“Qu(e)’erying the Qur’an:”

How non-heterosexual Muslims in London articulate sexual citizenship narratives

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to situate the phenomenon of "homonationalism" into lived experience in order to lay bare the contextual specificities of queer Muslim subjectivites in London, UK and to examine the local refigurations of power that informants enact therein. Through fieldwork at an inclusive Mosque in London, and interviews with queer-identifying Muslims, this ethnographic approach is dedicated to analyzing how those considered inauthentic in homonationalist imaginaries, and who are often elided in critical discourses of homonationalism itself, articulate narratives of sexual citizenship that challenge the regulatory codes of a universalizing script of homonormative sexuality, and how they make these pleas for belonging through a parallel reconstitution of Muslim normativities. I argue that examining homonationalism through sexual citizenship narratives captures the local navigations of power while still addressing how these micrological performances garner meaning in transnational networks of Muslim and queer belonging, and such an approach is useful in exposing how citizenship emerges as much through narrative iterations as do the categories of "Muslim" and "queer" that informants differently affirm and alter.

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Introduction

On April 23 2016, British-Pakistani Muslim student Maria Munir came out as gender non-binary to President Obama during a town hall Q&A in London. It was the first time they[1] had publically declared their sexual identification, and they used the platform to ask the US President to "go beyond what has been accepted in the LGBTQ rights movement in including people who fit outside the social norms" (The Guardian 2016), citing the North Carolina anti-trans bathroom law as well as the lack of rights for nonbinary peoples in the UK. In a later interview with BBC, Munir admitted that they had not come out to their parents: "I just thought, if anyone in the world is going to accept me for who I am it should be the President of the United States"(Dawson & Morse 2016).

Munir's plea to Obama (and to the countless others who were present and read about it), took place during my fieldwork period in London with queer-identifying Muslims, and illuminates some of the central questions I was in the middle of investigating. What does it mean that a British person with a Pakistani-Muslim background chose to 'come out' to the President of a different country in order to shed light on issues that they experience in their own locale? How does their chosen audience shape how articulations about non-normative gender and sexual rights are made and what community they see themselves as a part of?

While there has been a lot of discussion on the ethnocentrism and Islamophobia at the heart of mainstream LGBT movements, the local navigations and experiences of the people at these intersections are often overlooked. This ethnographic account, detailing

[1] Like many nonbinary-identifying people, Munir prefers the pronoun "they."

interviews with queer Muslim residents of London, and my fieldwork at an inclusive Mosque, comprise a venture into situating sexualized nationalisms and their discontents into lived experience, which can illuminate specific dialogical strategies for bridging the increasingly tense relationship between the Muslim and LGBT communities[2] in the UK. How do queer Muslims in the UK articulate sexual citizenship narratives? Who makes up the audience of these pleas to belonging, and in communicating such desires, what constitutes the appropriate speech through which to express claims to citizenship? Finally, how is the authority to construct such narratives negotiated and communicated, and at whose expense?

Munir's comment characterizes her as what Cossman (2007) would call a "border speaker:" a subject at the margins of a desired form of sexual citizenship whose speech acts either move the border or attempt to cross it (68). In rearticulating the borders of normative 'Muslimness' to include their own interpretations of sexual diversity, as well as interrogating the boundaries of normative queerness in the UK as racialized and secular, queer Muslims in London negotiate the contours of a narrative through which they can emerge as sexual citizens, disrupting the exlusionary binary of in/outside of the closet. Constructing personal chimeras of new language, queer Muslims not only enact border crossings, but necessarily reconstitute such borders elsewhere, as these professions of belonging are divested with their own norms that privilege some performances of being a queer Muslim over others. Only in situating studies of homonormative nationalism in lived experience can one reveal the particular ways subjects unravel,

[2] While there is not one homogenous community of either Muslims or LGBT peoples in the UK, the informants in this paper, seated at such intersections, often refer to these groups as such.

transverse, and re-erect boundaries in negotiations of authentic citizenship that give one the right to particular speech.

Theoretical grounding

Boundaries of belonging are always sexualized, and queer and feminist theorists have anguished over exposing heteronormativity as an exclusionary and imperative organization of bodies through which gender and sex performances are regulated and seen to cohere (see Rich 1980; Butler 1990; Warner 1993). Heternormativity's regulatory modes dictate proper masculinities and femininities, through which bodies they should proliferate, and how they correlate with proper gender and sexual performance (Butler 1993; Connell 1999). More recently, discussions of a "homonormative turn" (Agathangelou 2008:123) in LGBT rights organizing addresses a marked shift whereby movements aimed at disruptiving this normalizing project instead seek inclusion within it (Collins 2009).

Lisa Duggan (2002) introduced the idea of "homonormativity," out of a neoliberal reading of sexual politics, in which she argues homonormativity "…does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a…privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (179). The LGBT movement as emergent out of the West has accrued many of its successes precisely through the adherence to such a script, whereby, for example, lobbying for same-sex marriage rights often relies on the demonization of non-monogamous and non-privatized sexualities. This begs the question: "whose genders and sexualities gain value, visibilty, and universality, and whose are

patronized, particularized and marginalized in international LGBT rights "connectivities"? (Bacchetta & Haritaworn 2011:128). Agathangelou (2008) argues that "(normative) queerness might be offered incorporation into the parameters of citizenship…in exchange for closing [one's] eyes to other kinds of violence committed daily on bodies of other queers, indigenous, black, and other people of color, the terrorists, and members of the working class"(126).

The transnationalization of LGBT rights catapults these particular homonormativities into a narrative of modernity whereby those particular subjects who were unevenly incorporated into the body politic of some nations appoint themselves the universal referent for sexual emancipation. LGBT rights is not an inevitable progression of greater visibility for essential homosexual selves, as it is often imagined in international gay rights discourse, but is the result of as well as the dissemination of a narrative of universal queerness which is applied, sometimes forcibly, to disparate contexts regardless of class, race/ethnicity, religion, and nationalism (Altman 2001). The erection and maintenance of the boundaries of normative queerness is carried out based on a persistent imagination of the West as at the leading end of a temporal hierarchy of cultural progression (Peterson 1999; Binnie 2004; Butler 2008; Rahman 2014), which translates particular configurations of sexual performance into one coherent narrative that those in the West are privileged with writing. Much like how white Western feminists' proclamations of a 'global sisterhood' were criticized as a form of enduring colonialism that target "third world" societies as in need of intervention (Mohanty 1988), the 'global gay' enters the scene as the contemporary figure in the enduring "civilizing mission of modernity" (Binnie 2004:76).

Dennis Altman (1996,1997, 2001) coined the term "global gay" to point out how claims to membership in a transnational gay community based on self-identification of homosexuality masks the historical specificities that have given rise to sexual orientation as an identity in itself, applying a political economic perspective to sexual rights that interrogates how "concerns around gender, sexuality, and the body play a central role in the construction of international political, social, and economic regimes" (Altman 2001:9). Joseph Massad (2007) goes even further to claim that the "gay international," in introducing the binary of homosexual-heterosexual identity into Arab/Muslim societies targeted for correction destroys "social and sexual configurations of desire in the interest of reproducing a world in its own image" (189). Universalist gay rights discourses see liberation as already achieved in the West and thus in need of catalysis elsewhere (Rahman 2014). Cruz-Malavé & Manalanson (2002) put it succinctly: "while globalization is seen to liberate and promote local sexual difference, the emergence, visibility, and legibility of these differences are often predicated in globalizing discourses as a developmental narrative in which a premodern, pre-political non-EuroAmerican queerness must consciously assume the borders of representing itself to itself and others as "gay" in order to attain political consciousness, subjectivity, and global modernity" (5-6).

The new forms of empire made possible by sexual rights and its requisite racialization is exemplified in the phenomenon of "homonationalism" (homonormative nationalism). Jasbir Puar (2006) coined the term to describe the phenomenon whereby in post-9/11 USA, Islamophobia contributed to and emerged out of iterations of American modernity that were legible through the US as a space of sexual exceptionalism, enabling

a collusion between *some* homosexuals and the state itself (68). Using the language of Foucauldian biopolitics, she argues that the "turn to life" of homonormative subjects "is racially demarcated and paralleled by a rise in the targeting of queerly raced bodies for dying" (Puar 2007:xii): bodies which, she argues, are almost always coded as Muslim. Crucially, homonationalism addresses how the state itself enacts homonormative allegiances, rather than acting as a barrier to them. The uneven incorporation of queer subjects into the space of protection by the state "rests upon specific performances of…sexual exceptionalism vis-à-vis perverse, improperly hetero and homo Muslim sexualities" (Puar 2007:xxiv), giving rise to highly patrolled regulatory scripts of homosexuality which, in becoming normative, displace queerness onto another population demarcated as dangerously Other, in this case the Muslim.

The UK context

Homonationalism and the resulting discursive investigations it provoked lay bare how LGBT rights have been able to procure visibility through the articulation of a normative script of homosexuality, whose mobility has been possible only through the demarcation and restriction of a racialized group of "Others" (Bachetta & Haritaworn 2011:128). This investigation is concerned with how these scripts are reconfigured and contested by the non-heterosexual subjects they elide, namely, queer Muslims in London, and how public sexual identity narratives, such as Munir's coming out to Obama, have become central to claims to inclusion within a sexualized realm of belonging. If Muslimness is demarcated as incompatible with LGBT tolerance, how do queer-identifying Muslims make claims to inclusion into a sexualized realm of belonging

without renouncing the ethno-religious affiliation that scripts of normative queerness require emancipation from? This question forms my point of entry into my fieldwork at an Inclusive Mosque in London, where I met practicing Muslim informants identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, genderqueer, and trans[3].

While Puar's homonationalism originally focused on the specificities of the US context and its War on Terror, many theorists have applied its logic to other contexts, especially within Western Europe in the locales of the Netherlands (Mepschen, Duyvendak & Tonkens 2010; Jivraj & de Jong 2011; Bracke 2011), and France (Bachetta & Haritaworn 2011; Fassin 2011; Dard-Dascot 2012). While the European context is similar to the US in that LGBT rights discourses are implicated in what Butler (2008) calls the "story of progress" (18), which targets Islam as the site of threat, it differs in that debates over sexual rights cannot be divorced from contestations over Europeanness itself (Beger 2004). Tolerance of homosexuality has increasingly been linked to the core values of the European project through bottom-up and top-down processes, marking a European-specific homonormativity as the site of articulations of belongingness or desire to belong in the European Union (see Ayoub & Paternotte 2014; Thoreson 2014, Moss 2014). Such a homogenizing interiority requires a perverse Other as is constitutive outside (Yildiz 2009), and the palimpsestic set of normative commitments professed by European nations and their subscriptive actors has targeted the homophobic Muslim figure as such an antagonist.

While these analyses are valuable and provocative, the orientation of the UK toward the "idea of Europe" is more ambivalent than places like Germany and the

[3] While I met trans* people, none of them were my official informants, so I will not claim that this research covers the "T" in "LGBT"

Netherlands (Kollman 2014), which is compounded in recent "Brexit" fever that will decide whether or not the UK will stay part of the European Union. Homonationalism in the UK must therefore be explored in such a way that does not take commitment to a unified Europe as its starting point: in fact, fears of unrestricted mobility of potential Islamic militancy throughout the Union actually contribute toward arguments to leave the EU (Burke 2016). The "7/7" bombings in London on July 7, 2005 marked a turning point for attitudes toward a growing Muslim minority[4] in Britain. Following the attacks, Tony Blair spoke out against Islamic extremism, claiming that "its roots are…deep…in parts of the politics of most countries of the Middle East and many in Asia; in the extremist minority that now in every European city preach hatred of the West and our way of life" (Bullard 2015). "Our way of life" means different things to those who believe it is indeed under siege, but as with much of Western Europe, developments in LGBT rights in the UK, such as the 2005 Civil Partnership Act and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013 have brought homonormative sexuality closer to the heart of Britishness. In fact, David Cameron is known to boast UK as the "best place in Europe" to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (Duffy 2015).

Chris Woods (1995) demonstrates that in the UK, an alliance between some homosexual rights groups and the political right goes back as far as 1975, when the Conservative Group for Homosexual Equality was established. As an assimilationist group, CGHE (later TORCHE) "claimed the moral superiority to judge *which types of homosexual are worth defending, and which are not*" (Woods 1995:22, emphasis added). More contemporarily, Hubbard & Wilkinson (2014) formulate an interesting account of

[4] The Muslim population in the UK is estimated at just over 3 million, double the 2001 figure (Gani 2015; Finnigan 2016).

the London 2012 Olympics as an important catalyst for the uneven inclusion of LGBT rights into imaginations of Britain as civilizer. They argue that the games was "understood as a moment in which the future trajectory of the city was at stake" (Hubbard & Wilkinson 2014:599) and in asking what types of sexuality "rightly belong in a world city" (599), the Olympics encouraged the regulation and marginalization of non-normative sexualities, as well as set the stage for the education of those participating nations where LGBT tolerance was not a value. Not only were athletes from homophobic nations encouraged to "come out" while in the UK, but the Games were arranged strategically to transform immigrant neighbourhoods in the East End (such as Tower Hamlets, where there is a prominent Muslim demographic) (Hubbard & Wilkinson 2014:601), demonstrating how 'problematic' populations were demarcated and slotted for amendment in the UK both within and without.

The branding of the UK as an exceptional space of tolerance that can and should act as civilizer of others masks its imperial and colonial history, not to mention that laws punishing homosexual acts in many countries are actually an export of British rule. The UK, as the setting of this investigation, is emergent out of a deeply embedded and rehearsed script of demarcation and abjection for especially those peoples associated with the historical "Orient," whereby the (Arab) Muslim takes up his/her old place in Orientalist discourses of proper subjecthood along the lines of 'normal' versus 'perverse' sexualities (Said 1978). London as both a cosmopolitan and extremely multicultural city is an ideal site to explore how the queer as regulatory script plays out, and how it is contested and reformulated by different actors.

Limitations to discourses of homonationalism

Up until now the discussion has elaborated on how the emerging disciplinary queer is not only implicated in regulations of appropriate performances of homosexuality, but also in demarcating the space(s) of sexual exceptionalism and the sites of desired temporality, especially targeting Muslim populations as in need of instruction. While the manifestation of a universalized global gay culture is implicated in forms of colonialism (see Rahman 2014), other theorists warn against seeing this as an uncontested, unidirectional process. The abstraction of homonationalism from its original particular contextual usage loses sight of localized and specific meanings in order to formulate a totalizing theory (Ritchie 2015), as well as tends toward a fetishization of the state as monolithic and unified (Currah 2013). This is either communicated through a presupposed paranoid structuralism that loses sight of decolonized forms of queer activism (Zanghellini 2012), or else sees the state as the only one implicated in the policing of sexuality.

In order to remedy this, some have cited an ethnographic approach as a more useful investigation of homonationalism (Currah 2013), where examining how individual subjectivities are produced can shed light on transnational formations of power (White 2013). For example, Jason Ritchie (2010) argues that Palestinian queers, rather than being "dupe[d]" by Western LGBT ideologies (567), reformulate such rescue fantasies into more creolized projects of identity construction. Moreover, the existence of a recognizable gay identity can actually provide a valuable point of entry into a desired world for some people not expressive of normative heterosexual behaviour and unsatisfied with indigenous models of sexuality (Zanghellini 2012). Rofel (1999) argues

that Chinese gay identities are "not wholly global nor radically different from the West", whereby the desire to enter into transcultural practices of sex and sexuality entails competing notions of what it means to be gay (453). Renkin (2009) applies Tsing's (2005) concept of "friction" to argue that LGBT actors in the 2002 Budapest Pride March mobilized both global transnational imaginaries and assertions of national belonging (18). Seeing homonationalism as the undisputed flow of Western concepts of sexuality and its consequent erasure of difference not only occludes how some LGBT claims to inclusion provide alternatives to transnational sexual (homo)normativities, but also how they themselves affirm them (Renkin 2009:18).

Methodological and theoretical intervention

An ethnographic approach is useful for navigating these complex terrains of competing sexualities and addressing how particular individuals situate themselves within or against them, teasing out the subjectivities constituted out of such frictions. Within a homonationalist context that assumes a mutual exclusivity of Islam and homosexuality (El-Tayeb 2012), queer Muslims have been the subject of some research that takes their situated intersectionality as a way to deconstruct both monolithic understandings of Islam as well as non-heterosexual sexuality (Yip 2004, 2008, 2015; Al-Sayyad 2010; El-Tayeb 2012; Peumans 2014; Rahman 2014). Rahman (2014) claims research on Muslim LGBT people, as "theoretically queer," is the "empirical and epistemological beginning to disrupting the assumed Western superiority in sexual diversity" (116).

Following these authors, my fieldwork engages with subjective experiences of queer-identifying Muslims in London through an ethnographic approach. Taking up Rahman (2014)'s claim that "queer politics need to rethink the reflex towards unconditional secularism" (145), this work not only interrogates how informants navigate cultural and sexual identities but how this is done through, instead of despite of, religion. I carried out fieldwork at the Inclusive Mosque Initiative in London, an "inclusive sacred space" which welcomes "all people of all sects, genders, sexualities through "inter-community and interfaith dialogue (Inclusive Mosque Initiative 2016). IMI is a registered charity but receives funding only from private donors and the occasional grant, which has not yet been enough to provide a permanent physical space, so the "mosque" is a symbolic community which hosts events and prayers in rented out spaces around London. According to one of the founders, the concept sprang from a conversation between her and a few friends who wondered "what would it be like to have an inclusive space for ourselves?" Since its beginning in the UK in 2012, other IMI branches have opened up in Malaysia, Kashmir, Pakistan, and Switzerland, which were all grass-roots projects that contacted the UK branch for use of the same name. Those who have been with the initiative since the beginning claim that "the response has been overwhelmingly positive," although there is the occasional criticism from those unsupportive of their version of progressive Islam[5]. The wide media attention it has received in the UK focuses mostly on the role of women in the initiative, and its explicit welcome towards people of

[5] For example, in May 2016 the IMI UK Chair (who is female) went to Bern, Switzerland, where the newest IMI branch is located, and led a Jummah prayer. The photos that were posted of the event were met with some very negative and threatening criticism by people who were offended by a woman leading a (mixed-gender) prayer, and fear for the safety of those featured in the photo led to it being removed from Facebook and other media platforms.

all sexual orientations, which are also its biggest contentions with those unsupportive of the enterprise.

I met informants with whom I conducted semi-structured interviews through volunteering at Friday Jummahs and a Feminist Brunch, as well as through the online forum of the UK gay Muslim organization *Imaan*. The informants formally interviewed for this investigation include 5 male, 2 female and 1 genderqueer persons ranging from 17 to 37 years old; all born in or raised in London except one. They comprise different 'orientations' toward sexuality (lesbian, questioning, gay, bisexual); outness (eg. a few friends, close family, openly non-heterosexual); and Islam (eg. "cultural Muslim, practicing Muslim, educated Islamic scholar).

Using the theoretical framework of narratives of sexual citizenship, my approach is not only a methodological intervention but a theoretical one, which recognizes how forms of belonging are increasingly tied to intimate life (Weeks 1998), and how storytelling is key to this changing concept of citizenship (Plummer, as cited in Oleksy 2009). Citizenship, not limited to a list of legal protections, is "about participation in the social and political life of a….community" (Phelan 2001:6), and is often constituted through "active modes of affinity and techniques of normalization" (Rofel 1999:457-458). Rofel (1999) describes cultural citizenship as "not merely a political attribute but also a process in which culture becomes a relevant category of affinity" (457) and "sex is a critical site where the normalizations of cultural citizenship are being reformulated" (458). The normal citizen as axiomatically heterosexual and gender binary-affirming is being contested, but at the same time new hierarchies of sexual respectability are introduced in its place.

While the discussion of the global gay and transnationalized homonormativity has pointed out that the "good citizen" has been reconstituted past the gay/straight binary (Cossman 2007:2), there is a lack of investigation into how exactly those cast out from homonationalist imaginaries, such as queer Muslims, articulate their own sexual citizenship narratives, and more importantly, how these narratives operate according to their own logic of inclusion and exclusion. Ethnography itself, as an exercise in narration, offers a tactical means of creating a dialogue that can depart from metanarratives of 'coming out' and visibility politics that dominate the appropriate way to perform non-heterosexual sexuality, which has become a restrictive formula (Crawley & Broad 2004). However, it is crucial to remain conscious that ethnography itself comes out of a discipline (anthropology) directly complicit with a necropolitical narrative of colonialist and imperialist conquest. This imperial backdrop is further compounded by my positionality as a queer, white, secular, (and in the case of my Canadian heritage, settler) researcher, which has qualified me for entry into the very homonormative realm that my informants are often cast out of. Reflecting on these realities informs my engagement with such a work, and its politically-charged entanglements is reflective of the stakes of such a venture, evidence of the need to think through new narratives of sexualized connections across difference .

According to Rahman (2015), "both Muslim postcolonial or religious resistance and Western universalist queer politics compound the assumption that there is only one possible form of sexual diversity which has already been achieved in the West," and non-heterosexual Muslims' lived experiences at this queer intersectionality undoes these assumptions from both sides. Focusing both on how Muslim LGB* people queer

religious texts (Yip 2005) as well as construct counter-narratives to the mainstream coming out script (El-Tayeb 2012), this work will demonstrate how the boundaries of sexual citizenship are contested through "the cultural work of re-imagining the community" (Carver & Mottier 1998:16) as well as how these boundary crossings change the domain of sexual citizenship itself (Cossman 2007).

In addressing the autobiographical, this investigation will see how queer Muslims engage with an ongoing narrative negotiation in order to reconcile two imagined ontologies, whether it is personal interpretations of scriptural language, engaging in various encounters that facilitate disclosure, or seeking 'authenticity' without having to adopt a hegemonic gay identity. This investigation will begin by exploring the complexities of homonationalism in the UK, the dialogical strategies informants seek out in order to establish solidarity with LGBT and Muslim groups, and my own positionality in that regard. Next, it will examine how queer Muslim informants interrogate the normative (secular) script of non-heterosexual sexuality in the UK in communicating their sexual selves, and how agency is emergent out of religiosity. Finally, I will look at how my informants queer religious scripture itself in order to situate themselves within Islam and legitimate their authenticity as Muslims.

Chapter One: Dialogues

Homonationalism, while expressive of universalist notions of legitimate and defendable non-heterosexual sexuality, does not proliferate identically everywhere. Tsing (2005), in addressing how to provide an ethnography of the global, argues that "actually existing universalisms are hybrid, transient, and invoked in constant reformulation through dialogue" (9), and the particular ways that queer Muslim actors in the UK engage with hegemonic arrangements of (homo)sexuality demonstrates these reformulations: not always in the form of resistance, but nonetheless as a result of active engagement.

The metaphor of 'dialogue' in this chapter provides a way of looking at specific micro-negotiations of sexual citizenship within and between groups that totalizing theories of homonationalism often overlook, recognizing that in the UK, some queer Muslims see obstacles to belonging as rooted in a politically-correct reluctance to engage in critical exchange, perpetuated by both state-affiliated and non-affiliated actors. Dialogue is integral to citizenship contestation because "the enactment of citizenship is itself the recognition that one has a claim to be heard and responded to—that one should be acknowledged" (Phelan 2001:15), and so it is a useful heuristic in order to think through possible strategies of reconciliation among the groups my informants find themselves straddling.

Political (in)correctness

In the UK, political organizations such as UKIP (UK Independence Party), BNP (British National Party) and the EDL (English Defense League) form part of a far-right that is expressly anti-Muslim (and anti-immigrant) in their stance. However, informants

did not tend to perceive such groups as especially threatening when it came to their ability to negotiate a terrain of sexual discourse, probably because the anti-Muslim rhetoric of these parties is not explicitly linked to the protection of a sanctioned sexual diversity like it is in places like the Netherlands, France, and Sweden[6]. Considering this, investigating homonationalism in the UK through a state-centred approach as applied in other contexts (Butler 2008; Jivraj & de Jong 2011; Amiraux 2012) would lose sight of the particular manifestations of homonationalism that are mobilized in individual and collective encounters outside of legislative action. While analyses of the explicit state-enacted vilification of Muslims in the defence of LGBT rights are important, homonationalism is not unique to the state but also a practice of groups and individuals (Schotten 2015:6). Citizenship, which encompasses "different dimensions of belonging, recognition, and participation within a nation-state" (Cossman 2007:3) is monitored by disparate actors invested in the making or unmaking of particular borders which are differently-permeable for those seeking entry, and an investigation of the subjective experience of homonationalism must take these different dialogical arrangements into account.

In order to understand how and through what norming constrictions queerness emerges, Currah (2013) advocates for an investigation of "the local, micro, particular sites where public authority is being exercised." As an example, Ritchie (2010), unsatisfied with metanarratives of homonationalism in Israel/Palestine, uses an ethnographic approach to study the ways in which queer Palestinians encounter everyday

[6] For example, the Sweden Democrats in Sweden, the Front National in France (which is not expressly pro-LGBT put courts a large LGBT voting base), the Party for Vrijheid in the Netherlands,

violence and in order to "locate the specific meanings of race/racism" (Solomos and Black 1995, as cited in Ritchie 2010:632) as they occur in these subjects' contested access to queer spaces. This approach is useful here because it highlights the particular manifestations of homonationalism as they occur in a given context, enabling the pinpointing of tailored modes of resistance.

In my investigation, informants tended to deny a centralized homonationalist agenda in the UK but referred to various personal encounters where they felt they were excluded from LGBT spaces based on their Muslim identification. As a result, they perceived obstacles to the acceptance into this sexualized community as perpetuated in everyday experiences that are difficult to break due to their covertness. For example, when recounting a date he had, one gay male informant, Ishrat, said: "When it came up that I was Muslim, the guy said, 'But what about how they treat gay people?' And I was like 'They? That's me, I'm part of that.' I'm sick of people telling me what my religion says." Another person I talked to was adamant that there was less Islamophobia in the UK than in France and Italy (where they previously lived), but expressed discomfort at what they felt was "a desire to save me from my life" when recalling former involvement with a particular LGBT group in London. Informants tended to laugh off the rhetoric of parties such as UKIP and focused instead on a deep-seated prejudice that manifests itself in their everyday lives:

> *Yeah, I think most people think UKIP is kind of a joke, but all the people who are […] self-proclaimed liberals, you know…it's almost worse [than overt Islamophobia] actually, when you come across people who don't*

know that they're Islamophobic…they don't do anything to hurt you or anything but you know they feel you are different. (Anik: gay male)

Examining these local sites of prejudice offers insight into how homonationalism is invoked by different actors in the UK, and importantly, what strategies might be useful to combat this. Some informants were frustrated with what they saw as political correctness covering over a criticism of Muslim communities, both because it produces hypocrisy as well as denies those Muslims wishing to make reforms potential allies in the larger British society. They thus saw the solution in a greater willingness to enter into dialogue that appreciates the heterogeneity within the Muslim population while appropriately criticizing that which is harmful. One informant, Hadara, argued that she didn't like the term "Islamophobia" because it tended to conflate the critical evaluation of "real" problems in the Muslim community with bigotry, so that the former often persisted. In another example, Adem, a bisexual Islamic scholar, told me he witnessed an English Muslim guy screaming: "That's haram!" to two women wearing short skirts, and no one around was showing any reaction to it:

Actually, there is too much rights for Muslims! […] I think political correctness is making people a bit hypocritical. Because it is incorrect! To be screaming 'we will bring Sharia law on you!' That is unacceptable*! And as a non-British, non-white person, I am offended. And I can't imagine what a British person is saying walking around…they [those who let him] are being too kind, but it's hypocritical because they feel a fear…I feel a fear of this speech! I think if they don't act to this, they don't act to us for the same reason. I know sometimes when I talk to people, they are thinking how can*

you say these things…it is Islamophobia. So deep that they won't even admit it actually.

Adem's encounter is a reminder that Islamophobia is not always explicit, and implies that taboos against speaking out against certain groups in the UK do not necessarily dispel Islamophobia but disguise its internalization. Moreover, the hesitation for secular British people to intervene in a situation Adem considers deserving of correction makes him re-evaluate whether his own perceptions of belonging into British society as a Muslim are actually due to the same omissions rather than genuine welcome.

Hadara echoed the same frustration with shying away from dialogue:

You have the Left which is way too scared about talking about problems in the Muslim community because they are going to be labeled Islamophobic, or they're going to be labeled racist or whatever. So they don't really talk about it, and they don't really tackle it. That's what people are starting to call the regressive Left, where you have people who are progressive and all for, supporting gay rights since a long time…like Jeremy Corbin who I like, but come to Muslim issues, and you find them siding with the most conservative elements of the Muslim community, standing with Islamists, not listening to progressive voices within the Muslim community. […] Refusing to talk about that because of their white guilt or colonial past or the importance of appreciating multiculturalism…what they do is then, support the most conservative elements in the Muslim communities…the most sexist, homophobic, backwards groups, and they give more of an

> *excuse for people to support the bigots and the hateful people who are not helping, and whose views are generally wrong.*

The political correctness that has famously characterized the English appears here as a dangerous obstacle to fostering networks of solidarity, where external protections for ethnic or religious groups contribute to internal hierarchies that end up drowning out marginal-in this case, "progressive"-voices (Kymlicka 1995). People like Hadara, who consider themselves as part of a Muslim community but have issues with its particular norms, desire productive dialogue with the larger British society so that they may be able to forge other connections that offer new allegiances and spaces of belonging corrective to the marginalization they otherwise feel. The perceived refusal of non-Muslim actors to participate in such dialogical encounters is experienced as a simultaneous failure to acknowledge the diversity of voices within the Muslim population, and thus quests for citizenship fall on deaf ears. Most informants expressed a desire to see more bridges between minority groups, and the stories they tell reveal a re-imagining of the community they seek inclusion into: not through a simplistic change of political rhetoric but in local manifestations of solidarity where personal narratives are valued and respected.

Queer in conversation

> *Have you ever read* Of Mice and Men *by Steinbeck? I've taught it, for years and years, and one of the things I say to the kids is, there's a chapter where all the lower rung-the crooks, Curly's wife, Lenny…all the other men have gone to the cathouse and all these people are left behind. And instead of seeing a commonality amongst themselves, they cut into each other. So*

> *alliances are lost because they see one another as competition, and failing to recognize the strength in working together, because really they're at the bottom of the pecking order and the only way to survive is if they were to join forces.* (Sadiq, gay male)

This quotation formed part of the response to a question about how queer Muslims should engage in dialogues with the larger Muslim or LGBT communities, whereby the informant in question argued that homonationalist politics create unnecessary divisions that are perpetuated by actors on all sides. This coincides with Haritaworn et al's (2008) claim that in the British gay and lesbian mainstream, people of colour (and other minorities) have traditionally been treated as competitors for public resources and recognition (74), but Sadiq also added that many Muslims themselves are responsible for "alientating the Left."

If the "only way to survive is to join forces," how do queer Muslims seek out and foster dialogues with the groups they border, and how can ethnography provide its own useful dialogical venture into the ways these claims to inclusion play out? In this investigation, personal narratives provided a powerful tool for reformulating assumed universals of sexuality into nuanced, contested and grounded accounts, which were important for informants to both strengthen communities of support as well as to branch out in intersections with other groups, and having the attentive acknowledgment of these various audiences forms a crucial part of their perceived belonging.

As for the role of ethnography in framing these narratives, the "white guilt or colonial past" that Hadara mentions, and its crippling effect on effective critical dialogue between the British majority and ethnically marked groups resonates uncomfortably with

this methodology itself. Furthermore, as outlined earlier, my own situatedness as a defendable queer in the logic of homonationalist biopolitics may for some disqualify me from such an enterprise. However, my non-innocent entry into the field can in some ways be read as synecdochic of the messy exchange that might take place between secular queers and their Muslim counterparts, and can thus be useful in considering how my implication as an interpretive community alters the way the queer Muslims in question construct their narratives of sexual citizenship. For example, I was frequently treated as an embodiment of the mainstream secular LGBT world, which was apparent in informants' use of second person pronouns when discussing mainstream LGBT activism or making a distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. In some cases, informants were extremely eager to divulge what they want to see mainstream LGBT politics address, and welcomed my interest in their experience as a positive opportunity to share this. In another case, when a member on an Imaan forum told me to "let the queer Muslims do the work and not be ethnographic subjects," my outsider position and the colonial relationship which structures our interaction for her negated any recourse to dialogue. Ethnography is itself a dialogical encounter, and informants' decisions of how (or whether) to participate is already a strategy of sexual citizenship appeals, demonstrating the micrological level at which reformulations of, in this case, a homonationalist metanarrative, can take place.

Not all queer Muslims in this study desired connection with a larger LGBT network in the UK. For example, one woman I talked to said: "sometimes it's just nice to have an echo chamber" with other queer or progressive Muslims, where she does not feel the need to defend her opinions all the time. Similarly for Faiha, a genderqueer student

who is very selective about who they divulge her sexual preferences to, a small community provides the desired safe space without impositions from outsiders. When speaking about the LGBT Muslim group they started at their school, they said: "A lot of people can't really be out. We've talked about growth but then you have the problem of losing what we have." Other informants, however, expressed a desire to have better communication between LGBT and Muslim groups, deconstructing both through their intersectional position. When talking about an annual retreat in South Africa he attends, put on by *The Inner Circle*, Adem said this:

> *There are people from all over…you have Muslim feminists, non Muslim feminists, Muslim LGBT, non Muslim LGBT, non LGBT…even neutral, journalist or anything. And it still helps, because they are understanding you as a 'you,' a queer Muslim […] I think in queer Muslim organizations, especially in West, it's all about queer Muslim. Sometimes we forget there's a world around. The world is not that small. It causes an unconnectedness. We need bridges.*

Adem's case is interesting because he has faced marginalization in a lot of other contexts that purported inclusion. In LGBT groups he has experienced biphobia or Islamophobia, in queer Muslim groups he has been scrutinized for being a theologian, and in Turkish queer Muslim groups he has been ostracized as a Kurd. These shifting boundaries that differently-bifurcate him give him insight into the need for intersectionality and support from those who do not necessarily have the same struggle as himself, but who are willing to listen.

For Ishrat, the willingness to listen, on the part of secular LGBT actors, means giving up the prevalent saviour complex towards people of faith. "I think there can be dialogue. There can be intersection…the gay secular world just needs to listen, to realize [being gay and Muslim] doesn't have to be mutually exclusive." Sadiq also agreed that "having the non-Muslim and LGBT understanding is really crucial," and even proposed a way in which this understanding could come across. "If the LGBT community could marshal its Muslim identity and seek solidarity with an anti-Islamophobic position, it could nestle itself…we might gain just enough space to stand [within the Muslim community]." For Sadiq, personal narratives are crucial to this solidarity: citing the success of "back-alley abortion" stories in feminist movements, he argues that "we need the subjective to compliment the cerebral…the Other should not be an epistemic subject."

The Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI) claims that it is an initiative that fosters "inter-community and inter-faith dialogue," but the personal narrative does not take as central a position to this dialogue as some informants would hope. Adem, for example, praised the initiative for the people who are a part of it and its vision, but saw it as "not doing enough…it is about prayer, and then it finishes. I see people in the Mosque, and they cannot talk." IMI holds a Jummah (Friday prayer) bi-weekly, and will usually organize another event that month (during my Fieldwork, it was the "Feminist Brunch." Interestingly, it appears that the real dialogue occurs before and after the prayer, where some of the attendees will go to lunch and become enthralled in hours-long discussions of religion, cultural difference and stories of migration from their extremely varied backgrounds, and I got the sense that this is where the subscribers to the initiative really capitalized on having a respectful space to explore personal narratives. It could be said

that IMI establishes a context where like-minded people meet, and catalyzes discussion on progressive Islam, but a lot of the actual dialogue occurs outside the demarcated space of IMI. Perhaps this difference is due to a vision of prayer as effacing the ego: during one *khutbah*, the woman delivering her speech encouraged everyone to erase the "I" and find peace in oneness (*taohid*). Despite this philosophy, constituting the self was a continuous concern of my informants, and a central tenet of this constitution is the sharing of personal and intimate stories, whether it is with other queer Muslims, secular LGBT groups or other audiences.

Ethnographic work has the capacity to unlock some of these personal narratives in ways more macrological accounts of homonationalism in the UK lose sight of, and constant re-interrogation of the conditions of my own engagement with the work is imperative in order to constitute a productive exchange. If one were to conceptualize queer Muslims as a sort of Harawayian cyborg: embodiments of transgressed naturalized boundaries, re-reading the cyborg through Tsing's "friction" offers a way to look at how pleasurable entanglements are found at the intersections of the local and global, where situating immense sexual matrices of power into micrological connections should not lose sight of the way the latter affects the former. Non-innocent chimerical entanglements of researcher/subject, homosexuality/Islam, secular/religious, and UK/Other interact in shifting ways, and analyzing the narratives informants employ and alter makes these interactions accessible. One of the most crucial narrative interactions for the queer Muslims in question involves a universalist script of homosexuality, and their differential reformulations of this script and its subsequent implications for sexualized belonging is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are

Citizenship is enacted through continually reformulated narratives of what it means to belong within a particular imagined community. Wynter (2007) argues that every society operates according to a particular cosmogony, or "origin narrative," which "function[s] to enable us to "tell the world and ourselves who we are…[and] to enable us to autopoetically institute ourselves as [a] genre specific "We" (33). In other words, it is only through a given narrative of in/exclusion that one can "performatively enact" themselves (Wynter 2007:34), and these narratives are hierarchically arranged according to shifting formulations of what constitutes the authentic. The power of such narratives comes from their illusion as natural and immutable, when in fact they are fabricated and in constant revision: citizenship, as emergent out of these narrative performances, is a "moveable metaphor of belonging and inclusion that is deployed at different times for different purposes" (Carver & Mottier 1998:16).

Citizenship is both a status and a practice of belonging whose conditions for entry are highly monitored, cherished, and defined as natural, and feminist and queer theorists have exposed how performances of belonging are deeply gendered and heterosexualized (McClintock 1993; Nagel 1998; Mayer 2012). According to Carver & Mottier (1998), citizenship "generates gendered narratives...[which] establish[] hierarchies of citizenship (gradations of esteem) in ways to do with sex and sexuality" (21). The growth of literature in the field of "sexual citizenship" demonstrates how such a hierarchy, which privileges a singular (heteronormative) practice of sexual respectability, is being challenged, and new forms of sexualized belonging are forged through individual and collective narratives that are in the process of invention (Weeks 1998:46). However,

these novel sexual belongings are not without their own set(s) of established norms, as "citizenship is about a process of becoming recognized subjects…a process that operates according to its own technologies of inclusion and exclusion" (Cossman 2007:2), and the emergence of the disciplinary homonormative queer demonstrates how the sanctioning of some forms of sexual belonging require the subversion of others. As outlined earlier, critical discourses of the "global gay" and the "gay International," along with "gay Imperialism" (Haritaworn et al 2008) and homocolonialism (Rahman 2014) are concerned with how Western nations claim possession of modernity (as 'proven' by LGBT rights), and how this logic justifies and even encourages the intervention and representation of queer of colour subjects by white Western gays (Haritaworn et al 2008).

Central to articulating claims to sexual citizenship is the role of storytelling (Plummer 2003, as cited in Oleksy 2009: 4), as actors bridge the private with the political through public identity narratives (Oleksy 2009:5). In mainstream (Western) LGBT rights activism, "coming out" narratives have become the ritualized prerequisite for entry into an imagined community of so-called authentic gay subjects, which relies on specific historical conceptualizations of sexual behaviour as rooted in some essential self which must be liberated from a repressive closet. The epistemology of the closet has given a consistency to Western gay culture (Sedgwick 1990:68) that is problematic in that it assumes pre-political gay identities rather than seeing LGBT politics as interconnected and emergent through class, religious, and ethnic structures that give differential access to this "queer world" (Rahman 2014: 99). Queer Muslim informants expressed ambivalent positions toward this universalist text and articulated varying narratives of 'coming out'

that expressed their resistance to the emancipatory and ethnocentric language of the 'gay secular world.'

Recipe for coming out

Western liberal individualism tends to philosophize the self as an internally-bound, discrete entity residing in a singular body and which interacts with a public field according to various degrees of visibility. Discourses of "coming out" are illustrative of this ontology, where a biologically-rooted sexual self-identification must be verbalized in order to gain validity and "honesty" in an ongoing reflexive construal of selfhood. In such a myth, "gay gains meaning according to a developmental narrative that begins with an unliberated,"prepolitical" homosexual practice and that culminates in a liberated,"out," politicized, "modern," "gay" subjectivity (Manalansan 1995:487). Stella (2012) claims that "the importance attached to the public avowal of one's identity in global LGBT politics is deeply ethnocentric, and rooted in 'the myth of Stonewall' as the birthplace of the LGBT movement" (9), and such a focus on the speakability in "fails to grapple with the complex subjectivities of diasporic queer Muslims" (Jivraj and de Jong 2011:3). Reluctance to come out in the formulaic way urged by mainstream LGBT discourse cannot unproblematically be read as evidence of internalized homophobia, but must be considered indicative of the ethnocentrism and historically particular philosophy of the sexual self as preached in the West, and the interstitial position of queer Muslims lays bare the ethnocentric language of the narratives the gay secular world offers.

Informants recognized mainstream gay culture as a particular set of semiotic codes, and discussed their orientation toward it in terms of whether or not this scripted language

was successful in communicating their desired sexual selves to those they 'came out' to, revealing their perceptions of incongruence with the text of gay life available to them in the UK. Consistent with Plummer's (1996) claim that new forms of communication, such as mass media and electronic communication technologies, diversify the dialogues with which we construct sexual stories (35), informants were all familiar with a particular set of established norms that are pervasive in the UK and the "West" surrounding ideas of coming out, and in fact, some even visited online forums where these stories had been published as guidance for their own lives. Sadiq argued he was "culturally programmed" through television and movies to see coming out as a movement along a strict binary of honesty and dishonesty, in which adherence to the former is necessary and straight-forward. He referred to his coming out as "textbook" and claimed that the "gay community" operates according to a "cultural narrative…it's about until you come out you're not really true to yourself." Ishrat used the term "gay secular world" to refer to what he sees as mainstream gay culture, and claims "there's this whole script they want you to follow: they want you to go home and shove it in your parents' face…you know, 'I'm here, I'm queer, I take it in the ass' sort of thing."

On top of identifying the relevance of such a script, several informants implied its ethnocentrism, which marginalized them as Muslims but also gave them privileged access to its inner logic. When speaking about a gay youth group he attended, Ishrat claimed:

> *The white…gay secular world doesn't think it has its own cultural codes it follows…for example, when people point out that it's irrational to not eat pork, I ask them, so why don't you eat dog? That stems from these cultural*

codes, these scripts, that they think they don't have…Whiteness is seen as being above this culture.

Here Ishrat makes a connection between the 'gay secular world' and whiteness itself, as both to him are situated in opposition to himself as a gay Muslim, and uses his positionality to expose how other groups follow implicit exclusionary cultural narratives whose naturalization renders them inconspicuous. The universalist logic of the gay secular world is legible through whiteness as a category, as both disguise themselves as unmarked: displacing illiberal constraints onto other categories such as "Muslim" in order to claim primacy in a narrative of progress measured through levels of "freedom" (Butler 2008).

Ishrat, as a white ethnic Albanian Muslim, occupies an intersectional space in terms of race/ethnicity that reveals the ethnocentrism of the coming out narrative, because he claims that people assume he is more "rational" than Muslims of colour, as if he is "more capable of sort of pushing away the Muslimness…in a way that a brown Pakistani, or Moroccan guy wouldn't." This claim coincides with El-Tayeb's (2012) accusations of the emancipatory logic of the coming out narrative, in which the closet stands not only for a 'hidden' sexuality but the confinement in a backward community one needs to be saved from. At the same time, homosexuality, or sexual exceptionalism, is more easily conflated with whiteness than people of colour: sexual agency itself is white (Haritaworn et al 2008:73). As a white Muslim, Ishrat is perceived by some as further along the developmental path toward such emancipation, and therefore his continued dedication to his cultural and religious heritage appears perplexing to those who adhere to such a homocolonialist narrative. Ishrat even expressed disdain in using the term "white

Muslim" because he saw it as compounding the assumption that Muslimness and whiteness are incompatible. This is one example of how the queer intersectional identities (Rahman 2014) of queer Muslims provide what McCall (2005) would call an intracategorical approach, in which the deconstruction of categories is the starting point of deconstructing systemic inequality (1777).

We're queer, but where is "here"?

The supposed universal coming out script is not only a formula for how to "be your real self" (Crawley & Broad 2004:1) but maps out the spaces in which this self should be expressed and realized. Ambivalence amongst informants towards coming out was espoused with a reluctance to be a part of the bounded 'gay culture' their self-identifications are supposed to give them access to, which was perceived as necessitating a rearrangement of identity hierarchies that grants homosexuality ascendance. Informants perceived gay social life in the UK as rooted in exclusive spaces of consumption, where cruising is stereotypically bound up with drugs, alcohol and promiscuous behaviour (especially in the case of gay men), creating a schism informants were wary of crossing. The commonality amongst female and male informants with respect to a their rejection of a perceived dominant gay culture had to do with a shared commitment to sobriety. Gay male Aakar spoke in disdain about people he used to meet on Grindr who would participate in "chem nights" and weeklong benders, and Faiha claimed they felt like the mainstream queer spaces would need to be shifted away from drinking culture in order for them to feel as though they belonged. What's more, lesbian Sara argued she distanced herself from the feminist/LGBT groups at school because "they would all brag about

being intersectional and then go out and get drunk," which was for her a repugnant hypocrisy that preached inclusion of non-drinking Muslims like her while in practice left them out.

Informants—both those who followed this script and those who rejected it—reflected on entrance into the 'gay secular world' as inextricable from the privileging of a 'gay identity' as hegemonic over all else, and their failure to 'successfully' come out of the closet reflects their refusal to renounce or marginalize their Muslim identity. Ishrat claimed that he never thought he would give up being Muslim to be a gay man: "I didn't want to adopt that whole lifestyle…dancing half naked in a pride parade. It's not my lens, I don't want the gay gaze. I want the Muslim gaze." For Ishrat, keeping his Muslim identity as a primary organizer of his sexuality meant practicing his religion as usual, and not letting him transform into the "gay friend" as if that was the most salient marker of his identity. He did this by engaging in a level of omission about his male partner, so that he could be "known as a Muslim first." Adem also rejected the organization of groups according to sexual 'identity' labels.

> *In my perfect futuristic world, [sexuality] is just so simple thing like what did you eat, what did you drink, no one will judge you if you drink cappuccino while I drink Turkish coffee. It doesn't change who you are or who I am […] I told my sisters, did I change from the moment I told you to now, 5 minutes…did I change for you?*

Homophobia contributes to the negative reaction Adem's sisters had to this divulgence, but he does not see homophobia as the outward rejection of people who 'are' non-heterosexual, but as embedded in a complex matrix of ambivalence towards sexuality as a

marker of identity, which he claims was "introduced [in Turkey] after Westernization." As a man who engages in relationships with both men and women, the Western understanding of gender and sexuality as essentialized demands from Adem a 'liberation' of his 'true self' into a public domain (Rahman 2014:129). His ambivalence toward accepting the label bisexual and sharing it with his family cannot be reduced to a pre-discursive 'Muslim homophobia' but must be understood as partially resulting from the problem of Western concepts of sexual identity not being exportable everywhere. The binary logic of visibility and invisibility through which the closet and the coming out narrative operate rests on a problematic assumption that sexuality is (and should be) ascendant over other categories such as religion and ethnicity, masking the historical specificities of this model and negating the possibility that if the space 'outside the closet' is bounded through these regulations, it is not a desirable location for everyone.

Shifting publics

Narratives of coming out generate communities through the creation of a public language (Plummer 1995: 149), and the rise of transnational LGBT advocacy and missions of the 'global gay' are evidence of the growth of these communities, etching out larger spaces where their narrative is heard. But what is the role of the audience in actually shaping how these stories are told, and subsequently how the narrator emerges through such tellings? If, following Butler's (1990) gender performativity, coming out is a performative act that itself constitutes the identity it purports to describe, those who bear witness to such a performance are highly implicated in its constitution. As "new stories emerge when there are new people to listen to and understand them through

interpretive communities" (Weeks 1998:47), coming out can be seen as an interaction whereby demands for inclusion are made to an audience which has the power to legitimate belonging. Belonging, in the case of intimate citizenship, is not only a contract between an individual and a state institution but is negotiated in everyday lived experience (Oleksy 2009), where shifting publics affect the way one articulates their stories, and thus their position in relation to the border they want to cross.

Sadiq's family's misconstrual that his same-sex relationship was a passing phase forced him to continually re-assert his sexual narrative. "In my family, you've got to keep coming out…they keep falling back into the illusion." Recalling a recent episode involving his sister trying to arrange a wife for him, he said: "she is Western-born, she can't bury her head in the sand like Mum and Dad can," demonstrating that he expects different criteria of acceptance from his sibling than his parents when it comes to talking about his sexuality. Ishrat advocated for a different script of coming out depending on the conservatism of one's audience: "I guess maybe [coming out] works if you're English, you have the divorced parents and your mother is…smoking, drinking in the living room [laughs], but I think if you have conservative parents it's better if you wait until you're in a relationship."

Both Anik and Faiha were adamant in not divulging such sexual stories to their family, and instead sought out different audiences. Faiha started a gay Muslim group in their school where they say: "some people have never even met another gay Muslim before…we just end up talking for hours every time." While Faiha expressed anxiety over making such a group too public, "which would out them and make them not feel safe," other informants sought out larger publics in order to demand recognition. Sadiq

recounted a long debate he had with friends from an Islamic society in school, in which they argued for hours about whether homosexuality had a place within Islam. He told me: "If you really want to strengthen your argument, you've got to speak to someone who doesn't agree," and that even if he could not get full acceptance from the Muslim community, "I crave acknowledgment, even if it's just to say, yeah, we see that you're raising a valid problem." In this way, engaging with a public more hostile to his position than his friends or family forced Sadiq to rearticulate his narrative of sexuality, seeking respectful debaters in the apparent absence of sympathetic consenters.

For some informants, IMI provided a receptive audience with whom they could engage such problems productively. Aakar claimed: "I had taken part in mixed gender prayer with Imaan[7], but because it happened with IMI, I just found it on a really on a larger scale. Because although a lot of people that go to IMI are homosexual, IMI is not just for gay people, it's for everyone." Imaan is a long-running gay Muslim association in the UK through which I actually met Anik and Sadiq, but Aakar's comment shows that the nature of IMI as a space not exclusively for gay Muslims marks it as more meaningful for him as an audience to his citizenship claims. IMI is not a space where the public is united by a shared sexual marginalization, which makes acceptance into it more groundbreaking because it is a synecdoche of integration into wider society itself: where those who form the 'interpretive community' do not necessarily need to have the same condemned sexual identification in order to offer support.

Coming out narratives do not mark the linear and complete movement of a pre-discursive subject into a pre-discursive polity over some static line, but are part of a

[7] Imaan is an organization for gay Muslims that grew out of *Al-Fatiha UK*, founded in 1998.

multiply negotiated process whereby subjects experience and seek out different levels of "outness" that support their desired sexual performativity, and this process moves the border itself depending on where one believes they should belong, and who has the authority to grant such citizenship. While this chapter has outlined how scripts of the 'gay secular world' affect how queer Muslims orient themselves towards their sexual identification, the next chapter will elaborate on how more literal interpretations and innovation of Qu'ranic scripture form the basis of sexual citizenship narratives.

Chapter Three: *Author*-izing scriptural interpretation

Authenticity

> *Aakar is discussing how a particular Arabic phrase in the Qu'ran could be translated into Urdu, and Adem and Haifa argue what the Turkish equivalent is. Ishrat asks for a clarification and Aakar adds a disagreement between Su'unni and Shi'ite Muslims. Ishrat turns to me and jokes: "This is what it's like hanging out with queer Muslims. We're always philosophizing. We philosophize because we have to."* (Fieldnotes, 8 April 2016, Café in Shoreditch.)

To become a subject is to be subjected to norms that govern appropriate speech (Butler 1997, as cited in Cossman 2007:47), and the 'appropriateness' of a particular speech act is contested based on whether it falls within the narrative framework of citizenship of which the subject is a part. In the speech acts that threaten traditional teachings of Islam as well as mainstream conceptions of homosexuality in the UK, queer Muslims are constantly navigating a contested terrain of authenticity in their rights to produce particular utterances, which locate non-heterosexual sexuality within existing narratives of Islam. As we have seen, informants rework a metaphorical queer lexicon, but they also literally innovate the scripture of Islam in order to justify inclusion within it, resisting normative interpretations by deconstructing the text.

The queer Muslim is seen by many as an oxymoron, and despite the overrepresentation of Muslim homophobia in the media, this is not the only barrier to queer Muslims achieving religious and sexual 'authenticity.' Informants talked about people they encountered in the UK who were sometimes skeptical of the compatibility,

because in mainstream LGBT narratives, holding onto religion (and especially Islam) is seen as being obstructive to fully realizing a healthy queer self. Giametta (2014), for example, demonstrates that for gay asylum-seekers to the UK, success is judged according to the ability to "inhabit[] an emancipated temporality [represented by the UK], which separates him or her from the sexual subject who lives in a time (and space) when sexual difference is socially abhorred, namely the backward nonWest" (584). Those who held onto their faith were seen as out of sync with the secular time that not only characterizes the UK but through which queerness is visible, and are instead rendered as passive victims, unable to be "'saved' by neoliberal intervention" (Giametta 2014:591). By contrast, those who described their wish to migrate in a "future-oriented way" (Giametta 2014:589), claiming a desire to escape an overbearing religious household in a peripheral country and seek freedom in the UK, showed "recognisable agency" to those judging validity of gay asylum claims (Giametta 2014:591).

Studies like this one confirm that in Western contexts such as the UK, authenticity tends to be legible only through secularity: "the queer agential subject can only ever be fathomed outside the norming constrictions of religion, conflating agency and resistance" (Puar 2007:15). If we are to re-locate agency as potentially emergent within religious contexts, we also need to be critical of what qualities are attached to secularity that make it appear especially conducive to genuine agency, and how these qualities themselves contain their own structural language. Lewin & Leap (2002) ask: "how is it that some lesbians and gay men do not become proficient in lesbian or gay-related text-making?" (138) However, perhaps a better question to ask would be: why do some queers reject an already-established queer language? In order to expand the narrative framework of queer

subjectivity, authenticity must be conceptualized through different forms of sexual belonging outside the norming constrictions of *secularity*, which, far from being a synonym for freedom, "requires a set of practices, behaviour and life conduct…cultivated by liberal secular norms and conventions" (Amir-Moazami 2011:16). Giametta (2014) begins her investigation by asking: "how can a secular-oriented feminist or queer standpoint avoid the risk of misreading or disregarding religious subjects' lived experiences?" (584). The answer lies in the recognition of these liberal secular norms, and an avowal that they are part of a system of governance not wholly unlike those subscribed to by people of faith.

Ishrat explicitly stated that the gay secular world he experiences in England did not offer him his desired practice of sexual identification, and recognized the constrictions invested therein. "I wanted to be an authentic version of myself. I wanted to be the same person, do all the things I would normally do as a Muslim…not go dancing in a speedo on the street. There is nothing in gay culture that appeals to me. I didn't come out to be a part of it." Authenticity for Ishrat is not achieved through the adoption of a gay identity and the shedding of religious 'tethers' but through the reconciling of these two components of his subjectivity, and IMI provided him a potential space for this to happen. "The first time I attended a prayer, and it was mixed guys and girls, and Halima was leading it, I was shaking. I knew this was how it was supposed to be." Sadiq puts this navigation articulately:

> *It's sort of like you're having to reinvent yourself in a new narrative of sorts, and so you've got to find the contours of that narrative, you've got to figure*

out, alright, 'what are the boundaries?' […] What are the syntactical structures for this particular thing I'm subjectively feeling?

For many, this linguistic venture is achieved through the syntax of Islam, whose narrative censorship has a "productive power" that makes certain kinds of citizens possible (Cossman 2007:47) For example, Aakar, who was raised Jain, describes his sexuality as emergent out of his conversion to Islam.

I found mysteriousness around a different script of language…I'd been raised with Indian mantras and religious kinds of things but then I found the languages of Urdu that were spoken in an Indian way but written in an Arabic kind of thing…and at the same time I was kind of discovering Arabic music and I just came very pulled towards it…I dunno, people say that your sexuality is a very strongly rooted and a very deep desire, and that forms the base of a lot of things in your life. And I found that [...] when I became aware of my feelings, my physical feelings and attraction to people of the same gender, it happened with people who were from a Turkish/Mediterranean/Asian kind of background. So sometimes I do question myself, has my interest in Islam come because of an attraction physically, of an intrigue in a different facet of that culture, I don't know.

Aakar cannot divorce his sexual development from his adopted Muslim identification, as his sexual attraction to men was realized and nurtured through a novel architecture of cultural and religious difference. In fact, when he was outed by his brother to his family, it was not only a discovery of his sexuality but of his new faith, which appeared to his family as irreconcilable. "They said, how can you follow a religion that

condemns that kind of behaviour? Which they were against anyway from a cultural understanding, from an Asian Indian point of view." In the eyes of his parents, his religious conversion and sexual behaviour intersected to invalidate them both, but for Aakar, the authenticity of one is only possible through the other.

Not all informants were so sure of the compatibility of their faith and sexuality, and because the performances of gayness available in the secular world are not universally appealing, many sought out religious and culturally-relevant referents for non-normative sexuality in their sexual narratives. For Sadiq, language was an issue in trying to narrate his identification to his family, because "there is no word for gay in Urdu." This forced him to come out in English to his parents, and his father misunderstood it as a claim to cross-dressing. He then tried to use the story of Lut in the Qu'ran, "because that's the closest thing in the cultural idiom," but it did not bode well for him because, as I will discuss later, the people of Lut end up being obliterated for same-sex acts. Adem, in describing his relationships with men, claims that the cultural reference he could use is steeped in ancient pedophilic practices:

> *"[In Turkey] There is no 'heterosexuality,' there is sexuality, but there is no name for it. And also I am coming from city [Urfa] where most common saying is: 'I can sleep without a blanket but I cannot sleep without a boy.' For a man to be, not [with] a woman…it is not a relationship kind, it is an abusive kind."*

For these informants, the available scripts for communicating a desire to have sex with the same sex are often religiously and culturally imbued with negative significations, whether as a result of literal linguistic constraints or a paucity of narrative referents,

making it difficult to situate themselves within them. This intersectional positionality, however, offered some a revelation of the heteronormative and patriarchal language that structured their speech which might be otherwise hidden. Adem had just gotten married to his partner when we talked, and he told me he still has trouble calling him his "husband," because the language available to him on being a male is steeped in heteronormativity, making him realize he "still ha[s] a lot to learn." Ishrat expressed the same problem, recounting a story where he had friends visiting and, without thinking, ordered his male partner to get them refreshments. One of his friends was taken aback and told him: "you can't talk to a man like that!" to which the other replied: "you can't talk to a woman like that either!"

> *"It was this moment of…conscientization, where there was this rupture in the narrative. I had this script, as someone who identifies as a man, for how to interact with my partner, and it was very gendered, assuming my partner would be female. And it made me realize something about this patriarchal relationship that I wouldn't have if I wasn't gay…in a gay relationship. It provided this window into patriarchy, it really was this disrupture."*

Ishrat's observation perfectly illustrates the power in the intersectional positions of these queer Muslims. "The 'impossibility' of gay Muslims is exactly their power in resistance…their lived experience is disruptive to established identity categories, as it challenges the ontological coherence of these dominant identity narratives" (Rahman 2014:113). Queer Muslims evoke Haraway's cyborg figure in their appearance at the intersections of apparently 'natural' identites, and are therefore disruptive of this fictive dualism. With no origin story in the Western

sense (Haraway 1991:150), the cyborg is a useful conceptual tool in the attempt to contest and queer the mythic Autobiographies (Derrida 2002) of the secular, exceptional, progressive West, as well as the timeless, immutable Islam. Not only do their rejection of the secular scripts of non-normative sexuality lay bare its hierarchies, but frustration with the available narratives of sexuality in Islam also leave them searching for new speech.

Islam in context

While there is enormous diversity in how Muslims across the UK interpret the Qur'an, the censure of homosexuality is almost universally seen as explicitly stated in the Qur'an, the Shari'ah (laws for public/private life) as well as the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), so that alternative readings are difficult and risk being seen as being to innovative. Moreover, a recent study titled "What do British Muslims really think?" demonstrated that over half (52%) think homosexuality should be illegal in Britain (Perraudin 2016). While this polling has been met with criticism of skewed sampling (Shabi 2016), it is important to note that some of my informants perceived Muslim homophobia in the UK as worse than many Muslim-dominant countries, and that the religious conservatism is mounting.

As many queer Muslims reject the secular script of the UK in order to communicate their sexual selves, they look for the appropriate lexicon in the scripture that structures their Muslim worlds. AKT Yip (2005) argues that non-heterosexual Muslims engage in several strategies to harmonize their sexual and religious identities, which include a 'defensive' approach that preserves the sanctity of the sacred word but

argues that it has been misinterpreted; an 'offensive' approach which challenges hegemonic discourse and relocates interpretive authority to the self; and a 'creative' approach that seeks queer voices within the text (54-56). Evidently, not all of these strategies are accepted as legitimate by other Muslims. As Hadara mused: "It's hard because as soon as you start talking about interpretations, the majority of Muslims already think that you have departed from the literal word of Allah." Despite this challenge, most informants used personal experiences as a means to interpret scripture, and validated these reflexive engagements as legitimate, demonstrating agency as emergent out of rather than outside of religious structures. The personal narrative is crucial in these interpretations: in the lack of already-established identity markers of queer Muslims, self-identity is a reflexive project at the core of which is autobiography (Giddens 1991). Importantly, the writings of Amina Wadud, a self-proclaimed Muslim feminist, came up several times in conversations at the mosque and in interviews. She is known for her advocation of an extremely pluralist Islam, which Sadiq remembers as "a view that there are as many Islams as there are Muslims." This philosophy is partially subscribed to by several informants as they attempt to maintain authenticity despite deviating from the normative Islam.

Adem, upon feeling that his sexual inclinations were irreconcilable with his religious teachings, became extremely dedicated to studying Islam, attending a school in Turkey so religious "even the government does not accept it." He claims he was trying to cure himself, and later, when he was accepted to train under an openly gay Imam in South Africa, he was the most difficult student: "I thought we were all just bullshitting,

interpreting it for our own way." He described his epiphany that led to him finally accepting his sexuality in this way:

> *One day, we were talking about the meaning of Islam, we were talking about some words, salam in Arabic, it means peace. You know how in Islam they say Salaam. Strangely, they changed it: it used to mean bringing peace, but changed it to surrender…which changed the meaning of religion. You know that language is not static, it is alive actually. And many words change, I know that because of my Arabic studies that they are changing a lot, but I never knew it changed the meaning of Islam as well […] I realized that most of my studies are rubbish, especially about women. All traditional Islamic studies say that women are half of men. Between 3rd century until now, it means 11 centuries, they were teaching this. But when you go back to first 3 centuries, you see some people who are challenging. Then I realized if they doing this for everything, maybe they are doing the same for homosexuality or for other sexual orientation as well.*

Adem did not support the re-interpretation of scripture until he realized that even the traditional narratives involve interpretations that change according to matrices of power. He defends the sanctity of Islam in arguing that it has been misinterpreted and corrupted over centuries, and his 17 years of intensive theological schooling justifies him transferring authority to himself to judge the acceptability of homosexuality.

Aakar, similarly, discounts the corruptions of other scholars in order to validate his own interpretation:

> *At the centre of Islam, at many religions really, is this message of peace, but it's power that changes the message […]and the Qur'an teaches you to develop your intellect yourself. If it is not interpreted properly, if it is in the hands of any layperson, if you don't have the wisdom or knowledge for reading that text, then literally anything can be excused.*

Aakar implies that, unlike any "layperson," he has the skill to correctly interpret the scripture. He told me how he studied various texts and mixed with many denominations of Muslims, which broadened his perspective, and even went to Syria to learn Arabic a few years ago. His relocating of authority from traditional powers to himself is coupled with a denouncing of imams, who he says: "take advantage of their position to control the people."

The way in which queer Muslims contend with the story of Lut is an important marker of how they position themselves within Islam, as this is the story that is most often used for justification that homosexuality is *haraam* (forbidden). As it goes, two angels disguised as regular men visit Prophet Lut's city, and they encounter a group of men who try to sexually assault them, inciting God to destroy the city in anger. In order to preserve both the sanctity of this writing and the legitimacy of his homosexuality, Sadiq told me: "But that's not me…I'm in a loving relationship." Similarly, Aakar said: "these are men who are trying to rape the angels. It's non-consensual sex that angers God, not sodomy. What I have had with my partners, that is not the same as in the story."

These readings do not dismiss the Qur'anic text but instead enable informants to distance their own sex acts from those which are forbidden, displacing sin onto the matter in which sex is pursued rather than who it is pursued with. These examples of innovative

strategies of self-constitution can be read through Tsing's (2005) metaphor of "friction," in which she conceptualizes the co-production of cultures as "awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (4). Friction for Tsing is "not a synonym of resistance," but rather "a reminder of the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency"(6). This is an important point in the case of queer innovations in religious scripture, because it re-casts the interpretation and application of religious texts as a shifting and *productive* process rather than a tug-of-war, and reminds us that agency is not only visible out of a negation of a particular movement but in its different inflections.

While some can creatively queer the story of Lut to preserve both the written word as well as their sexual practices, other informants expressed anxiety over these creative navigations. Hadara, for example, said:

> *I respect those who can reconcile better than me their faith and sexuality, really. But at the end of the day scripture is the word of God…and having sex with the same sex clearly makes God very angry! When you start progressive readings of the text, you see things that aren't there…this whole mental gymnastics thing. I don't know if I can do it.*

Hadara's reluctance to engage in some of the strategies as the others to queer the scripture makes it unsurprising that she eventually left Islam, incapable (or unwilling) to find a place in its narrative. She told me, exasperatedly: "religion has set in stone certain views about morality which were common at a certain time and made them true for every time and place, and that's the issue we have." Sadiq addressed the same issue:

> *The narrative of Islam that we have, this really is an aporia, this is a kind of Derridean moment where the narrative really shows itself up as possibly unraveling before your eyes […] Your narrative, what you take as the authentic Islam, that you think is unchanging from 7th century onward, suddenly starts to… maybe it isn't unchangeable, maybe what I've been brought up in, is a sort of manufactured constructed entity, and I've just taken it as an ontological object, as never changing.* (Sadiq)

There is a clash of different experiences of time at stake, where the Qu'ran, taken as timeless and immutable, is challenged by those who claim that it has always been bound up with shifting power relations. What's more, this contestation is occurring in the context of the UK, which, like much of the West, adheres to a model of progress that assumes it alone possesses modernity and therefore marks time in its own way (Rahman 2014). Butler (2008) argues that hegemonic narratives of progress do not simply rank 'cultures' along a line of development, but that ideas of what is "now" is bound up with geo-political imaginations of relevant borders, so that time itself is conceptualized differently according to one's orientation toward a constructed modernity. Definitions of the sphere of modernity as occupied by Western nations operate according to a temporality that sees freedoms as increasingly unfolding in a narrative of time that is progressive in nature, and that those who have not yet 'arrived' at modernity do not develop in the same direction (Butler 2008). In order to contest this unidirectional narrative, Manalansan (2003), in his ethnographic account of diasporic gay Filipino men in New York, describes his informants as "charting hybrid and complex paths that

deviate from a teleological and developmental route to gay modernity" (xi). Freedom in the form of sexual rights politics is deeply imbued with problems of time and progress, and in this case, Islam, as a representation of "another time" requires emancipation in order to coincide with and thus 'achieve' not only the same stage, but the same pace as Western liberalism (Butler 2008). Attempts to queer the scripture in a way that makes room for their subjectivities thus involves unhinging Islam from the realm of timelessness without seeing it as an inchoate stage in a desired trajectory of development.

At this awkward juncture, I argue queer Muslims, in their claims to legitimate sexual citizenship, are involved in establishing zones of personal time foundational to self-actualization (Giddens 1991). However, the establishing of such paths are invested with their own exclusive markers. In transferring themselves authority to interpret and 'queer' Islamic scripture in their own ways, maintaining their status as Muslim subjects, queer Muslims are implicated in their own projects of homonormativity.

Homonormativity amongst queer Muslims

Discourses of authenticity are predicated upon a parallel impermissible and condemned inauthenticity that haunts its borders. "The self-disciplining citizen needs an unruly subject against which to emerge, an obscenity against which it can be produced as normal" (Cossman 2007:68). Queer theorists have pointed out how homosexuals have long been the unruly outcast of heteronormative citizenship, and more recently, discourses of homonormativity point out a shift whereby some queers achieve normative

status at the expense of those sexual performances that do not exhibit "highly privatized, monogamous and white(ned) docile subjectivity" (Agathangelou et al. 2008:124). While homonormativity privileges whiteness, the possibility of homonormativity being practiced by non-white actors is largely unaddressed. For example, Hubbard & Wilkinson (2015) argue that the London 2012 Olympics encouraged the marginalization of non-normative sexualities, cultivating a 'gay friendly' image tied to particular "responsible" performances of sexuality as touted by white affluent gay males. While their analysis is good, in arguing that white affluent gay males are the primary benefactors of homonormativity, they also assume that this demographic is its only purveyor, ruling out the possibility that other groups harness homonormative performances of respectability, and assuming that homonormativity itself must always be tied to whiteness.

Contrary to this assumption, informants in this investigation mobilized their own homonormative regulations of queer sexuality in order to safeguard their Muslim identification. Muslim authenticity for them is emergent out of the policing of appropriate performances of queerness that are seen as compatible with existing heteronormative attitudes toward relationships and family life. Monogamous relationships and marriage were desired by informants as a legitimate and important existing script through which their sexuality could be performed, and the emphasis on this normativity for some was a strategy of inclusion within Muslim spaces that might be hostile towards their sexual choices. Informants expressed that being in a committed, faithful relationship is extremely important to them: "I want to do everything I would do if I was straight, but just with a man" (Aakar). Sadiq argued:

> *The Muslim community has huge stereotypes of the gay community, they think that it really is just all promiscuous, it's all sweaty orgies. And if you could just sort of say 'No actually it's not that. One goes to Tesco. One does their shop.' And you just get on with it, right. Relationships last, you know, they don't all just break down and it's not just about sex.*

In invoking 'going to Tesco' and a dismissal of 'sweaty orgies' for lasting relationships, Sadiq uses the homonormative language of a "depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 2002:179), claiming inclusion in the Muslim community through a performance of respectability he sees as rooted in monogamy. Sara similarly suggested that anyone coming out to parents of faith should wait until they are in a "stable relationship" so the news will be less disruptive. On top of monogamy, Faiha defended her Muslim-ness against "other gay Muslims who go out to clubs and drink, which I find a bit jarring." In some ways, the homonormative script of queerness, which these informants utilize in their own ways, intersects with available scripts of being a respectable Muslim, so that performing homonormativity actually provides a point of access into Muslim authenticity. In the Derridean aporia that Sadiq invoked earlier, whereby coupling homosexuality and Islam causes the narrative to unravel, these defenses can be read as attempts to re-knot the narrative; to re-introduce some sort of coherence. Christopher Grant-Kelly (2009) argues that queer Muslims are likely to be fluent in several 'Discourses,' which are ways of enacting socially recognizable identities (231), but these discursively-produced identities, in the regulatory syntax of Islam, are also not translatable across all queer experience.

These judgments reveal that queer Muslims are engaged in writing scripts of homonormativity that theories of homonationalism assume solely belong to queer liberal secularity (Puar 2007:13). If theories of homonormativity, and of homonormative nationalism have focused on how the establishment of a privileged performance of queerness proliferates through the "violent capture" of disenfranchised Others (Altman 2001:94), in which "homonormative and queer gay men enact forms of national/racial or other belongings by contributing to a collective vilification of Muslims" (Puar 2007: 21), we need to theorize the enactment of homonormative belongings by queer Muslims as a *reification* rather than a *resistance* to their religious norms, and investigate how such demands for inclusion into existing scripts of Muslim sexual belonging rely on the parallel exclusion of non-monogamous, non-domestic performances of sexuality.

Faiha asserted that even if she was in a heterosexual relationship she would not talk to her parents about it until marriage was a possibility, and Sadiq claimed that it was difficult to talk about his gay identification with his parents because sexual talk itself is so censored in his household. It appears that this de-sexualization of homosexuality is central to the production of homonormativity amongst queer Muslims. Ishrat's story provides another example. When he was 17, he was taken to a clinic to get tested for HIV (which his parents insisted upon, despite his not being sexually active). "The doctor asked me: 'Do you fuck or get fucked?' And I was so shocked, this older man speaking to me about this, I wasn't used to it. And I didn't go back to the clinic for a long time after that." The overtly sexual nature of the doctor's language was in some ways repugnant to Ishrat, and although at the time of the interview it had been almost twenty years since that incident, I noticed a continuity in the way Ishrat thought homosexuality should be talked

about: an adherence to de-sexualized scripts that promoted romantic love. For example, he is in the middle of writing a play about two men, whereby: "we wanted to write something about falling in love that doesn't have to be about sex […] a different narrative of gayness that doesn't have to be sexual." On top of this literal script of regulatory queerness, his own burgeoning relationship with a man at the time of the interview followed the heteronormative formula provided by Islam. Another of my informant's had set him up with a friend who lives abroad, in what they joked is "a very Muslim way to meet someone," because it happened according to the logic of a regular arranged marriage, only between two men.

Islam is a narrative, and finding queerness within its grammar involves strategies of contextualization and translation, like any literary analysis. However, in order to maintain and negotiate an elusive 'authenticity' as a Muslim, queer Muslims contribute to erecting and policing a border of sexual citizenship that privileges domestic, monogamous relationships over other performances of queerness, in their own homonormative acts that are under-theorized in discourses of homonationalism. Moonwomon (as cited in Leap & Lewin 2002) argues that: "[t]he authentic lesbian voice is characterized not by use of a special lexicon, but by implication, inference, and presupposition that reveal a speaker's stance within the territories of various societal discourse" (138). Authenticity, not just for the lesbian, is rooted in positionality, and for queer Muslims, appearing at the intersection of perceived antithetical ontologies can be precarious.

Conclusion

This work has elaborated on how queer Muslims in London attempt to situate themselves within, and therefore transform, the dominant narratives of homosexuality and Islam, grappling with a new language through which to communicate their sexual and religious selves, and moving the border of sexual citizenship in the process. Queer Muslims, considered oxymoronic according to a temporal narrative of progress that ranks sexual 'exceptionalism' as part of a desired modernity from which the non-West (and especially Islam) is out of sync, are the theoretically queer entrypoint from which to begin to undo dominant assumptions about proper performances of non-heterosexual sexuality, and the narratives within which they are legible.

Discourses of homonationalism tend to be totalizing in their scope, and in a context such as the UK, where informants perceive the linking of Islam and sexual intolerance as largely covert, it is necessary to apply an approach that addresses the friction between individual actors and the competing hierarchies of sexual respectability they participate in revising: whether it is through re-affirmation or contestation. In other words, homonationalism needs to be re-situated within the realm of lived experience in order to map out the micro movements and dynamicity that are lost in its abstraction, and subsequently design a potential strategy for amendment. An ethnographic approach is useful in capturing these local reformulations as well as accessing the subjective experiences of informants' embodied intersections of 'Muslim' and 'queer' out of which they are emergent.

I have attempted to show how in my queer Muslim informants' sexual citizenship narratives, existing formulaic scripts promoted as universal by mainstream secular LGBT

groups are not always compatible with their imaginations of an 'authentic' queer self. Informants articulate claims to sexual belonging not through an emancipatory framework but in a way that harnesses personally-, religiously- and culturally-relevant referents, and this practice threatens to change the realm of sexual citizenship itself. In relocating authority to themselves to determine appropriate and authentic construals of non-heterosexual sexuality, my informants at once challenge Western ethnocentric notions of agency as rooted in the white secular queer and authorize themselves to invigorate Islamic texts to make a space for such performance. They thus make claims to sexual citizenship that enable them to enact border crossings into a larger queer community in a way that enables their continued membership in an unfolding Muslim category. However, informants enact these border crossings through a parallel inadmission of other more 'promiscuous' Muslims subjects, so that their own transgressions of normative Muslimness are tempered with a performance of perceived sexual respectability.

The disparate interpretive audiences for the sexual stories in this investigation lay bare how individuals orient themselves toward different groups in order to legitimate their authentic membership, and how these shifting publics inflect narrations of belonging with different meanings. In this case, IMI provided the stage for a symbolic community devoted to promoting inclusivity. This was important to some informants in order to have an audience that was receptive to their non-normative sexual identifications, but others craved more of a focus on disclosure and discussion, which IMI made only indirectly accessible.

Citizenship is multiply contested by different groups of variously-aligned actors with their own schemes of hierarchical difference (Rofel 1999: 458) which are mobilized

in continually reformulated narratives of proper and improper enactments, and sex is a powerful site through which these enactments are regulated and policed. Queer Muslims' alterations of both the secular scripts of homosexual belonging and literal religious scripture reveal different imagined communities whereby they attempt to unravel the naturalized universalisms of both, and their articulations of legitimate belonging reveal their own techniques of in/exclusion. Investigations into subjective experiences of homonationalist imaginaries, and the sexual citizenship claims that are mobilized as alternatives would benefit from further research on the gendered experiences of queer Muslims, more profound investigations on the differences between migrant and non-migrant queer Muslim sexualities in the UK, as well as research into class differences that alter access to different resources with respect to constructing meaningful notions of sexualized belonging. If gay rights has provided the language for Islamophobia and xenophobia (Mepschen et al 2010), it is imperative to articulate and communicate a new metaphorical semiotics of belonging which is constituted out of multiple translations of non-heterosexual sexual expression inclusive of non-Western and non-secular imaginations, and ethnography is a valuable dialogical medium through which we can enact this queer, and queering, narrative.

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