



Dismissal, Repression, and Struggles of Homosexual Individuals: A Critical Evaluation of Homosexuality in a Conservative Context

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Abstract: Family and surroundings are the place where every individual seek support. Homosexual individuals also yearn for familial support and understanding. However, they often receive rejection and humiliation from them. It becomes severe when the people outside their family start humiliating and torturing them. They suffer from rejection, lack of support, humiliation, and abuse everywhere. It makes them hollow from the inside. It makes them psychologically weak. They start questioning their self-worth, place in society and family. It makes them doubt their existence and sense of belonging. This research paper discusses these points in the lives of homosexual individuals through the study of the novel *The Clothesline Swing* by Ahmad Danny Ramadan by employing Qualitative research methodology.

Keywords: Repression, Familial and Societal Dismissal, Psychological impact, Homophobia, Conservativeness, Societal Order

INTRODUCTION:

Queer individuals face humiliation and violence everywhere; in their houses by their family members, outside their houses by strangers and known ones. They have to endure shame, discrimination, and dismissal. Most homosexual people globally face rejection, violence and abuse because of their sexual orientation. These factors affect their well-being. It has negative impacts on them psychologically and emotionally.

This paper discusses the sufferings and their impact on homosexual individuals. It employs a Qualitative research methodology. The researcher has analysed various written sources and real-life data that support and form the argument. Various research papers and critical books have been written on the topic of homosexuality from many different viewpoints. Nevertheless, the topic has not been explored much. There are numerous points of view and sources that still require further study. This research paper discusses the dismissal and suppression of homosexual individuals by their parents, and the silent torture that they endure in their homes.

This research paper evaluates the lives of homosexual people in Ahmad Danny Ramadan's novel *The Clothesline Swing*. The novel shows the rejection of queer identities by families. The novel features numerous homosexual characters. Every character is enduring a different battle. They all belong to different families, yet the ideology of every family is the same on the topic of homosexuality. They have to face refusal, discrimination, violence, abuse and silent torture. As a result, some have to leave their houses, and some commit suicide. The rejection can affect anyone's mind, heart, and ideology. They could start questioning their identity, self-worth, and place in society.

However, they often have to suffer such incidents repeatedly. It shows that violence, discrimination and humiliation for homosexual individuals are part of a larger systematic structure. Violence and discrimination based on different sexual orientations and weaker gender have become a norm in society. According to 2021 data given by gender and

women's expert Fidele Mutoni et al, people still face sex and gender-based violence in society, despite global awareness and progress in reforms.

The majority (74%) of respondents reported having experienced GBV at their workplace. The most prevalent type of GBV experienced was emotional violence (85%); and sexual violence (35%), with physical violence being the form of GBV they had been least likely to encounter. Respondents had also experienced discrimination in terms of being excluded from organisational decision-making meetings and consultations (71%). (p. 10)

These vast numbers of sexual and gender-based violence would be unsettling for any society. The data shows that this discrimination is not an isolated occurrence but a structurally embedded one and supported by all the hetero people who conform to normativity. People treat queer individuals as a downgraded community and consider them as a means of bullying and to be humiliated. Once a person comes out of the closet, they start eyeing them down. "Several comprehensive reviews have demonstrated that sexual and gender minorities are more likely to be victims of physical and sexual violence than the general population" (Blondeel et al., 2018, p. 29). This highlights the suffering that any Queer individual has to endure. Ramadan has put these sufferings in his novel with utmost skill.

The protagonist of the novel, who identifies as Hakawati, is a storyteller who narrates the scenes and stories of his past life, including his childhood and adolescence, to his love interest. He uncovers the violence, humiliation and abuse that he had to endure at the hands of his family and known ones because of his sexual orientation. One of the most distressing memories was the incident when his father came to know about his sexual identity.

He grabbed me by the hair and pulled me behind him. I walked backwards, tears gathering in my eyes; my skin was tightening and the pain of his grip on my hair was swaying inside my head like a pendulum. He didn't speak and I didn't scream, not until we reached my grandmother's building and he started to pull me up the stairs. I lost my balance and fell, but he continued to pull me by the hair as my body hit the stairs one after another. (Ramadan, 2019, p. 70)

His father's silence reflects the depth of his anger. It underscores societal intolerance towards homosexuality. People do not consider it a sexual identity but as a source of shame. His father did not even have the words to reprimand or forbid him. The only response he considers is to punish him physically and mentally.

My father pulled out his belt and repeatedly whipped me on my side. He slammed me on the ground and called me a louti, a faggot. 'I raised a man,' he said. 'You're not my son, You're not a man.' My father punched me on the face, dislodging one of my teeth... Two hours and broken nose later ... he left.... (Ramadan, 2019, p. 71)

This act of physical violence reveals both anger and fear towards homosexuality. His father's merciless words were more brutal than the beating itself. He disowns him as his son for being homosexual. Conversely, it could also be argued that his son's revelation was so heartbreaking for him that he found it impossible to believe his son could be a homosexual. He asks him the name of the other boy involved. Once he learns it was Samer, he stops beating Hakawati, calls Samer's father, and informs him of his son's sin.

On the other side, for Samer, the punishment was more severe than physical torture. They threaten him for killing, "We are instructed to take you to the tallest building in town and throw you off the edge to a crowd of spectators," he said. "Then we should drop rocks upon your body until you're covered in your makeshift grave." I've always feared height" (Ramadan, 2019, p. 77). This threat was more than it seemed. In some cases, killing is not the punishment, but rather it is the act of showing power and authority as a deterrent to society. Hetero people kill the homo individuals to keep them under their control and authority. Through these acts of killing and threatening, they compel other people to stick to conformity. It also highlights the bureaucracy of those in authority. They use their authority and rights to control the people's desires. No individual's life is of any importance to them. Every heterosexual individual is considered superior to every homosexual and has authority and right over them. They can punish them in any manner they please. They scapegoat any person for their mean; to preserve the illusion of morality, honour and tradition.

The ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die. To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty's limits, its principal attributes. To be sovereign is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power. (Mbembe, 2019, p. 66)

This way, they shut the voices of other homosexual individuals who may be considering coming out. They want them to be suppressed, invisible and unrecognised to keep society pure of filth. This type of killing is often termed as honour killing. These honour killings happen at the hands of members of the family. They do so to save their family's honour and manhood, and it is unquestionable. By threatening Samer, they compel him to marry a girl and stick to normativity. They say it is the only way to wash out the impurity and seek forgiveness for the sin. "Redemption is possible, though,

the sheikh pointed out ... 'You'll marry your cousin. I already spoke to her father,' my father said in a decisive tone ... You shall ask for forgiveness every day of your life until the day you meet the angel of death" (Ramadan, 2019, p. 77). Marriage is used as a mechanism of suppression. They think that it is the most suitable way to turn a homosexual person back to heteronormativity. At the same time, for homosexual people, it becomes a way to be saved from the punishment of being killed.

All people, whether known or unknown, want homosexual individuals to marry as a way to seek forgiveness for their sins and to avoid engaging in same-sex sexual activities. Hakawati recalls his experience of fleeing from home and moving to a strange city. He lived there with a group of boys; they shared a house, slept together, and spent their time together until they learned about his sexuality. Once they found out, they approached him and asked,

'What are you? Are you a top or a bottom?' said Fady, ... 'I mean, if you're a top, just get married to a girl and do with her as you please.' ... The group, all eight of them, were still discussing the matter of this man's sexual life; they were all attempting to agree on a plan to salvage what was left of his soul. 'We might each be able to afford to contribute a small amount of money for him,' Fady said, referring to that man who used to be me. 'And we can prepare him for marriage.' (Ramadan, 2019, p. 24)

This effort to convince of marriage highlights the unacceptance of homosexuality. Marriage becomes less a tie of companionship but a disciplinary mechanism. It illustrates how the collective force imposes its beliefs and rules on others. They consider homosexuality to be a disease and filth rather than a sexual orientation. The collective and structured attempts by everyone demonstrate that it is an effort to erase homosexuality. The only option one can think of to get rid of such pressure is to make them understand that homosexuality is not harmful to people and society, and it is not a threat to tradition and culture. Hakawati did the same; he tried to purify his image and said, "I never asked for your approval or for your understanding," he said... 'You slept next to me.' He pointed to Santa Claus, whose face was now red. Did I touch you? Did I bother you? Did I even remotely make you feel uncomfortable?' Everyone was lost for words" (Ramadan, 2019, p. 25). His words make them angrier. When he left the place and was roaming around the city with his companion, a group of boys came to them and started beating them brutally.

The first kick came right between the legs. 'Khawal,' one of them said. 'Faggot!' ... There was a blow to the chest, followed by a sharp pain in the lungs. There was a kick to the knee that dropped us to the ground. Then the many kicks came. 'I'm doing it for you,' Santa Claus said. 'You should know who you truly are.' ... His chest took a kick from the sole of a shoe. He heard the crack echoing in his head, as his fractured rib gave up and broke completely. I heard it too... Their kicks mangled his insides every time they connected. He tried to take a deep breath... He tried to beg for forgiveness to a sin he didn't believe in... He gasped, but couldn't get the air inside his body... He wished for them to hear the cracks of his bones. He wished for mercy. (Ramadan, 2019, p. 26-27).

His mistake was that he refused to stick to conformity and embraced his sexual orientation in front of them. The heteronormative people defend this act of lynching by showing it as a moral act of punishing them for their sins. Violence operates not as a physical punishment but as a societal discipline. Homophobia is so well ingrained in the structural ideology of society that at every age, people downgrade homosexuals. There are many reported and recorded incidents of people lynching homosexual people to death. One out of many is,

In Sydney in 1991 a gay man was beaten to death by a group of young men, most of whom were still at school. Having decided to "beat up a fag" they found his phone number on a toilet wall in a park and deliberately encouraged him to come to the park, where they bashed him to death. (Birmingham, 1991, as cited in Mason, 1993, para. 1)

This incident raises questions about the children's upbringing. It shows that since childhood, they are taught that homosexual people are meant to be ill-treated or that they are meant to be erased. People get killed and mob lynched in the name of honour killings. Divya Arya reports in the BBC, a story of the sufferings and mental and emotional torture of a person who was reported to be female at birth. However, later in life, she became attracted towards the same sex, "I had thought whatever be my truth, I would be accepted, after all this was my family. But my parents were ready to kill me for their honour" (Arya, 2023). In such families, a void of emotional companionship takes place. This void sometimes becomes deadly. People with high self-esteem leave their houses and begin to find themselves as Hakawati did. On the other hand, people who do not dare to leave their homes may resort to suicide, as Samer did. He did so because he feared the punishment his family would give him. Familial support and familial rejection have an excellent impact on the lives of people. This forms the way they live their life.

International studies show that how the family reacts to the disclosure of sexual orientation influences the quality of life and health of gays and lesbians, for example, negative reactions of family members are associated

with lower social support and higher incidence of health problems such as anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and excessive alcohol consumption. (Braga, 2018, p. 1221)

The study clearly demonstrates how familial rejection can impact a person's mental health and can drive them towards self-destruction. It collapses the sense of security. They begin to question their sense of belonging. Where do they belong? What place do they have in society? Do they have the right to live or not? These points become more concrete with Samer's suicide and Hakawati's statement when he says, "We queers were the loneliest people in Damascus..." (Ramadan, 2019, p. 189). Through this statement, the loneliness and lack of essential support are evident. At the same time, Samer's suicide underscores the deep-rooted homophobia that affects the psychology of homosexual people.

Family is the place that is supposed to provide shelter and safety from the world's cruelty outside. However, for homosexual individuals, it becomes a worse place. They see people talking negatively about them and looking down on them. "In this context the so-called internalized homophobia can be developed, which refers to the fear of prejudice because the homosexual subject has internalized the social stigma associated with his sexual orientation" (Braga, 2018, p. 1221). This internalised homophobia is one of the most devastating consequences of dismissal. It is considered a powerful form of trauma by psychologists. Ramadan displays the form of trauma through Hakawati's character. He tries to heal himself by remembering the traumatic scenarios more lightly by converting them into stories.

Ramadan delightfully uses this storytelling technique. The character of Hakawati, the storyteller, not only recounts his own experiences but also acts as a custodian of memories, skilfully connecting fragments of both personal and communal narratives. Through the stories of Hakawati, Ramadan unveils historical moments, blending reality with reminiscence, individual experiences with cultural suffering. These remembered events are not merely sentimental; they are profoundly political and insightful. They show the hardships, silences, and challenges that homosexual people endure in a conservative society. Religion, Culture, family and state join to marginalise them.

This paper uses real-world data to support its claim. It illustrates how the experiences portrayed in the novel align with the actual challenges faced by homosexual individuals. It draws on international research regarding queer mental health, familial rejection, and societal violence to contextualise the challenges outlined in the novel. These studies indicate that problems of isolation, suicide, and internalised homophobia are not just fictional embellishments but are, in reality, significant issues. By connecting Ramadan's fictional story with academic research, the study bridges literature and lived experiences, highlighting the pain, resilience, and endurance of homosexual individuals.

This topic can be explored from various perspectives. This paper has sought to present stories that not only shed light on the violence, coercion, and rejection faced by homosexual people but also the strength they exhibit in enduring within hostile environments. It highlights the necessity to reevaluate the ideas of honour, ethics, and identity. It raises the question of why only heterosexuality is considered valid and why homosexuality is seen as a violation that jeopardises the core structure of family and community.

This paper will serve as a valuable resource for researchers and intellectuals aiming to explore the topic in greater depth. It provides perspectives on how sexuality intertwines with themes of power, honour, and dominance in cultures that uphold heteronormativity and stifle differences. The cases of Samer and Hakawati, along with examples from the wider society, illustrate the pervasive nature of homophobia in both private and public spheres. Within families, homosexuality is often erased through arranged marriages, punishments, or emotional neglect, while in the broader community, queer individuals encounter threats of death, shame, and violence. Nevertheless, despite these oppressive circumstances, homosexual individuals persist, resist, and carve out spaces for themselves, be it through migration, storytelling, or underground communities.

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