individuals or groups.

Finally, values are intertwined with various systems, such as religion, economics, culture, and politics, as highlighted by Emile Durkheim. Thus, they are not merely subject to individual will but are fundamental to social relations (Durkheim E. , 2013). Consequently, trends in sociological research have emerged that focus on measuring values (Inglehart R. , 1997), which will be explored further in this research.

2 – 3 –The religious values:

Religious values hold a central place in the lives of individuals and communities, acting as moral and ethical benchmarks. They influence not only personal behaviors but also social interactions and relationships with the divine.

In this regard, Majeed Zaki el Djelad describes religious values as ideals, beliefs, and norms that guide individuals and groups, originating from a divine source. These values influence interactions with the divine, oneself, others, and the universe (2007 ، الجلاء). Furthermore, Majeed Eziyouid notes that these values serve as standards for conduct, primarily derived from the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (2006 ، الزيود).

Additionally, Wadha Ali Al-Suwaidi defines religious values as norms from Islamic sources that affect choices and behaviors, both explicit and implicit (2022/2021 ، ساحي). In Islam, these values shape beliefs and judgments, guiding relationships with the environment and the afterlife. Consequently, they are crucial for Muslims, impacting personal development and

community cohesion, while helping individuals navigate life's challenges while remaining connected to their faith.

Moreover, those who embody religious values are characterized by discipline, balance, and acceptance within society. (أخضري و عروس، 2023). In the same context, Mahmoud Ata adds that values represent a set of principles and rules that function as a guide to orient human behavior. They also serve as references that allow us to judge reflections, people, objects, and attitudes. All of this is derived from the divine sacred book and the Sunnah; some values are categorical in meaning, while others are speculative in comprehension. Thus, religious values can be measured and identified through performance and behavior (عقل م، 2000).

It can be said that religious values are fundamental beliefs that guide the individuals and the communities, promoting the compassion, the justice, and the respect. Rooted in divine sources, they shape moral frameworks and foster personal development and community cohesion—elements essential for interfaith dialogue and harmonious societies.

2 –4– The homosexuality:

The relationship to sexuality in the Arab-Muslim world is shaped by the Koran, which outlines legal and illegal bodily practices. Unlike Christianity, which emphasizes procreation, Islam views sexuality as positive but confines it to marital unions (Bellakhdar, 2008). Certain acts, particularly sodomy, are prohibited and carry stigma, reflecting societal taboos (Kligerman, 2007).

The concept of homosexuality emerged in the 19th century and was classified as a mental illness until 1973. (جابر و كفاي، 1991). It refers to relationships between individuals of the same sex, including both male and female relationships, with terms like sodomy for male relationships and lesbianism for female relationships (براميلي، الإنحرافات الجنسية و أنواعها أسبابها، الطرق العلاجية، 2009). The American Psychological Association (APA) defines homosexuality as a consistent pattern of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction toward individuals of the same sex (خطاب، 2021).

The Arab-Muslim perspective on sexuality is complex, affirming and restricting sexual expression simultaneously. While the Koran presents sexuality positively within marriage, it imposes strict prohibitions that are interpreted through historical and cultural lenses. This ongoing tension between religious beliefs and evolving understandings of sexuality continues to shape individual experiences within the Arab-Muslim world.

2 – 4 – 1 - Homosexuality in Islamic Societies:

The views regarding homosexuality in the Islamic world are complex, particularly in literature and poetry. Persian poets like Rumi and Saadi explore themes of same-sex love within a spiritual and mystical Sufi framework (Rouayheb, 2005). However, in modern Islamic societies, homosexuality is often seen as sinful and immoral.

This change in attitude can be attributed to Sharia and the influence of conservative religious interpretations that denounce homosexual acts, often citing the reference to the people of Prophet Lot as evidence of prohibition (Kugle, 2010). Traditional perspectives view homosexuality as a violation of divine commands, reinforced by many hadiths and interpretations by Islamic scholars who condemn it as unnatural (Rahman, 2001).

Some scholars, like Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, advocates a reinterpretation of Islamic texts that embraces greater sexual diversity (Kugle, 2010). These perspectives significantly influence societal attitudes and are reflected in the legal frameworks of many Muslim-majority countries, where conservative interpretations often lead to hostility, discrimination, and violence against homosexuality.

The religious interpretations significantly influence societal attitudes toward homosexuality. In conservative societies, homosexuality faces hostility, discrimination, and violence, which are reflected in the legal frameworks of many Muslim-majority countries.

2-5- Identity conflict:

Identity conflict is a complex phenomenon influenced by social pressure, cultural expectations, and family norms. According to Erik Erikson, identity evolves constantly through social interactions and personal experiences (Erikson,

1968) . This conflict is particularly pronounced among minorities, especially homosexual individuals, who often face stigma and discrimination. Judith Butler, in "Gender Trouble" (1990), emphasizes that gender and sexuality norms are rigid, making self-acceptance difficult. She states that "gender performance is both a liberating and constraining act" (Butler, 1990). Erving Goffman, in "Stigma" (1963), explores how stigmatized individuals, including homosexuals, manage their identity, noting that "the stigma devalues the individual" (Goffman, Stigma: Notes on the management of spotted identity, 1963), which can create a conflict between personal and social identity. Young homosexuals feel intense pressure to conform to heteronormative expectations. A study by Ryan et al. (2009) reveals that LGBTQ adolescents suffer more from mental health issues due to isolation and family rejection, highlighting that "family acceptance is a key factor in the well-being of young homosexuals" (Ryan & al, 2009).

It can say that identity conflict deserves exploration, particularly in the context of homosexual individuals, to promote acceptance and support.

To clarify this idea, we will illustrate some real-life experiences of homosexual individuals in Muslim societies:

Homosexual experiences in Muslim societies:

In Iran, the government allows sex reassignment surgeries but criminalizes homosexual acts, leading some to undergo surgery to conform to societal norms despite significant risks (karimianpour, 2021). In Indonesia, a progressive movement among Muslim scholars is advocating for inclusive interpretations of Islamic doctrine, resulting in the formation of LGBTQ affirming religious organizations (Boellstorff, 2005). In Turkey, LGBTQ organizations have gained visibility in a more secular environment but still encounter resistance from conservative religious groups. Many LGBTQ individuals practice selective integration, balancing private secular beliefs with public adherence to religious norms to avoid social ostracism (Ozturk, 2014).

These case studies highlight the complex dynamics of navigating religious and sexual identities in predominantly Muslim societies and

underscore the potential for reinterpreting religious beliefs and community values.

3- Theoretical Framework Literature Review

3-1- Theories of identity and conflict

Identity theory is crucial for understanding how individuals form their personal identities in relation to their social environments, particularly the impact of societal norms on self-perception. Identity conflict arises when individuals manage multiple, potentially incompatible identities, especially for those who identify as both Muslim and homosexual.

Grounded in the symbolic interactionist framework, Identity Theory examines how self-identities are shaped by societal norms. Sheldon Stryker argues that identity is a complex construct encompassing various roles individuals assume in different contexts (Stryker & Burker, 2000).

In Algeria, where Islam predominates, religious identity significantly influences beliefs and moral frameworks. Muslim homosexuals often face identity conflicts due to societal and religious condemnation of their sexual orientation, compounded by a legal and cultural environment that perpetuates stigma.

Negotiation strategies may include compartmentalization, where individuals publicly adhere to religious norms while privately acknowledging their sexual orientation, or reinterpretation, seeking more inclusive theological perspectives (Mahaffy, 1996). In extreme cases, individuals may experience identity foreclosure, relinquishing one aspect of their identity for the other, leading to feelings of loss or alienation.

Examining the dynamics of identity conflict among homosexuals in Algeria provides insights into the psychological and social obstacles they encounter, as religious socialization profoundly influences their beliefs and behaviors (Jaspal & cannirela, **Coping with potentially incompatible identifies: Accounts of religious ,ethnic, and sexual identities from british pakistani men who identify as muslim and gay, 2010**).

We can say, the identity theory sheds light on the complexities of personal identity for individuals

like Muslim homosexuals in Algeria facing conflicting identities. The clash between societal norms and religious beliefs creates significant challenges and psychological distress, making it essential to understand these dynamics to promote inclusivity.

3-2- Social Constructivism

Social constructivism asserts that reality, including social identities, is created through interactions within specific cultural contexts, emphasizing that identities are shaped by societal norms and values. In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann argue that social institutions, like religion, play a crucial role in identity formation by providing lenses for interpreting experiences (**Berger & Luckmann, 1966**).

In many Muslim-majority contexts, such as Algeria, religious doctrines influence sexual morality, often categorizing homosexuality as sinful. These norms are internalized through socialization, leading individuals who identify as homosexual to experience shame and self-rejection (**Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010**).

The social constructivism helps us understand how religious and sexual identities are shaped by social environments and highlights the power dynamics in identity formation. In Algeria, religious socialization influences beliefs about sexuality from an early age, creating challenges for individuals reconciling their identities with conflicting norms. For homosexuals, this can lead to significant internal conflict as they try to align their sexual identity with their religious upbringing (**Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010**).

Overall, social constructivism provides a framework for understanding how internalized religious values influence sexual identity formation and the complex processes individuals face in reconciling their beliefs and identities.

3-3- Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that explores how various social identity—such as race, gender, class, religion, and sexuality—interact to shape distinct experiences of oppression or privilege. Introduced by Kimberli Crenshaw, intersectionality emphasizes the need to understand these identities as interconnected

rather than as separate or additive categories (**Grenshaw, 1989**).

Intersectionality illustrates how social structures and power dynamics affect individuals with intersecting identities. In Algeria, where Islamic values influence legal and social systems, homosexuals face a hostile environment that stigmatizes and penalizes their sexual orientation, forcing them to negotiate their identities to survive and maintain dignity (**Jaspal, The social psychology of gay men , 2017**).

In the context of this study, intersectionality is essential for comprehending the experiences of homosexuals in Algeria, who must navigate the complexities of their religious, sexual, and cultural identities. For many, being both Muslim and homosexual presents unique challenges that cannot be fully understood by examining these identities in isolation. This intersection often leads to compounded marginalization, where individuals face not only homophobia but also discrimination rooted in religious beliefs and cultural stigmatization.

Furthermore, intersectionality facilitates an examination of how different social identities can result in varying levels of privilege or disadvantage within the same community. For example, a homosexual individual from a wealthy, urban background in Algeria may have access to more resources and support compared to others.

4. Analysis and discussion

4.1. Religious values in Algerian society

Islam plays a central role in shaping Algeria's culture and society. As a predominantly Muslim nation, Islamic teachings influence individual behavior, national identity, social norms, and legal frameworks. Islamic values inform moral and ethical standards, and religious education begins at an early age, with children being taught the Quran and Hadith.

Religious institutions—such as mosques and Islamic schools—play a pivotal role in preserving and transmitting these values. The prominent presence of Islam in public life is reinforced by state support, which often collaborates with religious authorities to ensure social order and cohesion. This close interconnection between

religion and the state amplifies the influence of Islamic values in Algerian society, making them nearly inseparable from the national identity (Herek, 2009).

The central role of Islam in Algerian society establishes a socio-cultural framework that strongly discourages deviations from its doctrinal principles, particularly in matters of morality and sexuality. Homosexuality is widely regarded as fundamentally incompatible with Islamic principles, which have traditionally condemned it. This creates a social environment in which adherence to religious values is not only expected but also reinforced by legal frameworks, informal norms, and community pressure (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010).

Within this context, social constructivism provides a useful framework for exploring how religious values are internalized and how they influence the development of sexual identity. This perspective highlights the complex social and psychological dynamics experienced by individuals as they navigate the often-conflicting demands of religious beliefs and sexual identity.

4.2. Experiences of Homosexuals in Algeria

In Algerian society, homosexuality is widely disapproved of and regarded as a taboo that threatens both moral and religious values. Religious doctrines classify same-sex relationships as immoral, a perception further reinforced by cultural norms that promote heteronormativity and traditional gender roles. This marginalization fosters fear and repression among homosexual individuals, leading to discrimination, violence, and social ostracism if their sexual orientation is disclosed. (Amine & Keenan, 2012).

Public discourse on homosexuality in Algeria remains predominantly negative, with media often portraying it as a foreign intrusion that threatens the nation's moral fabric. This stigmatization deeply permeates mainstream culture, fostering widespread homophobic attitudes. The existing legal framework criminalizes same-sex relationships, reinforcing societal perceptions of homosexuality as deviant. As a result, many homosexual individuals conceal their identities, contributing to a culture of secrecy that suppresses open expression.

For those who identify as Muslim, the intersection of sexual orientation and religious beliefs creates significant tension. Many religious communities in Algeria categorically condemn homosexual behavior, labeling it as *haram*. This often leads to deep internal conflict, as individuals attempt to reconcile their religious identity with their sexual orientation, frequently experiencing guilt and shame. The pressure to conform to religious expectations can cause psychological distress as individuals suppress or deny their sexual identity to maintain their beliefs.

In some cases, this tension may compel individuals to renounce their faith, leading to emotional and social consequences, such as estrangement from their communities and loss of familial support. Conversely, others may reassess their religious beliefs, resulting in reinterpretations of sacred texts or the adoption of a more personalized spiritual framework that affirms their sexual identity. (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). This dynamic highlights the complex interplay between identity formation and the negotiation of belief systems within sociocultural frameworks.

4.3- Approaches to reconciliation

In Algeria, many homosexual individuals face the challenge of reconciling their religious beliefs with their sexual identity, adopting various strategies to navigate this internal conflict. One prevalent approach is **compartmentalization**, through which individuals separate their religious and sexual identities. This strategy allows them to maintain their faith while privately accepting their sexual orientation, a process that demands considerable emotional effort (Mahaffy, 1996).

Another common strategy is religious reinterpretation, where individuals engage with progressive scholarship to find more inclusive understandings of Islamic texts. Some scholars argue that the Qur'an's condemnation of homosexuality is not definitive, advocating for a broader and more nuanced understanding of sexual diversity (Kugle, 2010).

Community and social networks play a crucial role in providing emotional support and fostering a sense of belonging. While family support remains significant, it is often conditional, prompting individuals to turn to friends—

particularly those who identify as LGBTQ or who hold progressive views—for acceptance and affirmation (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010).

Progressive religious groups also contribute to identity reconciliation by offering spiritual guidance and challenging conventional norms. LGBTQ organizations in Algeria work to advocate for rights and raise awareness, creating a sense of solidarity and resilience in a socially restrictive environment (El Tayeb, 2011).

Furthermore, Reddy (2005) underscores the importance of inclusive religious spaces in fostering acceptance. Similarly, Herek (2009) emphasizes the crucial role of social movements in promoting LGBTQ+ rights. (Meyer, 2010) adds that online platforms empower marginalized communities by facilitating dialogue and offering psychological and emotional support.

In summary, Algerian homosexuals navigate the complexities of reconciling their faith and sexual identity through strategies such as compartmentalization and reinterpretation, while relying on community support and progressive organizations for advocacy and affirmation within a challenging social and religious context.

Conclusion

This study highlights significant limitations stemming from its reliance on existing literature, which constrains a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of homosexual individuals in Algeria. To overcome this limitation, future research should prioritize empirical investigations, including qualitative studies and comparative analyses with other Muslim-majority countries. Such approaches would enrich the understanding of the complex interactions between religion, sexuality, and identity, thereby contributing to a more inclusive discourse on LGBTQ+ issues in contemporary society and helping to counter discriminatory behaviors.

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