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## To Come Out or Not to Come Out: Queer Coming Out in *Nine Lives* by Zodwa Nyoni

Açılmak ya da Açılmamak: Zodwa Nyoni'nin *Nine Lives* Adlı Oyununda Kuir  
Açılma

Yunus Emre ÖZMEN

Uzman, Atatürk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü

[yemreozmen@outlook.com](mailto:yemreozmen@outlook.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4179-7792>

### Abstract

Queer studies, as a field of gender studies with particular focus on LGBTQ+ culture and issues at the end of the twentieth century, has increased nonbinary individuals' visibility because it has enabled queer people to define and reveal their non-normative gender identities and sexual preferences in many ways and platforms. This process, also called "coming out", has become one of the watersheds in a queer person's life. Despite its importance for the queer individuals, this process is a rather manifold one. Variables such as race, religion, and family cause difficulties in terms of the coming out process of individuals. In 2014, Zimbabwean playwright Zodwa Nyoni wrote *Nine Lives* which delves into the coming out process and its challenges. The play portrays Ishmael's experiences who flees from his country Zimbabwe due to his sexual identity. Although he succeeds in entering the United Kingdom, Ishmael continues to struggle to be out with his sexual preferences. This paper scrutinises the process of coming out and how the internal and external factors in a queer person's life affect the process and its outcome as they are manifested in *Nine Lives*.

**Keywords:** Coming Out, Queer Theory, Contemporary British Theatre, Queer Theatre, Zodwa Nyoni

### Öz

Yirminci yüzyılın sonunda, özellikle LGBTQ+ kültürü ve sorunlarına odaklanan bir toplumsal cinsiyet çalışmaları alanı olarak ortaya çıkan kuir çalışmaları, nonbinary bireylerin görünürlüğünü artırmıştır. Bu çalışmalar, kuir bireylerin normatif olmayan cinsiyet kimliklerini ve cinsel tercihlerini birçok şekilde ve platformda tanımlamalarına ve açığa çıkarmalarına olanak sağlamıştır. "Açılma" olarak da adlandırılan bu süreç, kuir bir insanın hayatındaki dönüm noktalarından biri haline gelmiştir. Kuir bireyler için arz ettiği öneme rağmen, bu süreç birtakım değişkenlere bağlı olarak çeşitlilik göstermektedir. Irk, din ve aile gibi değişkenler bireylerin açılma süreci açısından çeşitli zorluklara neden olmaktadır. Benzer bir şekilde açılma sürecini ve sürecin zorluklarını ele alan Zimbabveli oyun yazarı Zodwa Nyoni, 2014'te *Nine Lives*'i kaleme almıştır. Oyunda, cinsel kimliği nedeniyle ülkesi Zimbabwe'den kaçan Ishmael'in yaşadıkları anlatılmaktadır. Ishmael, her ne

kadar Birleşik Krallık'a girmeyi başarsa da, cinsel tercihleri noktasında açılma için mücadele etmeyi sürdürmektedir. Bu makale, *Nine Lives*'da betimlenen şekli ile açılma sürecini ve bu sürecin sonuçlarının kuir bireylerin hayatlarındaki iç ve dış faktörlerden nasıl etkilendiğini incelemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Açılma, Kuir Teori, Çağdaş İngiliz Tiyatrosu, Kuir Tiyatro, Zodwa Nyoni

## Introduction

The word queer is originally described as “someone or something with an odd or unusual appearance or of questionable and dubious character” (Oxford Dictionary, 1989). Yet, at the beginning of the twentieth century, queer has started to be used as a pejorative term for homosexual people. However, by the end of the twentieth century, queer is reclaimed to refer to people who do not fit into the gender binary and is linked to the LGBTQ+ pride. The reclamation of the word opened a path for queer theory to emerge as a field of critical theory that is mainly associated with gender studies. Originally, “[q]ueer theory attempts to break down the continual use of categories and labels that stereotype and harm those who are in marginalized positions, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people” (quoted in Gedro and Mizzi, 2014, p. 450) as Teresa de Lauretis points. It puts the emphasis on the fluid nature of sexuality and encourages the removal of identity categories that limit a person’s sex, gender, sexuality, and gender role.

As the awareness of nonbinary identities increases, queer people begin to take the public step of disclosing their gender identities or sexual orientations. This disclosure is referred to as coming out of the closet. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick coins the phrase “skeleton in the closet” (1990, p. 65), meaning someone has something to hide or keep private from others. In the world of queer, the skeleton symbolises the identities of queer community hidden in their closets. The process of coming out is important because it increases queer visibility and presence. However, many LGBTQ+ individuals choose to remain silent without taking a public step in their lives as these public steps can result in being exposed to shaming, humiliation, and discrimination in their social circles.

The reactions given to the coming out process vary from one environment to another. This means that the consequences of coming out might involve negative responses or actions taken against queer people. It is possible to see such responses and consequences of coming out in the works of playwrights, as well. For instance, Zimbabwean playwright Zodwa Nyoni writes *Nine Lives* in 2014. The play depicts a gay

character named Ishmael, who knows that his sexual orientation will not be tolerated in his country Zimbabwe. That is why he flees to the UK. Yet his problems relating to his sexual identity and to his coming out process do not come to an end just by changing his environment.

The struggles with coming out stem from several reasons. Religion is one of the main reasons why LGBTQ+ individuals feel oppressed about coming out. Brenda Beagan and Brenda Hattie state that “[m]any people experience conflict between an LGBTQ identity and any religion with which they identify, since many faith traditions denounce homosexuality” (2015, p. 1). Homosexuality is considered as a sin in most religious beliefs. It is not tolerated, in fact, nonbinary identities are either chastised or cast out their societies.

Additionally, the lack of family support leads LGBTQ+ individuals to stay closeted. When LGBTQ+ individuals believe that coming out would bear devastating consequences for themselves and their family, they choose to keep their gender identities and sexual preferences hidden. In their study conducted on family support’s effects on LGBTQ+ youth, Adam McCormick and Stephen Baldrige conclude that “LGBTQ youth who are not out to their family report that the lack of acceptance was the most overwhelming obstacle in their lives” (2019, p. 33). In situations where the parents lack the education on differing gender identities, they tend to deem their children as a disgrace to their names and/or to their families. Such negative responses and lacking the support causes the lack of self-esteem and confidence in individuals.

Last but not least, racism appears as one of the reasons as to why LGBTQ+ do not disclose their sexual orientation. As one of the biggest problems of the world, racism is an obstacle when it comes to coming out. In their study conducted on ethnic/racial differences in the coming out process, Margaret Rosario, Eric W. Schrimshaw, and Joyce Hunter (2004) write that “[f]or ethnic/racial minority LGB individuals, the coming-out process may be complicated by cultural factors that operate to re-tard or arrest the process” (p. 216). People with certain inherited attributes still endure hard times because of their racial background. LGBTQ+ members with different ethnicities living in foreign countries are often victimised by the bigotry towards their ethnicities on top of their gender identities. Such bigotry causes them to feel doubly ostracised both because of their ethnic and gender identity. In the following part of the paper, the coming out process and how

internal and external factors affect this process are examined in Zodwa Nyoni's *Nine Lives*.

### **To Come Out or Not to Come Out: *Nine Lives* by Zodwa Nyoni**

In 2014, Zodwa Nyoni wrote *Nine Lives*, a monologue of a gay asylum seeker Ishmael, who recently fled from Zimbabwe and is dispersed into Leeds struggling to get his residency. In the writing process of the play, Nyoni makes use of the experiences of asylum seekers, as well as her own. Regarding her experience to get a residency, Nyoni says "most of my teens and all of my 20s were shaped by applications for residency. I spent a lot of time feeling unwanted despite giving back to communities and to the arts" (The Guardian, 2020). Being a refugee, Nyoni portrays how it is to be a refugee and gay through her protagonist Ishmael as opposed to how it is reflected by the governments.

The first scene of the play mainly focuses on Ishmael's escape to the United Kingdom and how much he craves for adapting to his new surroundings as himself. He does not have a permanent place to stay in and he is constantly dragged wherever the Home Office sends him to. He flees from his home country as he is afraid of being rejected by his friends and family if he were to come out. Furthermore, due to the spiteful approach towards homosexuality in his country, he would possibly encounter homophobic persecutions. As Gibson Ncube states "non-normative genders are criminalised in Africa" (2016, p. 10). They are considered "un-African" (Epprecht, 2008, p. 6). Being one of them, Ishmael leaves Africa and pursues happiness in the United Kingdom.

Attesting to this flight, the play opens with Ishmael on a dimly lit stage. In order to light up the place, he takes out a light bulb from his pocket and screws it into the holder. As the light switches on, Ishmael gets startled, because an angry mob marches towards him and he starts running for his life. Ishmael's turning on the light can be read as a metaphor for his coming out as he is immediately chased by a group of people referring to the homophobic reactions of society to queer visibility. As soon as a queer individual comes out with their gender identity or sexual preference, they may encounter negative responses or even assaults from their society. In Ishmael's case, it is seen that when he is under the dim light, in other words, in his closet, he is not disturbed or agitated. However, the moment he gets to have a bit of visibility, he starts to be chased down by a group of people.

Commenting on this chase, as he outruns the mob, Ishmael stops to sing to a Zimbabwean instrument:

Some of us are running. Some of us are fleeing. Some of us know wars that will never cease. Some of us were persecuted. Some of us were stripped and beaten. Some of us have scars that will never heal. (Nyoni, 2014, p. 1)

The song has a crucial function when the overall message of the play is considered because Ishmael sings for people alike. 'Some of us' in the song refers to refugees, nonbinary people, and nonbinary refugees like him. It comments on their common fate. They have to flee from the oppressions of their people, countries, and beliefs in order to be themselves and find peace. Yet, each of them has to face various difficulties as accentuated at various parts of the song. Each and every sentence reveals the fact that these people's lives will never be free of suffering. They get assaulted, beaten, and wounded. They are either imprisoned, sent back, dispersed, or left alone without any choices. Ishmael's likening the possibility of being kicked out of the United Kingdom and being sent back to Africa to a "nightmare" (Nyoni, 2014, p. 2) explains how it feels for these people to live. In this sense, the song turns into a collective elegy of those who share the same fate with Ishmael.

The homophobic atmosphere created in African countries deprives people of their freedom to be themselves. The country's intense homophobic approach is the very reason why Ishmael ends up fleeing his country. He knows that his country will not tolerate his homosexuality in any way. He knows that he will not have a place in his society if he chooses to come out. He fears that he would be treated differently by his friends and family alike. As he gets older, he starts to be afraid of what "drunk mouths would say" (Nyoni, 2014, p. 4). As he realises and embraces his tendencies, his country begins to feel more like a prison rather than home. It is at this point he begins to long for a place that he can call home and feel it. The consequences of coming out and staying in his country might have been fatal for Ishmael, which justifies his decision to leave the country in the first place. Even if he were sympathised with by a few people, he would still have to deal with homophobic slurs and assaults. He would be marginalised in his society; he would be chastised and/or end up losing everything that he has, and it might even lead to a point where he loses his life.

The oppressive environment and intolerant attitude towards nonbinary gender identities are affiliated with religious beliefs. In a study on the role of religion in internalised homophobia conducted by Kubicek et al., a participant claims that “I am always committing a sin just because I’m being me” (2009, p. 612). This sort of approach naturally affects the individuals who are a part of a religion. Such negative depictions supported by religious claims might lead individuals towards internalised homophobia. This means that LGBTQ+ people would start to be in a state of doubting, questioning, and conflicting themselves due to the idea that they do not meet the needs of the correct way to be.

For instance, Ishmael admits that he contemplates coming out to his mother. Yet, he does not, as he is sure of the result. Humorously, he says “I thought about telling my mother. But maybe she’d die right there on the spot, and then be resurrected to drag me to church to receive a healing” (Nyoni, 2014, p. 4). The possibility of his son coming out as a gay is so impossible that he thinks she would have a heart attack and be resurrected immediately to drag him into a church. He believes that his mother would recognise his identity as a sort of sickness to be cured in church.

When such an oppressive topic turns one against oneself, such religious passion can have their families and friends turn against them after coming out. Since coming out is an ongoing process that a nonbinary person relives with each person they come out to, an ongoing support is utmost needed. Familial support can contribute to an individual’s mental welfare, self-esteem, and independence to be themselves even when their religions are strictly oppressive. In their study, Kathleen Miller, Ryan Watson, and Marla Eisenberg conclude:

Religious affiliation, while associated with both depressive symptoms and family acceptance, was not clearly identified as either a detrimental or protective quality for LGBTQ youth. Rather, we found that family acceptance, regardless of religious affiliation, continued to be a powerful protective factor for LGBTQ youth. (2020, p. 35)

Familial and friendly bonds are the most intimate bonds a person can have. Therefore, this kind of support is mainly provided by one’s family. It can be an emotional support or a financial one depending on the individual’s age. It further complicates things when they are not accepted by their families and friends alike. When they lack the support of the ones that they feel closest to, it may result in LGBTQ+ people repressing themselves.

It is no surprise that LGBTQ+ people feel an immense amount of stress when they cannot find the courage and freedom to come out to people closest to them. Regarding familial support, McCormick and Baldrige state that “family acceptance is one of the strongest predictors of the health, mental health, and well-being outcomes of LGBTQ youth” (2019, p. 36). This can easily be seen in Ishmael’s example. Ishmael admits that after he leaves his country, he did not contact any of his family or friends. For years, Ishmael contemplates coming out to his parents, curious as to what they would say, and how they would react. He claims, “I spent years practicing what I’d even say to my father” (Nyoni, 2014, p. 4), but he remains silent as he cannot predict whether his father can handle the news. Regarding his father’s reaction, he says, “maybe he’d understand. Or maybe I’d die right there on the spot. No, not his only son. Not the one who’s supposed to carry his name. Not in this family! Not in this house!” (Nyoni, 2015, p. 4). In the end, the oppressive burden to carry out his father’s bloodline weighs heavier and he gives into it as the heteronormative understanding of his family would not allow such a stain on their family.

The situation is not so different when it comes to his friends. Although he feels so close to them, Ishmael does not feel comfortable enough to come out to them. Ishmael claims “I wanted to tell them. When I was fifteen, I knew for sure. But, I was worried about them treating me differently” (Nyoni, 2014, p. 4). Although he wants to come out to them, he feels forced to stay closeted due to the fact that their responses might be negative. He claims that he knows about his identity for sure yet, he chooses not to come out to them because he thinks that they will not understand. As he grows older, he starts to feel those around him will not see him as a man. Even when it is the people to whom he feels closest, he feels oppressed about coming out.

It is evident that LGBTQ+ people encounter many hardships throughout their lives when they attempt to be accepted by their families, friends, or societies in general. Lacking support from the loved ones leads to the lack of confidence and hopelessness. In order to explain the feelings of LGBTQ+ people, Rozhan Khdir and Gözde Latifoğlu state that “feelings of hopelessness and pessimism have been commonly experience[d] among [LGBTQ+] people” (2021, p. 1). Therefore, LGBTQ+ people often feel ostracised when they live in homophobic and discriminatory environments. Ishmael’s situation presents a comparable example. Throughout the play, Ishmael appears to be overtly stressed about revealing his identity even when he is in the UK. His stress mainly stems

from the fact that he comes from a country that has heterosexual expectations with a homophobic frame of mind. He feels as if he would be judged and shamed regardless of whom he comes out to. For instance, he meets a white girl named Bex at the park and Bex acts quite friendly towards Ishmael. However, Ishmael does not know how to act around someone friendly, so he ends up lying about who he is. Even after he redeems his lies and Bex accepts him as he is, Ishmael cannot come out to Bex directly.

Ishmael's ostracisation is also caused by his loneliness as he is denied support from people like him. He tries to contact his old lover David with whom he escaped Zimbabwe. David justifiably does not want to risk losing hard-earned asylum by helping Ishmael. But this does not change the fact that Ishmael is left alone even by people that share the same fate. His experiences lead him to feel oppressed by minority stress which can be seen among the members of a minority group. Minority stress is described as "excess stress to which individuals from stigmatised social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position" (Meyer, 2003, p. 675). Ishmael's minority stress seems to be rooted in both external and internal factors. Nicholas C. Borgogna, Ryon C. McDermott, Stephan L. Aita, and Matthew M. Kridel explain such factors as "discrimination, harassment, and prejudice based on one's identity (i.e., heterosexist social policies) are considered external stressors, whereas the negative thoughts, feelings, and emotions one has as a result of their identity (i.e., internalized heterosexism) are considered internalized stressors" (2019, p. 55). As someone who is aware of the discrimination and prejudice his country harbours, and the harassment he endures during his encounter in the Home Office, Ishmael begins to feel the minority stress due to external factors. His experiences with these external factors lead him to have negative thoughts and feelings towards his identity. Although this does not necessarily mean that he despises what he is, he is still not comfortable with being open about himself.

Later, with a flyer he pulls out of his suitcase, Ishmael demonstrates that he has been to a place called the Sanctuary Point, a place that holds gatherings of others like him. He meets a Nigerian man who greets him warmly. He is informed that there are five Nigerians, one Ghanaian, and six Libyans. As the man advises him to not worry, Ishmael begins to worry. Although he is out and is in a different country, he still feels somewhat oppressed to talk about his homosexuality. He fears to let them know about his claim in the United Kingdom. He says "I know that, even in our collective misfortune, my brothers



and my sisters could still shun me. A citizen of the unwanted being excluded by the excluded” (Nyoni, 2014, p. 5.) In their study, Robin J. Lewis, Valerian J. Derlega, Jessica L. Griffin, and Alison C. Krowinski state that “[o]ne’s expectations regarding prejudice and discrimination as a result of being gay/lesbian may also be important in understanding the distress of G/L/B individuals” (2003, p. 718). He believes that although everyone else in the room is cast away or forced to run, they can still be judgmental about Ishmael’s sexual orientation. He fears that his homosexuality could be perceived as inferior to others’ claims. Despite the diversity in reasons for people to leave their country, Ishmael sees his homosexuality to be unspeakable. He believes that due to his sexual preferences, he would be shunned by those who are also otherised for different reasons. Ishmael feels doubly ostracised as he feels like a pariah not only in his country but also among those who are excluded.

As the story progresses, it is found that Ishmael was not eagerly accepted when he first came to the United Kingdom. The Home Office does not believe that he is gay, so they ask him to prove it: “[t]hey ask me, what does a penis feel like? Why do I like it? (Visibly upset.) I need to tell them we weren’t dirty. I need to tell them we were so much more. I need David” (Nyoni, 2014, p. 4). Although he was forced to keep his true identity a secret back in his own country, he is now asked to be open about it and is embarrassed as he feels uncomfortable to even talk about it because of the direct way the questions are asked. Despite the fact that the United Kingdom is known for its embrative attitude towards variety in genders, it does not seem to apply equally to Ishmael because he will not be granted asylum for as long as he does not cooperate. As Ishmael does not answer the private questions, his residency claim is postponed. This causes him to feel even more stressed and insecure.

Ishmael does not want to leave it to chance to see whether people like him and accept him for who he is. His stress leads him to forget how to be someone around people. He either chooses to remain silent or lie about his identity. This is one of the results of minority stress faced due to the distal stressors. Kyle K.H. Tan, Gareth J. Treharne, Sonja J. Ellis, Johanna M. Schmidt, and Jaimie F. Veale assert that “proximal stressors also [include] nondisclosure, which describes attempts made by TGD [trans and gender diverse] people to conceal their TGD identity in an attempt to protect themselves or others close to them from directly experiencing distal stressors” (2019, p. 12). Despite the fact that he did not suffer any homophobic responses for coming out, he gets involved

in a mental state where every coming out scenario ends disastrously. He does not even come out to people who seem to show affection and connection.

As both his possession and stage prop, Ishmael carries a suitcase that he brought with him from Harare. Changing from scene to scene, he uses the suitcase as different objects such as a chair, bench, or a sofa or he pulls out different sets of objects such as African dancing shells or Sanctuary Point fliers. The suitcase is like a symbol of Ishmael and his identity. Just like the suitcase, he is constantly on the move, ready to be opened yet always closed as he cannot find the right place and circumstances. It is like his closet; all his possessions and items regarding his experiences are placed inside the suitcase belonging nowhere waiting to be opened. As he proceeds with his story, he uses the items one by one linking them to his past and current experiences.

Another reason why the suitcase resembles his closet as a gay person is because it also includes items that are only known to Ishmael. Throughout the play, inside of Ishmael's suitcase is not seen by anyone else unless he tells the stories related to the items that he pulls out of it. Similarly, his homosexuality is not known to everyone unless he decides to reveal it to certain people such as David, and indirectly to his newly made friend Bex in the UK. He also tells the Home Office that he is gay to justify his claim. But he is not truly out. He does not feel comfortable enough to come out and reveal his sexual preferences vocally. Hence, just like his suitcase, Ishmael is loaded but both can never find a place to settle and to open.

Sedgwick describes the closet as the defining structure for gay oppression in the twenty-first century (1990, p. 71). This is because the closet exists as societies accept heterosexuality as the default sexual preference along with the gender binary as the default gender identity. Therefore, nonbinary individuals feel forced to come out to disclose their identities and if they choose to remain closeted, they will be regarded as heterosexual. It is quite appropriate to link Sedgwick's statement to Ishmael's situation. As he is raised in a country that only sees the gender binary as the only possible gender category, he is oppressed. He is afraid of facing the consequences of coming out because of his homophobic country, religious family, David's abandonment, and discriminatory approach of the Home Office. He spends all his life worrying about how he would be perceived if he dares to come out. Ishmael's learned hopelessness leads him to never be at ease with anyone around him.

In the fifth scene, Ishmael finally casts aside his insecurities and fears to embrace himself even for a brief moment. He pulls out a pair of pink and glittery stilettos from his suitcase. This allows the readers and spectators to realise that this is one of the examples in which his suitcase should be interpreted as his closet as a gay man. As he shows the stilettos to the spectators, he appears hesitant. It is crystal clear that Ishmael might be an out gay man, but he has not yet completely left his closet and still lives in it. At night, Ishmael decides to go to a gay club that he could not find the courage to enter before. As he puts on the stilettos, he says “I want to know what it’s like to become. Inner beings escaping from their cages. Free to be. I want to escape my body” (Nyoni, 2014, p. 14). Though he does not verbally come out to anyone, Ishmael embraces himself and visibly steps into his reality. Regarding coming out Paula Rust (1993) states that “[c]oming out is a process of discovery in which the individual sheds a false heterosexual identity and comes to correctly identify and label [their] true essence, which is homosexual” (p. 53). Similar to how Ishmael likened their lives to “concrete cocoons” (Nyoni, 2014, p. 1) from which they shed the past to new inflictions, his coming out exemplifies Rust’s description of coming out. By accepting to be himself, Ishmael finally comes out to himself and starts to shed the hidden and false heterosexual image he has maintained to keep his own identity a secret.

He is later accompanied by a possible drag queen in the club. He is asked to let go and start dancing. To be able to comprehend this unfamiliar situation and feelings, he asks himself some questions such as “[i]s this what it feels like to not be afraid? Is this what freedom feels like? Is this how it feels to be yourself?” (Nyoni, 2014, p. 14). He recognises his awkwardness, and he embraces it. He finally gets a glimpse of what it means to be himself or what it feels like to become somebody. He is able to communicate with the drag queen in gay slang. As he gets lost in the moment, he realises that he has been holding himself for too long and he finally decides to move on. Once again, he does not directly come out, but he begins to perform his gender as a way of coming out. Regarding performing one’s gender, Judith Butler states:

Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative— that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. (1990, p. 33)

It is evident that as Ishmael begins to perform his gender, he accepts and becomes who he is supposed to be. He dresses, acts, dances, and speaks like a gay man. He is finally at peace with himself. For the first time in what feels like forever, he feels free of his worries, insecurities, and fears. Pure joy completely takes over him as he dances.

At the end of the play, Ishmael receives a letter from the Home Office that bursts his bubble, and he is reminded that it is not that easy to have a choice once again. He will have to go for his last appeal, and he has to prove himself yet again. It is possible that he will have to endure the same homophobic approach shown by those responsible for refugees in the country's Home Office. In the beginning, Ishmael comes to the United Kingdom with the hopes that he will be welcomed and accepted as he is. However, he encounters new difficulties and a different wave of homophobia.

## **Conclusion**

Coming out process is one of the most important phases in a queer person's life. This process does not only provide an opportunity for queer individuals to be open about their identities but also increases queer visibility and presence. However, reactions to coming out are not always positive and embracing. This process is also negatively affected by internal and external factors. It is concluded that racism is one of the reasons as to why LGBTQ+ individuals feel ostracised. It is seen in Ishmael's example that Ishmael encounters racism in the UK which is one of the reasons why he struggles to come out. Furthermore, religion is deduced to be one of the reasons why LGBTQ+ individuals cannot come out. Ishmael's endeavours to come out are also oppressed by religious views of his country because homosexuality is seen as a sin. It is further understood that lack of family support interferes with Ishmael's self-esteem and causes him to feel insecure about himself. The external factors of coming out cause Ishmael to develop minority stress and internalised homophobia which ultimately make him feel forced to hide his preferences or lie about himself. The negative reactions and depictions make Ishmael believe that every coming out scenario would end up in misery. However, despite the challenges and negativities Ishmael does not give up. Therefore, it is further concluded that he still strives to be himself which is the reason why he escapes his country in the first place.

Ishmael's story exemplifies the case of many LGBTQ+ members like him. Whether it is their countries, religions, faiths, values, families, or all of these reasons together, they are forced to live their lives within the boundaries without being allowed to settle anywhere. As one of these people, Ishmael is also the one who chooses to remain closeted due to the intolerance and homophobia he has been exposed to. Therefore, he takes the bold step of giving up on his family, friends, and country to start a new chapter where he can be himself unapologetically. However, life does not treat him kindly even after his departure. He struggles to get a residency and he experiences a homophobic encounter in the country's Home Office. He is humiliated and treated as inferior, which ultimately makes his coming out process even more challenging than it is.

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