

Chapter 12

Forced Migration and Evolving Responses to Queer Identity in the Muslim Family



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12.1 Introduction

Asylum documents tell the story: Hassan¹ had always loved to sing and dance in his home in rural Pakistan. He would dress in his mother's clothes and sway to the sounds of traditional Punjabi music. Although this was not how sons typically behaved there, his mother came not only to 'accept her son's feminine behaviour, but [to] love him as God made him' (Association for the Social Support of Youth (ARSIS), personal communication, 2019).² However, once Hassan left the house for school, socializing or travel, his gender expression posed an extreme danger in public, one that finally forced his family to send him to Europe at age 17 to seek asylum.

Hassan's earliest memories of harassment based on his sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) began when he was 5 years old at his primary school in the Punjab region. In research interviews, he described how other children abused him verbally and physically and were often encouraged to do so by adults. He said:

¹The research participant's name has been changed to protect his anonymity. He chooses to be addressed with masculine pronouns.

²Throughout this chapter, 'ARSIS, personal communication, 2019' refers to the EU's *Best Interests Assessment Form for the Purposes of Implementing the Dublin Regulation* that was completed on Hassan's behalf. 'ARSIS, personal communication, 2020' refers to a completed version of a free-form report on Hassan's case, *Social Report*. Both were composed by a social worker at the Association for the Social Support of Youth (ARSIS) NGO in Thessaloniki, Greece, and are unpublished.

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There would be complaints about my behaviour from teachers and other villagers. My father would react to those complaints by thrashing me in an effort to 'correct' me once I got home. The societal pressure on my father to have a 'normal' child was so great that he felt pressured and embarrassed. The beatings would get intense. (Interview, 5 February 2020)

Eventually, Hassan's father sent him to live 2 h away at a madrassa, an Islamic religious school where they thought he could earn respect by becoming a hafiz, one who has memorized the Quran by heart. He did, but this achievement made no difference. The verbal and physical abuse continued at his madrassa. 'It would start with bullying and verbal abuse and build up to sexual abuse. They would hate me for being different and tried to sexually abuse me. At one point my fellow students even tried to rape me', he described (Interview, 5 February 2020).

During these years, some people in Hassan's life—his mother, his religious teacher and his maternal uncle in Spain—tried to protect him, but their efforts were never enough to counter the homophobia and violence from outside. At his mother's request, out of fear that community members would kill him or that he would eventually commit suicide, his parents gathered the money to have a smuggler send him by land across Iran and Turkey to Europe. They informed Hassan of the plan the night before his departure. He endured a month of treacherous travel by bus, truck, van, boat and on foot with about 25 other displaced people, including several days crammed into a shipping container in the mountains without food. Hassan finally arrived in Thessaloniki and became one of the over 50,000 asylum seekers who arrived in Greece in 2018, and was among an estimated 17,000 asylum seekers under the age of 18 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), [n.d.](#); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), [n.d.](#)). Upon arrival, he requested family reunification with his maternal uncle, who was living in Spain.

Hassan was received at the Association for the Social Support of Youth (ARSIS) in November 2018. ARSIS is an NGO that houses 30 unaccompanied minors in a group-home setting outside Thessaloniki. Residents attend classes, receive therapy and live in dormitories among other asylum seekers. The ARSIS social workers endeavour to help residents with their adjustment to Europe and advocate for their asylum cases with the relevant immigration authorities by building case files on their behalf. In Hassan's case, his social worker arranged for his uncle to fly from Spain to Greece for an official DNA test for their family reunification. While waiting for reunification,³ Hassan has been navigating the challenges of living among fellow refugees and exploring new ways to express his gender identity in Europe. Meanwhile, he enjoys a loving but geographically distant relationship with his parents and siblings, one in which his gender, religious and sociopolitical identities have been continually reconstructed over time and space, sometimes vis-à-vis his family's community belonging.

This chapter explores the nexus of gendered securities, forced migration and family dynamics as illustrated through Hassan's life history. The central research

³Hassan's case was still pending with the Spanish immigration authorities at the time of this research.

question is one of cause and effect: How did a transgender youth and his family members experience insecurity due to his SOGI, and what were their strategic responses aimed at reducing their individual and shared vulnerabilities across contexts?

Displaced children began migrating to and within Europe in large numbers after World War II. They had few codified protections until the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child officially named refugee minors as rights-bearers, though the exercise of these rights is dependent on how children's claims are recognized, respected and implemented in international and national systems (Lawrence et al., 2019). Today's migration of unaccompanied minors to Europe shows no signs of abating, evidenced by the almost 6000 children who arrived by land or sea in Greece alone in the first half of 2019. Of these, 17% were without an adult, an 18% increase compared to the same period the year before (UNHCR et al., 2019). Some minors may be turned away or viewed with suspicion as false petitioners. This case study describes the experiences of a relatively fortunate minor who was welcomed into the Greek refugee system and housed based on his age and SOGI minority status.

Sexual orientation-based rights abuses are recognized as a compelling reason for flight and as grounds for receiving refugee status based on the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Since at least 1990, courts have found sexual orientation to be a fundamental part of human identity and to constitute membership in a particular social group with a well-founded fear of persecution in many countries (Goldberg, 1993, p. 617). Nevertheless, the asylum process for those fleeing due to sexual orientation is not unproblematic. First, asylum seekers must ensure that their narrative aligns with the destination state's 'checklist' for LGBTQIA+ identity (Lee & Brotman, 2011). Lee and Brotman (2013) find that asylum assessors tend to look for a linear and essentialized sexual identity trajectory, as conceived of in Cass's six-stage model of identity formation (1979). Berg and Millbank (2009) argue that psychological 'stage models' of sexual identity development are based on white, middle-class men and may not be relevant for non-Western refugees with limited experiences of SOGI categories. They also found that Western assessors judge whether asylum seekers are 'out' enough according to their own standards. Benedicto (2008) calls these notions an imagined 'gay globality'.

Scholarship on LGBTQIA+ forced migration from the Islamic world to Western countries has revealed that the insecurity of belonging is a constant struggle for refugees. Belonging is a point of strain for Muslim LGBTQIA+ refugees because their SOGI endangers them in their countries of origin, and their 'refugeeness', as Lee and Brotman (2011) term it, endangers them at their destinations. Jaspal's (2014) studies of gay Iranian migrants in the U.K. show that migrants receive a psychological reconceptualization cue fraught with tension in the period after their arrival. Anyone outside the gender binary can be labelled 'gay' in their home country, and then the applicant is retraumatized as immigration officials force them to label themselves during the intake processes, even if inaccurately, for purposes of asylum-seeking (Jaspal, 2014). Additionally, refugee reception centres may be unable to mitigate the cultural pressures LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers face when housed with others from their home countries; there are ample reports of

homophobic violence within displaced populations in Europe (Reading & Rubin, 2011; LaViolette, 2013). These experiences were all salient in this case study of Hassan.

In line with this book's inquiries into everyday security, this chapter adopts a framework inclusive of the practices that people engage in to govern their safety, offering a critical vantage point to understand the nexus of gender identity and insecurity. More specifically, it embraces a transnational intersectional approach to account for multitudinous vulnerable identities within the forced migration context. This approach is vital because Hassan self-identifies as a *khwaja sira*, a transgender woman from South Asia who dresses and behaves in ways that conform to female gender roles (Khan, 2014, p. 173).⁴ Pakistani *khwaja sira*s number about 30,000⁵ and endure severe human rights abuses despite legal rulings in their favour since 2009. They face persecution in terms of access to housing, employment, education and healthcare, as well as profound violence at the hands of their families and the larger community (Munir, 2019; Ming et al., 2016). This particular cultural and gender identity is pivotal to understanding Hassan's contextualized identity formation, thus aligning this case study with critical feminist scholarship focused on gender, the differential experiences of immigrants and quotidian deprivations (Safi, 2010).

12.2 Methods and Theoretical Framework

This chapter examines the vulnerabilities and strategic responses of a gender minority and his family through a case study based on interviews with Hassan and an information-oriented sampling of the relatives who supported him within a cultural milieu of public persecution. The first methodological decision in designing this study was to determine which questions we sought to answer. The research design's driving inquiries were based on Elizabeth Cole's (2009) guidance on intersectional research. Cole encourages researchers to ask three questions in intersectional investigations: Who is included within a social category? What role does inequality play? Where are the similarities? These questions are not mutually exclusive; in fact, each question builds on insights generated by the previous one.

The chapter adopts transnational intersectionality as its theoretical framework to delve into Hassan's multiple identities across place and time. As pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality is a feminist theory that identifies how interconnected systems of power affect those with the most vulnerable identities, with multiple vulnerable identities often coexisting and interacting to create either

⁴ *Khwaja sira* refers to individuals, while *hijra* refers to the culture or community. *Khwaja sira*s often live together in *hijra* communes. *Hijra* derives from the Urdu word 'to migrate' and comes from the notion of migrating in the body, from one gender to another (Hadid, 2017).

⁵ The Pakistani federal government's census figure in 2017 was 10,000; LGBTQIA+ activists estimate 50,000 ('Pakistani eunuchs' 2009; Baig, 2012; Haider, 2017; Mustafa, 2017).

group or non-group membership that leads to inequalities. Moreover, as Rahman (2010, p. 944) points out, 'queer is necessarily intersectional'. In this case, Hassan's status as a sexual minority youth from a poor agricultural family created discriminatory conditions that would not have existed if he was just one or the other. Hassan's experiences after arriving in Greece demonstrate a particular form of 'transnational intersectionality', a term espoused by Grabe and Else-Quest (2012). The transnational element to the discussion acknowledges that the classic canon of intersectionality is based on a globally insufficient trifecta of gender, race and class: it interprets identities primarily within the borders of individual nation-states and is a form of 'domestic intersectionality' (Patil, 2013). Not only are these three categories limited in their nuance, but migration scholars point out they are socially and culturally constructed based on context and thus not static across continents (or even necessarily nearby communities) (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

Hassan's case was selected on the basis of its richness and depth of family relations across time and space from among the first author's qualitative data set collected from 20 transgender respondents in Pakistan and four European countries from 2017 to 2020 (see Munir, 2019). In light of Hassan's unique and information-rich life trajectory as a transgender minor refugee who fled public persecution but retained a loving relationship with his family, we adopted the case study method for our emic investigation.

Hassan's history meets the criteria of a compelling case study since it is a new and complex functioning unit in its natural context that was investigated with many methods. This chapter's analytical approach combines two explicative strategies: qualitative and interpretation-historical. These two strategies have in common a holistic approach to the case. The former allows the research participant to construct their interpretation of their reality, true to postmodernist empirics, while the second is dependent on a constructed logic of that interpretation by the researcher. The goal of these data interpretation modes is to give voice to the vibrant life of the individuals involved, voices that may be unheard, suppressed or purposely ignored and often get lost during the refugee's journey. In the words of Olive (2014), it hopes to 'serve to disrupt the commonly held beliefs which are widely considered to be 'the truth' regarding a certain group of people' (p. 2).

The main research participants were Hassan and his uncle, whose in-depth interviews were mutually constitutive in building a narrative of vulnerabilities and responses. We interviewed Hassan first and his uncle afterward, with the expectation that the uncle's timeline would align with Hassan's while adding an extra dimension to the narrative. The uncle's interview data extended Hassan's by showing the secondary effects of Hassan's life trajectory on his family members in both Pakistan and Spain in a way Hassan himself had not perceived. An additional three interviews with Hassan's social worker in Greece served to undergird Hassan's and his uncle's accounts from a bystander's perspective. Hassan's mother and father in Punjab did not wish to be interviewed again after their interview with Hassan's Greek social worker, but fully consented to the record of that interview being used to analyse this case.

The investigation's interviews were guided by a semi-structured protocol consisting of 20 exploratory, open-ended questions regarding perceptions of sexuality, migration, and family and community security. The most general questions were presented first, with the following questions becoming progressively more specific; hence questions about the general community preceded those about specific family dynamics. Questions were also posed in chronological order to aid memory recall. Questions that pertained specifically to Hassan, such as 'How did you come to identify as queer?' were altered when asked of his uncle in order to interrogate how Hassan's family perceived his experiences and how they were affected by them (e.g., 'How do you believe Hassan came to identify as queer, and how did that impact his family?').

At its core, the essence of the case study methodology is triangulation, meaning the combination of different techniques, methods, strategies or theories in gathering and analysing data (Natow, 2020). For this investigation, triangulation was based on comparing our interviews with the three interviewees, the voice memos we exchanged with Hassan and his uncle (Noor corresponded with Hassan in their native Punjabi language, Munir with the uncle in their shared Spanish language), non-sensitive NGO case documents from ARSIS, emails with the Greek social worker and photos of Hassan at the safe zone for unaccompanied migrant children in Greece. The analysis also draws from Munir's 2017–2020 data (Munir, 2017, 2019). The combined information was analysed in three stages based on positionality: first from Hassan's perspective, then from his parents and his uncle's perspective, and finally from a bystander perspective as represented by his child protection officer. Together, these sources of information offered 'insights into what the individual interviewee considered significant and reportable while pointing to issues that may be of significance to a wider segment of society', as is the purpose of the case study method (Palmer, 2010, p. 530).

12.3 Persecution in Pakistan

12.3.1 *Individual Insecurities*

The case study analysis below details the sexuality-based persecution that propelled Hassan's forced migration, which has negatively impacted his family. It reveals his three strategic responses to the vulnerabilities he faced because of his gender identity: first to hide, then to work harder to be a 'good Muslim' and later to migrate to Greece for safety. During this process, his family followed a similar trajectory of responses, first hiding his sexuality within the home, then sending him to madrasa to 'correct' him and demonstrate their religiosity to others, and finally sending him away. After detailing these strategic responses, we describe how Hassan and his family navigated multiple individual and collective identities within their community to balance Hassan's personal security needs with their group security needs.

When Hassan describes his early life outside his family home in Pakistan, nearly all his accounts include violence. He was mocked, isolated, physically assaulted and threatened with his life (ARSIS, personal communication, 2019). Classmates often called him pejorative names like ‘hijra’.⁶ They followed him home from school, beat him in the streets, attempted to remove his clothes and threatened to rape him as a form of correction for his ‘abnormality’. He said in his interview that by the time he reached adolescence, ‘I tried to conform to the norm and forced myself to “act normal”, to be more acceptable to those around me, but it was too painful’ (Interview, 5 February 2020). He felt that there was nothing he could do to end the abuse because:

Everyone seems to think I do not deserve to live with dignity and respect. There is a lack of education in general in Pakistan on how to treat others who are not cisgender like the majority of the population. The treatment of the transgender community is similar throughout the country. This includes the extended family, neighbours, schoolmates and teachers. They all feel entitled to ridicule us for being different. (Interview, 5 February 2020)

Feeling marginalized at school, Hassan sought out relationships with others who were also gender-fluid, a group within which he felt he could ‘disappear’. While out with a group of older khwaja siras in 2015, he witnessed an act of extreme violence against one of his friends that traumatized and transformed him. This friend was living in a commune for khwaja siras and being forced into dance performances and transactional sex by the commune’s abusive leader. Hassan described the incident:

My unlucky friend was one of those who got killed before my very own eyes. One night, the landlords of the village raped him after he danced for them. They then killed him for fun, as they know that they [khwaja siras] are not considered people and no one will miss them if they die. It was horrifying. I still cry for him. I cannot express how much pain I feel when I remember that night. I did not tell anyone about it, as we are made to believe that no one cares about people like my friend, a poor, helpless hijra. (Interview, 5 February 2020)

Hassan understands that violence against the LGBTQIA+ community remains the norm despite Pakistan’s position as a leading country in terms of transgender protections: a Supreme Court decision gave khwaja siras the right to vote and run for public office, and the federal government granted the transgender community a distinct gender category within Pakistan’s National Database and Registration Authority in 2009. It has since added the ‘third gender’ option to the national census, identity cards, passports and voter registration data, starting in 2017 (Khan, 2019a; b, p. 1194). Nevertheless, there is widespread bottom-up opposition to LGBTQIA+ equality at the local level, with the police themselves often committing the most egregious human rights violations (Associated Press of Pakistan, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2017, p. 5). Because of this, Hassan told us, ‘there is no law or protection against it.’ There are indeed laws on the books to protect the transgender community, including the federal Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018, but they are relatively new, and there is no indication they have been implemented in Hassan’s semi-rural community.

⁶ *Hijra* is an outdated pejorative term when used to address a transgender person in Pakistan.

12.3.2 *Family Vulnerabilities*

Having an LGBTQIA+ family member resulted in secondary discrimination against Hassan's family. Despite a family's own acceptance of their LGBTQIA+ child, the child's SOGI can threaten the entire family's social security in the larger community. When asked how his SOGI threatened his family, Hassan said, 'There was general hatred from outside of the home. They never took us seriously as human beings, and they felt it was their right to get cheap laughs at our expense. I think it made them feel powerful and better than us' (Interview, 5 February 2020). In countries with weak state services like Pakistan, acceptance into local socioeconomic networks is vital for a family's well-being, determining access to local financial support mechanisms in times of need, potential marriage partners, and employment opportunities for sons that will act as financial security for elderly parents.

Hassan's parents are farmers living at the poverty line. Their agricultural income is vulnerable to weather patterns, transportation routes and world markets. Hassan's stigmatization threatened his father's inclusion in rural economic support networks for farming based on cooperation, such as informal lending and insurance schemes.⁷ These traditional solidarity networks depend on both a shared sense of moral obligation and salient in-group membership; thus, they punish forms of deviance, including gender non-conformity (Banerjee & Duflo, 2012, pp. 144–146). Hassan's family was less likely to receive these socioeconomic benefits because his gender identity was seen as anathema to Islam and community standards.

Hassan also faced limited employment opportunities due to his SOGI. In particular, he mentioned that older family members would never hire him. The extended family plays a pivotal role in economic outcomes in rural Pakistan. 'In Pakistani society, extended family like aunts, uncles, cousins are also very involved with day-to-day family business. I got the same discriminatory treatment from the extended family, and I was ridiculed a lot at family gatherings. I had no hope [of employment] with them' (Interview, 5 February 2020). As the eldest male child, Hassan had the particular burden of supporting his parents and his siblings, which in Pakistani society is accomplished by getting married and starting a family. In this way, fear of future economic uncertainty was thrust upon Hassan, rendering his immediate daily life insecure. Crawford and Hutchinson (2016) point out that for people to feel secure, they require assurances that their safety will continue in the future, and people tend to have more confidence about future risks that are taken on voluntarily compared to those 'imposed' upon them by outside actors and forces (p. 1194).

Hassan's lack of marriage value in his community endangered his parents' financial future. There was scant chance he would take a wife who would provide a

⁷There are several examples of these in his family's area, such as 'merry-go-round' savings plans, in which 12 people pool their money each month to receive the entire pot themselves once per year, and coordinated bank deposits and withdrawals to maximize interest payments and minimize fees. Informal rural networks of lending and borrowing may allow those who suffer an economic shock to repay less of a loan (Banerjee & Duflo, 2012, p. 189).

dowry or produce children who would grow up to be economic agents. His public gender identity also lowered his younger sisters' marriage value, posing a socioeconomic danger for the entire family. This issue of marriage prospects is essential because South Asian households use marriage to diversify the 'risk portfolio' of their families, as in-laws can call on each other when in financial trouble (Rosenzweig & Stark, 1989). Overall, Hassan's SOGI made the rigid life trajectory he was supposed to follow impossible.

12.4 Individual and Shared Strategic Responses

12.4.1 *Social Avoidance*

Our in-depth interviews revealed three strategic responses by Hassan and his family. First, Hassan and his parents tried to hide him in the privacy of their home whenever possible; second, they turned to Islam as a means of changing his identity and establishing heteronormativity; third, they placed his wellbeing in the hands of the European immigration system, which incentivized his public identification as transgender. In discussing the earliest strategy, Hassan describes his time attending his village school as his years of 'hiding'. He would walk to and from school as fast as he could, taking less-travelled routes. He did not leave the house to socialize voluntarily and stayed inside with his siblings and mother. He gender-expressed openly at home in the hopes that he could 'let it out' and then be able to hide his SOGI more easily in public. 'I could not bear the pain. I contemplated committing suicide a lot. I just wanted to escape in any way' (Interview, 5 February 2019). Hiding Hassan at home was a strategic response fully shared between him and his family.

According to both Hassan and his uncle, his family's attempts to shield him within the confines of their home whenever he was not at school was not motivated solely by shame, but because they loved him. Although Hassan's father was not initially comfortable with Hassan's gender expression, his mother and siblings were less troubled by it. He explained:

At home, I always preferred to dress like a girl. My siblings loved me a lot and they joined me in dancing and singing. It was hard for my mother at first, but gradually, she accepted my 'behaviour' and the fact that I did not behave like the rest of the boys because she loved me. (Interview, 5 February 2020)

He also said, 'I was the eldest, which means I got a lot of love from my parents. It always disturbed my mother that I was mistreated by the people around us. She always stood up for me.' Hassan's mother believed that 'These people are not good Muslims. It's these people's minds and not the Quran that obstructs my son's freedom' (ARSIS, personal communication, 2019).

Although hiding at home protected Hassan from public physical abuse, he still endured abuse from his father as a means of 'guiding' him to more socially acceptable behaviour that would keep him safe. Even while detailing his father's beatings,

Hassan maintained in interviews that he felt loved. ‘It took a long time for my father to accept it. My father used to beat me badly until the age of 11 or 13 because of [religious] pressure that I did not behave like other boys.’ Based on Hassan’s narrations, beatings are a regular part of rural Pakistani parenting and a sign of engaged childrearing. Hassan explained that his father would feel guilty and apologize afterwards because he did not know how else to modify his son’s behaviour to keep him safe (Interview, 5 February 2020).

During this cloistering period in the home, Hassan’s family briefly considered seeking out police protection but quickly dismissed the idea. Hassan’s mother said, ‘We couldn’t go to the police. The nearest police station is far, and we are too poor to go to the police. You cannot turn to the police’ (ARSIS, personal communication, 2019). Indeed, the nearest police station is 30 km from their family home, and it is common practice in Pakistan that complainants offer a ‘fee’ to the police to get their case investigated, which was not financially possible for the family.⁸ Police regularly fail to pursue cases of violence against the LGBTQIA+ community (Munir, 2019), and worse still, are often the perpetrators of the gravest violations against the vulnerable populations they are supposed to protect (Lieven, 2012, p. 25). In Hassan’s view:

No one cares about [transgender people] and the local police and public service officials humiliate them too. It is considered normal to beat and mock them for being different. There have been incidents where activists from the hijra community have been brutally murdered, and since their status in Pakistani society is low, they are not heard or supported by the local law enforcement agencies. (Interview, 5 February 2020)

Hassan and his family felt he had no legal protection because, in their legal world, Hassan was on his own. For his father, in particular, there was an additional fear of what visiting the police would mean: ‘We felt such shame, that then everyone would really know about Hassan’ (ARSIS, personal communication, 2019).

12.4.2 Increased Religiosity

When it became clear that hiding was not enough to protect Hassan, Hassan and his family’s second strategic response was to help him to ‘be a better Muslim’ to prove he was heterosexual. At that time, they believed that Muslims could not be gay, so if Hassan was a good Muslim, they thought he would not be gay. Hassan prayed ardently to strengthen that tenant of Islam for himself and tried to use prayer to try to control his thoughts and behaviours. As the culmination of his attempt at increased religiosity in 2014, he agreed with his father that he would go away to a madrasa 2 h from his home to study. Hassan said he and his family thought it would help ‘cure this predicament’ and make him become a ‘normal boy’ (Interview, 5 February

⁸There is approximately one police station for every 50 villages in the Punjab region (Lieven, 2012, p. 148).

2020). Hassan's Greek social worker sees this second stage of response as an extension of the first: 'Sending Hassan to madrassa was, on the one hand, an effort to confront the harassment they faced, but on the other hand, it was also part of a strategy of further concealment' (NGO social worker, interview, 17 January 2020).

Madrassas are controversial Islamic institutions of education that stress memorizing the Quran over basic literacy and math skills. Hassan's suffering increased in this extremely conservative environment. He responded by memorizing the Quran because he felt it would increase his chances of entering paradise and also be a blessing for his parents—which he felt he owed them for all their struggles because of his SOGI. He also increasingly turned to his religious teacher, who tried to shield him from the other students' harassment. This teacher was empathetic and understood Hassan's difference. He even advised Hassan's father to accept his son's identity based on Quranic scripture, with the reasoning that 'this is how God made him, so you should accept him and protect him' (NGO social worker, interview, 17 January 2020). This one religious teacher could not keep Hassan safe once he was outside the madrassa walls, however.

During this time, Hassan's more religiously conservative extended family murdered his aunt's daughter in an honour killing to assert their Islamic ideals. Hassan's cousin had continued seeing her boyfriend after being married to a man in a nearby town against her will. Hassan described the situation:

Relatives never approved of the man she was seeing before and forced her to marry someone they considered appropriate for her. When it became known that the girl was still meeting her ex-boyfriend, the relatives strategized to kill her with electroshock and strangulation. The incident remained unreported. (ARISIS, personal communication, 2019)

As Hassan told his Greek social worker, he immediately understood that this could be his fate as well because homosexuality and extramarital relations bring the same shame upon a family in Pakistan. A public killing or an honour killing by their extended family was Hassan's and his parents' greatest fear for him. Hassan recounted:

My mother always felt my pain. She did her best to explain my suffering to my father. I realized later that my mother convinced my father I should be sent away from home for my safety. My mother anticipated that I would either be killed, just like my friend, or I would commit suicide if I stayed in Pakistan. (Interview, 5 February 2020)

When it became clear that Hassan was unsafe both at home and at his madrassa, his parents' concern that he would self-harm became too great. His parents ultimately decided to send him away to where they thought he would be safe: Europe.

12.4.3 Forced Migration

Sending Hassan to Greece in October 2018 was initially his mother's idea, but his father followed through and made the arrangements. Hassan said, 'Initially, I was against their decision and my sisters felt the same. We expressed our disagreement

but we couldn't change my father's mind. My father had already contacted a relative who had all the necessary contacts for the trip' (ARSIS, personal communication, 2019).

Upon initial intake at the living facility for unaccompanied minors in Thessaloniki, 17-year-old Hassan identified as 'gay'. However, he said the support and mental health services he received at the facility helped him verbalize his transgender identity. He told us, '[Greek people] have acceptance. Now, I feel comfortable accepting my own gender identity and difference as an individual. I feel more confident speaking about it' (Interview, 5 February 2020). Hassan's third strategic response—to migrate to Europe for his security—provided him with a new environment that allowed him to identify as a *khwaja sira*, a specifically Pakistani transgender person.

Hassan's identification as a *khwaja sira* served the dual functions of placing him in the European LGBTQIA+ in-group while also maintaining his Pakistani identity during his migratory transition. This was compatible with his protection goals in the European asylum system as a transgender person whose asylum claim benefitted from entrenching this LGBTQIA+ identity, while also mooring him in the unique *hijra* tradition from Pakistan. Meanwhile, his Pakistani 'foreignness' also undergirded his place in asylum deliberations in Greece. He simultaneously embraced Pakistani culture and thwarted it by identifying as LGBTQIA+.

Hassan's strengthened outward *khwaja sira* identity persisted in the Greek living facility despite the homophobia and violent ideologies of other Pakistani youth refugees there; such attitudes are not uncommon in ethnically homogenous refugee centres in Europe. Hassan recounted that he was name-called, threatened and physically harassed in classes, during recreation and in shared sleeping quarters. Some residents of the facility accused him of pretending to be gay and 'weak' to gain favour with the safe zone's staff and for his asylum case to be promoted. His peers insisted he 'reveal his identity', 'confess his crime' and apologize for his sexual orientation (ARSIS, personal communication, 2019). When describing his experience before moving from the facility to an independent apartment, Hassan said: '[I was] getting the same ridicule from other boys here as at home. [Being] outside of Pakistan is no different for me' (Interview, 5 February 2020). Despite this treatment at the living facility, Hassan maintained that he would no longer hide from his *khwaja sira* identity.

Hassan's maternal uncle had always shared his sister's support of Hassan and readily agreed to a family reunification application. The uncle has taken proactive measures to be reunited with Hassan in Spain, promptly assisting with asylum interviews and paperwork (ARSIS, personal communication, 2020). The uncle explained to us that he feels 'like a European' after 15 years in Spain, despite having previously had negative views of the LGBTQIA+ community when he lived in Pakistan (Interview, 13 February 2020). The uncle formally attested in the asylum documentation and numerous interviews that Hassan would be free to gender-express as he wishes in Barcelona. Hassan says of his family now, 'My parents are relieved that I am in a safe space, or much better place, now', and that their lives are easier as well (Interview, 5 February 2020). They have expressed relief that he can gender-identify

as he wishes. Sending Hassan away protected both him and their social position in their home community from even greater insecurities, threats and risks.

12.5 Individual Identity as a Threat to Communal Needs

Hassan and his parents experienced a significant tension between his gender non-conformity and their shared Muslim identity. This tension of identity extended to their belongingness to the larger Pakistani and Muslim community—their nationality and religion being mutually constitutive for them. Their home community reinforced the incompatibility of Hassan's LGBTQIA+ and religious identities at every turn. Hassan's life is a powerful example of the experiences of many queer Muslims, demonstrating how religion and sexuality converge, yet are forced apart by spiritual and cultural ideology. This conflict has also been identified and studied by scholars such as Siraj (2012), Kugle (2014) and Minwalla et al. (2005) across a variety of immigration contexts. Individuals navigating these extreme nexuses often feel both endogenous and exogenous pressure to choose one side of a binary to feel secure: being straight and Muslim or being gender non-conforming and a 'bad Muslim' (or not Muslim at all).

The interconnectedness of religious and Pakistani national identity is key to understanding transnational intersectionality and security in this case. Pakistan's political and military elite has always endeavoured to define a robust Pakistani state as a religiously fundamental Islamic republic above all else, with Islam mobilized as a masculine political and nationalistic power resource necessary to ensure public safety (Mirza, 2013; Afzal, 2018). This has created a common notion that a good Pakistani is a good Muslim, placing khwaja siras and their families at the crossroads of individual and group identity with the perceived potential to threaten collective security. This configuration of religious and national identity presents questions as to how LGBTQIA+ Pakistanis and their families can belong to a secure Muslim nation. This clash between sexuality and the Pakistani national identity is only exacerbated when the displaced queer family member migrates to Europe, as gender non-conformity is commonly seen as a Western construct that could undermine the Islamic state. Hassan's identity therefore made him vulnerable to additional ethnic and national identity and security trappings beyond religion.

Hassan's case both challenges and buttresses other findings in the larger scholarship on forced migration, vulnerability, and insecurity, and demonstrates the limits of traditional gender concepts in the 1951 Refugee Convention and in studies of gay asylum seekers. We still do not fully understand how migrants with multitudinous and sometimes conflicting identities, such as transgender and Muslim, navigate these identities to their own benefit during the asylum process. Hassan's fluctuating intimacy with his mother's family in Spain, periodically falling in and out of touch with them over the years, does not fit with studies of reunification (see Chaps. 2 and 4). However, Hassan's case resonates with other cases in migration studies in terms of individual agency. Like many migrants, his strategic responses to vulnerability

are not only reactive, but also proactive. This degree of agency is also found in Chaps. 9 and 10 on Syrian refugees who employ relational coping mechanisms to rebuild a sense of belonging through new networks and the consolidation of social bonds. As Lafleur and Vivas Romero (2018) write, ‘immigrant families may actively design their social protection strategies to counterbalance the less advantageous position they have in one space with a more privileged position they have in the other.’ In this sense, Hassan and his family are subjects of their environment, but also dynamic actors simultaneously experiencing multiple standpoints in a transnational context, characterized by geographical distance and their socioeconomic and political involvement in different nations. His family demonstrates the formidable and responsive agency of migrants everywhere.

12.6 Conclusion

As this chapter demonstrates, the everyday vulnerabilities and strategic responses of forced migrants and their families left behind are shifting, temporal and environmentally contingent. This is particularly so when migrants navigate multiple and fluid gender, religious and national insecurities over time and across space, as in the case of displaced LGBTQIA+ youth. Moreover, identifying as a gender minority often pits the individual human right of self-expression against a family’s collective need for socioeconomic acceptance within the home community. This case study focused on everyday realities of migrant life within the theoretical orientation of transnational intersectionality, helping to move the traditional security conversation away from armed conflict, sovereign interests and state centrism and towards examinations of informal institutions, private processes and non-state actors. Such a perspective serves as an antidote to past security studies in international politics, which have lent insufficient attention to the views and experiences of gender minorities and other marginalized groups. Thus, this chapter also contributes to critical feminist scholarship. Above all, it illustrates how security is produced and managed by individuals in enabling and productive ways, lending novel insights into what Crawford and Hutchinson (2016) aptly term ‘security’s messy everyday world’.

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