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## UNIT 72 IDENTITY, MARGINALITY AND SEXUALITY

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### 72.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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We expect after you have gone through this Unit, you will be able to

- Understand the sexual and gender identity and differentiate various identities based on sexual orientations
- Understand the forces responsible for and marginalization of such identities
- Learn about the social and political movements of LGBT and Queer groups, their rights and empowerment.

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### 72.2 INTRODUCTION

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We discussed the role of identity in diasporas and migrants' lives in broader terms in earlier units. Whether it is ethnic, religious or national identity, it helps the migrants in negotiating their demands both in the home and host country. Identity is an instrument of survival and also an act of assertion and belonging for the migrants. In this unit, we will discuss the individual identity of the migrant vis-à-vis their personal aspiration, individual characteristics and preferences in terms of sexuality and its exclusion leading to their marginalisation. It should be noted that diaspora as such is already a marginalised community in their receiving countries and if they happen to exhibit differential sexual orientations like lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (collectively called LGBT), they are further relegated and marginalised at various levels of their diasporic existence. These individual traits of the diaspora members are part of sexual and gender identity, which they negotiate their way through and form the part of diasporic subjectivity. As you know, when people move from one place to another they carry with them their individual selves with their individual behaviours, customs, rituals and also their sexual orientations. Sometimes, it also becomes the reason

for their migration and exile from their place of residence. While good number of liberal democracies recognize various forms of sexual behaviour as normal and have extended to its members rights to pursue their individual choices, there are still countries where these people are either censured or are not allowed to come out openly with their sexual orientations. This unit deals with some of these issues and contradictions inherent in its conceptualization

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### **72.3 SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY**

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When looked from the male and female perspectives, sexuality assumes different dimensions both within and outside the diasporic lives. There is more associated norms related to women, which are disadvantageous to them. A large number of these norms are associated with cultural practices, which have been responsible in pushing them towards marginality vis-à-vis their male counterparts. It is an observed fact that women have been associated with secondary value creation be it agrarian economy, industrial production or in the service sector that are directly and directly related to their sexuality.

One such cultural practice has been the creation of purdah (veil) and hijab for women by men to safeguard and control female sexuality and to prevent them from male gaze. The cultural practices associated with menstruating women are yet another form of sexual surveillance unleashed by patriarchy and male-dominating societies. These are some of the mechanisms which have been common in various societies and cultures. Feminist theorists have seen them as means to subvert and marginalize women in their social, economic and political functions.

It is in the light of this social dominance that some of the gender movements, which took place in the twentieth century, could be seen and juxtaposed in contemporary times. For example, the LGBT movement occupied the mainstream gender discussion and came into existence in the 1990s. It had direct relation to migration and diaspora as many of these marginalised people began migrating to other countries to evade discrimination and social taboos. This was largely because of their gender expression, which was quite distinct from heterosexuality. The movement of people to escape discrimination based on sexuality has been called queer migration and is a distinct feature of migration and diaspora formation.

There is yet another term 'Queer' which has been in existence for quite some time and came to be closely associated with LGBT movement. Some of the popular groups under it include Queer Youth Network in the UK and Queer Cyprus Association in Cyprus. In India, Queer Azaadi Mumbai and the Delhi Queer Pride Parade have gained popularity among the groups. It was the queer studies and women's studies in 1990s that led to the emergence of post-structuralism. The works of Jasbir Puar, Lisa Duggan, Rod Ferguson and others added a new dimension to gay political movement in the twentieth century. One of the major issues of the time was church-sanctioned to monogamous gay couples. It was to conceptualizethese new trends that Jasbir Puar came out with a new term called 'homonationalism' which refers to patriarchy within the gay community and was related to White supremacy and nationalism. Likewise, in Canada Morgan Holmes, a sociologist took part in demonstration by intersex people and that is how Intersex Awareness Day came into existence. It was also contested that

the dominant LGBT community was responsible in marginalizing the weaker identities like bisexual and transgender. Nevertheless, LGBT community itself was labeled as “the last great minority” by the transgender actress Candis Cayne.

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## 72.4 QUEER MOVEMENT AND NEW SEXUAL IDENTITY

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It should be noted the term queer is an all-encompassing term and refers to people who are either non-heterosexual or are questioning their gender and sexual identity. It has become an inclusive term for non-cis gender group in addition to gay, lesbian and transgender. The term came into existence in the 19th century and was used pejoratively to refer to people who sought same-sex relationship. Subsequently, queer activists formed an umbrella organization called Queer Nation to press upon their cause and referred to its radical nature in term of sexual desires. The queer identities in the 21st century have led to the formation of Queer cultural groups, Queer art and queer political groups to find a place for their sexual orientation and gender identity.

It has been argued that non-normative sexual and gender identities have been there since time immemorial and in almost all societies. In Indian culture it finds mentioned in Kamasutra which recognizes same-sex relations during the ancient times. The concept of Ardhanarishvara in Indian theology affirms the duality of gender identities and the importance attached to it.

In the Western culture, we come across differential and non-heterosexual identities as early as sixteenth century in the mention of queer groups, which showed differential sexual preferences. These groups of people were not well accepted in British society and were looked down upon and discriminated. During those days, it was considered an offence against the order of nature to be non-heterosexual. There are historical records of such group of people migrating to India to evade discrimination and social taboos. At that time India was liberal to individuals' sexual orientations. But the things changed drastically with the inclusion of Section 377 in the IPC in 1860 by the British colonial rulers. They made it a natural offence for people who were homosexual and prescribed punishment up to life imprisonment for the offence. It was much later in 2018 that Indian law decriminalized homosexual activities. This was achieved after decades of struggle and fight by the LGBT community.

It was William Safran who while conceptualizing diaspora raised the question of the gendered nature of diasporic experience. The sexuality of women becomes a critical point of discussion as they are transmitters and reproducers of ethnic and national ideologies, which play pivotal roles in transmission of cultural norms. In fact, the idea, the reality and the experience of diaspora is felt differently by people based on their gender, class, age, caste and sexual orientation..

Understandably, gender and sexuality has assumed a central role within and outside the diaspora as well as in the ethnic and national projects of some of the nations. It also extends beyond the national boundaries in the formation of solidarity groups to safeguard its interest and express its sexual orientation more freely. The sexuality of men and women are interpolated at various sites of experiences including in the country of settlement, within their own self-defined diasporic communities as well as at the transnational levels. This has

led to a shift in the cultural and structural levels thus producing emancipatory and liberating experiences and in fight against gender subordination.

### Check your progress 1

Note: Answer the following questions. Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

1. Write a short not on LGBT community and the challenges faced by them.

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2. What do you understand by Queer movement as an alternate form of sexuality?

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## 72.5 SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND MARGINALITY

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The norms of sexual differences, gender identities, sexuality and sexism have also produced niche areas of economic value, which is dynamic and has become transnational. The femininity of domestic role as part of gender role has become dominant discourse in the economic value of the diaspora in some of the receiving countries. This has also been evident in the women’s labour market with rampant exclusionary, racism as well as a source of cheap family labour. In such incidences, their sexuality remains confined to their gender role of domesticity. As a result of which women are assigned social and economic roles with regard to diasporic ethnic groups, national and the demands of the globalisation.

Also, women and their sexuality are often made to symbolize nations with the concept of purity and claiming their bodies as national site which has more to do with the patriarchal society. The radicalization of sexuality has been responsible for their exclusion, which has made it disadvantageous for them. Sometimes, diasporic sexuality is left outside the discourse of national belonging. The process of hierarchy, unequal resource allocation and inferiorisation of gender roles has been the result of domination and subordination of sexuality. It is under these circumstances that inequality in identities has created political and social marginalization of non-hetrosexual group of people, both within and outside the diaspora relations.

The essentialised moulds of gender identity and sexuality at times also result in breaking the national and cultural practices and can spur political mobilization against the racialised and oppressed sexual behavior, both in the home and host countries. As the diasporas have to face challenging situations in the receiving countries, it became equally important for LGBT community to extent and

affirm their existing identity in the face of threats.

How important are institutions of family, kinship, religion and other social groups to the diaspora's sexual identity? In fact, gender and sexuality are not stand-alone individuality rather they exist and thrive in defined liberal societies. This is also because the diaspora in addition to gender and sexuality have rested their gaze on other domains of politics, nationality and ethnicity and calls for a balance between all spheres of gender and sexuality. Moreover, gender identity and sexuality are distinct attributes unlike the diaspora, which owe its existence in relation to the concept of belonging, nationality and homeland.

It has been argued that the absolute notion of belonging in the diaspora sexuality is at times missing as these groups of individuals are able to strike trans-ethnic solidarity and social mobilisation in order to achieve inclusivity and multiculturalism. Just as diaspora is not a homogenous category and they are differentiated based on class, caste, gender, nationality and ethnicity, the gender identity too is divided based on individual sexual orientation. Thus, individuals become woman, gay, and lesbian through the interplay of such differentiation.

Apparently, within feminism discourse the concept of intersectionality has been mobilised to throw light on women as a heterogeneous category. These gender rights dates back to 1832 when the first anti-slavery society was formed by a Black woman in Salem, Ohio in the USA. It eventually led to Sojourner Truth Campaign for the abolition of slavery and women's rights. It was only in 1977 when the Black Lesbian feminist organisation was formed in Boston that raised the voice against the way the group was marginalised by the White, middle-class and heterosexual counterpart. The movement was 'actively committed to struggling against racial, heterosexual and class oppression'. But while this movement was fighting for its rights, it was at the same time accused of marginalising the other sexual behaviour because of its dominance.

During the post-World War II, when these right groups were raising their voices and challenging the heteronormative practices, the *Bridge Called My Back: Writing by Radical Women of Colour*, pointed out how White lesbian feminism was sidetracking the experiences of Lesbian of colour by not accommodating them in the larger fight against racism and the prevailing prejudices.

During the 1970s a similar movement was launched in Britain by women of African, Caribbean and Asian origin who formed the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD), to espouse their cause and focus on the marginalisation of their sexuality. It was argued, giving centrality to differential sexual behaviour, as to who has the power to differentiate? What is the nature of normative sexual behaviour and the processes through which differences are marked, constructed and propagated?

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## **72.6 DIASPORIC SUBJECTIVITY AND SEXUAL IDENTITY**

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It has been argued that it is the language, which is the site of formation of diaspora subjectivity and identity. The way languages are used to bring similarity and differences are the points of discussion. As Stuart Hall says, to understand

the meaning of identities one has not to look at the specifically of origin and stability but to the meaning which is constructed through differences. Sexual identities are inscribed through experiences, which are culturally constructed within social relationship. Subjectivity in that sense is our sense of ourselves and its relationship with the rest of the world. Needless to say, identity is constructed through similarity or contradictory nature of the subject and its relationship to the inside and outside world. It is therefore neither fixed nor singular but involves within itself through multiplicity of relationship. Likewise, political identity relates to specific positions and is closely related to subjectivity of the person.

But to get a better picture about negotiating sexual identity one needs to look at intersectionality within feminism. It was Kimberle Williams Crenshaw in 1989 who coined the term in relation to feminism and other sexual roles of individuals. It refers to multiple role and differentiation and discrimination. Foucault says that all relations are relations of power and need to be seen from the same perspective. It is both coercive and productive depending on its response to such relations. Within the same perspective, the radicalized female body becomes a historical archive while desiring the racial others becomes a defining feature of White imperial gaze which is available to brown bodies.

For the articulation of sexuality, histories of colonialism and racism reveal the power of eroticism. It is in this context between the White and the Black bodies that become the contesting point which was evident during the annual India Day parade in 1990s for the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association. In Indian context, the lesbian sexuality found expression in Deepa Mehta's film "Fire" which contested its space against the dominant politics in India. It was also a realistic measure in which concepts like desire, bodies, subjectivities, culture and tradition were measured against so-called "perverse" sexualities.

The gendered and sexualized contexts of the diaspora were also influenced by the dominant 21st century phenomena, namely globalisation and nationalism. While globalisation has been responsible for the faster spread of sexuality and developing trans-solidarity across the borders, nationalism has either tried to curb such expression or has made attempt to see it through nationalistic cultural production. It is the male nationalistic ideologies that has attempted to take control or set the discourse on sexuality and its various forms.

It is through women's bodies that nations tried to form communal identity and set the borders and boundaries of nationalism. The female bodies are the site of nationalistic surveillance where culture contests their global gender order. It is under these lights that norms of heterosexuality as new normal have been defined by nationalism. It is not surprising that alternative sexualities have posed a serious threat to such patriarchal nationalism. In recent times, to overcome the emerging nationalistic challenge of sexuality, jurisprudence has taken a more liberal outlook to the LGBT demands by way of extending recognition to such groups. It has also become evident that both the home and host country of the diaspora determine and influence the female sexuality in one form or the other. There have also been incidences when homeland nationalism got translated into diasporic subjectivity.

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## 72.7 NATIONALISM, GLOBALISATION AND SEXUALITY

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Gender and sexuality of women often becomes an emblem of nationalistic morality as was evident during early years of anti-colonial nationalistic movements in which diasporic women were seen as impure and immoral in contrast to women in their home countries, which were considered pure, moral, chaste and virtuous in their disposition. The consideration of the diaspora as Other and the one at home as own was responsible in creating a bourgeois nationalism. The British colonialism and Indian nationalism both recognised women heterosexuality as the primary structures of the institution. In fact, there seems to be a similarity between diasporic nationalism and the state with regard to women's sexuality.

The women's bodies soon became both an instrument and means for constructing diaspora identity for hetero and homo sexuality. It was the gender and sexual ideologies of the late twentieth century which found a parallel in the globalisation process. It has been contested by feminist theorists that the female sexuality is a private affair of the individuals but has been globalised in the wake of emerging transnational market forces. In fact, a section of theorists have rightly pointed out that female sexuality has been framed, shaped, transformed and exploited by powerful forces of politics, society and economy.

Also, the global labour market which has been a powerful instrument of globalisation has differentiated sexuality on the basis of gender, racial and national identities. As a result, the sexuality in the diaspora has been disrupted and reinscribed by the sexual ideologies of the globalised forces. In fact, both nationalism and globalisation have deeply impacted the sexual ideologies within the diaspora.

The transnational capitalism, which set the tone for globalization and nationalism, has forced the nations to look at its diaspora solely from the angles of monetary remittances, social, political and diplomatic capital, undermining the individual characteristics of their gender, sexuality and marginality. In a way, loyalty to nationalist ideology soon became the dominant feature of identification in which heterosexuality has played a defining role, undermining the alternative sexuality. It is here that transnational capitalism has been found well aligned with nationalist ideologies, but at the same time undermining and marginalising the alternative sexuality within the diaspora. The desires, practices and subjectivity of alternate sexuality within the diaspora had been unimaginable till recently. It was beyond the traditional and conventional diasporic discourse. In the meantime, the alternate sexuality has been challenging the traditional national ideologies, thus making space for itself which is considered impure and nonproductive.

It is the close relationship between heterosexuality and nationalism that has posed a challenge to marginalised sexuality both within and outside the diaspora. It is for this reason it is said that alternative sexuality is to heterosexuality what diaspora is to the nation. Both alternative sexuality and diaspora are considered inauthentic imitation of heterosexuality and nativity in the dominant discourse. However, it has also been argued that diaspora needs alternate sexuality

in order to express its diversity and individual choices. On the other side, alternate sexuality needs a diaspora to express its flexibility and its relations with migration, race, colonialism and globalisation. This has challenged the homonormativity in some of the racialised immigrants in Europe and America and has been theorized both locally as well as transnationally.

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## 72.8 THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER

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The colonial narrative on sexuality in diasporic formation has a close relationship with the categorisation of gay and lesbian identity. It also includes a wide range of solidarity and dissent that works against it. There have been attempts to compare and contrast it with Euro-American sexual identities. Some of the diasporic cultural formation on sexuality was the result of inter and intra assimilation that became possible after the First World War in the global cities of London, New York, Toronto and other European cities. Like colonial capitalism, transnational and neo-colonial capitalism has produced cultural forms out of sexuality and has added new subjectivity, kinship and community formation within the diaspora and the nations. The process of globalization has further accelerated it. These cultural practices have been mapped along with universalized sexuality that has asserted that homosexuality has traditionally been encoded in the cultural norms.

Various forms of sexuality within and outside the diaspora has been seen with taboo and secrecy and has followed the rituals of gender inversion and cross-dressing which has assumed transnational appeal. It is for this reason that the conventional marker of sexuality has been challenged by same sex subjectivity and eroticism, which are radically different from heterosexuality. Not only this, in some cases the sexuality of a marginalised community, it has been contrasted against progress, development and liberal political ideologies. One of the ramifications of above gender discourse could be noticed in colonial constructions where Third World sexuality was considered regressive, pre-modern and full of contradictions.

It was asserted that the Third World sexuality should follow and modify itself with the sexuality norms practiced by the developed Western culture. The construction of sexuality in the prevalent transnational political practices was seen in quite contrast to nationalistic ideologies which revolved around organic heterosexuality. It was soon followed by a cross-border flow of bodies, gender, desires and sexuality along with goods, capitals and commodities. In fact, the concept of alternate sexuality has been seen to be dependent on heterosexuality, without which the concept of sexuality identity and marginality would fall flat.

The popular imagery of women as pure, unpolluted beings and her body as national boundaries for the nations and diasporas have become dominant representation of female subjectivity. The invisible subject has been recognized as visible representation in the popular imagining of diasporic and nationalist ideologies. These illegible, non-heterosexual women subjects have been relegated to the background in the dominant gendering of colonialism and nationalism and more so in the age of globalisation. Under these circumstances, gendered male is said to be doubly privileged as they are assimilated and accounted for in the heteronormative national identity. As a result, male and



female sexuality are differentially impacted at the material, psychic and social levels in the globalised world.

The history of gender mobility and migration in recent years has been widely impacted by the transnational movements because of their transgressive nature of existence. In contrast to this, it has been argued that rootless mobility has become the dominant feature of contemporary existence thereby making nations, home, family; kith and kin play a role in the migrants' sexual lives. This role could be seen to be dominating at times as it tries to control alternate sexuality and subjective desire. This was observed by Roger Rouse who said that "the cultural politics of domination always concerns the regulation of desire."

The regulation to control such subjective desires are variously manifested the way nations and societies have put various regulatory norms. But to predict a future path for gender and sexuality seems to be difficult as its conception differs from place to place and time to time. The way alternate sexuality was viewed a century back is quite different from what social and gender movements have made it possible in the 21st century. It has added an economic and labour value to migrants, which has assumed a central figure in its relationship with identity, gender and sexualisation in the globalised process. For example, sex work is now considered a mobile, gendered form of labour.

In fact, gender is considered to be a kind of labour in the production of gendered bodies. As a result, it has become a material manifestation and an instrument of reproduction thus creating new citizens for the nation in the broader production and exchange of citizens and non-citizens. It has been further argued that sexuality and gender identities are created in relation to the process and mechanism of global market forces. The articulation of identity, subjective desires and sexuality has produced a mobile diaspora across the nation which is not necessarily dependent on gender but also on its internal dynamics.

### Check your progress 2

Note: a) Write your answer in about 50 words.

b) Check your answer with possible answers given at the end of the unit

1. How have women's bodies been contrasted against nationalism?

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2. What role has globalization played in relation of alternate sexuality?

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## 72.9 LET US SUM UP

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The concept of identity based on sexuality has gone through major transformation during the last 50 years, especially in the liberalized economy of post-globalised world. What was once private and individual expression of subjective desire has become public and collective expression of sexuality. The expression of alternate sexuality was accompanied with freedom of expression and rights movement. The emergence of LGBT community and their collective articulation and recognition by states has consolidated their identity at the global landscape. However, their marginalization has led to various forms of discrimination, which still exist in some of the societies. An increased pace of globalization and nationalism has further created new dynamics which has become a predominant narrative vis-à-vis diasporic gendering.

It can be safely concluded that both identity and sexuality no longer remain a monolithic structure of subjective expression. There are number of intersectionality that has emerged in recent years related to its relation with feminism, capitalism and labour market where sexuality-based identities are negotiated both at individual and collective levels. Women, as an instrument of biological reproduction, have added new dimension in furthering the cause of nationalism and meeting the demographic challenges.

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## 72.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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### Check your progress 1

1. People who exhibit a differential sexual orientations apart from heterosexuality like lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (collectively called LGBT) for the part of alternate sexuality. They are relegated and marginalised at various levels of their existence. These individual traits are part of sexual and gender identity, which they negotiate their way through and form the part of subjectivity desire. The LGBT movement occupied the mainstream gender discussion and came into existence in the 1990s. It had direct relation to migration and diaspora as many of these marginalised people began migrating to other countries to evade discrimination and social taboos. This was largely because of their gender expression, which was quite distinct from heterosexuality.
2. The term queer is an all-encompassing term and refers to people who are either non-heterosexual or are questioning their gender and sexual identity. It has become an inclusive term for non-cisgender group in addition to gay, lesbian and transgender. The term came into existence in the 19th century and was used pejoratively to refer to people who sought same-sex relationship. Subsequently, queer activists formed an umbrella organization called Queer Nation to press upon their cause and referred to its radical nature in term of sexual desires. The queer identities in the 21st century have led to the formation of Queer cultural groups, Queer art and queer political groups to find a place for their sexual orientation and gender identity. Queer movement is closely associated with LGBT movement. Some of the popular groups under it include Queer Youth Network in the UK and Queer Cyprus Association in Cyprus. In India, Queer Azaadi Mumbai and the Delhi Queer Pride Parade have gained popularity among the groups.

### Check your progress 2

1. It is through women bodies is that nations tried to form communal identity and set the borders and boundaries of nationalism. The female bodies are the site of nationalistic surveillance where culture contests their global gender order. It is under these lights that norms of heterosexuality as new normal have been defined by nationalism. It is not surprising that alternative

sexualities have posed a serious threat to such patriarchal nationalism.

2. It has been contested by the feminist theorists that the female sexuality is a private affair of the individuals but has been globalised in the wake of emerging transnational market forces. In fact, a section of theorists have rightly pointed out that female sexuality has been framed, shaped, transformed and exploited by powerful forces of politics, society and economy. Also, the global labour market, which has been a powerful instrument of globalisation, has differentiated sexuality on the basis of gender, racial and national identities. As a result, the sexuality in the diaspora has been disrupted and reinscribed by the sexual ideologies of the globalised forces. In fact, both nationalism and globalisation have deeply impacted the sexual ideologies within the diaspora.

