



Dalton, Andrew (2023) Is there a space to fight back? Exclusionary queer and Islamic spaces and resistance from queer Muslims. In: Justice After Stonewall: LGBT Life Between Challenge and Change. Routledge, London. ISBN 9781032260525

Downloaded from: <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/16769/>

Usage guidelines

Please refer to the usage guidelines at <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact sure@sunderland.ac.uk.

Chapter 23 – Is there a space to fight back? Exclusionary queer and Islamic spaces and resistance from queer Muslims

Drew Dalton

1. Introduction

In 2019, many queer organisations and individuals in the West celebrated 50 years since the Stonewall riots of New York and the invention of the pride flag, which is now entering its third decade of existence. Change has been significant in the United Kingdom, with positive changes in law and policy toward queer people, as well as the growing acknowledgement of the acceptability of social attitudes toward 'homosexuality'.¹ Several scholars of sexuality have observed this sea change and have suggested that we now live in a 'post-closet era' where the identity options for queer people have grown significantly and queer people are no longer confined to their 'gaybourhoods' in major cities.² Other positive movements have seen the rise of Pride celebrations, a growing acceptance of openness toward sexuality and gender identity within places of employment and even a change in Relationship and Sex Education in schools proposed for 2020 to include queer relationships and families. However, in contrast to this, and within the same year marking this 50th anniversary, the United Kingdom saw parents of predominantly Muslim children protesting outside of Parkfield Primary School in Birmingham against the school's 'No Outsiders' programme which discussed same-sex family structures, under the notion that this was not suitable for children of ethnoreligious backgrounds (in this case, Islamic and South Asian). These protests raised and brought to light media questions about the intolerance of the predominantly South Asian Muslim community toward queer people and whether Muslims 'fit in' to wider British values and changing social attitudes.³

In contrast to this event, once Manchester Pride and several other Pride organisations in the United Kingdom announced that they were using a new and updated version of the pride flag, with an additional brown and black stripe to represent people of colour, this caused friction within the queer community. Many argued passionately that it should not be changed from the original colours and that these colours

¹ British Social Attitudes Survey, 'Homosexuality' (2013) Available at: <http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/personal-relationships/homosexuality.aspx> (accessed 20 August 2019).

² S. Seidman, *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life* (New York, Routledge 2002) 5; A. Ghaziani, *There Goes the Gaybourhood?* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press 2014) 29.

³ *The Spectator*, 'Should Muslim Parents be Allowed to Challenge LGBT Lessons?' (2019) (Online). Available at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/should-muslim-parents-be-allowed-to-challenge-lgbt-lessons-> (accessed 17 March 2020).

represented all peoples in a 'colour blind' approach to the community.⁴ However, this was met with opposition by many others, arguing that stopping this change is a form of racism and stating that the addition of the brown and black stripes is a fitting representation of people of colour within the queer community who have historically been, and continue to be, ignored and who are widely held up as the group, alongside trans people, who started the Stonewall Riots in the first place.⁵

Nonetheless, this wider social acceptance of queer people has not necessarily percolated to all levels of society and neither has racism and islamophobia abated within the United Kingdom at large. With these events and challenges in mind, this chapter will discuss the experiences of queer Muslims within the United Kingdom. It will posit the notion that queer Muslims still face unique barriers on a number of levels, including representations of Muslims and queer citizenship, the heteronormativity of Islamic spaces and finally, the nature of racism and islamophobia within queer communities. This intersectionality of issues creates the unique lived conditions of queer Muslims today. So, it is vital to examine where queer Muslims form sites of resistance and seek support whilst they traverse the bridge between their ethnoreligious communities and the larger, predominantly white, queer communities. This chapter will explore the position faced by queer Muslims in the 'cash of cultures' debate in which Muslims are increasingly represented as the ideological 'Other' in post-9/11 politics. It will further examine in light of this how some queer Muslims have fashioned their own sense of belonging in queer spaces of their own making as sites of resistance to political ideology, racism and Islamophobia felt within queer communities and the pressures of heteronormativity within Islamic spaces. As a point of reference, the author uses the term 'queer' to broadly refer and encompass many of the identities included in the sexuality and gender identity spectrum (the LGBTQI+ acronym).

2. Representations of Muslims and queer citizenship: a clash of cultures?

The representations of Muslims (and of Islam) has altered significantly throughout socio-historical time periods and this still has effects on how people in the West perceive Muslim communities to be. This has shaped modern day discourses of Islam and has fed into Islamophobic tropes of how Muslims act, behave and treat others. Within postcolonial theory, the classic work of Said argues that early 'expert' knowledge of geographical spaces of the Middle and Far East, and their peoples, was developed in the academies of the West and through the scientific expeditions of academics, they formed the 'exotic object', the 'Orient'.⁶ These exotic objects were viewed as different to that of the people of the West and with the 'Orient' full of people ('Orientals'), who were seen as traditional rather than modern, suspicious and corrupt rather than

⁴ A. Kotak, 'Combat Racism by Adding Black and Brown Stripes to the LGBT+ Rainbow Flag ' (2019), at <https://www.openlynews.com/i/?id=f81e044d-ac93-44dd-bf89-b7fb9bec68e7> (accessed 20 August 2019).

⁵ See Kotak, **n 4**.

⁶ E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage Books 1978) 160.

industrious and enlightened, and fanatical rather than scientifically interested in the truth. Through discourses of Western enlightenment, Western scholars have created this imaginary place and of the people who inhabit it. Narratives not only from academia but from early film and media, emerged of romanticised yet highly sexualised, dominant Middle Eastern men who covet Western, white women and who stand in contrast to Middle Eastern women, who are portrayed as mysterious, submissive and exotic. Said argues that due to this knowledge coming from Western scholars and academics, this formed wider policy decisions of how the West would interact with other people. Despite its inaccuracies and stereotypes, this has become the dominant norm when discussing Muslims, which has garnered modern popular imagination in the media as the 'Other' especially in post 9/11 times.⁷ Whilst this argument presented by Said has come under critique via 'Occidentalism',⁸ which argues that the 'Orient' has a similar reductive view of the West and so there are misrepresentations on both sides, the power relations are not the same. Whilst some Muslims in Arab states can use anti-Western arguments and some economic influences, this pales into comparison with American and Western economic geopolitical power and dominance over other cultures.⁹ Nonetheless, Said's arguments still hold relevance in how Muslims are represented as the 'Other' and conversely, complicated by queer Muslims whereby to exist is to be framed within a wider discourse of queer sexuality and gender identity as a 'Western' invention and not part of a wider Muslim culture. This distancing technique was highlighted in the 2019 Birmingham school protests in the United Kingdom, whereby some Muslim parents campaigned against the teaching of same-sex family structures by using the narrative that they were 'not part of Muslim culture'.¹⁰ Queer sexualities and identities should always be analysed in light of ideological, geo-political and nation state framing, which will be discussed next.

In terms of the historical shift from European colonialism to present day neo-colonialism, Bracke argues that homosexuality has 'shifted columns' – whereby once it was used as a descriptor for markers of uncivility and deviance, it is increasingly being framed as a tool of 'civilisation' of cultures.¹¹ Islam is imagined as an alternative to European modernity, or yet to achieve modernity¹² and those of Islamic origin as childlike and of another time, who are yet to develop into modern adults.¹³ In several EU countries in recent years, conflicts over homophobic violence and racism have increasingly pitted

⁷ S. Garner, *Racisms: An Introduction*. (2nd Edition. London, Sage Publications 2017) 238.

⁸ I. Buruma and A. Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (New York, Penguin 2004) 10.

⁹ Garner (n 7) 239.

¹⁰ Donna Ferguson, "'We Can't Give In': the Birmingham School on the Frontline of Anti-LGBT Protests", *The Observer*, 26 May 2019, at <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/may/26/birmingham-anderton-park-primary-muslim-protests-lgbt-teaching-rights> (accessed 20 August 2019).

¹¹ S. Bracke, 'From "Saving Women" to "Saving Gays": Rescue Narratives and their Dis/continuities', (2012) 19:1 *European Journal of Women's Studies* 237-252.

¹² J. Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London, Verso 2010) 10.

¹³ D. DasGupta, and R. K. DasGupta, 'Being Out of Place: Non-Belonging and Queer Racialisation in the U.K.' (2018) 27 *Emotion, Space and Society* 31-38.

Commented [PB1]: The original had 'covert' – I take it you mean 'cove't'?

Commented [AD(2R1): I do! Covet

mainstream queer and, in particular, Muslim ethnic communities against each other at the national level as well as the local geographical level. The infamous 'clash of civilisations' argument by Samuel Huntington has received widespread support in the wake of the 'war on terror', which appears to have translated into a 'clash of subcultures',¹⁴ whereby inherently homophobic Muslim men lambast, attack and murder non-Muslim queer people. As a result of this, a narrative has emerged of a Muslim and gay binary with distinct and polarised positions into an 'Islam versus homosexuality tug of populations war'.¹⁵ Within popular discourse, this posits a progressive, secular West versus a conservative, undemocratic and theocratic Islam. This has largely been informed by mainstream and queer media outlets representing examples of images of ISIS attacks toward gay men in Syria or of nation state leaders and some Muslim preachers' condemnation of homosexuality in the Arab world and Sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁶ It has also been further fuelled by feminist and queer condemnations of Islam as deeply patriarchal, homophobic and hostile toward women and minorities as a new formation of racism.¹⁷ The 'Other' as Muslim has become threatening and highlighted to queer people via media outlets and this fuels the fear of the 'Other' to those who live in a largely secular queer community in Europe.

Due to these wider ideological positionings, the lines of civility and barbarism have been redrawn in a discourse which informs who is included and excluded from nation state citizenship as the apparent threat to white female and queer people looms from the differentially 'perverse others' from the Muslim world.¹⁸ This has altered the way in which queer 'subjects' relate to their nation-states as Western queer people are increasingly taken into the 'national fold' as a process which is deeply racialised.¹⁹ Puar refers to the term 'homonationalism' to refer to the specific use of (homo)sexuality in the discourse of nationalism in the USA and as a post-9/11 strategy of homonormativity within nationalistic and patriotic discourse.²⁰ Homonationalism becomes a tool in which to position a nation state's 'national gays' higher than that of 'racial and sexual others'²¹ who are positioned as from the 'outside.' Similar to this, Puar's concept of 'femonationalism' sees the rights of white Western women as threatened by Muslim outsiders who would

¹⁴ N. Heidenreich, 'The Struggle Between the Subcultures – Homophobia vs. Racism?' In E. H. Yekane and B. Michaelis (eds), *Queer Across the Humanities: Perspectives on Queer Theory* (Berlin, Querverlag 2005) 30.

¹⁵ J. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press 2007) 2.

¹⁶ Michelle Nichols, 'Islamic State Throw Gay People off High Buildings UN to Hear', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 August 2015, at <https://www.smh.com.au/world/islamic-state-throws-gay-people-off-high-buildings-un-to-hear-20150814-giyu0t.html> (accessed 17 March 2020).

¹⁷ K. Kosnick, 'A Clash of Subcultures? Questioning Queer-Muslim Antagonisms in the Neoliberal City', (2015) *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 687-703.

¹⁸ J. Puar (n 15) 45.

¹⁹ Kosnick (n 17) 690.

²⁰ L. Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. (Boston, Beacon Press 2003) 32.

²¹ A. Yildiz, "'Turkish, Dutch, Gay and Proud": Mapping out the Contours of Agency in Homonationalist Times' (2017) 20:5-6 *Sexualities* 699-714.

seek to cover, veil and limit the freedoms of them. In fact, many mainstream queer movements of the global North have unwittingly, and sometimes not so, become an agent of this racialisation and islamophobia in post-9/11 times, as both femonationalism and homonationalism have redrawn concepts of 'good' and 'bad' nations and the views of their subjects within them. Kosnick presents the notion that the policing of Muslim communities in terms of gender equality is now a global phenomenon in post-9/11 times, due to three key tropes used in the war on terror and its underpinning of the 'clash of cultures' polarisation.²² These three key figures have evolved from this and have been constructed as the *dangerous* Muslim man, the *imperilled and fragile* Muslim woman, and the *civilised* European, creating a threatening 'Other' as outlined by Said. This redefining of 'who belongs' in terms of national citizenship places White Western women and White queer people as 'proper' citizens who are accorded protection by the liberal nation state and who stand in sharp contrast to racialised 'others' who exist to subvert and curtail the rights of both groups, or who exist outside of the fold.²³

Okin argued that the debate about incompatibility of religious minorities in the West was already forming pre-9/11 and whilst most have focused on gender, some emerged around the incompatibility with sexual diversity and Muslim culture.²⁴ Anti-immigrant right wing politics has become emboldened by this and this has affected the larger White feminist and gay activist movements, as Fekete argues:

Most alarmingly, even some feminists and gay activists are now part of an overtly right-wing consensus that calls for immigration controls specifically targeted at immigrants from the Muslim world. Central to this process is a generalised suspicion of Muslims, who are characterised as holding on to an alien culture that, in its opposition to homosexuality and gender equality, threatens core European values²⁵

This illustrates the dichotomy of identities amongst queer Muslims whereby 'queer' and 'Muslim' are viewed as mutually exclusive identity categories, with queer as Western and Muslim as unable to accept public equality of queer people. This assumption becomes highlighted by the press and media as something evident within the attitudes of Muslims and so feeds into their 'Otherness' and continues to position Muslims as an 'Other' to Western ideals of democracy and tolerance of sexual minorities as a result.

Massad argues that there have been policy changes at the national and global level by Western world leaders, who have strategically used sexual minority groups and gender equality to their own ends and to continuously represent Muslim-majority countries as the 'Other.' In reaction to this, Massad contends that LGBT identity politics has been imposed upon Arab and Middle Eastern Societies as part of a 'gay

²² Kosnick (n 17) 687-703.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ S. M. Okin, 'Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some Tensions' (1998) 108:4 *Ethics* 661-684.

²⁵ L. Fekete, 'Enlightened Fundamentalism? Immigration, Feminism and the Right' (2006) 48:2 *Race and Class* 1-22

international agenda' of American neo-imperialism in the region.²⁶ Queer Arabs, he contends in his polemic, are succumbing to a false consciousness levered upon them by Western interests which exploit them in the false belief that they are protecting their rights. It is easy to see currency within the argument that the West has this agenda, especially notable when former UK Prime Minister David Cameron stated that countries (many of which were Muslim majority) who practice homophobic and transphobia policy making should be denied UK international aid.²⁷ However, intellectuals such as Massad appear more concerned with ethnic solidarity rather than ensuring the safety of the most vulnerable members of a society whom he purports to defend.²⁸ Furthermore, Massad's arguments have often simplistically dismissed global (and Western) queer rights movements as the 'gay international' lobby and his argument that Western LGBT identity politics causes harm has been disputed via the protestation of LGBT activist movements across Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world, as well as the lack of evidence of his theory on the lived experiences of queer people in those nation states.²⁹ As discussed, the 'Other' has emerged through ideological, geo-political and social influences and has seemingly solidified Islam as an apparent monolith, positioned as a threatening and heterosexual (Brown and Black) Muslim culture, which has become framed against that of enlightened Western and White queer sexualities. This polarisation works to reinforce many non-Muslim queer viewpoints toward how they perceive Muslims, as well as how queer Muslims living and born in the United Kingdom are seen and treated in queer communities. In fact, queer space needs to be understood as not just structured through sexuality as 'these everyday spaces intersect with various other scales of spatiality, including national, international and transnational spaces.'³⁰ Added into this mix are problematic ideas of 'race', racialisation and the enactment of racism and Islamophobia within queer communities, which add problems for queer Muslims as they seek to access queer spaces, which will be examined in the next section.

3. Queer Muslims in queer spaces

Before attitudes to queer Muslims are discussed, it is vital to examine what is meant by the concept 'Islamophobia' as it has been debated by several leading academics and confusion still reigns as to whether it is a form of racism or religious intolerance. Islamophobia as a concept emerged in recent years and was first discussed in the social sciences, yet it covers a phenomenon which is not new and is largely

²⁶ J. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 2008) 160.

²⁷ H. Seckinelgin, 'Same-Sex Lives Between the Language of International LGBT Rights, International Aid and Anti-Homosexuality' (2018) 2 *Global Social Policy* 1-26.

²⁸ S. Kugle Siraj al-Haqq, *Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Muslims* (London, New York University Press 2014) 4.

²⁹ M. Rahman, 'Queer as Intersectionality: Theorising Gay Muslim Identities' (2010) 44:5 *Sociology* 944-961.

³⁰ K. Browne, J. Lim, and G. Brown (eds), *Geographies of Sexualities: Theory, Practices and Politics* (Surrey, Ashgate Press 2007) 12.

a process of homogenizing all Muslims into a negative, backward and exotic idea of the 'Other' as a group.³¹ Islamophobia is a complex phenomenon and has been argued to be more about 'race' than religious prejudice by some authors,³² though this has been hotly contested by others who have argued that it is more about being about an aversion to Islam as a religion.³³ In critique of the idea that Islamophobia is strictly an aversion to religion, Islamophobia has developed within the public imagery and has developed a 'Muslim-ness' that allows Muslims to become inserted into one category based on physical, religious, cultural and national genealogies rather than only the values and behaviour of religious people themselves.³⁴ As such, Moodod and Werbner argue that Islamophobia is about *both* 'race' and religion and it has become a 'new' form of cultural racism and exclusion which is pernicious as other traditional forms of racism, and in doing so, it has become something that is both biological and cultural.³⁵ In agreement with this, Garner argues that it is unimportant whether 'Muslims' are a priori a 'race' because the patterns and behaviours of non-Muslims group people under the heading 'Muslim' and deal with them as if they share particular characteristics, beyond that of being identified to a global religion.³⁶ As such, Islamophobia functions like many forms of traditional racisms by maintaining binary ideals (such as civilized versus barbaric), but it is more complex in that it collapses a complex set of positions into one negative view. This negative view is then projected onto Muslims as a cultural stigma and then works further by jettisoning any non-Muslim communities of any similar practices or norms (for example, domestic abuse, control of women and sexual minorities). This form of Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism involving both 'race' and religion as set out by Moodod and Werbner and Gardner, will be the one which is utilised in this chapter moving forward. The following section will look at attitudes toward queer Muslims in queer spaces and the intersectionalities of queer people of colour and Islamic identity, paying specific attention to how racism and islamophobia find outlets within queer communities. Secularism and notions of 'coming out' form a key backbone of many queer communities, and often as a rite of passage to gain access to queer spaces in their entirety, however this can be problematic for many queer Muslims when this is set as a standard of modern queer politics and identity. As set out by Massad earlier, some mainstream national and global 'gay rights' organisations or groups have also framed queer Muslims in such a way so that they should consider rejecting their religion upon 'coming out,' and so they reinforce the negative stereotype of Islam as a threat to modernity, whilst pushing queer Muslims to see

³¹ Garner (n 7) 239.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ F. Halliday, 'Islamophobia Reconsidered' (1999) 22:5 *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 892-902.

³⁴ Garner (n 7) 240.

³⁵ T. Moodod and P. Werbner (eds) *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community* (London, Zed Books 1997) 30.

³⁶ Garner (n 7) 242.

themselves as 'victims' with no sense of agency.³⁷ In this light, traditional cultures and perspectives, and especially religion, are often posited as incompatible with a modern queer identity and of an ideal coming out process which will label them with an identity. The 'freedom of norms' is seen as the 'queer ideal,' however the atheism of the queer idealised subject often overlooks religion and faith as being a place of identity and difference.³⁸ In fact, 'queer Muslim subjects are framed as subjects outside the White gay spaces...and are required to disavow their ethnic-religious identities in order to be read as appropriately queer' and if this is not jettisoned, queer Muslims may face islamophobia as a result. In the United Kingdom, there is a 'stubborn thread of islamophobia' within queer secular spaces, whereby queer Muslims face Islamophobia within the queer community and beyond as a result of increased stigmatisation of Muslims by the press and by some politicians.³⁹ This pervasive idea that individuals cannot be queer and religious is still common and is exacerbated by the influence of the media, which also inherently paints religious groups and queer communities in opposition to each other.⁴⁰

Added to this mix, many queer young people of colour perceive a White discourse around the 'coming out' process, whereby this is represented as an individualistic action by queer White people. However, this is often different for many queer people of colour as coming out is about a larger social change which may involve a greater consciousness about challenging social practices and defying tradition.⁴¹ Furthermore, many British South Asian men may feel hypervisible in queer spaces due to their ethnicity and religious or Islamic identity, and so feel unable to derive feelings of acceptance and inclusion within these spaces⁴² and so as a result, anticipate rejection on the basis of their identity as a minority. This is often compounded by the issue that many fear that they will be recognised and identified by ethnoreligious members and their sexual identity may be disclosed by somebody on the gay scene or even by family members who could see them. However, it has been observed in some research that young British South Asian gay men go to queer spaces to seek solace from their estrangement of their ethnic and religious identities.⁴³ However, this is often to a point, as interpersonal contact in 'gay spaces' can pose additional social and psychological spaces for queer Muslims as they can perceive a risk of sexual disclosure as a result of associating with White British queer people who are perceived as being 'too open'

³⁷ Kugle (n 28) 4.

³⁸ S. D. Shannahan, 'Some Queer Questions from a Muslim Faith Perspective' (2010) 13:6 *Sexualities* 671-684.

³⁹ DasGupta and DasGupta (n 13) 31-38; M. Waites, 'Analysing Sexualities in the Shadow of War: Islam in Iran, the West and the Work of Reimagining Human Rights' (2008) 11:1 *Sexualities* 64-73.

⁴⁰ S. R. Smallwood, "'Queerituality': Reforming What it Means to be a Religious Queer' (2015) 36 *The Vermont Connection* 73-81.

⁴¹ O. C. Fox and T. E. Ore, '(Un) Covering Normalised Gender and Race Subjectivities in LGBT "Safe Spaces"' (2010) 3 *Feminist Studies* 629-649. See also Shannanhan (n 38).

⁴² R. Jaspal, 'Coping with Perceived Ethnic Prejudice on the Gay Scene' (2017) 14:2 *Journal of LGBT Youth* 172-190.

⁴³ R. Jaspal and M. Cinnirella, 'Identity Processes, Threat, and Interpersonal Relations: Accounts from British Muslim Gay Men', (2012) 59:2 *Journal of Homosexuality* 215-240.

about their sexual identities, as well as the fear of religious discrimination from non-Muslim men. One possible method of managing a stigmatised status is through concealing or 'passing' one's stigma. However, in order to do this with success, the stigmatised individual must be able to hide their stigma in such a way in which to make it invisible to others – however, this can be fraught with inner pressures.⁴⁴ To those who could not hide their Islamic identity and due to ethnicity being a visible characteristic, several respondents in Jaspal's research believed that White gay men held erroneous assumptions about South Asian culture and about the Islamic faith, due to a growing Islamophobia in the United Kingdom and felt that White gay men fixated their attention on their ethnic identity which inhibited discussions around 'normal issues'.⁴⁵ This made them feel different on the gay scene and exacerbated their feelings of being in the sexual outgroup.

Voices that have dominated Western queer activism both past and present, have largely been White and as such the 'community' has become homogenised, based on a false sense of cohesion being fostered which ignored the oppression of people of colour within these 'safe spaces'.⁴⁶ The discourse of 'safe spaces' within many queer communities fails to account for intersectionality of experiences as it relies on a binary logic that focuses on the elimination of homophobia and heterosexism, creating a singular and marginalised identity in how the spaces are organised. This becomes problematic as the construction of this singular identity means that other privileges and oppressions are unaccounted for or represented in an additive manner (for example, 'double oppression').⁴⁷ This additive approach can mean that individuals are perceived to pile up oppressions without any real understanding of the complexity of interaction between them and therefore, the only safe space is that of a 'colour blind' space on the queer scene. The notion that queer people experience heterosexism and homophobia in the same way leads to a normalised and universalised gendered and racialised experience in these spaces alongside a common practice whereby 'many White people attempt to group all LGBT people of colour together...[but] there is no universal experience for LGBT people of colour'.⁴⁸ Various grassroots club nights and Black Pride have evolved for queer people of colour in parts of the United Kingdom and whilst they admirably represent a space for people of colour to have a voice and to be represented, these can also be problematic. These spaces may well appear to be 'safe spaces' free of racism and islamophobia for queer people of colour, however, this has a secondary effect of transferring responsibility to identify, protect against and address racism onto queer people of colour, rather than it being a collective effort by the whole community. In

⁴⁴ C.-S. Han, K. Proctor and K.-H. Choi, 'I Know a Lot of Gay Asian Men who are Actually Tops: Managing and Negotiating Gay Racial Stigma' (2014) 18 *Sexuality and Culture* 219-234.

⁴⁵ See Jaspal (n 42).

⁴⁶ S. Giwa and C. Greensmith, 'Race Relations and Racism in the LBGTQ Community of Toronto: Perceptions of Gay and Queer Social Service Providers of Colour' (2012) 59 *Journal of Homosexuality* 149-185.

⁴⁷ Fox and Ore (n 41) 629-649.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

transferring this responsibility, this absolves many queer White people of this responsibility themselves⁴⁹ and so issues and concerns that should be addressed openly begin to manifest into racism in the queer community since issues are not tackled head on and instead, are kept apart. Therefore, there is a need to focus away from creating a 'safe space' into a 'safer space' as this removes us away from the belief that safe spaces can be entirely secured in a way in which they are free of struggle or challenges.

Social geographers have noted how sexuality is made in everyday interactions in certain places and how interaction sexualises spaces. Everyday spaces such as the home, workplace and the street, are constituted as heterosexual due to repeated heterosexual performances.⁵⁰ Within 'gaybourhoods' exclusions are produced on the grounds of identifiers other than sexuality and so particular identities (White, gay and male) may exclude differences on grounds of social class, 'race', disability and gender. Whilst appearing as 'open to all' and 'colour blind' to all queer people, 'gay bars often act as gated communities keeping out certain classed, gendered and coloured bodies'⁵¹ and so reinforce wider racism and Islamophobic attitudes. This can produce a certain type of homonormativity whereby gay villages focus on able-bodied, male, White, middle-class younger people with expendable incomes.⁵² Caluya's research into Asian men on Sydney's gay scene documented how they see this space as a space of segregation filled with racially based sexual rejections and exotification of the Asian body.⁵³ Brennan-Ing et al argue that ethnoracialised queer people experience racism in other forms, such as physical and verbal assault, as well as fetishized and eroticised due to their 'race' as 'trophies'.⁵⁴ Amongst South Asian lesbian and bisexual women, research has examined how they view gay spaces in London as White, not only because of the presence of White women, but also because their bodies were 'read' and treated as 'the Other'.⁵⁵ There is a clear relationship between 'race' and 'space' in that space is something that is racialised and 'race' is spatialized.⁵⁶ Whilst not always apparent, this becomes recognisable when a particular racialisation of space is disrupted or altered when racialised bodies are 'out of place' within these spaces.⁵⁷ Groups formed around 'shared Whiteness' are not seen by White people as a racial category and therefore, serve

⁴⁹ Giwa and Greensmith (n 46) 149-185.

⁵⁰ N. Held, 'Comfortable and Safe Spaces? Gender, Sexuality and "Race" in Night-time Leisure Spaces' (2015) 14 *Emotion, Space and Society* 33-42.

⁵¹ DasGupta and DasGupta (n 13) 31-38.

⁵² Held (n 50) 33-42.

⁵³ G. Caluya, "'The Rice Steamer': Race, Desire and Affect in Sydney's Gay Scene' (2008) 39:3 *Australian Geography* 283-292.

⁵⁴ M. Brennan-Ing et al., "'I'm Created in God's Image, and God Don't Create Junk:": Religious Participation and Support Among Older GLBT adults' (2013) 25:2 *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* 70-92.

⁵⁵ R. Kawale, 'A Kiss is Just a Kiss...Or Is It? South Asian Lesbian and Bisexual Women and the Construction of Space' in P. Puwar and P. Raghuram (eds) *South Asian Women in the Diaspora* (Oxford, Berg 2003) 120.

⁵⁶ Held (n 50) 33-42.

⁵⁷ N. Puwar, *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*. (Oxford, Berg 2004) 8.

to work as an unmarked and silent 'racial norm'.⁵⁸ A group of Black or South Asian queer people coming together becomes much more, 'visible as they threateningly fill the space [to White people] in much larger numbers than they literally do'.⁵⁹ It is not just a case of seeing the 'race' but of triggering emotions by the perceived practices that produce racialised bodies and so as such, spaces are always racialised even if only White bodies are present. Therefore, brown and Muslim identities threaten to dislocate the heterogeneity supposedly safe spaces.⁶⁰

Manchester's Gay Village was not a source of 'racial neutrality' in the work of Held who found that exclusions were inbuilt and the space itself was a 'sea of whiteness'.⁶¹ If Black and South Asian people are assumed that they cannot be queer due to their religion or culture, then once they access the Gay Village they are very likely to be perceived as heterosexual and potentially homophobic. Therefore, the 'racial other' becomes seen as sexually oppressed and so 'Muslim' and 'gay' become seen as incompatible within queer spaces. It is of little surprise that many queer Muslims feel alienated in White queer spaces and feel that they are visually marked out as holding an Islamic identity (through beard, hijab or other factor that could lead to suspicion) and once this identification happens, they face Islamophobia within these spaces or exclusionary door practices.⁶² Whilst many queer spaces may advertise themselves as tolerant, accepting of all and safe, they are often juxtaposed against other areas that are 'black' or 'South Asian' and which are perceived to be unfriendly and threatening for queer people. This narrative is a powerful one to cultivate the notion that queer spaces are safe spaces, however this ignores the racializing discourses within queer spaces and sets the queer subject as inherently White.

Comparative studies of gay media print have shown that White gay men are depicted more often on covers and inside pages of commercial LGBT magazines than their racialised counterparts.⁶³ Online, the internet represents a frontier whereby racism is propagated and contested and the movement of bodies online has ensured that perpetrators of racism are protected by a shield of anonymity against their

⁵⁸ Held (n 50) 33-42.

⁵⁹ Puwar (n 57) 8.

⁶⁰ DasGupta and DasGupta (n 13) 31-38.

⁶¹ N. Held, "'They Look at You Like an Insect that Wants to be Squashed': An Ethnographic Account of the Racialised Sexual Spaces of Manchester's Gay Village' (2017) 20:5-6 *Sexualities* 535-557. See also S. Giwa, *Surviving Racist Culture: Strategies of Managing Racism Among Gay Men of Colour – An interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (PhD Thesis, York University, Toronto 2016) 14; Puwar (n 57) 8.

⁶² Kawale (n 55) 121; C. Bassi, 'Riding the Dialectical Waves of Gay Political Economy: A Story from Birmingham's Commercial Gay Scene' (2006) 38:2 *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 213-235; J. Haritaworn, T. Tauqir and E. Erdem, 'Gay Imperialism: Gender and Sexuality Discourse in the "War on Terror"', in A. Kuntsman and M. E. Esperanza (eds), *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness Raciality* (New York, Raw Nerve Books 2008) 159.

⁶³ T. Sonnekus and J. Van Eeden, 'Visual Representation, Editorial Power, and the Dual "Othering" of Black Men in the South African Gay Press: The Case of Gay Pages' (2009) 35:1 *Communicatio* 81-100; O. Roy 'The Colour of Gayness: Representations of Queers of Colour in Quebec's Gay Media' (2012) 15:2 *Sexualities* 175-190.

targets.⁶⁴ Within queer communities, queer people of colour may experience racism in dating relationships and social networks, which is sustained by reports from people of colour finding exclusion in queer community events and spaces. Racism in dating and intimate relationships has been reported amongst gay and bisexual men, with 'race' having a greater likelihood of being mentioned in internet ads for men who have sex with men than in heterosexual online ads. Indirect and direct racism as 'sexual racism'⁶⁵ is especially prevalent in personal ad sites used for partner and sexual selection where sex role stereotypes and racial stereotypes are meshed together to devalue sexual currency or to assume stereotypical sex roles and penis sizes based on racialised fantasies of White men.⁶⁶ In terms of Eastern and South Asian men, research has found dominant and stereotypical ideas of feminisation and emasculating bodies to form a submissive sexual position in intercourse.⁶⁷ In opposition to this, spaces such as Grindr can become spaces where immigrants and people of colour experience racism and xenophobia.⁶⁸ Shield recounts interviews with Arab interviewees who faced online racism and islamophobia on Grindr, and in particular one account whereby an Arab man received a message from a White gay man who stated 'F*ck [your Arab country]. f*ck Islam, and f*ck you.'⁶⁹ Whilst interviewees tended to play downplay these exchanges and placing people as 'bad apples,' Shield argues that in light of Europe's turbulent political discourses around immigration and Islam, statements like these become 'entitlement racism' whereby aggressors justify hate speech as simply 'speaking their mind.'⁷⁰ Online gay men's dating profiles with 'no Asians' perpetuate common Orientalist stereotypes of Eastern and South Asian people, while disavowing them altogether. This brings the classic work of Said to relevance as to why the Orientalist narrative still prevails. The West, Said argues, defines itself by producing an Other which exists outside of the West's defined boundaries. Therefore, representations produce powerful border-making practices which separate the West and its practices and its Other (the orient, or indeed, the 'Muslim').

⁶⁴ D. Callander, C. E. Newman, and M. Holt, 'Is Sexual Racism Really Racism? Distinguishing Attitudes Toward Sexual Racism and Generic Racism among Gay and Bisexual men' (2015) 44:7 *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* 1991–2000.

⁶⁵ V. C. Phua and G. Kauffman, 'The Crossroads of Race and Sexuality' (2003) 24 *Journal of Family Issues* 981–994; L. D. Icard, 'Black Gay Men and Conflicting Social Identities: Sexual Orientation Versus Racial Identity' (1986) 4:1/2 *Journal of Social Work & Human Sexuality* 83–93.

⁶⁶ Brennan-Ing et al (n 54) 70–92; C. Grov et al., 'Challenging Race-based Stereotypes about Gay and Bisexual Men's Sexual Behaviour and Perceived Penis Size and Size Satisfaction' (2015) 12:3 *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 224–235.

⁶⁷ See Brennan-Ing (n 54).

⁶⁸ A. D. J. Shield, 'Grindr Culture: Intersectional and Socio-Sexual. Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organisation' (2018), at <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/grindr-culture-intersectional-and-socio-sexual> (accessed 10 August 2019).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ P. Essed, 'Entitlement Racism: License to Humiliate', in S. Pfohman and L. Fekke (eds), *Recycling Hatred: Racism(s) in Europe Today* (Brussels, ENAR 2013) 62.

For many queer people of colour, racism in whichever form it is expressed, has effects on the quality of life and racism-related stress has health implications⁷¹ and some research has suggested that a fragmentation of identities among queer people of colour means that they are often compelled to identify with either their sexual or racial identities.⁷² The preferred discourses of a multiracial queer community form around 'Whiteness' as a priority in terms of desire, advertising and basis of many organisations.⁷³ As such, these 'controlling' images⁷⁴ especially of Black or South Asian men in largely White scenes form imagery which is built to satisfy White gay male desire. This representation reinforces the one-dimensional view that ethnicity and sexual orientation are not compatible and these seemingly incompatible categories feed the narrative that to be 'gay' means to be White. Due to this, the Black gay man, or other men of colour, become anomalies or inauthentic and as such, White people can only lay claim to same-sex orientation.⁷⁵ Microaggressions become normalised within this context and are characterised as brief, daily assaults on minority individuals which take a variety of social and environmental forms, which are verbal or non-verbal as well as intentional and unintentional.⁷⁶ Three types of microaggressions have been identified – microaggressions, microinsults and microinvalidation which impact on poor mental and physical health in both queer and racial and minority ethnic communities. Microinsults and microinvalidations (for example, 'you cannot be gay and a Muslim') lead to distress amongst those targeted and as such, perpetrators may discredit an individual because of wider societal beliefs about their minority group (microinsults). Balsam et al noted that these microaggressions were prevalent in three distinct ways: 1) being told that 'race isn't important' by White people (microinvalidation), 2) being framed as a 'sex object' by other queer people due to ethnicity (microinsults) and, 3) reading personal ads stating, 'White people only' (microassaults).⁷⁷ The queer scene and community can be fraught with difficulties by queer Muslims who often become the 'Other' within these spaces, whereby racism and Islamophobia can go unchallenged and are reinforced structurally. In contrast to this, solace within Islamic communities can also be a challenge, which will be discussed next.

4. Queer Muslims in Islamic spaces

⁷¹ A. Ro et al., 'Dimensions of Racism and their Impact on Partner Selection Among Men of Colour who have Sex with Men: Understanding Pathways to Sexual Risk', (2013) 15:7 *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 836–850.

⁷² J. M. Gibbs and B. E. Jones, 'The Black Community and its LGBT Members: The Role of the Behavioural Scientist' (2013) 17:2 *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health* 196–207.

⁷³ C. I. Nero, 'Why are the Gay Ghettos White?' in E. P. Johnson and M. G. Henderson (eds), *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press 2005) 241.

⁷⁴ P. H. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York, NY, Routledge 2004) 149.

⁷⁵ See Nero (n 73).

⁷⁶ K. F. Balsam et al, 'Measuring Multiple Minority Stress: The LGBT People of Colour Microaggressions Scale' (2011) 17:2 *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 163–174.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 165.

The cultural process of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality is acutely active in Islamic religious communities and this identity configuration can have detrimental effects on queer Muslims. Heterosexism implies overt and covert manifestations of sexual prejudice against queer people as well as the elevation of heterosexuality as 'the norm' and therefore preferential treatment of heterosexual people at the individual, institutional and cultural levels. By design, heterosexism promotes and assumes that opposite-sex sexuality is the cultural norm within human relationships, which can make it problematic toward queer people. Some studies of South Asian gay men have found higher levels of homophobia within South Asian communities where there may be a prevalent belief that homosexuality is a Western phenomenon⁷⁸ which echoes that of occidentalism as mentioned earlier within this chapter.⁷⁹ This has a secondary effect of socialisation into an environment whereby same-sex sexuality is considered foreign and abhorrent (or 'haram' – forbidden). The voices of queer Muslims are rarely heard and have been both silenced and edited in the past and when speaking up, they are expected to express contrition. They are voices of an oppressed minority group, 'a minority within a minority,' within their religious community.⁸⁰ Added to this, contemporary 'gay' culture can also leave much to be desired in the larger Muslim community, with the flamboyancy, perceived indecency and licentiousness that is associated with it can conflict with Muslim ideas of modesty and notions of no sex outside of marriage.⁸¹

The nature of the family can also cause difficulty in that not only do parents form part of a control method against norm-breaking behaviour, but the extended family offer a host of adult authorities who can act as surveillance and critique.⁸² In this sense, the immediate family bleeds into the wider Muslim community and can make stepping outside of regulated and heteronormative boundaries difficult. The family and extended family also act as a role in which to preserve family honour, reputation and their standing within the Muslim community which very often can be valued higher than that of the individual's welfare.⁸³ Given that South Asian ethnic cultures attach great importance to arranged marriage, many young queer South Asian people may feel uncertain and fearful about their future and as such, cope with their threatened identity by denying it and so present their worldview as heterosexual and sexual behaviour as a phase. As such, queer Muslim South Asian men manifest high levels of internalised homophobia and may eschew friendships with other queer people deepening their levels of social isolation.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ R. Ratti, R. Bakeman and J. L. Peterson, 'Correlates of High-Risk Sexual Behaviour Among Canadian Men of South Asian and European Origin who have Sex with Men' (2000) 12:2 *AIDS Care* 193–202, and see Balsam (n 76).

⁷⁹ Buruma and Margalit (n 8) 3.

⁸⁰ Kugle (n 28) 2.

⁸¹ A. Jama, *Queer Jihad: LGBT Muslims on Coming Out, Activism, and the Faith* (USA, Oracle Publishing 2013) 10.

⁸² Kugle (n 28) 11.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 55.

⁸⁴ See Jaspal (n 42).

Familial honour or 'izzat' is an important concept which affects self-disclosure of many queer people of South Asian origin and linked to this are heteronormative concepts of marriage, family building and procreation.⁸⁵ For those who hinder or deviate from set heteronormative sexual scripts they may be at risk of being ostracised, face threats to their identities or forms of violence, and so may attempt to 'pass' as heterosexual in order to deflect attention from the stigma attached to their sexual orientation.⁸⁶ Religious heterosexism becomes a system of oppression that contributes to larger hegemonic notions of heteronormativity within ethnoracial communities⁸⁷ and often sources of queer identity in literature are not present and so by examining Islamic books, 'if you check the index in the back of the book, it's rarely mentioned. There's almost a complete silence on the matter.'⁸⁸ Not only is silence about queer lives and identities propagated through religious heterosexism, queer Muslims may also face regular denunciation of same-sex romantic relationships in religious communities and 'out' individuals may face scriptural injunctions hurled at them. As a result, many queer Muslims may feel pressured to choose between their two apparent conflicting identities, their sexual orientation and their religious identity, in the mistaken belief that the two cannot coexist.

As such, ethnoreligious queer people may experience a double-sided homophobia – from both the general population and their ethnoreligious communities.⁸⁹ This means that casual homophobic language, concepts of shame and family honour and internalised pain as a result, have consistently been found to lead to higher levels of internalised homophobia in South Asian communities amongst queer people.⁹⁰ Due to this polarisation of the two identities, an individual may face social and psychological problems due to an identity conflict.⁹¹ This may lead to a perceived obligation to conceal their sexual orientation from their ethnoreligious ingroup members and to conceal their religious identity from sexual ingroup members⁹² causing problems of identity authenticity. Due to this identity conflict, religiosity may be much less positive for some queer Muslims who may find that a more personal spiritual relationship with Allah is more preferable⁹³ in order to reduce the sting and prejudice-induced messages of religious organisations. However, other authors have pointed out the damaging effects of this identity disconnect

⁸⁵ Jaspal and Cinnirella (n 43) 215–240.

⁸⁶ R. Jaspal and A. Siraj, 'Perceptions of "Coming Out" Among British Muslim Gay Men' (2011) 2:3 *Psychology and Sexuality* 183–197.

⁸⁷ Giwa (n 61) 13.

⁸⁸ Jama (n 81) 6.

⁸⁹ See Jaspal (n 42).

⁹⁰ Jaspal and Siraj (n 86) 183–197; Jaspal and Cinnirella (n 43) 215–240; Giwa (n 61) 16.

⁹¹ C. L. Anderton, D. A. Pender and K. K. Asner-Self, 'A Review of the Religious Identity/Sexual Orientation Identity Conflict Literature: Revisiting Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory' (2011) 5:3/4 *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling* 259–281.

⁹² See Jaspal (n 42).

⁹³ A. L. Dahl and R. V. Galliher, 'LGBTQ Young Adult Experiences of Religious and Sexual Identity Integration' (2009) 3:2 *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling* 92–112.

as, 'there is the type who hates himself and would like to be White or straight or both. Or there is the type who cut off all religious and spiritual aspects, going to the hardcore denial of any form of spirituality.'⁹⁴

Islamic spaces and communities offer sites of safety for many queer Muslims of colour, in terms of buffering against structural racisms and Islamophobia. However, they offer only a partial protection in that they often offer silence or condemnation of queer Muslim sexual minorities and gender identity which is not cisgender. This causes added complications to the lived experiences of queer Muslims and means that many are left in a complex position of intersectional threads, which Orne refers to as the 'intersectional knot,' in which one side loosens and offers freedom to an individual, whilst another part tightens offering restrictions.⁹⁵

5. Queer identity, resistance and queer spaces for queer Muslims

Within the wider ideological geopolitical framing of Muslims as antithetical to Western and British values, of racism and Islamophobia within queer spaces and heteronormativity in Islamic spaces, how do queer Muslims find resistance to this? It is important to state that there has been very little scholarship on the Queer South Asian diaspora in the United Kingdom.⁹⁶ Traditionally communities have been understood as groups of people who are connected through faith, ethnicity, social class, nationality and geography. In order for many communities to develop a rally cry as a single point of unity to tackle oppression, this often means suppressing difference. However, this is not to state the idea that all South Asian and Islamic spaces (and therefore Muslims) are homophobic by default and that queer Muslims are always caught perpetually between religious-ethnic enclaves and queer spaces. No culture or religion is a monolithic or homogenous entity and marginal identities of many South Asian and Black Muslims in the United Kingdom do find a way to coexist and resist powerful social norms, despite this being difficult and straining upon the individual.

In fact, the existence of queer Muslims has received much attention in the Global North and in part, due to the international activism of queer Muslim groups, traditional media through television programming and social media, pride marches and distinct communities within predominantly secular queer spaces. Alongside this, there has also been a flourishing of academic and semi-academic interest in the testimonies of queer Muslims.⁹⁷ Due to many Muslims living in Western democratic nations, which grant LGBT protections by law, many queer Muslims have been able to organise and to critically engage with

⁹⁴ Jama (n 81) 8.

⁹⁵ J. Orne, *Boystown: Sex and Community in Chicago* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 2017) 77.

⁹⁶ R. K. DasGupta, *Digital Queer Cultures in India: Politics, Intimacies and Belonging* (London, Routledge 2017) 10; A. Yip, 'Embracing Allah and Sexuality? South Asian Non-Heterosexual Muslims in Britain' in K. Jacobsen and P. Kumar (eds), *South Asians in the Diaspora: Histories and Religious Traditions* (Leiden, Brill Academic Publishing 2004) 294.

⁹⁷ DasGupta and DasGupta (n 13) 31-38; Shannahan (n 38) 671-684.

their religious identity, family norms, religious authorities and community traditions in ways not possible in Muslim-majority countries.⁹⁸ Since the early 2000s, new technology has allowed networks of queer Muslims to become increasingly cohesive and to set up support groups, internet chat rooms, discussion threads and websites. This has developed a community of queer Muslims who can represent and take their concerns to the larger Muslim community and the wider secular world.⁹⁹ Online communities are 'part and parcel of the modern queer Muslim experience',¹⁰⁰ whilst the proliferation of queer Muslim organisations in the United Kingdom, such as Hidayah, Imaan and London Queer Muslims means that they can create their own communities and spaces in which to congregate, worship and meet for Islamic celebrations. This is often within the wider context of much more cisnormative, heteronormative Islamic spaces.¹⁰¹ For many queer Muslims, being a member of a mosque with people from the same ethnic background is fraught with ambivalence and many feel that mosques are sites of control.¹⁰² Due to this and in finding their own routes of practice of Islam, many queer Muslims in Peuman's research invited other queer Muslims to their homes during Ramadan for dinner parties. During these celebrations, participants re-appropriated a religious holiday as an embodied practice to give a positive content to their stigmatised identity as a queer Muslim. Queer Muslim organisations such as Hidayah and Imaan have nurtured this further with Eid celebrations and queer prayer spaces.¹⁰³

Many queer Muslims in the United Kingdom have implemented key strategies used to buffer against religious homophobia and to destabilise homogenous ideas of queer identity. One such strategy used by many queer Muslims is the queering of religious texts.¹⁰⁴ The interpretation of homosexuality as an offense and therefore sanctioned by stoning to death (rajm) is often interpreted by juristic measures in some nation states who link this to the struggles of the Prophet Lut with his people.¹⁰⁵ However, this punishment is seen as deeply problematic and inaccurate by many queer Muslims, as they argue that the Qur'an does not use any terms corresponding to 'homosexuals' or 'homosexuality' within the entirety of its text and there are no terms used within the Qur'an which specifically refer to same-sex relations. Nor does the Qur'an prescribe death or any form of punishment for consensual same-sex behaviour. As such, many queer Muslims contest this and refer to the story of the Prophet Lut and how the people of Lut were

⁹⁸ Kugle (n 28) 10.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 221.

¹⁰⁰ H. Kesvani, *Follow Me, Akhi: The Online World of British Muslims* (London, Hurst and Company 2019) 221.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 222

¹⁰² S. W. Peuman, 'Queer Muslim Migrants in Belgium: A Research Note on Same-Sex Sexualities and Lived Religion' (2014) 17:5/6 *Sexualities* 618-631.

¹⁰³ Hidayah, 'Homepage' (2019), at: <https://www.hidayahlgbt.co.uk/> (accessed 20 August 2019); Imaan, 'Homepage' (2019), at: <https://imaanlondon.wordpress.com/> (accessed 20 August 2019).

¹⁰⁴ A. K. T. Yip, 'Queering Religious Texts: An Exploration of British Non-heterosexual Christians' and Muslims Strategy of Constructing Sexuality-affirming Hermeneutics' (2005) 39:1 *Sociology* 47-65.

¹⁰⁵ J. Rehman and E. Polymenopoulou, 'Is Green Part of the Rainbow: Sharia, Homosexuality, and LGBT Rights in the Muslim World' (2013) 37:1 *Fordham International Law Journal* 1-52.

punished not due to same-sex practices but instead, due to rape, incest, stealing and murder. Many queer Muslims point to the notion that the story of Lut, 'is male to male rape, involving power and humiliation and so it is not fitrah, it is a choice.'¹⁰⁶ This queer reading of the Qur'an means that these factors led to Allah's destruction of the city and not the occurrence of same-sex loving relationships. In fact, many queer Muslims argue there is no verse in the Qur'an which unambiguously condemns sexual minorities and all verses relating to 'sodomites' are referring to ritual rapes of young men and women by the political elites of a vanished people.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore a commonly cited report in the Hadith in which the Prophet appears to announce the death penalty for homosexual intercourse, is highlighted as unreliable as this does not appear to originate with the Prophet himself, but rather a second-generation follower who was prone to exaggeration, fabrication and ideological extremism.¹⁰⁸

Another strategy used by queer Muslims is to highlight the rich queer Islamic history and to show that 'transgressive' sexual behaviours were tolerated for centuries in the Arab-Muslim world.¹⁰⁹ In terms of gender identity, this rich queer Islamic history has witnessed at least three categories of gender non-conforming persons: the castrated man (khasi, or eunuch), the effeminate man who may dress, speak or have a feminine gait but is cisgender (mukhannath), and a third gender (hijra), which in Western terms we may recognise as a form of transgender.¹¹⁰ This strategy argues that the Prophet had formally forbidden attacking effeminate men (mukhannathuns) and in one Hadith, Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, reported that an effeminate man was accustomed to visiting the wives of the Prophet as they had no sexual desire toward women.¹¹¹ Through queering religious texts, queer Muslims do not question the content of religious texts and the Qur'an but instead, question the 'accuracy and therefore the hegemony of the traditional interpretation of such texts.'¹¹² As such, many queer Muslims when queering religious texts argue that they should be placed within a socio-historical and cultural frame in which they have been produced and reproduced by heteronormativity and through doing this, they are deconstructing the heterocentric history of the faith.¹¹³ Another key strategy used to positively frame queer Muslims relationship to Islam was to pull upon an essentialist view of sexuality by viewing themselves as fully part of Allah's creation.¹¹⁴ These strategies combat the role of Islamic homo/bi/transphobia and refashion

¹⁰⁶ Jama (n 81) 16.

¹⁰⁷ Kugle (n 28) 49- 50.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid* 76.

¹⁰⁹ J. W. Wright and R. Everett (eds), *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature* (Columbia, Columbia University Press 1997) 3.

¹¹⁰ Kugle (n 28) 207.

¹¹¹ *Ibid* 241.

¹¹² Yip (n 104) 47-65.

¹¹³ Jama (n 81) 115.

¹¹⁴ Kugle (n 28) 14.

spaces in which to live as a queer Muslim identity, as well as contesting and destabilising the notion that a person cannot be both 'queer' and a 'Muslim.'

People will also seek out situations where identities that are meaningful to them are verified and supported and so individuals may possess a variety of identities (Muslim, feminist, friend and so on) in that they may be activated and performed in different social contexts.¹¹⁵ These identities are also situated within power relations within a society and within social norms and regulatory discourses – for example, identity categories may be given to us by powerful social forces or by our own social ties. As Kugle states, many queer Muslims may have formed their own counter-hegemonic queer theologies that serve to challenge religious spaces that they feel are denied to them. Religious practices may or may not conform to official proclamations by religious authorities but represent the ways in which people enact their faith and construct their own religious identity – a 'doing religion'¹¹⁶ through agency and interaction. As such, religious identity must take into consideration the agency of the person as well as the sociotemporal context around them. Instead of a strategy of reconciliation, Fuist noted that people engage in selective disclosure, approaching situations with a variety of performances, whilst others adopted a strategy of integration, seeing their religious identities as fully congruent. Neither one is more 'genuine' than the other or are in contradiction to each other. Queer Muslims have used strategies in which to show that queer and Islam are not about being reconciled but are about empowering each other.

Importantly and politically, queer Muslims represent an intersectional location that moves against the clash of cultures argument and problematises it further, because their very existence challenges the positioning of Western and Eastern cultures as oppositional and mutually exclusive.¹¹⁷ However, due to being situated within this location, queer Muslims may face oppression as they remain caught in between cultural/political Islamophobia and homophobia, and so they exist within an 'inside/out' location as they challenge the category of Muslim and the category of queer.¹¹⁸ Importantly, this positioning and 'impossibility' of queer Muslims means that they are stood at a site of resistance where they can actively reject dominant narratives of both categories. This is not only a challenge to unchallenged traditions and heteronormativity within Muslim communities, but it is also an equal challenge to the racism, Islamophobia and homogeny within Western queer identities, spaces and organisations.

6. Looking toward the future – is there space to fight back?

¹¹⁵ N. T. Fuist, "'It Just Always Seemed Like It Wasn't a Big Deal, Yet I Know for Some people They Really Struggle with It': LGBT Religious Identities in Context' (2016) 55:4 *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 770-786.

¹¹⁶ See O. Avishai, "'Doing Religion" in a Secular World: Women in Conservative Religions and the Question of Agency' (2008) 22:4 *Gender and Society* 409-433.

¹¹⁷ M. Rahman, 'Queer as Intersectionality: Theorising Gay Muslim Identities' (2010) 44:5 *Sociology* 944-961.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Commented [PB3]: Where? Do you have a source?

Commented [AD(4R3)]: S. Kugle Siraj al-Haqq, *Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Muslims* (London, New York University Press 2014) 21.

Commented [PB5]: Where? Do you have a source for that?

Commented [AD(6R5)]: N. T. Fuist, "'It Just Always Seemed Like It Wasn't a Big Deal, Yet I Know for Some people They Really Struggle with It': LGBT Religious Identities in Context' (2016) 55:4 *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 770-786.

Commented [AD(7R5)]: Footnote 115

When discussing queer Muslims, concepts of nationalism and sexuality are important as sexuality forms a crucial role in the symbolic enclosure of space in nationalism¹¹⁹ and as such, larger geo-political framing of Muslims as the 'Other' in a simplistic binary of 'them' versus 'us' are grounds in which to find space to contest this narrative. Queer Muslims form a distinct part to play in this ideological position and they face unique intersectionalities which have the growing potential to destabilise what is meant by both queer and Muslim identities, especially as the movement grows in power and strength in the United Kingdom. Whilst they face distinct pressures, namely the heteronormativity and religious homo/bi/transphobia from Islamic communities as well as racism and Islamophobia within queer communities, many queer Muslims have found strategies to contest what they have experienced in both. Queer Muslims are marching at gay pride events and even lead pride marches in London Pride and they are forming online and face-to-face organisations, leading to a flourishing of queer Muslim visibility. Importantly, it must be recognised that not all queer Muslims in the United Kingdom can partake in this growth, and many remain deeply excluded, hidden or discriminated against, facing unique social, cultural, family and identity pressures. In fact, fifty years after the Stonewall Riots, not all queer communities have caught up with the dominant White and secular queer community in terms of progress and so this chapter aims to act, in its own small way, as a rallying call to the broader queer community to reject concepts of homogenisation and to recognise the problems within the community as a whole regards racism and islamophobia, as well as the complex intersections faced by queer Muslims and other people of colour. Only by doing this will we ensure that in another fifty years when the riots of Stonewall celebrate their centenary, will we see progress made.

¹¹⁹ J. Binnie, *The Globalisation of Sexuality* (London, Sage Publications 2004) 15.