Intellectual Discourse

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Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	ʿ
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	ʾ
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
◌َ	a		◌َا، ◌َى	an
◌ُ	u		◌ُّو	un
◌ِ	i		◌ِّي	in
◌َا، ◌َٰ، ◌َى،	ā		◌َوْ	aw
◌ُو	ū		◌َيْ	ay
◌ِي	ī		◌ُّو	uww, ū (in final position)
			◌ِّي	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: http://rotas.iium.edu.my

Globalisation and Religion: A Study of Thai Muslims' Experiences on Gender Diversity in Thai Muslim Society through an Islamic Perspective

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Abstract: This research examines the impact of globalisation on gender diversity within the Thai Muslim community and the Islamic perspective on this issue. Using documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with LGBTQI+ Thai Muslims, the study explores how individuals negotiate their identities while adhering to Islamic teachings. Interviews with religious leaders and scholars provide further insights into pathways for understanding and accepting gender diversity in the Thai Muslim context. Findings reveal that globalisation, particularly through increased media access and exposure to Western values emphasising individual rights, has enabled LGBTQI+ Muslims to express their identities more openly. However, tensions remain as traditional Islamic principles are deeply embedded in Thai Muslim society. The author proposes fostering understanding through two key approaches: first, employing sensitive communication and guidance that allow LGBTQI+ individuals to live in line with Islamic teachings; second, creating supportive family environments that encourage personal growth while maintaining Islamic values.

Keywords: globalisation, gender diversity, Islam, Thai Muslims

Abstrak: Kajian ini meneliti kesan globalisasi terhadap kepelbagaian gender dalam komuniti Muslim di Thailand serta perspektif Islam mengenai isu tersebut. Melalui analisis dokumen dan temu bual mendalam bersama Muslim Thailand yang berciri LGBTQI+, kajian ini mengkaji bagaimana individu bergelut dengan identiti mereka sambil tetap berpegang pada ajaran Islam.

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Temu bual dengan pemimpin agama dan sarjana turut memberikan pandangan lanjut tentang usaha memahami serta menerima kepelbagaian gender dalam konteks Muslim Thailand. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa globalisasi, khususnya melalui akses media yang lebih luas dan pendedahan kepada nilai Barat yang menekankan hak individu, telah membuka ruang kepada Muslim LGBTQI+ untuk mengekspresikan identiti mereka dengan lebih terbuka. Namun begitu, ketegangan masih wujud kerana prinsip Islam tradisional masih berakar kukuh dalam masyarakat Muslim Thailand. Pengarang mencadangkan dua pendekatan utama: pertama, menggunakan komunikasi sensitif dan bimbingan yang membolehkan individu LGBTQI+ hidup selaras dengan ajaran Islam; kedua, mewujudkan persekitaran keluarga yang menyokong perkembangan peribadi sambil mengekalkan nilai Islam.

Kata kunci: globalisasi, kepelbagaian gender, Islam, Muslim Thailand

Introduction

In the wave of globalisation, the world has undergone tremendous transformations in various dimensions—economically, politically, and socially. Globalisation is often defined in different ways. Roland Robertson describes it as "the compression of the world (shrinking the world) and the intensification of a shared consciousness globally" (as cited in Steger, 2002). This definition suggests that globalisation is an ongoing, ever-evolving process, influencing human perceptions and bringing about significant changes in multiple aspects of life, including economy, politics, identity, and social norms. Globalisation also plays a role in shaping new standards, values, religious beliefs, and cultural practices. It represents an accelerated change due to advancements in science and technology, enabling rapid communication and interaction among people across continents and countries. Consequently, cultural exchanges, as well as ideological and religious beliefs, are inevitably affected.

While globalisation has positive impacts, such as improving the quality of life in many Muslim countries and modernising various sectors like education and infrastructure, it also has negative consequences. One of these is the dominance of Western ideologies, particularly from the United States, which promote values that sometimes conflict with Islamic beliefs. Anjum (2017) argues that globalisation affects not only American Muslims but also Muslims worldwide, turning them into

consumers and targets of American culture, policies, and the global war on terror. This influence has introduced new lifestyles that prioritise individual rights and freedoms, emphasising personal autonomy over collective social values. The Western interpretation of human rights often criticises Islamic social practices and punishments aimed at protecting society from crimes.

This study, however, focuses on a specific aspect of human rights: gender diversity and same-sex relationships within the context of the Thai Muslim community. These new identities challenge long-standing customs, traditions, and beliefs among Thai Muslims, a community that is known for its adherence to unique faith-based practices and values. This study aims to explore how globalisation influences Thai Muslim perspectives on gender diversity and same-sex relationships, how Thai Muslim individuals reconcile these identities with their faith, and what Islamic principles can offer as solutions for LGBTQI+ Muslims seeking to live according to their faith while holding on their LGBTQI+ feelings.

Gender Diversity

Gender diversity recognises that people experience gender beyond just 'male' and 'female' categories. It acknowledges that gender identity is shaped by personal experience and self-perception, not just biology, and represents a complex, deeply personal aspect of who we are (Assawaboonyalert et al., 2022). The term LGBTQI+ is used to include a range of sexual orientations and gender identities, not just same-sex attraction. For example: Lesbian (women attracted to women), Gay (men attracted to men), Bisexual (attracted to more than one gender), Transgender (gender identity different from assigned sex at birth), Queer/Questioning (identifying outside traditional labels or exploring identity), Intersex (born with biological sex characteristics that do not fit typical definitions of male or female), and "+" for other identities, non-binary or asexual, (The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, n.d.).

The Thai Context of LGBTQI+ Issues

Thailand is often described as one of the most visible hubs for LGBTQI+ culture in Asia. Legal debates around the Civil Partnership Bill and the Marriage Equality Bill, alongside the popularity of 'boys' love' (Y-series) dramas, have contributed to wider acceptance of sexual and gender

diversity in mainstream society. The term *kathoey* (commonly used for transgender women or gender-nonconforming males) is embedded in Thai cultural life, and subcultures such as *tom-dee* (masculine-presenting women and their feminine partners) highlight the local ways gender diversity is expressed.

However, this apparent openness is more complex in practice. While LGBTQI+ individuals in Thailand are highly visible in public life—through media, entertainment, and activism—they continue to encounter structural barriers. Until the recent passage of the Marriage Equality Bill, same-sex couples were not granted the same legal recognition as heterosexual couples. Many workplaces still lack clear protections against discrimination, and social stigma remains common in conservative religious settings and rural areas. For Thai Muslims, this national context presents a particular challenge. On the one hand, they are part of a society where LGBTQI+ identities are increasingly normalised, yet on the other hand, they belong to communities that uphold stricter interpretations of Islamic principles and values. As a result, Thai Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals often find themselves negotiating between the wider cultural acceptance present in Thai society and the expectations of their religious communities.

Islamic teachings maintain a strict stance on same-sex relations, with the Qur'ān presenting the story of Prophet Lūṭ's people as a moral warning:

> Do you commit the worst sin such as none preceding you has committed in the 'Ālamīn (mankind and jinn)? Verily, you practise your lusts on men instead of women. Nay, but you are a people transgressing beyond bounds (Qur'ān 7:80–81).

Yet the Qur'ān also reminds believers that the Prophet Muhammad was sent as a mercy to all: 'And We have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the 'Ālamīn (mankind, jinn and all that exists)' (Qur'ān 21:107).

This tension between divine prohibition and divine mercy frames contemporary debates on gender diversity within Islam. In the Thai Muslim context, globalisation has increased LGBTQI+ visibility and introduced new cultural norms, compelling individuals to reconcile personal identity with religious principles. This study asks how Muslims can critically engage with Islamic teachings to foster understanding

without alienating individuals from their faith. While some uphold strict adherence to traditional interpretations, others argue for a more inclusive reading of Islamic sources to address present realities (Anjum, 2017).

Literature Review

Globalisation and Gender Diversity

Globalisation has shaped economic growth, trade, and international interactions while also diffusing Western values—democracy, liberal markets, consumer culture, and gender diversity. Robertson defines it as "the compression of the world and the intensification of global consciousness" (as cited in Drakulovska & Dragović, 2018). Building on this, Charoenwongsak (2016) proposes glocalisation, integrating global and local dimensions whereby universal values such as individual rights spread worldwide. Ritzer further widens the scope to transcontinental ties, emergent global social life, and the pull of capitalist globalisation and Americanisation (as cited in Drakulovska & Dragović, 2018). Religion and globalisation intersect in two ways: (1) religious responses that reinterpret practices globally, and (2) globalisation's impact on belief, from adaptation to resistance. Within this nexus, the LGBTQI+ movement has influenced international relations, politics, and policy (Picq & Thiel, 2015). While some states recognise LGBTQI+ rights and gender diversity, others resist. In 2014, same-sex relations were criminalised in 78 countries, with five imposing the death penalty (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2014).

Culturally, globalisation reshapes values unevenly. Many in the West see diffusion as natural progress, while numerous non-Western communities view it as a threat to cultural-religious identity (Phuanghat, 2016). This divide echoes Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995), framing tension between American-led Western culture and Islamic identity, and Huntington's claim that post-Cold War conflict pivots to civilisational differences (Huntington, 1996).

Historically, roots of contemporary gender-diversity discourse trace to the Renaissance turn to rationality and science, the rise of secular states, and liberalism's pursuit of freedom from external constraints. The European sexual revolution then provided a platform for LGBTQI+ legal recognition, anti-discrimination laws, and social acceptance,

especially in Europe and America (Yaqeen Institute, 2022). Today, opposition to gender diversity is often cast as a human-rights violation, intensifying friction between religious commitments and liberal norms. Critics note that religious views on gender/sexuality are sometimes labelled 'hate speech.' Al-Qawīm (2015) highlights this inconsistency by citing Nick Clegg's defence of Charlie Hebdo under free expression and questioning why liberalism that supports LGBTQI+ rights appears intolerant of religious dissent—underscoring enduring tensions between liberal ideals and religious worldviews.

Muslims and Gender Diversity in the Western World

Rahman (2015) examines the experiences of Muslims in the West, particularly in the U.S. and Europe, where navigating LGBTQI+ identity politics often produces tensions between religious belief and social expectations. Opposition to LGBTQI+ identities is seen by some as resistance to modernity, while others link it to Islamophobia. Rahman identifies four key research themes: negative reactions from families and communities, perceptions of homosexuality as a Western import, reinterpretations of religious texts to accommodate same-sex relations, and the invisibility of LGBTQI+ Muslims due to fear of discrimination.

Some scholars seek to reframe the Islamic discourse on this issue. Ḥabib (2008) argues that *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf* (80–84) addresses the rejection of Prophet *Lūṭ* and the attempted assault on his guests, rather than condemning all same-sex relations, critiquing *fiqh* for over-generalisation. Yet others note this reading misinterprets the Qurʾān's moral lessons for future generations. LGBTQI+ Muslims in the West often face pressure, mockery, and exclusion, prompting some to reinterpret scripture through themes of dignity, equality, and justice (Siraj, 2016). Muḥsin Hendricks, a South African gay *imām*, similarly contends that Islam does not inherently forbid same-sex relations, but views them as part of Allāh's plan (Siraj, 2016). Such positions, however, clash with *ʿaqīdah* (Islamic belief), which holds both Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* as divine; rejecting *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* (authentic ḥadīth) is considered apostasy by many *ʿulamāʾ* (Islam Q&A, n.d.).

In the U.S., where Muslims comprise about 1% of the population, most reject Western gender values; 71% define family strictly as heterosexual, with first-generation immigrants less accepting than later

generations, particularly African American Muslims (Rayside, 2011). Younger Muslims show more openness: in 2009, 58% of Muslim students supported same-sex marriage, influenced by civil rights and equality discourses, though traditional norms endure under pressures such as Islamophobia, family values, and conservative leadership. In Canada, Golriz (2020) found varied acceptance among Muslim organisations, suggesting that opposition arises from social and cultural values as much as ʿaqīdah. Alvi & Zaidi (2019) likewise show that South Asian LGBTQI+ Muslims conceal their identities due to family shame and socio-economic pressure, noting a gap in research on those deeply committed to faith. In Britain, Iqbal (2020) highlights how LGBT+ Muslims grapple with rigid gender norms and familial pressures, often concealing identity but sometimes reconciling faith and sexuality by reinterpreting the Qurʾān to align with lived experience.

Islamic Perspectives on Same-Sex Relations

Islamic teachings do not accept same-sex relationships. The earliest example being the people of Prophet *Lūṭ* who were punished for engaging in same-sex acts: "So when Our Commandment came, We turned (the towns of Sodom in Palestine) upside down and rained on them stones of baked clay …" (Qurʾān 11:82–83). An authentic *ḥadīth* also records that Allah cursed women who imitate men and the men who imitate women (Al-Tirmidhi, Vol. 5, Book 41, 2784), reinforcing the prohibition of such behaviour.

Two Arabic terms are central here: *khunthā* (intersex), describing those with both male and female characteristics, and *mukhannath*, men with effeminate traits (Napakorn, 2022). Islamic jurisprudence provides rulings for *khunthā* depending on their inclination towards one gender but does not recognise alternative or third genders. For *mukhannath*, rulings treat them as men, though natural effeminacy was distinguished from deliberate imitation.

Historical sources confirm the presence of *mukhannathūn* during the Prophet's time. Ibn Ḥajar, in *Al-Iṣābah*, records that individuals such as Hīt, Hidm, and Mātiʿ freely associated with women (Napakorn, 2022). Mātiʿ, a slave of Fakīthah, was permitted to enter the Prophet's wives' households as he was believed to be uninterested in women. Later, however, when evidence suggested otherwise, restrictions were imposed (Napakorn, 2022).

Al-ʿIrāqī, in *Ṭarḥ al-Tathrīb*, clarifies that natural effeminacy carries no blame, while deliberate imitation is sinful, echoing the *ḥadīth* on cross-gender behaviour (Napakorn, 2022). Thus, effeminacy itself was not considered a violation, but misuse of it prompted corrective action.

This distinction underscores the need for balanced understanding. Individuals naturally tested with such traits should recognise their boundaries, while the society should avoid disdain or discrimination that may drive them towards impermissible behaviour. Hence, it is crucial to differentiate between same-sex inclinations, which serve as a test of faith and are not sinful in themselves, and same-sex acts, which are explicitly prohibited in Islam—just as resisting desires for *zinā*, alcohol, or drugs distinguishes faithfulness from sin.

Gender Diversity in Thai Muslim Society

In the past, research on gender diversity within Thai Muslim society has been limited, reflecting the broader reluctance of the community to engage with this sensitive issue. It continues to be perceived as a source of shame, often metaphorically 'swept under the rug' rather than confronted through meaningful solutions. This avoidance extends across institutions within the Muslim community, including schools, mosques, and, importantly, the family unit, which plays a central role in shaping the values of Muslim children.

More recently, scholarship has begun to address gender diversity among Thai Muslims, particularly in relation to same-sex attraction and LGBTQI+ identities. Notably, studies reveal that same-sex behaviour frequently occurs within religious educational settings, especially Pondok schools (religious schools) and integrated Islamic schools that combine religious and secular curricula.

Kosem (2017) documents how effeminate or queer-presenting students in all-male religious schools were often subjected to sexual exploitation by peers or senior students. This pattern reflects the dangerous misconception that same-sex acts (*liwāṭ*) are less sinful than heterosexual extramarital relations (*zinā*). Kosem also highlights the problematic practice of Muslim families sending effeminate sons to male-only religious schools in the hope of 'correcting' their behaviour, an intervention that may instead expose them to harm. The study calls for urgent clarification of these misconceptions and the establishment

of protective mechanisms in Islamic schools to safeguard vulnerable students from abuse or from engaging in behaviours contrary to Islamic teachings under external pressures.

Kosem (2017) also examined historical accounts of *liwāṭ*, noting the widespread sexual exploitation of boys in certain Muslim societies. Kligerman (2007) controversially argued that homosexual conduct could be permissible in Islam if carried out in secrecy, citing examples from the Arab World. Such claims are highly problematic, as they risk legitimising *liwāṭ* and creating the false impression that same-sex acts are acceptable within Islam. From an Islamic perspective, divine injunctions cannot be overridden by human practice, and morality cannot be redefined by shifting social norms—a principle that remains central to Islamic ethical teaching.

Other studies have examined expressions of gender diversity among Thai Muslims in university settings. Samdaengsan et al. (2018) found that transgender identities often emerge from early childhood socialisation, particularly when boys grow up primarily among female peers. This prolonged exposure to female social environments fosters feminine behaviours that become embedded in self-identity. Most participants in the study reported recognising their transgender identity between the ages of eight and ten. Importantly, many of these students sought to gain acceptance from peers and families by participating actively in university and community life, creating spaces for self-expression within their social context.

Research has also explored same-sex attraction among Muslim women, particularly those identifying as masculine-presenting, commonly referred to as *toms* in Thailand. Meenpran (2019) concludes that such identities often arise from environmental influences, family upbringing, and negative experiences with men. Many participants expressed hostility towards men and assumed protective roles over women they loved. One participant reflected:

> The shift in my feelings did not emerge purely from within but was shaped by my   environment—my community and family. Growing up as the only daughter in a family of brothers, I was raised similarly to them. This experience influenced me significantly. My parents raised me as a boy, reinforcing my masculine traits. I never found interest in

> playing with dolls or engaging in activities typical of girls,
> as I viewed them as trivial and foolish. My upbringing had a
> clear impact on my identity (Meenpran, 2019).

Further perspectives emerge in the work of Sa-u (2019), who investigated the experience of a former gay Muslim in Thailand who eventually left Islam. Using symbolic interactionism and interview data, the study demonstrates how Western models of gay identity and neoliberal values shaped his departure from religion. Despite leaving Islam, he continued to perform certain rituals to maintain family and community ties. The study concludes that Muslim society must provide constructive spaces for understanding gender diversity to reduce conflict and foster social cohesion.

These studies collectively underscore the need for broader, intersectional research. Future scholarship should examine how ethnicity, regional identity, community dynamics, religious leadership, educational systems, and state policy interact in shaping experiences of gender diversity among Thai Muslims. At present, much of the research is limited to the individual and family levels, overlooking institutional and structural factors that significantly influence the discourse on gender diversity within Thai Muslim communities.

Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative methods to examine Islamic perspectives on gender diversity, with a particular focus on how Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals in Thailand negotiate their identities in relation to religious teachings. A documentary research approach was first undertaken, drawing on secondary sources such as books, academic articles, research papers, magazines, and websites. These materials were systematically analysed to identify aspects of the discourse often neglected in wider society, where those who diverge from heteronormative expectations are too easily labelled as 'heretical.'

Alongside this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals. The participants, aged between 23 and 55 years, represented varied educational backgrounds: one held a master's degree, five held bachelor's degrees, and one had primary-level education. They resided in different regions of Thailand—Bangkok (three), Pathum Thani (one), Ayutthaya (one),

Songkhla (one), and Pattani (one)—and were employed in diverse sectors, including teaching, corporate work, healthcare, online sales consultancy, entrepreneurship, social work, and freelance occupations. The group included individuals from both urban and rural settings, highlighting contrasts in religious environments: rural areas were more strongly shaped by religious conservatism, while urban areas generally offered more openness to evolving social norms. Ethical clearance for the interviews was granted by the RSU Ethical Review Board (COA. No. RSUERB2023-152), ensuring compliance with established research ethics.

The study follows a lesson-learned approach, analysing and synthesising participants' experiences to develop best practices for engaging with Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals in ways that are both respectful and consistent with Islamic values. Interviews were conducted one-to-one, using open-ended questions to encourage depth of reflection. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymising participants with alphabetical codes (A-I), acknowledging their vulnerability as a research group. Recruitment followed a snowball sampling method, whereby existing participants referred others who met the criteria of being Muslim, identifying as LGBTQI+, and striving to reconcile their identities with Islamic principles. Trusted intermediaries facilitated contact, after which the research objectives were explained and consent obtained. If a potential participant declined, the researcher sought alternative referrals until the sample was complete.

To incorporate perspectives from Islamic authority figures, one Islamic scholar and one religious leader were interviewed. The scholar was selected based on demonstrated expertise in Islamic jurisprudence related to gender diversity, while the religious leader was chosen for his governance role within Muslim communities, such as serving on provincial Islamic committees or mosque councils.

A key limitation of the study lies in its participant composition. Although the focus is on gender diversity broadly, the individuals accessed identified specifically as lesbian, gay, or queer and transgender. Other identities within the LGBTQI+ spectrum—such as bisexual, intersex, or non-binary—were not directly represented, largely due to difficulties in access and willingness to participate. This limitation highlights the need for future research to engage with a wider range

of identities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender diversity in Thai Muslim contexts.

To ensure accuracy, the study applied triangulation by cross-checking information across multiple sources and involving more than one researcher in the interview process. Data were analysed thematically, allowing key themes to emerge across both documentary and interview sources. This enabled the development of conclusions and recommendations that contribute to more informed, inclusive, and faith-consistent approaches to gender diversity within Thai Muslim society.

Findings

The Impact of Media and Globalisation on LGBTQI+ Identities in the Thai Muslim Community

This study explores the role of media and globalisation in shaping LGBTQI+ identities within the Thai Muslim community. While interviewees largely agreed that mass media and social media do not create LGBTQI+ identities, they acknowledged their significant role in spreading related concepts. Biological factors such as hormones and upbringing were cited as more influential in shaping identity.

Participant C (personal communication, January 7, 2024) noted that media increases visibility but does not directly influence sexual orientation, emphasising that Islamic principles still guide self-expression. Similarly, Participant G (personal communication, January 28, 2024) viewed social media as a space for expression rather than a determinant of attraction. Conversely, some interviewees believed that media fosters behavioural imitation. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) highlighted how repeated comments on platforms like TikTok and Facebook shifted their attraction from men to women. Participant F (personal communication, January 21, 2024) pointed to Instagram, BL (Boys' Love) series, and online content as influences on gender behaviour. Findings suggest that media shapes LGBTQI+ self-expression and societal acceptance but does not inherently determine sexual identity. Many Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals continue to navigate these influences within an Islamic framework, balancing identity with religious principles.

Factors Influencing Gender-Diverse Identities

Gender-diverse identities in the Thai Muslim community arise from multiple influences, including biological, psychological, and social factors. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023), from a rural province, argued that gender identity is shaped more by social structures than genetics, noting the strong influence of religious expectations in their community. Participant B (personal communication, December 23, 2023), also from a rural area, questioned the role of hormones in shaping attraction, expressing discomfort with his feelings. By contrast, Participant C (personal communication, January 7, 2024), based in Bangkok, described early same-sex attraction as linked to parental roles but emphasised that their urban context provided more opportunities for self-expression and relative acceptance.

School environments further reinforced these differences. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) from an urban all-girls school associated identity development with close female friendships, while Participant F (personal communication, January 21, 2024), raised in a rural province and attending an all-boys religious school, described attraction to men as a product of peer influences in a tightly monitored religious setting. Participant E (personal communication, January 20, 2024), also from a rural area, highlighted subconscious emotions as central in shaping identity, yet expressed greater caution in disclosure due to the close-knit nature of their community.

These accounts demonstrate that while biological and psychological factors play a role, the environment—whether rural or urban—significantly conditions how gender-diverse identities are understood, expressed, or concealed.

Self-Realisation of Gender-Diverse Identities

The process of recognising gender-diverse identities varied widely. Participant E (personal communication, January 20, 2024) recalled first experiencing attraction at the age of 13 in a boys' religious school. Participant F (personal communication, January 21, 2024) identified a gradual shift in preference towards men during a school sports event.

For others, gender nonconformity in behaviour signalled early awareness. Participant G (personal communication, January 28,

2024) remembered playing with dolls and adopting feminine traits as a child. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) became aware of her identity after forming an emotional bond with a female classmate in an all-girls school. These accounts reveal that self-realisation of gender-diverse identities is shaped by age, upbringing, and environment, with some participants recognising their feelings early in life while others became conscious of them later.

Experiences of Being a Muslim with Gender-Diverse Identities

Interviewees described diverse experiences in reconciling their identities with Islamic teachings. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023) interpreted his inclinations as a divine test, turning to practices such as prayer and fasting to maintain discipline. Participant B (personal communication, December 23, 2023) considered nonconforming attractions religiously impermissible and sought to control them.

Others described emotional struggles. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) expressed guilt and sadness: "It hurts to love the same sex. Sometimes I just want to cry." Participant F (personal communication, January 21, 2024) actively moderated his outward expression to align with religious principles. Participant G (personal communication, January 28, 2024) reflected on their upbringing in a daʿwah-oriented (*Jamaah Tabligh*) family, which reinforced the conviction that gender diversity contradicts Islamic values. These narratives underline the tension experienced by Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals, who must balance personal identity with religious expectations. Many relied on faith practices as a source of moral guidance, even while facing inner conflict.

Approaches to Managing Gender-Diverse Identities

Participants described a range of strategies for managing their identities within the framework of Islam. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023) highlighted prayer, fasting, and acts of worship as tools for self-discipline. Participant B (personal communication, December 23, 2023) stressed remembering the afterlife as a way to resist worldly desires. Participant G (personal communication, January 28, 2024) argued that performing good deeds protects against harmful behaviour.

Participant C (personal communication, January 7, 2024) emphasised the importance of surrounding oneself with pious Muslims, though rejecting marriage as a solution. These findings suggest that devotion, moral self-regulation, and supportive peer networks are central to how Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals manage diverse identities within Islamic boundaries.

Desired Perspectives and Treatment from Family and Society

Interviewees expressed different experiences regarding family and societal acceptance. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023) called for greater understanding, arguing that LGBTQI+ individuals should not be judged without clear evidence of sinful actions. Participant C (personal communication, January 7, 2024) found acceptance in the medical and healthcare sectors.

Others faced discrimination. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) sought societal acceptance without pressure or insults. Participant E (personal communication, January 20, 2024) described a non-confrontational family approach where relatives acknowledged but did not discuss their identity.

Participant F (personal communication, January 21, 2024) shared experiences of being bullied despite efforts to conform. Findings suggest that while some Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals receive family support, societal acceptance remains a challenge.

Prevention and Resolution Approaches for Gender Diversity in the Thai Muslim Community

Interviewees proposed religious education, family involvement, and personal commitment as key solutions. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023) recommended strengthening faith through Islamic teachings. Participant B (personal communication, December 23, 2023) emphasised parental guidance in shaping gender identity.

Participant C (personal communication, January 7, 2024) advocated religious devotion as a coping mechanism. Participant D (personal communication, January 14, 2024) highlighted the importance of acceptance within the family. Overall, strategies focused on religious

adherence, open communication, and structured guidance within families and communities.

Can Islamic Principles Transform One's Identity?

Interviewees viewed Islamic teachings as essential for self-discipline and transformation. Participant A (personal communication, December 16, 2023) credited Islamic repentance (*tawbah*) and worship with helping regulate emotions. Participant B (personal communication, December 23, 2023) noted that focusing on the afterlife reduced attachment to worldly desires.

Some acknowledged ongoing struggles. Participants C and D (personal communications, January 7 & 14, 2024) noted that negative thoughts persist in moments of vulnerability. Findings suggest that while religious adherence aids self-discipline, complete transformation remains challenging for many individuals.

Perspectives of Islamic Scholar and Religious Leader

Professor H (personal communication, January 29, 2024) emphasised globalisation's role in spreading LGBTQI+ discourse via mass media. He argued that Islam rejects gender diversity, citing religious texts and historical divine punishment. However, he advocated compassionate engagement rather than discrimination. He proposed parental guidance, religious education, and community outreach as preventive measures, reinforcing faith-based morality and ethical behaviour.

Interviewee I (personal communication, February 4, 2024) acknowledged that LGBTQI+ individuals have always existed and emphasised self-control as key to social integration. He identified social media and improper parenting as major contributors to gender diversity in Muslim communities. He proposed a 'Tripartite Model'—involving families, mosques, and schools—to provide structured Islamic guidance. Proper oversight was deemed essential to prevent issues such as sexual misconduct in male-only religious schools.

Findings highlight the ongoing negotiation between LGBTQI+ identity and Islamic principles in Thai Muslim society. While religious teachings provide a framework for self-discipline and moral regulation, societal pressures and media influences continue to shape gender identity discourse. Solutions must balance faith-based guidance with compassionate community support.

Discussion

The Influence of Globalisation on the Changing Perceptions of Gender Diversity Among Thai Muslims

Globalisation has brought about significant transformations across multiple dimensions worldwide, including in Thai Muslim society, particularly regarding gender diversity. The spread of Western values and ideologies that emphasise individual rights and personal freedom has led to greater acceptance and expression of the notion of gender diversity, extending beyond the traditional binary of male and female to include gay, lesbian, and transgender identities.

The easy accessibility of information through the internet and social media has allowed Thai Muslims to unconsciously absorb global discussions surrounding gender and sexual diversity. The ability to communicate instantly across different countries and continents has facilitated deep and rapid cultural and ideological exchanges, influencing how gender diversity is perceived. The expansion of globalisation into local communities, a phenomenon known as 'glocalisation,' has had a profound impact on traditional beliefs and practices, including those in Muslim communities worldwide. Thai Muslims have inevitably been exposed to LGBTQI+ discourse through globalisation, leading to a clash between Western liberal values and Islamic teachings.

While this study focuses on gender diversity as a case study, the broader conflict between Western and Islamic values extends to various social issues, including dress codes and modesty, the prioritisation of family versus individual autonomy, women's rights, the right to self-determination, abortion, and sterilisation. As a result, globalisation has influenced how Thai Muslims think about gender diversity. Exposure to LGBTQI+ representation in international media and societies where these identities are widely accepted and supported has encouraged some members of the Thai Muslim community to be more open about their sexual identities. This Western discourse on rights and freedoms inherently contradicts traditional Islamic beliefs, yet globalisation continues to shape societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality, driving inevitable social change.

Islamic teachings oppose gender diversity based on the belief that Allah has created all things in the most appropriate form, including

the natural order of human beings. This extends beyond gender and sexuality to environmental and ethical concerns, such as deforestation and unsustainable development leading to climate change, pollution, including PM2.5 air pollution, and deviations from natural laws that result in negative consequences for humanity rather than God. Similarly, the case of gender and sexual diversity is seen as a deviation from the natural laws established by God, which leads to negative consequences like higher risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as syphilis and hepatitis (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

Several studies referenced previously highlight the influence of globalisation, primarily driven by Western values, particularly American and European liberal democracy. These ideologies prioritise individual freedoms, placing personal rights above religious doctrines. As a result, Muslims worldwide, including Thai Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals, face challenges in navigating their identities. Similar to Muslims in Western societies, Thai Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals express their gender identity differently depending on their social environment. In public spaces or within LGBTQI+ circles, they can express themselves more freely. However, within Muslim communities or religious settings, they face restrictions due to religious and familial expectations.

Moreover, the findings suggest that environment plays a critical role in how gender diversity is experienced and negotiated. Participants living in rural, Muslim-majority provinces such as Songkhla and Pattani described stricter religious expectations, stronger family monitoring, and greater pressure to conform to traditional norms. In these settings, deviations from gender norms are more visible, often leading to stigma or attempts at correction by families and schools.

By contrast, participants residing in urban centres such as Bangkok and Pathum Thani reported greater exposure to diverse social networks, broader access to online communities, and comparatively higher levels of acceptance. Although they still encountered prejudice, the urban environment provided more opportunities for self-expression and less constant scrutiny. This distinction highlights how globalisation is not experienced uniformly. Its influence is filtered through local contexts, with rural environments maintaining stronger religious conservatism and urban areas reflecting more pluralist values.

In sum, globalisation, driven by Western liberal ideologies, prioritises individual freedoms over religious teachings. This has led some Thai Muslims to adopt LGBTQI+ discourse alongside Islamic principles, resulting in internal conflicts and pressures in shaping their identities. The inherent contradiction between Western and Islamic perspectives creates tensions in self-perception, making it challenging for individuals to reconcile their faith with their sexual identity. Despite these challenges and ideological clashes, globalisation continues to play a key role in spreading discussions about gender and sexual rights, leading to social transformations that Thai Muslims cannot entirely avoid.

Islamic Perspectives on Gender Diversity

Islamic teachings on gender diversity are firmly rooted in religious doctrine, rejecting homosexuality and gender diversity, considering them sins that remain prohibited until the end of time. Similar to adultery, alcohol consumption, gambling, and drug use, these acts are deemed prohibited (*haram*). Al-Qurʾān and ḥadīth explicitly mention punishments for homosexual behaviour, referencing Prophet Lūṭ's people, who were punished for engaging in same-sex relations. Additionally, Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) condemned those who imitate the opposite gender, prohibiting women from behaving like men and vice versa. As a result, Islam strictly forbids homosexuality and transgender behaviour.

Historically, Islamic jurisprudence distinguishes between *khuntha* (intersex individuals) and *mukhannath* (effeminate men). *Khuntha* are born with both male and female characteristics, and Islamic law provides specific guidelines for their treatment. *Mukhannath*, referring to effeminate men, are not sinful if their traits are natural. However, deliberately altering one's gender expression is impermissible and subject to religious consequences.

Islam emphasises self-discipline and moral restraint. Muslims who experience same-sex attraction but refrain from acting upon it are not considered sinful, just as those who resist adultery, alcohol, or corruption are regarded as good Muslims. Islamic teachings differentiate between sexual attraction and behaviour—a person who has same-sex desires but does not engage in prohibited acts, such as *liwāṭ* (sodomy) or gender nonconformity, and instead follows Islamic principles, is still considered

a righteous Muslim. If an individual naturally exhibits effeminate traits but remains within Islamic boundaries, their efforts are acknowledged.

In Muslim societies, gender diversity is viewed as a test from Allāh, challenging both individuals and the community. Some successfully maintain their religious identity, while others fully embrace an LGBTQI+ identity, highlighting the ongoing tension between Islamic teachings and modern influences. The rise of digital platforms has amplified discussions on gender and sexual identity, making LGBTQI+ visibility more prominent. Globalisation and social media have introduced new challenges for religious authorities and families striving to uphold traditional Islamic values.

Recommendations for Thai Muslims Regarding Gender Diversity

The general Muslim population should approach Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals with compassion rather than judgment. They should not be condemned or cast out but instead supported in living within the framework of Islam to prevent them from seeking acceptance outside the Muslim community, which might distance them from their faith. It is essential to recognise that many Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals do not choose their sexual orientation but experience these feelings involuntarily. Despite these attractions, they can still be devout Muslims as long as they do not engage in prohibited acts, such as *liwāṭ* (sodomy) or gender transition surgery. However, even if they have sinned, Islam always provides a path to repentance (*tawbah*), allowing them to return to a righteous path.

For Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals, their non-conforming identity should be viewed as a test from Allāh, similar to how others face various life challenges. They must distinguish between same-sex attraction and acting upon desires, recognising the "red line" established by Islamic teachings. Islam upholds the unchanging principle that same-sex behaviours remain sinful and beyond reinterpretation. The ultimate goal is to please and live within Allāh's framework, as expressed in the Qurʾān (89: 27-30):

> It will be said to the pious — believers of Islamic Monotheism: O (you) the one in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back to your Lord, — well-pleased (yourself) and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter you, then, among My honoured slaves, And enter you My Paradise.

To address gender diversity, religious education is key. Parents and religious leaders should play an active role in fostering *īmān* and guiding children's moral development. Scholars should organise Islamic educational programmes to provide accurate knowledge on gender diversity while ensuring that discussions are rational and well-grounded, rather than focusing solely on legal rulings and punishments.

Psychological and social support are also necessary. Counselling services should help individuals navigate their feelings while adhering to Islamic teachings. Safe spaces should be created where Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals can receive guidance from scholars and professionals. Additionally, Muslim communities should be educated on gender diversity to foster respect and appropriate engagement, avoiding discrimination and exclusion. Educational institutions must implement preventive measures to protect gender-nonconforming students, ensuring they are not bullied or harmed. Schools should develop fair intervention strategies for handling such cases.

A structured approach should include research-based best practices. Studies should explore the lived experiences of Muslim LGBTQI+ individuals, examining education, employment, family life, and religious observance. This can inform policies and guidelines that enable them to live in accordance with Islamic principles while leading fulfilling lives. Additionally, Thai Muslim communities should engage in dialogue with Muslim-majority countries that have addressed these issues constructively, adopting best practices aligned with Islamic values within the Thai social context.

Addressing gender diversity in Thai Muslim society requires collaboration between parents, scholars, community leaders, and educational institutions. The goal should be to foster understanding and inclusivity while upholding Islamic principles. By approaching the issue with knowledge, wisdom, and compassion, the Muslim community can support individuals struggling with gender diversity, helping them live in accordance with their faith while maintaining dignity and social integration.

Conclusion

Globalisation has significantly influenced the transformation of Thai Muslim society, particularly regarding gender diversity. The rapid

dissemination of information and exposure to global ideas, including LGBTQI+ rights, have led to increased visibility and advocacy among LGBTQI+ Muslims in Thailand. However, this shift has also caused internal conflicts within the Muslim community, where traditional religious values often clash with modern human rights perspectives. This tension became particularly evident during the 2023 Thai general election when the progressive Move Forward Party promoted the Marriage Equality Bill. Many Thai Muslims viewed this as contradictory to Islamic principles, raising concerns about the future influence of liberal ideas on Muslim youth. Islamic perspectives on gender diversity are traditionally rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, which consider same-sex relationships sinful. However, some contemporary Muslim scholars and religious leaders in Thailand have begun adopting a more compassionate approach, emphasising understanding and religious guidance over condemnation. This shift reflects an effort to balance adherence to Islamic teachings with the realities of societal change brought about by globalisation and liberal thought.

To address gender diversity in Thai Muslim society effectively, a comprehensive approach that fosters mutual understanding and inclusivity is essential. The research highlights the importance of providing religious counselling that is both faithful to Islamic teachings and sensitive to the well-being of LGBTQI+ individuals. Education on gender diversity within an Islamic context should be promoted at institutional, community, and family levels. Furthermore, dialogue between supporters and opponents of LGBTQI+ rights within the Muslim community is crucial for reducing conflicts and fostering coexistence. By combining religious principles with adaptive social strategies, Thai Muslims can navigate the complexities of globalisation while maintaining their faith and respecting human dignity.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study has shed light on gender diversity within Thai Muslim society, it faced limitations in scope. The participants represented primarily lesbian, gay, transgender and queer identities, leaving other dimensions of LGBTQI+—such as intersex, non-binary, or asexual Muslims—largely unexplored. Future research should aim to include these groups, whose experiences may reveal different forms of negotiation between identity, religion, and society. Moreover, while this

study highlighted differences between urban and rural environments, a deeper exploration of regional variations, ethnic identity, economic background, and generational change would provide a fuller picture of how Thai Muslims experience gender diversity. Longitudinal studies following individuals over time could also help to clarify how identity and faith evolve in response to globalisation and shifting social conditions.

Acknowledgement

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Chapter in a Book
In-text:
Alias (2009)

Reference:
Alias, A. (2009). Human nature. In N. M. Noor (Ed.), *Human nature from an Islamic perspective: A guide to teaching and learning* (pp.79-117). Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.

Journal Article
In-text:
Chapra (2002)

Reference:
Chapra, M. U. (2002). Islam and the international debt problem. *Journal of Islamic Studies, 10*, 214-232.

The Qur'ān
In-text:
(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36
(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:
The glorious Qur'ān. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

Ḥadīth
In-text:
(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)
(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:
(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

The Bible
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