LBTQ MUSLIM WOMEN INTERSECTIONALITY: EXAMINING THE RESISTANCE

STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This qualitative study critically examined life stories of 14 Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LBTQ) Muslim women in the Global North (Canada and the U.S.) within an interpretive paradigm. Emphasis was placed on how LBTQ Muslim women lived out the intersections of (race, sexuality, gender identity and expression, religion, and spirituality) as well as addressing community, societal and familial dimensions amongst hegemonic discourses that exist within normative Muslim and LGBTQ communities. Transnational and critical race feminism, intersectionality theory and an Islamic liberationist approach to gender and sexuality frame the project. Findings suggest that the women do not abandon Islam, sexual and/or gender identity while living out lives; and LBTQ Muslim women resist hegemonic discourses within normative Muslim and LGBTQ communities vis-à-vis principles within the Islamicate tradition.

Keywords: LBTQ Muslims, women, Islam, resistance

Dedication

This dissertation study is dedicated to the Ever-loving Creator. For without you there is nothing. One of the best blessings in my life is my partner in crime and my soul mate, Kaushilya. This dissertation would not have been possible without your shoulder to cry on. You have been my inspiration, solace and everything. I love you.

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For all of the participants who shared their stories with me, May God bless you always and keep you safe. Ameen.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the name of Rabbana, the Tenderly Compassionate and the Infinitely Merciful.

This qualitative dissertation examines the intersectional identities of 14 Lesbian,

Bisexual, Trans and Queer (LBTQ) Muslim women from the Global North[1] (Canada and the

U.S.). The life stories illuminate varying complexities of living out[2] a LBTQ Muslim

intersectionality. Specifically, the ways in which the intersections of race, sexuality, gender

identity and expression, religion, and spirituality are lived out amongst pervasive and

hegemonic[3] discourses that exist within both normative Muslim and LGBTQ[4] communities.

Reconciliation[5] of these intersections (to an extent) becomes necessary as there are competing

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[1] This term refers to countries and continents situated in Northern parts of the globe, i.e., Canada, U.S., U.K., Netherlands, Europe and so on. My use of the term recognizes that there are cultural, political and economic differences within these countries and continents. From a critical anti-colonial perspective, in my view, what unifies these nation states are the historical, cultural and political othering of bodies and identities perceived and/or associated with Islam. See El-Tayab (2012), Haritaworn (2015) and Puar (2007) for how nation states in the Northern hemisphere form national identities grounded in the othering of Islam and those associated with the tradition.

[2] I am opting to use 'living out' when referring to the diverse, multiple and nuanced ways in which LGBTQ Muslims live and mitigate non-normative gender and sexual diversity amongst the hegemonic norms that exist in the many communities of belonging (Hendricks, 2009; Kugle, 2014). Each LGBTQ Muslim life is unique and needs to be celebrated for its non-normative existence (even by applying the identity label).

[3] By hegemonic discourses, I am referring to the pervasive, normalized and institutionalized discourses that exist within society which create binaristic understandings of people, places and objects. For example, normative discourses on Muslim women in the Global North represent these subjects as passive, non-agentic, and Islam as an oppressive religion. See Foucault's (1972) scholarship which discusses discursive practices and the power and knowledge nexus that shapes discourses, i.e. regimes of truth. The matter of discourse, its limitations and discursive constructions of identities, has received considerable attention from scholars across disciplines (Gopinath, 2005; Hall, 2005).

[4] LGBTQ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer identities. These labels are self-applied by individuals or used to refer to non-normative identities and expressions of gender and sexuality predominantly in the Northern hemisphere. I recognize that these identities are socially constitutive and do not capture or represent all the ways in which an individual may perform and use these identities. My aim in deploying this acronym is for its popular use amongst the sexually and gender diverse populace both in Canada and the U.S., and this term's proliferated use in the literature (Global North) relating to gender identity, expression and sexuality. My use of these terms is a political strategy in attempts to unite individuals with non-normative gender and sexual identity categories everywhere who are creating alliances to combat the multiple intersecting oppressions (Ahmed, 2006).

[5] The term 'reconciliation' was used minimally due to the normative assumptions it harbours, i.e. that there exists an inherent disagreement on ontological and epistemological levels between LGBTQ and Muslim identities. When 'reconcile' is used, it is mainly to communicate and maintain a connection with the larger scholarship's discourses on sexually and gender diverse Muslims.

discourses, each pulling LGBTQ Muslims in varying directions that can have implications on personal and professional life domains (Jahangir & Abdullatif, 2016).

Focus was placed on how LBTQ women take up and live out a Muslim identity. Dominant discourses imagine a 'Muslim Woman' identity as lacking agency (Desai & Haffajee, 2011), cisgendered, and heterosexual (Khan, 2016 a, b). In order to challenge such discourses, I explored strategies employed by LBTQ Muslim women that constantly negotiate the existing chasms in both normative Muslim and LGBTQ communities within religious, spiritual, community, societal and familial domains. Overall, the research study discusses the complexities of identifying as a LBTQ Muslim woman in the Global North.

This chapter continues below discussing the significance of the research topic and current gaps found in the literature (empirical studies, theoretical articles, personal narratives and gray literature). The overarching research objectives and main research questions are also outlined. The literature is briefly reviewed and key concepts which frame the study are also discussed. The chapter concludes with how this study adds to the disciplines of social work, sexuality and gender studies, LGBT studies, Queer studies, critical religious and women's studies.

The second chapter explores current literature on LGBTQ Muslims, secularism, orientalism, sexuality and gender diversity in Islam with an overall emphasis on LBTQ Muslim women in the Global North. The research study is grounded within the larger scholarship on diasporic and transnational perspectives, socially constructed identity categories, discourses on Muslim women, intersectional identities, religiosity and spirituality.

Chapter three describes the theoretical approaches deployed in this study. Critical Race Feminism (CRF), Transnational Feminism (TF), and Intersectionality theory are outlined. Overall, this research was framed within progressive and liberationist theological perspectives on

gender and sexuality, grounded in the Islamic principles of plurality and diversity within its jurisprudence.

Chapter four outlines the method (interpretative paradigm and life story method), research design, method of data analysis and critical self-reflexivity. The fifth chapter delineates data analysis, research themes and provides a summary of the key findings. The findings were critically analyzed and presented in relation to the existing literature. The final chapter provides a conclusion to the dissertation which discusses the limitations of the study, implications for further research and for social work practice.

Problem Statement & Significance of Research

Affirmative literature on Islam, sexual and gender diversity is growing of late in recent social sciences and humanities related disciplines (Habib, 2010; Kugle, 2016; Slater, 2016). Most existing literature on this topic is oriented to (gay) male Muslim experiences (Jaspal, 2012). Nevertheless, there still remains a general knowledge gap on LBTQ Muslim women's understandings and experiences of being Muslim and navigating existing hegemonic discourses within normative LGBTQ and Muslim communities (Habib, 2007, 2009; Siraj, 2012). To this end, the research community has been advocating the theological and sociological investigation of lesbianism and Islam (Jahangir & Abdullatif, 2016; Rahemtulla, 2017), and resistance strategies deployed by LBTQ Muslim women in claiming and reclaiming Islam, sexuality, gender identity and expression concurrently from an intersectional lens (Khan, 2016 a, b). It then becomes important to glean the agency and resistance strategies of Muslim LBTQ women in daily life to build and enhance social support, resource capital and capacity in the larger LGBTQ Muslim, LGBTQ, and Muslim communities (Kugle, 2016).

Reconciliation of an intersectional LBTQ Muslim identity is necessary in challenging static and normative understandings of sexuality and gender diversity within Islamic jurisprudence (Siraj, 2016 a, b). Current literature on identity reconciliation (sexuality, religiosity, race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression with a Muslim identity) has garnered inconsistent results. Some studies suggest that LBTQ Muslim women have difficulties reconciling their sexual identity with their Muslim identity, since they are viewed as inherently antithetical to one other (Siraj, 2011, 2012); others suggest that women can and do reconcile their sexualities with an enduring strong connection to Islam (Al-Sayyad, 2010; Yip & Khalid, 2010). Given that some LBTQ Muslim do reconcile, this research will add to the affirming literature on LBTQ Muslim women intersectionality.

There are gender differences in how men and women practice Islam (Ahmed, 1992), and further research is needed on how LBTQ Muslim women conceptualize and practice their Islam (Kugle, 2016). It has been noted that normative understandings of Islamic jurisprudence have been opposed by LGBTQ Muslims through engagement with the principles of *ijtihad* and *jihad* (Kugle, 2014). *Ijtihad*, is often translated as "critical reasoning" (Barlas, 2002, p.71), and is an ongoing life-long process. It is defined by Muslim LGBTs in Shannahan's (2009) study "as either a religious duty, or a tool for deepening one['s] understanding of Islam" (p. 68). For LGBT Muslims, ijtihad "is expressed as an act of worship, and as fundamental to practise" (Shannahan, 2009, p. 68). *Jihad* means to resist and strive against oneself; to become a better human being (Kugle, 2010). Unfortunately, at present, the term *jihad* conjures up disturbing thoughts and negative images related to Islam and Muslims that are monolithic.

Dissertation Research Objectives

There are three main objectives of this study. The first is to understand the complexities of identifying and living out life as a LBTQ Muslim woman in the Global North. Specifically, the ways in which LBTQ Muslim women live out the intersections of religion, spirituality, gender expression and identity, race, and sexual identities in larger normative Muslim and LGBTQ communities. The second objective is how LBTQ Muslim women conceptualize their Islam and live as a 'Muslim woman' in religious, social, political and cultural spheres. In other words, exploring what being Muslim means and looks like to LBTQ Muslim women, as there are dominant constructions and imaginations of what and who a 'Muslim Woman' *is* and *can be* in both normative Muslim and LGBTQ communities (Siraj, 2018a, b). LBTQ Muslim women undergo processes of racial, sexual, and religious othering (Yip, 2008 a, b) and uncovering how resistance is enacted on micro, mezzo, and macro levels against these forces is needed (Zine, 2008). Particularly at the intersection of sexuality and religiosity, LBTQ Muslim women are on the one hand often considered an anomaly (Yip, 2005a), and on the other are not held to be authentic Muslims (El-Tayab, 2011). Debunking such assumptions will enable the exploration of resistance strategies deployed by LBTQ Muslim women, which the literature identifies as falling into the categories of *ijtihad* and *jihad* (Khan, 2016b; Kugle, 2014).

The third objective is to shed light on the experiences of LBTQ Muslim women within normative communities of LGBTQ and Muslims in the Global North. In mainstream LGBTQ spaces, queerness and secularism are often fused together as sexually and gender diverse individuals are not imagined as being religious and/or connected to a faith community (Taylor & Snowdon, 2014; Wilcox, 2006). This creates issues for religious LGBTQ individuals, especially for Muslim LBTQ women who also contend with racism and Islamophobia in normative LGBTQ spaces (Khan, 2016 a). It is also important to note that in most LGBTQ circles the

discussion of God and religion are not well received due to the homophobia and transphobia present in many organized religious institutions (Dessel & Bolen, 2014); and the ongoing global persecution of LGBTQ individuals orchestrated in the name of God and religion, rationalized by the defence of traditional morality and family values (Mulé, Khan & McKenzie, 2017).

The process of maintaining a LBTQ identity for Muslim women in the Global North has varying implications. This is due to past, present, and shifting global and local socio-political forces including and not limited to: imperialism, Islamophobia, colonization, racialization of Muslims, homonationalism, orientalism, and secularism (Grewal, 2005; Puar, 2007). Additionally, the rise of fundamentalism and religious right ideologies, and terrorism continue to influence and shape how identities are understood, negotiated and lived out (Mahomed, 2016). The ways in which these forces intersect and impact LBTQ Muslim women, their families and the larger LGBTQ Muslim communities on varying levels warrants attention- mainly in individual, social, political, cultural, familial, religious and spiritual, community, and societal domains.

Research Questions

- What are some ways in which LBTQ Muslim women live out their intersectional identity (sexuality, religion, race, gender and so on) whilst negotiating dominant discourses in the many communities they belong to (normative Muslim and LGBTQ; professional domains; family of origin and choice, friends, extended family members; LGBTQ Muslim communities)?

- What strategies and politics are deployed by LBTQ Muslim women to resist, subvert, and challenge homo- and hetero- norms?

- What does it mean to be a LBTQ Muslim woman?

Key Concepts

Some key concepts important to the project are orientalism, identity, experience, race,

racialization and whiteness.

Orientalism.

Edward Said's (1978) work on orientalism is key in understanding how contemporary

ideas about Islam, Muslims, regions and countries referred to as *Islamic* and *Islamicate*[6] are

shaped by colonial and imperial histories. According to Said (1978), orientalism underscores the

creation and circulation of expert knowledges to justify colonial and imperial expansion of the

orient. Said's analyses make poignant "the varying signifying practices – such as those present in

the mass media, state policies, and educational curriculum – that bolster cultures of

imperialisms" (Chua, 2008, p. 1181).

Following Said's (1978) work on orientalism, Ahmed (2006) builds on the connection

between whiteness and orientalism. Ahmed (2006) argues that there are power dynamics

involved in the construction of the orient as other and "orientalism, […] would involve not just

making imaginary distinctions between the West and the Orient, but would also shape how

bodies cohere, by facing the same direction" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 120). Given this, certain spaces

begin to take shape as oriental and become racialized following particular lines of created desire

and myths for the oriental and orient. An example is how Muslim women are constructed as

passive subjects requiring salvation from their 'oppressive' religion (Mahmood, 2005). Also,

drawing on Said's (1978) concept, Puar's (2007) scholarship demonstrates the following: how

Islam and a Muslim identity is constructed in opposition to the West and Europe; why LBTQ

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[6] Following Babayan and Najmabadi's (2008) work, I have opted to use Islamicate as an umbrella term that refers to understanding Islam, Islamic societies (colonial and contemporary), the larger Islamic world, Islamic cultures not necessarily grounded in religious doctrine, but also through literary, linguistic, and cultural expressions and contributions. This term was originally coined by Hodgson (1974).

Muslim women are imagined as properties of the Global North; and the notion that Islam is inherently homophobic and is not inclusive of gender and sexual diversity (Puar, 2007).

Identity.

The conceptualization of identity shapes, represents, and determines realities for the positionality of LBTQ Muslim women in the Global North. To honour the myriad shifting complexities of identities (positionalities/subject positions, representation, and so on); and their impacts (on self, community, society, politics, culture, religion and so on), diverse critical global perspectives that can centre varying intersectionalities (race, diaspora, gender) are imperative. This needs to occur while keeping in mind divergent her/histories and experiences of coloniality for those who fall under and choose to use the 'woman' category. Upholding feminist principles are imperative in shedding light on living out intersectional identities and strategies that challenge normative understandings (Grewal, 2005; Gopinath, 2005; Hall, 2005; Jamal, 2015).

Hall's concept of 'articulation' can be helpful in understanding the contradictions and complexities that come with positionalities and identity categories for LBTQ Muslim women. The concept of articulation views identity as an inherent, continuous, and contradictory struggle for representation. This struggle is dominated by historical processes that are couched in complexity and based on differentiation. There exist no offers of absoluteness or assurances on how specific historical processes will be taken up in the social world, and their implications are unknown. Emphasis is placed on the effects of such a process and not necessarily their origins (Grossberg, 2005). The concept of articulation holds *identity* together with all of its contradictions, differences, fragments, and its various constructions that transcend practices. Articulation unifies and "links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning

to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structures, etc." (Grossberg, 1992, p. 54).

Experience.

The experiences of LBTQ Muslim women living out their intersectionality is vital to this research project. Razack's (1998) favouring of an anti-essentialization strategy in relation to gender and race, emphasizes that "we can no longer devise political strategies that start with something we might call women's experience" (p. 159). Instead, she proposes that it is quite different to examine the particular ways in which "patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism interlock to structure women differently and unequally" (p.159). Further, determining the ways in which one is complicit in the domination and subordination of others while also being cognizant of "engaging in liberatory politics" (p. 159) can help one be accountable.

Part and parcel of feminist politics is the notion of accountability. Accountability in feminist-based research can be observed through serious engagement with critical reflexivity (Skeggs, 2002), not claiming innocence (Rossiter, 2001), and upholding transparency throughout the research process (see Chapter Four). Critical reflexivity makes visible how knowledge production is impacted by the author's location and makes visible the power dynamics inherent in research (Smith, 2012).

Race, whiteness and racialization.

Race is a social construct couched in specific historic and material conditions conceptualized as "a social-relational category defined by socially selected real or imagined physical, as well as cultural, characteristics" (Castagna & Dei, 2000, p. 20-21). The concept of race is still relevant today due to its deployment and its shifting meanings (Hall, 2005). Racialization is an ongoing process of othering when varying meanings are applied to specific

people, culture, inanimate and animate things, body parts, bodies, and processes that add on layers of additional meanings based on cultural, historical, and socio-political contexts (Ahmed, 2006; Henry & Tator, 2002). Race, racialization and whiteness are intertwined since (normative) whiteness is used as a yard stick to measure and straighten out racialized bodies (Ahmed, 2006). Ahmed's (2006) analyses interweaves the colonial and imperial impacts on racialized bodies that are maintained and perpetuated by whiteness. She argues that "colonialism makes the world 'white,' which is of course a world 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies" (p. 111). In this way, the world follows a white orientation, which has implications for racialized and non-racialized LGBTQ Muslims. Whiteness alongside orientalism work to construct Islam and racialized Muslim communities as threats and as polar opposites to what the Global North values and represents (Ahmed, 2006).

Interdisciplinary Contributions

This research contributes toward the larger body of critical literature on Islam, sexuality and gender diversity, while suggesting further lines of related inquiries (see Chapter 6). Discussions at the nexus of religion, LGBT, and Queer studies remain largely untouched (Wilcox, 2006), and to honour the work and lives of all LGBTQ persons, incorporation of these topics can enrich classroom and curriculum based discussions. Even though LGBT and Queer studies overlap, there exist some distinctions between the two. Historically, LGBT studies has focused on equality-driven initiatives (i.e. same-sex marriage) by arguing through a 'rights-based' approach (Mulé, 2008; Mulé, 2016). On the other hand, Queer studies scholars have argued in favour of politics that challenge rights-based initiatives for equality and have critiqued identity categories for not being nuanced enough to value diverse intersections (Ahmed, 2006; Mulé, 2008). Especially within Queer studies, religion is perceived as a "stultifying, oppressive

institution of a heteronormative, sexist social order" (Wilcox, 2006, p. 74). Given this, there exist religious LGBT and Queer studies scholars' that are attempting to bridge the gap in what can feel like silos from transnational and diasporic perspectives (Boyarin, Itzkovits & Pellegrini, 2003; Gopinath, 2005; Goss, 2002; Goss & West, 2000; Schippert, 2011; Vidal-Ortiz, 2005). The future of LGBT and Queer studies can further benefit from the inclusion of topics that impact Muslim LGBTQs since both streams have neglected to include religion and religiosity as affirmative sources of support.

Contemporary orientalist and monolithic representations of Islam that posit Islam and the West as static entities (Said, 1978) and frame LTBQ Muslim women as Western novelties (Puar, 2007) require ongoing critique. This study adds to the growing body of affirmative resources on LBTQ women by highlighting reconciliation strategies, experiences and complexities of living out intersectional identities. In doing so, practitioners in the human services arena can become familiar with concerns, community strengths and needs, address spiritual, religious and other intersectional issues experienced by LBTQ service users and their families.

Minwalla, Rosser, Feldman & Varga (2005) argue that practitioners not assume that a LGBTQ identity is antithetical to a Muslim identity and Islam. Clinically, the findings will contribute to social work, psychology, and psychotherapy by highlighting issues related to 'coming-out' experienced in relation to familial, cultural mores and expectations from one's ethno specific community. An important aspect to note is that the findings and the overall study do not claim to represent all LBTQ Muslim women, as there are differences in how each person, family, community and so on, respond to queerness. Research further demonstrates that there is a spectrum of acceptance and support that LGBTQ Muslims receive from their families of origin; and Muslim families are not inherently homophobic and transphobic (Kugle, 2014). This is a

fictitious essentialized framing of Muslim families, just as is the equally erroneous imaginary in which all secular-Christian or secular-Jewish families are LGBTQ positive.

Additionally, staying abreast of cultural shifts in LGBTQ Muslim communities is important in bridging the academic and community silos by bringing the community voices to academe's forefront (to impact curriculum development). On a policy level, there is a dearth of programs and services that support LGBTQ Muslims, since sexually diverse Muslims are deemed non-existent by normative Muslim communities (Siraj, 2006). On the other hand, mainstream LGBTQ community is predominantly white and secular (despite featuring faiths such as Judaism and Christianity), making this an important area of research and development (Yip & Khalid, 2010). Given these issues, normative Muslim and LGBTQ communities share some responsibilities in negating LGBTQ Muslim intersectionality.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter explores the literature on how LGBTQ Muslims in the Global North understand and live out the intersectionalities of race, religiosity, spirituality, gender expression, identity and sexuality on local and global fronts. Emphasis is placed on how LGBTQ Muslims navigate hegemonic discourses present in both normative Muslim and LGBTQ communities. Focus on LBTQ Muslim women is couched within the larger scholarship on LGBTQ Muslims on racialization of Muslims, racism, diasporic perspectives, and socially constructed identity categories. Contemporary discourses in the Global North on Muslim women, sexuality, gender expression and identity within the Islamicate tradition, religiosity and spirituality, and the impacts of secularism and orientalism are also outlined.

Constructions of Racialized Muslim Women

This section explores how Muslim women are represented and situated in Western feminist discourses. Zine (2008a) notes, "both *Muslim* and *woman* are loaded signifiers and contested categories that cannot be reduced to settled notions" (p. 112). Further, these terms cannot be reduced to a homogenized racialized woman configuration (Kaplan & Grewal, 2002). Contemporary Western feminist discourses on *Muslim women* shape how their identities and bodies are represented (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001). These discourses offer limited options since they situate Muslim women in either orientalist or Islamic fundamentalist spheres (Zine, 2006). For example, in the orientalist sphere, Muslim women are represented as either "the veiled and oppressed victim or hypersexualized Oriental" subject (Zine, 2008a, p. 111). Specifically in the fundamentalist sphere, "patriarchal Islamic religious authorities" have exercised control over Muslim women's bodies and morality "in equally narrow and limiting terms that have relegated us [Muslim women] to positions of gendered subordination and public exile into domestic

harems and political forms of purdah, while in the same breath, assuring us of our spiritual equality" (Zine, 2008a, p. 111).

At the intersections of religion, nation-state, identity politics, capitalism, colonial and imperial histories, Muslim women have been perceived and presented as non-agentic (Jiwani, 2005; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Razack, 2004). Zine (2008a) reminds us that fundamentalist and orientalist tropes are products "of deeply entrenched historical, political, imperial, and religious inscriptions. These discursive markings bear the imprint of colonial fascination, desire, and disavowal, as well as religious invocations of piety, honor, and moral regulation" (p. 110). In battles for representation, especially post 9/11 in the Global North, Muslim women and their bodies are reduced to things that are used to further certain agendas—war, occupation, persecution of Muslim men (Jiwani, 2005, 2009, 2011). Razack (2004) argues that in Western feminist discourses "the naming of violence against Muslim women is a principal weapon in the 'War on Terror', Western feminists have begun to share conceptual and political terrain with the far right" (p. 130). For example, women in Afghanistan have been used as "pawns of war" by both the Taliban and by women's rights groups in the Global North (Eisenstein, 2002, p. 90). To this day, women and "gender equality" continue to be given as the reason for "policing" and surveilling Muslim communities around the world (Razack, 2004, p. 129). This surveillance is made possible by the assumption that Islam is the antithesis of the west, and that there exist inherent civilizational and cultural differences between the two (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001, Rahman, 2014 a, b).

One reason offered by Mahmood (2005) for Muslim women being perceived as non-agentic lies within the conceptualizations of agency that is grounded in liberal ideas of autonomy and progress; and resistance is seen as defying subordination, refusal or emancipation from

oppressive regimes. The author contests the universal application of agency and resistance, and their use as concepts that transcend meanings, histories and sociopolitical origins, applied globally to anyone resisting dominant powers. Mahmood (2005) does not offer a clear theory of agency, instead she proposes that we "analyze agency in terms of the different modalities it takes and the grammar of concepts in which its particular affect, meaning, and form resides" (p. 188), i.e. examine normative practices.

I agree with Mahmood's (2005) analysis that agency should not "be fixed in advance" and it needs to surface from the coalescing of "particular concepts that enable specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity" (p. 14-15), which in her case is grounded in Foucault's framework and the navigation of norms based on Islamic principles of piety. However, my approach diverges from Mahmood's in some ways. First, is that the Egyptian women in the mosque movement's personal determinations "toward self-realization" remain directed "at honing one's rational and emotional capacities so as to approximate the exemplary model of the pious self" and "aimed not so much as discovering one's 'true' desires and feelings, or at establishing a personal relationship with God" (Mahmood, 2005, p. 31). Whereas, LBTQ Muslim women do try to foster a personal relationship with God in light of the adversities associated with a LBTQ Muslim identity (Yip &Khalid, 2010), with self-reflection as a goal on a myriad of matters: to honour and/or abandon the faith, their sexuality or both and variations in between (Kugle, 2003, 2014).

Second, Mahmood's (2005) emphasis on 'navigating norms', takes focus away from the women's positionality and lived experiences. For instance, normative practices within dominant Islamic discourse render LBTQ Muslim women invisible, and whenever recognition is available, it is based in deviance, debauchery and abnormality (Habib, 2007). The focus on the norms,

makes sense in Mahmood's (2005) analysis, which helps us see how the women in the mosque movement are upholding and perpetuating the conventions of a type of Islam, and its practice in Egypt. Approaching agency from the perspective of the navigation of norms, as suggested by Mahmood (2005), does not acknowledge LBTQ Muslim women who by mere virtue of their existence (spirit, body, thoughts, emotions, investment in Islam) challenge the conventional ways of practicing Islam and its principles (Kugle, 2003, 2010; Shannahan, 2010). As LBTQ Muslim women engaging in reform to formulate understandings of the Quran and Islamic principles can be read by jurists as inventing a new religion or misinterpreting the 'right' or 'true' Islam (Khan, 2016b). Therefore, reliance on LBTQ Muslim women's perspectives (religious, spiritual practices and sense of self) of what agency and resistance look like in thoughts, intentions and practice which may include acceptance, subversion, total refusals, and amendments shaped by positionality and life experiences is the focus.

Jamal's (2015) notion of 'transgression' makes sense in thinking through LBTQ Muslim women's agency, as it grounds "women's transgressive agency as a possibility of action within rather than against Islamic tradition" (p. 57). Building on the work of Jenks (2003), transgression involves uncovering "the inherent heteronormativity of modern culture" and a moving beyond parameters set by canonical laws (Jamal, 2015, p. 57). Drawing on Sufi approaches and practices, Jamal (2015) argues that corporeality can be viewed "as the site of divine immanence and the conduit for divine blessing" (p. 58). Therefore, it is then conceivable to think about "a pious subjectivity even where agentive acts or practices appear to be contrary to theological or doctrinal accounts of the Islamic or pious" (p. 58). She further states that "these transgressive acts cannot unthinkingly be assumed to signify a disengagement from Islam or the Muslim community, just as no given act or outward practice can be construed as a verification of

religious purity" (Jamal, 2015, p. 58). This framing of agency coincides with the fact that LBTQ Muslim women *do* try to foster a personal relationship with God in light of the adversities associated with an intersectional identity (Yip &Khalid, 2010). On the agency of Muslim women, Jamal (2015) argues the following when unpacking non-normative modes of agency in the context of violence against Muslim women:

> Feminists of Muslim background, challenge mainstream feminism by offering community based instead of state-oriented responses. An emergent strategy is to reinstate alternative modes of subjectivity and agency for Muslim women, thereby questioning the secular trajectory of transgression/resistance as self-determination by contrasting it with the self-affirming potential of the communitarian and the religious. Muslim women's devotion to their families, community, and Islam; their willing adoption of practices such as the hijab and niqab; and their self-defined ideas about honor, freedom, and respect are proffered to challenge imperialist narratives of their victimization (p. 56).

In this way, religiosity and spirituality are not considered as inherently causing women's oppression and can be sites of resistance for LBTQ Muslim Women. Especially in the realm of LBTQ Muslim women practising their 'Islams' within a community framework for individual, community, global, spiritual and religious liberation. In the theoretical framework chapter, I expand further on resistance and conceptualize it in theological terms. To make clear, I am not removing the personal from the political and presenting it as an individual agentic act based solely on choice. Rather, agency, choice and resistance are framed within the socio-political contexts of the present time with religious fundamentalism and white supremacy on the rise in the context of neoliberalism (Butler & Desai, 2008; Mohanty, 2003; Puar, 2017).

Global Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Diversity

This section discusses how sexual and gender diversity is taken up in various global contexts, and the multiple perspectives on this topic.

There is a gap in literature which undertakes a critical perspective on gender and female sexuality in the Islamicate context (Kugle, 2016; Wadud, 2006). Overall scholarly research on female same-sex[7] attractions and relationships in Islamicate societies is growing of late (Abdi & Gilder, 2016; Abu-Hatoum, 2007; Siraj, 2011, 2012, 2016a, b; Yip, 2005b, 2008a; Yip & Khalid, 2010). There are personal narratives that speak to the experiences of living out racialized Muslim and lesbian identities (Abdi, 2014; Denborough, 2002; Khan, 1998; Manji, 1999; Rahman, 2006; Rashida X, 2006; Saed, 2005). Other than personal blogs, literature on intersex and asexual Muslims is very limited, especially in the English language (Ace-Muslim, 2014; Laura P., 2015; Rotten Zucchinis, 2016). A separate section on Trans Muslims is discussed later on in this chapter.

To date, male same-sex attractions and relationships, and male homoeroticism in Islamicate societies continue to dominate the focus of research studies (El-Rouayheb, 2005; Habib, 2010; Jaspal, 2012; Jaspal & Siraj, 2011; Kugle, 2002; Minwalla et al., 2005; Murray & Roscoe, 1997; Sharlet, 2010; Siraj, 2006, 2016b; Yip, 2004a). There exist essays on personal narratives, interviews, reflections and experiences written by gay Muslims and non-Muslims

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[7] My use of the concept same-sex attractions and relationships denotes desires, relationships, intercourse, eroticism, behaviors and expressions related to the multiplistic and fluid nature of sexuality and which can encompass the plethora of identity labels used in contemporary society: lesbian, bisexual and so forth (Murray & Roscoe, 1997). This does not encompass transgender identities and how they are constructed in Islamicate societies. See the section on trans identities. Ultimately, no category which deals with socially constructed identities can ever be inclusive of the diversity of human experiences of sexuality or any other human dimension. When I make references to individuals who identify under a socially constructed identity as a group, I am not suggesting that all those who identify under the same term are homogenous and share similar values, knowledges and critical thinking base. What I want to honour are the similarities versus differences that bring people together to discuss: unique understandings of oppressions and queer politics to collectively challenge the status quo (Ahmed, 2006).

outlining the complexities of living out a LGBTQ intersectionality (Khan, 1997a, 1997b; Khan, 2001; Kramer, 2010; Luongo, 2007; Shah, 2010; Ratti, 1993; Schmitt & Sofer, 1992; Whitaker, 2011).

Some normative Muslim clergy throughout the globe remain steadfast to the claim that homoerotic behavior and same-sex relations are Western novelties that have infiltrated the Islamicate tradition (Habib, 2009; Yip, 2005b). It is because of this stance, which is rooted in orientalist conceptions of the faith tradition (Puar, 2007), that make it necessary to discuss historical and contemporary examples of sexual and gender diversity in Islamicate societies. There is considerable literature which establishes that same-sex attractions and relationships have pre-existed Islamicate traditions in various regions across the globe (mostly what we call Africa, Middle East and South Asia) where most of the Muslim diaspora have their origins (Habib, 2009; Kidwai, 2000; Kugle, 2002; Patane, 2006; Petievich, 2002; Roscoe & Murray, 1997; Vanita, 2002; Vanita & Kidwai, 2000). Notably, such relationships, attractions and identities have continued to co-exist within Islamicate societies in varying expressions that may or may not be rendered intelligible within North American and European framing of sexuality and gender diversity (Habib, 2007, 2009; Vanita & Kidwai, 2000).

Ilkkaracan (2005) postulates the "taboos around sexual orientation in Middle Eastern states constitute a profound example of hypocrisy regarding sexual morale in the region…there is widespread evidence and a collective knowledge that homosexuality has been widely practiced in the region for centuries" (p. 4-5). ABVA (1993) discusses various examples of male homoeroticism and same-sex relationships in Islam's history that are clearly ignored by some Muslims in contemporary society and argue that "under Muslim rulers…homosexuality entered Indian court life" (p. 31). The histories of gender and sexually diverse individuals are erased to

an extent in mainstream literature to maintain the status quo, and subordination of sexual minorities; yet still exist in fiction and poetry (Kugle, 2002).

Roscoe & Murray (1997) assert that: "Islamic homosexualities (and those of sub-Saharan Africa) have been almost completely overlooked" when examining the various histories (p. 4). What we refer to as the contemporary Middle East regions also have histories of same-sex relationships and attractions. Muslim men and women in Mombasa, Kenya shift between what is considered as 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' categories. Lesbian and other same-sex relationships are not hidden in secret, but are done so openly. An example, is in Sindh, Pakistan where "three words refer to a female friend: these distinguish between a "friend," a "close friend," and a "loving/physical relationship" (Hélie, 2006, p.29). Such categories can be envisaged as evidence of same-sex relations and behavior, yet they remind simultaneously that a 'lesbian' or 'gay' concept and label do not necessarily apply or fit (Hélie, 2006).

There also exists the perspective that same-sex attractions and relationships are a result of homosociality (socializing and living in close proximity to one's gender group), and gender segregation. It was a popular assumption made of women in the medieval Arab world, where women resorted to same-sex relations due to gender segregation, to avoid pregnancy and disgrace (Habib, 2009). In fact, homosociality was identified as among many explanations behind a minority of women, and *not* the case for most women solely engaging in sexual and emotional relationships with females in some Islamicate regions (Zuhur, 2005). Zuhur (2005) argues that "forms of birth control were known and employed" by the women, so avoiding pregnancy was not the reason for women engaging in same-sex relations (p. 45). The author further argued that "the tradition of homosexuality is historically discernible" in Islamicate regions and this cannot be explained as simply resulting from homosociality (p. 45).

Babayan & Najmabadi's (2008) collection discuss texts that focus on sexuality, same-sex practices, identities and desires in the Islamicate world from various parts of the globe. Of interest in their volume is the chapter on Amer's (2008) work on female same-sex marriage in Arab and medieval French literature. The author examines "texts that combine female cross-dressing with same-sex marriage, texts in which the cross-dressed woman ends up marrying another woman" (p. 76). Babayan's (2008) discussion of a seventeenth century poetry of an Iranian widow who reveals love for her female friend with whom she had a relationship in the past. The poem "exposes a feminine space in Isfahani society that was established through a ritual of sisterhood or companionship (*khwahar khwandagi*), which made use of religious connotations and the language of mysticism to express female love and friendship" (p. 240).

Within "Sufi literature homosexual eroticism was a major metaphorical expression of the spiritual relationship between god and man, and much Persian poetry and fiction used gay relationships as examples of moral love" (AIDS Bhedbav Virodhi Andolan, 1993, p. 32; Kugle, 2002). It must be noted that Sufi approaches to Islam have been adopted by many LGBTQ Muslims across the globe (Safi, 2003). This is since Sufism offers multidimensional ways of practicing and living out Islam. Jamal (2015) points out that in addition to the scripture and the traditions of the prophet, Sufism upholds "multifarious modes of embodiment, bodily practices, dress, and so on. Yet Sufism is ultimately devoted to spiritual cultivation and eschews any straightforward association of piety with ritualistic practices, bodily expression, or sartorial appearance" (p. 57). It is important to note that there is diversity in how Sufis practice Islam and that there is not one 'right' way emphasized (Kugle, 2007b; Safi, 2003).

El-Rouayheb's (2005) work on analyzing pre-modern Sufi poetry and Islamicate texts demonstrates that male same-sex relationships and attractions existed in the Arab world before

the term 'homosexuality' commenced circulation. Europeans at the beginning of the nineteenth century referred to same-sex relations and homoerotic behavior as the "'Persian disease,' 'Turkish disease,' or the 'Egyptian vice' " (Hélie, 2006, p. 19). And now Islam and Muslims are constructed as the exact opposite, as inherently trans- and homophobic (Haritaworn, 2015; Puar, 2007). This bifurcating discourse is further discussed later on in this paper. Najmabadi (2008) analyzed stories in nineteenth century Qajar Iran that are demonstrative of male (adult male and adolescent male) same-sex practices and desires. The author traces the shifts in thinking around sexual desire and acts from being acceptable and desired to unnatural and disallowed. For instance, the nineteenth century brought an awareness that "Europeans considered older-man and younger-man love and sexual practices… a vice. As Iran became identified by Europeans for and by homosocial and homosexual practices, Iranian modernists came to identify with and simultaneously disavow this abject position" (p. 286).

Some scholars argue that contemporary understandings of sexuality and gender (LGBTQ identity categories), predominantly used in the Global North, cannot be readily applied to persons and communities globally (Gopinath, 2005; Massad, 2007). Gopinath (2005) argues for a "queer diasporic" form instead of a LGBTQ positionality since the latter "replicates a colonial narrative of development and progress that judges all 'other' sexual cultures, communities, and practices against a model of Euro-American sexual identity" (p. 11). Gopinath's (2005) work contests the South Asian diasporic longing of an imagined past which suppresses queer desires and orientations. She argues that it is "the queer diasporic body" which challenges these imaginings and transforms them (p. 4). The author argues that the 'queer diasporic body' brings to light complex histories of sexual and gender diversity that have been buried within dominant ideologies and longings about a heterosexual past. The transformation occurs when diasporic

bodies act as linkages to the colonial past and present which challenge 'authentic' ways of performing South Asian identities in contemporary culture and cinematography.

Massad (2007) also critiques the use of LGBTQ identity categories, because for him contemporary LGBT identity categories have been impressed on Arabs, and considers this imposition an example of U.S. neo-imperialism. His work examines notions of sexuality, culture and gender in the postcolonial Arab world. Massad's (2007) writing critiques sexually and gender diverse activists within the Arab world and those that reside in the Global North for perpetuating and enforcing Eurocentric interests.

On the other hand, some literature stipulates that LGBTQ identity categories can be made intelligible and applied to discuss formerly colonized communities and persons, as well as contemporary sexual and gender diverse persons globally (Vanita, 2002). Habib's (2007) work demonstrates that there existed scholarly literature on the topic of sexuality in the medieval Arab world (9th-13th century), as well as classifications "for sexual behaviour and personal traits which are not entirely dissimilar from modern concepts such as 'bisexuality, 'homosexuality', 'sodomy', 'effeminacy' (in men), 'masculinity' (in women)" (p. 48).

A notion circulates that 'homosexuality' is a modern phenomenon, which has been attributed to Foucault. People have misinterpreted Foucault when he said that sexuality was a modern invention, and have come to believe that before the nineteenth century sexuality did not exist and was not named (Foucault, 1990/1985). As a result of operating under this assumption, many scholars did not feel comfortable applying contemporary language of sexuality, (homosexuality) to discuss historical accounts of homoeroticism (Vanita, 2002). Foucault did assert that sexuality as a concept of scientific classification emerged in the nineteenth century, but he did *not* assert that same-sex sexual practices did not exist before that particular time in

history (Habib, 2009). Even if the argument is made that the 'homosexual subject' (as attributed to Foucault) is a modern invention, as the site of disciplinary practices, technologies of the self, and so forth, his genealogy of this European development may not be applicable to all regions of the globe.

Najmabadi (2014) discusses that contemporary trans identities in Iran, are a "product of the country's sociocultural and political circumstances over the previous half century…specific to this national-transnational nexus" (p. 3). In the Iranian context, the "homosexual" subject did not "emerge as a dominant discourse for disciplinary practices or for self-identification" and male same-sex sexual relationships were viewed "as what men did before they settled into heterosexual procreative sex with wives (or even as they so settled so long as they performed their reproductive obligations) and did not mark them as particular human type" (Najmabadi, 2008, p. 287-288). As mentioned earlier, majority of same-sex relationships that flourish in Pakistan and the larger Arab world go unnoticed because such relationships and encounters are not always couched in 'lesbian' or 'gay' terminology, and may be understood under sisterhood and brotherhood camaraderie (Babayan, 2008; Khan, 1997b). However, it has also been documented that things are shifting to the 'gay and lesbian' identity model as privileged signs of modernization and progress (Najmabadi, 2014).

In many ways, Najmabadi's (2014) argument can be applied to most regions of the globe since identities are a product of specific historical processes, while they are also shaped by hegemonic imperial and colonial powers. In some cases processes of colonization have attempted to *heterosexualize* same-sex South Asian writings like poetry (Kugle, 2002; Petievich, 2002). In Iran's case, the *gay* category emerged in the 1970s, and it was considered pejorative since it translated as "(*kuni*)", which is understood as "pejorative and dishonorable load"

(Najmabadi, 2014, emphasis orig, p. 9). It wasn't until two decades later, the term gay gained momentum in Iran because it created "distance from that Persian pejorative assignation and helped those who so identified to connect to a global imagined community" (Najmabadi, 2014, p. 9). Even with the imagined community aspect acknowledged, Najmabadi (2014) argues that categories like sex, gay and lesbian are not merely words, they are laden with certain meanings which originated in a specific history and context. An example is the DSM among other US imported documents to diagnose and treat trans identified individuals in Iran. For Najmabadi (2014), the focus is not really on the origins of a concept or a practice, instead she is concerned with exploring "what the borrowing, appropriation, and embracing means for the importers" and how their meanings are transformed and the particular effects in new spaces (p. 9). In this way, the term does not remain the same, and the meanings shift as these terms get incorporated in the lives of local sexually and diverse individuals.

It is important to note here that all identity categories come with their 'baggage' and are contentious. No category can be fully accountable and reflective of every agentic person's life, values and worldviews (Ahmed, 2006). To dismiss identity categories as simply 'western' delegitimizes the many adoptions and re-imaginings of these categories by racialized diasporic bodies locally and globally. As users of identity categories, it falls on the user to maintain critical vigilance of identity categories. There is immense diversity in how one person's use of 'lesbian' can hold many meanings contingent on varying contexts. For example, see the work of the 'Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights' research project, on the use of terminology related to gender and sexually diverse communities and individuals globally (Lennox & Waites, forthcoming; Mulé, Khan & McKenzie, 2017). This work coincides with the proliferation of LGBTQ labels readily used by Muslims and LGBTQ Muslim groups residing globally for many

reasons. One of the reasons is using the discourse of LGBTQ as a strategy to organize politically in struggles against state and non-state sanctioned violence against sexual and gender diversity (Abdi & Gilder, 2016).

Islamic Jurisprudence

The following section takes an in-depth look at the components of Islamic jurisprudence. I want to note here that I remain sensitive to how Islam, Muslims, and the Quran are represented in various texts (video, written, images and so on), due to my positionality as a racialized Muslim lesbian woman. My aim in offering critiques related to these topics are coming from a place of investment and are not to be taken out of their contexts. As Wadud (1999) astutely posits, "to challenge gender biases in these endeavors from within a pro-faith perspective is not the same as critiques offered by classical and neo-Orientalists, for whom no constraint or motivation of belief exist" (p. xvii).

According to Kugle (2010), "Islam is a complex tradition with many variations, internal contradictions, and creative ambiguities" (pp. 20-21). Presenting Islamic jurisprudence and teachings as an autonomous, ordered, and a monolithic entity is a Eurocentric conception rooted in orientalist and colonial view of Islamic law and teachings (Khalafallah, 2005). Said (1978) asserts, that one needs to remain cautious of "falsely unifying rubrics like, 'America,' 'the West,' or 'Islam' [that] …invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse, cannot remain as potent as they are, and must be opposed" (p. xxviii). Irrespective of this, Islam is often taken up as a monolithic entity, despite the multiple understandings of its tenants globally, and its adherents' diverse application of the faith tradition (Ali, 2006). Kadri's (2012) scholarship traces the many influences that have come to impress upon what we call Islam and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), from the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of Arabia, to

the Prophet's familial relations and the rise of Islam as an entity. What is referred to as *Islamic tradition* is a composite of *hadith*, *sharia*, *fiqh* rulings and scriptural (Quran) sources (Kugle, 2010).

The *hadith*[8] are believed to be the collected sayings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad to whom the Quran was revealed (Kadri, 2012). The *hadith* have been recorded to guide Muslims on matters related to faith (Kadri, 2012), that serve "as normative behavior for believers" (Wadud, 1999, p. xvii). Important to note that "Shia hadith differ from Sunni hadith, mostly in that they involve the sayings of the Shia imams who are considered to have been divinely inspired" (Khalilia, 2016, p. 43).

Barlas (2002), Habib (2007), and Kugle (2010) have argued that most of the negative attitudes and legislation on sexual and gender diversity comes from *hadith*, and therefore the *hadith* deserve special scrutiny for their influence on Islamic jurisprudence and everyday practices of Muslims. The collection of *hadith* was actually put together and in circulation after the passing of the Prophet (Siddiqui, 2006). This means that the *hadith* were not part of the early Muslims' practice of Islam (Kugle, 2010), which raises questions about its actual place within the practice of the faith. Barlas (2002) asserts that the *hadith* "are the source of most Muslim misogyny" (p. 73). There exist problematic and demeaning *hadith* on the topic of women, gender, and sexually diverse persons, which Muslims have responded to in several ways (Kadri,

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[8] As a Muslim, I do not place the *hadith* at the same level as the Quran (as some Muslims do), since the former is the word of man and the latter is the word of God. The topic of *hadith*, and its adherence alongside the Quran is a nebulous matter. The majority of the Muslims I have come across uphold the hadith on the same level as God's words, and consider it sacrilegious to exclude it from their practice of Islam. I do not place strong emphasis on the *hadith* for two main reasons. First, many *hadith* contradict other *hadith* (Barlas, 2002; Kugle, 2010). Second, the Prophet actually forbade anyone from writing his *hadith* due to fears that the *hadith* will be used instead of the scripture. The methods that the hadith stand upon to prove their authenticity remain unchallenged (Kugle, 2010). For detailed accounts of the methods of verification and an overall excellent discussion of the history and tensions surrounding the *hadith*, see Barlas (2002), Kadri (2012), Kugle (2010) and 'The History of the Hadith-Part 1 & 2' at: http://www.quran-islam.org/articles/part_1/history_hadith_1_(P1148).html

2012; Kugle, 2010). Some Muslims take the *hadith* as the infinite truth and cannot see its limitations, whereas others develop apologetic statements to ameliorate injuries, and provide 'context' about the *hadith* in question (Kadri, 2012). Some Muslims reject the 'unfair' *hadith* and follow the *hadith* considered '*sahih*' or authentic by the jurists. The offensive and problematic *hadith* are dismissed as "clearly out of character with all of Muhammad's words and deeds" (Siddiqui, 2006, p. 118), which still enforces the *hadith* tradition. If one questions the institution and use of *hadith* in practice, one is accused of blasphemy (Kadri, 2012).

Sharia[9] (or Islamic laws) are considered to be "God's will as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad" (Mir-Hosseini, 2010, p. 9). These laws were developed over a span of 200 years after the death of the prophet (Siddiqui, 2006). *Sharia* rulings cover family, marriage, divorce, adultery, inheritance and sexuality (Ali, 2006). Notably, in the modern period, the *Sharia* has been contested as to whether it refers to "Islamic law or as Muslim custom, as a code of rules or a constitution?" (Kugle, 2010, p. 130). Many LGBTQ Muslims pose this question since the *Sharia* has also been understood as "the product of human debate and social evolution" (Kugle, 2010, p. 132). *Fiqh* is understood as jurisprudence, which "denotes the process of human endeavour to discern and extract legal rulings from the sacred sources of Islam, that is, the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the practice of the Prophet, as contained in Hadith, Traditions)" (Mir-Hosseini, 2010, p. 9).

Fiqh rulings are "interpretive scholarship represented by local opinion" and *sharia* is deemed the "definition of practice" (Barlas, 2002, p. 71). The distinction between *sharia* and *fiqh* is important since it affords the many "jurisprudential schools in the [Islamic] tradition, and,

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[9] Mir-Hosseini (2010) makes a useful distinction for Muslim feminist engagement with *sharia* and *fiqh*. The author asserts that *sharia*, as a set of guidelines (not codified laws) is considered to be revealed, but *fiqh* is human understanding of *sharia* and thus amenable to change. Kadri (2012) provides a detailed analysis on the conception of *sharia* and its application throughout Islamicate history.

within them, a multiplicity of positions and opinions" to operate within and draw from (Mir-Hosseini, 2010, p. 9). As there are many different schools of jurisprudence governing the many sects and the approaches to Islam, it is important to note that each 'jurisprudential school' comes with its own sets of "immense epistemological and political ramifications" which require consideration (Mir-Hosseini, 2010, p. 9).

There exist many approaches and sects within the Islamicate tradition. For example, to mention a few, there are Ahmadiyya, Shia, Zaydi, Alawites, Druzes, Ismaili, and Sunni Muslims. Sufism can be understood as a way of being a Muslim which cuts across and within all sects (Kugle, 2007). There are two main schools of jurisprudence in the Islamicate tradition, Sunni and Shia—the "Shia jurisprudence (known as Jafri law) [is] separate from the Sunni legal learning" (Nasr, 2016, p. 69). The "four Sunni jurisprudential schools—the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali—differed in their methodologies and philosophies of law" (Nasr, 2016, p. 40). Despite the existing divergences, all schools of thought agree that males and females are to be treated differently in the eyes of the law (Barlas, 2002). This among other instances is an example of laws marginalizing women. The utmost thing to bear in mind is that the *sharia* laws are an interpretation of the misogynist and patriarchal readings of the Quran, and of contradictory and unverified *hadith* (Barlas, 2002; Wadud, 1999).

Quran and Tafsir

The Quran is the sole scriptural source, which outlines the fundamental tenets that Muslims adhere to in their practice of Islam (Esack, 2005). It is of utmost importance to note that the Quran does not speak for itself (Kugle, 2010). People who identify as Muslims speak for the sacred text thorough its interpretations, which are slathered in misogyny, heteropatriarchy, and sexism (Kugle, 2010). Reforms that seek to emancipate Islamic jurisprudence toward social

justice for all have been in the works for some time now and are evident in contemporary discussions on gender and sexuality in the language of rights. For instance, Shannahan (2009) asserts that reform in Islam must be framed within human rights[10] at the nexus of gender parity and sexual autonomy.

Scholars of Islamic theology who undertake a critical, progressive and liberatory approach to Islam and its teachings argue that the problem does not lie with God's scriptures, just how they have been interpreted and packaged for consumption, that have caused the othering of women, sexual and gender diverse persons (Barlas, 2002; Esack, 1997, 2005; Kugle, 2010; Wadud, 1999, 2006). The Quran is considered a living document with universal guidance that transcends the particular context in which it was revealed (Esack, 1997). Wadud (2006) points out that the sacred text "is founded upon [the] male sexual experience" (p. 238), and argues for the inclusion of experiences and perspectives of those marginalized parties through critical, God and woman centred *tafsir* (interpreting); and for Kugle (2010), this includes gender and sexuality.

Esack (1997) also discusses the inclusion of historically marginalized voices to bear on the process of Quran exegesis. Esack (1997) is a South African theologian, whose work on Islamic liberation theology comes from his involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle. He situates liberatory or progressive Islam within grounded in Quran's emphasis on social justice. Esack (1997) conceptualizes liberation theology as, "one that works towards freeing religion from social, political and religious structures and ideas based on uncritical obedience and the

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[10] Barlas (2002) advocates for a systematic overhaul and contestations of conventional constructions of meaning derived from scriptural and non-scriptural sources in Islam. She argues that such normative constructions have been deployed by nation-states to subjugate citizens (women's sexuality, body, rights, autonomy and so on) vis-a-vis religion for political gains; patriarchal and misogynist understandings of Islam (Wahhabism) to further subjugate Muslim women (Mernissi, 1996 cited in Barlas, 2002). For example, the Gulf Arab states influencing legislation through specific Wahhabi religious doctrine and influence in Pakistan (see Jamal, 2013), and in Sri Lanka (see Schwartz & Al-Alawi, 2013).

freedom of all people from all forms of injustice and exploitation including those of race, gender, class and religion" (p. 83). Esack (1997) urges to emancipate Islam – and especially the Quran – from the misogynistic, patriarchal and sexist interpretations that get in the way of all Muslims relating to and following the Quran and its teachings.

Esack (1997) argues that one of the goals of the Quran is to emancipate the oppressed from practices, structures, and regimes deemed oppressive to the believers. Themes of resistance (the engaging of *jihad* and *ijtihad*) to oppression are expressed throughout the Quran, and thus are central to a Muslim's belief system. God abhors practices and regimes of oppression and expresses the need for liberation of believers through various parables in the former scriptures and the Quran. For instance, in the Quran, God mentions Moses and the Israelites who were liberated from the Pharaoh's oppressive regime. Framing Islam within a theological liberation lens functions as a "liberative praxis of solidarity" in times of marginalization and oppression (Esack, 1997, p. 110) that seeks to unite the practice of faith adherents within their contexts. This unification works beyond the practice of individual faith and connects to community and society to achieve social justice for all irrespective of religion, race and so forth.

When interpreting scripture, it is imperative to put the Quran first and rely on "its own use of language its own retelling of narratives, and its own principles—rather than falling back on cultural prejudice, pre-Islamic patterns, or related scriptural traditions" (Kugle, 2010, p. 42). Both Esack (2005) and Wadud (1999) purport that obtaining a holistic understanding of the Quran as *one* is necessary. As Wadud (1999) emphasizes, the book "is not a manual of directives which only commands the individual reader to perform certain actions or fulfil particular characteristics" (p. 32). God has identified in 2:256, that "*there is no compulsion in religion*" which speaks to the "message of religious pluralism" (Siddiqui, 2006, p. 146). In other words, to

observe *tawhid* or unity of the Quranic principles throughout its interpretation as a coherent text; and not assign meaning to each verse in isolation or a take a literal reading of each verse without considering "a systematic rationale for making correlations" is warranted (Wadud, 1999, p. xii).

   Quran as sex positive.

   The Quranic verses addressing romantic and sexual relationships employ the term "*zawjan"*, which is not tied to any specific gender (Habib, 2009, p. 18). The term *zawjan* refers to "a pair, a couple, a spouse" only, so it does not exclude same-sex relationships and acts (Habib, 2009, p. 19). In analysing the Islamicate writings on 'homosexuality' in the Middle East, Habib (2007) uncovers the central arguments posed against same-sex attractions and dismantles them with strong evidence and suave. The author argues *against* the claims that postulate same-sex attractions and relationships as forbidden in the Quran, which she maintains were open to debate prior to the thirteenth century, and can be traced to the ninth century. Habib (2007) further states that the sacred text is "much more ambivalent toward homosexuality than the Torah or the New Testament" (p. 8).

   Kugle (2003) asserts that the Quran, and Islam as a tradition is sex positive. Sex and sexuality are seen "as a healthy part of human existence which can be transformed into an act of charity and kindness, elevate one's spirituality, and allow believers a taste of the delights of the afterlife," as indicated in 2:223 of the Quran (Shannahan, 2009, p. 62). Sex in the Quran is mentioned alongside other desires like "food, wealth and power" that may "be good or bad depending more on the intent, intensity, and ethical comportment of the desiring than on the specific object or experience desired" (Kugle, 2010, p. 50).

   Bucar and Shirazi (2012) argue that "the Qur'an is clear that sexuality was part of Allah's plan for human life" (p. 422). Targeting LGBTQ Muslims solely on who they have sex with

takes away from other aspects (emotional, mental, spiritual and so on) of relationships. To solely focus on the physical aspects of sex, is to devoid a relationship of its companionship and social facets. This invariably results in the construction of heterosexual relationships as fulfilling since they are not all about sex, and same-sex relationships as being driven by pure lust. The negative focus on sex and sexual acts, especially same-sex acts may give way to the deployment of these in causing harm to individuals.

According to Habib (2007), the Quran does not stipulate "degrees of sin" for homosexuality, and "there is no mention in the Quran or the hadith that there are degrees of fornication […F]ornication is fornication, plain and simple" (p. 59). She further argues that the definition of fornication, as indicated in a *hadith*, "is quite literally the presence of a penis inside a vagina between a man and a woman who are not married to each other" (p. 59). This means that anal sex between men and the female same-sex act of grinding cannot be considered 'fornication' at all.

Unpacking the story of Lut (Lot).

Kugle (2010) argues that existing discourses surrounding sex, sexuality, gender roles, sexual and gender diversity that pre-dated Islam have influenced the interpretation of its doctrine and tenets. Furthermore, the interpretations of the specific passages are too narrowly focused on sex (Kugle, 2010). The debatable Quranic verses[11] are mainly located in the story of Lut (Lot) and are in reference to the communities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Hendricks, 2010; Kugle, 2010). Terms like *luti* (a person who engages in male same-sex acts), *liwat* (sex between males), *qawm lut* (people of Lut's tribe) were invented by the jurists and are not from the Quran (Kugle,

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[11] The Quranic verses are as follows: chapter 7, verses 80-84; chapter 11, verses 77-83; chapter 15, verses 73-74; chapter 21, verse 74; chapter 22, verse 43; chapter 26, verses 165-166; chapter 27, verses 56-59; and chapter 29, verses 27-33 (Duran, 1993; Hendricks, 2010; Kugle, 2010).

2010). These terms are used in reference to Lut's tribe and male same-sex acts (Kugle, 2010). The verses related to the destruction of Lut's community are commonly interpreted as being attributed to male same-sex acts, and that Lut was sent to prevent and punish these acts (Habib, 2007; Kugle, 2010).

However, it has been argued that the destruction of Lut's community was rather for a range of immoral acts/immoralities (*fahisha*), which included: rejecting God's message, disrespect of Lut and his prophet hood, and an attempt to sexually assault and rape Lut's guests, who were angels. Further, scholars have argued that the distinction must be made between consensual sex and forced rape and sexual assault (Habib, 2007, 2009). Reading the controversial verses for sexual acts (non-consensual and consensual) takes away from the larger focus, which was disobedience to God in rejecting the message brought by Lut (Habib, 2007). If Lut's community was destroyed due to the same-sex acts, then why did Lut's wife share a similar fate? (Kugle, 2010). Notably, in the Quran, there is no indication that Lut's wife was engaging in same-sex relationships. Many scholars attribute her demise and that of Lut's community to be a result of rejecting the word of God, as has been the case of many communities/people mentioned in the sacred text, i.e. Pharaoh rejecting Moses (Hendricks, 2009, 2010; Kugle, 2010).

Notably, the Quranic verses that are used mainly to abhor sexual and gender diversity are directed solely toward males and mention of female same-sex relationships is absent from the scripture (Habib, 2007). The emphasis on male same-sex relationships speaks more about the surrounding socio-political and historical contexts of the verses and their interpretation rather than sexuality, gender identity and expression (Hendricks, 2010; Kugle, 2010, Safi, 2003). It is

worth mentioning that the terms 'homosexuality' or 'homosexual,'[12] do not exist in the sacred texts (Hendricks, 2010; Kugle, 2010).

The lack of references on female same-sex relationships sheds light on the status of women at the time of revelation and the processes of hermeneutics (Habib, 2007, 2009). In order to unpack these alleged abhorring verses, attention must be placed on the principles of *tafsir* (interpretation or exegesis which will be discussed later on in detail) that govern such ideological constructions. It is imperative to note that the Islamicate tradition did not come out of a vacuum. It exists as part of the Abrahamic faith traditions (Judaism and Christianity), and was influenced by its predecessors.

> The urge to condemn homosexuality among Muslims was reinforced by the Jewish and Christian traditions that surrounded them. Early Muslim interpreters relied upon Jewish and Christian sources to understand the story of Lot, sources that were already saturated with a culture of homophobia and misogyny (Kugle, 2010, p. 62).

Kugle (2010) argues that even if the conventional interpretations of the Torah and Bible of Lut are true in condemning male same-sex, "this would not necessarily apply to Muslims because the Qur'an's revelation abrogates the legal force of earlier revelations and the legal systems put in place by earlier Prophets who brought them" (Kugle, 2010, p. 61).

Female homoeroticism.

Female homoeroticism within the Islamicate tradition is captured under the abhorrence of male same-sex relationships, and has very few mentions within Islamic legal texts (Bucar & Shirazi, 2012). There is a shortage of literature on female sexuality in general, especially female

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[12] The terms homosexuality and homosexual are modern inventions. See Chap 2. For further discussion, see Foucault (1990/1985), Habib (2009), Mahmood (2005) and Vanita (2002).

same-sex attractions and relationships in the Middle East (Habib, 2007). Babayan (2008) argues that men are authors of the bulk of writing where the emphasis is placed on men's lives and "women surface in a limited variety of roles as wives, dominant mothers, and beguiling seductresses. Women remain on the margins of recorded premodern Islamicate history, and so their experiences are often obscured" (p. 240).

An example of men penning the writings can be found in how the sexual act of 'grinding' is discussed. Habib (2007) argues that the notion of grinding was "always thought to have involved surface grinding, for in the patriarchal imagination, penetration could only be attained with the male presence" (p. 18). The absence of lesbianism and/or lesboeroticsm from Islamicate history has been attributed to the patriarchal structures in place that devalued women (Murray, 1997). Habib (2007) traces that the ideas in theological and scholarly literature which condemned female homoeroticism began in the later part of the thirteenth century, and "by the fifteenth century, the devil became the cause of female homosexual desire, together with supposedly male ill-treatment" (p. 57). The author attributes this to the changes in the political and religious realms, where the discussions around the permissibility of same-sex attractions and relationships completely halted. She questions the censure of these discussions, "given the ambiguity, or perhaps the complexity, of the Muslim holy texts. That homosexual acts are prohibited in Islam is not a matter that has always been accepted among Muslim scholar[s]" (Habib, 2007, p. 58).

Musahiqa is a term commonly used to address female same-sex relationships (Babayan, 2008) and *suhaq*, which is translated as grinding or rubbing is used to denote the sexual act between two females (Kugle, 2010). This term or its variation does not exist in the Quran (Habib, 2007; Kugle, 2010). Some jurists assert that verses 15-16 in chapter 4 of the Quran

prohibits female same-sex acts (Habib, 2007; Kugle, 2010). Habib (2007) argues that this verse

in question uses vague "grammar and wording" and "is unlikely to be related to homosexual

activity at all…much like the rest of the Quran, these verses have multiple meanings and possible

interpretations" (p. 60-61). The key word in this verse is again *fahisha* which refers to

immorality, and is interpreted as purely sexual acts, and in this case female same-sex acts

(Habib, 2007; Kugle, 2010).

It is worth mentioning again that immorality, as conceptualized in the Quran, refers to a

variety of things which include "adultery, idolatry, and financial dishonesty" (Kugle, 2010, p.

65). Habib (2007) argues that if indeed this verse was intended to refer to female homoeroticism,

for the sake of argument, it is still a blurry deduction. Furthermore, this verse "does not prescribe

the death penalty or even corporeal punishment, as the ahadith allegedly do" (Habib, 2007, p.

61). What's important is that this verse does not mention the word sex or sexuality at all, which

demonstrates "how far interpreters with prejudice will go to find ideas in the Qur'an that are not

there in its language and context" (Kugle, 2010, p. 65). In fact, these verses "actually address

financial honesty and fraud, something male jurists and interpreters either misrecognize or

obscure" (Kugle, 2010, p. 65).

Wadud (1999) argues that those interpreting verses about the importance and/or about

women mentioned in the sacred text arrive with pre-conceived ideas of women's roles. And

when such notions are met through a superficial reading, a critical and in-depth look is eluded.

She argues that these processes have resulted in "a great deal of oversimplifications and

contradictions when the perspective of the individual exegete is superimposed on to the Qur'an

itself" (Wadud, 1999, p. 32). I believe the same premise can be applied to the mention of women

in the *hadith*, where bias is evident, not from the Prophet himself, but from the people who have

reported such mentions. That is why the "hadith is much more difficult to authenticate and is easier to swear by or to forge", whereas "the Quran makes no mention, prohibitory or otherwise, of female homosexuality. By contrast to the hadith, the Quran is considered to be infallible" (Habib, 2007, p. 59).

Trans Muslims

There is a considerable gap in studies that specifically explore the trans Muslim experience in the Global North. Most scholarly studies exploring LGBTQ Muslim experiences do have trans participants, but are not focused solely on trans Muslims. Existing research studies with trans Muslims discuss the marginalization of gender diverse individuals throughout the globe due to the dominant understandings of Islamic jurisprudence; while simultaneously demonstrating the creation of 'in between' spaces of expressing gender that challenge the binaristic conceptions of gender identity and expression (Alipour, 2017; Jama, 2008; Kalra & Shah, 2013; Kugle, 2014; Maulod & Jamil, 2010; Najmabadi, 2014; Teh, 2001; Williams, 2010).

According to Teh (2001), gender can be broken down in a few categories within the Islamicate tradition. In addition to the male and female genders, there are the *khunsa* (intersex) and *mukhannis* (transgendered) or *mukhannas* (transsexual) individuals. The *khunsa* are also referred to as *khasi* or as a eunuch (Kugle, 2010). The term *mutathakirat* was used by medieval Muslim scholars to refer to women who at present day are referred to as 'butch' and was also applied to transsexual and intersex persons (Habib, 2009). The term "mukanath" was deployed as an umbrella term to capture a variety of sexual and gender orientations (Habib, 2007, p. 49). On the gender spectrum, *hijras* are seen as occupying a third gender and are sometimes referred under the trans umbrella (Nanda, 1999). *Hijras* do not fully identify with masculine or feminine gender categories and reside mainly in contemporary South Asian countries (Kalra & Shah,

2013; Naqvi & Mujtaba, 1997). In Pakistan, *Khawaja Sarra* (*hijra*) community members are legally recognized as a third gender (John, 2015). Historically, *Khawaja Sarras* were revered as sacred by the monarchy (pre-colonial Hindustan) and were understood to possess spiritual and religious wisdom. They served as "guardians of princely harems", and as "entertainers who earn their living by performing [primarily] at weddings [and] births" among the many roles and responsibilities (Zia & Butt, 2012, p. 80). However, after British colonization, the *hijras* and the *Khawaja Sarra* were looked down upon and were ridiculed (Nanda, 1999).

In some Islamic schools of thought, *khunsa* or intersex individuals are permitted to undergo gender confirmation surgeries (formerly known as sex reassignment surgery) in order to either adopt the male or female gender (Teh, 2001). At times the gender confirmation surgeries are deployed as a strategy by some Muslim jurists to avoid discussing the complexities surrounding same-sex orientations and ways in which normative Islam is practiced and understood. Mainly, the practice in "classical shari'a" has been to use the genitals and anatomy in deciphering the gender of the person (Kugle, 2010, p. 258). Some LGBTQ Muslims also access gender confirmation surgeries, since it is easier to conform to normative gender ideals than maintain same-sex orientations (Habib, 2007). In this way, the operation fixes the gender ambiguity and ensures that gender roles remain undisturbed since one gender is selected (Najmabadi, 2014). Habib (2007) argues that the male and female "gender binary is central to Orthodox Islamic religious doctrine" and any nonconformity that deviates from gender norms are perceived as "not only undesirable but as contradictions of the Creator's intention" (Habib, 2007, pp. 13-14).

Najmabadi (2014) has written extensively on gender and sexuality in Islamicate societies, especially Iran. Her work explores trans identities in contemporary Iran. Najmabadi (2014)

argues that understandings of gender and sexuality (in Iran) cannot be simplified to a mere repression of 'homosexuality' and viewing gender confirmation surgery as a strategy to get rid of 'homosexuals', which is how this issue is commonly understood in Western and European imaginations. Najmabadi (2014) discusses how gender "non-normativity" is a legitimately recognized space in Iran as carved out by trans activism and lived experiences. She argues that "cultural practices and codes of conduct may not be as tightly sex/gender-inflexible as they may appear at first sight" and asserts that "normative gender/sex expectations have become formed around conduct rather than identities" (p. 299). Najmabadi (2014) offers the example of individuals who are either waiting for surgery and/or are in the middle of surgeries as occupying liminal spaces that bend the gender/sex normative roles and expectations. These liminal spaces allow individuals fluidity in transitioning since these spaces are not governed by specific identity categories (i.e. male, female and so on).

Secularism, Modernity, Orientalism, Neoliberalism and Homonationalism

Over the years, gender and sexual minority rights (women and LGBTQs) have been constructed in such a way that these are considered exceptionally tied to the Global North (Bilge, 2012; El-Tayeb, 2011, 2012; Grewal, 2005). Ideologies and discourses that render Islamicate societies inherently homophobic, and non-Islamicate societies accepting of sexual and gender diversity, evoke a civilizational and cultural clash rhetoric (Razack, 2008). These so-called clashes create binaries and false divides where dominant narratives of progress, modernity, individualism, secularism and sexularism play chief roles in discourses of gender and sexual rights which have implications for LGBTQ Muslim intersectionalities (Asad, 2003; Bilge, 2012; Jamal, 2015; Scott, 2009).

In contemporary society, the acceptance of sexual diversity is seen as "global progress" and a milestone that has to be met in order to achieve modernity as spearheaded by nation states in the Global North (Rahman, 2014a, p. 275). In stark contrast, Islamicate regions and Muslims are imagined as the antithesis of these values and regarded as threats (Haritaworn, 2015). In the context of Europe, El-Tayeb (2012) argues that:

> Postnational Europe frequently defines itself around shared values of humanism, equality and tolerance, [yet] there is an increasingly intolerant and repressive attitude towards migrants and racialized minorities – justified by their supposed threat to exactly these values, especially when they are identified as Muslim. The growing centrality of the (second generation, Muslim) migrant as internal threat to Europe can also be read however as being caused by and at the same time hiding an important change: the continent-wide shift to a 'migrant' population that is increasingly minoritarian, i.e. consisting of the so called second and third generation, born and raised in their countries of residence, which in effect have become multi-ethnic and multi-religious (p. 80).

As El-Tayeb's (2012) above assertion demonstrates, the need for a nuanced understandings of identity and belonging are required to validate intersectional identities which are erased due to dichotomous thinking. El-Tayeb (2012) asserts that the othering of Muslims (including LGBTQ) "is a European phenomenon, that in fact the Europeanization of the continent's nation-states is in no small part manifest in a shared Islamophobia and a framing of immigration as the main threat to continental union" (p. 80). I would like to further her argument to include Canada and the U.S. in this regard since such notions have also been deployed in building nationhood and a nationalistic identity against Muslim immigration in this post-911 period (Ahmad, 2002; Puar, 2007). An example is the most recent U.S. travel bans following the 2017 U.S. election, and the

rise of nationalistic right-wing (against immigration) groups and activism in Canada (Parlapiano & Singhvi, 2017).

Hate crimes and violence based on sexuality, gender identity and expression, when committed by whites in the Global North, are described as individual acts orchestrated by a 'few bad apples' (Haritaworn, 2015). However, when Muslims are found committing such acts, the responses from the nation-state is to paint Islam and Muslims as static and inherently trans- and homophobic (Ahmad, 2002). Similar to their European counterparts, the U.S. is also perceived as tolerant/progressive when it comes to LGBTQ recognition and legitimization when compared to global Islamicate regions (Puar, 2007). The U.S. imagines itself as a defender of human rights (LGBTQ and women) and bifurcates Islam and Muslims as the opposite of these values (Puar, 2007). For example, Puar (2007) argues that the "national imaginary" is built and contingent on "the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others" – and specifically LGBTQ Muslims (p. 2). This exclusion of the other leads to "the emergence of national homosexuality" which she calls homonationalism (Puar, 2007, p. 2).

The unification of nationalism and homonormativity inevitably leads to homonationalism, which serves as a yardstick to measure other nation states that have varying histories of (ongoing) coloniality and socioeconomic realities (El-Tayab, 2011; Puar, 2007). Homonationalism works toward the normalization of specific ways of being a sexual subject and promotes certain ways of being lesbian and homosexual, which also consolidates the supremacy of whiteness (Puar, 2007). According to Puar (2007), the presumption that LGBTQ Muslim is an oxymoron is due to the ongoing orientalist tropes of the "sexually pathological terrorist figure" that cannot coexist with the "disciplined homosexual subject" (p. 21). Homonationalism serves to position the Global North as morally superior to other regions due to 'progressive' and

'tolerant' sexual and gender politics, irrespective of how equitable such actually are in practice. An implication of homonationalism is the invisibilization of intersectional positionalities— LGBTQ Muslim, LGBTQs are seen as belonging to the Global North, and Muslimness is divorced due to irreconcilable ideological differences. In other words, identity categories of 'Muslim' and 'LGBTQ' are perceived as mutually exclusive, which replicates false dichotomies that erase nuanced understandings of intersectional identities.

In Europe, LGBTQ Muslims are othered due to their Muslim label and are imagined as "being too oppressed and alienated from their own needs to speak up as long as they still identify with Islam" (El-Tayeb, 2012, p. 80). El-Tayeb (2012) argues that LGBTQ Muslims gain recognition by "step[ping] into western modernity-a step that necessarily requires the break with, the coming out of the Muslim community-that they can claim an individualized identity as feminist or queer, usually by expressing gratitude for being saved by their 'host society'" (p. 80). Even though some countries in the Global North offer freedoms (legal rights) related to sexual orientation, these are recent emergences that did not exist anywhere before the late 1960s and 1970s and are not universally found. For an in-depth discussion, see Altman (1993, 2001) as this topic is beyond the scope of this paper. As evidenced in the literature, these recent freedoms do not guarantee that rights alone can shift societal attitudes and eradicate institutionalized cisgenderism, heteropatriarchy, trans- and homophobia (Rahman, 2014a; Rayside & Wilcox 2011).

It is also important to discuss the role of neoliberalism[13] in shaping LGBTQ Muslim identities in the Global North. Neoliberalism as a hegemonic force removes and de-historicizes

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[13] Following Puar's (2007, 2017) scholarship, the neoliberal consumerist subject is constructed culturally, socially and materially within liberalist notions of capitalist freedoms that support free enterprise, privatization and belief in the free liberal subject who can exercise choice in the marketplace. Through homonationalism, which is "a structure of modernity, a convergence of geopolitical and historical forces, neoliberal interests in capitalist accumulation both

the individual from their socio-political contexts; and such contexts cannot be easily removed as these impact and influence the intersectional positionality of individuals' and choices (Grewal, 2005; King, 2015; Manalansan IV, 2005). For example, in debates on immigration policy in the Global North, the primary focus tends to be unassimilable racialized (diasporic) Muslims. Muslim persons and communities are constructed as the antithesis of progress and modernity, and as static entities that are unable to let go of cultural and religious chains from back home (El-Tayeb, 2011; Haritaworn, 2015). Quite often their "socioeconomic marginalization remains unaddressed as it is seen as merely an indication of their failure to adapt" to life in the Global North, and also as a malfunction of multiculturalism and its policies (El-Tayeb, 2012, p. 80). In other words, racialized Muslim bodies are blamed without paying attention to historical and sociopolitical contexts and thus require regulation from the state to fix (cultural values) through various means (banning of religious symbols i.e. hijab controversy in Canada and Europe) (Bilge, 2012; El-Tayeb, 2012).

Often in policy debates, there is limited or no discussion of the colonial history of immigration (and its treatment of immigrants through laws and exclusions) and the ongoing subjugations of marginalized groups in the Global North. When needed for a nation's economic growth, immigrants are invited to stay so long as they return 'home' after they are no longer required. There are countless examples throughout history of immigrant purging through bans and citizenship restrictions in Canada and Europe (Dua, 2007; El-Tayeb, 2012). Such histories of

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cultural and material, biopolitical state practices of population control, and affective investments in discourses of freedom, liberation, and rights" (Puar, 2017, p. 117-118). Following Foucault's biopolitics, Puar (2017) distinguishes between good 'gay' subjects that can be folded into the neoliberal enterprise and (dis)abled, racialized others who are regulated and disciplined. Puar (2017) examines the body as the site of the neoliberal agendas and asserts, "neoliberal investments in the body as portfolio, as site of entrepreneurship, entail transition of some disabled bodies from the disciplinary institutions of containment, quarantine, and expulsion into forms of incorporative biopolitical control" (Puar, 2017, p. 76).

exclusion are evident in contemporary treatment and laws of immigration and travel to Europe, Canada and the U.S. (Dua, 2007; El-Tayeb, 2011, 2012; Razack, 2008).

In Europe, racialized Muslims (diasporic and/or native) are treated as homogenous and static persons and communities that are imagined as unassimilable due to their religious identification; and thus cannot be fully integrated into a European nationhood and hold a national identity as their white counterparts (El-Tayeb, 2012). The imagined "otherness is primarily framed as one of fundamental *cultural* opposition to everything Europe stands for …[and] … the increasingly popular claim of 'the failure of multiculturalism' still manages to position racialized minorities outside of the space of 'proper' Europeanness" (El-Tayeb, 2012, p. 81). The situation is similar in Canada and the U.S., where Muslims are treated as not part of the nation state, even if they hold citizenship and passports (Razack, 2008). Assimilation into the body of the nation-state requires a giving up of Islam and a Muslim identity (El-Tayeb, 2012). In making visible the role neoliberalism plays in the development and influence of subject positions, it then shifts "feminist analyses of culture away from a focus on individual agency and 'choice' toward an engagement with identities, subjectivities, structure, and power" (Butler & Desai, 2008, p. 8). Grewal (2005) asserts that when critiquing neoliberalism, one must abstain from seeking a panacea and a "utopian search for the pure, uncommodified self or a modernist longing for the uncontaminated Other" (p. 19). In fact, the author advocates for rupturing the hold neoliberalism has through seeking contradictions, tensions, unevenness and messy formulations of subjectivities that do not cohere and make spaces for subversion and resistance to unearth (Grewal, 2005).

Often discourses of resisting western imperialism are deployed to abhor LGBTQ rights in discussions in Islamicate regions (Sweibel, 2009). However, as demonstrated earlier in this

paper, same-sex attractions and relationships have been a part of Islamicate history and traditions. In order to meaningfully challenge the bi-furcation of Islamicate/homophobic and Global North/LGBTQ-accepting discourses, thoughtful work lies ahead. Rahman (2014a) proposes that serious shifts need to be made by LGBTQ agencies in the Global North, Muslims and Islamicate regions. The author urges Islamicate regions to shift beyond the discourses that write off LGBTQ rights as western inventions in order to achieve political gains (against the Global North); and to recognize the work of activists from Africa, the Middle East and the Global South who are attempting to decolonize the discourses of rights, sexuality and gender diversity.

Rahman (2014a) suggests that LGBTQ advocacy organizations in the Global North can become increasingly critical of their Islamophobia, and consider serious engagement with all Muslim based agencies (not only those that identify as secular) to start critical dialogues about meeting the needs of Muslims and LGBTQ Muslims. Some organizations in the Global North and within Islamicate regions are doing this arduous work of decolonizing and creating bridges for critical dialogues to emerge. See the work of organizations listed in the 'Role of Support Groups in Living out an Intersectional Identity' section.

Secularism, existing as a narrative in contemporary society in the Global North, "draws much of its meaning from an imagined clash with Islam, and by extension with Muslims" in ways that invisibilize how (Judeo-Christian) religious perspectives have shaped the production of positionalities (Bilge, 2012, p. 306) and nation-building (Asad, 2003). The concept assumes that through the processes of secularization, one can obtain gender parity and sexual liberation (Bilge, 2012; Scott, 2009). A manifestation of this premise lies in the fusion of secularism and queerness in contemporary society. For example, LGBTQ individuals are perceived as

secular/non-religious, and imagined as not being connected to a religious identity. Notably, the literature on religious LGBTQs is fast expanding in many disciplines (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005; Taylor & Snowdon, 2014; Yip & Khalid, 2010). Contemporary discourses on religion as anachronistic/primitive and spirituality as agentic/enlightened also feed into secularist and sexularist discourses (Carrette & King, 2005; Bilge, 2012).

LGBTQs that operate from a faith-based spirituality as inferior and erases the agency involved in following faith (Khan, 2016a; Taylor & Snowdon, 2014). As "polarized constructions of religiosity and spirituality obstruct investigation into the interaction and relationship between the two concepts... [as] both religion and spirituality are social constructs and that construction is contingent on socio-political contexts" (Khan, 2016a, p. 133). Razack (2007) following Asad (2003) argues that secularism can be viewed as a hegemonic force that seeks to regulate its citizens into following what is deemed appropriate by the state. Secularism "requires a normative citizen who is unconnected to community, a figure who achieves definition only in comparison to racial Others, the latter presumed to be trapped in the pre-modern by virtue of their particularist tendencies" (p. 7).

According to Asad (2003) secularism cannot be perceived as a panacea for moving toward modernity from pre-modernity. This concept requires ongoing critique in how it manifests in capitalist nation-states to further certain values and agendas. Secularism as a political tool, aligned with coloniality, gained ascendency through capitalism in the fortification of capitalist nation-states. Secularism is not synonymous with acceptance of religious difference, because it seeks to subjugate religious others that do not conform to the state's notions of the normative. In order to subjugate religious others, the state can and does demonstrate its power through state-

sanctioned policies and at times violence. Secularism works in tandem with modernity in

furthering the agendas of capitalist nation-states. According to Asad (2003):

> Modernity is a project – or rather, a series of interlinked projects – that certain people in
>
> power seek to achieve. The project aims at institutionalizing a number of (sometimes
>
> conflicting, often evolving) principles: constitutionalism, moral autonomy, democracy,
>
> human rights, civil equality, industry, consumerism, freedom of the market– and
>
> secularism. It employs proliferating technologies (of production, warfare, travel,
>
> entertainment, medicine) that generate new experiences of space and time, of cruelty and
>
> health, of consumption and knowledge. The notion that these experiences constitute
>
> ''disenchantment'' – implying a direct access to reality, a stripping away of myth, magic,
>
> and the sacred – is a salient feature of the modern epoch (p. 13).

As a project, modernity seeks to institutionalize secularism and sexularism as technologies under

the guise of obtaining equality for Muslim LGBTQs. Sexularism is a concept critiquing the

assumption that secularism leads inevitably to the resolution and acceptance of sexual and

gender difference (Scott, 2009). Drawing on binaristic cultural clash rhetoric, sexularism propels

the framing of spirituality as separate from religion. Spirituality[14] then becomes a commodity for

consumption by the modern liberated neo-liberal individual. There are many examples of this

found in daily interactions with people, places and things (dream catchers, headless statues of

Buddha, 'zen art' or 'having a zen moment'). These common expressions of commodified

spirituality observed in society have been co-opted from Indigenous and Buddhist belief systems

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[14] My use of the term spiritualty seeks to expose the co-option of Indigenous and so-called 'Eastern' complex belief systems and traditions as consumable and marketable products (see Carrette & King, 2005). I am aware that there exist conceptualizations of spirituality that have no connection to religious traditions at all (as may be the case in many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people/communities). Religion has been and continues to be a tool of colonial and imperial subjugation, and has been incredibly detrimental to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people/communities' ways of thinking, living and being overall.

like chanting, meditation, healing circles, sweat lodges, and burning sage (Carrette & King, 2005).

Sexularism, secularism, and modernity among other forces play important roles in constructing Islam and certain approaches to the Islamicate tradition as suitable to Western and European palettes. In the Global North, these terms come up often in discourses related to Islam and Muslims, and specifically construct Islam "at odds with modernity" where "secularism is usually the unquestioned standard of judgement" (Scott, 2009, p.1). Even though, it has been proven in the literature that secularism does not guarantee specific freedoms related to sexual and gender parity (Asad, 2003; Scott, 2009).

Sexularism operates in how certain approaches to Islam, are discursively constructed as 'secular' and thus are perceived as separate from the religious realm. This is evident in the discourses surrounding Salafist[15] and Sufi[16] approaches to Islam. For example, the Sufi approaches are generally more acceptable in the Global North than the Salafist approaches since the former is aligned with secularism, and the latter with radical and traditionalist Islam (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009a). In other words, Salafist approaches to Islam are constructed as traditional, heteronormative and thus not LGBTQ friendly (Al-Sayyad, 2010). Even though there exists diversity, (irrespective of what approach is utilized), in how each Muslim observes their faith tradition (Safi, 2003).

In the Global North, Sufism is consumed in many ways. At times, Sufism is classified as 'mysticism' and seen as separate from Islam; or is take up in new age spiritual practices (where religious elements are removed altogether or minimized); and a safer 'Islam' separate from

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15 Salafist approaches tend to interpret the Quran in a purely literal sense (Weismann, 2005). Salafist groups can be found in Saudia Arabia, among many other places. Salafi Islam has been referred to as 'Wahabism', 'Arab Islam' or 'Wahabi Islam'. See Lauzière (2010), Weismann (2005) and Wiktorowicz (2006).
16 See Raudvere & Stenberg (2009b) and Kugle (2007b) for an in-depth on Sufism.

conservative Islam to practice (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009a; Safi, 2003). Further, there exist

many Sufi spiritual groups that offer no connection to Islam (Klinkhammer, 2009; Schönbeck,

2009). Sufism is palatable to Europeans, and Westerners since "Sufi communities often appear to

stand out as an alternative to more ethnically defined congregations and especially to younger

people an alternative arena" (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009a, p. 8). Even though Islamicate sects

are deeply influenced by Sufism, some approaches to Islam are considered more ethnic, less

trusting and not accessible to individuals in the Global North. Furthermore, Sufism is heralded as

"the spirituality of Islam" (Heck, 2009, p. 13) which make it less risky for individual to divorce

the religion from this approach. Raudvere & Stenberg (2009a) state that:

> Idealised presentations of Sufism as the history of pious mystics and orders more or less
>
> separated from society in a world of pious mystics and orders more or less separated from
>
> society in a world of beautiful poetry and rituals, or as abstract outlines of universalist and
>
> essentialist mysticism, have played a vital role in the history of Orientalism. As a
>
> consequence…still transmit an image of Sufis as estranged from other Muslims and
>
> generally to be regarded as a challenge to Islam and Muslims (p. 2).

There is much literature that speaks to the marginalization of Sufism and Sufis in geopolitical

landscapes (parts of Africa, South Asia, Turkey, Indonesia and Syria to name a few places where

many types of Sufism is practiced), mostly at the hands of Sunni and Salafist groups (Geaves,

2009; Christman, 2009; Jamal, 2013, 2015). An important consideration to take note of is the

Saudi state's promotion of Wahhabi Salafism especially in Asian and African Muslim majority

societies (Jamal, 2013, 2015). Muslim feminists such as Jamal (2013, 2015) and the network

'*Women Living Under Muslim Laws*' [17] (WLUML) are suspicious of Salafi-centric discourses on

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[17] For more information, see the network's publications and reports on this topic: http://www.wluml.org

gender and sexuality. Since the state support for Salafi-centric groups has usually meant a diminution of women and gender related freedoms in many Muslim majority states such as Pakistan. Based on the women's experiences, recorded by WLUML, societies where Sufi traditions dominate are generally more accepting of diversity in not only gender performance but also diversity of faith within Islam (Jamal, 2013, 2015).

Progressive Muslims.

Many scholars and theologians (LGBTQ and allies) who write critically on sexual and gender diversity in the Global North often align themselves with progressive notions of Islam (Kugle, 2014). At first glance, the concept of progressive Muslims, can arguably elucidate discourses of *progress* that are inextricably linked to modernity, secularism and enlightenment. However, this is not the case as the progressive approach to the Islamicate tradition is diverse, consists of many types of Muslims and engenders Islamic principles. For example, Safi (2003) argues that "the progressive Muslim project represents an ongoing attempt at an Islamic *ijtihad*, or committed critical thinking based on disciplined but independent reasoning, to come up with solutions to new problems. This progressive ijtihad *is* our jihad" (p. 8, emphasis orig.). The author further argues that *ijtihad* and *jihad* as conceptualized by the progressive and liberationist movement seriously considers "the possibility of engaging and transforming the social order and the environment in a just and pluralistic fashion that affirms the humanity of us all" irrespective of religious and spiritual affiliation (Safi, 2003, p. 8).

The progressive approach is critical of secularist and modernist notions of Islam since it is anti-monolithic and engenders religious and spiritual pluralism. This approach arose from liberationist, non-oppressive and critical understandings of the scripture and of Islamic jurisprudence. As the origins of progressive Islam and Muslims are grounded in the anti-

apartheid struggles of South Africa (Esack, 1997, 2005). The anti-apartheid movement consisted of individuals from various religious traditions, ethnicities and so forth, who were united in their resistance to racial, ethnic and religious among other oppressions. As indicated earlier, Esack's (1997), work on Islamic liberation theology arose from his involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle. "Liberation theology has come to be known as the movement of Progressive Muslims, a rubric that seems to have been first applied in South Africa and subsequently spread to Muslim communities living in North America and Europe" (Kugle, 2010, p. 38). Given that the liberatory ideas were espoused by the anti-apartheid struggle, which had an impact on the practice of Islam for many Muslims cannot be easily dismissed and overlooked.

Overall, the Progressive Islam movement is not the same as the *liberal Islam* movement, in fact the former offers significant critiques of it (Safi, 2003). Progressive Islam follows in the foot-steps of the feminist critique that seeks to challenge patriarchy and work toward socially just and pluralistic practices in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies (Safi, 2003). Safi (2003) explains that the *progressive* in a progressive Muslim identity denotes "a relentless striving towards a universal notion of justice in which no single community's prosperity, righteousness, and dignity comes at the expense of another" (p. 3). The main emphasis is on the "values that we hold to be essential to a vital, fresh, and urgently needed interpretation of Islam for the twenty-first century…the kind of Islamic interpretation one comes up with is largely determined by who undertakes the interpretation" (Safi, 2003, p. 3).

Varying Discourses on Living out LGBTQ Muslim Identity

In this section, I outline contemporary discourses (hegemonic and challenging alternative perspectives) evident in the literature on LGBTQ intersectional identities. The following section will use the term 'living out' an intersectional LGBTQ Muslim identity as opposed to 'reconcile

and/or reconciliation' when discussing the literature on intersectional identities of Muslim LGBTQs. The term 'living out' is expansive since conceptually it offers infinite possibilities for LGBTQ Muslims to exist locally and globally. Further, this term is not normed on or tied to any LGBTQ models of living and acceptance. 'Living out' also has been used by scholars who write critically on this topic to discuss the uniqueness of each LGBTQ Muslim life—since each individual life is not the same. Albeit, there may exist similarities and dissimilarities in the lives of LGBTQ Muslims as individuals and as a part of many communities (Hendricks, 2009; Kugle, 2014).

The 'living out' of intersectional identities speaks to the complexities of living, identifying and existing i.e. breathing, negotiating relationships, tangible and intangible things, embodiment, and everything in between that comes with how LGBTQ Muslims as a marginalized community, mediate and interact with structures, many communities of belonging, families and individuals.

Hegemonic discourses.

Woven into the fabric of the Canadian national identity, societal institutions and attitudes are deep-rooted multifaceted forms of oppression, i.e. heterosexism, trans-, bi- and homophobia among others (Chapman & Withers, forthcoming). Families and individuals, irrespective of religion and ethnicity are not immune to such influences. For example, within normative religious orthodoxies (Judaic, Christian and Islam) and society, there is constant pressure to conform to compulsory heterosexuality and the normative, which affects many LGBTQs, Muslims and non-Muslims alike (Ahmed, 2006). Therefore LGBTQ Muslims at times do contend with intricate family obligations and ties, and can face pressure toward heterosexual marriage and to uphold 'family honour' (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010, 2012; Jaspal & Siraj, 2011;

Khan, 1997a, 1997b; Naz Project, 1999, 2000; Yip 2004b, 2008b). One way of upholding family honour found in the literature was to not disclose sexuality and gender status to maintain secrecy and silence (Beckers, 2010; Siraj, 2006; Yip, 2004b). This at times created tension when it came to dating and relationships since some non-Muslim LGBTQs did not understand the associated complexities. The topic of honour has been explored in detail and has been critiqued in the literature[18]. Jamal's (2015) critical engagement with honour in the context of 'honour' related violence exercised on Muslim women can be helpful here. The author urges readers to examine the notion of honour in a transnational context, meaning to move beyond the dichotomous label of Islam and Muslims as backwards/cultural and the west as tolerant/accepting. As LGBTQ Muslims occupy an intersectional space, which is created amidst the frictions from negotiating hegemonic norms in normative Muslim and LGBTQ communities (Gopinath, 2005).

Abu-Hatoum (2007) investigated 11 queer diasporic Muslims' understandings of 'home', belonging and migration experiences. She interviewed 5 women, 5 men and 1 MTF trans person connected with the Salaam[19] chapter in Toronto. The author found that the participants did not feel a sense of belonging in Canada and also in their countries of origin, as "home is never fully located on either side, but in the gap between the two spaces and experiences" (p. 13). Participants experienced racism from the mainstream LGBTQ community, which is "dominantly White-masculine and because it is capitalist/consumerist and individualistic" (p. 14). The author was taken aback when majority of the participants in her study did not discuss being queer and Muslim. The presumption was made that this topic may dominate the interviews alongside the difficulties in living out these perceived antipodal identities. Abu-Hatoum (2007) found that the

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[18] See Abu-Lughod (2011) and Zine (2008b)
[19] See https://www.salaamcanada.info

majority of the participants were critical of the assumption that sexuality and religion were incompatible.

An existing hegemonic discourse in the literature constructs LBTQ Muslim intersectionality as 'incompatible' and 'forbidden/sinful' vis-à-vis 'reconciliation' discourses. There are a few assumptions underlying reconciliation discourses. The first is that, Islam is constructed as a monolith, and adherence to institutionalized normative Islam (where no alternative understandings of scriptural texts is imagined possible) exist. The second assumption is that of compulsory heterosexuality, which is naturalized in normative interpretations of the scripture and the practice of Islam. In most reconciliation discourses, living out LGBTQ life is seen as a test from God, and considered sinful and wrong (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Siraj, 2009, 201; Yip, 2007b).

An example of how normative understandings of Islam can impact a racialized Muslim lesbian intersectionality can be found in Manji (1999). The author discusses her experiences of growing up in Canada where there is stigma attached to a lesbian identity within the normative Muslim community. Manji (1999) argues that the normative Muslim community did not consider her an authentic Muslim due to her sexuality and denied her existence. The author describes how she drew on her spiritual connection with Islam and her personal relationship to God in daily life to overcome adversities and prejudices.

The ways in which the reconciliation discourses manifest is through the compartmentalization of a LGBTQ Muslim intersectionality. In these cases, individuals attempt to separate their religious and spiritual selves from sexual behaviour and gender identity and expression among other aspects of identity i.e. ethnicity, normative familial expectations (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Khan, 1997a, 1997b; Kramer, 2010; Siraj, 2006; Yip, 2004a). For example,

going to the mosque to pray even though there are trans- and homophobic sermons (Kugle, 2014). Additionally, in normative LGBTQ spaces, playing down their Muslim identity, since these spaces are predominantly understood as secular (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010).

Existing research demonstrates that there is a spectrum of acceptance and support LGBTQ Muslims receive from their families of origin; and that the families are not inherently homophobic and transphobic (Hendricks, 2009; Jama, 2008, 2015; Kugle, 2014). It is important to note that there is diversity in how families (Muslims and non-Muslims) in the Global North respond to gender and sexual diversity, since there exist trans- and homophobia across faith traditions in diasporic and non-diasporic individuals and communities (El-Tayeb, 2012). Therefore, it would be inaccurate to follow binaristic tropes of Western tolerance and Islamic intolerance when discussing LGBTQ Muslims and their families. Kugle (2014) argues that sexually and gender diverse Muslims "do not simply reject their parents' expectations and their siblings' pressure to conform. They challenge rather than reject their families. They also create new models of family and community as they grow in strength and confidence" (p. 78). The author also highlights that LGBTQ Muslims engage the families, relatives in ongoing critical dialogue about Islam, Muslimness, gender and sexual diversity (Kugle, 2014).

Some families respond with an outright disownment and abandonment of their LGBTQ children and family members with no attempts at coming to an agreement in the future (Hendricks, 2009). However, the majority of LGBTQ Muslims and their families end up having some form of co-existence; and their families demonstrate varying levels of acceptance, from maintaining contact and relationships (visiting, defending and supporting LGBTQ children with extended relatives and family members) with their LGBTQ children post coming out (Hendricks, 2009; Jalees, 2013); varying levels of acceptance and openness to the partners and spouses of

their children (Compton, 2017); some family members attending milestone life celebrations like weddings and child births of LGBTQ children (Compton, 2017). In order to do away with dichotomous thinking, a transnational, anti-colonial and anti-imperial lens is warranted to understand why some families have an arduous time with queerness. Although it cannot be denied that all heteronormative cultures and traditions including Muslims are transphobic and homophobic, the denial and censure of queer identities by some Muslim families can be understood as a rejection of Western and European imperialism and colonialism which can intensify trans- and homophobia. For a discussion on some elite Muslim families, especially diasporic Iranian, and Arabs embracing westernization in cultural and social life, see Farsoun & Mashayekhi (2005), Najmabadi (1991), and Sabry (2009).

Affirmative approach.

An affirmative approach considers no inherent contradictions within LGBTQ and Muslim identities by offering arguments grounded in Islamicate theological traditions that coincide with progressive anti-racist approaches. In this approach, sexual and gender diversity is considered a part of God's plan and LGBTQ Muslims are not seen as choosing a lifestyle (Kugle, 2010). The matter of *choice* is mainly used by Muslim jurists to negate, criminalize and sanction violence against sexual and gender diverse Muslim individuals. Many individuals undertaking this approach have found and/or gained acceptance in communities of choice and origin through support groups, positive experiences of coming out in personal, communal, religious and professional domains. One reason for this approach's ascendency is the recent surge of literature on liberatory and progressive perspectives on Islam in the past decade (Hendricks, 2009; HRC, 2015; Jama, 2008, 2015; Kugle, 2014).

The queer Muslims in Hendricks (2009) and Jama's (2008, 2015) work attributed the homophobia and transphobia found in normative Muslim communities to patriarchal, colonial, sexist and imperialistic influences on the Quran and its exegesis. The affirming strategies were identified as: developing an LGBTQ affirmative perspective grounded in Islamic theology; fostering a personal relationship with God; unlearning transphobia and homophobia in Islamic jurisprudence through critical reflection individually and collectively; engaging with the pluralistic practices of Islam; getting connected to a LGBTQ support groups—online and in person.

Rahman's (2006) narrative clearly identified that there exists no conflict Bengali, Muslim and lesbian intersectional identity. She considers herself a "spiritual Muslim" and discusses that other Muslims due to her sexuality might not consider her a "real" Muslim (p. 238). The author is not too concerned about what other Muslims may think of her, since she does not believe that the Quran abhors same-sex relationships. Rahman (2006) argues that "my islam is between me and my god", (p. 238) and even though she does not label it, Rahman is engaging in *ijtihad* by coming to her own understanding of God and Quran.

It is important to note here that coming-out to family and friends is a process (for Muslims and non-Muslims alike), which at times can require ongoing negotiating with people and communities found in one's circle of belonging (Roy, 2012). Furthermore, dominant narratives of coming-out have been critiqued for marginalizing racialized LGBTQs in the Global North, as these elide questions of discrimination and racism (Alimahomed, 2010; Roy, 2012).

Role of Support Groups in Living out an Intersectional Identity

There exist many non-profit groups (online and physically) that offer support to LGBTQ Muslims and their allies in the Global North. The support groups have played an immense role in

the reconciliation of dominant Islam with sexual and gender diversity as they nurture and affirm

a LGBTQ intersectional identity (Hendricks, 2009; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Kugle, 2014;

Shannahan, 2009, Yip, 2007a). Much of the work on Muslim LGBTQs have come from support

groups in the UK like the Safra Project (2002, 2004) and its members (Tauqir & Jivraj, 2002)

along with the Naz Project (1999, 2000).

An example is Rashida X's (2006) article on the British Gay Muslim movement that

commenced in the 1990s, which gave rise to Imaan (formerly called Al-Fatiha). The author

discussed growing up with the common misconception that Islam and sexual diversity were at

odds. "Islam, we were brought up to believe, was wholly against homosexuality…. we were

informed, you could not be gay and Muslim. The two identities were utterly incompatible, an

oxymoron" (2006, p. 152). These support groups have selected names that are either derived

directly from the Quran (concept, surah/collection of verses, principles) or concepts used in the

Islamicate tradition. Al-Fatiha is an Arabic word which means 'the opening' and its namesake is

the first chapter, or the opening chapter of the Quran. Founded in 1998, Al-Fatiha Foundation[20]

was a non-profit dedicated to supporting queer Muslims, and their allies. The non-profit was

dissolved in 2011 (Minwalla, Rosser, Feldman & Varga, 2005).

Salaam Canada is a national Muslim LGBTQ non-profit support group with chapters

across the provinces. The Salaam Toronto chapter directs its programming to anyone who

identifies as Muslim and allies. One of the core principles propelling the programing is the

reconciliation and affirmation of LGBTQ and Muslim identities. The term Salaam is commonly

translated as peace. This term is also considered a characteristic of God, and is the welcoming

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[20] For a critical perspective of the 'queer Muslim movement', especially the (now dissolved) Al-Fatiha Foundation in the States, see Rouhani (2007) and Kugle's (2014) concluding chapter on the internal politics in LGBTQ Muslim support groups that work against social justice.

greeting of inhabitants of the universe, earth and paradise. The El-Tawhid Unity Mosques endorse the message of acceptance and echo the unity of all creation by God and God's unity with everything animate and inanimate. The concept of *tawhid* or unity is core to the practice of Islam and the identification as a Muslim (El-Tawhid Juma Circle, 2017).

In South Africa, the group 'Inner Circle's' predecessor was called '*Al-Fitra*'. Fitra is translated as nature, and this name's poignancy is rooted in the Quran (Kugle, 2010). The '*Safra*' in Safra Project refers to a "journey and discovery" (Safra Project, 2002, p. 3) that LBT women experience through various interlocking systems of oppression like "sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, religion, race, culture and immigration status" (Safra Project, 2002, p. 3). Safra Project supports LBT women by developing affirmative resources on Islam, sexual and gender diversity and "accessing appropriate social and legal services" (Safra Project, 2002, p. 3). The other UK support group 'Imaan', which means faith, supports LGBTQ Muslims through various activities (Shannahan, 2009). All of these names are significant since they convey the message that Islam and the Quran are not owned by compulsory heterosexuality. The guidance in the Quran is open to everyone and all people irrespective of race, ability, sexual identity and so forth all have the right to access and practice the faith (Kugle, 2003; Wadud, 1999).

In conclusion, this chapter explored literature on LBTQ Muslim women situated within the larger scholarship on LGBTQ Muslims on identity, diasporic perspectives, and socially constructed identity categories. It is important to note that the scholarly works discussed here have documented a mere snapshot in the lives of LGBTQ Muslims. These stories are not all encompassing and are products of their socio-political contexts and histories. From a thorough examination of the literature, it is evident that the process of living out an intersectional identity is complex as LGBTQ Muslims navigate existing norms in Muslim and LGBTQ communities.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach

This chapter discusses the three theoretical approaches that have guided this study. The first is Transnational Feminism (TF), followed by Critical Race Feminism (CRF), and lastly, Intersectionality theory. Overall, this research was also framed within a liberationist theological framing of gender and sexuality, grounded in plurality and diversity that exists within the Islamicate tradition. It is important to mention that the theoretical approaches discussed in this chapter are diverse, fluid and not mutually exclusive. In the sections below, I discuss the reasons behind the selection of each theoretical approach and how it informs this research project. I also discuss where these approaches converge and diverge, by drawing on specific scholars and theorists that have written under the larger realms of critical, feminist and intersectional approaches.

Theories Working in Tandem

Epistemologically, CRF, TF and IAT are a part of critical frameworks that fall under the umbrella of critical race-gendered epistemologies (Bernal, 2002; Hunter, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2003). Such epistemologies concede and value the knowledges that arise from the intersectionality of race, gender, sexual identity, religious identity, class among others social categories (Bernal, 2002). Critical race-gendered epistemologies have originated from different socio-political purviews than dominant Western heteronormative perspectives, and in turn challenge such forms of knowledge (Stanfield, 1994 cited in Bernal, 2002, p. 107). As Ladson-Billings (2003) argues:

> The point of working in racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies is not merely to "colour" the scholarship. It is to challenge the hegemonic structures (and symbols) that keep injustice and inequality in place. The work also is not about dismissing the work of

Europeans and European American scholars. Rather it is about defining the limits of such

scholarship. The push from scholars of color is to raise the bar or up the ante of

qualitative inquiry (p. 421).

CRF, TF and IAT do not make claims to a right way to apply their theories; rather their strength

lies in its diverse application by multidisciplinary perspectives of racialized women scholars

resulting in rich and nuanced discussions of intersectional identities, gender, race and experience

(Grewal, 2005; Jamal, 2011; Mahrouse, 2010; Puar, 2007; Razack, 2007, 2008). The

combination of CRT, TF and intersectional frameworks can offer "sophisticated analyses of race

and gender that grapple with the politics of difference without denying its relevance or reducing

it to questions of embodiment" (Hawkesworth, 2010, p. 689). The theories work in tandem to

bring to the fore issues and centralize "questions of race, nation, empire, and political economy"

while considering the implications of these on varying intersectional identities and positionalities

with varying histories of colonialism and imperialism (Butler & Desai, 2008, p. 2).

I am deploying these theories as diverse and intersecting schemes to bring to light where

these converge and diverge when examining the intersectional identities of LBTQ Muslim

women residing in the Global North. In particular, the kinds of sexual and gendered subjects

LBTQ Muslim women become, especially racialized LBTQ Muslims. Grewal & Kaplan (2001)

have argued that there are linkages which require probing between state apparatuses, social

movements, and positionalities. Since, "thinking simply about global identities does not begin to

get at the complex terrain of sexual politics that is at once national, regional, local, even 'cross-

cultural' and 'hybrid'" (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001, p. 663).

Transnational Feminism

Sara Ahmed (2000) brings to attention that "feminist theorizing is 'in the world' that it seeks to transform, and is hence implicated in the transnational flow of objects, images and peoples across national borders" (p. 100). In this way "theorizing involves challenging the local through and in relation to the transnational (the question of 'where' feminism is requires that we make links between 'here' and 'there')" (p. 100). In other words, transnational feminism (TF) makes links between local and global contexts that trace moving subjects (diasporic LGBTQ and heterosexual Muslims) across visible (nation states, regulated borders) and invisible borders (shifting terrain of the socio-political constructions of identity politics).

A TF critique "interrogates globalism, empire, and the nation-state" in how it structures subjects differently across intersections and experiences (Butler & Desai, 2008, p. 5). In this way, a transnational practice seeks strategies that deconstruct binaristic divides and encourages researchers to locate new ways of mapping out constructed categories across local and geopolitical contexts (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Kaplan & Grewal, 2002). As Mohanty (2003) argues:

> A transnational feminist practice depends on building feminist solidarities across the divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief, and so on. In these very fragmented times it is both very difficult to build these alliances and also never more important to do so. Global capitalism both destroys the possibilities and also offers up new ones… Our minds must be as ready to move as capital is, to trace its paths and to imagine alternative destinations (p. 530).

Following Mohanty's (2003) insights, it is imperative to seek out how LBTQ Muslim women across varying intersections of class, practices and understandings of Islam, sects, and personal experiences are building community and affirmative resources on the faith tradition. This is

imperative to the project as Muslims undergo processes of racialization and otherness due to race, religion, heritage and ethnicity as discussed in Chapter 2. Especially visible Muslims, (hijab and so on) irrespective of race (White converts donning hijab and so on), and LGBTQ Muslims and/or as allies of LGBTQs move across and negotiate differently visible and invisible boundaries (Haritaworn, 2015; El-Tayeb, 2012).

TF dismantles and argues against a homogenized racialized woman configuration (Grewal, 2005). In fact, the theory grew as a response to second wave feminism which situated the 'women' category as experiencing oppressions in the same fashion globally as a result of gender identification (Herr, 2014). Instead, TF configures the shifting interdisciplinary, complex, and multifaceted (local and global) relationships that can exist between diverse women and their respective positionalities. As Grewal (1988) has argued, "complex subjectivities, positions, and power relations are endemic to all groups, whether in the north, south, First World or Third" world (p. 523). This research aligns with Grewal and Kaplan's (2002) approach to TF as it views the theory as "an interdisciplinary site [that] can provide a space for critique and production of new sites of knowledge" (p. 67). This is important in dismantling the often deployed 'Muslim women' positionality as a homogenous construction, that is imagined as heterosexual and cisgendered, and which therefore negates LBTQ Muslim intersectionality (Khan, 2016a).

Even though there may be interdisciplinary differences in how TF is applied in feminist research, Swarr & Nagar (2010) assert that a transnational feminist methodological praxis contains more or less three elements. The first is "engagement with positionality and reflexivity…. [where] critical self-reflexivity becomes a tool to produce a description of that positionality" (p. 7). The second they describe as "representational experiments that seek to interrupt the researcher's own authority by incorporating or juxtaposing multiple 'voices'; [and

the third is] enacting accountability" (p. 7). Accountability is understood as "sharing of interview transcripts, life histories, and finished academic products with informants/subjects" (p. 7).

Critical Race Feminism

CRF considers critically how constructions like "race and gender" interlink and create "racialized, gendered relations in an ostensibly race- and gender- neutral liberal state; and about the ways in which these interlink with continuing coloniality and Indigenous disposition in the settler state" (Razack, Smith & Thobani, 2010, pp. 9-10). An example is Razack's (2000) critical analysis of the murder of an Aboriginal woman, Pamela George, which reveals the extent of colonial violence in which race, gender and class are implicitly intertwined. CRF simultaneously historicizes while interrogating current relations of power that are gendered and raced, among other intersections, through a critical lens which makes visible whiteness and its ascendancy (Razack, 1998). This is imperative to this research project since the discursive and material production of racialized identities, and identity categories – such as Muslim women, LGBTQ, gender and Islam – need to be scrutinized (Hawkesworth, 2010).

It has been demonstrated that Muslims are racialized in a myriad of ways (primitive, uncivilized), and that Muslim positionality is relationally perceived in an inferior light to the *civilized* European in the Global North (Razack, 2004). Furthermore, Muslims in Europe and North America have been stripped of legal impunity and citizenship rights (Razack, 2008). CRF analysis offers a nuanced, yet complex approach to investigating intersectional identities within micro, mezzo and larger political contexts. CRF is also against universality of perspectives, and monolithic understandings of identity and experiences (Razack, Smith & Thobani, 2010).

CRF is committed to social justice, social transformation vis-à-vis political engagement, where other traditional political theories have failed to engage on macro political issues (Razack,

Smith & Thobani, 2010). CRF is multidimensional since it employs narrative, storytelling and other non-traditional sources of knowledge, such as "counterstory as a means of understanding multiple positionalities of individuals or groups of individuals, particularly those stories of socially and politically marginalized persons living at the intersections of identities" (Berry, 2010, p. 25).

Intersectionality

In this section, I discuss the use of intersectionality approach (Collins 2009; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw 1994) as influenced by Puar's (2007, 2012) work on assemblage[21] theory to theorize Muslim LBTQ intersectionalities. "Intersectionality theory directs us to researching the standpoint of those identities located at the site of intersection" as in the case of LBTQ Muslim women (Rahman, 2010, p. 951). There is a matrix of oppressions that operate on multiple levels to subjugate persons. Social identities are created, naturalized and maintained by social arrangements (Collins, 2009; Davis, 2008). For instance, gender as a social construct is imbricated and is mutually constituent of and reinforces class, ethnicity, race and so on, and in this way race is always gendered and vice versa. Yip's (2004a, 2005a, 2008b) scholarship has highlighted these intersectional issues and how they overlap as related to race, religion, citizenship, community, family, ethnicity, and sexuality in the lives of LGBTQ Muslims. Intersectionality theory emphasizes that different truths and realities can co-exist while

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[21] Race, sexuality, and other markers of identity are not fixed, and should not be viewed as such since the meanings ascribed to such concepts is always in motion, shifting according to ideas of nation, belonging, global and local contexts couched in neoliberal capitalist frames (Puar, 2007). Through assemblage theory as a theoretical and political lens, Puar (2007) urges us to think prior to and beyond positionality and its intersectional coordinates to account for the fluid movements. In order to address the limitations of intersectionality theory and its current mainstream uses (which has become a framework to account for differences), Puar (2007, 2012) has proposed the fusion of intersectionality with assemblage theory to account for the complexities of identities. For a robust discussion on intersectionality theory and assemblage theory, see Avitar and Phoenix (2004), DeLanda (2006), and Puar (2007, 2012).

simultaneously imbricating the larger structure of power relations (McCall, 2005). This is important to consider, since there are varying degrees of identity reconciliation evident in the literature of a LGBTQ Muslim identity (Al-Sayyad, 2010).

Contemporary intersectionality theory "addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women" (Davis, 2008, p. 70). It is in relation to this *difference* issue that Puar (2012) argues that intersectionality theory has fallen short by re-centring the subject position of white women in the precise act of dealing with *difference*. The focus on *difference* re-establishes whiteness and others racialized women, specifically African American women, and does not challenge "masculinist frames" that centre the experiences of men as normative (Puar, 2012, p. 52). Puar (2012) explains that at times intersectionality theory posits "all identities are lived and experienced as intersectional" irrespective of the subject's acknowledgement of this (Puar, 2012, p. 52). This practice can inadvertently suggest that all socially constructed identity categories (i.e. race, sexuality) can be neatly sliced into measureable portions. Puar (2012) challenges the static and essentialized notions of identity that intersectionality theory can at times contribute to (during application and practice) when discussing categories of identity.

Puar (2012) proffers that the two theories (intersectionality and assemblage theory) differ in "content, utility, or deployment. As analytics, they may not be reconcilable. Yet they need not be oppositional but rather, I argue, frictional" (Puar, 2012, p. 50). It is this *frictional* relationship between the two theories that would be advantageous in seeking a nuanced, contextual, temporal, spatial and sensitive understanding of identities and their functions. Assemblage is a "concept of knowledge" and is gaining ground in social sciences (Phillips, 2006, p. 108). Puar (2007) defines assemblage "as a series of dispersed but mutually implicated and messy networks, draws

together enunciation and dissolution, causality and effect, organic and nonorganic forces" (p. 211). She proposes looking at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, nation, class as assemblages—as concepts that are linked together and are constantly evolving and are "always in the state of becoming" (2007, p. 194). Puar's (2007) definition of assemblages seeks to broaden ways of belonging outside of normative identity categories and subject positions. For example, the author asserts that identity categories, animate (body) and inanimate (things, concepts) all work together to form new relationships and meanings. Puar (2007) states that all of these end up creating "melding, fusing, viscosity, [and] bouncing" configurations (p. 211) of animate and inanimate objects and things.

The author illustrates this notion by discussing how a turban worn by Sikhs can be understood as an assemblage. In many ways the turban can have various meanings (how it is perceived by others and the wearer) which give it life, and Puar (2007) argues that such meanings and process are not easily separable and indistinguishable. The author employs the turban example to demonstrate the irony of an article (turban) that clearly identifies a person as Sikh (and therefore as non-Muslim) has been explicitly used to racialize Sikhs as Muslim. In rejecting the racialization as the other, some Sikh communities were then put in a position where they had to align with or against Muslim communities that were being targeted in the U.S. in the 'war on terror'.

> Thinking of the turbaned man as an assemblage that cuts through such easy delineations between body and thing, an assemblage that fuses, but also scrambles into chaotic combinations, turban into body, cloth into hair, skin, oil, pores, destabilizing the presumed organicity of the body (p. 193).

In this way, the turban's infusion with the wearer can speak to various material realities co-existing, not limited by an event i.e. 9/11, 2017 U.S. elections and the 'Muslim travel ban'. Intersectionality as an ontology cannot fully account for a Sikh turban, which has been used to racialize turban wearers as Muslim. This has no bearing in reality or actual identity of the turban wearer. In other words, Puar (2007) suggests that intersectionality theory, as a set of actual identities with some grounding in reality, is not able explain how a clear marker that someone is Sikh, and therefore non-Muslim, is acted upon to racialize and other 'as Muslim'. Such conflations or 'errors' may be an important starting point for understanding identities, for example, in the notion that being LGBTQ and Muslim are contradictions also rests in normative discourses; rather than as a result of ontologically coherent 'queerness' intersecting, coexisting or interacting with ontologically coherent 'Muslimness'.

Intersectionality theory as influenced by assemblage theory does not essentialize identities and broadens understandings of subjectivities in the same way that race, gender and so forth can impact a body in various ways across time and space that do not end at, nor start at the identification of positionality. Between the two approaches lies a frictional liminal space which shifts and bends according to many variants not limited to ideologies, representation, the ways in which identities and bodies are constructed in specific contexts. In this space, fluid movements of subjects, identities, nuances and so forth can be tracked across many types of borders (Puar, 2007, 2012).

Theological Framing of Sexual & Gender Diversity in the Quran

In this section, I suggest a critical approach be applied to examine sexuality and gender diversity within the Islamicate tradition, by drawing on critical liberatory, feminist oriented, gender and sexuality affirming perspectives. Paying attention and being sensitive to issues

related to gender when interpreting the Quran supports a "sexuality-sensitive" approach since it brings to the fore the patriarchal and sexist notions embedded in the interpretation (Kugle, 2010, p. 41). These perspectives are interwoven together to formulate an affirmative and liberatory approach which is LGBTQ friendly and has a focus on social justice, while considering diversity it all its forms (not limited to racial, sexual, and gender parity).

Specifically, I assert that an affirmative and liberatory approach[22] for LGBTQ Muslims can be deployed through the use of Islamic principles of *tawhid*[23], *tafsir*, *taqlid*[24], *jihad*, and *ijtihad*[25] as taken up in the critical theological literature and scholarship of Barlas (2002), Esack (1997), Hendricks (2009, 2010), Kugle (2010, 2014) and Wadud (1999). Furthermore, through these perspectives, I also propose that gender and sexual diversity is an integral part of the Creator's larger diversity plan (as evidenced in animal, plant, spirit and human worlds); and that social, political, historical and cultural circumstances favour certain expressions of sexuality and gender to surface at any given time.

Tawhid.

Tawhid or unity is an important concept in the Islamicate tradition. It has been understood in liberation and feminist scholarship as an expansive concept, since it speaks to how everything (living, unseen and the seen and so forth) is interconnected to a single divine source, and encourages a holistic approach to interpreting and understanding the sacred text (Barlas,

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[22] Even though I am not a legal scholar trained by a specific theological school in jurisprudence. I believe that God's message is eternal and that I do not need any intercessors for guidance. As a lay Muslim, I am attempting to follow Quranic injunctions related to acquiring knowledges, and using my life experiences (mind, body, spirit and emotions) for guidance. I am also reliant upon the divine, which resides inside my heart and spirit for support and guidance.

[23] For a detailed exploration of *Tawhid*, see Barlas (2002) and Wadud (1999).

[24] *Taqlid* has been taken up in many ways, albeit some contested. It is important to note that there exist varying perspectives of its efficacy and role within Islamic jurisprudence. See Abdelaal (2012), Jackson (1996) and Jahangir and Abdullatif (2016).

[25] For a detailed account, see Arshad (2006) and Giunchi (2014).

2002; Wadud, 1999). Wadud (1999) proposes a "hermeneutics of *tawhid*" as a model that interprets the verses and messages of the sacred text in a holistic and unified fashion; and considers the Quran as offering a universal message of social justice and liberation from varying oppressions (p. xii). The author argues that the Quran is universal and is meant to respond to all societies and times (Wadud, 1999). In other words, the Quran has to speak to all people, irrespective of social identity categorizations (ability, race, sexuality and gender) (Barlas, 2002; Wadud, 1999).

The aim of the Quran is not the duplication and preservation of historic communities, "rather, the goal has been to emulate certain key principles of human development: justice, equity, harmony, moral responsibility, spiritual awareness, and development" (Wadud, 1999, p. 95). Chapter 39, verse 55 of the Quran states the following: "And follow the best of what was revealed to you from the One who has authority over you, before distress takes you by surprise and while you are in a state of unconsciousness" (Hendricks, 2010, p. 33). This establishes that "Muslims are instructed to extract, out of the many possible interpretations, the interpretation that achieves the greatest good" (Hendricks, 2010, p. 33). The author further stipulates that "if divine guidance is ignored and interpretations are personally motivated and unconsciously made, it can lead to both individual and social distress" (Hendricks, 2010, p. 32). In this way, ongoing interpretation of the scripture is necessary in maintaining relevance to the place and time of our existence that is not grounded in exclusion and prejudice.

Tafsir.

The following are a summation of the guiding principles of *tafsir* (interpretation tools) when attempting to engage in exegesis of the scripture. The first is that the institution of laws that govern society are to be framed within love, meaning that each member within society

resides in harmony with their significant others, families, neighbours, and the rest of society (Kugle, 2010). The second principle is harbouring a belief that all humans are created with the breath of God and that all life is sacred (Kugle, 2010). Based on the principle of sacredness, every person, should they desire, are entitled to "pursue the highest spiritual aspirations of well-being in this world and salvation in the next" (Kugle, 2010, p. 41).

The third principle argues that pluralism or diversity is inherent in God's plan and is evident through human, animal, plant and the larger natural world (Kugle, 2010). The fourth principle is that God's message is eternal in nature, due to "its principles of social justice and human equality, and its objective of guidance" which are the organizing principles evident in the Quranic verses—and which should be given primacy over exegesis and its interlocutors (Wadud, 1999, p. xxii). Lastly, the principles of social justice and equity need to be able to respond to shifts in cultural and social circumstances that shift with time in any given society (Kugle, 2010).

Kugle (2010), who has written extensively on sexual and gender diversity, proffers that LGBTQ Muslims "approach the Qur'an with a dual strategy of resistance and renewal. They resist previous interpretations, but advocate on behalf of new interpretation that is arguably better—more accurate, more insightful, or more ethical—than previous interpretations" (p. 40). Engaging in a gender and sexuality sensitive interpretation of the text uncovers verses in the Quran that indeed validate and confirm sexual and gender diverse persons (Hendricks, 2010). These verses do not condemn such diversity, but instead make exceptions for LGBTQ individuals. These affirmative verses are discussed in no particular order. The set of verses below discuss sexual and gender diversity as an inherent aspect of creation and can be found in chapter 42, verses 49-50 of the Quran.

To God belongs dominion of the heavens and earth. God creates whatever God wills and

gives to whomever God wills females and gives to whomever God wills the males, or

pairs them as male and female. And God makes whomever God wills not reproducing, for

God is one who knows all, One capable of all things (Kugle, 2010, p. 66).

The unique combination of 'male and female' together in one person suggests a separate

category for individuals who do not conform to either gender norms, or those who inhabit more

than one gender. This verse can be applied to persons who may identify as trans or those who

may identify as intersex. The second verse discusses persons whose sexual identity or behaviour

does not necessarily lead to 'reproduction' in the ways that cisgendered heterosexually identified

individuals might—reproduction as a result of a sexual act between man and woman. In other

words, the argument here is that since some persons (i.e. gay and lesbian) do not reproduce

directly from engaging in sexual intercourse, they are considered under this verse (Kugle, 2010).

While LGBTQ individuals do have families and reproduce, the emphasis here is on the sexual

act which leads to reproduction.

The following two verses discuss modesty with respect to gender (Kugle, 2010). The first

verse is located in chapter 24, verse 31. Historically, this specific verse has been used by

patriarchal men to regulate women's bodies and movements. Wadud (1999) offers an excellent

analysis of modesty in these verses and their context specific interpretation[26]. At second glance

however, the verses offer information about the diversity as part of God's creation (Kugle,

2010). "*Let them…not display their beauties except to their husbands…or their followers among*

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[26] Wadud (1999) argues that the Quran's rulings about observing modesty was in line with the practices of Arab women at the time of revelation. "[A]t the time of the revelation, women of wealthy and powerful tribes were veiled and secluded as an indication of protection…Qur'an acknowledges the virtue of modesty and demonstrates it through the prevailing practices…the veiling and seclusion which were manifestations particular to that context. These were culturally and economically determined demonstrations of modesty" (p. 9-10).

the men who have no wiles with women or children who do not recognize the sexual nakedness of women" (Kugle, 2010, p. 67). Even though these verses are directed toward women, there are also verses addressing modesty for men in the Quran. In this verse, there is mention of a group of men who possess no sexual desire for women. Kugle (2010) asserts that this verse was interpreted historically to identify "elderly men or impotent men" and could be extended to including gay men, who do not desire women sexually (p. 67). Verse 24:60 also deals with modesty and mentions women who do not seek marriage[27] (Hendricks, 2010). Common interpretation of this verse has been directed to women who are no longer able to bear children or are elderly. These two interpretations are extremely limited and leave out women who are economically independent, do not desire children, those who are not attracted to men, and so on.

Verses 30:22 and 49:13 discuss diversity in creation, "and among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: Verily in that are signs for those who possess knowledge" (Hendricks, 2010, p. 36). The other verse "and have made you into nations and tribes that you may come to know. Truly, the noblest of you, in the sight of God, is the most God-conscious amongst you" (Hendricks, 2010, p. 36). Primarily, these verses were interpreted to denote the diversity in humans like customs, gender, language and race. Seventh century scholars had limited knowledge about evidences of 'homosexuality' in nature (Roughgarden, 2004), when compared to contemporary scholars in the sociological and scientific realms and the complexities and diverseness of the universe and its inhabitants. With advances made in the social and natural sciences, what is now known about humans and the natural world challenges restrictive understandings of the Quran. Because of these advancements, these verses remain inclusive of sexual and other diversity evident in the

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[27] It is important to note that marriage is Sunnah (Prophet's tradition) and not made compulsory in the Quran.

natural world (Hendricks, 2010; Kugle, 2010). Another mention that applies to sexual and gender diverse persons lies in the verses that discusses Genesis in the Quran.

> We constructed the sky with our hands, and we will continue to expand it. And we made the earth habitable; a perfect design. We created a pair of everything, that you may take heed. You shall escape to GOD. I am sent by Him to you as a manifest warner. Do not set up beside GOD any other god. I am sent by Him to you as a manifest warner (Quran, 51:49).

God mentions creation in pairs, which has been interpreted as referring to male and female heterosexual human pairs. There is no word in this verse that discusses gender or whether God is referring to the creation of humans. Since these verses are about creation, interpreters have extrapolated that God is referring to the heterosexual couple. In keeping with this assumption that God may be referring to humans, however, this verse could also be interpreted as pairs consisting two males and two females. Even though the Quran mentions female and male genders as spouses, this does not automatically translate into the abhorring of same-sex pairs. There is another verse in chapter 35, verse 11 which refers to the creation of pairs, and Kugle (2010) argues that this is not in reference to gender but the "fetal development within the womb" as a process and/or discussing more than one fetus (p. 246).

Taqlid, jihad, and ijtihad.

In addition to *tafsir*, *taqlid*, *jihad* and *ijtihad* and have also been identified as tools for reforming Islamic jurisprudence. Traditionally, these concepts have been understood by some scholars as antagonistic (Abdelaal, 2012; Jackson, 1996). In fact, there is growing body of scholarship which argues that the aforementioned concepts can be understood as part of liberationist perspectives and can work as parallel and interrelated processes that are not

adversarial (Abdelaal, 2012; Jackson, 1996; Jahangir & Abdullatif, 2016; Khan, 2016b, Kugle, 2010, 2014; Safra Project, 2002, 2004; Shannahan, 2009; Yip, 2004a, 2005b, 2008a; Yip & Khalid, 2010).

From a liberationist theological perspective, *taqlid* is an important concept used mostly used by Shia Muslims (and jurists) to understand matters related to faith and the application of these in daily life (Jahangir & Abdullatif, 2016). Specifically, the concept refers to following the interpretations of a jurist in matters related to faith and jurisprudence on any given topic (Jackson, 1996). In the context of Islamic law, Abdelaal (2012) asserts that, "*taqlid* means following the established opinions or decisions of a certain jurist rather than introducing a new rule or decision by engaging in an individual interpretation (*ijtihad)*" (emphasis orig., p. 160). The author further argues that in many ways *taqlid* is not that different than seeking someone's expertise on a topic to bridge the gap in knowledge. For example, "in the modern legal systems when the judge, who lacks knowledge and expertise in a specific issue, refers to an expert's opinion" (Abdelaal, 2012, p. 161).

Consulting scholars and jurists who have expertise in liberatory and critical perspectives on sexual and gender diversity can therefore be considered *taqlid*. For example, there are multi-racial female and male identified religious leaders, across varying sects, who have formal education in theology, some of whom are LGBTQ identified across the globe, whose approach to gender and sexuality can be used as guiding frameworks to these issues. In fact, the majority of the authors used in this section are in some way connected and/or follow the works of these leaders, which are couched in resisting normative understandings of faith and its application[28].

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[28] There is El-Farouk Khaki in Canada; Muhsin Hendricks in South Africa; Dr. Amina Wadud and Daayiee Abdullah in the U.S.; and Dr. Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed in Europe.

Resistance is an important concept in liberationist perspectives. One of the principles of liberationist theology is to strive against or resist oppressions in all its forms (Esack, 1997). The concept of *jihad* translates as resistance or struggle, and can be used to denote efforts to reform Islamic jurisprudence (Esack, 1997; Kugle, 2010). For example, in Wadud's (1999) scholarship, the author takes up *jihad* as resisting and/or struggling to seek gender justice or gender *jihad*. The term 'queer *jihad*' is used by an online resource for LGBTQ Muslims, which signifies striving for gender and sexual parity and recognition (Queer Jihad, 2005). *Jihad* refers to resisting and striving against oneself; to become a better human being (Firestone, 1999). Unfortunately, at present, this term conjures up disturbing thoughts and negative images related to Islam and Muslims since it is conceptualized as 'holy war'. This is a reductive understanding of the concept of *jihad*. "The semantic meaning of the Arabic term *jihād* has no relation to holy war or even war in general. It derives, rather from the root *j.h.d.*, the meaning of which is "to strive, exert oneself, or take extraordinary pains" (Firestone, 1999, p. 16).

Jihad originates from the root word, *jahada* which refers to the application of one's maximum power, energies, labour, abilities and exertions in dealing with an unfavourable thing or object (Firestone, 1999). There exist many types of *jihad*, "and most have nothing to do with warfare" (p. 16). There is "Jihād of the heart" which signifies resisting "one's own sinful inclinations" and "jihād of the tongue," which requires speaking on behalf of the good and forbidding evil" (p. 16). Below, Islamic jurists have distinguished between *lesser* and *greater* types of *jihad*:

> The qualifying phrase "in the path of God" (*fi sabīl Allah*) specifically distinguishes the activity of *jihād* as furthering or promoting God's kingdom on earth. It can be done, for example, by simply striving to behave ethically and by speaking without causing harm to

others or by actively defending Islam and propagating the faith. *Jihād* as religiously grounded warfare, sometimes referred to as "*jihād* of the sword" (*jihād al-sayf*), is subsumed under the last two categories of defending Islam and propagating the faith, though these need not be accomplished only through war. When the term is used without qualifiers such as "of the heart" or "of the tongue," however, it is universally understood as war on behalf of Islam (equivalent to "*jihād* of the sword"), and the merits of engaging in such *jihād* are described plentifully in the most-respected religious works. Nevertheless, Muslim thinkers, and particularly ascetics and mystics, often differentiate between the "greater *jihād*" (*al-jihād al-akbar*) and the "lesser *jihād*" (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*), with the former representing the struggle against the self and only the "lesser *jihād*" referring to warring in the path of God (Firestone, 1999, p. 16).

Clearly, it is evident that there are diverse ways of engaging in *jihad*. The various types discussed in the example above are in reference to internal Muslim struggles (Firestone, 1999). Kugle's (2014) interviews with GLT Muslim activists see their activism work as *jihad*, which is also inclusive of *ijtihad*. These two concepts are seen as integral in the Quran's message to all Muslims to struggle "through *ijtihad* of the mind and *jihad* of the body, to take full responsibility for one's place in the world and become God's vice-regent on earth (*khalifa*)" (p. 112). It is interesting to note that *Ijtihad* "shares a common linguistic root with the Arabic word *jihad*...The two types of struggle are integrally related. The custodians of power most often oppose those who engage in *ijtihad*" since it threatens conventional religious sources of authority" (Kugle, 2010, p. 42). The 'custodians of power' historically have been cisgendered, heterosexual men who are in positions of religious authority and primary gatekeepers of theological doctrine and knowledges (Barlas, 2002; Kugle, 2010).

Lay Muslims are actually dissuaded from attempting any exegesis of the Quran on the premise that they are not well versed in Islamic theology (Barlas, 2002; Kugle, 2010). This in fact is in direct violation of the teachings of the Quran, which encourage the reader to come to their own understanding of the scripture and its teachings (Kugle, 2010). *Ijtihad* can be seen as an important aspect of *jihad*, in harvesting the desire and creating the space and to debate and critique sexually and gender marginalizing practices which are enforced by humans with no basis in the scripture. For instance, through *ijtihad*, there have been significant critiques offered on how the rights of women surrounding marriage, divorce and inheritance are sexist and privilege men (Barlas, 2002; Najmabadi, 1991, 1998; Wadud, 1999, 2006).

Arshad (2006) argues that *ijtihad* allows for multiplistic understandings of Islam to emerge, and that pluralistic thinking is already part and parcel of the faith. When engaging in *ijtihad*, one must deploy one's intellect (reason), lived experience, spirit, understandings of human nature achieved through various knowledge streams (science, philosophy, psychology), to gain an ongoing understanding of faith. Barlas (2002) points out that the shared duty of engaging in *ijtihad* was eclipsed "fairly early in Muslim history" (p. 71), and was relegated to the authorities[29].

In this chapter, TF, CRF, IAT and liberationist theological framing of Islam as the guiding theoretical approaches for the research study was discussed. The selected theorists and scholars offered critical and nuanced understandings of intersectional identities as it relates LGBTQ Muslims. Mainly, the authors cited in this chapter and the preceding chapter help demystify how Muslims, especially LGBTQ Muslims, are constructed in the Global North. Specifically, in the realms of historicizing identities in geopolitical contexts; examination of

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[29] For a detailed account on the decline of *ijtihad* in Islamicate history, and its contemporary revival in a liberatory context, see Abdelaal (2012), Barlas (2002), Kugle (2010) and Safi (2003).

citizenship and national identities; processes of othering and racialization; and exploring the lives and resistance of LBTQ Muslim women. The next chapter discusses the methods and research design of the study.

Chapter 4: Methods and Data Analysis

This chapter discusses the research design and method of data analysis used in the research study. An interpretive qualitative method was applied to understand how LBTQ Muslim women live out the intersections of race, sexuality, spirituality, gender and religiosity—lived experiences of social identities. In an interpretive paradigm, these intersections are considered sources of knowledge along with the meanings individuals attach to various aspects of life. Emphasis is placed on tacit (knowledge about daily life) and local knowledges (applying tacit knowledge in life), as well as taken for granted practices and ideas (Schwartz-Shea, 2006). Interpretive research has played a significant role in producing knowledges that counter the dominant discourses about marginalized communities i.e. feminist, women, racialized communities and LGBTQ oriented research and validate the knowledges championed by these groups themselves (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Razack et al., 2010).

A life story method is in sympatico with the theoretical approaches used in this study. As indicated in the earlier chapter, the intersectionality approach values positional (situated) knowledges that arise from lived experiences related to identity facets (Collins, 2009). These lived experiences are embedded within the narrative of the life story method and can offer rich details on the nuances and complexities of living out a LBTQ Muslim life. A life story method has been used already in the LBTQ Muslim literature to generate knowledge about LBTQ Muslim women intersectionality (see Siraj, 2011); and with the liberatory, TF and CRF approaches nuanced and situated knowledge can be developed about LBTQ Muslim women.

In a life story method, a person's lived experience is explored alongside how individuals make sense of such experiences, and in turn how these shape lives (Atkinson, 2002). With respect to identity construction, a life story method can organize multi-layered stories and the

multiple intersections into coherent narratives (Buitelaar, 2006). An interpretive approach is consistent with a life story method, since the latter considers the epistemological position that knowledge is socially constructed and allows researchers to "understand the meanings that individuals give to their lives and the social phenomena they have experienced" (Chaitin, 2004, p. 2).

The life story method originated out of oral history among other ethnographic approaches (Atkinson, 2002). Life story differs from life history approach since the former does not proclaim to harvest a hidden "historical truth" about certain events and lives and tends to "represent the experiential truth of the life lived" (Mann, 1992, p. 272). Also, a life story method focuses on a person's entire life and can take many forms such as "a factual form, a metaphorical form, a poetic form" and so on (Atkinson, 2002, p. 125). Life stories can offer critical information on how intersecting identities are organized and outline significant events that have shaped identity and their meanings (Josselson, 1995). Life story method emphasizes detailed and rich descriptions of the interview narratives, rather than a set goal for number of participants. In other words, a large sample size is not necessarily emphasized in this method (Ludvig, 2006; Smart, 2009).

There are a few assumptions underlying a life story approach. Every person is entitled to tell their story in ways they/she/he please and should not be limited by the researchers' theoretical frameworks which may restrict the person's narrative (Atkinson, 2002). As Smith (1987) has stated, "[o]ur conceptual procedures should be capable of explicating and analyzing the properties of their experienced world rather than administering it. Their reality, their varieties of experience must be an unconditional datum" (p. 93). Therefore participants commenced their

interview from where they felt most comfortable (in terms of life events, relationships, situations, reflections) and were selective about the sharing (Chaitin, 2004).

Recruitment and Sampling

Ethics clearance was secured from York University, Toronto, Canada (see appendices for relevant forms). Consent forms were sent in advance by email to all the participants. All participants endorsed the consent forms and no amendments were offered. Confidentiality was observed in all interactions with the participants and their participation was voluntary. The participants were provided $25.00 honoraria, and the study was funded by the researcher. The consent forms and other identifying data was secured according to York University's policies governing human research and record keeping. All transcripts, tapes, USB keys, identifying information and so on were secured in a locked cabinet at all times (Creswell, 2007).

Participants were recruited through advertising within existing LGBTQ Muslim support groups and networks, general local LGBTQ serving agencies and community events held in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Snowballing was deployed as a technique (Neuman & Robson, 2009). Two main recruitment methods were used. The first, in-person recruitment at the LGBTQ Muslim support groups located in the GTA, including various GTA colleges and universities (Centennial, Seneca, Humber, OCAD U, Ryerson, UofT, York, and Trent). Mainstream LGBTQ networks, places of worship, and agencies (The 519 Community Centre, Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto) were also accessed for recruitment.

The second, online support groups serving LGBTQ Muslims and their allies (via social networks like Yahoo, Google, Facebook and Hotmail) were targeted. The internet is a popular recruitment tool since it can offer sexually and gender diverse Muslims anonymity and safety

(Shannahan, 2009). Also, online listserves at the various GTA colleges, universities and mainstream LGBTQ networks as mentioned-above were also accessed for recruitment.

It is noteworthy that the Muslim LGBTQ community (online and in person) in the GTA is tight-knit, and real fears and anxieties exist about being 'outed'. Whenever an interest was expressed in the project, a meeting was scheduled (in person and/or online) to discuss the research and my interest in this topic. My legitimacy as a member of the LGBTQ community was repeatedly brought up in queries related to the project and discussed at length during meetings. Potential participants were interested in knowing about me as a Muslim lesbian and wanted to ensure that I really existed. There have been unfortunate incidents of harassment and assault of individuals pretending to be LGBTQ Muslims and tricking community members to reveal themselves.

With one participant, I had many meetings about the research (skype and in person) before they consented to a formal interview. The feedback I received (regarding the request for numerous meetings) was that researchers and journalists are always soliciting interviews from LGBTQ Muslims involved with support groups and networks. I was told that once the interview is over, hidden agendas are revealed in the final publication (e.g., exoticization of LGBTQ Muslims, pejorative perspectives on Islam). Some researchers and journalists are never seen or heard from again, since they are not part of the community. Most of the individuals I met with went forward with the interview, whereas some did not show up at all and others had concerns about anonymity and safety because they were not out with most family and friends. There were also a few people who feigned interest in the project with trans- and homophobic agendas. To ensure my safety, I met with potential participants in public places during daylight hours at coffee shops around the GTA.

All the participants who responded to the research call were community members and/or affiliated with LGBTQ Muslim support groups and networks. The networks, I primarily recruited from are a part of my religious, spiritual, social and cultural domains. In these LGBTQ networks and support groups, it is common to remain cautious of researchers and their representations. Trust, integrity, authenticity and transparency are of paramount importance in the LGBTQ Muslim community. In many ways, I was not only responsible to the participants but to the leaders and to the LGBTQ Muslim community at large to engage in ethical research.

In total 14 interviews were collected from adult LBTQ Muslim women (23-38 years of age) residing in Canada (12 participants) and the U.S. (2 participants) from September 2016 until February 2017. The participants varied in sect identification, approaches to Muslim identity, and the practice of Islam. Majority of the participants identified as racialized (12), and (2) participants identified as White. See Table 1 in the appendices section.

Originally, the focus of recruitment was on LBTQ racialized Muslim women in the Global North because there are limited nuanced research studies on this topic. In the Global North, White converts do not necessarily grow up/live with, and/or struggle with the same normative-hegemonic understandings surrounding a LBTQ Muslim identity as their racialized counterparts. However, during the recruitment phase of the project, I was unable to secure an all racialized LBTQ Muslim women sample. Due to time and resource constraints, I was unable to dedicate more time to recruitment to expand the sample. Even though the two White converts did not experience growing up Muslim, they still faced the stigma and persecution (based on gender and religion) that exists in normative families within society. Since their religious conversions, these two participants have been welcomed and accepted into the LGBTQ Muslim community and as a result have some insights to offer on a LBTQ Muslim intersectionality.

Data Analysis

    Validity and reliability.

    The claim that knowledge is socially constructed has had implications on how validity is approached and defined in the interpretive paradigm (Creswell, 2007; Kvale, 1996). Before discussing validity, it is imperative to problematize scientific knowledge, which is the context behind how validity is understood and is contested (Kvale, 1996). Scientific knowledge is not an objective enterprise since male-centric, patriarchal, sexist and misogynist perspectives are embedded in the social sciences (Harding, 1987; Rouse, 2004). It is also important to note that there are degrees of validity and that no knowledge claim is ever fully valid or invalid (Polkinghorne, 2007).

    It has been argued that there are eight procedures and techniques that speak to validity and reliability in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Schwartz-Shea, 2006). The first set of criteria is referred to as "first-order terms: thick description, trustworthiness, reflexivity and triangulation" (Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 101). The "second-order concepts: informant feedback/Member checks, audit, and negative case analysis" as techniques to achieve the 'how to' for interpretive research (Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 103). According to Creswell (2007) engaging in two out of the eight procedures (criteria and techniques) is key in achieving validation in a qualitative study. In this research, thick description, member checks, and critical reflexivity were deployed. These were selected due to their cost-effectiveness and popularity (Creswell, 2007). Reliability was achieved by taking detailed notes/memos, using good quality recording devises, having an additional coder, and through member checks (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2005).

Interviews and transcription.

All interviews were between 1.5 - 4 hours in duration and were conducted in person and/or over skype after consent forms were endorsed and the interview guide explained. The interview guide was created in consultation with the literature and was sent in advance by email to the participants. As mentioned earlier, due to the stigmatization and marginalization faced by LBTQ Muslims, the participants were interviewed over skype and/or in safe locations agreed upon by both parties (coffee shops throughout the GTA). All the interviews were audio-taped, completed and transcribed by the researcher. The life story interviews were in-depth, unstructured, open-ended.

Interviewees were conscious of being represented in a good light in relation to racist associations with language use, and so grammar, tenses, sentence and fragments were adjusted in the transcript (Kvale, 1996). The transcripts were organized in a tabular format which contained a memo/notes section (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In interpretive methodologies, transcription is often viewed as part of the data analysis process (Pamphilion, 1999). Especially in life story method, capturing the responses of the researcher (i.e. reactions, thoughts, and feelings) and the participants (i.e. affect, voice inflections, body language, shifts in mood and energy, silence) is considered data (Pamphilion, 1999). Therefore, this information was included as it can offer nuanced and rich analyses of the life stories and documented in the memo section of the transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The style of the transcription was formal, and was informed by the literature on life story and history methods (Buitelaar, 2006; Ludvig, 2006) especially the 'zoom model', (defined below) as this was the most comprehensive and detailed model available to analyze life history and story approaches (Pamphilion, 1999).

Coding.

Due to resource (cost, time and availability) constraints, one second coder was secured through informal networks. The coder holds a PhD and has experience conducting qualitative and mixed methods research. This coder was not known to the project and was given information about the project and the 'zoom model'. The coder and I had many preliminary and ongoing discussions about the application of the model (Pamphilion, 1999). A hybrid of Creswell's (2007) coding process in conjunction with Pamphilion's (1999) zoom model was adapted to facilitate the intercoding process. Descriptive coding was used by the researcher and the second coder to develop categories from the initial field notes, transcript memo data and coding labels (brief descriptions, words, phrases) (Creswell, 2007). The literature on LBTQ Muslim intersectionality also informed the fortification of the codes and their labels. Both coders maintained a thorough record on how data was assigned to the established categories to ensure consistency (Creswell, 2007; Silverman, 2005).

After the initial independent coding of each transcript, the two coders met to discuss and compare the codes and coding labels. A codebook was developed and coding labels were established. A second round of coding was undertaken where the coders assigned codes and coding labels to the data. In this round of coding, attention was placed on agreeing on the text segments assigned to the codes. An 80% agreeance on the coded text was the goal, which was achieved following many robust discussions. The codes were then collapsed into broader themes of the zoom model, and the same process was undertaken to fortify the themes and subthemes. The codebook was revised to reflect the themes and subthemes. The data was revisited to ensure that the coders maintained an 80% agreeance on the text assigned to each theme and subthemes. In total, the coders reduced the 15 codes (combining, discussing and working through) to manageable themes with subthemes in the findings section. The themes and subthemes were also

derived in consultation with the literature on LBTQ Muslim women (Creswell, 2007; Miles &
Huberman, 1994).

Member checking.

The process of member checking (transcript approval) took some time since there was a
lot of back and forth with each participant around language use, preliminary analysis and
representation (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Schwartz-Shea, 2006). All participants approved the
transcripts (including memo section) after making changes (clarification of narrative, correcting
misreading and misinterpretation of narrative, adding new verbatim, removing original verbatim,
language and concept use, highlighting quote preference for use in publications, and selection of
pseudonyms).

With some participants, there was a significant level of mistrust of academic research that
had to be negotiated on an ongoing basis. One participant in particular was highly critical of
academe and, as a representative of this highly bureaucratic and unjust system, I therefore had to
work hard at establishing and maintaining good rapport. As Chowdhury (2009) explains,
engaging in academic research with the university "can be quite contradictory to feminist
principals of equality, self-reflexivity, and reciprocity", especially when it comes to the
"disparate political agendas" of universities that are not always in line with global and
transnational feminisms (p. 52).

A clear example of the 'disparate political agendas' between the research and academe is
evidenced in the process of member checking with the participants, which was lengthy and
involved. I negotiated with the participants my interpretation, preliminary analyses, and their
representation, while staying true to the context of the women's narratives. The back and forth
with the participants on the transcripts, memos, my interpretations and analysis was a lengthy

engagement. It was a frustrating process, getting all parties involved (myself and the participants) to feel confident in the representation and what was being said and interpreted. One participant in particular was unhappy with my interpretations and analysis of their transcript; they denied having said many segments recorded in the transcript. It was emotionally and mentally taxing to go through these negotiations and justify the decisions made with the participant in question. In the end, the participant rewrote most of the transcript and the analysis that went along with it.

The data was analyzed using the 'zoom-model' developed by Pamphilion (1999) since it caters to the complexities of the life story and life history approaches, and allowed the narratives to be analyzed using the theoretical perspectives (CRF and TF). The zoom model considers the interpretive nature of life stories as created jointly by the researcher and the interviewee; and the researcher as constitutive of knowledge production. Furthermore, this approach does not emphasize some areas of the life story over others and celebrates contradictions in life story narratives. In this model, the focus is on "the macro, the meso, the micro, and the interactional" levels found in the narratives, which can offer detailed and nuanced analyses (Pamphilion, 1999, p. 395).

Macro zoom.

According to the model, "the macro-zoom focuses on the sociocultural collective dimensions…it examines what a personal narrative can reveal about the culturally specific processes that impact on all women" (Pamphilion, 1999, p. 395). The levels of analyses in macro zoom focus on the "dominant discourses, narrative form, and cohort effect" of the narratives (Pamphilion, 1999, p. 397). When considering the dominant discourses, it is important to examine the narrative as it "may present a struggle to resolve incongruences between one's own

experience and the dominant cultures surrounding" the phenomenon (Pamphilion, 1999, p. 397). The narrative form speaks to whom the women centralize in their narratives, i.e., self, partners, friends. It has been argued in the literature that women in general tend to relay their stories and focus on the "male archetypes" (Pamphilon, 1999, p. 398). The cohort effect discusses how the "[age,] socioeconomic group, physical location, and family types" of the narratives are shaped by historical events and are context specific. In other words, for the life story to be made intelligible, it needs to mesh with and hit chords with the ways in which identities are lived and experienced in collective ways of a particular social category (Appiah, 1994).

Meso Zoom.

The meso level considers the themes and key phrases found in the narrative. In this level, attention is on the entirety of the life story narrative as emerging thematic fields are mapped out and constructed from each participant. It is "through attention to the order of telling, what is selected, and what is left out, [that] personal values within" the narratives are exposed (Pamphilion, 1999, p. 401). This stage requires multiple readings of the narratives to gain nuanced understandings that transcend the most freely available assumptions of 'problems' versus 'acceptances' in living out a LBTQ intersectionality.

Micro zoom.

Micro zoom pays particular attention to "pauses and emotions" in the narratives (Pamphilion, 1999, p. 403). Identifying pause (long and short) patterns in each transcript and then across all the narratives can offer insights into how the women have assigned meaning to a specific aspect of their lives. Pauses may tell us about "linguistic incongruence" where the normative discourses accessible to the participants may not capture and/or facilitate the expression of personal experiences (Devault, 1990, p. 97).

The importance of examining emotional dimensions in life story narratives and the research process have been discussed widely in feminist research, as these challenge the principles of masculinized notions of objectivity and rationality (Blakely, 2007; Jamal, 2011; Reger, 2001; Reinharz, 1992; Rouse, 2004). Emotions can offer insights into how an experience or set of experiences are perceived by the participants and its impacts (reactions) on self and identity.

Interactional-zoom.

Creswell (2007) argues that "how we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research. All writing is 'positioned' and within a stance" (p. 179). This statement holds true for this research project which necessitates the need for critical reflexivity, especially in feminist-oriented research (Alcoff & Potter, 1993). I discuss critical reflexivity vis-à-vis interactional-zoom level, which considers the "transaction and reaction facets" of the research process in shaping the data interpretation (Pamphilon, 1999, p. 404). In this level of analyses, the attention is placed on the interactions and dynamics between the researcher and the participants. Here "the researcher [is] to address and not hold aside his or her own subjectivity" during the entirety of the research endeavour (Pamphilon, 1999, p. 406).

The section on critical reflexivity will be explored in detail in the Findings (Chapter 5) as there are specific references made to the participants and the context of the research study as it relates to the overall findings. As an act of praxis, it is listed here briefly to make note of its importance.

In this chapter, the methods for data collection and analysis were discussed. The next chapter will focus on critical reflexivity, research themes that emerged from the data gathered and a summary of the key findings.

Chapter 5: Findings and Critical Reflexivity

In this chapter, the study findings and the themes which emerged from the data analysis are discussed. The chapter concludes with a section on critical reflexivity.

The findings are bundled under three main interrelated themes and sub-themes of intersectionality, relationships with varying communities, and agency/resistance of LBTQ Muslim women. I want to highlight a few things to keep in mind when reading the embedded narrative excerpts. First, even though I have pulled excerpts from stories, these still remain attached to the larger narrative(s) (Ludvig, 2006; Smart, 2009). The ways in which these remain attached are since the life stories are still a part of specific contexts and interactions with the researcher (Smart, 2009). Some excerpts were chosen highlight how the varying identity intersections impact (implicit and/or explicit), inform and shape the lives of LBTQ Muslim women (Ludvig, 2006). Second, there exist limitations in modes of communication and exchange which cannot fully relay all nuances, gestures and so forth that transpire in any given situation. These can be at times easily 'read' within the larger narrative and are much trickier to ascertain in small excerpts of the narrative (Smart, 2009).

Intersectionality

This larger theme examines the ways in which the participants understood and lived out their intersectional identities. In most of the narratives, the participants centralized themselves and how living out an intersectional identity was a complex task (as part of the many communities and systems) where constant negotiations of positionality (race, gender identity and expression, sexuality) was taking place concurrently in daily life.

Intricacy of intersectional facets.

The participants in this study revealed how intersectional facets of their identities were intricately enmeshed and were inseparable. The participants discussed their identity as one organic entity that continued to shift and evolve contingent on contexts (social, political, cultural). For example, Selma a gay Indian woman discussed her Muslim identity as cultural, which enmeshed with her familial and community identifications and interactions.

> In terms of my family identity, my racial identity has been very important to me. I guess I am a *pick and chooser* in terms of actual [religious] practice. I will fast some Ramadans', and I don't usually pray. I'll say *Bismillah* [prayer] before I do something. It [Muslim] is a cultural identity and the way I form community with other people…Doing communal prayers or fasting with my family, that is a tradition which ends up being spiritual…For me it [Islam] is as a communal practice, and it is impossible to separate the doctrine and spirituality from the cultural and the social, since they are one of the same. They are part of the same package.

In Selma's narrative excerpt, the identity facets' enmeshment demonstrates how identity categories of Muslim continue to shift and create new meanings (doing multiple things at once). In many ways, Selma's intersectional identity is in a state of becoming with no specific end goal (beyond the intersectional coordinates). Similarly to Selma, Noor a bisexual Pakistani woman asserts no separation between her intersectional identity facets.

> I don't feel like there are categorical differences between my background and Islam. I feel like they are the same thing. I feel like my life is my Islam. My path that I have been walking on my entire life is my *shariah* [path]. That's how I feel about how overlapping or even essentially the *same* things are for me…. I cannot pray five times a day and turn

my head to the fact that there are people that are homeless on the street and be Muslim.

That's a contradiction.

Rani, a Pakistani lesbian woman discusses below how varying identity facets in daily life

were inseparable, as these were informed by hr practice of Islam.

My understanding of Islam is [to] just to try to be the best person that I can be. For instance,

taking care of your community, yourself, and your family. In the whole process keeping

your *deen* [faith], which is essentially belief in God and Prophet Muhammed at the

forefront of everything that you do. For me that's my *deen* coming through in those

moments in practice. I don't necessarily pray five times a day. I don't necessarily go to the

masjid. I don't do all those things, but I keep *deen* in my heart all day long. I try to give

back to the community.

The participants also demonstrated how certain intersectional identity facets were made

prominent in certain social interactions and exchanges. In most cases, the participants'

connection with Islam and/or a Muslim identity was centralized in a pejorative manner

within normative communities of belonging. For example, in Sophia's case, her co-

workers expressed shock at her for practicing Islam as a gay Muslim of Caribbean descent.

Sophia stated, "I get *more* surprise that I am *Muslim*, and that I actually believe in Islam!

Especially working in a small company and fasting during Ramadan. People at my work

say, *You are fasting and you are gay*!"

The message Sophia received was that it was okay to be LBTQ identified, yet it

was not acceptable to identify as a Muslim simultaneously. Sophia's narrative excerpt

speaks volumes to how LBTQ identities connected with Islam and/or a Muslim are

perceived as incompatible due to the dominant views on Islam's incompatibility with a

sexually diverse identity. All participants critiqued the hegemonic and orientalist discourses that purport Islam's incompatibility with an LBTQ Muslim identity. The participants also questioned hidden assumptions of compulsory heterosexuality in discursive constructions of who a 'Muslim woman' is and Islam imagined as solely belonging to cisgendered men. For example, Chinara, a Black gay convert to Islam contested the normative hegemonic perspectives on Islam, sexual and gender diversity.

> Sometimes people ask me, '*How you can be queer and Muslim*? I don't understand! Isn't that a *contradiction*?' I hear that all the time. My response to that is Islam is universal. It is not only for straight people, or Arabs or men. I really do believe that the religion is for all of us. When we say it is for all of us, then all of us should be able to approach the text and the religion on our own. I feel that this is a big thing in Islam, which I really appreciated [since] growing up in Christianity.

Below Hawa, a queer Black woman shares her frustration around challenging normative understandings of Islam – especially her desire to identify as a Muslim, and practice Islam as a queer woman. This desire is significant to take note of because it is in contradiction of two existing pervasive hegemonic discourses in the Global North that situate Islam as not being compatible with a queer identity; and that a queer identified individual would even have the desire to stay Muslim. Hawa also points to the ways in which bodies and identities associated with Islam are constantly under surveillance in the Global North.

> I think it is super difficult to have alternative voices within Islam. I often get into heated arguments and debates with people about *why* and *how* I have found a way to reconcile my sexuality and religion or *even* the idea that I could want to be religious. Yeah, it's really *frustrating* because a lot of like other religions are able to because they are not under attack.

They [other religions] are able to expand and explore alternate ways of being. Islam does

not have the reflexive space to do that. We have to be *concrete* and *simplified* things, since

we constantly are *told* what *we* are. We aren't in a place to be allowed to question and be

critical, and it's really frustrating.

On a related note, Noor brings to light the larger (global and local) ideological, imperial and

colonial forces that have impacted and continue to impact understandings of Islam internal and

external to the Islamicate world.

This is coming from me, as a sociologist of race, ethnicity and religion. The push for

Islamic orthodoxy is a reaction to colonialism. It is a reaction to colonial powers trying to

divide and conquer. It is a reaction to the fact that there's such a large diaspora of Muslims

around the world. In order to feel like we are still unified and connected and that we still

have a voice, there can only be one Islam.

Historical events impact on intersectional identity.

Most of the participants discussed the implications of historic events on living out life as

an LBTQ Muslim (i.e. the 2017 U.S. election outcome, June 12, 2016 U.S. Orlando Pulse

Shooting tragedy, and 9/11). These events will be discussed briefly in Chapter 6. As a result of

these events, especially the Orlando shooting, many LGBTQ Muslims in U.S. and Canada

gained significant visibility alongside normative Islam's stance on gender and sexual diversity.

Many participants discussed that as a result of these events, social activism and campaigning

against Islamophobia increased in their personal and professional lives. Some participants

discussed how they used identification as a LBTQ Muslim, and the political dimensions of a

Muslim identity to effect social change. For example, 9/11 was a significant event in Hajra's life

as it directed her professional aspirations. Hajra identifies as a queer woman of Arab/Egyptian

decent. Motivated by challenging Islamophobia among other oppressions, Hajra used her

Muslim identification in a political sense to affect change on policy level.

> When September 11 happened, I was in my early twenties and being Muslim was a
>
> *huge* problem. A lot of issues about being racialized, queer and Muslim really came
>
> to a head for me during that time. Dealing with the racism in the queer community
>
> was really prominent. I was just finishing my undergrad and was contemplating grad
>
> school. That's when I decided to get into policy stuff to work towards challenging
>
> Islamophobia and other isms.

 In Alexis' case, the Orlando Pulse tragedy generated many fears and anxieties related to her

Muslim, bisexual and gender facets. Alexis, a European convert who frequently travels to the

States to visit family and friends shared anxieties about travelling as a Muslim even though she is

not racialized and is not a visible Muslim (does not wear hijab). Alexis asserts below that she is

open to taking risks travelling as a Muslim and does not withhold disclosing her Muslim status

when travelling.

> The day after I graduated seminary was the Orlando massacre. At that time, I was deeply
>
> involved in the mosque, and it felt like my worlds had collided like my interfaith path, my
>
> queer path and my Muslim path! All of these intersections that I embraced about myself,
>
> which I ran from before and feared came to a head…What has been an overnight change
>
> for me is due to this election outcome. Suddenly it is very daunting and scary to go to the
>
> States. I am going to be there in less than ten days. Being a queer Muslim woman is
>
> becoming even scarier now. The level of marginalization when I look at the States is so
>
> overwhelming…When I spent my life in what seemed like relative safety and
>
> happiness…Now that I am not in any kind of safety in terms of my location, I couldn't be

happier. I am okay to risk it all since I am much happier being this whole person who loves every part of herself.

For Nafisa, a gay Bangladeshi woman, the rampant Islamophobia and transphobia existing in the larger society, especially Islamophobia within mainstream LGBTQ community was highlighted as problematic for intersectional identities. Especially, in a world asking her to give up one identity over the other, Nafisa did not relinquish her Muslim identity. This signaled a political strategy wherein identification as a Muslim was used to disrupt normative perspectives.

A lot of people still don't get that there's vast Islamophobia even in mainstream gay organizations. Things around the war on terror and all this stuff that has happened against Muslims after 9/11 and the election results. You can't say that you are not a Muslim, and a queer unless you totally just give something up and that part of your life. It's too hard living in a homophobic society and living in a society that has been increasingly Islamophobic.

In the narrative excerpt below Jenn, A European convert, discusses her Muslim identity affords her to be 'a part of the struggle' and identification as a bisexual Muslim allows her to engage in 'debates' around normative Islamicate practices. For Jenn, the strategy to challenge the normative is through politicization of her Muslim bisexual identity.

At earlier stages of my life, I was really attracted to Buddhism. I see a lot of similarities between Buddhism and the Sufi approaches to Islam but I am not sure what it is particularly about Islam that appeals to me right now. I actually enjoy being a part of the struggle. I like being a part of debates and trying to change the mainstream approach or what people think about Islam. I don't know. There's just something about my personality, I guess, that appeals to me as a feminist having those arguments.

Relationships with Varying Communities

All participants discussed the importance of building relationships with the many communities of belonging they were a part of (race, sexuality, religion, and ethnicity). It was found that LBTQ Muslim women consistently negotiated these relationships while traversing through varying stages in life (coming out, some getting married, some against the institution of marriage, getting one's own place, some having kids, and some wanted no offspring) that involved their family and friends. Below are findings on the many relationships with communities of origin and choices that the participants engaged with.

With normative Muslim communities.

Participants discussed their positive, negative (and in between) experiences of coming out to friends and family in communities of origin. For example, Sophia discusses below the complexities of coming out and being regarded as influenced by the West.

> My parents would think that because I am living here, that's why I am queer. *No*, I would still be queer in Guyana if I lived there. I probably wouldn't be out as I am now because I don't want to go to jail or die. I may never come out if I were living in Guyana. Why can't I have the freedom to be who I am here? Yes, I understand the sacrifices you made when you came to this country, so your kids could be who they are.

Many participants remarked that the level of religiosity (family, relatives, and friends) could not be used as marker to determine acceptance of sexual and gender diversity. For example, in the case of some participants' acceptance of sexual and gender diversity came from unexpected sources (such as religious leaders or conservative parents). In Hajra's case, her father who was identified as 'more religious and conservative' accepted and celebrated her marriage to another woman.

Two years ago my wife and I got married. My dad gave me away at the wedding. My mom did not come but my brothers and sister did. I remember being really scared about telling him [dad] that I was getting married to a woman. I thought that he would *disown* me but instead he asked when the wedding was. *My dad is more religious than my mom*! I think my mom never really forgave my dad for coming to the wedding. I still try and talk to her and visit. I just don't have the same relationship I do with my dad than my mom. I feel like I *do* have my family no matter what. Even though my mother has really struggled with it and doesn't want to talk about it. I don't feel like she has completely rejected me so I feel secure in my relationship with her.

Some participants did experience strong rejection from their families in the form of being kicked out and initially disowned by conservative and religious parents. In most cases, discussions about family members presented a mixture of grief, contentment, relief while dealing with loss and sadness. For example, Fatima's narrative excerpt on living out life as a trans-Muslim woman after undergoing gender confirmation surgery in Iran illustrates this mix. However, toward the end of the excerpt, Fatima reframes her accumulative experiences as positive because she considers herself 'unique' as a result.

For transgender people, it [living, coming out] may be *very* intense because it is so inevitable—For every LGBT person, the idea of coming out—means you have to *grieve* for every single person in your life. And that's so *intense*, so huge, so *heavy* that I don't know how we pass through that… grieve for everyone. When you do that, you are not an ordinary human being. You are a unique reality. It does not matter what the result is, you are a unique entity right now.

With most of the participants, the relationships and ties with community, family and friends were never seen as final. As these were negotiated on an ongoing basis and connections were maintained in many ways (visits, coffee dates, phone calls, and so on). The levels of acceptance and support found in families and communities of origin are evident in Rani's excerpt, as she discussed her mother's interaction with her wife.

> She's [wife of participant] respected, *but* because she is a person. It is a different level of respect when you are walking into your parent's house with your spouse in hand. Had she been a male gender, and I walked into the house, my mom would be following all over the place making sure that he was comfortable. That whole hospitality aspect, when your son-in-law comes to *your* house and you take care of them is *missing*. Even the way my mom treats my brother's wife there's more respect. It is not that my wife is *not* respected, but there's a *different* level of respect that's given to my sister-in-law that is not given to my wife.

With Arabicization of normative Islam.

Most of the participants were highly critical of interpretations and practices, especially around sexuality and gender that they associated with Salafi and Wahabi traditions dominant in parts of the Arab world and in some diasporic and geopolitical contexts. As Wahhabi and Salafi approaches to Islam are often constructed and imagined as the 'right' and 'true' Islam in the Global North (see Chapter 2). Overall, all of the participants advocated for a separation of Arab culture (even the Arab identified participants), which is often confused as Islam itself in the Global North. In the narratives, the participants discussed Wahhabi and Salafi Muslims as the antithesis to pluralistic and diverse approaches to Islam. Many participants argued that the push

for Islamic orthodoxy and censure of sexual and gender diversity was rooted in Wahhabi and Salafi interpretations of the sacred text.

Overall, the excerpts below reveal the complexities surrounding the particular locations participants speak from (i.e. intersections: race and gender, and so forth); and how this impacted an LBTQ Muslim positionality. Notably, the significance lies in how the participants positioned themselves at a distance from certain types of Muslims, and Islamicate practices. An excerpt from Alexis demonstrates the nuances and complexities related to this topic.

> As I put myself more out there due to my leadership role in my communities. I get push back from more traditional and Wahhabi Muslims. That push back actually emboldens my queerness…It does have moments of fear and gets me pretty rage-y [the term refers her rage, anger]. So I have to work on how to bring this up without stooping to the same level.

Below Tamira, a non-binary queer Bangladeshi brings attention to ways in which Salafi and Wahhabi approaches to Islam have impacted Bangladesh. Such normative approaches were viewed as an 'imposition' on how Islam is practiced in Bangladesh.

> In Bangladesh now, and I don't go there that often, there is a palpable difference between when I [was] there in 2015 and when I was there 10 years before. A huge part of that is the funding from Saudi Arabia. So it's changing the way Islam is practiced from how it used to be practiced. I know that it [Saudi influences] is an external imposition and that external imposition is not aligned with what my Dadi [grandmother] believed. It is not aligned with what my ancestors would have believed.

Chinara's excerpt below discusses how her practice of Islam was influenced by normative understandings of the faith tradition. As a convert, Chinara was exposed to conservative perspectives which situated a type of Islam as 'right' and 'true' Islam that did not correlate with

her lived experiences and life in the U.S. Like many other participants, Chinara questioned the hegemony of Arab cultural understandings on Islam.

> When I became Muslim I found myself in a community of folks who were either born Muslim [and were] trying to come closer to their faith in this conservative way…. I feel like we, all of us went through an identity crisis, all of us. We tried to live the '*true Islam*' which happened to be very Saudi oriented Islam. Very Arab Saudi Salafi Islam which comes in its own historical context. We were trying to live this ahistorical '*true Islam*' which came out a historical movement, and then bring it here to 21st century America or Canada or the West or whatever. And it didn't work for any of us….That was not a sustainable way. You *cannot* just try to bring the culture, understanding, and idiosyncrasies that come with a specific culture and understanding of the world to *your* culture; and not even try to look at Islam or understand *your* Islam and these texts from your practice of faith from your own personal experience. It is just so inorganic or so unauthentic to do that and ultimately unsustainable. I think that is unsustainable! I think at some point, I was like, '*I am trying to live this Saudi version of Islam, and I am this Black queer woman in America*'. It doesn't work because my experiences are so different. When I read the text, I see and understand different things. I have to apply things differently just because that's the reality of my life.

With normative LGBTQ communities.

Almost all the participants shared mainly negative experiences within the broader LGBTQ communities. Namely, experiences of othering (racism, Islamophobia, perception that one cannot be LBTQ and Muslim simultaneously) dominated the participant stories. For example, Noor, (a bisexual Pakistani woman) asserted that normative LGBTQ support groups

she attended did not have a diverse and inclusive focus on intersectional identities in programming and service provision. Noor stated the following: "I feel like resources are less accessible because of my intersectional identity. For example, the 'coming out' group at the 519 was very *white heavy*. Even in a city like Toronto, it still very *white heavy*". Nafisa, discussed her experiences of racism and Islamophobia in normative LGBTQ spaces.

> People just don't get it, that it's *not a joke* when you say that there's racism in the queer community. It *exists*! I've had people tell me their experiences of discrimination and Islamophobia. I have also experienced racism, so I have distanced myself from the white queer community.

Sheema, a Somali Black trans bisexual woman shared her experiences of being 'exoticized' due to her intersectional identity.

> Most of the queer Black friends I have met are from the Caribbean. They have had negative experiences from the traditional white, Caucasian queer group. Being a Somali and growing up with racism—I have been commodified. My diversity is not my diversity it is a commodity. I'm seen as exotic rather than who *I* am.

In the stories, most participants critiqued normative 'coming out' models since these propel certain ways of performing and living out LBTQ identities. For example, many participants critiqued the normative assumption of an assumed correlation between identity acceptance and being out to every known person. For example, Tamira's excerpt questions the need to share with parents about their gender identity and expression. Since according to Tamira, there exists an established understanding around gender roles and dynamics within the family that has been confirmed over time.

I question the idea of 'coming out' because it is a Western concept in a lot of ways. My parents *know* me well and they *know* the way I walk through the world. My parents *knew* that I was gender non-conforming before I did. My mom dressed me in my brother's hand-me downs. They *know* I am uncomfortable around a lot of the gender roles and expectations for women.

Some participants felt immense pressure from teachers, non-Muslim friends and partners, and social workers among others, to come out immediately to family and friends. In a few cases, the participants succumbed to the social pressure and ended up damaging relationships with some family members due to coming out in a normative manner. Many participants identified that coming out models in the Global North signified a giving up of community, religion and family which were required for membership into the normative LGBTQ communities. For example, Nafisa's predicament captures the complexities around coming out.

When I decided to come out I was contemplating many things. Can I and do I want to fit into the mainstream white queer community? Do I want to suppress all these parts of myself and all this history that I have just so I can fit into this homogenized white gay community? Do I want to hear hateful things from the dominant Muslim community?

Hajra, discusses post coming out (after high school) experiences with normative LGBTQ individuals and the larger LGBTQ community.

When I was coming out in high school, I felt that I had to navigate these two worlds [queer and Muslim], and now I don't feel that anymore. I feel like I have a more holistic kind of life where I'm just living my life. People understand how they are living their lives as well and they are not constantly asking me to choose between my religious or my ethnic community and the queer community. That also came with distancing myself from white

queer spaces and that's the only way that has happened. I feel so much happier now that I have done that.

I find that a lot of time white queer people want you to be really, really oppressed like they really want you to reject your Muslim stuff. They really feel threatened if you are like, '*No this is my community too*'. It's is not just the queer white people that say this stuff. It is also the non-Muslims that have this attitude that all Muslims are the most violent people in the world. Well, *no* that is what is portrayed in the media. So, I don't want to deal with that anymore. Islamophobia is something that I don't deal with in straight communities so why should I deal with it in queer communities? I feel like people want to exoticize my story too. '*Well you are a Muslim and you are queer how did your parents take it? Did your parents beat you*? *Did they kick you out of the house? Did they try to have you killed?*' In response, I'm like, '*Well, even if that stuff was happening, it is not a story for your amusement or your entertainment. Is it because you actually care or is it because you want to hear a story about some violent Muslim man or something?* So I 'm trying to be really cautious about what people's motivations are in wanting to hear that side of me or wanting to see that side of me.

With support groups.

All of the participants experienced challenges locating individuals, communities and spaces that honored their intersectional identities. This sub-theme addressed the politics around belonging as the participants felt the need to locate and/or create communities and spaces that would not reject a critical facet of their positionality. Therefore, it was not surprising that all participants were affiliated with the larger LGBTQ Muslim support groups and networks (online and in-person attendance at the events). The participants who identified as culturally Muslim

and/or did not engage in ritualistic practices found the support groups and networks helpful in fostering a sense of community and not feeling isolated.

Most participants commented that support groups and networks provided access to build community and alliances, have a safe place to worship, maintain religious, spiritual and cultural ties to Islam and other Muslims (cultural, religious and social), for social nurturing, recreational opportunities, and to build a sense of online and in-person communities. For some participants it was about building and having a sense of community during the high Islamicate holidays and observances, i.e. Ramadan and *iftaar* (breaking of fast), Battle of *Karbala* (Shia observance), celebrating Eid culturally and religiously, meeting like-minded people to make friends, and engage in social justice work.

On the other hand, the support groups and networks were also identified as problematic by some participants. Alexis, who held one of the main leadership positions at a LGBTQ Muslim support group (at the time of the interviews) discussed many interrelated ongoing issues with respect to the group.

> Just because we [LGBTQ Muslim support group] may be inclusive and speak up for all of
> these things doesn't mean that we aren't a product of patriarchal, misogynist, homophobic
> society that infiltrates into those spaces. It does. Since I experience it in those spaces.

Alexis does not mention racism and does not identify cisgendered whiteness as problematic. Her White privilege shapes her experiences which are primarily grounded in gender and sexuality domains. For the racialized participants, it was very important to locate and create affirmative spaces when compared to their white counterparts. Especially around issues related to anti-Black racism, the ways in which the many 'isms' especially racism, together with gender and Islamophobia manifest in support group settings. For example, Tamira highlighted several issues

with LGBTQ Muslim support group related activities, events and overall happenings related to

race, ethnicity and belonging.

> I feel that I *can't* bring the racialized part to [LGBTQ Muslim support group]. I am acutely
>
> aware of my racialization… I'm trying to get away from white supremacist influences. I
>
> *don't* want to go to a mosque space shared with white converts because they take up space.
>
> A lot of times it can be people with integral roles and they speak a lot and speak over the
>
> rest of us. So that's my issue with the [LGBTQ Muslim support group], but it doesn't take
>
> me away from the religion… It is important that me *being Muslim* is welcome and me
>
> being racialized is welcome too. I want to be able to bring *all* parts of me into a space…The
>
> white converts are still white people, and they don't need to be prioritized in a safer space
>
> in the same way, because they are going to be read as white before they are read as Muslim.
>
> The racialized women and non-binary people are always racialized as Muslim.

Even though topics like racial safety, decentering whiteness, identifying and remaining critical of

settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, transphobia, patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, and

all the 'isms' are on the programming agenda of the LGBTQ Muslim support group recruited

from; the programming and culture is largely shaped by the volunteers and attendees. Such

topics are taken up by the participants in diverse ways as there are many voices at the LGBTQ

Muslim support groups and networks (diverse Muslims, non-Muslims, non-religious people).

The LGBTQ Muslim support group and networks do not ban anyone, especially for not being

critical enough, as these are meant to be inclusive and accessible spaces. Therefore at times,

some attendees can find these spaces and programming oppressive and problematic (i.e. Tamira).

Agency and resistance of LBTQ Muslim women

One recurring theme that was strongly evident in all narratives was the participants' agency and engagement in resisting and challenging hegemonic norms in their many communities of belonging.

Personal relationship with God and pluralistic understandings of Islam.

The participant narratives on personal faith and the experiences with and conceptions of the divine flowed effortlessly and were accompanied by marked changes in affect such as: smiles, energetic and calmed tones, and conveyed a sense of contentment and reflection. These narratives were marked by personalized approaches to the divine, religious and spiritual practices. For example, Fatima's narrative excerpt demonstrates a rejection of normative, monolithic and institutional Islam. Fatima's conceptualization of unity, (through deployment of 'tawhid[30]', or unity, a Quranic concept) informs her worldview, ethics, behaviors and practice of Islam. "I kept my own version of Islam… It's very much different from what the establishment is promoting and the mainstream Islam is promoting... the entire concept of Islam is based on unity and that's why I identify as Muslim". In Fauzia's case, who identifies as an Indian lesbian woman a personal relationship with the divine has been a continuous source of support.

> I have a great relationship with God! When my sexuality peaked at a very young age,
> I would *actually* pray to God: '*God, please let me get that girl!*' I never found
> *anything wrong* with that because I thought that God was the only one whom I could
> be myself with. I asked God for things that I could not ask from anyone else. So, I
> never thought that was a bad thing. I always joined those two together. It was only
> when I grew older that I found out that those two things supposedly didn't go ….One

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[30] *Tawhid* is an important concept as it also speaks to God's oneness, see Wadud (1999).

of my outlets in life is religion. Not the radical praying but just talking to God. It unburdens my load a lot! In that sense, I have never been into the negative things. So, my identity when I came out, when I knew I was lesbian it wasn't problematic to me. I was okay with it.

The deployment of tafsir, ijtihad and jihad.

The narratives demonstrate how the participants conceptualized what is meant to live out an LBTQ Muslim intersectionality vis-à-vis sources of resistance and support while engagement with Islamicate principles of *tafsir*, *taqlid*, *ijtihad* and *jihad*. These sections were marked with a sense of self-acceptance and reflection. Even though the participants did not clearly identify *taqlid* as a strategy in this study. I decided to include it in to honor Shia jurisprudence as it contributed to the participants' epistemological and ontological orientations. As discussed earlier, *taqlid* is identified in the literature as a reformist strategy. Sophia deployed *tafsir* (ongoing interpretation based on one's experiences and being) as a strategy used to reconcile any normative incongruences with an LBTQ Muslim intersectionality.

> From what I have read in the Quran, everyone can interpret the Quran. I feel that it is good to understand different ways of interpreting. At one point in my life, I can read the Quran and understand it one way. I can always go back and read the same thing and understand it differently after certain life experiences. I feel that the Quran is applicable to your life and at all points in it. So, you can find different interpretations of it throughout your lifetime, which is nice. Doing my *own* research was really important to me.

Fauzia's narrative excerpts demonstrate the engagement with *ijtihad* (coming to one's own understanding and a personal exploration of text).

> When I came out to myself, I was a really religious kid. Islam was *really* important to me. I always wondered how those two things connected, because I was being told about the story of Lot. But the way that they made it out was not what's written in the actual scripture because, I took the trouble of understanding Arabic. I learned Arabic and then read the Holy Quran myself. I wanted to find out for sure.

Hawa's excerpt demonstrates that through *jihad*, internal (self) and external (community, larger world) realms can be aligned together.

> In Sufism, you can't have external *jihad* unless you have internal *jihad*. So you have to find a way to resist internal struggles first to resist external things that we are trying to fight against. That concept [of resistance] is super important for anyone who wants to do any work in the realm of being good and doing good. Like you can't do that type of work unless you find *balance* within yourself.

Even though all the participants engaged in *tafsir*, *ijtihad* and *jihad* at varying levels, some participants felt it unnecessary to use Arabic terms to capture their experiences and describe ways in which agency is deployed to resist the normative (in its many manifestations). For example, the three converts (Jenn, Chinara and Alexis) did not grow up in Muslim traditions, and instead deployed the language of 'resist' and 'challenge' to communicate their experiences. As indicated elsewhere, the participants were critical of the Arab cultural influences on Islamic discourses, and especially vociferous in this regard were the converts. For example, when Chinara converted to Islam, her friends asked if she would take a Muslim name (an Arabic name). Chinara's response was that by virtue of identifying as Muslim, her name automatically became a Muslim name.

Existing and living.

Many participants revealed that existing, living and identifying as an LBTQ Muslim woman was a form of resistance against the status quo (normative discourses on Muslim women as passive, non-agentic, and Islam as an oppressive religion). All participants discussed plethora of experiences of being questioned by the larger society including Muslims and non-Muslims about living out an LBTQ Muslim identity. Such interactions were experienced on a continual basis and many participants had to 'come out' to validate their LBTQ intersectionality. Sophia discussed coming out as a strategy to create awareness about LBTQ Muslims.

> Being queer and Muslim together is resistance on its own. For me that is a *huge* thing…Talking to people about it and informing them on Islam. Showing them that you can be whoever you want to be…I get *surprise* all the time.

Rani used such questioning opportunities to 'educate' individuals and entertain questions about being an LBTQ Muslim. For these participants, affirmative embodiment of an LBTQ identity could serve as an example of validation, while demonstrating their practice of Islam.

> Being an example to five people is going to get me further than trying to be an example to a *million* …I meet new people every day. I don't *hide* my sexuality from anyone, including Muslims. I answer their questions. I *feel* that I do more for the main cause like that. My version [of resistance] is a few people at a time. My hope is that I am imprinting on them without them realizing it… Islam talks a lot about the importance of community and taking care of one another. Not being self-centered and learning from each other [is important].

Tamira's excerpt connected living out an 'authentic' life as a non-binary individual while existing as a human being.

> Being authentic and true to myself is an act of resistance. It is a revolutionary act of resistance, since people *don't want us to exist*… The main thing is that we exist. We are

here. We were meant to exist and we were made this way. That is my response to when I

hear, '*How can you be queer and Muslim*?' You *can't* argue with a tangible thing like a

person. I am here and I exist.

Critical Reflexivity, Research Context and Emotions

In this section, I discuss power dynamics inherent in the qualitative (feminist) research

process as a part of a critical reflexive practice (Jamal, 2011). This is an important consideration

in intersectional, transnational feminist, and critical research as the narratives were co-

constructed between myself as researcher, and the participants; alongside the political, social,

and cultural contexts implicated in shaping this research project (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Grewal,

2005). I also discuss the emotional aspects of this research by highlighting an emotional laden

exchange with a participant.

The writing of this dissertation commenced with one of the most popular prayers within

the Islamicate tradition. This specific prayer is usually uttered at new beginnings of activities,

intentions and thoughts. Notably, most academic articles and scholarship do not begin in this

fashion, and I commenced this paper with my faith-based spirituality as a way of challenging

traditional academic writings which tend to emphasize reason, logic, and objectivity (Shahjahan,

2005). In this dissertation, I am not pretending to be objective nor trying to write myself out. My

epistemological and ontological orientations as a racialized lesbian Muslim woman have

impacted this research project.

Growing up amongst the urban, immigrant diasporic communities (Caribbean and Black,

South Asian and Arab) in largely poor and working-class neighbourhoods within the Greater

Toronto Area has afforded me with unique experiences and access to diverse perspectives, ways

of being and living. Undeniably, my formative years have shaped and continue to shape my

perspectives on life. Even though my family of origin (South Asian) identified as Sunni (Muslim), my siblings and I were exposed to many types of Muslims and many Islams. Growing up, I did not perceive my sexual, gender identity and expression in opposition to my religious and spiritual identity. Irrespective of what I personally felt and believed, my surrounding communities, dominant approaches to Islam, and the larger societal structures continue to attack my practice of faith and belief systems. I recognize that my personal experiences are my own and are *not* a reflection of all sexually and gender diverse racialized diasporic Muslim women in the Global North (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Narayan, 1993). From an anthropological disciplinary perspective, Narayan (1993) offers noteworthy reflections on the effects shifting class status can have on individuals and their communities of origin as related to researching within one's communities of belonging:

> "Native" anthropologists, then, are perceived as insiders regardless of their complex backgrounds. The differences between kinds of "native" anthropologists are also obviously passed over. Can a person from an impoverished American minority background who, despite all prejudices, manages to get an education and study her own community be equated with a member of a Third World elite group who, backed by excellent schooling and parental funds, studies anthropology abroad yet returns home for field work among the less privileged? (p. 677).

What I can offer are my critical reflections on the varying and interrelated contexts of the current research project, which situate it in a particular geopolitical space and time.

Varying contexts.

The participants and I all reside in the Global North, and this project specifically deals with Western and European feminist discourses on Islam and Muslim women. There are

systemic, heteropatriarchal, Islamophobic, cultural, socioeconomic and historical forces like ongoing colonialism and imperialism that play a significant role in the lives of LBTQ Muslims, especially racialized women locally and globally. Recognizing these issues is important as feminists locally and globally have "complicated relationships" with one another (Chowdhury, 2009, p. 55). Therefore, as a researcher, deploying CRF and TF are important theoretical approaches in theorizing the varying and at times disparate "geopolitical and historical analysis" (Chowdhury, 2009, p. 55). Not doing so can offer reductionist and limited perspectives and can lead to individualization of systemic issues (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003). Therefore, I have not minimized the real risks and adversities faced by LBTQ Muslim women. On the other hand, I have not "*code[d] for*—the exotic, the bizzare, [and] the violent" in the narratives (Fine, Weis, Weseen & Wong, 2003, p. 186, emphasis orig.). Also, I have not presented a very rosy picture about the Global North as the hero-nation-state that accepts sexual and gender diversity, while rendering Islam and Muslims as the villains.

Ladson-Billings' (2003) scholarship on conducting Critical Race Theory (CRT) with racialized communities of which they are a member resonates with my work. The author discusses how much of their personal life intertwines with their research. Ladson-Billings (2003) states the following: "My research is a part of my life and my life is a part of my research" (p. 417). This statement rings true in many ways for my research. I belong to the community with whom I have engaged in research. These are the people I pray, break bread, fast in Ramadan, cry and celebrate with. I am invested in the longevity and well-being of the larger LGBTQ Muslim community in the GTA and globally. This research project is part of an ongoing commitment I have to the LGBTQ Muslim community. Actually, it was the leaders who endorsed my research project. If it wasn't for that endorsement, I do not think that I would have any participants.

Therefore, I had to be very careful in how I interacted with and represented the women that I interviewed. Straddling the insider/outsider status was not an easy task. I had to be really transparent about the academic requirements and limitations of carrying out and writing this dissertation with the participants (Ladson-Billings, 2003).

Emotions.

Undertaking this project has been an emotional feat. In addition to recording participants' emotional responses, I also included my reactions when interpreting the transcript. Recording these were helpful in finding areas of the narrative that elicited my strong reactions. For example, I reacted to Selma's visceral reaction against LGBTQ Muslims who conceptualize the origins of gender and sexual diversity as something that one is 'born with' or as a 'biological' entity. Selma discussed her sexuality through mainly a constructionist lens and as "not a biological category" even though she believed that, "God made all of me, but the words I chose to describe myself like, brown, woman, gay are produced by society". My intent here is to not engage in essentialist versus constructivist debates on sexuality and gender diversity to prove one's supremacy over the other[31]. My goal is to situate Selma's narrative in the shifting geo-political landscapes as an indicator of specific ways sexuality and gender are situated and deployed as political entities in the Global North. My other goal is to add a critical theological layer and insights to the ongoing conversations on essentialism and constructionism that can affirm LBTQ Muslim women's lives. Towards the end this section, I suggest a possible Islamicate approach to understanding sexuality and gender which is grounded in critical, liberatory and feminist readings of the Quran.

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[31] For a robust discussion on this topic see Feldman (2009) and Waites (2005).

Selma's strong dismissal of LGBTQ Muslims who favour a biological or an essentialist approach to gender and sexuality was unsettling. I reacted to the *ease* with which Selma offered her critique and dismissed the lives, and in many ways silenced sexually and gender diverse Muslims who are being persecuted locally and globally for 'choosing' a 'sinful' and 'hell bound' path in this and the afterlife. Evident in Selma's discourses (knowledge bases on sexuality) are sets of practices (which may be seen as competing) that inform her subject position on this matter. These sets of practices are situated in certain regimes of truths deployed in the Global North (Foucault, 1972). Foucault (1972) has argued that discourses are situated in what is considered "within the true" (p. 224) and are laden with power dynamics. When Selma distinguishes her perspectives on sexuality from other LGBTQ Muslims who situate sexuality as biologically determined, she is invoking specific hegemonic 'truths' in the Global North about sexuality, gender, Islam and Muslims. In many ways, then, Selma is rendering these LGBTQ Muslims 'backwards' and less evolved and learned.

In significant ways, however, Selma's understanding of sexuality is not that different from the other participants. That is to say that Selma believed that God created her, and therefore also created her sexuality. It may be that Selma's insistence on not using the language of 'biology' conveys scepticism and mistrust of the history of (sexuality and gender) essentialism, which is rooted in specific socio-political and cultural formations specific to the Global North. As a resident of the Global North, Selma does not exist outside of discursive practices; she is constructed by them. Selma's opposition to the 'biological' is grounded in particular layered histories of enlightenment, modernity, gay and lesbian rights movement, among other shaping factors that are local to Canada and the U.S., that have shifted away from essentialist perspectives. Over decades, these constructivist perspectives have challenged essentialist

approaches that were oppressive, racist and evolutionary. Theorists across disciplines have critiqued static and biologically based notions of sexuality, gender, and racial identity categories; especially the assumption that there are shared inherent characteristics for any given social identity category (Foucault, 1990/1985; McClintock, 1999; Said, 1978; Waites, 2005).

All that said, as a resident of the Global North, Selma is able to make constructivist assertions partly because her existence and life, sexual expressions and identity are not constantly under threat and surveillance by family, friends and societal systems. She is 'out' to most of her family, friends and many community (religious, ethnic, familial, professional) members and domains. Furthermore, as a Canadian citizen, Selma enjoys relative legal freedoms associated with sexual and gender identity and/or expression (vis-à-vis individual rights, rights to hold assembly and so forth). Selma can easily adopt frameworks where the notion of 'fluidity', and 'degrees of expression', can be configured seamlessly in conceptualizing such identities; and not realize the position and voice being affirmed and put forward (the privileged aspect of even uttering and having conversations about sexuality as not biological). The problem with this, however, is that such situated and privileged constructivist and anti-biological accounts are used as yardsticks to measure and further colonial projects vis-à-vis women and sexual minority rights in mostly Islamicate nation-states under the guises of narratives related to progress, modernity, civilization and so forth (Grewal, 2005; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001).

If deploying 'biological' or otherwise determinist arguments (such as those grounded in Quran) can support the survival of LGBTQ Muslims and can ease lives and familial relations, then space needs to be made and taken by such perspectives in the larger conversations. As examples below, I discuss how some racialized participants understood their sexuality and

gender identities in the context of living out life as a Muslim in the Global North that push the boundaries of these debates.

One participant, Hawa discussed struggles with her family of origin understanding sexuality and gender expression as a 'choice'. In order to gain legitimacy for her queer status and to be respected and taken seriously, Hawa deployed 'strategic' essentialist based arguments as a strategy to assert that her queerness is not a mere lifestyle (Spivak & Harasym, 1990). Also, to convey to family that 'socialization' with 'White kids' did not turn her queer. Hawa's belief systems around sexuality and gender are complex and multifaceted. Even though Hawa deploys essentialist based arguments to defend her queerness with her family, she does not completely write them off. As a self-confessed Foucauldian, Hawa also believes in social constructionist perspectives related to gender and sexuality fluidity, and asserts that 'choice' can configure into the equation for some individuals. In the same breath, Hawa discusses that the Creator is responsible for her queerness, and views queerness on a spectrum while contending with the question of its (queerness) origins.

> A hindrance I have noticed in my family is they see my queerness as a choice. Because
> they see it as a choice, they really question my intelligence and maturity. The way they
> [family] understand my queerness is fully based on socialization. [My family believes that]
> I went to university and I hung with white queer feminist kids. I was socialized and co-
> opted by white people to believe that I am gay from their perspective. They [family] feel
> bad for me. All of these things put me in a place where I am taken less seriously. My
> opinions and thoughts on things are less important because I am queer. Because they see it
> as a choice and they do not understand how I am queer. They do not think that I am a fully
> functioning human. And that is why I sometimes have to use the essentialist argument with

my family just to make it real. I have to be like, '*I've been gay since the moment I came out of mom's womb*'….

>…Everything is created by God and everything is intended. It is far easier to understand sexuality through a Foucauldian, constructionist perspective if you are not religious…I think the choice thing does fall into play for some people. Everyone falls on the spectrum. If you don't have the knowledge or the representation of queerness. You are on the spectrum and you are bisexual, and you have been socialized and feel the comfortability in relation to men. You can go the rest of your life being heterosexual and not questioning it, because there isn't anything else that you are seeking. Some people do make choices based on what is manageable for them and what is easier in their life…For me if I had been more in the middle of the spectrum. I probably would predominantly be heterosexual for it would make life very easy for me. It would make things easier for my family and I would not constantly be questioning how I would keep up familial relationships for my entire life. I think there's some space for the choice argument. I have been trying to figure out how I understand it too. If you look at the Quran, Allah clearly describes the embryonic stages and I feel like it is part of that process. There is something in there and maybe it is hormonal thing. Have you heard about this womb stuff? It is really fascinating!

Above, Hawa is conveying that everything is created by God, while stating that there is room within that fundamental understanding for choice and the strategic use of biological determinism. Hawa is holding all of these ideas in tension; and since everything is attributed to God, exploring fluidity and strategic determinism can be understood as a part of this design and context. Below Fauzia asserts that 'God created her', and God 'doesn't make mistakes'.

The bottom line is that God created you. If you just go with what they say, you are created by God and this is not a choice you made. This is the way you are and this is created by him. So, to say that there is a fault in you is to say that there is a fault in him—God and that's never true.

Chinara also attributed her sexuality to God and considered it as an intentional part of human design.

For *me* to live my Islamic principles, the overarching principles of neither harming nor returning harm for example as one of the principles, I have to be true to myself. Even preservation of life, for me to maintain my sanity I need to be true to myself and I can't pretend to be who I am not. God made me this way, I believe for a reason. There is a purpose. I need to live an ethical life.

Rani also believes this and further asserts that sexuality is essentialist and constructionist in nature concurrently.

That's [sexuality] still God given. Us as people are created by God. From what I understand, it is genetic and mainly a chemical balance within us. So, that is all God controlled. If that's our belief. Our belief is that God created us, therefore God created sexuality to be fluid. I find the whole categorization of sexuality being constructed or the essentialist arguments dangerous. I think it is dangerous to believe that it is one way over the other way, because they [arguments related to essentialism and constructionism] all factor into gender and sexuality. What I mean by that is, as much as it is God given, it is constructed. It is combination of both [constructionist and essentialist] and we need to recognize that it is a combination of both because as much as we are born this way. It is also socially constructed because we are being told what to do.

I follow these assertions below with Tamira's powerful insights that honour diverse experiences of being and living in the world beyond categories of sexuality and gender.

> Everything exists and one way of existing is not better than the other. When you argue that there's only one way to be, it can lead to violence and subjugation. I don't think it is equitable and fair to diminish other people's lived experiences if they don't fit certain moulds.

I believe Tamira's excerpt captures the essence of what is at stake here in this geopolitical landscape of sexuality, identity and gender politics. There are many approaches to living out a LBTQ Muslim intersectionality, and with dominant approaches, there are high risks of marginalization and othering. Tamira's excerpt is a reminder to remain in constant vigilance of how one is implicated in the ongoing oppression and subjugation of marginalized identities, persons and communities. Doing so can hopefully inform work that aims toward social justice in tandem with, and not against marginalized communities. Mahomed (2016), who is likewise in favour of legitimizing arguments grounded in the Islamic tradition as necessary to validating LBTQ Muslims, proposes:

> It is fair to characterize the scholarship arguing for the legitimization of same-sex sexual conduct within Islam as being part of the internal interpretive debate rather than external critics to the tradition. The chief purpose of delineating religious arguments for the permissibility of a homosexual orientation and same-sex sexual conduct is twofold: first, it is an important way for LGBTIQ Muslims to reconcile their religious faith with their sexual orientation. Second, it is a call for Muslims to become aware of the existence of LGBTIQ Muslims and recognize their equal right to the same social goods that heterosexual Muslims enjoy such as marriage, sexual intimacy, freedom of expression

and not to be subjected to discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. In engaging in internal interpretive debates in order to achieve some agreement and move the tradition forward, the parties to the engagement are speaking a common language that is grounded within the tradition and the immediate socio-political context (p. 62).

Establishing legitimacy for sexual and gender diversity through a theological perspective can offer an opening of dialogues to support family reconciliation for LBTQ Muslims, especially for racialized LBTQ participants' families and communities of origin. This is especially so because the main arguments used against LGBTQ Muslims by normative Muslim clergy and institutions are grounded in theology, especially in creationist based arguments (Eve and Adam as only partners chosen by God) among others (Hendricks, 2010; Kugle, 2014). Racialized LBTQ Muslims are perceived to be influenced by 'Western culture and sexuality' and thus rendered less authentic racial and ethnic Muslims by families and communities of origin (Al-Sayyad, 2010; Siraj, 2016, 2018, 2018a). The racial, cultural and ethnic othering experienced by diasporic LGBTQ Muslims in the Global North further compounds these issues (as discussed in Chapter 2, see El-Tayeb, 2011; 2012) as Islam and Muslims are perceived to be unassimilable groups. Therefore, it is not surprising that racialized LBTQ Muslim individuals face additional pressures from families and communities of origin when compared to their white counterparts to conform to static and hegemonic norms (Siraj, 2016, 2017a, 2018).

In Wadud's (1999) formative work on gender, women and the Quran, the importance of language and socio-political, historical and cultural contexts are identified as key forces that have influenced the normative readings of the Quran. Also, how these normative understandings of gender have impacted and continue to impact the lives of women in most Islamicate societies. As discussed in earlier chapters, the Quran approaches gender and sexual diversity as a facet of

human creation in a positive manner (Kugle, 2010). There are aspects of human creation which are talked about, i.e. revealed (breath of God, embryonic stages, humans created from a blood clot, and so forth). However, some aspects of creation are a mystery and remain in the unseen knowledge with the Creator (Wadud, 1999). In general, with language's gendered limitations, it can be difficult to translate the specifics of how gender, desire and sexuality are conceptualized in the Quran. This matter has been taken up by critical Islamicate theologians who have examined verses in context (of the Quran's overall message) as it relates to human creation, gender and its implications (Esack, 1997; Hendricks, 2010; Wadud, 1999). For example, Wadud (1999) has argued that the following with respect to creation and gender:

> In the Qur'anic account of creation, Allah never planned to begin the creation of humankind with a male person; nor does it ever refer to the origins of the human race with Adam. It does not even state that Allah began the creation of humankind with the *nafs* of Adam, the man. This omission is noteworthy because the Qur'anic version of the creation of humankind is not expressed in gender terms (pp. 19-20).

The term 'nafs', which is understood as soul, self, or person is used alongside another term in the Quran to discuss humans, '*zawj*',which refers to partner, mate, or spouse. These two terms do not refer to female/male pairings exclusively (Kugle, 2010; Wadud, 1999). Kugle (2010) asserts that "[t]he Qur'an does not differentiate between a male or female person as *nafs* or between the person's female or male partner as *zawj*. Homosexual pairs could also, within this wide and varied framework, be considered mates" (p. 23). Each *nafs* (which is not gendered) comes with its own desire (whatever it may be, including sexual) is not necessarily bound to the physical manifestation of the body, and how the body is constructed given varying contexts. In the Quran, each person or *nafs* is held responsible for its choices and actions, both in this life and the

hereafter; and is highly encouraged to deploy intellect, emotions to make judgements according to its capacity and ability to live an ethical life (Kugle, 2010).

There are many references in the Quran urging its readers to apply critical thinking when reading the text. For example, Chapter 39, verse 55 stipulates that "Muslims are instructed to extract, out of the many possible interpretations, the interpretation that achieves the greatest good" (Hendricks, 2010, p. 32). *Ijtihad*, is one concept which speaks to using one's own body, mind, emotions and experiences to bear on understanding divine guidance. Through *ijtihad*, as discussed earlier on as a tool that can facilitate LBTQ Muslims to live out a dignified life. For example, in the narrative excerpt below Fatima discusses how through *ijtihad* she is able to live out a meaningful existence.

> Maybe what I am doing is *ijtihad*. Living the life and being honest with yourself and with life itself, and searching for the concept of reality and for truth. Searching for reality and for truth in every moment of your life can be *ijtihad*…Looking at every moment of life to find truth is *ijtihad* itself. It may not be acceptable scientifically, but what is science? For thousands of years, there was no publications, no movies, scientific circle or scientific centre as we know it from our traditional point of view. People lived by their own intuitions and lived on their own experiences.

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that diverse expressions of human gender and sexuality are a part of the Creator's master plan. It is humans who have interpreted diverse and divine creation in ways that are suitable to a given context (based on language, society, history, culture, ideologies) which affirm and/or abhor certain expressions of gender and sexuality in a given context. This perspective seeks to critically unpack the layered influences caked on human understandings of gender and sexuality, and is grounded in liberatory, feminist and critical

interpretations and understandings of the Quran as discussed in Chapter 3. Additionally, this perspective blends the essentialist and constructionist debates by placing emphasis on understanding sexuality and gender critically, as facets of the human condition that are lived out individually and/or collectively within specific socio-political, cultural and historical contexts.

In this chapter, key study findings from the data analysis were outlined. The findings were bundled under three main interrelated themes and sub-themes of intersectionality, relationships with varying communities, and agency/resistance of LBTQ Muslim women. Attention was also placed on critical reflexivity as it pertains to the research project and the findings. In the next chapter, a discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical approaches and literature on the topic of LBTQ Muslim women will be discussed alongside the study's limitations and the implications for social work practice.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this final concluding chapter, the research study with a discussion of key findings in relation to the theoretical approaches and the larger literature on LGBTQ Muslims in the Global North is outlined. The research study's limitations and the implications for social work practice are also outlined.

In this qualitative study, the 14 life story narratives suggest that LBTQ Muslim women living out lives in the Global North comes with its own challenges due to the varying hegemonic discourses surrounding this intersectional identity in both normative Muslim and LGBTQ communities. The participants demonstrated that living out an intersectional identity was a complex task (as part of the many communities and systems) where constant negotiations of positionality (race, gender identity and expression, sexuality) were transpiring concurrently due to the cultural and socio-political shifting terrain of identity politics as it relates to Islam and Muslims in Canada and the U.S. Focusing on such aspects through the examination of lived experiences is key in understanding a LGBTQ Muslim intersectionality (Rahman & Valliani, 2016). Further, paying attention to nuanced subjective complexities and power dynamics is an important aspect of transnational feminist research (Grewal, 2005; Jamal, 2011).

Rahman and Villani (2016) succulently summarize extant research on a LGBTQ Muslim intersectionality into five themes. First theme discusses the struggles LGBTQ Muslims experience in their families of origin as it relates to ethnicity, religiosity and coming out. Second theme suggests that LGBTQ Muslims and their families do not have adequate support from mainstream LGBTQ serving agencies, normative Muslim and ethnic serving agencies that support living out a dignified LGBTQ Muslim life. Thirdly, LGBTQ Muslims are imagined as belonging to the Global North due to their identification with non-normative gender and sexual

orientations. The fourth key theme is the Islamophobia, racism and prejudice experienced by LGBTQ Muslims within the larger LGBTQ communities. The last and final theme addresses the many strategies (re-interpreting the text) used by LGBTQ Muslims to reconcile faith, sexuality and gender.

This research study is distinct from previous research as it examines a LBTQ Muslim intersectionality from an affirmative perspective, which does acknowledge adversity associated in living out a LBTQ Muslim life, but does do with a focus on agency and resistance of LBTQ Muslim women. Specific focus on a LBTQ Muslim women intersectionality with a strong focus on LBTQ Muslim women being considered as knowledge holders and experts of their own lives has not been explored in the literature. Siraj's (2018 a,b) research on British Lesbian Muslims is moving in an affirmative direction, does not solely focus on the resistance strategies and agency of LBTQ Muslim, which in this study are identified as: living and embodiment, *tafsir*, *ijtihad* and *jihad*. Further, in this study LBTQ Muslim women's agency and resistance are framed within an Islamicate context, which differs from past research where religiosity (Islam and Muslimness) has been considered a source of oppression for LBTQ Muslim women and has been compartmentalized (i.e. religion is kept separate from sexuality). This study suggests that LBTQ Muslim women continue to maintain a strong connection to Islam and do not abandon the faith tradition. Further, a LBTQ Muslim intersectionality is not inherently antithetical to Islam as the participants demonstrated a successful integration of the varying positionality facets. Overall, there is a general lack of affirmative scholarship on LBTQ Muslim women which this study is making a contribution to. Furthermore, there is limited exploration of hegemonic norms in the mainstream LGBTQ communities in the Global North, with a strong focus on race which this study is contributing towards.

The life stories were analyzed through transnational feminist, liberatory approaches on the Quran, and intersectional lenses (Grewal, 2005; Kugle, 2014, Puar, 2007, 2012; Wadud, 1999). Emphasis was placed on broadening ways of belonging outside of identity limitations and borders that are surveilled and regulated by hegemonic norms (community and societal). The LGBTQ Muslim intersectional identity is often 'exoticized' as an anomaly, as sexually and culturally repressed by Islam in normative LGBTQ communities (Habib, 2010; Minwalla et al., 2005; Siraj, 2009). Tied to this norm is the belief that LGBTQ Muslims need to be saved from their oppressive culture, faith and family (El-Tayab, 2012; Khan, 2016 a, b). This study confirms the othering (racism, Islamophobia and so on) experienced by LGBTQ Muslims, especially racialized individuals in mainstream LGBTQ spaces (Haritaworn, 2015; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Minwalla et al., 2005).

There are many factors which come into play to account for such othering experienced by LBTQ Muslim women in the Global North. One such factor is that secularism, which is found in normative LGBTQ communities and elsewhere, imagines individuals connected with a faith tradition, especially Islam as incompatible of being absorbed into the body of the nation-state (El-Tayeb, 2012; Haritaworn, 2015). Razack (2008) argues that "the secular/religious divide . . . functions as a color line, marking the difference between the modern, enlightened West, and people of color, notably Muslims" (p. 148). This binaristic trope is what Rahman (2014a) takes up as a strong connection between Western progressive modernity and LGBTQ identification and visibility. Rahman (2014a) argues that "Muslims, both at 'home' within the West and internationally, are therefore characterized as bearers of a 'traditionalism' that marks them out as resistant to queer rights because they have yet to fully experience or embrace modernity" (p. 277).

Another important factor, which cannot be overstated, is that most mainstream religions approach sexual and gender diversity from deviant, sinful and overall prejudiced perspectives (Wilcox, 2006). Varying levels of transphobia and homophobia has been documented in normative religious (normative Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism) institutional practices that marginalize religious and spiritual LGBTQ persons (Taylor & Snowdon, 2014). Even though this is the case, transphobia and homophobia related to Christianity and so forth are constructed as individual failings, whereas in Islam's case the entire tradition is represented as problematic (Ahmed, 2011). This continues to reinforce what Razack refers to as the 'color line' divide and affirm the othering of bodies and traditions associated with Islam (Razack, 2008, p. 148).

Due to the othering and discrimination found in normative LGBTQ spaces, the participants in this study actively engaged in creating and seeking individuals, and communities that concurrently honored their intersectional identity (faith, race, ethnicity, sexuality, spirituality, gender identity and expression) (Hendricks, 2009). The importance of such support groups and networks cannot be overstated as these have played a role in LBTQ identity reconciliation and support globally (Hendricks, 2009; Kugle, 2014). Former research on LGBTQ Muslims confirms that prior to meeting other Muslims (through support groups and networks) and engaging in "collective ijtihad" to borrow Shannahan's (2009, p. 69) term, believed that a Muslim identity was incompatible with sexual and gender diversity (Jama, 2008, 2015; Kugle, 2014; Minwalla et.al, 2005; Shannahan, 2009).

The study participants were all recruited through LGBTQ Muslim support groups and networks in the Global North, where access to affirmative resources and individuals was seen as helpful in building emotional and social capital. At these support groups and networks recruited from, emphasis is placed (ideologically and through programming) on creating safe, transparent,

respectful and supportive environments where affirming messages and resources related to sexuality, gender identity and expression can be sought. The LGBTQ Muslim support groups and networks used for recruitment attract Muslims and non-Muslims from all walks of life, and so there exist users which may still be struggling with their intersectional identity, and reconciliation of family, community and faith.

The study findings suggest that LGBTQ Muslim support groups and networks to which the participants belonged to were also problematic and did not fulfil the needs of every user. Muslim LGBTQ Support groups and networks have been critiqued in the literature for maintaining identity politics that privilege cisgendered gay male voices over trans, lesbian and bisexual identities in leadership and programming (Rouhani, 2007). Not everyone recruited was actively involved in the support groups and networks. Some participants did not attend specific events (Islamophobia workshops, prayer services and so on) organized by these groups due to many reasons (distance, disagreement with the programming ideologically—too critical or not critical enough). Mainly, personal preferences and needs of each participant determined level of participation. For some racialized participants, the approach to programming was not critical enough around issues related to visibility and acknowledgement of Anti-Blackness, and support for trans- identified Muslims. For these participants, the support groups and networks were not immune from racism, sexism and hierarchical politics.

Coming out and living out Muslim LBTQ lives

Participants discussed the politics of coming out when managing normative Muslim community expectations and living out Muslim LBTQ lives. Notably, the participants discussed the mixture of othering and acceptance (varying levels) found in the normative Muslim communities. Coming out for lesbian Muslims is perceived as: "evidence of women's cultural

assimilation with the White majority and their adoption of fundamentally "un-Muslim" norms and values (Siraj, 2011, p. 103); as a threat to family reputation in the larger Muslim and ethnic communities (Al-Sayyad, 2010; Abdi, 2014); as a rejection of ethnic culture (Siraj, 2012); and some LGBTQ Muslims finding it 'culturally' acceptable to be sexually and gender diverse in the Global North as opposed to within 'ethnic' diasporic communities (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Yip, 2004b, 2008b).

The narratives discussed in the former chapter (especially Sophia and Hawa) discussed these abovementioned geopolitical realities that arise for diasporic sexual and gender diverse Muslims, in the context of coming out. There are some key pieces which need to be configured into this larger conversation. The first is what is considered 'tradition' of a specific diasporic demographic can be understood as political formations coming out of specific socio-political and historical contexts that have been influenced by many forces including imperialism and coloniality (Abu-Lughod 2002; Volpp, 2011). Therefore, an ongoing analysis of coloniality and imperialism, as it relates to sexual and gender diversity and how it is understood in the geopolitical landscape needs to be considered (Grewal, 2005). Simplistic understanding of Guyana (Sophia) and Somalia (Hawa), among other regions, as homophobic and transphobic ignores the notion that there exist multifaceted relations of power in a geopolitical context (Grewal, 1988). For example, what often gets ignored is the ongoing colonial missions spearheaded by right-wing groups based in Canada and the U.S. travelling to the so called 'developing nations' in the 'third world' to promote the repression of gender and sexual diversity (Mulé, Khan & McKenzie, 2017).

Secondly, under the banner of human rights, the narrative of 'development' in the Global North continues to create knowledges about the other, which is the " 'developing world' within

the existing capitalist international-national system" (Grewal, 1999, p. 338). The author further

asserts that both discourses of human rights and development are "based on linear notions of

progress by relying on notions of the South as Other and utilizing North-South inequalities to

claim that the North has human rights (with a few aberrations) and the South needs to achieve

them" (Grewal, 1999, p. 338). Gopinath's (2005) work further considers the international

political and cultural influences on the normative diasporic imagination as it tries to remove

diverse sexual and gender diversity and expression from its history in cultural forms such as

literature, media and the arts. Following Stuart Hall's work on diaspora in the Global North,

Gopinath (2005) critiques the heteronormative tradition embedded in histories of coloniality and

imperialism and the power it yields in creating narratives of ahistorical pasts which regulate

LGBT bodies as deviant. The author argues that:

> The various regimes of colonialism, nationalism, racial and religious absolutism are
>
> violently consolidated through the body and its regulation. When queer subjects register
>
> their refusal to abide by the demands placed on bodies to conform to sexual (as well as
>
> gendered and racial) norms, they contest the logic and dominance of these regimes"
>
> (Gopinath, 2005, p. 28).

Both Sophia and Hawa, among other participants, are caught in these varying geopolitical

contexts that factor in living out lives as LBTQ Muslim women. Indeed, such factors can play an

important role in deciding whether or not to engage with the normative process of coming out to

family and friends. The normative coming out models[32] (with stages of leaving the closet and

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[32] Understandings of coming out have been influenced by the following perspectives (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989). For a recent stance on coming out models as it relates to supporting sexual and gender diverse populations in the helping professions, see Martos, Nezhad, & Meyer (2015). Critiques of normative discourses on coming out from diasporic perspectives, see (Ahmed, 2006; Gopinath, 2005; Puar, 2007). The 'closet' as a space of resistance and safety, see (Eribon, 2004; Sedgwick, 1990).

following the linear trajectory of acceptance) were critiqued by the participants in this study as these do not accommodate LGBTQ intersectional identities and have been highlighted in the LGBTQ Muslim literature as problematic (Siraj, 2011, Minwalla et al., 2005, Rahman, 2014). For some participants, coming out was not an option to certain family and friends since this would create rifts in the relations. Farid and Mahomed (2011) argue that for some LGBTQ Muslims the closet is a "voluntary but vital expression" that poses a challenge to normative ways of living out a sexually and gender diverse existence (p. 55). For some LGBTQ Muslims, the closet can be a place of solace and freedom from the prejudices found in normative Muslim communities and racist-Islamophobic othering in normative LGBTQ communities.

> The 'closet' can then, in fact, function as a prophetic voice on the periphery, a mode of existence that refuses to be allured by the trappings of "normative" practice. It is also perhaps the only empowering space for many homosexual Muslims where it is possible to preserve a balance between their religion, sexuality and society even if such a balance is tenuous and incommensurable at best (Farid & Mahomed, 2011, p. 55).

The struggle to come out in normative ways while balancing familial expectations has been explored in LGBTQ literature (Minwalla et al., 2005; Siraj, 2018). Of importance here is not measuring LBTQ Muslims in this study with respect to the following: as evidence of persons not living up to normative Western ideals on coming out, and therefore somehow lacking in self-confidence and agency; as well as not situating Muslim family members as transphobic and homophobic. What is needed is an intersectional approach to LGBTQ Muslim lives which argues against binaristic conceptions of LGBT identities as these offer limited options (Khan, 2016 a, b; Rahman, 2014a). Rahman (2014a) argues that "Muslim experiences of sexual diversity are not

temporally linear reflections of Western ones" (p. 281), which need to be situated in larger geopolitical and historical contexts specific to the Global North:

> The expansion of global culture through technologies such as easy travel and the Internet and the recent internationalization of queer rights and issues of sexuality are vastly different contexts for the emergence of sexual diversity than experienced in Western gay liberation (Rahman, 2014a, p. 281).

One of the ways in which this study challenges the hegemonic norms existing in both normative LGBTQ and Muslim communities is by bringing together traditionally disparate identities: race, ethnicity, sexuality, religiosity to validate a LBTQ Muslim identity. The participants did not separate (in silos) the identity facets to 'fit in', as has been discussed in some literature (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Siraj, 2006).

The narratives on coming out in this study suggest that there are multiple ways of living out LBTQ Muslim women intersectionality, which transcend binaristic ideas of the 'closet' and 'acceptance'. Also, that coming out is a process which is negotiated with loved ones over time, as LBTQ Muslim women alongside their families are trying to forge ways of relating that are beyond the total acceptance and total rejection models. Rani's example (as discussed in the former chapter) of her mother's unequal treatment of her wife when compared to her brother-in-law during family visits communicated varying levels of respect and disrespect. Even though Rani's wife partakes in all family celebrations, her status is of an elevated 'friend'.

Also, discussed in the former chapter was Tamira's approach to coming out. Tamira stated that she does not need to come out to her parents, as her parents already 'know' her and the 'way she walks and lives her life'. That understanding of her parents knowing her already signals beyond communicating with words, which are not deemed necessary in her case.

Through living out an LBTQ life, the participants have already communicated to their loved ones about their identities, which does not require a verbal confirmation with specific contemporary language that is deployed in the Global North.

The findings suggest that the diasporic racialized Muslim communities in North America are diverse, and as a result have varying responses to queerness and LGBTQ Muslims (Kugle, 2014). The research demonstrates that not all Muslim families respond in similar ways to queerness; and that the participants did not outright reject their families of origin due to Westernized notions of acceptance. Instead, mirroring Al-Sayyad (2010) and Kugle's (2014) research, the participants continued to build relationships with families and communities of origin. The study further suggests that family acceptance can be viewed as a process; and that diasporic Muslim families are not inherently homophobic and transphobic (Jama, 2008, 2013, 2015; Kugle, 2014). The varying levels of acceptance was demonstrated through visiting, dinner invitations, defending and supporting LGBTQ children with extended relatives and family members with their LGBTQ children post coming out (Compton, 2017; Jalees, 2013).

LBTQ Muslim women expanding the Islamicate tradition

Another hegemonic discourse which is supported in mainstream LGBT and Muslim communities is the assumption that a LBTQ identity is inherently at odds with a Muslim identity or the Islamicate tradition. This dominant discourse was challenged fiercely in the narratives. Not one participant believed that the Quran and other Islamicate texts were inherently transphobic and homophobic. The transphobia and homophobia impressed upon the Quran was attributed to social, cultural, political and historical systems of domination i.e. heteropatriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality and gender bias (Kugle, 2016; Siraj, 2016). It was also attributed to specific conservative monolithic approaches to Islam that were considered to marginalize sexual

and gender diversity, especially through phenomenon of Arabicization of Islam in the Global North. Most of the participants critiqued the Arabicization of Islamic practices and discourses, since these were often confused in the Global North to signify 'true' Islam. There is significant literature critiquing the Arabicization of Islam through the Wahhabi and Salafi conservative approaches which have marginalized diverse approaches to Islam and its practice, especially Sufi approaches (Raudvere & Stenberg, 2009b). This critique has not yet been made from the standpoint of a LBTQ Muslim intersectionality in the literature. The strongest proponents of this critique were the three converts in this study. The converts in the study tried to make sense of the negativity surrounding Islam's representation in the Global North and attributed this to conservative approaches to the faith tradition, especially conservative Wahhabi and Salafi approaches. The convert narratives discussed their journeys to Islam while navigating existing Islamophobic hegemonic discourses on Islam and Muslims.

A personalized approach to living out life as a LBTQ Muslim, irrespective of sect, is welcomed in the Islamicate tradition due to its plurality and diversity (Kugle, 2014). It was found that LBTQ Muslim women have unique understandings and personalized relationships with God and the Islamicate texts. The participants connected living out a LBTQ Muslim life as a core aspect of resisting normative discourses and using themselves to educate and validate an intersectional identity. Further, the participants challenged normative practices and understandings of monolithic Islam to re-formulate understandings of the Quran and Islamic principles that are sexuality and gender affirming through *ijtihad*, *tafsir* and *jihad* (Hendricks, 2016; Kugle, 2016). Recent research on LGBTQ Muslims demonstrates that personalized understandings of Islam through critical, gender and sexuality sensitive approaches are

broadening and creating spaces for alternate perspectives on Islam, sexual identity, gender identity and expression (Rahman & Valliani, 2016; Siraj, 2016).

In this study, the participants did not abandon the Islamicate tradition and identified with the Muslim identity, either spiritually, religiously, politically or culturally. This correlates with existing research on the topic, which supports that a Muslim identity is considered multi-dimensional (Al-Sayyad, 2010; Yip & Khalid, 2010; Rahman & Villiani, 2016; Siraj, 2016); and Islam transcended religious, spiritual and cultural aspects, since it was viewed as a guide to live out one's life (Yip, 2005a, 2008b). This study suggests that a Muslim identity is more than a religious identity (Meer, 2010), especially for the study participants who identified as culturally Muslim. A Muslim cultural identity signalled a non-rigorous engagement with rituals found in the Islamicate tradition such as: praying at specific times of the day and observing Ramadan. Identification as a cultural Muslim was equated with being raised in a 'Muslim household' and being surrounded by extended Muslim community and family traditions.

In striking contrast to white supremacist and Islamophobic framings of Islam as inherently conservative, the political dimension of a Muslim identity was used to engage in social justice and activism related to challenging monolilthic understandings of Islam and Islamophobia. Deploying the Muslim identity as a political tool for social justice and activism has been demonstrated in Kugle's (2014) research. In this study, the political dimension was especially evident when LBTQ Muslims discussed their experiences in the larger LGBTQ communities, the impacts of 9/11, the 2016 U.S. election and the Orlando Pulse shooting.

The 45th president of the United States came into power in 2017 and commenced his xenophobic, Islamophobic and capitalist crusade against racialized people – primarily Muslims – locally and globally. The 'Muslim travel ban' was instated which prevented Muslims from Iran,

Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Yemen and Iraq to enter the US for a period of ninety days (Criss, 2017). Other examples are the overt and covert violence and attacks on Islam and racialized bodies (Muslim and non-Muslims). Mosques and temples were being burned across the border, in Canada and overall, hate violence increased dramatically. In this context of increasing Islamophobic hate, there was the heinous Québec mosque shooting on Jan 31, 2017 where many Muslims lost their lives (Balkissoon, 2018).

On June 12, 2016 transpired a massacre in Orlando, Florida at the LGBTQ Pulse nightclub on 'Latin night' by a racialized Muslim man struggling with his sexual identity. In many ways, this shooting forced the larger Muslim community in the Global North to respond to the existing transphobia and homophobia evident within normative institutions and practices. The normative Muslim community condemned the violence and remained largely silent on the plight of LGBTQ Muslims. Many LGBTQ Muslims and groups across the Global North stepped up and provided a voice for alternative and progressive approaches to Islam. For a robust discussion, see Mahomed (2016) and Shah (2016). The lives lost in the Orlando Pulse shooting are commemorated every year during Ramadan at the 'Peace Iftar', sponsored by LGBT Muslim support groups and networks in the GTA.

This study found that Islamicate religiosity and spirituality were not considered as inherently causing the participants' oppression and were sites of resistance. Especially in the realm of LBTQ Muslim women practising their 'Islams' within a community framework (support groups and networks) for individual, community, global, spiritual and religious liberation. I want to emphasize here that agency and resistance are framed within the current socio-political contexts, and "formed in intersection with the increasingly globalized discourse of western LGBT political identity and local possibilities of gender, sexual, ethnic and religious

identities, potentially disrupting both sides of the purported cultural divide" (Rahman & Valliani, 2016, p. 74).

LBTQ Muslim women's self-construction of identity can be explored in relation to Mahmood's (2005) Egyptian women forming identities through embodiment of a Muslim identity vis-à-vis rituals and practices in living out pious lives according to individual and communal understanding of piety. Where LBTQ Muslim women diverge from Mahmood's (2005) work is through the creation of alternate understandings of Islam by resisting the normative ideas on gender and sexuality in Islam. Mahmood's (2005) women are adhering to authority of the Islamicate tradition (conservative Salafi and Sunni approaches) as laid down by patriarchs and are not challenging the authority of historically passed notions of gender roles. For LBTQ Muslim women, the patriarchal religious authority is being challenged, particularly through fostering a leadership role in championing reform within the Islamicate tradition through progressive approaches to the tradition. For example, the participants in this study have engaged in self-study (*ijtihad* and *jihad*) to locate approaches to Islam which are unique to each person based on their lived experiences.

The self-authority of *ijtihad* is not reflected in the same ways as how LBTQ Muslim women have conceptualized it in this study, within the practices of Islam in Mahmood's (2005) mosque movement women. Even though both Mahmood's (2005) and the LBTQ Muslim women are engaging in 'piety', the intentions and end goals of these distinct expressions of piety are different. As discussed in earlier chapters, Jamal's (2015) notion of 'transgression' fits with LBTQ Muslim women's agency and resistance strategies found in this study, because 'transgression' works within the Islamicate tradition, and does not situate LBTQ Muslim women

as existing outside of Islam. Most normative approaches to Islam, as taken up by Mahmood

(2005) do not emphasize reform through cultural and political dimensions of a Muslim identity.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited in that it explores the lived experiences of 14 LBTQ Muslim women

in the Canadian and U.S. contexts. Further, the life story interviews were co-constructed through

the research process and are situated in specific sociopolitical, historical and cultural contexts

(Pamphilion, 1999; Smart, 2009). Ergo, the study findings cannot be generalized as this is a

qualitative project with a limited set of participants. Generalizability has been identified as

transferability in the qualitative interpretative tradition (Schwartz-Shea, 2006). If an author wants

to apply findings to a different study, then it is up to that author to produce a detailed and context

specific explanation as to why the findings can be generalized to a different group/study

(Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

Another limitation relates to the targeting of participants while recruiting. This study

assumes that Islam and a Muslim identity is not inherently at odds with a LBTQ identity. The

recruited participants were comfortable with a LBTQ Muslim intersectionality and had mainly

reconciled any issues related to coming out and acceptance from family and friends. There may

be differences with LBTQ Muslims who do not believe that one can be LBTQ and Muslim

concurrently, or are not out to most family and friends, or have rejected aspects of intersectional

facets. All participants were young to nearing middle age adults and most were out to their

families, friends and communities of origin and choice. Participant meanings attached to specific

identity categories, i.e., lesbian, bisexual and so on were not explored in the study.

The life story method provided the participants with leeway to lead the discussion and

select the content for sharing. Even though this method is developmental in nature, the

conversation and questions that came up in each interview were specific to each participant and could not be used with other participants. There was a pre-developed interview guide (with open ended questions) which was not used in its entirety as the conversation took a life of its own. For example, the first question on the guide was, 'Tell me about your experiences as a [fill in sexual, gender identity and expression] Muslim?' elicited extensive information and the conversation proceeded from there. Any follow up questions used in the interview were specific to the context with each participant. After the first interview, the guide was not used and the participants were relied on largely to guide the narrative. Due to the participants' socio-economic status and comfort level with a LBTQ Muslim identity, the level of critical awareness related to gender, Islam, sexuality was pretty high. So, there were not any gaps in conversation and content. Specific emphasis on participant sect and or approach to Islam was not fully explored in this study.

As a result of the participants' involvement in LGBTQ Muslim support groups and networks, their understandings of Islam, sexuality and gender diversity would be more affirmative than LBTQ Muslims who may be socially isolated, of varying ages, and economically marginalized (i.e. newcomers, youth, refugees and so forth may have differing experiences). For example, Muslim LBTQ youth who may be in different stages of self- and community acceptance due to financial, social and economic constraints. Additionally, the participants were financially stable, well educated professionals—some highly educated, some in leadership positions internal and external to LGBTQ Muslim communities. This resulted in the participants being well connected to resources in the larger Muslim LGBTQ community due to their socio-economic status, where the women were able to connect with like-minded individuals. As a result, the women had a comprehensive understanding of Islam due to self-

study (individual *ijtihad*) and ongoing interaction with diverse Muslims (many sects and understandings engaging in collective *ijtihad*). It seems to be the case that with sufficient community (LGBTQ Muslim) support, there is no problem whatsoever in reconciling being LBTQ and Muslim. However, where this isn't possible, this may be due to lack of support and an unfriendly political climate, rather than having anything to do with Islam or queerness as fixed entities. Future researchers may therefore move away from the tension between Islam and queerness, and may instead choose to explore the political and social climates that prevent self-affirmation and community belonging for LGBTQ Muslims. Future researchers could also explore the varying levels of impact support groups and networks have on LGBTQ Muslim identity reconciliation, especially how these facilitate and hinder LGBTQ Muslims' identity development.

Future research on the lived experiences of adult LBTQ Muslim women in the Global North could benefit from utilizing mixed methods approaches that incorporate multiple data collection methods, and a larger randomized sample. For example, triangulating data from interviews with key informants employed in LGBTQ service provision sectors (social work, psychology and so on) on how issues related to diversity and intersectional diasporic identities are met through (or not) through programming and policies in agencies across Canada and the U.S. This may help in bridging the service gaps for LGBTQ Muslims, which exists due to the racism and prejudice in normative LGBTQ serving agencies.

Convergences and divergences that may exist between sexual, gender identity and expression categories could be explored in future scholarship on LBTQ Muslim women. This would benefit in the generation of nuanced knowledges, which could inform service provision related to a specific gender and sexual identity category. For example, specific exploration of

trans Muslim subjectivities would add to the growing body of scholarship on Islam, gender identity and expression. The lived experiences of trans Muslims in the Global North are limited. There were no asexual and intersex participants in this study. Examining the experiences of asexual and intersex Muslims could add to the growing literature on Islam, sexual and gender diversity and sex characteristics.

Overall, research on diasporic families of LBTQ Muslim women is limited. Especially how family members negotiate the normative expectations related to gender, religion and sexuality within ethnic and cultural communities of belonging. Further studies exploring LBTQ Muslim converts, who did not grow up in the Islamicate tradition can deepen understandings by sharing unique insights on their journey to Islam in spite of existing hegemonic discourses that tend to situate Islam as a transphobic and homophobic faith tradition. Future research can also explore, if LBTQ Muslim women stay with the Muslim communities and groups they converted into and how practices of Islam have shifted over the years.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This study adds to the growing body of knowledge that furthers our understanding of LBTQ Muslim women's intersectionality based on the lived experiences of the participants (Rahman & Valliani, 2016). Especially, this research challenges hegemonic discourses on traditionally considered mutually exclusive identities, i.e. religion, sexuality, gender identity and expression in the Global North; and provides a voice to LBTQ Muslim women who are subjugated and ostracized in the larger Muslim and LGBTQ communities.

Examining social work issues within academe from diverse LGBTQ perspectives in Canada is a growing body of scholarship (Hillock & Mulé, 2016). Specifically, perspectives on how social work education and the profession take up LBTQ Muslim intersectionality in the

classroom are limited. The existing scholarship advocates for a dismantling of binaristic identity perspectives from an intersectional standpoint, and challenges tropes that stipulate 'religion equals homophobia and transphobia' and that 'queer identities and lives are mainly secular' (Khan, 2016a). Advocating for and including LBTQ intersectional perspectives in social work classrooms can be the starting point for a critical approach to practice that does not silence marginal voices in practice settings (Khan, 2016a). Khan ('in press') cautions that these topics be taken up with extreme sensitivity and respect in the social work context so as not to further oppress First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, beliefs and traditions. Since, talking about religious and spiritual matters (depending on how these are defined) in the discipline of social work can be controversial due to the discipline's horrific history, ongoing exploits and subjugation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people, traditions and ways of being vis-à-vis religion and assimilation (Kovach, 2013; Sinclair, Hart, & Bruyere, 2009). Especially, as social workers, the focus also needs to be on remaining cognizant of ongoing coloniality of heterosexism, cisism, and nuclear family's focus on traditional values (Chapman & Withers, forthcoming).

Critical social work educators and practitioners advocate for a serious engagement with reflexive practices (Chapman, Hoque, & Utting, 2013). This is imperative when supporting stigmatized and marginalized persons/communities like LGBTQ Muslims and families. Built on the works of many critical scholars, including racialized feminist scholars, a critical reflexive approach to practice considers that one needs to engage in "[i]nterlocking analyses of oppression" to locate "aspect[s] of our lives in which we are complicit in others' oppression. We do not equally participate in interlocking oppression, but we can all consider our complicity in particular arenas of oppression" (Chapman, Hoque, & Utting, 2013, p. 28-29). As a social

worker, it is imperative to not maintain 'innocence' (Razack, 1999) and work against

Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism in practice (Beck, Charania, Al-Issa & Wahab, 2017).

One way social work educators and practitioners can engage in critical practice is to be

mindful of how 'cisheteropatriarchalization' intersects with Islamophobia.

Cisheteropatriarchalization refers to the ways in which the many 'isms' (cisism, heterosexism,

racism, sexism and heteropatriarchy) alongside heterosexual family norms/values are

institutionalized and enforced through imperialism, coloniality, neo-liberalism, laws, culture, and

whiteness in the social sciences disciplinary knowledge bases such as social work, philosophy

and psychiatry (Chapman & Withers, forthcoming). An expansive understanding of

Islamophobia based on Puar's (2007) scholarship, which considers the othering, discrimination

and violence subjected onto perceived and actual Muslim bodies based on skin colour, attire and

dress, name, language and traditions, customs, and ethnic regions; as well as the orientalist

reduction of Islam as a monolith is warranted. Both Islamophobia and cisheteropatriarchalization

have subtle and pervasive aspects that can go unnoticed in the every-day happenings. Having a

critical knowledge base about the diversity that exists in Muslim communities and approaches to

Islam can be a good start (Hodge, 2005). There is a sizable amount of literature dedicated to how

social workers can support Muslim individuals and communities in practice, which highlights

strategies to practice and in some ways advocates for 'culturally sensitive approaches' (Crabtree,

Husain, & Spalek, 2008; Graham, Bradshaw & Trew, 2010; Hodge, 2005).

There are limited works on supporting LGBTQ Muslims in practice from Islamicate

affirmative perspectives (Hammoud-Beckett, 2007; Shah, 2016) and social work with Muslim

LGBT asylum seekers (Kahn, 2015). In one of the interviews, a participant recalled in high

school being pressured by a social work counsellor to 'come out' to immediate family right

away. When reflecting on this experience, the participant regretted being pressured in to coming out in normative ways and damaging relationships with their family. The main point I wish to emphasize here is that every Muslims' practice and approach to Islam, whether LGBTQ identified or not, is unique so getting to know the service users' perceptions and practices is vital. This is particularly important for social workers, especially those supporting youth and children in a multitude of settings (Hammoud-Beckett, 2007). Practitioners and therapists supporting LGBTQ Muslims should not assume that their clients' religious and sexual identities are antithetical (Minwalla et al., 2005), since there are many types of Islams and Muslims (Shah, 2016). It is impossible to 'know' every nuance and all strategies. Getting in touch with local and regional LGBTQ Muslim support groups and networks can also be helpful in locating resources. As a critical social worker, if one is unsure about matters or issues related to supporting LGBTQ Muslims and their families, the best route is to merely 'ask' respectfully and not assume.

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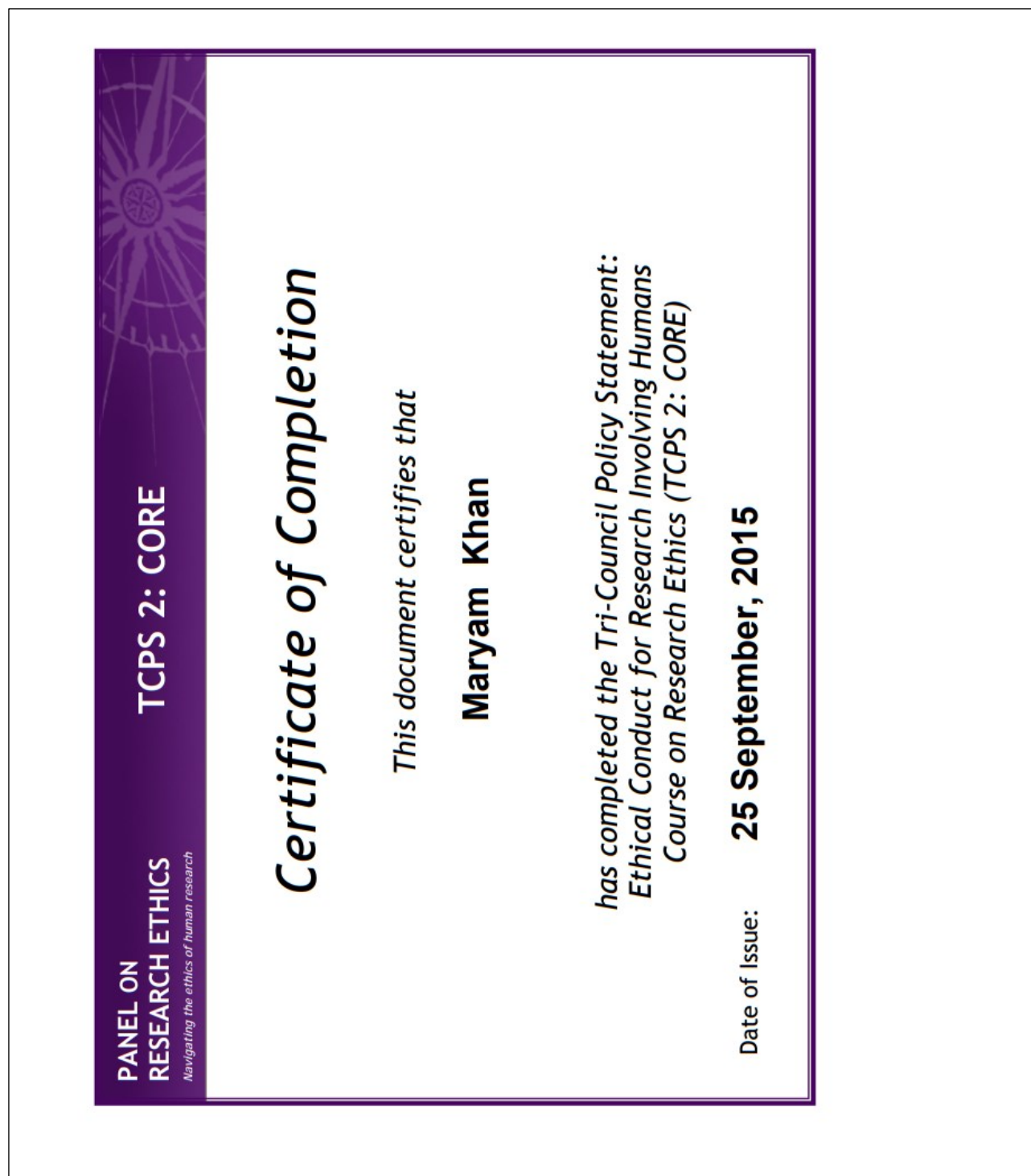
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Appendices

Appendix A: TCPS Certificate

PANEL ON
RESEARCH ETHICS
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Maryam Khan

has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)

Date of Issue: **25 September, 2015**

Appendix B: Ethics Approval Form

YORK U
UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF
RESEARCH
ETHICS (ORE)
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Toronto ON
Canada. M3J 1P3
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Fax 416 736-5512
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Certificate #:	STU 2016 - 126
Approval Period:	09/16/16-09/16/17

ETHICS APPROVAL

To:
Graduate Student of Social Work,
Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies

From:

Date: Friday, September 16, 2016

Title: LBTQ Muslim Women Intersectionality: Examining the Resistance Strategies

Risk Level: ☒ Minimal Risk ☐ More than Minimal Risk

Level of Review: ☒ Delegated Review ☐ Full Committee Review

I am writing to inform you that this research project, **"LBTQ Muslim Women Intersectionality: Examining the Resistance Strategies"** has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Note that approval is granted for one year. Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics as soon as possible.

For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, **"RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE".**

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at:
at:

Yours sincerely,

Office of Research Ethics

RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE

Upon receipt of an ethics approval certificate, researchers are reminded that they are required to ensure that the following measures are undertaken so as to ensure on-going compliance with Senate and TCPS ethics guidelines:

1. **RENEWALS:** Research Ethics Approval certificates are subject to annual renewal. **It is the responsibility of researchers to ensure the timely submission of renewals.**
   a. As a courtesy, researchers will be reminded by ORE, in advance of certificate expiry, that the certificate must be renewed. Please note, however, it is the expectation that researchers will submit a renewal application prior to the expiration of ethics certificate(s).
   b. **Failure to renew an ethics approval certificate** (or to notify ORE that no further research involving human participants will be undertaken) **may result in suspension of research cost fund and access to research funds may be suspended/ withheld.**

2. **AMENDMENTS:** Amendments must be reviewed and approved **PRIOR** to undertaking/making the proposed amendments to an approved ethics protocol;

3. **END OF PROJECT:** ORE must be notified when a project is complete;

4. **ADVERSE EVENTS:** Adverse events must be reported to ORE as soon as possible;

5. **POST APPROVAL MONITORING:**
   a. More than minimal risk research may be subject to post approval monitoring as per TCPS guidelines;
   b. A spot sample of minimal risk research may similarly be subject to Post Approval Monitoring as per TCPS guidelines.

FORMS: As per the above, the following forms relating to on-going research ethics compliance are available on the Research website:
   a. Renewal
   b. Amendment
   c. End of Project
   d. Adverse Event

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Date: [insert date]

Study Name: *LBTQ Muslim Women Intersectionality: Examining the Resistance Strategies*

Researcher: Maryam Khan, PhD Candidate at School of Social Work, York University

Contact:

Purpose of the Research: This study aims to understand the ways in which lesbian, bisexual, trans and queer (LBTQ) Muslim women live out the intersections of religion, spirituality, gender, race, and sexual identities. Focus is on the strategies used in constantly negotiating the hegemonic (existing) chasms in Muslim and LGBTQ communities within religious, spiritual, community, societal and familial domains. The findings of the study will be presented in a dissertation, journal articles and at conferences.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: You will be asked to partake in the interview, which can approximately take anywhere from 1.5 -2.5 hours in duration, after understanding and signing this consent form. The interview will be audio-taped for transcription and data analysis purposes. You will be provided a $ 25.00 honoraria for your time and consideration. Please note that I cannot put a price on your story/experience as it is priceless. The honorarium signifies gratitude for your time and efforts.

Risks and Discomforts: I do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research. However, due to the sensitive nature of this topic, you may or may not experience some discomfort in talking about this topic. If you do experience discomfort, please follow up with me and I can connect you to LGBTQ Muslim support groups and/or a counsellor.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: You will be making a difference in how Islam and a Muslim identity is represented, which is not in line with negative current climate of Islam and Muslims here in the Global North.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of relationship you may have with the researcher (Maryam Khan) or your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. If you decide to stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive the promised pay for agreeing to be in the project. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: Your confidentiality is paramount and no identifying information will be disclosed without your consent, unless you choose otherwise. All data (consent forms and audio

files) will be kept in a locked file cabinet at all times. Only I have access to the data. After two years, all data will be destroyed completely and adequately. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact _____ either by telephone at _____. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____, consent to participate in '*LBTQ Muslim Women Intersectionality: Examining the Resistance Strategies*' conducted by Maryam Khan. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature_____   **Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____   **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

Attention Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Muslim Women

'LBTQ Muslim Women Intersectionality: Examining the Resistance Strategies' Study

You will be asked to:
- Answer questions related to your experiences on living out religion, sexuality, race and gender
- Interviewed—sharing your lived experiences of a LBTQ Muslim intersectionality

What's in it for you:
- Challenge monolithic and orientalist understandings of Islam and the Quran
- Provided with $25 honoraria for your time and efforts

You can:
- Rest assured that your confidentiality will be upheld (All information will be redeemed anonymous. Therefore, anything that bears your identity will not be disclosed by any means—written or oral).
- Refuse to answer to any question
- Withdraw from the research anytime you wish to

Please contact:

Maryam Khan

I am a doctoral candidate in Social Work at York University. I identify as a lesbian and I want to talk to other LBTQ Muslim women. I believe that being a LBTQ Muslim woman is NOT an oxymoron, and that there is a space in Islam for gender and sexual diversity.

Appendix E: Interview Guide

1. Please tell me about your experiences as a [fill in sexual, gender identity and expression] Muslim.

2. How would you like me to address you in terms of your positionality which includes sexuality, gender identity and expression and/or orientation?

3. Can you please share your experiences as a [fill in identity] in the larger queer/ LGBTQ community or communities?

4. Can you please share your experiences as a [fill in identity] in the larger Muslim community or communities?

Appendix F: Participant Demographic Information

Table 1

N=14	Pseudonym	Identity as conceptualized by the LBTQ Muslim Women	Muslim and/or Islamic identity as defined by the LBTQ Women	Age	Education Levels and Profession	Relationship Status	Country
1	Hajra	Arab/Egyptian decent. Queer Woman	Affiliated with the Sunni approach	30	Graduate Degree. Lawyer.	Married to a woman.	Canada
2	Sheema	Black (Somali) Trans Bisexual Woman	Identified as non-practicing Muslim. Affiliated with the Sunni approach	23	Undergrad. Community Activist.	Polyamorous relationships.	Canada
3	Fauzia	Indian, South Asian Lesbian Woman	Affiliated with the Sunni approach	35	Graduate Degree. Policy Analyst.	Married to a woman.	Canada
4	Nafisa	Gay Bangladeshi Woman	Identified as a spiritual and cultural Muslim	25	Undergrad Degree. Social Worker.	Polyamorous relationships.	Canada
5	Fatima	Queer /Trans Iranian Woman	Affiliated with the Sufi and Shia approaches	36	Undergrad Degree. Journalist.	Single.	Canada
6	Jenn	Queer (Bisexual) Woman European	Affiliated with the Sufi approaches	31	Doctoral Degree. Academic.	Married to a man with children.	USA
7	Sophia	Non-binary Queer, West Indian (Guyanese)	Affiliated with the Sunni approach	28	Undergrad Degree. Information Technology.	Committed relationship with a lesbian.	Canada
8	Noor	Bisexual Pakistani Woman	Affiliated with the Shia and Sufi approaches	26	Doctoral Degree. Academic.	Married to a man. Engages in polyamorous relationships with all genders.	Canada
9	Hawa	Queer Black Woman	Affiliated with the Sunni and Sufi approaches	26	Unknown.	Polyamorous relationships.	Canada
10	Chinara	Gay Black Woman of African descent	Affiliated with Sunni/Salafi approaches	35	Graduate Degree. Nurse Manager.	Married to woman with children.	USA
11	Rani	Pakistani Lesbian Woman	Affiliated with Sunni approaches	34	Undergrad Degree. Real Estate.	Married to woman.	Canada
12	Alexis	European Bisexual Woman	Affiliated with Sufi approaches. Also Buddhist approaches	38	Undergrad Degree. Ordained Interfaith Minister.	Married to man with children.	Canada
13	Tamira	Non-binary Queer, Bangladeshi	Affiliated with a cultural Muslim identity. No sect.	36	Undergrad Degree. Television and Media.	Single.	Canada
14	Selma	Gay Indian Woman	Affiliated with the Ismaili approach and cultural Muslim identity	27	Graduate Degree. Social Worker and Community Activist.	Committed relationship with a non-binary queer individual.	Canada