

Toward new educational foundations from the metaphysical catastrophe in the Global South

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper looks at Maldonado-Torres’s (2016) idea of “metaphysical catastrophe” and how it helps to understand the marginalization happening in the Global South. This paper, by focusing on the LGBTQ + community in Iran, uses one clear example to show the kind of systemic exclusion that many marginalized groups face. The point is not to generalize one group’s experience, but to show how these realities can push us to rethink and redesign the educational foundations in a more honest and responsive way.

Design/methodology/approach – This research employs a theoretical approach shaped by postcolonial and decolonial ideas. By using the Iranian LGBTQ + community as the main example, the paper connects their lived experiences to the larger patterns of structural exclusion and leans on critical philosophy to show how material conditions and deeper knowledge hierarchies come together to shape these realities.

Findings – The analysis demonstrates that marginalized groups are relegated to what Fanon terms the “zone of non-being” which highlights both the philosophical depth and the material consequences of systemic exclusion, while also underscoring the potential for educational transformation.

Research limitations/implications – The study does not provide an ethnographic or quantitative account of LGBTQ + experiences in Iran. Instead, it uses the case as a symbolic point of entry into a larger theoretical reflection, which may limit the concreteness of its conclusions.

Practical implications – Educational policymakers and curriculum designers can use these insights to develop inclusive frameworks that move beyond Western-centric paradigms.

Social implications – The paper invites societies to confront systemic exclusion and to embrace practices that enable all communities to transcend conditions of non-being.

Originality/value – By linking metaphysical catastrophe to education and drawing from a Global South perspective, the paper offers a novel lens for rethinking educational foundations as transformative and inclusive.

Keywords Educational foundations, Metaphysical catastrophe, LGBTQ+ community, Iran, Global South, Zone of non-being

Paper type Research article

I have loved justice, and injustice has never had a place in my heart. My will was that the widow and the orphan should not be wronged [...] I severely punished the one who did not tell the truth; I paid the worker the just wage (Herzfeld, 1938, p. 4 as cited in Dussel, 2007, p. 51) [1].

Introduction

The paper opens with focusing on Persia’s long history of its cultural strengths and influences. The Persian Empire, founded by Cyrus II in 559 BC, is recognized as the world’s first real empire which known for its impressive communication system that could let messages travel from Sardis to Susa in only two weeks (Dussel, 2007). Even though Iran’s LGBTQ + communities face serious challenges today, the country’s people have made major contributions to world culture and knowledge, from *One Thousand and One Nights* to the development of algebra. In more recent history, Iranian’s government partnership with Venezuela under Hugo Chávez Frías showed a shared push back against Western power (Understanding the Iran-Venezuela Relationship, 2020). At the same time, it cannot be judged that any nation is good or bad, for example, colonial power like France promoted *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* while carrying out violent colonial rule across Africa and Asia (Aldrich, 1996; French Colonial Rule, 2016). Starting in the 16th century, France began building its overseas colonies in places like present-day Canada, the Caribbean, South America and even



parts of Mexico, which led to conflicts such as the “Pastry War” [2]. French leaders often defended these actions by claiming they were bringing progress and “civilization” to the people they colonized (Conklin, 1997). However, this expansion was often combined with oppression and strong resistance from the people who lived there (Aldrich, 1996). Over time, when anti-colonial movements grew and led to major independence struggles in the mid-20th century, it ended up reshaping former France colonies and global policies [Decolonization and Independence in 20th Century Africa \(2021\)](#).

In a different context, attacks on LGBTQ + students in the US education system have also been rising in recent years, showing up through bullying, harassment and discriminatory policies. [GLAAD \(2023\)](#) reports that almost 60% of LGBTQ + students have heard teachers or staff make homophobic comments and more than 70% have heard other negative remarks from school personnel, showing a hostile school environment for these students in the USA. [The Trevor Project \(2024\)](#) also found that nearly one in three LGBTQ students faced at least one anti-LGBTQ policy at their school. These policies also target transgender and nonbinary students especially hard, causing into the limitation of their access to facilities and sports that match their gender identity ([The Trevor Project, 2024](#)). [Human Rights Watch \(2016\)](#) shows that many LGBTQ youth face serious bullying and exclusion, which leads to major psychological stress and limits their opportunities in school. These kinds of attacks create an environment of fear and vulnerability, weakening the overall safety and well-being of LGBTQ students across the USA ([GLAAD, 2023](#); [Human Rights Watch, 2016](#)).

With this context in mind, we can look at the challenges LGBTQ + communities face in Iran and how these issues shape educational foundations when viewed through a decolonial lens. In particular, Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s work (2007, 2011, 2016) helps us understand what he calls a metaphysical catastrophe. According to [Maldonado-Torres \(2016\)](#), colonialism created a deep, two-layered catastrophe that affects both how people live and how they are understood in the world. The first layer is a very physical catastrophe, shown through genocide, the violent creation of slavery and the large-scale theft of land, resources and even the bodies of Indigenous people, Africans and immigrants. The impact of these harms is still felt today and lives in the collective memory of the communities that went through them. At the same time, a deeper metaphysical catastrophe took shape. This one pushed marginalized groups into what [Maldonado-Torres \(2005\)](#) calls zones of non-being, where their humanity was repeatedly denied. That denial created the conditions for a constant, ongoing war against them ([Maldonado-Torres, 2005](#)). The effects of this metaphysical catastrophe do not stay in the past. The metaphysical catastrophe continues shaping the struggles for justice and recognition that many marginalized communities still face today, including LGBTQ + groups in the Global South. The goal here is not to limit the discussion to the LGBTQ + community in Iran, but to use their experience as one example of the wider challenges that many groups face, such as immigrants from the Global South, Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant communities and others. The point is not to make broad conclusions from one case, but to show how this example reflects a much larger systemic issue that impacts many communities whose experiences fall outside Western-centered perspectives.

Coloniality of gender and sexuality

Colonialism has significantly influenced modern concepts of gender and sexuality. According to [Lugones \(2007\)](#), colonial power gradually imposes a binary gender system to control and even erase the indigenous system. This system created a social order, and in this order, it possessed European superiority over indigenous people.

[Lugones \(2007\)](#) mentioned that the rigid gender role in colonial times was a key to colonization. This system degraded people who did not fit its norms and forced violation and discrimination against these people.

[Bohrer \(2020\)](#) highlights that to create a new portrayal of humanity, it is important to include marginalized groups such as intersex individuals in this category. [Bohrer \(2020\)](#)

emphasizes that when the colonial system norms are broken down, LGBTQ + individuals can fit in, and their identities can freely be recognized. As a result, it is important to concentrate on how this heritage system of colonial times shaped the way that gender and sexual norms are seen today.

[Lugones \(2007\)](#) emphasizes that the colonial gender system intersects with other forms of oppression, such as race and class. She argues that this system was binary and hierarchical and possessed European gender norms at the top of its hierarchy. That is why, in the modern system, this hierarchical system still exists, and LGBTQ + individuals are still marginalized. In particular, we would like to suggest that marginalized communities, such as the LGBTB community, have the character of being marginalized because, by not being accepted within Iranian society, they are left in a state of metaphysical catastrophe ([Maldonado-Torres, 2016](#)). Decolonial queer feminism seeks to address the influence of colonialism on gender and sexuality. According to [Cox \(2018\)](#), Haraway brought up the cyborg idea, which challenges the traditional perspective of gender and sex. Haraway's idea supports different gender and sexual identities that colonial ideologies ignore by promoting hybridity and adaptability. [Cox \(2018\)](#) also critiques colonial identity's ideas and considers the cyborg as a symbol of a new path to queer liberation. The author also mentioned that this path could be more practical in the digital age, where technology and social media can be considered a way to build the LGBTQ + community.

[Pereira \(2019\)](#) explains how queer theory challenges the colonial gender system and complements decolonial critiques of this system. According to [Pereira \(2019\)](#), queer theory supports the idea that identities are fluid and, like decolonial theory, agrees with the way the colonial system shapes today's perspective of gender and norms. This connection helps in understanding that the colonial system not only imposed power on and tried to control land and politics but also had control over intimate aspects of life, including gender and sexuality.

The colonial system used feminist ideas to support colonial action and maintain Western dominance. [Lugones \(2014\)](#) argues that, in colonial ideas, females are naturally equal and have the same identities as females. To achieve real liberation, colonial feminism needs to be disassembled ([Bohrer, 2020](#)). This framework often considers non-Western cultures as oppressive toward women and LGBTQ + individuals to legitimize Western dominance. Decolonial feminists challenge this framework by respecting and including different cultural practices. According to [Bohrer \(2020\)](#), colonial feminists fail to address race as an important part of shaping gender and sexuality. The author mentions that decolonial feminists seek a wider view of gender issues and try to be more inclusive and diverse.

[Bohrer \(2020\)](#) analyzes that colonial feminism reveals a contradiction in its voice. It often employs the language of liberation to push colonial objectives. Colonial feminism insists that non-Western cultures are oppressive and Western ideas are superior to them. As a result, colonial feminism perpetuates an oppressive system and marginalizes non-Western women and LGBTQ + individuals.

Intersex liberation is an important part of decolonial gender politics. According to [Adamson \(2023\)](#), a decolonial framework challenges the binary gender system of colonialism and shows how the medical and legal system supports colonial ideologies. If we acknowledge that the binary philosophical foundation was created by the Cartesian modernist western philosophy (the mathematician Cartesian place is based on the binary distinction between X and Y), then we will distinguish how the metaphysical catastrophe ([Maldonado-Torres, 2016](#)) started from that philosophical point of departure.

[Adamson \(2023\)](#) argues that to achieve intersex liberation, it is important to have a broader view of the intersection between different forms of inequalities, such as race and gender. According to the author, the fight for intersex people's rights should include tackling colonialism because, in a deeper approach, gender justice is a systematic approach caused by colonialism. [Adamson \(2023\)](#) emphasizes that this approach has still impacted modern medical and legal procedures and its norms still harm marginalized individuals from a colonial perspective.

Colonialism had control over personal aspects of life, such as gender or sexuality. Therefore, LGBTQ + identities are assumed to be medical problems that need to be fixed to fit the idea of the existence of only two genders (male and female, just like the Cartesian mathematic-philosophical plain of X and Y). The colonial system labeled and controlled people's bodies to keep social rules and its hierarchies' system in place (Adamson, 2023).

Rubin (2017) argues that modern intersex activists focus on individual rights within the medical system instead of questioning the broader system of colonialism regarding heteronormativity, and they unintentionally continue the colonial ideas. Rubin (2017) mentions that only a deeper understanding of the colonial's impact on the modern approach can help to question the real gender and sexual oppression caused by that traditional system.

Global contexts and universal rights

Wynter (2003) argues that the global conversation on LGBTQ + rights often portrays non-Western practices as outdated and Western norms as universal standards that can be applied to everyone. However, practices such as genital cutting challenge this viewpoint. The author critiques international human rights frameworks and mentions that Obiora's critique uncovers the viewpoints of trying to apply a universal standard for everyone while failing to consider different cultures or even the effect of colonialism.

The pathway of the colonial system can still be seen in the modern approach. In Iran, LGBTQ + individuals face challenges due to colonial influence, religious beliefs and political and legal factors. Even if there are some adjustments in laws regarding LGBTQ+ in Iran, this adjustment continues to follow a colonial approach. Understanding the colonial perspective and its norms can help better understand the situation that LGBTQ + individuals face in Iran, considering the religious beliefs that reinforce the impact of the colonial system.

LGBTQ + rights in Iran are heavily influenced by the country's religious, cultural and political landscape. Laws and social norms in Iran are deeply rooted in Shia Islam, influencing gender identity and sexual orientation framework. Ayatollah Khomeini, the header of the Islamic Republic of Iran, plays an important role in shaping the legal and religious perspective on gender and sexuality in Iran (Karimi, 2016). According to Karimi (2016), Shia Islam believes that there must be a binary gender system and no other spaces for other forms of gender and sexuality.

In 1982, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa (decree) allowing gender affirmation surgery. This Fatwa made Iran the first Muslim country to recognize and support sex reassignment surgeries legally. According to this Fatwa, transgender individuals experience psychological distress, and they are given the right to align their physical characteristics with their gender identities through medical procedures (Karimi, 2016). Alipour (2017) suggests that the Fatwa showed the first level of accepting transgender individuals in Islamic communities. The Fatwa allowed transgender individuals to undergo sex reassignment surgery (SRS), which helped transgender people legally be recognized as part of the community needed to get medical treatment. According to Karimi (2016), the fatwa is important because the legal framework in Iran is very repressive regarding homosexuality. Under Islamic law, individuals who do not fit Islam's binary system are considered major sins and are criminalized according to Iran's Penal Code. There are different penalties for engaging in same-sex sexual activities in Iran, from flogging to the death penalty. As Saeidzadeh (2020) states, "The rise of the Islamic state resulted in the suppression of all non-heterosexual forms of sexuality." (p. 296). By considering transgender people as individuals who need medical treatment, the fatwa alleviates this strict religious viewpoint; however, homosexuality is still considered unnatural and sinful (Karimi, 2016). Although Transgender individuals can legally undergo gender reassignment surgery, they must go through a challenging process to be recognized, as they need to undergo surgery. After the process of diagnosing gender dysphoria and obtaining permission for surgery through the Legal Medicine Organization (LMO), they must obtain judicial permission for the surgery (Azadi & Saeidzadeh, 2023).

Transgender individuals in Iran still face social stigma and discrimination. According to [Azadi and Saeidzadeh \(2023\)](#), people who are rejected from society feel alone, experience mental health and struggle financially. The medical treatment for transgender individuals is legal because it considers them as a psychological disorder. However, this consideration leads society to see their identities as problems that must be fixed ([Azadi & Saeidzadeh, 2023](#)). As [Maldonado-Torres \(2005\)](#) highlights, Frantz Fanon's examination of the colonial condition consistently emphasizes how Enlightenment rationality takes on distinct pathological and contradictory qualities within the colonial context. [Eftekhar Ardebili, Janani, Khazaei, Moradi, and Baradaran \(2020\)](#) found that the mean quality of life scores, measured using the WHOQOL-BREF and SF36 questionnaires, indicated transgender individuals reported experiencing improvement in their life quality, such as improvement in social relationships and mental health. However, they still face social and economic problems such as social exclusion, limited employment opportunities and ongoing mental health issues.

Educational foundations as a colonial social construct

Social attitude in Iran is greatly influenced by religious, cultural norms and historical context ([Azadi & Saeidzadeh, 2023](#)). In Iranian culture, family, media and education, heteronormativity is strongly emphasized, leading to a negative and stereotypical viewpoint regarding LGBTQ + individuals ([Karimi, 2016](#)). According to [Naeimi and Kjaran \(2022\)](#), "The overall aim of education is, therefore, to uphold Islamic values and produce the ideal Islamic citizen." (p. 249). This stereotype in society and family reputation reinforces LGBTQ + individuals to hide their identities to prevent shame and social isolation ([Azadi & Saeidzadeh, 2023](#)). [Nematy, Fattahi, Khosravi, and Khodabakhsh \(2014\)](#) pay more attention to the role of family and cite the following:

LGBTQ+s relationships may take place in the context of markedly less family support in comparison with heterosexual relationships...To develop a secure identity, queer youth must contend with a stigmatized social identity compounded by years of internalized homophobia and heterosexism (p. 363).

In Iran, cultural stories mostly show LGBTQ + people as morally corrupt or misbehaving. Media and education perpetuate this perspective and create a hostile environment for LGBTQ + individuals ([Karimi, 2016](#)). In Iran, the media often portrays LGBTQ + identities as Western imports to emphasize a sinful perspective regarding them, causing LGBTQ + individuals to feel more excluded and isolated less ([Yadegarfarad & Bahramabadian, 2014](#)). [Mofradidoost and Abolghasemi \(2020\)](#) emphasize that transgender individuals, especially trans women, continue to experience body concerns even after hormonal treatment and surgery. The authors believe this body concern is caused by social stigma and the feeling of not being accepted by society. The authors suggest that injecting a positive image of transgender individuals in media, social values, education and cultural attitudes can help transgender individuals feel safe and secure about their bodies. [Talaie, Sorouri Khorashad, Afzaljavan, and Omidvar Tehrani \(2024\)](#) investigate the public attitudes toward transgender individuals in Mashhad, Iran, using the Genderism and Transphobia Scale (GTS). [Talaie et al.'s \(2024\)](#) study of 1202 participants found a notable level of transphobia. According to the study, positive attitudes were more common among men, individuals who know transgender individuals, single people, highly educated individuals and people of higher socioeconomic status. The authors suggest that higher education can reduce transphobia, and the media can positively change people's attitudes toward transgender individuals by representing the issues and challenges they face. Drawing on Fanon, [Maldonado-Torres \(2005\)](#) contends that true liberty is realized through the dynamic relationship between universality, identity or particularity and an understanding of the history and present conditions of the consideration of the history and present reality of the condemned, consistently dehumanized sub-jects, or sub-others, those who have been perpetually

dehumanized and marginalized, in the case of this work, the LGBTQ community. Fanon views decolonization as the creation of the necessary conditions for the *damnés* or the condemned to fully reclaim their humanity and become true individuals or people. The way in which some communities are socially constructed as *damnés* or the condemned is part of the metaphysical catastrophe that [Maldonado-Torres \(2016\)](#) talks about.

The combination of religious and traditional values, such as “honor” and “shame” stigmatizes LGBTQ + identities in Iran. People in Iran traditionally see transgender people as having psychological disorders and abnormal identities needing treatment ([Azadi & Saeidzadeh, 2023](#)). [Meghani, Afary, Babayan, Najmabadi, and Ilkharacan \(2010\)](#) mention that, in the past, homoerotic was more accepted than in modern times in Iran, but over time, due to external and internal factors, the focus shifted to heterosexual norms. These historical changes, even due to internal factors such as social and political changes or external factors such as Western ideas, show that sexual norms can change over time and modern government and policies can play an important role in shaping society’s attitude. [Karimi \(2016\)](#) mentions that Iranian cultural narratives, shared through schools and media, strongly shape traditional gender roles, heterosexual norms and negative people’s attitudes toward LGBTQ + individuals. Educational institutions play a significant role in shaping how people view LGBTQ + individuals ([Karimi, 2016](#)). Traditional and religious values are dominant in Iran’s education system and do not permit LGBTQ + representation and inclusivity. As a result, Iranian people neither have enough understanding of LGBTQ+ in schools nor in the media and society ([Karimi, 2016](#)).

[Yaghoobi \(2021\)](#) discusses how Saghi Ghahraman, an Iranian poet in exile, uses their poetry to challenge cultural silences around non-heterosexual female sexuality in Iran. Ghahraman uses their unique style of poetry to portray the hidden issues and ignored desires of queer in Iran. Ghahraman uses the internet to give LGBTQ + individuals a platform to share their stories. Ghahraman, in her poetry, rewrites men-centered stories to express her identity and give this opportunity to other queer to feel empowered and freely express themselves ([Yaghoobi, 2021](#)).

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A key point is to recognize the material reality of LGBTQ + struggles, rather than viewing them solely through symbolic representation. In other words, new educational frameworks risk focusing only on the representation of these communities, overlooking the fact that marginalized groups are primarily fighting for tangible improvements in their living conditions.

[Yaghoobirad, Azadfallah, Farahani, and Cameron \(2023\)](#) studied the challenges that Trans women in Iran face due to social stigma and legal discrimination. According to [Yaghoobirad et al. \(2023\)](#), trans women in Iran often face hardship in accessing healthcare and secured employment, going hand in hand with struggling to gain social acceptance. Then, the material, and not only symbolic, construction of a better life is part of what [Maldonado-Torres \(2006\)](#)

calls the affirmation of existence by the *damnés*. In this sense, the philosophical affirmation of marginalized communities in new educational foundations means the emphasis on the material transformation of their lives.

[Kjaran and Martino \(2019\)](#) discuss the challenges that gay men experience in Iran, where being gay is illegal and has severe punishments. They explain how gay men in Iran keep their identities hidden and are cautious not to be recognized by authorities. Despite the threat of being arrested and punished, gay men have established underground networks to express their identities and seek support ([Kjaran & Martino, 2019](#)). Again, the struggle is mainly material: the tangible bodies of marginalized communities are objects of tangible punishments, and those individuals struggle to change that in their tangible lives.

[Heidari, Abdullahzadeh, and Naji \(2021\)](#) conducted a qualitative study regarding the religious and spiritual experiences of transgender individuals in an Islamic society. The authors analyze how transgender individuals connect themselves to religion and spirituality to achieve healing, full acceptance by society, and inner peace. The study also mentions that transgender people view their gender dysphoria as a test from God. Despite being rejected by religion, transgender people still search for peace in religion, and it shows the complicated relationship between gender identity, religion, and spirituality in their lives ([Heidari et al., 2021](#)).

In constructing new educational foundations, for instance, in the construction of a new curriculum for schools, it is key to address how marginalized communities, such as the LGBTQ + community, works so hard to stand out as philosophical action As [Maldonado-Torres \(2006\)](#), drawing on Lewis Gordon, suggests, the act of standing out or coming into existence is perhaps the most essential problem or challenge for those individuals who live, in Fanon's terms, in a "zone of non-being" ([Maldonado-Torres, 2006, p. 10](#)).

[Mahdavi \(2012\)](#) examines how social and political environments shape LGBTQ + individuals' lives. The author discusses that the system in Iran oppresses LGBTQ + identities and, at the same time, how young people try to challenge this negative attitude toward LGBTQ + individuals. The article mentions that a sexual revolution takes place with youth in Iran to create a safe space for discussion and accepting different sexualities, even though they may put themselves at risk ([Mahdavi, 2012](#)).

[Nematy and Hines \(2020\)](#) conducted a study that examines the challenges that bisexual women face in Iran. They mentioned that bisexual women often feel confused regarding their identities, moving between heterosexual and homosexual labels, because the traditional and religious society in Iran does not recognize bisexuality. In that society, their identities are considered wrong; it is even difficult for them to accept their identities. According to [Nematy and Hines \(2020\)](#), bisexual women are not only discriminated against by heterosexual people but also by LGBTQ + communities. The authors highlight the pressure that bisexual women face in Iran to accept their identities and find acceptance from society.

[Sheikhmoonesi \(2023\)](#) discusses the case of a 26-year-old transgender woman in Iran with high-functioning autism and gender dysphoria (GD). Even though her psychiatrist recommended that she undergo surgery, her request was denied due to her autism. The study highlights that people with GD and autism mostly do not receive the needed medical treatment due to the lack of regulation for their situation, which puts people like her in a hard situation to struggle with social interactions, being misdiagnosed and dealing with societal stigma.

Violence against LGBTQ + individuals in Iran is a serious problem. This, once again, relates to the necessity of addressing the material reality of the philosophical inclusion of marginalized communities, rather than limiting the discussion to their symbolic representation.

[Nematollahi, Farnam, Gharibzadeh, and Khoda-Khah \(2022\)](#) discuss that LGBTQ + individuals, especially transgender people, face a high level of physical and sexual violation from their families and society. Transgender individuals have fewer opportunities to find jobs and social support due to discrimination, leading them to sex work

for survival. This hostile environment led them to conduct suicide, highlighting the urgent need for supporting organizations (Nematollahi *et al.*, 2022).

Mental health problems are severe among LGBTQ + individuals due to the hostile environment they face in Iran. A recent study of Iranian gay men by Kabir and Brinsworth (2021) found that a significant number of participants had mental health symptoms. 39.44% of participants showed minor to severe symptoms. The study also revealed that 19.72% of participants reported suicidal thoughts, and 7.51% reported making suicidal threats. According to Kabir and Brinsworth (2021), gay men in Iran face greater challenges and mental issues compared to the general male population.

Similarly, Khorashad, Talaei, Aghili, and Arabi (2021) found that many transgender individuals in Iran seeking gender-affirming treatment at Mashhad University of Medical Sciences experience mental health issues. According to the study, 48% of them have at least one current psychiatric condition, and 67% of them experience psychiatric disorders in their lifetime. The most common disorders they face are depression and trauma-related disorders. The authors also mentioned that the rate of transgender individuals' mental health problems is similar to those in Western countries. The authors mention that many of these individuals experienced suicidal thoughts, self-harm and sexual assault. The study highlights that transgender individuals need more mental health support.

Arianmehr, Cheraghi, Ahmadpanah, and Mohammadi (2022) studied the quality of life of 235 Iranian transgender individuals using the SF-36 questionnaire. According to the study findings, the highest mean QOL score, around 88.59%, belongs to physical functioning, and the lowest, around 30.78%, belongs to bodily pain. Other areas like mental health, emotional well-being, energy levels and general health had mean QOL scores below 50. The authors state that the results show a significant challenge for transgender people in Iran. The study also found that having gender reassignment surgery and having a job positively impacted the mean QOL score.

Many LGBTQ + individuals are deprived of accessing appropriate mental health. Structural barriers, social stigma, fear of discrimination and legal consequences serve as barriers to not letting LGBTQ + individuals reveal their identities and subsequently seek mental health. Nematollahi *et al.* (2022) conducted a study regarding transgender women in Iran. In their study, they found that transgender women struggle to access mental health services due to being mistreated and encountering transphobia. Similarly, Yadegarfar and Bahramabadian (2014) state that social stigma negatively affects LGBTQ + individuals and not only leads them to experience more depression, anxiety and self-harm but also serves as a barrier for them to seek mental health and support.

In highly traditional and religious countries like Iran, advocacy and support groups for LGBTQ + individuals, whether local or international, are under serious consequences from authorities and face high restrictions. According to Mahdavi (2012), young people in Iran are actively involved in supporting LGBTQ + individuals and call it a sexual revolution. They secretly created groups to support LGBTQ + individual's rights as platforms such as blogs and social media to connect and share information. They also try to connect to the global LGBTQ + movement to support through their created platforms (Mahdavi, 2012).

Yadegarfar and Bahramabadian (2014) stress the importance of social media and online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Telegram to connect LGBTQ + individuals in Iran. The authors believe that these platforms can help LGBTQ + individuals connect and share their experiences, get advice and build supporting relationships to alleviate their loneliness and the rejection they experience from society.

Najmabadi (2008) discusses that social media coverage of LGBTQ + individuals since the early 2000s has increased public awareness and perception in Iran, resulting in more acceptance by society. Physical gatherings are important in addition to online platforms. According to Rastegar (2013), in cities like Tehran and Shiraz, LGBTQ + individuals hold underground gatherings to create a strong community. These activities attract more attention and build a cohesive community to advocate for their rights.

The LGBTQ + individuals living outside of Iran provide support, international attention and awareness for those living in Iran in a chance for policy changes (Rastegar, 2013). If Frantz Fanon underscored the significance of acknowledging the zone of non-being, a concept that Maldonado-Torres (2016) expanded as a metaphysical catastrophe, it becomes clear that this philosophical zone not only defines the category of the *damned* but does so in a way that transcends mere social marginalization.

This metaphysical catastrophe is simultaneously material; in other words, when Western philosophy established who the damned were, it also, in that very act, imposed upon them a material existence characterized by suffering. This means new educational foundations should make it clear and evident that the struggle is material and not only symbolic in terms of the *damned*.

Following this notion of materiality of the *damned*, LGBTQ + individuals face many legal and social challenges when seeking asylum outside of Iran. They leave Iran to escape the hostile environment and laws against their sexual orientation and gender identities in the hope of finding a more accepting place to live (Jafari, 2013). Azadi and Saeidzadeh (2023) highlight that transgender refugees, most of them living in neighboring countries of Iran and Turkey, face many challenges. Although they are more accepting and can openly express their identities, they have limited access to health insurance and labor rights (Azadi & Saeidzadeh, 2023).

Similarly, Yadegarfar (2019) discusses the challenges that gay men face when they seek asylum through the UNHCR in Turkey. However, they face challenges such as a shortage of money and the inability to receive help. The author also mentions that Turkey, similar to Iran, has conservative politics. Even though it is less hostile, it still puts gay men under hardship. In another study by Yaghoobirad *et al.* (2023), transgender women encounter the same problems when applying for asylum, such as accessing healthcare and finding jobs. Nematy and Oloomi (2016) discuss the social challenges and discrimination that bisexual individuals face in Iran and the countries where they seek asylum. In both settings, they are challenged with health problems and social isolation. Mahdavi (2012) emphasizes how the international community can affect LGBTQ + asylum seekers. The author discusses that LGBTQ + individuals from Iran try to challenge sexual norms and make social and political movements, while the international community sees them as victims needing rescue and overlooks their achievements and efforts. The author highlights that this perspective influences the support that LGBTQ + need to receive in their host country.

Similarly, Jafari (2013) explains that LGBTQ + refugees from Iran face two main challenges in Turkey. They have to flee from Iran and encounter significant challenges in Turkey, such as social isolation, economic exploitation, being taken advantage of, and a long asylum process. Even though Turkey has a more accepting perspective regarding LGBTQ + individuals than Iran, it still affects the mental health and well-being of these people (Jafari, 2013).

The materiality of the struggle of the *damned* is also translated into migration patterns. The bodies of the members of those *damned* move to escape from suffering; this clearly shows how the struggle is mainly material and not only symbolic. Toward the end of his text, Fanon emphasizes, an idea he revisits in *Wretched of the Earth*, that as the colonized engage more intensely in collective revolutionary struggles and assert their presence, new challenges arise. The purpose of this analysis, as Maldonado-Torres (2006, p. 10) explains, is to develop fresh concepts, ideas and initiatives aimed at constructing “the world of the YOU.” Creating such a world requires the establishment of an alternative humanism – one that is not only distinct from European forms of humanism and anti-humanism but also embodies a humanism of the Other, as articulated by Emmanuel Lévinas and that Other is also tangible, material and it is not only a symbolic representation of that Other.

The LGBTQ + community in Iran faces different challenges compared to other Middle Eastern countries. According to Mahdavi (2012), despite most other Middle Eastern countries, young Iranians are actively involved in a sexual revolution to challenge social norms and

support LGBTQ + rights. Turkey is the only country in the Middle East that, despite its traditional culture, allows more freedom for LGBTQ + individuals (Kjaran & Martino, 2019).

In Iran and Lebanon, despite legal restrictions and conservative attitudes, organizations like Helem were created to support LGBTQ + individuals. Organizations like Helem build supporting networks for LGBTQ + by fighting against discrimination and social stigma, which could be considered a lesson for the Iranian context (Yadegarfarad & Bahramabadian, 2014). Moreover, according to Rastegar (2013), Egypt, a country in the Middle East, also makes homosexuality illegal and people have very traditional views. The author highlights that international bodies have a significant role in raising awareness of challenges for LGBTQ + individuals in Egypt.

Discussion

Building alternative educational foundations requires addressing one of colonialism's most damaging legacies: what Frantz Fanon described as the creation of the zone of non-being. Similarly, Maldonado-Torres (2016) refers to this as a metaphysical catastrophe imposed on racialized and marginalized communities – communities that Fanon identifies as *the damned*. When groups, such as the LGBTQ + community, are dehumanized and rendered inferior, this catastrophe extends beyond the metaphysical and becomes material. In other words, when Western philosophy defined who the damned were, it simultaneously condemned them to a material existence marked by suffering. This critical discussion must be integrated into the foundations of new educational foundations. Colonialism has played a significant role in reshaping concepts of gender and sexuality. The colonial system established a rigid norm to control or eliminate non-Western practices and put European norms as superior by marginalizing those who did not fit these norms. A similar pattern has been established in Iran, as traditional and religious norms encourage binary gender norms and oppress people who do not fit these norms.

Gender, race, imperialism, class and Global North-Global South dynamics intersect in the colonial system, and this complexity of intersection can be seen as a form of discrimination in the Iranian context due to the interplay of colonial legacies, religious beliefs and cultural norms toward LGBTQ + individuals. Criminalizing homosexuality and social norms of not accepting LGBTQ + identities in Iran are an impact of colonial systems that prioritize heteronormativity and binary gender roles.

Decolonial queer feminism, similar to Haraway's concept of the cyborg discussed by Cox (2018), offers a framework to challenge traditional notions of gender in the colonial system. Similarly, the digital age plays the same role as technology provides a platform for LGBTQ + individuals to have their voice in countries like Iran, where their identities are ignored. The underground network and online platforms in Iran serve as decolonial queer feminism by restricting the imposed binary system and creating a safe space for LGBTQ + individuals to share their experiences and identities.

In colonial times, LGBTQ + identities have been viewed as medical issues, and those people were labeled as needing medical issues because they were abnormal. In Iran, according to Ayatollah Khomeini's Fatwa, transgender people have the right to undergo surgery to align their identities with their bodies. This viewpoint is similar to the colonial ideas that see transgender people needing medical treatment to fit in with a society of *normal* people.

Modern intersex activities focus too much on medical rights for transgender people instead of focusing on a broader area of how the colonial system still supports binary norms. In Iran, similarly, the concentration is on medical treatment instead of questioning the concepts and ideas that marginalize LGBTQ + individuals and value binary gender norms.

Regardless of the impact of colorism and cultural differences, international discussion considers Western norms as a standard that can be applied to everyone. Besides these international norms, in Iran, the belief is that LGBTQ+ is a concept of Western norms, which has made LGBTQ + individuals more isolated and excluded in Iran; as a result, in Iran, not

only is there a need to consider LGBTQ + as a concept from Western norms, but it is also needed to pay close attention to how traditional and religious influences gender norms.

Colonial norms tried to create a hierarchical system, with European norms at the top and marginalized people who did not fit these norms. In Iran, similarly, cultural narratives, media and education try to shape a binary gender belief to show those who do not fit these norms as sinful and morally corrupt. Both create a hostile environment for LGBTQ + individuals, leading them to experience social isolation, discrimination and violence.

The combination of colonial legacies and religion in Iran has a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ + individuals. They experience depression, anxiety and thoughts of suicide and besides all of this, their rejection from society serves as a barrier to preventing them from seeking mental health and expressing themselves. Transgender in Iran have the right to undergo medical treatment, which is a big step for a religious country such as Iran. However, it continues the ideas of a colonial system that considers them as having identities that need fixing. Many LGBTQ + individuals in Iran seek asylum to improve the quality of their lives. However, in the host countries, they still face discrimination and economic hardship, showing the global impact of colonial norms on attitudes toward LGBTQ + individuals. The international attitude toward LGBTQ + individuals seeking asylum sees them as criminals needing security, which perpetuates the colonial attitude rather than supporting them.

Homosexuality is criminalized in many countries in the Middle East, like Iran. However, similar to the Decolonial strategies that emphasize addressing the oppression that the colonial system imposed, youth in Iran and organizations like Helem in Lebanon led a movement to support LGBTQ + identities and make a revolution to change traditional perspectives and binary gender norms.

Examining the relationship between the colonial system, the traditional perspective and religion in Iran reveals the complexity that LGBTQ + individuals experience in Iran. The colonial ideas that impose a binary gender system and label LGBTQ + identities as a problem still have an impact in the modern day. Decolonial queer feminism and queer theory challenge this perspective and support the rights of LGBTQ + individuals. In Iran, despite the legal right to undergo surgery for transgender people, social stigma and discrimination against LGBTQ + individuals still marginalize them. The use of technology, online platforms and underground supporting activities and organizations creates a space for LGBTQ + individuals to express their identities and try to challenge the binary gender norms.

This work identifies several research gaps, including the need for more comprehensive studies on the lived experiences of LGBTQ + individuals in rural areas, the psychological and social impacts of legal oppression and the role of digital technologies in LGBTQ + activism. Future research should also explore the relationship between international advocacy and local LGBTQ + movements in more detail.

Understanding how the colonial system oppresses and marginalizes LGBTQ + identities and the traditional norms, social stigma and religious dominance in Iranian society can help to address the issues faced by LGBTQ + individuals and help to promote their mental health and well-being. Scholars and activities need to consider different perspectives that look at how gender, race and class overlap and question the unfair system rooted in colonial and religious norms to offer more equal policies and practices. This is to say that Frantz Fanon highlights the critical importance of recognizing the zone of non-being, and [Maldonado-Torres \(2016\)](#) created the notion of a metaphysical catastrophe. This theoretical framework reveals that the zone of non-being does not merely designate a state of social marginalization but instead constitutes a profound ontological and existential condition that defines the category of the *damned*. This catastrophe is metaphysical because it is intrinsically material. In other words, when Western philosophy articulated who the *damned* were, it simultaneously inscribed them into a material condition of systemic suffering and exclusion. Consequently, any effort to establish new educational foundations must explicitly address and make visible the material

dimensions of this struggle, underscoring that the oppression of the *damned* is not merely symbolic or discursive but deeply embedded in material realities.

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Notes

1. Darius I was the third King of Kings of the Achaemenid Empire, ruling from 522 BC until his death in 486 BC. He came to power during the zenith of the Persian Empire, gaining extensive lands that stretched from Iran to India, which included areas such as Elam, Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt and the Greek settlements in Asia Minor. Darius I had this text, reproduced in the above epigraph, engraved on his tomb.
2. The Pastry War was a military conflict between France and Mexico that occurred from 1838 to 1839 (Britannica, 2024). It originated from French claims for economic losses in Mexico, particularly due to the destruction of properties, including pastry shops (Minster, 2023). The war is named “Pastry War” because of the claim of a French pastry chef, Monsieur Remontel, who demanded compensation from the Mexican government after his shop was looted during civil unrest, which was emblematic of broader grievances by French nationals in Mexico (Encyclopedia.com, 2024). France, the most powerful army at the time, was defeated by the Mexican army under the command of Ignacio Zaragoza (born in the former Mexican territory that remains occupied to this day and is now called Texas). At that time, Mexico’s president was an Indigenous man named Benito Juárez, who owned his first pair of shoes at the age of 12.

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