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Between the Cracks of Contemporary Dutch Discourse: Being an LGBTQ Muslim in the Netherlands

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SIT Graduate Institute - Study Abroad

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Between the Cracks of Contemporary Dutch Discourse: 
Being an LGBTQ Muslim in the Netherlands

How does the religion and the culture of Islam affect the lived experiences of first-generation Muslim migrants who identify as queer/LGBTQ in the Netherlands?

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Gender & Sexuality Studies  
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Abstract

This independent study project (ISP) is the product of a month-long study to explore how the religion and culture of Islam affect the lived experiences of first-generation migrants who identify as queer/LGBTQ\(^1\) and Muslim in the Netherlands. The data was obtained through interviews with five individuals: two women and five men. All interview subjects met the requirement of identifying as queer/LGBTQ and Muslim (with the exception of one, who left the faith) as well as being a first-generation migrant to the Netherlands. Being at this specific cross-section of religion and sexuality and migration is an often overlooked demographic who’s stories are ignored in both queer and religious circles and discourses. This intersectional identity affects the lived experiences of these individuals and this study explores and analyzes specifically how. This study will look into the Quran and different schools of thought as well as scholarly literature referring to homosexuality within the context of Islam. While taking this preliminary research into consideration, in-person and open-ended interviews were conducted. This report notes key themes as well as differences such as the image of Amsterdam and its “myth of tolerance,” intersectionality, and the reconciliation of their faith and sexuality. This report examines the how sexuality, Islam, and migration all collide within the modern Dutch context and its influence on the lives of queer/LGBTQ Muslim migrants.

ISP Keywords: Homosexuality/Queer/LGBTQ, Islam, Religion, Migration, Intersectionality

\(^1\)When talking about sexualities other than heterosexual and cis-gendered, I use queer and LGBTQ in conjunction because I want to refer to a group which is under the non-heteronormative identity. If “queer” or “LGBT” are ever used on its own, it is because a particular subject has identified that way. At times, individuals use the label “queer” very intentionally and arguably, politically. Others, may prefer certain labels over others, or simply no labels at all.
Acknowledgments

My most sincere thanks goes to all of my participants for their time and more importantly, their stories. Being at the cross-section of faith and culture and sexuality and migration (and so much more) has not been an easy journey to say the least, but how you all have chosen to carry yourselves with such strength and positivity is an inspiration for me. You have all taught me a deeper definition of empathy through the sharing of your stories, and I am eternally grateful.

Thank you to the activists and leaders in Amsterdam who have connected me to the queer Muslim community: Dino Suhonic, chairman of Maruf, and Döne Fil, ambassador of Respect2Love. You are true leaders in the work that you do for queer/LGBTQ individuals of color and Muslims. Your unhesitant willingness to help me and my research did not go unnoticed and it gave me such confidence and motivation for my work and the vision for my future.

Thank you to the queer/LGBTQ community in Amsterdam, specifically the spaces, events, and gatherings for queer/LGBTQ people of color. Thank you for creating such a positive and welcoming energy where I did not feel like the “other.” There is so much power in a space that is so unique such as the ones I attended with you all.

Thank you to SIT Study Abroad as a whole for giving me the great opportunity to do research in a field I have found much passion in while simultaneously studying in Europe. My academic as well as personal vision has broadened further to encompass the world. Thank you more specifically to the administration, staff, and professors of the SIT Study Abroad program in Amsterdam including, but not limited to: Garjan Sterk, Yvette Kopijn, Rugiero Vitalis, Bastiaan Franse, Paul Marlisa, Eduard Verbree, Jan Duvekot, Laurens Buijs, Chandra Frank, Marije Janssen, Jasmijn Rana, Nancy Jouwe, and Guno Jones. You all have such positive energy and what you have taught me this semester and the passion for your own work—academic or otherwise—has immensely encouraged me to work hard this entire semester. A special and warm thank you to Garjan Sterk. You are a beacon of light to say the least. You are so kind and you did so much more than be the academic director. You have been there for students emotionally and you have put up with our bombarding of questions. Most importantly, you care for us deeply and all of the students this semester have felt it. Thanks, “Mom”! And sorry on behalf of all of the students for this often chaotic semester.
A huge thank-you goes to my research advisor Ihsan Zakri. I could not have asked for a better match as an advisee. Your in-depth knowledge in the field of all things queer and Muslim really put me in the right direction from the start. Thank you for pointing me in the right direction for literature, interviews, researching, writing, and for connecting me to desperately needed interview subjects. Also thank you so much for being able to keep our conversations and meetings easy-going, casual, personal, and calm—all while still being efficient and professional. I wish the best of luck to you, your research, your career, and aspirations.

Last, but certainly not least, to my host mother and host brother in Amsterdam, Ineke and Timothy, I want to thank you for offering your home to me this semester. We have shared many stories ranging from the more serious to the very comedic, from the superficial to the philosophical and political. You created an environment for me to be immersed in Dutch culture and I was able to take what I have learned in the classroom to the real world with you. Timothy, you have always remained such a warm and light-hearted character in the house, and I learned a lot about Dutch culture among the youth through you. Of course, I have also loved our conversations about your passion: food. Your passion is contagious, and anyone in the room can feel it. I wish you the best of luck with your culinary career. Ineke, the relationship I have developed with you is exactly what I needed at this time in my life. You have taught me so much about what it means to be a strong woman. Thank you for making such a comfortable space for me to come home to after long days of work and stress. Thank you for taking me seriously when I have shared stories of discrimination and stress and brokenness. I appreciate your keen eye for the myth of tolerance in the Netherlands, also known as one of the most “tolerant” and “progressive” countries in the world. I had to attend a class on the other side of the world to learn about this myth, but you have had a critical eye towards this your whole life, which is truly amazing, respectable, and admirable. Thank you for showing me care and respect in a home away from home.
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Introduction & Literature Review

This Independent Study Project (ISP), titled *Between the Cracks of Contemporary Dutch Discourse: Being an LGBTQ Muslim in the Netherlands*, attempts to answer the research question: how does the religion and culture of Islam affect the lived experiences of first-generation migrants who identify as queer/LGBTQ and Muslim in the Netherlands?

In recent years, studies on gender and sexuality have increased immensely worldwide. Queer/LGBTQ activism has been spreading, policies and laws in favor of gay rights have been created and enforced, and gay marriage is currently legal in almost two dozen countries. However, sexuality and gay rights has often been pitted in opposition with religion in multiple scenes such as: academia, political debates, culture, and everyday conversation.

This creates a huge hole within the homonational discourse—the space to be queer/LGBTQ within a community of a faith, to be of a faith within a queer/LGBTQ community, and more importantly to be the intersectional identity of both queer/LGBTQ and of faith in the world.

This paper attempts to fill in this gap with the stories of individuals who fall within this intersectional identity. More specifically, the research focuses on interview subjects who identify as queer/LGBTQ and Muslim who are also first-generation migrants to the Netherlands. The additional dimension of migration to the Netherlands was added to this already unique intersectional study because of Amsterdam, arguably the Netherlands’ key tourist attraction, also known as the “gay capital of the world.” Being a first-generation migrant implies intentionality in moving. It is not to say that the researcher does not care about the narratives of queer/LGBTQ Muslims who were born in the Netherlands, but the researcher inquires whether there were any commonalities in the motives for the queer/LGBTQ Muslims migrating to the Netherlands. These motives will be touched upon later in the analysis section.

When looking for literature for this research, there was relatively little research, texts, and dialogue on the cross-section of homosexuality and Islam within the Dutch context. Gert Hekma’s piece titled *Queers and Muslims: The Dutch Case* gives an insight into the history of the merging of a “queer” Netherlands and the migrant Muslim population, specifically Moroccans. Hekma’s work starts out by explaining how Morocco, in the early to mid-1900s, was known to be a popular tourist destination for gay men. In the 1960s, Moroccans originally came to the Netherlands as “guest workers” and as the years passed, new generations of Moroccans were born and raised in the Netherlands. Eventually “the white
Dutch… abandoned the ideals of a multicultural society and became convinced that the new immigrants caused many problems that had not existed before on this scale” (Hekma, 2011). Hekma goes on to talk about Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, who was the “most vocal opponent of immigration” at this time as well as openly gay. He was popular among the Dutch because “He dared to say the truth’ that other politicians were apparently hiding.” There were also two specific imams Hekma refers to who had spoken out against homosexuality which got much attention in the media. Politicians “all spoke out forcefully in favor of homosexual rights and often at the same time against the Muslims that endangered Dutch gender and sexual freedoms because of their sexist and homophobic ideology. Their outspoken perspective created a dichotomy of the ‘progressive’ Dutch and the ‘backward’ Muslims” (Hekma, 2011). Hekma’s work is important to this research because it gives a basis for why homosexuality and Islam have been placed dichotomously specifically in a Dutch context. A common thread in the interviews was the feeling of being left out in politics and the media, and one can see from Hekma’s work that this is a historical habit.

The Netherlands is known for its tolerance and progressiveness to the rest of the world. It was the first country to legalize gay marriage in 2001. The Dutch take is as a point of pride and identity when it comes to being tolerant, but one can see this tolerance slowly unravel when looking a little deeper and more critically. “In 2006, a government commissioned report on the acceptance of gays and lesbians… In general, up to 95 percent of the Dutch population is said to have no objections to homosexuality. This is the highest score of being gay friendly worldwide. Yet when more specific questions are asked, and homosexuality gets ‘closer,’ the percentages drop quickly. As mentioned, 42 percent of the Dutch do not want to see two men kissing in the streets, 31 percent object to two women doing the same, while only eight percent states so about a mixed couple” (Hekma, 2011).

This mythical tolerance was a common complaint among interview subjects even within the queer/LGBTQ community in the Netherlands.

Two other critical works that contributed establishing a strong foundation in this research. Samar Habib’s collection of essays that examine homosexuality in the Muslim world titled Islam and Homosexuality which consisted of two volumes, and Joseph Massad’s Desiring Arabs which dissects the Western judgment of Arab civilization base on sexual desires. These two texts helped with logistical concepts and terminology which will be referenced to throughout this report.

There was little research and literature focusing specifically Muslim queer/LGBTQ women. The majority of the work focused on Muslim homosexual men.
The interviews conducted have three common themes that will be expanded upon in the analysis section of the report. The first theme was the location, the Netherlands. Two reasons were prominent in the interviews when asked about motives for moving to the Netherlands specifically, as opposed to any other European country or continent. One reason focused on the “image” of the Netherlands, and the other was and attraction to the immigration policy in place at the time of their moving. The second theme that resonated within all the interviews was the concept of intersectionality. Only one of all the interview subjects said the word “intersectionality” specifically, however, this academic term and concept is one that all of the subjects understood very well through their lived experiences. This term will be explained and analyzed within the context of this research within the analysis section. The third theme that will be brought to light is the reconciliation of faith and sexuality, not as separate or opposing entities. Many interview subjects brought up interpretations of the Quran that were harmonious with their sexuality as opposed seeing themselves as “sinners.”

Before going into the logistic and detail of the research, there will be a personal statement from the researcher to shed light on her personal background in order to show her motives and passion for this topic of study and also in an attempt to clear any biases and subjectivity readers may presume of the researcher. Following the personal statement, the paper will go into the logistical components of the research: methodology, limitations, and then the literature review. All five of the interview subjects will be introduced before jumping into the analysis in order to set the stage and give context to the readers. The interview analysis section will be organized by them as opposed to by interview subject because the researcher finds this approach to be more fluid and efficient in answering her research question. Lastly, a conclusion will be made followed by a section on future discussion to elucidate the gaps in the research as well as where future research can explore within this intersectional topic of study. A list of references, the interview guide used, and copy of the written consent form are all located in the last pages of this report.

The goal of this research is to fill in the gaps previously mentioned within the discourse on homosexuality by highlighting the personal narratives of the interview subjects and to answers the research question of how their lived experiences are affected due to this unique and often over-looked intersectional identity.

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2 Term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.*
Personal Statement

Before getting into the specifics of my ISP, such as the methodology and findings, I would like to give some insight into my personal background to elucidate my motives and positionality as a researcher in this specific topic. I am a self-identified queer Korean-American woman of the Christian faith and the daughter of two first generation migrant parents. For a large portion of my life, I repressed my sexuality because I lived under the impression that being queer and of color (in my case, specifically Korean), or being queer and a Christian was not in the realm of possibility. Due to this repression, for all intents and purposes, I considered myself completely heterosexual for almost the first two decades of my life. Towards the end of these two decades, there was a period where I was extremely torn, depressed, worried, and callous because I was finally becoming honest with myself about my sexual orientation.

One thing to note however, as a young child, I never considered in my own heart for faith and homosexuality to be mutually exclusive even though others in my community stated otherwise. Even before considering the possibility of my being gay, I didn’t understand why so many of the Koreans and Korean-America Christians\(^3\) around me demonized homosexuality so much. As the discourse on homosexuality in the United States grew due to LGBTQ activism, changes in policy, and the legalization of gay marriage in various states, I saw a huge increase in the vocalized homophobia among the Korean Christians around me. I began to question my position in the discourse. There was much inner-conflict. I realized I was gay, and I was upset with my faith while still not wanting to leave it. I knew my feelings for women were true and I knew my feeling for God was true, and I refused to believe that one of them was wrong or incorrect or a sin. Long story short, I have come so far looking back on my teenage self. I am proud of who I am—as a Christian and a queer woman of color. After much thought, self-reflection and prayer, I have reconciled the two\(^4\). So this part of my upbringing has had an influence on the interview subject pool I wanted to reach:

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\(^3\) It is important to note that I grew up in the United States going to Korean churches throughout my entire adolescent life, so when I refer to “Koreans” and the “Korean-American church,” this is not representative of an entire demographic, it is only to recall groups and people from my lived experiences.

\(^4\) I, in no way, am saying the right way to handle the intersection of faith and homosexuality is to reconcile the two, but this is what I have chosen to do with my journey. There are many individuals who have left behind their faith or their sexuality, or they are still in the process of figuring out which path is best for them. All of these possibilities are just as respectable and valid as my choice. I am telling my story to give insight into my positionality as a researcher.
queer/LGBTQ and Muslim. Muslim culture is one I hold close to my heart due to my particular past which I will also elaborate on.

Growing up in New York, I saw much Islamophobia especially after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Even as a young child who did not understand a minitua about politics at the time, I knew society was wrong to suddenly hate and discriminate an entire demographic due to the act of a small group. The memory of 9/11 and my critical thoughts following the attacks affect me to this day and one can argue that it has influenced many of my academic decisions and outlook later in life. In college, I decided to learn Arabic, and I picked up the language quickly. My professor encouraged me to major or at least minor in Arab studies, and by the end of my first year, she recommended me to apply to a competitive program in the Middle East to study the Arabic language more intensively in order to bring my language skills to the next level. During my summer abroad in Amman, Jordan I fell in love with Arab and Muslim culture. It is important to note that I was in Amman during a very critical time. Jordan shares boarders with Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel. During my stay in Jordan, there were multiple conflicts simultaneously occurring in the neighboring countries around me. The Israel-Gaza conflict in 2014 was constantly on the news where thousands of people were killed, the majority of which were Gazans. In Syria and Iraq, ‘ISIS had ‘carried out attacks deliberately and systematically targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, with the intention of killing and wounding civilians.’ The UN concluded that in the first eight months of 2014, at least 9,347 civilians had been killed and at least 17,386 wounded’ (Obeidallah, 2014). Every day on the news I saw graphic images of innocent lives being killed and injured and I felt the tension of the Middle East around me every day. Because of Jordan’s more neutral state, compared to its surrounding countries, it served as a huge center for refugees. Approximately half of Jordan’s population are Palestinian due to the ongoing Gaza conflict, and there was a huge influx of Syrian and Iraqi refugees because of ISIS. I am explaining all of this because I want to paint a picture of how much violence and blood and gore I saw every day on the news and the angry and saddened tension of the refugee residents of Jordan. Censorship is different in the Middle East compared to what I was used to in the United States. I saw blown up bodies daily on the news, a child’s body on one side of the television screen while his head was on the other. In this dark time, I talked with professors and the Jordanian inhabitants in Arabic, and I realized that not only did I love the language and

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5 Refer to the methodology section to understand why I chose to interview queer/LGBTQ Muslims as opposed to queer/LGBTQ Christians (or of other faiths).
culture, but more so I loved being able to talk to these people about family, gender roles, conflicts, and religions. Jordan and its people helped me understand empathy on a deeper level. Coming back to America after my studies in the Middle East, I knew I gained a better understanding of how much Muslims lives matter, and how much their lives are constantly devalued by the rest of the (western) world.

When it came time to propose an ISP topic to the administration of SIT, it clicked in my head to combine these two passions. Amsterdam was able to foster a great environment for my research because it is considered the “gay capital of the world” and is very much commercialized in that way, and the Netherlands has a large migrant and refugee population, many of whom are Muslim.

I leave this personal statement here, not only as an insight to my personal background, but also as a disclaimer in an attempt to remain neutral as a researcher. I felt that looking into queer/LGBTQ Christians would be too personal and I would not have an objective positionality. The decision to separating myself by altering which religion I focused on was an intentional one. I’ve experience and realized incredible privilege in myself because of the experiences and life stories that were shared with me by members of the queer/LGBTQ Muslim community which welcomed me so warmly and openly. I am grateful and blessed for my experiences and all of those that I’ve met along the way.
Methodology & Limitations

Foreword

This ISP has been prepared for approximately three months and conducted for less than four weeks during the researcher’s semester abroad in Amsterdam. To execute all of the components of the final product, including but not limited to: searching for interview subjects within an extremely specific demographic through contacting organizations and “middle-men,” scheduling and conducting interviews, transcribing, researching literature, analyzing data, and producing into a well-organized final report was a monumental task to say the least. However, it was completed, not without stress and panic, much caffeine, and of course the guidance and care of the SIT administration.

An ISP proposal was approved by the local review board (LRB) of SIT before conducting any field research.

Positionality

The researcher was extremely aware and careful when approaching the specific intersectional group: queer/LGBTQ, Muslim, and first-generation migrant to the Netherlands. Queer/LGBTQ Muslims have been a hot topic of research within recent years, so the research took precautions to not be disrespectful, impose upon, or abuse this subject group which will be explained under “Participants and Procedure.” The researcher, as mentioned in the personal statement, is a queer American woman of Korean descent who identifies with the Christian faith. She also knows Arabic and has a great appreciation for Arab and Muslim culture after studying the language for multiple years and living and studying in Amman, Jordan. This specific positionality was both beneficial and one to be cautious of. It was beneficial because there are marginalizations that the researcher falls under which the subjects were able to relate to, such as being queer/LGBTQ, a person of color, and a woman. The researcher is cautious as she approaches a group that is tired of being studied and analyzed especially within a power dynamic they sometimes and often battered by: the stereotypical middle-aged, cis-gendered, heterosexual, White-savior, western, orientalist academic man.
The researcher made very clear that the interviews are not merely information-gathering tools. It is more of a platform to give more agency to the interviewees to share their narrative in the way they would like to be seen and heard. The traits of the researcher that were mentioned allowed subjects to relate and feel more comfortable during their interviews. The research was simultaneously cautious of her positionality because she knew that although she has many relatable traits, there are key differences in identities—and subsequently key difference in lived experiences—that must be respected. The procedures below explain further how caution and respect were maintained.

**Participants and Procedure**

The researcher mainly obtained its interview subjects by means of reaching out to organizations that specifically catered to queer/LGBTQ of color and/or Muslims. The two organizations that agreed to offer their help and connections were Respect2Love and the Maruf Foundation, which are both based in Amsterdam, Netherlands. On the website of Respect2Love, it describes “Respect2Love is a community for young lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people with a bicultural background” (Respect2Love, 2015). The Maruf Foundation focuses more specifically towards queer Muslims. On its website it states “Maruf is an organization dedicated to improving the positions of LGBTI Muslims in the Netherlands and around the world. We increase awareness about Islam, gender and sexual diversity. Maruf supports Muslims in the acceptance of their sexual orientation and gender identity” (Maruf, 2015). Three interview subjects were obtains through making connections within these organizations. Because those who visit and participate in these organization attend to find a community of belonging, the research was aware of her position. In order to not imposed on and abuse this subject group, the researcher attended open events to build rapport and introduce herself and general research topic. The heads of the mentioned organizations assisted the researcher by telling the member of the organizations that interview subjects were needed and that the interviews would be confidential and about an hour of people’s time. The other two interview subjects were referred to the researcher through middle men such as the researcher’s advisor and members of the Amsterdam queer/LGBTQ community that are connection of SIT.

It was also important that the researcher interviewed first-generation migrants as opposed to second or third because being a first generation migrant suggests an intentionality
in migrating to the Netherlands. One of the researcher’s questions touches on if there was a reason to moving to the Netherlands, specifically, as opposed to other countries.

The interviews were all in-person to make note of body language, presentation, the researcher’s first impressions, and evaluate comfort levels of the subjects in addition to their responses to the questions. The interview guide consisted of eight open-ended questions which were prepared prior to all of the interviews\(^6\). In-person interviews also nurture a more genuine and natural conversation which the research preferred because there would be a potential of participants sharing sensitive memories regarding sexuality and religion. Participants were given and had signed a written consent form\(^7\) which gave permission to be interviewed and recorded. All subjects were above the age of eighteen. Before the start of each interview, the subjects were informed that their names would be changed in the research paper in order to keep their confidentiality (unless subjects preferred for their identities to be disclosed, two of which did: Harun Beekzad and Dino Suhonic) and recording clips that stated their name or identity would be destroyed upon completion of the final project. Subjects were also informed that their comfort and safety is a priority, above any agenda for research, and if at any moment before, during, or after the interview, they had the right to withdraw their participation if they no longer felt comfortable. They were also informed that they were allowed to answer and much or as little as they felt comfortable with, and had the right to “pass” on any question. Interview subjects were informed that on average the interviews would take approximately and hour but could vary depending on how much or little the interview subject was willing to share. The researcher offered to buy food or a drink for the interview subjects in order to help the flow of conversation\(^8\).

**Background Research**

The researcher had conducted preliminary background research in preparation for the interviews and final ISP product. This preliminary research consisted mainly of collecting and reading literature in the topic of homosexuality within the context of Islam and Muslim culture and society. The purpose of this preliminary research was to have a strong basic understanding of the potential topics that may have come up during the interviews in addition to strengthening the final ISP.

\(^6\) Refer to “Appendix” section  
\(^7\) Refer to “Appendix” section  
\(^8\) and also to show her gratitude towards them
Analytical Procedures

The researcher chose to transcribe all of the interviews prior to analyzing and drawing conclusions in order to mentally organize her thoughts and have a more organic approach to seeing what themes she wished to highlight from the interviews. When it came time to produce and analysis of the interviews, the researcher looked back to the transcriptions as well as her notes taken at the time of the interview. Common themes and key differences are highlighted in this research.

Limitations

Due to the limited time of the ISP period allotted to student, there were several limitations that came to light. Firstly, the interview subject pool is a very specific one. It was stressful to say the least to find five subject with enough time to transcribe, analyze, and form a project. The main difficulty was from waiting depending on other individuals (such as organizations, mutual colleagues, middle-men, etc.) to get the research in touch with potential subjects in a timely fashion. Even with the limited number of potential subjects, several turned down the request to be interviewed possibly due to the fact that homosexual Muslims have been a hot topic of research in recent years. They may have felt—as one of my subjects, Dino, would say—seen as “some kind of object more than a subject of the story.”

One interview subject, Harun Beekzad, does not identify as Muslim but he was intentionally kept in the research because his relation to Islam and religion in general is due to the specific colliding of faith and sexuality which will be expanded upon in his interview description and in the interview analysis section.

Travel was another unforeseen restraint. Originally, the researcher thought her subject pool would be more easily accessible within Amsterdam, but many potential subjects were refugees located in camp far away which required money to travel. Many more subjects could have been interviewed if there were more time and money to travel within the Netherlands.
Interviewee Descriptions

❖ Ruqiya Dauud

My first interview was with a 24-year-old woman who was born in Somalia. She has picked the pseudonym Ruqiya Dauud for this research herself for confidentiality purposes. Ruqiya was born in Somalia and at the age of four moved to Yemen before settling in the Netherlands because her family was fleeing the war going on in Somalia. She is a student in Amsterdam studying media, arts, design, and architecture. She is also working part time to earn money on the side. Her family had come to the Netherlands specifically because at the time, her father had heard that there was a good immigration policy in this country. She came to the Netherlands with her mother and two other siblings, however her father stayed behind and she has not had a father figure present in her life since the age of four.

Ruqiya is unique as an interview subject because of multiple aspects. For instance, Ruqiya is originally from Somalia. During our interview, the question of how society sees her versus how she identifies came up. In her own words, when asked what society sees of her, she said her Blackness⁹. Also Ruqiya is out¹⁰ only to her close friends, however still keeps her life very separate when it comes to sexuality and faith—“I think of it as two separate things. I think of faith being one thing and sexuality being another.” After I asked her why she separates it, she responded with, “I don’t know, they haven’t affected each other. Not yet.” Her separation of faith and sexuality will be expanded upon and analyzed later in this research, but one can see on top of the intersection between sexuality, religion, and migration, Ruqiya falls into other intersections which give more depth and dimension into this study.

❖ Kwagala Anick:

My second interview was with a 28 year-old woman who was born in Uganda. She has picked the pseudonym Kwagala Anick for this research herself for confidentiality

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⁹ Further mentioned in the interview analysis section.
¹⁰ Being “out” refers to being “out of the closet” which is a social construct of its own. There are many complexities and levels to coming out. Some may choose to come out because they see it as a form of liberation and being honest with themselves by telling others around them, and other may choose not to “come out” because they choose to see their sexual orientation as something that should naturally be integrated into society and it was never treated as a secret in the first place to reveal. The researcher uses the term “out” in this context not with a political agenda, but simply to state that Ruqiya has people in her life whom she keeps her sexuality from and others, among which are close Muslim friends which she has told with the intention of “coming out” to them.
purposes. Kwagala is devoted to her religion and finds peace and calmness in God, in prayer, and in fasting. She was born and raised in Uganda and came to Amsterdam to study on a scholarship. She worked in two fields. One as a teacher by profession, and the other in diplomatic international relations in Uganda working for the embassy of Saudi Arabia. She concurrently worked as a volunteer for LGBT organizations for women. In Amsterdam she took a summer course on sexuality but she did so in secret. Her family and employers from Uganda knew she was studying in Amsterdam, but they did not know the specifics.

Kwagala had lost her mother when she was 14 and her father when she was 16, so she and her sisters were married off. “I never chose to be a lesbian. As long as I’m concerned I’ve been attracted to women all my life, yeah. I was married in Uganda. I was forced to be married at the age of seventeen with a man, but still I dated women secretly.” During her time studying in Amsterdam, her husband (who resides in Uganda) found out that Kwagala is a lesbian by looking through her computer and emails. He was outraged to say the least and told her whole family and community, and he threatened to kill her. Her family did not take the news well either. They were planning to lynch her. “My family overreacted, some of them think I’m possessed by evil spirits, others think I’ve been recruited [to a cult] so I’m considered a criminal… and they believe I’ve been paid, others think I am here [in Amsterdam] for mercenary reasons and someone is sponsoring me so that I can go back [to Uganda] and promote homosexuality so that’s how I ended up in asylum and I can’t go back home. I was [fired] from the embassy where I was working because my husband went there and told them too. Also I had no other choice, it happened towards the end of the summer course [that I was taking in Amsterdam], yeah so it was very dangerous for me to go back.”

Kwagala’s story is a tragic one to say the least. She was a well-respected, well-educated, successful and beloved woman who was looked up to by her Ugandan community. Suddenly she was outed ¹¹ as a lesbian by her husband and her world turned upside down. She now is stuck in a seemingly endless procedure of seeking asylum, being forced to move from camp to camp for refugees. I traveled to meet her in the camp she was residing in at the time, and it seemed like a hospital. The walls were a dull brown color, the building itself was deprived of fresh air, internet connection was not always a given, rooms had simple and small beds with a locker for clothes and nothing more, there was simultaneously constant noise and silence all around.

¹¹ To be “outed” by another individual means that someone else has revealed the sexuality of another person. This term is usually used with a negative connotation.
Kwagala brings the unique dimension of being outed to her community and family, and being forced to live a life that she never could have foreseen. She gives insight into the lived experience of refugees dealing with sexuality and faith.

**Harun Beekzad:**

My third interview was with a 34 year-old man who was born in Afghanistan. He has specifically requested that I use his real name in my research. Harun came to the Netherlands when he was 19 years old with his three sisters and mother because of the war, and at the time “the way the Netherlands behaved to refugees was so good”

Harun was quite the character to meet. He was by far the most flamboyant and feminine of all my interview subjects, even in comparison to the women I interviewed. He was also extremely determined to be interviewed and share his story. He was very passionate about his story and was very proud of who he was. When I asked him how he identified he gasped and said “I’m too good! Believe me. I’m a very good person. I have very good ideas for this world but… I don’t know how to explain it. Ah! Yes, I’m too good. You know why I’m too good? It’s because I’m a good fighter. You know why I’m a good fighter? I’m not killing anyone, I’m not lying for someone, and I choose my own way. Look at this world! Everybody is killing each other in the name of Allah, Jesus, Moses, and Krishna... I’m too good. Yes. Not perfect, but I’m too good as a human being.” That was quite the humorous moment for me because I expected him respond to the question in a way that he would give insight into his sexual orientation or religion, but I settled for this answer. Later in the interview I began to realize that we was not religious. I had started the interview with that assumption because the middle-man who connected me to Harun must have assumed so too. But I kept Harun as an interview subject for this research because his passion and intentionality in not being a part of faith had a direct relation to his sexuality. He stated that he does not think any religion is good for homosexuality and that he respects all religions, but it is not for him even though he was raised in a Muslim family and country.

**Dino Suhonic:**

My fourth interview was with a 31 year-old man who was born in Bosnia. He came to the Netherlands to study at the age of 19 and has two professions. He is a teacher at a high school and he is also the chairman of the Maruf Foundation which is based in Amsterdam. In the words of Dino, “Maruf Foundation started three years ago, it started out of the need for
queer Muslims to gather and discuss the position of being queer in a Muslim community and being Muslim in a Dutch society, and in the end being a queer Muslim—that intersectional identity—in the whole world… I felt that with some of my fellows that we didn’t have enough space to be ourselves. The space where you could be spiritually yourself, where you can comfortably say that you believe in God, that you believe in social justice, that you believe in whatever you believe, and we needed that space… People who have issues or troubles by reconciling their identity as queer and Muslim come to us and we give them social and emotional support and shared knowledge and experiences…” For Dino this is a “pure passion” and volunteer work. He is one of the brave pioneers in Amsterdam that I met that works as an activist in creating a more inclusive community especially for queer Muslims and queer people of color within the Netherlands.

Dino uses the word “queer” very intentionally. Originally when he first started his work in queer-Muslim activism, he addressed the specific demographic as “gay Muslim” and then “LGBTI Muslim” but during our interview he told me, “we needed an umbrella term to cover all the queerness within the community. Even the queerness in the way you believe. We really consciously use that term ‘queer’ even when it comes to being Muslim. So not just being orthodox or mainstream and so on.”

Dino is unique as an interview subject because he is well-versed in the cross-section between queer/LGBTQ and Islam. Not only because he identifies as a queer Muslim himself, but it is a part of his profession. He is well-educated and views the world and religion and sexuality very critically. He has had much practice talking about this topic, which was very apparent in our interview by the way he efficiently talked with much ease. He also talked in a way many academics would, by using terms such as “intersectional” and “the other” and “class.” These terms will be further discussed in the analysis section of this study. Dino has reconciled his faith and sexuality and is at a point in his life, post-“breakdown,” where he is able to be at peace with himself and even others who discriminate against him. “Even if you call it a sickness, as some people do, there is this need for diversity—for a balance—in the world. So when people say it is a sickness, I tell them ‘but luckily you are healthy, so we can help and support each other!’ A lot of Muslims are very surprised by that (he laughs). But what I’m saying is that you are allowed to say that. I’m totally okay with people saying that, but realize also that when I’m sick you should take care of me…” Dino does not see homosexuality or queerness as a sickness, but one can see by this statement he made that he does not holding onto anger in the way some people who struggle with sexuality and faith do.
Shakir Zambib:

My second interview was with a 29 year-old man who was born in Morocco. He has picked the pseudonym Shakir for this research himself for confidentiality purposes. Shakir came to the Netherlands at the age of seven because his father had been working in the Netherlands. Shakir said that “the Dutch government made it easy, at the time, for workers to bring over their family to the Netherlands so my father used that benefit.” Shakir lived in the Netherlands from the age of 7 to 23 and had an “amazing” life and came back earlier this year to settle down. Between the ages of 23 and 29, she has lived in London and Dubai and he was able to give insight into the gay scene from these locations as well.

Similarly to Dino, Shakir was able to speak in a very efficient and seemingly well-practiced manner. He practices his faith through valuing his relationship with God. “I think a relationship with God is so much more important than the rituals.” He prays, and more importantly keeps an “open dialogue” with God. Shakir questioned his faith a lot from the age of 10 to about 20 years old, and now he has reconciled his faith and sexuality and does not consider homosexuality a sin. Shakir has an extremely bright and positive personality. He is extremely thankful to God for the life he has had so far and he views the world with little anger and negativity. His positivity and smile were very contagious throughout the entire interview. You could tell by his responses that the topics and questions that had come up, were concepts he has thought about previously. He is an introspective, yet extroverted and charismatic man who has seen the world.

Shakir is unique to this research because he moved to the Netherlands at a young age and has been immersed in Dutch culture, in addition to his Moroccan culture, throughout his childhood. He is also a life coach for queer/LGBTQ Muslims. Making the decision to have a job as a coach in this field suggests he is not only comfortable with his identity as a gay Muslim man, but he is secure in his outlook to be confident enough to share it with others who are going through similar struggles.
Interview Analysis

The interviews conducted with the five subjects described in the previous section capture many stories and aspects of the subjects’ lives, many of which will not be discussed in this research paper for the sake of brevity and conciseness. The interviews, as a whole, focused on the subject’s identities and experiences, and their religion and faith and how the two affect each other. In analyzing the transcriptions of the interviews, three major themes surfaced relevant to the research question at hand: (i) the specificity of the Netherlands, (ii) intersectionality as an identity and its experience, and (iii) the reconciliation between Islam and sexuality.

Theme I: The Specificity of the Netherlands

Since this research focuses on first-generation migrant, the researcher was able to ask the motives or reasons behind deciding to travel to and settle in the Netherlands. There were a combination of two popular answers. The first being, Amsterdam attracted them because of its seemingly flourishing queer/LGBTQ culture, and the second, the immigration process was good for them and/or their families. The researcher will begin by giving a further analysis into the “gay capital of the world.”

When I was young I thought oh Holland! Holland! I think it’s because of the history of Holland, the kindness of the people of Holland… I love Holland! First of all there are good men in Holland, there are very nice men in Holland. They treat you very good as a gay, and they understand you very good. They give a lot of attention to you. I love Holland! I even love the weather of Holland! (H. Beekzad, November 23, 2015).

One can see how much Harun absolutely loves the Netherlands. He is in love with the people and their reputation for acceptance and tolerance. However, when he was asked about his experiences with discrimination in the Netherlands, we was able to tell me right away that people at the gay bars assume he is Muslim and simultaneously that he is not gay and give him dirty looks very often. One important note for Harun is that he is the only interview subject who does not identify as a Muslim. He grew up in the faith and culture as a child but has left the faith due to his sexuality. Even though Harun could preach his love for the Netherlands for days on end, he still experiences discrimination within the queer/LGBTQ community which is arguably the community he identifies with and cherishes the most.
Kwagala, who came to Amsterdam to study said, “Amsterdam was a better place to acquire more knowledge in the sexuality field, to learn more about it. To learn about tolerance.” When I asked her if Amsterdam had met her expectations, she replied with,

Halfway. The people are tolerant and open, but I realized… this tolerance comes at the expense of migrant Muslims. Because they always tell you if you open up to them, they have different organizations that you can work with, refugee camps, assisting you in the asylum procedure and to contact their lawyer if you want them to give you information about asylum… I’ve noticed three people so far in different camps who have said, ‘you know the Netherlands was also like your country a long time ago and things got getter. We are tolerant and we are open to LGBT people but now things are getting a bit worse because of the many Muslim migrants who are coming to the Netherlands with their conservative cultures so they are holding us back’… So for me I think it’s a false accusation, it’s something they’re generalizing. I’m a Muslim and I’m gay, and I don’t have a problem with gay people… It’s not that all Muslim migrants have a problem with gay people, so it’s kind of, as they are enforcing their tolerance, they are discriminating, they are saying a lot of things with prejudice against Muslim immigrants, yeah and to me it doesn’t make sense. It’s as if Muslims were not gay. They always blame it on Muslims. And I believe there are also Dutch people who are against gay people (K. Anik, November 18, 2015).

The Dutch have been known to the rest of the world as a leader of acceptance and progression and tolerance, especially when it comes to sexuality. And one by one, countries have been following in its footsteps. However, it is important to note what specific qualities society deems acceptable and unacceptable when it comes to integrating and praising homosexuals. To simply say that gays are accepted and welcomed into Dutch society is not an accurate one. A more accurate claim would focus on the extremely specific type of “gay” that is accepted. First of all, it is the “G” of the LGBTQ acronym that is praised. And furthermore, it is the “G” which is the White, male, attractive, middle to upper class, successful, and masculine gay.

One may ask why this specific type of gay is so much more accepted over the others, and one of the reasons behind this—as D’Emilio would argue—is capitalism. John D’Emilio’s piece Capitalism and Gay Identity argues how “gay men and lesbians have not always existed. Instead, they are a product of history and have come into existence in a specific historical era. Their emergence is associated with the relations of capitalism; it has
been the historical development of capitalism” (D'emilio, 1992). The beauty of capitalism is that anything can become a commodity. In this case white, male, attractive, middle to upper class, successful, and masculine gay individuals are the most marketable and accepted types of gays. This is relevant to the Dutch context because it prides itself in being a progressive and tolerant culture and the gay scene is extremely commercialized. One must question if the culture truly is inclusionary when the subjects of inclusion are so specific and exclusive. This is where queer/LGBTQ people of color are often ignored and erased from the conversation. Now the researcher will give further insight into the relevance of Islam in this homonational discourse in the second theme: intersectionality as an identity and its experience.

**Theme II: Intersectionality as an Identity and Its Experience**

Since the 9/11 attacks of 2001, we have seen how gay pride and Islamophobia have been put in exclusive and dichotomous relationships. Puar’s *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* theorizes about the effects of the 9/11 attacks. Puar argues how 9/11 made the United States put aside its heteronormative agenda and fight terrorism. This meant that everything that was considered terrorism—commonly mistaken as Islam as a whole—is bad, and everything that Islam opposes is good.

The location of the attacks, New York City, plays a significant role as well. At the time, prior to the attacks, New York was seen as a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. It was a notorious scene for homosexuality and the HIV/AIDS epidemic ran rampant and struck fear into Americans decades prior. However, once the attacks had occurred, there was a sudden opposition to Islam by the world, and all of America started to love New York and everything that defined it, including the gay scene. Homosexuality, simultaneously located in a city America now loved, and also acting as the polar opposite of Muslim culture, drove the “us versus them” discourse which arguably has led to the rise in same-sex activism world-wide (Puar, 2007). Although New York is based within an American context, it relates directly to the Dutch context as well. Same-sex marriage had been legalized earlier in 2001 in the Netherlands, and the world perceived the Netherlands similarly to how it perceived New York City. Prior to the attacks, the world considered the Netherlands as a cesspool of sodomy and sin as well. And once the attacks took place, the Dutch suddenly had something to be proud of and was considered as a progressive, accepting nation.

Of course, this is problematic in itself. This implies that there are no queer/LGBTQ Muslims (or allies of the LGBTQ community who are Muslim as well). And this is where the
concept of intersectionality comes in. Intersectionality was a term coined by Kimerle Crenshaw in her infamous piece, Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. The term intersectionality was originally used to describe how the lives of Black women were oppressed further than a White woman or a Black man would face due to falling in the marginalization of both woman and African American. A Black woman would be treated poorly by White women because of her Blackness, and mistreated by Black men because she was a woman. Similarly to how Crenshaw argues for Black women in her work, the researcher argues that queer/LGBTQ Muslims are often erased from the conversation in queer/LGBTQ communities and Muslim communities. This intersection permeates to further than mere conversation. Queer/LGBTQ Muslims are left out of politics, the media, international debates, etc. The lived experiences and marginalizations of a queer/LGBTQ Muslim are not the same as that of white queer/LGBTQ people and heterosexual Muslims and being in this intersection often means they are ignored by both communities. One of the interview question asked the subjects to think of a time they were aware of being both queer and Muslim, and Dino gave an interesting insight into Dutch politics:

The political spectrum is very interesting because we have this liberal party called VVD and we have this extreme right-wing called PVV. The first one says that you have to liberate yourself and you have to be yourself, but when it comes to queer Muslims, they don’t really see us as liberated Muslims because we still believe [in God] and we are gay, and that’s a paradox for them, for a lot of people. Even some politicians ask me ‘why do you have to believe if you are gay?’ and I’m like ‘Pardon me?!’ Such a stupid question… But the extreme right wing, like Geert Wilders and PVV, they are using gay rights to label the Muslim community as ‘backwards.’ But they are truly not in support of the gay community… it is typical homonationalism going on in the Netherlands. Like ‘gay people are discriminated, Muslims are discriminating them, Muslims are not accepting our values, so Muslims do not belong to our society.’ That’s the discourse… I’m also being discriminated because I’m still Muslim… It’s very funny to see because [PVV] uses gay rights because ‘Muslims don’t respect our women and gay people and so on, so they don’t belong to our society’ but they are also do the same (D. Suhonic, November 23, 2015).

This is an uncanny resemblance to the Hekma piece mentioned in the literature review. It seems that Muslims, throughout Dutch history have been put in opposition with the agenda of progress and tolerance and additionally blamed for the country’s problems.
My interview subjects Ruqiya and Kwagala were both African women who felt that society did not see them for their queerness. Here is Ruqiya’s response when I asked what she thinks society see of her. “My blackness. And I’m a female… because I don’t talk a lot about [my sexuality], only my roommates know that I pray, basically that’s it. It’s difficult… But if I meet people, they don’t see me as a Muslim or as queer” (R. Dauud, November 11, 2015)

Due to this seemingly endless erasure of society handling intersectionality, many queer/LGBTQ Muslim individuals find it difficult to find peace in being both because they were taught their whole lives by politics, the media, and society that they were mutually exclusive. However, the majority of the interview subjects from this research came to an understanding between their faith and their sexuality which is theme III.

**Theme III: Reconciliation between Islam and Sexuality**

It was interesting to find that those of the interview subjects who identify as Muslim have found much peace with being both queer/LGBTQ and Muslim. It is not uncommon for individuals who identify as queer/LGBTQ and of a faith to have much inner conflict then leave one of the identities behind. For example, many individuals of this intersection may choose to leave their faith, like Harun Beekzad did.

I think if you talk with most of the gays, most of them don’t believe in Allah or the bible or the other books. I have respect for all the religions but I don’t believe because all the books are against homosexuality. So they’re against it, I’m not against them. They began first but now it’s time for me to say no. I was born in a Muslim country and Islamic family but I don’t believe it… I did try, I even went to see one girl, a prostitute. I gave her money and she said ‘Oh I don’t think you can. It’s okay, you can’t. It’s okay, just leave.’ She just saw that I couldn’t. She was very nice, she talked with me for like ten minutes, but she said ‘I don’t think you can.’ Very nice girl, very respectful. It’s very difficult to be gay in an Islamic world (H. Beekzad, November 23, 2015).
The other four interview subjects however were at peace with their religion and their sexuality. It is not that any of them accepted to live as a Muslim “sinner,” but rather their statements and responses made Islam and homosexuality seem harmonious with each other.

Homosexuality for me is a blessing, also from a religious perspective. Because you are a part of that diversity that God created. You are proof that diversity is all over the place. There might be a majority of people who call themselves heterosexual but it’s perfectly fine. Even if you call it a sickness, as some people do, there is this need for diversity, for a balance, in the world. So when people say it is a sickness, I tell them ‘but luckily you are healthy, so we can help and support each other.’ A lot of Muslims are very surprised by that (laughs). But what I’m saying is that you are allowed to say that. I’m totally okay with people saying that [it’s a sickness], but realize also that when I’m sick you should take care of me (D. Suhonic, November 23, 2015).

When I asked whether Ruqiya ever questioned the Quran and what is said about homosexuality, she answered with,

I find myself questioning people more… There’s questioning and there’s being curious. If you’re questioning something, you are wondering if it is really true or not… Being curious is wanting to know more… So I’m not doubting [the Quran], but I am trying to figure out what it really means. So there are more interpretations. I think the main goal of the Quran is to enrich our lives. And if we try to judge other people, it doesn’t matter what kind of people, we’re wrong because we are taught not to judge people. So that’s the first step. It doesn’t matter what kind of people you are judging for what sin or whatever, but judging itself is something you can’t do because you don’t know the person. So people who [judge] don’t understand [the Quran]. That’s how I see it.

And when I asked her about her thoughts on homophobic Muslims, she said,

I think most people are ignorant. Because the Quran teaches us to explore this world and understand God through the scriptures… Just be humble and peaceful, and most of all be aware of your own ignorance, of your own… people don’t know everything. Empty bottles make the most noise right? So if somebody’s empty here [points to her head] they’ll make the most noise right? (R. Dauud, November 11, 2015).

Also another important aspect of the reconciliation is to note how these interview subjects perceive the messages of the Quran that others would argue as homophobic. Shakir during our interview talked about how he reads the Quran.
I focus more on the message, and I have a personal connection with God. Even if I don’t follow the rituals I don’t think people can say you’re a bad Muslim or a good Muslim because I think that it’s the relationship that really matters.

Then the researcher asked him if he thinks homosexuality is a sin.

No not really to be honest. Maybe, there are guys or girls who do not have those feelings. For example, they’re just straight, but because their hunger for sex is so big, they also want to try to have sex with someone of the same sex. I think that could be a group back in the day where the Quran was sent to the earth for those group of people. Maybe that is who He means. I think there’s another group of people like me. I don’t have sex with guys just for the fun of it. I have sex with a guy because I really like him or really love him… When I read the Quran when it’s talking about Sodom and Gomorhra, I don’t have the feeling that the message is for me. I think that message is for the people we just described. We have a lot of tribes all over the world and maybe without that message from the Quran, people will get abused and this kind of things. I don’t abuse people, I don’t abuse men, not at all. So I don’t feel that message is for me. In that sense I can do whatever I want as long as it is with love. That is important (S. Zambib, November 24, 2015).

What Shakir said is an important analysis that has been made by some Muslim scholars. The term liwat, which means “the people of Lot” which is to sodomy, meaning “the sin of the inhabitants of Sodom where Lot lived” are ones to look further into (Hekma, 2011). In the Quran, the people of Lot are described in the Quran as “practis[ing] outrageous acts” and “commit[ting] evils in [their] gatherings” (29:28–29) and “lust[ing] after men rather than women” (7:81), “want[ing]” Lot’s male guests rather than his daughters (11:79), “lust[ing] after males and abandon[ing] the wives that God ha[d] created for [them]” (26:165–166), “lust[ing] after men instead of women” (27:55), and “lust[ing] after men [and] waylay[ing] travellers” (29:29). In the text Islam and Homosexuality, it dissects context of the word liwat being used. The text states that “a outsider might easily infer that the passages effectively proscribe all sexual activity between or among males. S/he might then be surprised to find out that, although contemporary mainstream or conservative commentators do tend to identify liwat—the sin of the people of Lot—with homosexuality broadly understood, the classical jurists’ discussions on the subject (on which contemporary mainstream or conservative commentators profess to base their opinions), actually tend to identify it specifically with anal intercourse” (Habib, Islam and Homosexuality (Vol. 2), 2010). One can already start to see
how translations and interpretations create a gray area for messages in the Quran, and any holy text for that matter.

As quoted in *Islam and Homosexuality*, “An important feature of the Quranic style is that it alludes to events without giving their historical background. Those who heard the Quran at the time of its revelation were fully aware of the circumstances. Later generations of Muslims had to rely on the body of literature explaining the circumstances of the revelation . . . and on explanations and commentaries based on the written and oral records of statements by eyewitnesses” the text then concludes that “The Quran’s preference for conciseness means that it neither explicitly states that the sin of the people of Lot was anal sex, nor elaborates on the significance of anal intercourse between adult males in pre-Islamic Arabia” (Habib, *Islam and Homosexuality* (Vol. 2), 2010). Now one can see that a term so synonymously used with sodomy and homosexuality, even by Muslim scholars, has an extremely unclear meaning. Some scholars such as “Omar Nahas of Yoesuf published *Islam en Homoseksualiteit*…offers a more liberal Islamic view. According to his interpretation, it is sexual abuse rather than homosexuality that is forbidden” (Hekma, 2011). It is a common and dangerous misconception that *sodomy or liwat* is interchangeable and synonymous with the term homosexuality. However all of the interview subjects, with the exception of Harun, had similar opinions on the Quran and Islam as the scholars Habib and Nahas. Even when politics, the media, family, and society imply that faith and sexuality are exclusive, they have still chosen to look at the Quran and Islam with a warm heart.
Conclusion

From the interviews and analysis conducted throughout the course of the ISP period, one can be enlightened to how important it is to have these intersectional lived experiences integrated into the discourse on homosexuality. The interview subjects from this intersectional research experienced and continue to experience multiple levels of marginalization due to their unique intersectional identities. These discriminations are present within, but are not limited to: their Muslim communities, their queer/LGBTQ communities, the general Dutch community, politics, the media, their countries of origin, and in international relations.

Even in the “tolerant” country of the Netherlands and in Amsterdam, known to be the “gay capital of the world,” one can take a mere glance at the lives of these individuals and quickly learn of the Dutch’s “myth of tolerance.” This myth of tolerance is one that is talked about in academia within classrooms focusing on various marginalization within a Dutch context, however the interview subjects from this researcher live and breathe this myth every day. They came to this country with a combination of motives and dreams that range from “my secret desire to be able to be myself” as Dino has said to the appealing immigration policy at the time of their move. Their hopes and dreams were only met halfway, if at all, and sadly this disappointment in the inclusivity—or the lack thereof—is a unanimous opinion among all the interviewees. Although this research did not pick a representative pool of subjects, many would argue that this is at least significant enough to question and criticize the current discourse of homosexuality, especially within the Dutch context.

Even though all of these interview subjects have been through difficult experiences due to their intersectional identities, they chose be positive. For different subjects, the positivity they have chosen takes differing forms. For some it is reconciling faith and sexuality. For others, it is letting it go and being okay with it. For Dino and Shakir, it is not holding onto anger and resentment to those who don’t love and accept them. For Ruqiya, it is pursuing a career in media in hopes to implement the change she wants to see in the world. For Harun, it is to know he is “too good” even when religion does not align with who he is. And for Kwagala, it is to hold on to hope that she will receive asylum after long torturous months of being trapped in a refugee situation she could have never foreseen.

These interview subjects are an inspiration. If their stories were at the forefront of political agendas, if their stories were represented in the media, if they were not forgotten or
ignored in international relations, if their identities were integrated into the homosexual and nomonational discourse, if their identities weren’t constantly questioned as a possibility by society, if the safe space to be who they are existed within faith and queer/LGBTQ culture and the general public, then our world would change for the better. It wouldn’t be an opposition debate on the “West versus the rest”, or an attacking of “backward” ideologies, or an “us versus them” mentality. The world would learn very quickly that there is no “us” or “them” to be put in opposition. There is only “we,” and we are currently losing a battle for empathy.
Future Discussion

This research focused specifically on individuals who self-identify as queer/LGBTQ and Muslim and a first-generation migrant to the Netherlands. Even though this intersection is already very specific, there are many other varying factors that affect the lived experience of individuals in this cross-section. For instance, class hugely affects individuals’ lives when deciding to come out. As Dino mentioned at the end of his interview, “the factor of class is very important. From my side it is very important to utilize that. That can be a huge obstacle for survival as a whole battle. Because it was a battle. And I won it because at the moment I decided I wanted to come out, I had a job, I had some kind of sustainability, I wasn’t depending on anyone’s help, so it was much easier for me to come out and accept myself and go on. It wasn’t easy, but it was easier.” If given the opportunity to continue and expand upon this research, the researcher would interview more subjects while making sure she had an adequate number of people interviewed per socio-economic class so analyze the differences and similarities within and between classes. The dimension of class was not ignored by the researcher. The researcher initially wanted to give attention to differing classes and obtain an interview pool that represented various socio-economic classes, however, she did not have the luxury due to the limited time period of the ISP. Also, to find merely five interview subjects was a difficult task in itself because of the extreme specificity—queer/LGBTQ, Muslim, and first-generation migrant. Also this demographic of queer/LGBTQ Muslim has been under a spotlight within the recent years by other researchers, the media, academia, etc. so the researcher came in contact with potential subjects who turned down the request of an interview.

Another dimension to look further into is faith, or the lack thereof. With the exception of the subject Harun Beekzad, all of the subjects self-identified as Muslim. It is important to note that there are many queer/LGBTQ individuals who were raised by a Muslim family however do not identify as Muslim themselves, or even have left the faith due to their sexual orientation. There are also individuals who were raised in a country and culture of Islam, however may identify with a different faith or none at all. For example, in Egypt the large majority of inhabitants are Muslim however there are also Egyptians who are in the Coptic Orthodox church. These individuals would identify as Christian, but one can argue that the (western) world perceives them as a Muslim.
There is also much variation within those who identify as Muslim. Differing sects of Islam include Sunni, Shi’ite, Sufism, etc. Differing sects of Islam were not focused on in this research.

This research focused specifically on first-generation migrants of the Netherlands, however there can also be a further analysis of the similarities and differences within and between first-generation migrants and the post-migration generations succeeding them (i.e. second- and third-generation, and so on). It would be interesting to observe the varying bicultural lifestyles and identities between these generations. The researcher would examine differing generations and whether it affects whether individuals identify with a certain culture over another or not at all (Dutch culture versus their culture country of origin).

This research focused on five individuals who came from the following countries: Somalia, Uganda, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Morocco. It is important to know that even though all of these countries have a strong Muslim presence, they are all nuanced. Countries over time develop differing cultural standards surrounding religion, and a further analysis and additional dimension to this research can be done by analyzing how Islam and sexuality—and the intersection of the two—are nuanced in each of these countries. Further research could look into even more countries than the ones this research has touched on.

Race was also a varying factor in this research. It is a common misconception that Muslims are all Arab or from the Middle East. Two of the interview subjects in this research were African, one Somali, and the other Ugandan. There are Muslims from all over the world in addition to the Middle East and Africa, such as in South East Asia, and not to mention the diversity among converted Muslims. Race plays an influential factor in ones lived experience. For example, as mentioned previously, Ruqiya Dauud said that society first see her for “[her] Blackness, and that I’m a female…” How society sees an individual will affect how it affects him or her, and subsequently their lived experience.

This research accepted interview subjects who simply identified as queer or anything within the LGBTQ\textsuperscript{12} acronym. The results to the research would differ if the focus were a specific letter of the acronym, such as solely transgender women, or gay men, lesbians, and so on. Again, for the sake of the limited time during the ISP period, the research sought it as best to focus on the umbrella-aspect of queer/LGBTQ, but given more time, further research and analysis can be done to look into the nuances of these subsections as well.

\textsuperscript{12} LGBTQ currently extends to LGBTQIJAP which stands for: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, questioning, asexual, and pansexual.
As one can see, there are many gaps to fill and much needed further research in the intersectional field of sexuality and faith, specifically queerness/LGBTQ and Islam.
References


Appendix

Interview Guide:

1. Tell me about yourself! (Name, age, occupation, etc.)
2. When/why did you move to the Netherlands? How long have you lived here? Why Amsterdam/the Netherlands?
3. How do you identify? (Open-ended questions, up to subjects whether they wanted to answer religiously, as a person, sexual orientation, etc.)
4. What is homosexuality/queerness to you?
5. How do your sexuality and religion affect your relationships (i.e. with your friends, family, romantic relationships, etc.)? How do they collide
6. Has the perception of your faith or sexual orientation been affected due to being both queer and Muslim? How so?
7. Do you have any memories where you’ve been very aware of being both queer and Muslim?
8. Is there anything you would like to talk about that we haven’t covered? You’re welcome to contact me at any time after this interview if you think of anything as well.
Between the Cracks of Contemporary Dutch Discourse: Being a LGBT Muslim in the Gay Capital of the World – How does the religion and the culture of Islam affect the lived experiences of first generation Muslim immigrants who identify as LGBT in Amsterdam?

Consent Form

You are invited to take part in an interview about Gender & Sexuality and Islam.

This interview will take no longer than 2 hours, unless the interview subject is willing to spend more time being interviewed. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this survey. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to be in the study you can withdraw at any time.

Results from this study will be used solely for this academic project. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and data will be stored in secure computer files and devices. All identifying material will be kept strictly private, and will be destroyed at the end of this study, 4 December 2015.

Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

If you have questions or want a copy or summary of this study’s results, you can contact the researcher at the email address above. If you have any questions, you may contact SIT Academic Director, Garjan Sterk (garjan.sterk@sit.edu) Please feel free to keep this copy of the consent form.

Do you have any questions about the above information?

Participant’s Consent to Take Part in This Study

I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study.

I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.

I give my consent to be recorded.

If tapes will be played in public, the following statement is also required: I give my consent to be recorded and to allow that tape to be used in conference and/or classroom presentations.

__________________________  _____________________
Signature of Participant     Date