Gay Muslim Refugees in Finland

Intersections of Experience

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tutkielma ristivalottaa seksuaali- tai sukupuolivähemmistöön kuuluvien muslimitaustaisten turvapaikanhakijoiden sosiaalista lokaatiota, jota ulossulkeminen sekä siirtymä tunnusomaisesti määrittävät edelleen. Tutkielmaa varten haastateltujen irakilaisten turvapaikanhakijoiden elettyjen kokemusten kautta pohditaan, kuinka sosiaaliset kategoriat kuten ”homo”, ”rotu/etnisyys”, ”muslimi” ja niiden risteämät muovaavat pakolaisuuden kokemusta sekä asemoi tutkimuskohteen alisteisesti moninaisissa yhteyksissä. Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan kuinka homoseksuaalit muslimipakolaiset neuvottelevat identiteettejään ja kuinka he rakentavat niitä diskursiivisesti. Lisäksi pohditaan, millainen itseymmärrys siitä muotoutuu ja kuinka se suhteutuu länsimaiseen seksuaaliepistemologiaan.

Tämän kvalitatiivisen tutkielman teoreettinen lähtökohta on intersektionaalisuus sekä *queer*-teoria, joiden lisäksi identiteetti määritellään itseymmärrykseksi, joka väistää ”identiteetin” mukanaan kuljettaman käsitteellisen painolastin ja soveltuu siten paremmin poikkikulttuuriseen intersektionaaliseen analyysiin. Taustoittavana materiaalina käytettiin lehtiartikkeleita, teoksia ja tutkimusartikkeleita, jotka käsittelevät homoseksuaalisuutta islamilaisessa maailmassa sekä *queer*-muuttoliikettä ja -pakolaisuutta.

Tutkielmaa varten haastateltiin neljää Suomeen vuosina 2015–2016 saapunutta irakilaista homoseksuaalia turvapaikanhakijamiestä sekä yhtä samaan aikaan saapunutta irakilaista turvapaikkaa hakenutta transnaista. Haastatteluissa sovellettiin puolistrukturoitua menetelmää, jonka avulla oli mahdollista ottaa mukaan mahdollisesti esiin nousevia uusia aihepiirejä, mutta silti pysyä alkuperäisen tutkimusaiheen puitteissa. Analyysi esitetään keskustelua jäljittelevänä kerrontana, joka pyrkii tavoittamaan aihealueen kompleksisuuden, mutta osoittaa kuitenkin moninaisia merkityksiä, rakenteita, konteksteja sekä vaikutuksia.

Tutkimustulokset ovat linjassa aihepiirin aiemman tutkimuksen kanssa ja viittaavat homoseksuaalin muslimimaahanmuuttajan moninkertaisesti alisteiseen asemaan, johon keskeisimpinä vaikuttavat yhdessä tai erikseen rasismi, heteroseksismi ja kansallismielisyys. Lopuksi ”homomuslimimaahanmuuttaja” näyttäytyy ”mahdottomana” lokaationa ja siten häirikköhahmona, joka tarjoaa *queer*-näkökulman normatiivisen järjestyksen epäoikeudenmukaisuuksien paljastamiseksi.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
Seksuaalivähemmistöt, islam, seksuaali-identiteetti, maahanmuutto, *queer*-pakolaisuus, intersektionaalisuus

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Introduction

In the autumn of 2016, the discriminating entrance policies of gay nightclubs in Helsinki made the headlines in Finnish media after a group of gay asylum seekers were rejected at the entry. A Swedish LGBT organization was hosting a private event in the premises of the well-known gay nightclub DTM. However, a group of their invited guests were denied entry due to their inability to present approved identity card for age verification. The rejected guests were asylum seekers; thus, they had no other documents to show but the residence permit card which was not accepted by the nightclub. As a protest and to show solidarity, the event organizers relocated the party in the street outside the club. The following public debate revealed that other gay nightclubs applied the same policy. Later on, DTM announced it will start accepting the residence permit card for age verification. (e.g. Qureishi 2018; Vesalainen 2016.) The case exemplifies well how accumulation of social markers may further marginalize the already marginalized and produce novel discriminations in their intersections at unexpected situations.

With the focus on various belongings and detachments of homosexual male Muslim refugees who have arrived in Finland from Iraq, I shed light on this particular social location that is distinctively characterized by exclusion and transition. Through their lived experiences, I explore how the social categories such as gay, race/ethnicity, Muslim and their intersections shape the refugee experience and position the subject subordinately in various contexts. Further, I examine how gay Muslim refugees are negotiating their identities, how identity is constructed in their speech and how the appearing self-understanding relates to Western sexual epistemology. In the end, gay Muslim immigrant appears as an “impossible” location and, consequently, as a disruptive figure providing a queer angle for exposing the inequalities of the normative.

The ever-hardening attitudes, persecution and sheer violence against minorities in the Middle East leave gay men particularly vulnerable. In practice, they can only flee, try to hide their orientation or get tortured and killed (Oakford 2015). The large-scale migrations in 2015 brought refugees to European front yards both physically and figuratively: Europeans were forced to confront the globalized human condition as it incarnated in the people fleeing their home countries that had become existentially hostile to them in various ways. Amongst the many, relatively large number of gay, lesbian and transgender asylum seekers from Muslim countries arrived (AFR 2017, 3–4). For LGBTQI refugees, migrating is a complex challenge, not merely a liberation narrative. They face potential multilevel identity conflicts and a severe risk of being multiply marginalized. (Murray 2014b.) The familiar means of identity negotiation and self-preservation may no longer be successful and new, sometimes contradictory strategies must be adopted. Thus, the underlying assumption for this inquiry is that the social location of the gay Muslim refugee positions the subject differently in the changing contexts of refugeeness and makes him particularly vulnerable in various ways.

In chapter one, I give an overview of the historical context wherein the research subject has come into being as well as the academic discourse and previous research on related themes. Even though this part is thematically divided, the interconnected and often mutually constitutive topics flow together and explain each other as they appear in the literature review throughout the chapter. Intersectionality theory and queer theory form the theoretical basis for this dissertation research. Further in chapter two, I address the question of identity and explain how it is conceptualized as “self-understanding” for the purposes of this dissertation. In chapter three, I explain the data collection process and how the collected data was approached. I have structured the actual analysis in chapter four under loosely thematical headlines to be able to point out various meanings, structures, contexts and influences mingling in the data.

Writing from a minority position, I acknowledge the privileges that allow me to do so as a White Western male academic. Further, I have used my own identity contemplations and experience as a gay man as points of reflexivity. At many points of this little inquiry, I have become aware of that odd feeling of outsiderness I assume I share with the participants. As articulated so eloquently by the great Stuart Hall: “[…] it is worth remembering that all discourse is ‘placed’, and the heart has its reasons” (1990, 223).

1. Contextual Flux

1.1 Whose Crisis?

In European public discourse and media, the 2015 migrations were soon referred to as “refugee crises” or “migrant crises” (Georgiou and Rafal 2017, 3). According to Frontex, over 1,8 million people crossed the border to European Union illegally, large number of them Syrians and Afghans (2016). Despite the per se large numbers of refugees arriving to Europe 2015 and after, the refugee crisis is global, and it is not over. According to the UNCHR statistics, 85 percent of the over 68,5 million people who have been forced to leave their homes due to conflicts and persecution currently live in developing countries. Further, the top three refugee-hosting countries are Turkey, Pakistan and Uganda, Turkey alone hosting over 3,5 million refugees. (UNCHR 2018a.) In European context, the crisis manifested itself powerfully in Greece during the winter 2015–2016 when more than million refugees (UNCHR 2018b) arrived in the country slowly recovering from the economic crisis that started 2008.

Differing from the European overall situation that year, majority of the approximately 32 000 asylum seekers arriving in Finland 2015 were Iraqis, second largest group being the Afghans (Migri 2016). Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) suggests the pre-existing connections and communities of these groups in Finland attract interest for the country (Kontio 2015). Moreover, according to the newly-arrived Iraqi asylum seekers interviewed by Finnish Broadcast Company (YLE), Finland has a “good reputation” and the Finnish asylum system is assumed to be favorable for Iraqis (Tolsa and Kankkonen 2015). These “pull factors” have since been tackled by implementing the asylum policy agenda the government prepared hurriedly by the end of the year 2015. For example, in its efforts to limit or “manage” the immigration, Government tightened the rules of family unification process. (Valtioneuvosto 2015, 3). Ironically, the measure is conceptually at odds with the government’s later-published policy agenda on economic migration that recognizes family well-being as major factor for successful integration (Sisäministeriö 2018, 21; 27–28; 32).

Certainly, nonheterosexual and noncisgender people around the world have migrated in search of refuge before. Prior to 2015 in Europe, the number of asylum claims made by people belonging to sexual or gender minority is estimated to be “thousands” annually. However, the immigration officials across Europe have struggled with recognizing this particular immigrant group legally and addressing its special needs in practice. (Jensen 2013, 26.) Nevertheless, this still very much invisible group has become less so in Europe as the number of asylum claims based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) has increased along with the growing awareness of LGBTQI persecution around the world and the possibility to claim asylum on SOGI basis. However, due to the information security and protecting claimants’ privacy there are no official statistics on LGBTQI refugees or documentation of the basis asylum has been granted. (AFR 2017, 3–4.) Drawing on the client numbers reported by nongovernmental organizations working with in LGBTQI refugees in several EU countries, The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights estimate the total numbers to be “significant”. The Finnish Helsinki based nongovernmental LGBTQI organization HeSeta reports having 500 clients during the period between autumn 2015 and February 2017 only. (AFR 2017, 3–4.) This suggest the total number on LGBTQI refugees in Finland is substantially higher as HeSeta is a small locally operating organization and cannot reach its potential clientele nationwide. Further, for the various reasons discussed below, many refugees with same sex desires do not wish to be associated with LGBTQI communities and rather keep their orientation to themselves.

Across Europe, the magnitude of the crises produced “de-humanizing” water metaphors such as flow, wave, flood and influx to describe the fleeing people implying the threat they constitute (Lazović 2015, 204). In the popular discourse on migration, the use of language is fluid in general. IOM’s

(International Organization for Migration) definition of refugee is based on the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees together with some further qualifications by the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration (IOM 2019). The 1951 UN Convention Article 1 as modified by the 1967 Protocol states that a refugee is a person

> […] owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (UNCHR 2010).

However, sexual orientation was recognized as ground for persecution not until 1981 by the Judicial Division of the Dutch Council of State (Jansen 2013, 29) Further, as a legal status, “refugee” refers to asylum process and to a person who has been granted asylum (IOM 2019). Held and McCarthy argue how the commonly long-lasting status of “asylum seeker” and the in-between social position negatively affects the subject in multiple ways (2019, 142). Consequently, this legally constructed difference discriminates between the refugees within the migration system keeping large numbers of the fleeing people in even more precarious position. This artificial classification that increases inequality is also addressed by queer migration studies (Murray 204a, 22).

In her critical discourse analysis on media representations of refugees, Lazović reminds how media uses power in choosing words when reporting on migration. Language usage shapes the public opinion and thereby influence values and power systems (Lazović 2015, 198−201.) Many media organizations chose to use word “refugee” over “migrant” to emphasize the inhumane conditions these people are fleeing and to draw distinction between voluntary migration due to work and running away from war, for example. On the other hand, term “migrant” has seized derogatory meanings that refer to voluntary movement as opposite to forced fleeing. Term “economic migrant” implies using the asylum system for economic gains. (Lazović 2015, 198− 201.) The Finnish equivalent, *elintasopakolainen* consists of two parts, *elintaso*, “living standard” and *pakolainen,* “refugee”, emphasizing the misuse of the refugee status to improve one’s standard of living. Recently, a further stigmatizing term *haittamaahanmuutto*, “harm immigration” has been introduced to emphasize the perceived threat and/or to strengthen xenophobic sentiments reflecting the hardening social climate.

Considering the power language convoys and acknowledging the “situatedness” of all research as intersectionality does, defining core terminology is necessary as it positions the research further. Hence, in this dissertation, I use the terms “refugee” and “refugee crises” pointing towards the subjectivity of the people seeking refuge, although I do it with some reservations. First, also “refugee” carries derogatory meaning in certain contexts. In Finland, this is present in various derogatory phrases containing the Finnish word for refugee. However, for the above-mentioned reasons and for the clarity, “refugee” is justifiable in this context and the legal asylum seeker/refugee distinction is made where relevant. Secondly, even if the term “refugee crisis” is fairly normalized, the word “crises” has a connotation of a disaster or existential danger that would better define the situation in the originating countries or the state of the fleeing people, not the challenges Europe is facing in managing the undeniably large-scale migrations that started 2015. “Whose crisis?”, is a rhetorical question Sajir and Aouragh bring forth in their article on the potential of the myriad images of the war-fleeing people in social media for creating mobilizing solidarity (2019, 555). Recognizing the relativity of the “crisis” elucidates the meaning of the “refugee”.

Moreover, the terminology referring to lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersexual people, and others affiliating with sexuality and gender nonnormatively in different ways is diverse. As with language usage in general, the related terms are contextual and convoy meanings with different emphases. Without belittling the complexity, and for the sake of it, I will use the abbreviation “LGBTQI” inclusively in this dissertation unless the reference requires otherwise. Further, I adopt Whitaker’s English LGBTQI terminology[1] that is clearly defined but still allows more liberal language usage.

1.2 The Street Not So Straight – Living It in the Middle East

According to Amnesty International, the persecution and discrimination of LGBTQI people in the Middle East and North Africa continued getting harsher during 2017–2018 as the governments in the region further limited the rights of sexual and gender minorities “[…] in law and in practice.” In Egypt and in Tunisia, suspected gay men were imprisoned for bogus reasons, some of whom were tortured by forcing them to undergo an anal examination, which is supposed to “prove” one’s homosexuality. (Amnesty International, n.d.) Further, the particular consequences of the on-going war in Syria and Islamist terrorism in many areas should be noted. In the previous years, ISIS has been reported to attack gay men in and outside its territory: men accused of being gay have been thrown from rooftops in Iraq and in Syria, others stoned to death. The organization has been enthusiastic in sharing images of these executions as part of its Islamist propaganda. (Counter Extremism Project 2019, 1–2.) Even if ISIS is nearly defeated at the time of writing (e.g. BBC 2019), the effects of the violence-normalizing execution spectacles with the hatred of LGBTQI people remains in the society as "[…] ISIS's actions are built on a well-established foundation" (Counter Extremism Project 2019, 10). Thus, it is necessary to emphasize how the particular conditions of war and terrorism in some areas (e.g. Iraq and Syria, Counter Extremism Project 2019, 1–2) and capital punishment law in some Arab countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Whitaker 2011, 62) generate extreme, often spectacularized manifestations of violence that are still only the tip of the ice berg of the less-lethal violence, persecution and discrimination that gay people encounter in the region. Furthermore, various laws criminalizing same same-sex acts in many Arab countries create a legal base for justifying multilevel harassment of gay people in the society (Whitaker 2011, 156). As Whitaker points out, amongst homosexual men in Saudi Arabia, decapitation is often considered to be less relevant, distant threat, whereas the fear of becoming exposed as gay and causing shame to the family was closer to their everyday reality (Whitaker 2011, 62). On the other hand, in the post-Saddam Iraq where homosexuality is technically legal, vigilante militias present a more immediate threat to anybody they consider nonconformant or simply not "manly" enough, for "[…] official legal position counts for less than realities on the ground" (Whitaker 2011, 31, 138–139).

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[1] ”Homosexual: Behavior, feelings, practices, etc, directed towards people of the same gender. It is used adejectivally in the text but not as a noun. (e.g. ’a homosexual’). Lesbian: Applied to women who have adopted this as their sexual identity. Gay: Applied to men who have adopted this as their sexual identity. In some contexts (e.g. ’gay community’) the term should be regarded as shorthand which includes various other non-heterosexual identities [LGBTQI]. Gay rights: a shorthand way of referring to all sexual rights of a non-heterosexual nature." (Whitaker 2011, 14.)

Gay Witch Hunt in Iraq (2012), an eye-opening TV reportage on the systematic and organized gay persecution in Iraq brings light to the comfortless situation of LGBTQI people in Baghdad after the British and American armed forces left the country 2009. Not only the militias hunt down gays and lesbians but also the Police is actively taking part in the witch hunt. Further, in collaboration with religious leaders, Iraqi Government has adopted violent policies that further strengthen the social stigma accompanying homosexuality. Furthermore, gays and lesbians are being killed by their own families in the name of honor. The occupation of the Western armed forces was considered as an ultimate humiliation and lowered the tolerance against everything not Arab or Islamic. Echoing the traditional, gendered power binaries, the reportage considers the Iraqi gay people as surrogate victims in the societal efforts to restore the honor lost in the Western penetration. (Antelava et al. 2012.) In other words, the man who lets himself to be sexually dominated is considered weak and feminine, submissive and non-Arab, thus representing the West. Consequently, in Iraq, the gay men are seen as Westernized traitors and embodiments of the shameful Arab submission. Moreover, their persecution emerges as a collective measure to regain Arab Iraqi masculinity and power.

Indeed, it is the antipathy towards homosexuality embedded in arab society at large that is revealed in numerous lived stories in Brian Whitaker's *Unspeakable love: gay and lesbian life in the Middle East* (2011). Through extensive collection of real experiences, Whitaker sheds light upon the overall circumstances and particular situations in which gay people have to manage their lives. As Whitaker points out, the appearing image of the societal antipathy towards homosexuality cannot be simply reduced to homophobia; on the contrary, interconnecting cultural, social, religious and political issues produce and maintain negative sentiments and hostile practices towards gay people. For example, in the debates over human rights, the above-mentioned forces are at play reinforcing the "badness" of homosexuality. To exaggerate by generalizing, Western cultural imperialism incarnates itself in the homosexual man who is portrayed as oppositional to Islamic ethics and demands for his recognition in the name human rights only exemplify the degradation of the West in its efforts to dominate. (Whitaker 2011, 10, 76–75.) Whitaker's usage of the unifying term "Arab Islamic society" when referring to the diverse societies of the Arab Islamic Middle East and North Africa is legitimized by the observed similarities concerning nonnormative sexuality in the region. Despite, for example, the legislative differences, gay people across the region face similar challenges in their lives as they

> […] have no legal rights; they are condemned to a life of secrecy, fearing of exposure and sometimes blackmail; many are forced into unwanted marriages for the sake of their family's reputation; there is no redress if they are discriminated against; and agencies providing advice on sexuality and related health matters are virtually non-existent. (Whitaker 2011, 9–10.)

By elaborately speaking out the "unspeakable", Whitaker displays the matrix of homosexuality in arab society and the social niche given to homosexual people. As with the reference to the human rights debates above, regarding homosexuality as an aspect of Western Otherness exposes the underlying "reverse orientalism" of the matrix. (Whitaker 2011, 77.) Arab press has adopted governments' xenophobic views in reporting on homosexuality: it is presented as foreign influence, an inferior Other. Projection of this kind is analogous with the way European cultural identity was constructed against the Orient in Saidian reading. In the similar vein with orientalist writers who erotized the Arabs, Arab media project unconventional topics to the Other enabling them to cover the otherwise unspeakable. Publishing scandalized stories often made up by the police, the press is eager to expose "Westernized sodomite orgies" without giving homosexuality a real human face. (Whitaker 2011, 75–78.) Turning to literature and cinema, Whitaker shows how modern writers and filmmakers have managed to display various aspects of homosexuality in Arab Islamic society despite the censorship and expected societal duty "[…] to conform to the dominant moral standards" (2011, 92–114). Whitaker connects the obsession with cultural conformity to the aspirations for national unity in the ethnically diverse Arab countries that the imperialist order left behind. Further, the overconcentration on conformity hinders them from facing other problems. (Whitaker 2011, 224.) The culture of silence has been disrupted however, during the Lebanese protests against the Iraq war in 2003, the rainbow flag first appeared from amongst the protesters (ibid, 42). Despite the fact that homosexuality is illegal, and even if the society is built around traditional family and religious values, living a gay lifestyle in Lebanon is somewhat possible, at least some of the time. As Whitaker points out, most choose to live "double life". (2011, 44.) Nevertheless, a nongovernmental organization for LGBTQI rights, Helem, managed to register itself officially most likely due to a stumble of authorities. Be as it may, for Whitaker, raising the homemade rainbow flag in 2003 by handful of Helem activists marked the "[…] start of a long struggle for public acceptance and recognition [of gay people in the Arab Islamic world]" (2011, 48).

The focus of the debates on same sex desire in Arab Islamic society has long been on the Western notion of "gay" as identity category and whether or not, and to what extend the concept can be applied to analysis on homosexuality in the Arab Islamic Middle East. Further, it has been argued to what extend the categories of sexuality in general meet and whether they are comparable across "cultures" at all. (e.g. Tolino 2014, 72–74.) The academic debates on the issue that are presented briefly below tend to forget the lived experience of the individual subjects and, the globalized reality in which the sexualities and identities are forged today. TV channels, Internet and various social media and smartphone apps with myriad communities offer a digital space where individual discovers alternative lifestyles to his traditional immediate context. Digital space or "cyberspace" thus provides a transnational cultural arena where identities can be negotiated and performed. (Atay 2016, 140.)

However, the transnational affiliations of the cyberspace are not unambiguously empowering. Various "cyber imams" offer religious guidance on issues such as how to combine different aspects of modern life with Islamic values. As summarized by Whitaker, for a homosexual Muslim, the most sympathetic advice regarding to his sexuality is to keep quiet about it and ask God to overcome the problem. (2011, 152.) Especially the LGBTQI youth in the Islamic world are in a limbo acknowledging the expectations of the traditional society and the greater variety of possibilities for sexual self-expression and acceptance offered by the West. Tolino marks this new emerging identity building process as the "third model", "[…] which is especially embodied in the younger generations, who are most exposed to this clash and who cannot but represent new forms of identities" (2014, 73). When brought into Arab Islamic context, the gay identity, LGBTQI rights and identity politics may be seen as form of cultural imperialism (e.g. Massad 2007, see below), an important analysis as such; nevertheless, it is the intersecting and sometimes colliding influences of the local and the global that shape the sexual self of the queer[2] subject. In the end, the burden is left to the individual homosexual subject alone. How he manages to negotiate his sexuality in the antagonistic environment is a matter of personal ability and resilience: many decide to leave.

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[2] "Queer" is here used as a transgressive reference to all sexual and gender minorities, not only to people who are questioning or cannot or do not want to define their sexuality or gender (Seta 2018).

1.3 M. Was Not Gay – Debates on Homosexuality in Arab Islamic World

In Islamic society, attitudes towards homosexual desire and behavior are generally hostile. The fact that the topic is addressed several times in the Quran reveals its prevalence amongst Arabs and the experienced societal need to control the phenomenon at the time of writing: "For ye practice your lusts on men in preference to women: ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds."[3]

In his opening article of the rather orientalist work *Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies* (Schmitt and Sofer, eds.1992), Arno Schmitt gives an archetypical description on how male-male sexuality has understood and societally managed in the heartlands of Islam through centuries. Followed by local variations exemplified by lived experiences of men from Morocco to Pakistan, the collection creates an image of male-male sexual conduct in Muslim societies at certain point in time. In the last chapters, a concise overview of male eroticism in Islam is given with some historical and linguistic notes on the topic. Schmitt argues how applying Western conceptions of sexuality to Muslim societies is misleading: categories such as homosexuality or heterosexuality simply do not exist[4] as the Arabic sexual terminology puts emphasis on the act of doing rather than who is doing. (Schmitt 1992, 1–24.) The patriarchal Muslim society has its roots in Hellenistic civilization and the ancient Greece where free Greek men were on top of the social hierarchy (Schmitt 1992, 2). Similarly, the Muslim male is multiply privileged in relation to other social groups and “[t]hese privileges were justified by male superiority, but in reality they created this superiority” (Schmitt 1992, 3). Further, the influence of classical pederasty is apparent in the desire for boys described in Arabic and Persian poetry and in the sexual encounters between adult men and adolescent boys. Yet another distinctive feature connecting Muslim society to the antiquity is the division to female domestic sphere and the public male sphere. (Schmitt 1992, 2.)

According to Schmitt, as with vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse appears salient in sexual conduct that reflects and reproduces the societal power positions wherein the man is always dominant, penetrating and the penetratee is a submissive non-man (1992, 2–3, 22). Hence, until the boy has fully entered the public sphere of adult men and left the private female realm, he is considered less of a man and may act, or may be used, as a penetratee. However, the boy should not show he enjoys the intercourse even if he does and preferably agree to it only to get something in return. Further, by the age of 16 or so, he should forget these things and ideally marry and have children. (Schmitt 1992, 6–7.) From a psychoanalytical perspective, Schmitt explains, the boy who has just left the save haven of the maternal domestic sphere is still in precarious position in the male world and will always be a non-man in relation to his father. The experienced insecurity will then subconsciously turn into macho behavior and aspirations for sexual domination. (1992, 3.) In his straightforward manner, Schmitt explains further how problems arise when the "desire to be fucked" continues in adulthood: an adult man who admits he enjoys being penetrated represents an anomaly that disrupts social conventionality (1992, 7). As penetrative sex is not possible between equals, the receiving side is inevitably left more vulnerable and is at risk of facing discrimination and disdain. Schmitt points out how all sorts of sexual encounters do happen in Muslim societies, but they belong to the silenced reality and only become problematic if brought to light (Schmitt 1992, 7).

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[3] *The Quran* 7:81 (Yusuf Ali).

[4] In the recent years, the Arabic term *al-mithliyya al-jinsiyya,* ”sexual same-ness” is frequently used to refer the “Western” notion of homosexuality (Whitaker 2011, 14).

In his overview on homosexual behavior in Islam from the theological perspective, Schild argues how the Islamic law and its seemingly unambiguous condemnation of homosexual behavior still leaves a "veiled" niche for homosexual desire to become physical (Schild 1992, 179–187). Theoretically, the Islamic law is explicit in condemning homosexual behavior. In addition to the Quran which is believed to be the word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad, and the *Hadith*[5], a collection of stories what the Prophet had allegedly said or done, the Islamic law is based on the interpretations of the Islamic scholars (e.g. Schild 1992, 172). The Quran demands punishment for both parties of a homosexual act and connects it to the people of Lot who are consciously doing against God's will in general. Consequently, "Lot" has become the root for Arabic derivates such as *liwat*, "homosexual behavior" and *luti*, "a person who performs such actions". Homosexual act has thus become to symbolize rebellion against God and violates the harmonious order of the world. The hadiths are more straightforward in condemning *liwat* and require killing of the *luti*'s if seen in action. (Schild 1992, 179–181.)

Charles Pellat examines the *liwat*, or "sodomy" in the *Hadith* and the traditional Arabic poetry with linguistic approach. He indicates how the sheer existence of the various *hadiths* and varied terminology on the topic demonstrates the prevalence of homosexual behavior in the Islamic societies that is promoted by the separation of sexes. (Pellat 1992, 151–160.) Depending on the school of law, the punishment for sodomy vary from death by stoning to flagellation. However, Pellat considers legal sanctions rather theoretical, "[…] since homosexual relations have always been tolerated."

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[5] *Hadith* consists of lore about Prophet Muhammad's life, deeds and words that, in addition to the Quran, defines the proper Muslim way of life, *sunna*. First written *hadiths* date back to late 8th century whereas the Quran was written in the 7th century. (Hämeen-Anttila 1999, 14–18)

(Pellat 1992, 155.) Furthermore, as the human being is considered errant and imperfect in Islam, and since God is merciful, the emphasis is on repentance and corrective action. Further, due to the salience of harmonious order set in the world by God, it is the public action against Islamic morals specifically that disturbs the social order. According to Schild, this is evident in the emphasis on eye-witnesses' testimonies in Islamic law: in the case of sodomy, four eyewitnesses who have seen the "carnal act itself" is required. Moreover, the Islamic values are validated through the social control mechanism of shame that demands secrecy over matters considered shameful. Ironically, this secrecy also allows homosexual behavior in the society as it usually takes place in privacy. (Schild 1992, 182–183.)

Writing as a devoted Muslim convert, Kugle provides an alternate theological reading on homosexuality and Islam in his book *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical reflection on gay, lesbian, and transgender Muslims* (2010). By conceptualizing homosexuality as an ”inherent disposition” that manifests in certain kind of behavior, Kugle essentializes the categories of homosexual, gay and lesbian and thus lays the foundations for political action to change the social relations (2010, 33–34). With his rather exclusive and stereotyping approach, Kugle provides homosexual Muslims with "Islamic" identity categories of sexuality that are not only potentially empowering for the people concerned but also, in theory, enable identity politics within the Muslim community. Kugle differentiates between "dispositional homosexuality" and "behavioral bisexuality" marking the latter as driven by "thwarted sexual urges", not inherent identity. In the same vein, he excludes queer as distractive to "real categories" of gay, lesbian and transgender which, according to him, are referred to in the Quran. Connecting the quranic concept of *liwat* (see above) with behavioral bisexuality, Kugle argues that Quran does not condemn dispositional homosexuality but rather the practices of violent domination, sexual recklessness and transgression against God. (2010, 32–40.) Kugle is writing form religious standpoint and indeed, the way he omits "B" and "Q" from the queer alphabets echoes the demand for conformity within the Islamic tradition even when it comes to social change. With his revisionist approach, Kugle argues how the "rebellious" Quranic notions on fundamental human diversity, equality and emphasis on tolerance were later superseded by the primordial Arab patriarchal power structures reproduced in the religious law, Sharia (2010, 26). Nevertheless, queer and bisexual remain too transgressive for Islamic society.

In the collection *Islamic Homosexualities. Culture, History and Literature* (1997), the editors Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe provide a cross-cultural analysis on homosexualities in time and space. The title refers to the multiplicity of homosexual *identities* in and *beyond* the Arab Islamic heartlands and implies the central argument of the book: throughout the history of the Islamic world, homosexual desire and its diverse conduct has provided a basis for identification in various ways not totally unlike the modern homosexuality of the West. As summarized by Murray and Roscoe: "[…] there is a continuum from gay identity to its absence, not a sharp break" (1997, 7). Through several studies, the collection presents the diverse ways society has accommodated same-sex desire around the Islamic world at different points of time. Murray and Roscoe point out how, according to constructionists, homosexuality emerged in the West as a "category of personhood" through the medicalization of gender and sexuality and the social changes that accompanied industrialization and urbanization. Further, the egalitarian aspect, meaning the idea that sexual relationship is possible between two *equal* men, was more generally associated with homosexuality not until after the Second World War. (Murray and Roscoe 1997, 4–5.) In other words, modern homosexuality and the related gay identity are fairly recent phenomena. Moreover, Murray and Roscoe argue how the elements that constitute the modern homosexual are to be found also across Islamic world in varying configurations as exemplified in the book. Against this diversity in time and space, the "modern homosexual" is rather narrowing category and reflects the aspirations of the nation state to control. (Murray and Roscoe 1997, 6.)

As with Schmitt above, Roscoe highlights the influence of the antiquity and the Mediterranean cultural area that the Arabs encountered during their conquest in the 7th century. He differentiates two categories of homosexual conduct that date back to *Oikoumene*, the civilized world of the ancient Greeks: the "status-differentiated pattern" refers to the roles in sexual conduct that represent and reinforce the societal status; whereas the "gender-defined" homosexuality provides effeminate men alternative roles in the society. The first is apparent not only in the classical pederasty but also in various forms of other penetrative sexual relationships that reaffirm the dominance of the masculine, such as prostitution and sexual conduct between free men and slaves, or between men with different social status in general. The latter includes the long state eunuch tradition and other institutionalized "third gender" constellations, whereby the "nonmasculine maleness" was deployed and incorporated to the society. (Roscoe 1997, 55–56.) Further, influence of the two categories is present in Islamic society as well as in the West today. Both "civilizations" have roots in the Greco-Roman tradition; however, whereas the status-differentiated and the gender-defined homosexualities endured in Islamic society, the Christian West soon bundled all forms of homosexuality under "sodomy." Nevertheless, the rejected sexualities came together in the margins of European cities and were merged in what became modern homosexuality. According to Roscoe, the diversity of "Islamic" homosexualities is now threatened simultaneously by global "homosexualization", Islamic fundamentalism and the nation states with their confirmative policies. (Roscoe 1997, 77–78.) In the light of the appearing diversity and the multiple ways the Islamic societies have incorporated and institutionalized homosexuality and how people have negotiated their homosexual desire throughout history, it is hard to imagine there has been no identity at play.

Building on Edward Said's critique on orientalism, Joseph Massad posits the discourse on Arab Islamic homosexuality into the neocolonial human rights project that he names as the "Gay International" (2007, 161). His controversial book *Desiring Arabs* (2007), Massad argues how the imperialist system imposed Western epistemologies upon non-Western civilizations through the orientalist project, and how "the European worldview served to determine Islamic identity" (2007,1–4). In other words, the Arab-ness that was emerging within nationalist contexts towards the end of colonial rule was produced in Western terms. In the same vein, Massad argues, the Gay International, by which he means the international LGBTQI movement and their "missionary tasks" and discourses that produces the exact grievances they are fighting against, is actually creating the gay Muslim subject "[…] by transforming [him] from practitioner […] of same-sex contact into subject […] who identify as 'homosexual' and 'gay'"(2007, 161–162). Further, by doing so, the "Gay International" "[…] represses same-sex desires and practices that refuse to be assimilated into its sexual epistemology", and moreover, the "liberational mission" has reverse effect in the Arab Islamic countries (ibid, 162–163). From his standpoint, the gay witch hunts across Arab world are due to the imported politized gay identity that sparks anti-homosexual sentiments and policies with their demands for public recognition:

> It is not same-sex sexual practices that are being repressed by the Egyptian police but rather the sociopolitical identification of these practices with the Western identity of gayness and the publicness that these gay-identified men seek (Massad 2007, 183).

In his critique, Massad goes through various aspects of literature on Arab Islamic homosexuality some of which are presented above. Amongst other, he points out quite rightly how this literature is produced mostly by white Western gay male academics (2007, 162) whose "native informants" belong to the small, already Westernized elites that cannot be considered representative of same-sex behavior in the society at large (ibid, 172). Further, Massad criticizes the orientalist approach, whereby the Arabs are merely objects and "never […] subjects and audience" (2007, 166). Furthermore, Massad argues that, by investigating medieval accounts, these authors pursue to demonstrate how same-sex desire/behavior did, or did not, appear as an identity category and how they then, apply their findings in the present (2007, 166). Hence Massad notes sarcastically: "[T]ime in the context of the Arab World and Islam is not an agent of change but rather the proof of its lack" (2007, 171). Moreover, Massad blames As'ad AbuKhalil of "identitarian essentialism" as he, according to Massad, "affirms that 'homosexual' identities and what he calls 'pure homosexuals' have existed in Arab/Islamic civilization" (2007, 168–169). In other occasion, he accuses Schmitt (see above) of essentialism because his argument that these categories never did exist in "Moslem societies" (ibid, 166).

What becomes apparent in such passionate debates over sexuality is the power it entails. Massad represents the international LGBTQI movement with its Western sexual epistemology and "assimilative efforts" as a form of neocolonialism, that is, the Western quest to rule over the "rest". Further, by insisting Western sexual identity categories "where they do not exist", the Gay International, according to Massad, destroys "the social and sexual worlds" of the people it tries to liberate (2007, 190). However, what is emerging from amongst Massad's critique, is a counter-orientalist image of Arab Islamic sexuality escaping lived experience.

1.4 Let Me In and Out? – Viewpoints to Queer Migrations

Alexander Dhoest (2018) has studied gay migrant identity narratives within Belgian asylum process. He highlights the contradicting impact of sexuality has to gay migrants: they have been persecuted and forced to flee because of their sexuality; however, when arriving in Belgium and/or entering the refugee system, their sexual orientation works for their benefit and is expected to be articulated "the right way" (Dhoest 2018, 1–3). Further, Dhoest examines to what extend the refugee system coerce Western identity categories upon the nonheterosexual refugees from "non-Western" origins. However, his interviewees independently defined themselves as gay and male. (2018, 9.) Moreover, the study supports the idea of gay migration as a liberation narrative and suggests lesser impact of the asylum process. On the contrary, gay identity was embraced prior to departure which points towards the de facto globalized (Western) gay identity. (Ibid, 11–13.)

Examining queer migration within the Canadian immigration system, Murray points out how migrants applying asylum in the basis of belonging to a persecuted minority have a double burden in demonstrating their right to an asylum: first, they are expected to prove their sexuality; and secondly, they must show that they are persecuted due to their sexual orientation (2014a, 22). This alone positions LGBTQI asylum seekers unfavorably in the refugee system. Further, Murray addresses the problematics of sexual identity (in)authenticity and how the refugee system favors individuals who are able to present their sexuality the way that is in line with the expectations the decision-makers and the sexual rights narrative of the neoliberal state (2014a, 25–27). Furthermore, to comply with the homonationalist narrative of Canada as safe haven for LGBTQI people, the nonheterosexual asylum seekers may change their identifications accordingly. Thus, membership of a persecuted group is earned at the cost of an another as the narrative of a racialized colonial subject does not comply with that of homonationalism. (Ibid, 28–29.) Elsewhere, Murray refers to the hegemonic liberation narrative, wherein gay immigrant arriving from a country hostile towards LGBTQI people always "becomes free" or is "reborn" in a neoliberal Western country, and its power to castrate "socio-political vitality" of the queer figure (2014b, 468). Drawing on previous research (e.g. Annes and Redlin, 2012; Personal Narratives Group, 1989, see Murray 2014b, 468), Murray concludes:

> [Gay migrant] narratives are situated at the intersection of human agency and social structure, simultaneously revealing agency or subjectivity and the ways in which larger socio- political forces such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, racism, and political and economic systems constrain individual lives.

In the same vein, Held and McCarthy point out how female gay migrants' intersectional location is *not* considered in the British refugee system (2019, 146). Further, they also note how the understanding of homosexuality is based on the Western (homo)normative gay identity: "Decision-makers often do not consider how the expression of sexuality is shaped by the intersections of other aspects of their lives" (ibid, 149). Foregrounding mental health challenges, or mental (dis)ability, as yet another intersectional category defining the social location of many LGBTQI refugees, Held and McCarthy point out that gaining refugee status does not stop the multiple oppressions of the people in question (2019, 147), rather, in many cases the experienced persecution has led to internalized homophobia making it difficult to identify with others sharing the same location (ibid, 152). Furthermore, arriving in the United Kingdom, the Black lesbian refugees encounter homophobia that they thought they had left behind: they are still positioned unfavorably but now by different configurations of oppressive systems, refugeeness being the cross-cutting determiner (ibid, 152–123).

Belonging refers to the emotional attachment of "feeling at home" and thus provides certain emotional aspect for examining the various attachments and dislocations of the globalized present. Drawing on Yuval-Davis, "home" may be conceptualized as specific physical location accommodating particular social environment as well as a cyberspace that enables self-realization that is not possible in the immediate context of an individual. Further, various belongings lay the foundations for human psycho-social existence and well-being; however, belongings get articulated and politized only when threatened. Yuval-Davis explains how social and political belonging is constructed of social locations, people's identifications, and value systems. (2011, 10–12.) Politics of belonging frames the global and globalized local, "glocal" power processes (ibid, 26–29) with questions such as "who gets to decide who belongs and on what basis", "what are the signifiers of belonging", "what are the limits of home and how are they secured", and further: "how to struggle against marginalization". The questions of belonging and examining the concept of home is relevant in the time of mass migrations and displacement. Especially when it comes to personal safety, home can be far away and at times it may be detached from any physical location altogether. Understood in the framework of belonging, home grounds the self emotionally and theoretically in time and space.

In addition to identity construction and refugeeness, Lee and Brotman analyze the experiences of sexual minority refugees within Canadian migration regime through belonging (2011). In some cases, the asylum process requires "refutation of home" in a sense that they are expected to describe their originating countries negatively to legitimate the asylum claims (ibid, 258) which leaves them symbolically homeless without any guarantees of future attachments. According to Lee and Brotman, the ways the immigrants manage to relate and network within the receiving community are salient to their survival after multiple exclusions or experiences of *not* belonging. However, the encountered racism within gay communities and homophobia in their respective ethnic or national communities produce new kinds of intersectional marginalization. Lee and Brotman emphasize the importance of inclusive spaces of affirmation and support to combat feelings of detachment and alienation. (Ibid, 259–261.) In his case study on LGBT Café / Queers without Borders in Helsinki, Qureshi reflects the possibilities of utilizing such spaces of resistance in questioning the normative understanding of racial identity (2018, 94). Established by group of activists, The LGBT Café / Queers without Borders project offers an "agenda-less" and "free" once-a-month meeting palace in Helsinki for sexual minority immigrants and native Finns. Qureshi suggests the LGBT Café / Queers without Borders differs from many other European organizations in that it has no funding and it does not deploy the "other" discourse into its "agenda-less agenda", which is exactly where its transgressive power lies. (Qureshi 2018, 101–104.) For a multiply excluded individual, such a safe space gives a possibility connect without the need to identify with any predetermined category allowing more diverse belongings.

1.5 The Gay Muslim Subject

As discussed above, Muslim scholars have traditionally condemned all homosexual acts referring to the Islamic religious law that is based on the Quran and to the extensive collection of the *Hadith*, "traditions" (Wafer 1997, 87). In a Muslim society, due to the religion's political nature (Hämeen-Anttila 2006, 60–62) everyone, also the people of other faiths and non-believers, must position themselves in relation to Islam. Thus, religious orientation is an unavoidable facet also for the identity processes of LGBTQI people living Muslim societies or in the sphere of their influence.

Focalizing his analysis on identity formation and movement within queer Muslim group Al-Fatiha, Rouhani draws attention to the need of understanding the complexity of diasporic queer complicities defined differently by sexuality, ethnicity and gender (2009, 173). Approaching gay Muslim identity through spaces of belonging and situatedness, Rouhani's "queer complicity" resonates with intersectionality. The preferred use of term “queer” over “gay” conveys an important meaning with both. In addition to referring more inclusively to the diverse nonheterosexual, “queer” marks a difference to the normalized mainstream homosexuality. Rouhani notes how this comes forth in queer activist thought in the United States: “[…] gay politics capitulate and are inauthentic while queer politics resist and are thus authentic” (2009, 160). In other words, “queer” disrupts and directs attention to difference, whereas “gay” implies conformity.

Rahman represents queer theory and intersectionality as mutually constituent and argues how “gay Muslim” is a social location that challenges the essentialist, monolithic understandings of culture and the Huntingtonian reading of the Islamic world and the West that is incompatible and oppositional. In both social realms, being gay and Muslim simultaneously appears impossible. Depending on perspective, gay identity is considered as profoundly Western construct that has emerged in the fight for gender equality and sexual freedom in secular liberal democracy and is per se incompatible with unemancipated patriarchal Islamic culture. Further, “gay” is seen as alien perversion exhibiting the moral inferiority of the West that can never be in line with true Islamic values. However, the gay Muslim lives lived in various ways disrupt the mutual incompatibility thesis and call for more fluid conception of identity and culture. (Rahman 2010, 945–946.) Thus, it is not so much the intersectional social location gay Muslims occupy *within* either eastern or Western realm that makes them vulnerable to discrimination but their position *in-between* (ibid, 945). Rahman points out how queer approach is necessary in exposing the multiple oppressions that take place in the intersections of ethnicity, religion and sexuality, and how the queer lens in examining the lived experiences of nonheterosexual Muslims produce more comprehensive understanding. Moreover, approached theoretically, queering this particular social location challenges the existing ontologies of “Muslim” and “gay”. The “impossibility” of the queer Muslim lives that are constantly negotiated in their intersections question the putative coherence of the dominant identity categories that are based on binaries and exclusion. (Ibid, 953–954.) Pointing towards queer transgression and intersectional standpoint of the marginalized, Rahman regards “[…] intersectionality as productively queer, and queer as necessarily intersectional” (2010, 944).

Examining the media representations in the Netherlands, Akachar (2015) sheds light on the ways the dominant discourses on sexuality and ethnicity marginalize gay Muslims as their social location falls outside the normative scope of the discourses in question. In the context of sexualized nationalism and *Othering*, the Muslim religiosity is racialized as opposite to the liberal Dutch values. Further, along with the emerged homonationalism, gay identity has become salient in the production of Muslim Other. Progressive gay rights have gained significance in characterizing Dutchness in public discourse following the immigrant attacks on LGBTQI people in the country leading to reinforcement of the “Muslim-or-gay” binary. Akachar suggests how using intersectionality as an analytical tool *unveils* the variety of Muslim gay identities that present a counter-narrative to the artificial confrontation of (homo)nationalist identity politics. Furthermore, intersectional analysis points towards the mechanisms that produce relative privileges and oppressions of minorities. The prominent secularization thesis in the European narrative of modernity and the progress of the neoliberal state is challenged by emerging Muslim religiosity. The consequent uneasiness experienced by Europeans when encountering Islam “within” is embodied in the disruptive figure of the gay Muslim immigrant, who is left “[s]tuck between islamophobia and homophobia.” (Akachar 2015, 173–187.)

2. Theory

2.1 Queering Intersectionality

In the previous chapter, whilst laying the ground for the analysis below, I have touched upon various themes and concepts central to intersectionality theory. Moreover, the multiply marginalized social location of a gay Muslim subject and the consequences it has to the individual in lived reality has started to appear. How, then, to proceed with the topic at hand in the complex intermingle of identities, social categories, power structures, cultural particularities and interculturalities, cyberspaces and changing localities, longings and belongings, genders and sexualities, mundane and divine, love and lust, and at times, life and death. So many borders to cross! In this dissertation, drawing on Collins and Bilge (2016), I use intersectionality as an analytical tool to understand the complexity of the particular social location and the accompanying human experience. By setting the human experience as a starting point, intersectional analysis aims to shed light on the multitude of factors that produce inequality and consequent discrimination and oppression (e.g. Zambrana and Dill 2009, 2). Audre Lorde’s description (1984, 122) of her personal struggle clarifies the importance of intersectional approach and reflects the experience of many:

> I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self.

As a term, intersectionality was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her benchmark essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”; however, intersectional approach has its roots in the Black feminist movement and Critical Race Theory (e.g. Carbado et al. 2013, 303; Wong 2019, 38). Further back, the intersectional thinking is said to appear already in the often-cited speech of Black abolitionist Sojourner Truth who challenged the narrow understanding of womanhood in the first wave “White” feminism (Yuval-Davis 2011, 4). With her criticism, Truth captured the essence of what was to become intersectionality: being Black woman is more than just being Black or a woman exclusively. Yet another milestone mentioned in the reviews on trajectory of intersectional approach is The Combahee River Collective, assembled together by small group of lesbian social feminists who found the black feminist movement as exclusive to the manifoldness of their identifications. The Collective first articulated heterosexism as a “system of power” amongst the other interlocking systems of oppression. The experienced homophobia within Black feminist movement called for better structural analysis to expose and intervene the ways the different social determiners come together and produce the multiply oppressed social location of the Black lesbian woman. Further, the empowering consciousness of shared social location resulted in collective action against the multiple oppression. (Collins and Bilge 2006, 68–71.) Furthermore, the “integrated analysis and practice” that the Collective demanded already in 1977 (Yuval-Davis 2011, 4), and the resulting “intersectional synergy” (Collins and Bilge 2016, 48) gave impetus for identity politics to develop as an integral part of the emerging intersectionality (ibid, 116). It is the twofoldness above, rooted in the social movements of the past century, that Collins and Bilge set as a starting point in understanding intersectionality (2016, 31). According to them, intersectionality is hence an analytical tool of critical inquiry and praxis, the two mutually-informing facets, that together “[…] produce important new knowledge and/or practices” (ibid, 32–33).

Since the Black feminist movement in America and the “three big” of intersectional thinking (race, class and gender), the number of potentially intersecting social categories examined has increased exponentially and the configuration of categories vary depending on the particular analysis (Yuval-Davis 2011, 6). To address the state of the Black lesbian woman in America, The Combahee River Collective added (homo)sexuality to the trinity thus conceptualizing heterosexism as system of oppression interlocking with other similarly interlocking systems of power, namely racism, capitalism and sexism. Collins and Bilge point out however, that it was not only the Black feminists amongst who the intersectional thinking developed in America: Latin, Native American and Asian-American women came together with African-American women in various occasions. Consequently, “Women of Color” became a political category that enabled alliances between women who were *differently* marginalized by race, class, gender, sexuality and so forth without compromising their identifications. (Ibid, 71–73.) Considering the topic of this dissertation, it is noteworthy to mention here that according to Collins and Bilge, the scholars of Indigenous/Native studies were also amongst the first to introduce queer theory with an intersectional framework, albeit within decolonizing discourse (2016, 74). Acknowledging the value of its development through the common efforts of people fighting their varying oppressions, Collins and Bilge credit Crenshaw for crystalizing intersectionality further in her subsequent essay “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991) in which she brought together the distinctive features of what was to become intersectionality as critical inquiry and academic field of study (2016, 81).

Collins and Bilge conceptualize the underlying ethos into six core ideas of intersectionality as an analytical tool (2016, 25). First, intersectionality postulates multiple causes for experienced and/or observed *social inequality*, that is to say, no social category alone can be accounted for marginalization of people: it is produced in their intersections. Secondly, *power* works behind, in and through all social behavior. In intersectionality, power is conceptualized as always relational and organized hierarchically. Human experience, for example identity, is thus influenced by power relations, or “interlocking, mutually constructing or intersecting systems of power” such as racism, class exploitation, sexism and so forth. (Ibid, 7–9.) Going back to the resident permit card case presented in the beginning, the gay asylum seekers rejected at club entrance were multiply marginalized because, in addition to being gay, they were also asylum seekers.

Power is working through the structures of nation state and its institutions, transnational corporations and other organizations of various kinds (ibid, 11–12, 117, 179). For analytical purposes, power is framed in four overlapping domains. *Disciplinary power* refers to the multiple ways power works through uneven execution of rules and conventions in every day social contexts. (Ibid, 7–9.)The asylum seekers were subjected to disciplinary power, for example, when the residence permit cards were not accepted for age verification despite the fact that the card was their only “official” document, includes all the necessary information needed and is as difficult to forge as Finnish driver’s license. Thus, even if the card is not considered as official identity document, it would have served as a reliable enough document for age verification as it later also did. However, one can only speculate about the attitudes behind the decision of not to accept the card in the first place. Furthermore, how different social locations influence human interaction and position them differentially in varying contexts falls under *interpersonal domain of power* (ibid, 7–8). Having arrived only recently, the asylum seekers had only limited knowledge of Finnish language and cultural conventions which prevented them from standing up for their rights or interpret the situation enough to do so, which lead to a situation of unequal communication. The fact that the Finnish migration system confiscates official identity documents from asylum seekers and provides them with imperfect document such as the residence permit card, exemplifies the *structural power* at play in the situation. *Cultural domain of power*, on the other hand, exemplifies how ideas and norms are reiterated, reproduced and challenged in cultural practices and through media (ibid, 10–11, 179). The fact that age verification is required in the first place points towards Finnish alcohol consumption and socializing culture. Further, for sexual minorities, nightclubs have traditionally been the place to socialize and meet people without being subjected to disapproving attitudes which underlines the importance of gay clubs for LGBTQI refugees and their integration.

Thirdly, continuing with the core ideas, intersectionality emphasizes *relationality*: social categories, race, class or gender have no cogency each alone, or rather, they do not even exist separately. In other words, social categories are always constructed and positioned in relation to others. Furthermore, the fourth core idea of intersectionality is *contextuality*. The specific context of any social phenomenon under scrutiny adds a modifying layer for intersectional analysis and "grounds" the analysis. (Collins and Bilge 2016, 28–29.) In the residence permit card case, the interplay of racism, heterosexism, homophobia, (homo)nationalism and asylum seeker status (and others) lead to discrimination in that particular occasion, for example. The manifold contextually transforming interconnectedness described above points towards the fifth core idea of intersectionality, namely *complexity* that reflects the intersectional approach to reality. Rather than simplifying complicated matters, intersectionality pursues the complexity in order to expose the discriminating power structures. (Ibid, 12, 29.) As much as intersectional thinking gets its impetus from the experienced oppressions and observed inequalities, it is the transformative aspect that makes it popular amongst activists and scholars calling for *social justice,* which consequently is the sixth core idea of intersectionality (ibid, 29–30). The event organizers expressed solidarity in walking out of the club and joining the asylum seekers in resistance against the encountered injustice. Further, the cross-sectional alliance managed to change the door policy at least in that particular nightclub and demonstrate how racist practices become normalized imperceptibly if not challenged.

Intersectionality has been criticized for essentialist tendencies in its focus on identities that assume certain fixity. Questioning such notion as too limiting, the critics emphasize the fluctuating nature of identities. Such processual "subjectivities" presume that the individual has relative agency in their construction through changing contexts. Collins and Bilge remark however, that intersectionality acknowledges this as the individual is thought to deploy varying identity combinations to best attend the given context. On the other hand, they agree that group identities have a tendency to unify induvial experience and suppress variation. (Ibid, 124–125.) Intersectionality comes together with queer theory in rejecting "either/or" binary thinking. However, whereas intersectional frame can be formulated as "both/and" (ibid, 27), queer equivalent could be something in the lines of "neither/nor but other”. As with intersectionality, queer theory has roots in the civil rights movements of the 1950’ss and the 1960’s in America. However, whilst feminist movement managed to gain victories, women were still expected to remain distinctively female, that is, conventionally feminine. Men could understand women’s demands for equal rights and opportunities; however, masculinity was received for men only. (Wilchins 2014, 18–26.)

In the same vein, the gay and lesbian rights organizations “tamed” homosexuality into socially acceptable forms. In their efforts for social conformity and tolerance, sex and sexuality got detached from gender whereby great deal of the nonheterosexual expressions of gender were marginalized and homosexuality was “de-queered”. (Ibid, 31.) Wilchins argues further, how the genderless-ness of normative gay and lesbian rights discourse has led to internalized genderphobia that accounts for the “bottom shame(ing)” amongst gay men: being the receiving part in a homosexual relationship is not something you want to talk about (ibid, 32). Such phenomenon reflects the underlying (hetero)sexist power structures and how they are internalized and reproduced within Western gay culture.

Later on, in the 1980’s, the anger that was raised by the mismanagement of the AIDS crises brought the original transgression back to gay liberation movement and queer became to designate the street level resistance of the multiply marginalized nonheterosexual. This meant conceptual shift from “just getting by” with assimilationist policies and the accompanying tolerance for the conforming “gay” to questioning the normative structures at large. (Weeks 2011, 144–145.) However, it was not until 1990’s that the silenced gender did a comeback in human rights movements and in academia along with postmodernism and queer theory, now with the prefix “trans” (Wilchins 2014, 36). In examining how binary thinking (re)produces heteronormative values and structures, queer theory considers identities as constructed and fictional and argues how categories such as gender and sexuality are naturalized and presented as “fixed” by regulatory regimes (Weeks 2011, 145–146). By destabilizing this fixity, “transgender” offers an extra-binary, or queer, angle for exposing power structures and fighting marginalization. As stated by Manning: “Queer theory ultimately represents a spirit of understanding how we are essentialized and how we can undo this essentialization […]” (2009, 8). Moreover, whilst being embodied in the transgender activists fighting for their rights in the 1990’s, the queer approach has since applied to analyze structural power at large (ibid, 3). For Collins and Bilge, “queering” intersectionality means questioning the normative underpinnings of some its readings and opening new horizons for analyzing power and challenging social hierarchies (2016, 104).

2.2 Identity Trouble

As demonstrated by the academic debates over homosexuality in Arab Islamic societies, identity is often considered probative for whatever reasoning at hand. It is justifiable to ask, to what extend identity is necessary category in examining same-sex desire and its manifestations amongst Arab Muslims in the first place, unless of course, homosexual identity is the topic specifically. However, in lay discourse, people often use identity as a conceptual tool in making sense of who they are. Intersectionality theory postulate certain social categories whose combinations *contextually* position individuals differently. To what extent individuals identify with, or attach to, these categories or groups vary, as does the level of how much the consequent identifications or belongings define the self. Further, identity has proven effective in creating commonalities for political organization and action (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 5). Intersectional praxis has utilized identity as a practical category in identity politics from the very beginning and, considering the empowering impact of sharing a particular intersectional location, identity has "more to it" than just instrumental value. Consequently, using "identity" to refer to "who one is" in lay context is understandable. However, as an analytical category, "identity" is more problematic.

Brubaker and Cooper address the problematics of what they refer to as "all-purpose 'identity'" in their article *Beyond "identity*" (2000) wherein they deconstruct identity into more definite categories for more accurate analyses. The authors question the necessity of using identity as analytical category at all. According to them, it is possible to examine nationalist-talk (lay discourse), for example, without positing nation. Similarly, analysis on identity-talk is possible without applying identity (2000, 5). Consequently, adopting identity paradigm in analyzing nationalism may reify the "imaginary" category of nation and thus further reinforce nationalist sentiments. Brubaker and Cooper do not renounce the usage of identity completely; however, analysis should be explicit and avoid reinforcing such reifications. For conceptualizing social and political action that arises from "noninstrumental" basis, or when the motivation for the action is assumed to be other than just plain self-interest, Brubaker and Cooper propose replacing identity with "self-understanding" which they define as "[…]one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act", or in other words as "situated subjectivity" (2000, 17). This applies to intersectional identity politics, of course, and the "processual subjectivity" was touched upon above. Following their reasoning, the concept of "self-understanding" would dismantle "the core aspect of selfhood" from the semantical burden laid upon it by identity as it does not assume fixed boundaries and sameness: "A sense of who one is can take many forms." Further, unlike identity, "self-understanding" does not automatically posit Western conventions of how the self is understood upon non-Western experience. (Ibid, 17.) Furthermore, “self-understanding” is potentially useful in “cross-cultural” intersectionality as “self-understandings” are formed in the existing discourses and need not to be articulated in order to “inform activity” (ibid, 18).

Moreover, the subjective nature of “self-understanding” resonates with experience, empowerment and agency that all belong to the very core of intersectional theory and praxis. However, as discussed above, intersectionality’s affinity with the social categories that constitute the various and changing social locations imply certain fixity. Even if identity is thought to be articulated, performed and negotiated contextually, the “core aspect of selfhood” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 7) that is strategically represented differently from situation to situation by the individual, is assumed somewhat stable and fundamental. Further, collective identities assume a level of sameness (ibid, 7) and present a paradox for the unfits: how to belong in a group from the outside. Furthermore, the intersectional dual approach blurs the line between analysis and practice. Thus, whilst seeking synergies, the mutual informativity of the categories of practice and the categories of analysis may participate in reifying the “fictional” as particular kind. In the realm of identity politics this is intentional to some degree, of course, but becomes more problematic in academic inquiry.

In the framework of politics of belonging, Yuval-Davies conceptualizes identity as processual narrative, or as a story we are creating of ourselves to achieve personal and collective order. As discussed above, the social locations people occupy position them differentially in the power hierarchies; however, the positions of locations vary across time and space. Further, separate categories that construct the social locations have different, similarly varying positionalities and carry varying meanings in different historical and geographical locations. Thus, Yuval-Davis emphasizes the importance of intra-categorical understanding to complement inter-categorical research. Furthermore, the possibilities that an individual has to move up in the power grid is a matter of personal ability and depends on which of categories ascribed in birth can be transcended. (Ibid, 12–13.) Identity narrative is an explanatory story about identifications with particular groups and the individual features that characterize us. Narrative identity is not fixed but contextual as its processual nature predicates reflexivity, agency and mutability; further, individuals value belongings and characteristics differently from each other and from situation to another. When under a threat, the “emotional components” become more salient and individual prioritizes their survival in expense of the others. (Ibid, 14–15.) Further, Yuval-Davies explains the multiple ways the self is understood to be composed through exclusion. She points out, however that because of unequal power positions, inclusions and exclusions are asymmetrical. Consequently, identifications can be forced upon people, and the hence apparent proximity of social location to identifications and belongings may result in internalizing the forced identifications. However, the facets should be kept analytically separate not the least because it potentiates reidentifications and resistance. (Ibid, 17–18.)

When it comes to the Arab Islamic homosexuality discourse, the centrality of identity is understandable considering the protagonist ethos that is conveyed, and it is this political aspect and the related defining categorization that Massad criticizes (see above). Furthermore, building on Hall (2011, 3) even if fluid and vague, through its multiple connotations, identity still provides sort of a focal point for understanding homosexuality also “cross-culturally”. Referring to the “sloppy” usage of identity in analysis, Brubaker and Cooper warn against participating in reification of the categories (2000, 9); however, this does not exclude “strategic identifications”. Hence, if identifying as gay at some point becomes not only strategically sensible option but also source of personal empowerment in the intercultural and transnational reality of an individual, “gay” may well serve as a major defining aspect of the self and should be studied as such. In this dissertation, “identity” is conceptualized much in the lines of “self-understanding” that is (re)constructed in continuous narration, negotiated contextually and informed by various identifications, attachments and belongings. Thus, “gay identity” may take many forms; however, homosexual orientation, as “something more” than just sexual or emotional desire and behavior, does not cease to exist.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participant Selection

Unquestionably, the situational factors affected the participant selection. The interviews took place in the winter 2016–2017 following the large-scale migrations of 2015. With the help preexisting contacts within the local gay community and with the help of LGBTQI refugee activists, I was introduced to individuals with versatile yet consistent enough profiles to tackle the questions at hand. Hence, I have collected empirical data from four self-identified gay men and one transwoman with Iraqi Muslim background. The participants had arrived in Finland as asylum seekers and were aged 23 to 28 with educational background varying from few years of elementary school to a college degree. Further, socio-economically they all identified with middle-class; however, one of them noted his family is belonging to a tribe that is recognized as religiously oriented and it is customary for the male members of family to become religious scholars. With “Muslim background” I refer to individuals who were born and raised in the areas where Islam has traditionally been the determinative private and societal factor which in the present case is Arab Islamic Middle East, or rather, Iraq. The self-articulated religiousness of the participants varied from devoted believer to habitual, or cultural Muslim and non-believer. Two participants mentioned that their families are “mixed”, meaning the mother is Christian, and that this has implications to their social status. Further, all the participants had arrived in Finland as asylum seekers and were in different stages of asylum process at the time of the interviews. The participants identified themselves as gay men; however, as discussed above, the ambiguous meaning of the concept “gay” and the various ways it is understood are considered throughout the analysis. Accepting the transwoman as participant is justifiable by her similar, but yet distinctive situation and experiences that further illuminate the life in the persecuted fringes. To protect their privacy, I have re-named the participants arbitrarily with common Iraqi names as Akram, Kasim, Lina, Samer and Sami.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews have been chosen as they will allow for more conversation-like circumstances that make the participants feel more comfortable in order to elaborate their experiences. The method posits certain frames for the research but leaves room for new themes appearing from the interviews and reformulation of the original research question yet keeping the focus in the topic. (Galletta 2012.) Further, I have chosen semi-structured interviews in order to underline the subjectivity of the migration experience as such but also because the very intimate nature of the matters in involved. The themes prepared for the interviews were based on intersectional assumptions and pre-existing research on queer migration discussed above. Further, the actual questions were left open-ended leaving room for reflection and potential new themes. More or less intuitively, the speech became framed chronologically into participants’ life stories and migration narratives. However, when the stories were diverging too far from the subject matter or when something potentially salient were left too vague, defining sub-questions guided the participants back to the thematic at hand.

Despite all the good efforts, it is important to recognize the power positions at play in such interview situations. The participants had recently arrived in the country and had gone through one or more interviews with the migration officers and some of them were still waiting for further hearings and/or decisions on their appeals. Consequently, the academic thesis research and the interviews at hand may be associated with the migration system creating a need to “perform”, or to tell what is expected. The fact that the interviews were conducted in a “nonheterosexual safe space” does not mean there were no hierarchies at play. However, rather than seeing the interviews only as point of potential re-traumatization, I suggest being heard and recognized this way has a potential to support participant’s self-actualization and well-being.

3.3 Transcription and Translation

The five interviews conducted were audio recorded and transcribed within a week after. Two of the interviews were conducted in English and three in Arabic with the help of interpreters. The other interpreter has similar background to the participants, and he knows the interviewees; thus, they felt comfortable in his presence, which enabled discussions on intimate and sensitive matters. Further, the second interpreter is a native Finn and a professional linguist, which allowed accurate translations and comfortable atmosphere. The two interviews conducted in English potentiated different kind of dynamics and privacy despite the occasional but minor language challenges. Despite the certain level qualitative difference of the collected data, the transcribed interviews are contentually comparable and, in the end, mutually supportive.

3.4 Ethical Issues

I recognize the necessity of absolute anonymity and protection of the participants as well as my responsibility and role as a researcher that continues after the research has been completed. Further, taking into account the potential traumatic experiences of the participants and diminishing the risk of re-traumatization (Lee and Brotman 2011, 254) the interviews did not include questions regarding persecution, (sexual)abuse or violence. However, most participants decided to open up spontaneously on the traumatic experiences they had gone through. This may be because the participants arrived in Finland fairly recently and were associating the interview with the hearings that they had to undergo with the immigration officials. Also, after long period of uncertainty and fear, some of them are, for the first time, in a relatively stable and safe situation that allows the processing of their experiences. All the participants come from Iraq. However, for the purposes of this research, disclosing the exact domicile prior to migration makes little difference. Thus, following Lee and Brotman (2011, 254–261), whenever quoting or discussing any specific participant, I have replaced or omitted all irrelevant identifiers such as names, hometown, names of reception centers, organizations or support groups etcetera. Nevertheless, relevant particulars regarding the themes at hand are discussed in a general level without making any reference to specific participants. Further, by beginning the interview sessions with “informed consent agreement” the participants were informed of the nature of this research and the measures taken to protect their anonymity and privacy including deleting the interview material after finishing the research.

3.5 Finding Meaning

Through reading the transcribed data multiple times, five major themes started to appear, and numerous minor topics stood out repeatedly. After framing the data preliminarily, I re-approached the data properly with more analytical and comparative manner, and I was able to detect certain patterns in participants' speech that helped me to conceptualize the appearing themes into following five frames: *exclusion, sexual self-understanding, oppression, agency,* and *belonging.* This directed the analysis towards examining the factors that cause marginalization and what are the power mechanisms at play. Further, the various ways the participants referred to their sexuality throughout their narrative and how their sexuality/transgender specifically made them vulnerable to oppressions of even the severest kinds raised questions about how the hostility and aggression of the immediate environment may have shaped the (sexual) self-understandings and how homosexual desire is conceptualized. However, participants speech revealed significant agency in securing their selves in different contexts and pointed towards strategic identifications, new attachments and "longing to belong". The analysis chapter is dived into two much in the lines of exclusion and belonging; however, the "sub-headlines" are provided as guidance to their subsequent themes and discourses that are loosely based on the codes formulated for the analysis. Furthermore, all the five thematic entities are considered throughout the chapter. In order to "find answers" in the research questions set in the beginning, I formulated number of sub-questions: "how is exclusion articulated"; "how do social locations and hierarchies manifest"; "what kind of power is executed"; "how is the experienced violence explained"; "how is the "self" referred to"; "which identifications/attachments are prioritized in any given situation", and so forth. The discussion-like narrative structure of the analysis addresses the complexity of the subject matter and reflects the holistic nature of intersectional approach; and moreover, it allows revisiting the themes from various angles.

4. Analysis

4.1 Home Crumbling

"Mother Said That and I Heard It"

Disciplination and feelings of alienation started early. All the gay participants trace their homosexuality into childhood feelings of being different from other boys, not being interested in what is consider "boy's things" but rather playing with girls and helping with domestic work. 23-years-old Sami describes how he was as a child:

> I knew I was gay already when I was really young…like, when I was a small boy, I was…I liked to help my mother a lot and did all kinds of house work…not so much…like boyish things…I didn't go out or anything like that.

Samer, 25, recalls of being effeminate as a boy:

> I was like nine years [old] in school […] And I want to tell you, I did not look like this before, I looked more like, kind of feminine little bit. […] I move like little bit girl…I never sat with boys, all the time with girls.

Childhood memories were generally happy for Sami and it was not before adolescence when the problems started. Samer, however, has more painful memories of being different as a child:

> I was at home, I wanted to lift something like…heavy from the floor and, I don't know why I took it in this way, but heard my mother telling to my father: "Look, look the way he lifts it, he's like girls exactly". The mother said that and I heard it.

Consequently, because of his "unmanly" behavior, Samer was taken out of school to work in an all-male environment as his parents were hoping him to take up masculine manners. He was, after all, the first child and had to be ready to take care of the family:

> I had so many responsibilities, I should be so man and macho. More masculine probably than my father…to take the responsibility of the family at some point…and I needed to get married.

Lina,23, a self-identified transwoman remembers enjoying the attention she got from boys:

> [At] the age between eight to ten, when men start to feel like men, […] I like to sit and see men coming to ask me…you know this attraction to men…any times I walk outside, those boys start to tell…like those nice things to tell for the girls and I feel like I am, really like start to be a big girl.

As she grew older, problems started with her family and her feminine appearance did not go without noticing in the neighborhood, either. Reactions were disapproving and aggressive, and it did not take long before the police started to sexually abuse Lina, then 13 years old:

> Many times, the police take me […] by force and abuse me […] I can't speak with anyone this time what happened…I tell for who? To my family? To my brother? To who? Just… because of my walk, how I walk…he stopped me, he just speak with me few words…[and heard that] my voice, clearly not masculine…direct take me.

Samer, too, was abused as a child. He thinks the separation of sexes may if not cause but at least enable such violence:

> The culture there is like, the boys need to play with the boys and men…and the girls the same, same sex people play together…and this kind of sexual aggression start by

> playing…[…] you don't know what he does to you exactly but first he just start touch your body, touch your…like, kissing you, things like that… it's almost like playing, you know, game. And even if something deeper happens, you can't speak to anyone because this effects your life inside your family. So, you can't say anything. This kind of progress can start [with] kissing, touching… [leading to] penetration even.

Above, both Lina and Samer describe how the culture of silence precludes any attempts to get help or justice. Thus here, "silencing" prohibits participants to articulate their oppressions and works to maintain heterosexist power relations through interpersonal power domain. Further, homosexuality is associated with femininity, which the participants perceived as "not appropriate", or shameful already as a child. This suggests early internalization of the heterosexist power relations, or rather, socialization in an utterly patriarchal society. Furthermore, the various verbal and nonverbal ways participants' families expressed their disapproval producing shame exemplifies how disciplinary power mechanisms are deployed to reproduce existing hierarchies and "force" them upon the subject. Moreover, honor culture sets the family in the fore of all and produce "traditional" power relations in the cultural domain.

"We Felt Good with Each Other, Have Same Feeling"

As the participants grew older, mingling with girls became difficult. Further, the desire for other boys become clearer forcing them to consider their sexuality. Some of the participants mention founding a friend in the school or neighborhood who was in a similar situation and whose company eased the feelings of being alone. Samer describes how he befriended with a boy in the same school. They both looked "different" and they were not interested in playing football but rather mingle with girls:

> We have all the time our snack different, like, those kind of Galaxy or something […] eating in front of those boys…and I remember once, he need jacket…he took my jacket from me and I told him, I give you number of my house, so you can call and return it back. […] so he came, and mother tell him to go in the room […] and he wake up me and he said he like to go out together. […] We never had any sex together or nothing like that but we felt good with each other, have same feeling.

Meeting another boy in similar situation was important to Samer. It gave him possibility to connect and to be encountered as equal without judgement or fear of being rejected. Their shared experience gave Samer something to identify with; at least they were different *together*. Sami describes how his feelings towards boys grew stronger to the point it became clear that it was his sexuality that made him experience difference:

> When I was maybe 14–15, I started to understand…I, like, had attraction towards other boys…not like in any…back then it was not sexual but it just felt more, like, interesting and then…it just felt difficult to go out with bunch of boys because I was maybe, like, more girly and I did not fit in because of that…in the beginning I just understood I was interested in boys, like , in a different way […] but it became very strong…that I could not hide it no matter what and even if I was killed, I could not hide the way I am.

In puberty, matters concerning sexuality and gender get tuned. Sami describes how his sexual orientation soon defined him to the extent that life in denial would not be possible reflecting the importance of sexuality for self-understanding. Further, Sami considered his appearance to be feminine and because of that he was uncomfortable in male company. This, again, reflects heterosexist power relations and derogatory use of “feminine” as qualifier of the social category “homosexual male”.

“You Are Just Looking in the Eyes and You Can’t Touch”

Realizing that they were sexually and emotionally attracted to men rather than women sparked whole new set of worries and fears. The participants were aware that their immediate environment and the society at large was thoroughly hostile towards homosexuality. Consequently, not only questions such as how to manage their sexuality, the social expectations, and the sin in the eyes of God arose but also, their mental and physical survival became uncertain. Akram, 26, describes how it was for him in Iraq:

> It was horrible. […] You can’t show your feelings; you can’t show anything. You are just looking in the eyes and you cannot touch, you cannot do, you cannot…make anything.

Akram describes suppression and yearning for being encountered as a whole and accepted as such. He notes how some homosexual men tried to comply with the normative expectations and establish a family; however, he did see it feasible for him:

> I know many gay guys they are married to a woman. They have a family, but they cannot do anything. […] This is our religion, and this is our normal life […] but the situation was different for me because I was looking for my freedom.

By referring to freedom, and in many other occasions, Akram implies certain agency in regard to his identity. Because he *is* particular kind, he cannot be free, or exist as his whole self within the limits of what is considered normal in his native society. Understanding the limitations of “double life” and the dangers of life in margins in Iraq, identification with "Western gay" with subsequent migration appears rational. On the other hand, men who adopt the normative male role as husband and father despite their homosexual orientation may have prioritized other identifications for maximal gain or survival in their life contexts. Notwithstanding what they *do* in secrecy. Further, the above excerpt from Akram's speech points towards the power that religion has to define normality. However, the norms do not apply to Akram as he positions himself outside the value and power systems that are counterproductive to his self-actualization, or put differently, freedom.

For some time, the participants managed live somewhat "normal" life carrying out their sexual and emotional desires for men in secrecy. Akram, too, managed to have a homosexual relationship whilst living with his boyfriend as roommates because of the school:

> I was living normal life and I had boyfriend. I was studying and I was working also in a company and then some day problems started with me.

Here, normal becomes re-defined in Akram's own terms and consequently, the "problems" become a matter of social disruption rather than identity conflict; a mechanism of self-preservation that implies strong sexual identification but positions him at odds with the society.

Sami spent time with his boyfriend in a group of like-minded friends further away their neighborhood:

> There is no actual gay places but there is some, like, coffeeshops little further from the city that we somehow understood to go…and, like, we tried to meet there so we would not be seen together…and we tried to identify each other, like, gays, by wearing black…we pretended to be like emo boys which is also considered bad but people do not connect it, like, automatically to sexual orientation.

Sami identifies with other boys in a similar situation. The group of "emo boys" with they dress codes provide peer support, some level of belonging and a relative "safe space" for at least partial self-actualization or affirmation. Further, the understanding that there are certain places where gay men meet and the fact that the boys were aware of the emo culture and its esthetics, and used it strategically, suggest that there is some kind of sub-culture and that the boys were intuitively aware that they are brought together by the characteristics that positions them unfavorably. Further, familiarity with emo culture shows how their social world is not limited to their immediate environment framed by tradition only.

”He Wanted to Kill Me”

When Akram was 20, his boyfriend was forced to marry by his family. Akram did not like this and broke up with him. However, Akram’s ex-boyfriend got mad and contacted his family and told them Akram was gay:

> My family, they just start to want me to marry a woman and something like that. They punished me for one month, like, they put me in a room, and they don’t let me go out, they don’t let me meet with the people and they don’t let me see anything.

Akram’s ex-boyfriend chose a different strategy to manage his sexuality in the antagonistic environment. Now complying with the normative heterosexist society, Akram’s noncompliance appeared as a threat especially when Akram refused to follow his ex-boyfriend’s strategy. Further, by “outing” Akram, he disidentified with “Akram’s kind” and rather presented himself as opposite, which potentially strengthened his position in the eyes of others. However, Akram was able to continue his life and studies until he bumped into a wrong guy in a gay chatroom in Internet:

> Yeah, and then we met…and I found he is a son of my uncle. I was just like first time he was gay same as me…but it was totally like, he want to, you know, like play with me, want to know exactly and show my family who I am…and then he did that and he show them who I am. […] My father, he get angry…and he want to kill me…and…he try shoot me with a gun…he shoot… but it wasn’t on my body, behind of me to make me scared. After that I decided to leave my country.

Again, drawing on Schmitt (see 1.3 above), Akram was subjected to macho behavior whereby insecure males hope to compensate their experienced inferiority; a phenomenon that would continue within Finnish Iraqi context. After Sami was caught in a situation with another boy which was considered suspicious, his father, too, tried to discipline him to follow the norm. Sami describes how his father shot family’s dog:

> We had a small yard where we kept our dog. […] And…Father took me to the yard…in Iraq, everybody has guns at home, he took me to the yard and shot our dog there in front of me and said, if he ever hears some men fuck me, what happened to this dog happens to me.

As dogs are commonly considered impure in Arab Islamic cultural sphere[6], Sami's father's action convoyed a strong cultural message of how homosexual people are positioned in the society, especially the penetratees. The experiences Akram and Sami describe above report on the prevalence of violence culture in the society which, together with the honor culture and the culture of silence, effectively disciplines the nonnormative. Further, even if Sami would manage to adjust his behavior to comply with the norm, his social leeway would still be limited to the "small yard" of his social position.

After a while "problems started" with the other participants, too. Because of her feminine appearance, Lina could not hide herself behind heterosexual/cisgender façade. Despite the negative attention she got outside, she felt relatively safe at home. However, her brother did not hesitate to show his dislike of her:

> I could probably accept people outside doing bad thing to me or like treating me…but I can't handle my brother at home. […] I remember, every time he pray […]and I pass around or near to him, he say "God forgive me" or something like that…and he stop his pray and he start again.

Lina's brother was also physically violent but for Lina, the level of loathing that was implied in brother's gestured and words was worse. Disapproval, exclusion and oppression take many forms. After her relationship ended in her boyfriend marrying a woman, problems with her brother escalated to the point that her sister, who was the only person she could trust, told her it is time to leave. Lina recalls how bad it got:

> And all the time I was afraid, of course, of my brother if he kills me, same thing. And all the time I heard from people those stories: this one, his family killed him…this one, his family kill him…so.

For Lina, too, the emotional aspect of belonging was crumbling along with the safety "home" is supposed to provide. With the support from her sister, Lina prioritized her mental and physical survival over hostile environment and imperfect "home".

"He Has Good Life There, So Much Money"

As noted by Yuval-Davis in the context of belonging, safety is important aspect of emotional attachment (2011, 10). As home becomes hostile, feelings of belonging start to crumble. As with

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[6] The Quran does not mention this, but number of *Hadith* take negative stance towards dogs. Consequently, dogs and Islam is a contested topic. (see e.g. https://www.answering-islam.org/Silas/dogs.htm.)

Akram, Lina's and Samer's experiences are harsh, too, but not uncommon. Further, also the experiences of the other participants suggest that violence is in commonly used in the efforts discipline the individuals considered as deviants to comply with the normative. Analyzing the described experiences of violence from intersectional perspective, it is the noncomformative sexuality or gender-identity that subjects the participants to abuse and violence. Young age favored the participants as children but starting from puberty, the expected identification as a man within the social group of "men" increasingly amplified the negative influence of homosexuality or transgender to their position. Lina, Sami and Samer imply how their feminine appearance made them particularly vulnerable to violence. Further, in the context of their immediate environment in Iraq, other social categories such as religion, class and level of education influence the individual possibilities and relative privileges. For example, Sami benefited from his tribal affiliation. He describes how he avoided getting killed by a militia as the threatener recognized him belonging to an established religious tribe:

> Group of guys with guns…in Iraq they go where they want…made a raid and, like, then one man who had a mask, he took me and asked if I am a son of this and this…and I said yes…so he said I will not kill you but your father can take care of it…because you belong to this specific tribe, they can knock you off.

On the other hand, Kasim suggests he and his family were ill-treated because his mother was Christian:

> When we were, like, kids and we going to relatives, they always looked to us different way…yeah…it's like there is something wrong about us…because we are not…Muslims or only Christian pair mix…there is something wrong about us… that's the way.

Samer explains how economic status, or class, affects the possibilities:

> The other guy is quite rich, he has good life there, so much money, he do sex with who he want…He can choose his people…and he's like, have his protection there with that. […] And the other one, Ahmed, he doesn't have the money to do it...don't have money or anything…and he hide, he hides his homosexuality so much.

Furthermore, education level is reflected in the ways the participants make sense of their homosexuality and what kind of strategies they have adopted to negotiate their sexuality. Similarly, the level of religiousness influences the experience. Kasim emphasize the fact his mother is a teacher and that education is highly valued in the family. He has a scientific worldview and he has adopted a strong professional identity as a [professional title]. Kasim refers to this on various occasions starting from the very beginning of the interview, "I was born in Baghdad and I am [professional title]", to the end: "[…] because I am a [professional title], I understand". Concentrating in his studies, Kasim somewhat managed with the hostile environment:

> It [being gay] became harder when I got older, teenaged and after that. It was always, every year harder and harder…but was always focused in studying, reading.

Kasim accounts his profession for his rational approach to his homosexuality:

> Many of the gays there, they don't do that because they always put religions on the way and they always lose. Because I am a [professional title]…I mean, they know they are, no matter what they do, they will go to hell, they do something against God…I don't have those feelings.

Furthermore, Kasim considers his family to be more tolerant because they are a "mixed family":

> There is a lot of families, especially in Iraq with two backgrounds…and this kind of family always open and more, like, easy going.

On the other hand, Kasim faced contempt from his paternal relatives as his mother is Christian:

> When we were, like, kids and we going to relatives, they always looked to us different way…yeah…it's like there is something wrong about us…because we are Muslim Christian pair mix…there is something wrong about you.

"God Supporting Me and Never God Left Me"

When talking about religiousness, the participants often connect tradition with conservative values. Above, Kasim also situates religion as oppositional to rationality. Disavowing religion this way "allows" his sexuality, which he hence prioritizes over religious affiliations in negotiating his identity in the context wherein the self is under threat. Akram, too, considers Islam to be incompatible with his sexual identity; however, he does not refute God completely, instead, he "privatizes" Him:

> I have my own god, like god of peace and love and good things. And the god who accept me as who I am. But my family, they pray, they read books, they read Quran. They are Muslim. But you know, like in Islam if you are gay you should die. And this thing, I was always afraid of that, like, why I cannot show them who I am.

Sami implies he might have managed his life in Iraq had he not belong to a "religious" tribe:

> Like, my uncle is Imam, and specifically in a big mosque…so he is, like, a notable preacher man…and Father and actually other relatives as well practice religion very much…but, in a way, that is exactly why I had to leave.

Further, Sami describes very early intuitive understanding of his identity being incompatible with Islam:

> Since I was very little, I have been very indifferent towards religion and it hasn't been important to me…because I have always somehow been aware…that I have other kind of way to exist and it won't be fulfilled in the religious framework.

The above excerpt suggests Sami understands his homosexuality much in the lines of "gay-as-identity". Further, he considers that this inherent trait is so fundamental that he is better off leaving his home completely rather than subject it to negotiations within religious environment.

Lina, too, considers her family very religious in a traditional, or old-fashioned way:

> My family still have the culture like grand grandfather with the religious practice, very traditional, yes…so much with the religion.

As with Kasim, Lina emphasizes her personal conception of Islam. However, more than Kasim, she has more communicative relation with God:

> I am all the time in contact, and I want to keep this contact with God, and I pray all the time to my God. And for me, I protect my Ramadan and I don't have problem about that, and this is my life, and this is my relationship with my God. And I feel all the time, really, God supporting me and never God left me.

What is apparent from the above and the many occasions God appears in her speech, for Lina, religion offers support and consolation, and religious identification ranks high in defining who she is. Furthermore, her "live" relationship with God allows her to identify as a Muslim despite being transgender. Thus, noncomformative gender identity have positioned her unfavorably in Arab Islamic society whilst at the same time, Lina has deployed religion as supportive to her identity by defining it in her own terms. Identification is hence, again, used strategically implicating agency within the identity *process*. Lina's identification as transgender woman *and* devoted Muslim makes her the bothering queer figure that challenges normative narratives.

“What I Do Is Wrong or Right?

Samer describes growing up in a “normal Muslim family”, which is not extremist or particularly conservative, either. Further, Samer explains his relationship with religion and his behavior during Ramadan:

> My parents are, like not the people like taking knives and say “pray or I kill you” …this is not happening in my family…and yeah, like normal Muslim family. For me, I spend Ramadan at work…so all the time I don’t eat already at work I return home by the time I have food, I go to eat and after drink, I have sex and I return to work. I feel it means something to me…I am not a person don’t believe, I believe about God and I want so spend Ramadan for my God.

He is obviously uncomfortable with his behavior and what he thinks is expected from a “good Muslim” seeing the two as contradictory. Nevertheless, religion offers him great support in his struggle:

> He keeps all my secrets…God, he know what, hurting me so much and he sees, feels it…and I think…all the time I am asking Him or asking the way like “God forgive me” or “God help me” or “Change the situation I am in”. […] He is all the time giving some answers about…so, he is still with me. Thank God I still feel the connection.

His identity conflict gets deeper when it comes to being gay and it is something, he has not talked about with anyone before:

> I feel normal right now. But still something inside me hurting…what’s hurting me, it’s first because I never speak about that. I didn’t tell that before already. After that I have all the time this question; what I do is wrong or right? And why I am like that... if you want to know if I am gay or straight, ok, I am gay.

In addition to religious concerns, Samer is extremely worried about being exposed as gay to his family. As mentioned above, he was abused as child by a relative, and he was left alone to deal with it. Further, his mother’s disapproval did not go unnoticed by the little boy: “[…] like girls exactly”. Despite the experiences of exclusion, discrimination and violence, Samer’s attachment to his family is strong and he feels sad for what he thinks he must leave left behind:

> If I was straight, this could be more happy and more nice…I can have family and have stable life.

The participants describe and refer to their sexual orientation at many occasions. Certainly, they are aware of the topics of this research but also, the fact that their sexuality has been, and continues to be, a major modifier of their life, shapes their speech. Except for Samer, all the gay participants experience their homosexuality as something inherent and fundamental. Samer does identify as gay; however, he connects his sexuality to the experiences of being abused and the resulting feelings of being disapproved and alone, fear, and exclusion:

> It doesn't make someone gay, but it is a person who doesn't feel, he doesn't find…a family, the presence of the family, the person doesn't find a person near to him to protect him in the good way…and he has found someone who gives attraction or gives some support but with benefit, touching…give security but with benefit, kind of using…and after you start to feel that you need this person…and you go by yourself to ask this kind of contact…to feel the protection or to feel the security and to feel good.

More than a trait that he has had from birth, Samer considers homosexuality as more of a feeling caused by his ill-treatment as a child. Further, he thinks his consequent need for safety and intimacy is abused in relationship with men. However, he does not address the sexuality of the other part in the relationship he considers unequal. This implies understanding of same-sex relationship in the lines of "status-differentiated pattern" which does not question the manhood of the "dominant" part but marginalizes the "submissive", as discussed in above in chapter 1.3. Further, this suggests internalization of the heterosexist power hierarchy which limits individual's agency and prevents strategic usage of sexual identification for empowerment and self-actualization. Nevertheless, facing existential threat to his embodied self, Samer decided to leave Iraq and is now in a situation where adopting more coherent gay identity may offer him relative benefit.

"We Are the Gay People, We Are Different"

The other three gay participants have adopted different strategies for negotiating their sexuality in their life contexts in Iraq. In their speech, understanding of homosexual orientation is built more in the terms of identity, as exemplified above by Sami's "other kind of way to exist" and Akram's quest for freedom to *be*. Kasim started to be aware of his homosexuality early in childhood "in a quiet way" and he didn't think much of it before other boys started to talk about girls at school:

> I didn't have those feelings [towards girls]and that is why I started to think I am weird or something […] I didn't choose to be gay…the same, why religions accept the handicapped or the Down Syndrome…and they accept it as God's will…how about us? So, I have always had those kinds of questions about myself… First, I was scared…but

> I only relax and start to understand what's going on, what's happening so…I didn't have those kinds of feelings like hating myself of being gay.

Kasim's quiet understanding of him being different some way already as a child points towards comprehension of homosexuality as inherent and something more than just sexual desire or behavior. Further, he was questioning the religious logic which does not recognize homosexuals as God's creation the same way it does disabilities. Along with his contemplations on homosexuality and religion, Kasim started to search information and connect with people in Internet:

> I have friends from like other countries I used to talk with in the Internet because they helped me somehow to understand myself more and more…because they know better than me...so I had the opportunity to learn from them…what I should do or…even there in Iraq there are gay websites, it's very dangerous.

Being aware of the risks surfing on gay sites, or even making Google searches on the topic as he mentions on other occasion, he made contacts with gay people in Europe and the United States. He befriended with an American gay man who has been providing significant mental support for Kasim until today. Kasim describes his relationship with him:

> I feel he is my father, too…because he was always there for me. Really, he helped me a lot.

Kasim describes the man as his "father" signaling the level of emotional attachment and the significance he gives to the relationship. As the cyber space enables transnational and intercultural identifications and attachments that better serve individual's self-realization, "home" gets detached from the immediate social and physical environment paving away for conceptual and geographical transition and new belongings. As Kasim's reasoning had led him to the same conclusion with Sami, namely that his "way of existing" is not possible under Islam and that he could not, or did not want to, suppress his homosexual desires, Kasim found alternative ways to conceptualize his sexual self in the Internet and with the support of his various online attachments. He describes how some married men he had discussed with, try to cope with the pressure conflict:

> [T]hey are back looking for boys…they say they can't change those feelings. Maybe they have family now…wife, but still they have that kind of feelings…And he is the same person, I asked one of them, I asked him: "if you discover your son is gay, what are you going to do." […] He said: "I am just going to kill him because I don't want him to feel the same way I feel." I was speechless. […] I asked, why is he looking for

> gays. He said, there is something inside him that he cannot change: ”It’s sex with men, it feels something different from women”.

Again, homosexual desire appears to be experienced as an inherent trait amongst these men; however, for them, it does not serve anything like acceptable grounds for identification. On the contrary, the stigma is so powerful they would kill their gay sons to protect them from it. Despite the fact that *being* gay is *haram,* “forbidden” in Islam, and socially in general, it does not prevent the men *doing* it in secrecy. This is exactly the “veiled” niche that, according to Schild (see above), the Islamic law “allows” for homosexual behavior in Islamic society.

When asked what he thinks homosexuality is, Akram puts emphasis on profound difference and the emotional aspect:

> [W]e are something different than the other people. We have different feeling, we have different…things…we are the gay people, we are different. We are just living…I mean like…the other people, like for example straight people, they don’t know exactly who we are. And because they don’t have our feeling, so they are always looking at us like strange people.

Further, Akram also suggest gay people share that difference, and he identifies himself as a member of that group of different people. As to clarify, Akram adds: “I don’t want to get married, I have no feeling to women.” The stories emphasize the strength of the “different feeling”. Sami explains how, when he was young, there was absolutely no information on homosexuality available for him what so ever. Nevertheless, he knew very well that he was interested in men:

> It was just so strong…the feeling I had that I knew I was interested in men…it was so strong so early already…and, like, I only heard people speaking about how forbidden it is for men to be with other men…and that way I understood it was an actual phenomenon…but it was impossible for me to struggle against it.

As can be read from the excerpts above, the participants understand homosexuality as mode of *being* rather than doing. Further, they are aware of other gay people exist, they create networks and their own code, and occasionally they gather together in places where they are not recognized. They know how the society and religion relate to homosexuality, the ways men manage to have sex and even relationships with other men, and what happens if they get caught. All this suggests that some form of a gay sub-culture, although hidden, shallow and fragile, does exist in urban Iraq today. Moreover, through sky channels, new media and transnational social networks, the appearing Iraqi gay culture and gay individuals are well informed of, and influenced by, the “Western” gay lifestyle and the identity concept it conveys. However, by no means it provides any possibility to meaningful life or self-actualization as a gay man. On the contrary, the analysis suggests that participants’ lives are constantly under threat in their native society no matter how they do, or do not, understand and practice their sexual orientation.

”I Am Not Bad, I Am Good”

As the understanding of their disadvantage and its consequences grew, the participants adopted techniques to compensate their “faultiness”. This is expressed by the participants at many occasions, most discernible in Kasim’s speech:

> [T]hey start to prove they are better people…all gays…and always they, and I am one of them, have to be top of everything because I want to prove I am not bad, I am good. I have those feelings…and all of them, I am sure they have the same way.

Kasim suggests that gay people commonly want to excel to demonstrate themselves. Further, he wants to confute the negative connotations attached to the cultural deviance he represents. Samer, on the other hand, ended up controlling everything he does to maintain masculine, straight image:

> I try to take care reality needs, I try to take care all what I do, how I walk, how I speak with the people. [I]f I see someone in front of me I need to cross, I walk behind him…because all the time I think, he sees something wrong…after he start to speak about it…so I am like controlling myself more than 100 per cent.

What arises from Samer speech throughout the interview is fear of being exposed as gay and consequently as feminine and weak, as a non-man. This points towards internalization of the identification set on him by others, or rather internalized homophobia.

Kasim describes how showing his virtuousness has an aspect of revenge:

> I have to prove myself; I have to do something to make that…it’s not about…maybe I am punishing but different way…punish what he did but not with my behavior. In different way.

More than just revenge, Kasim shows agency in that by bringing forth his virtues, he challenged the identification predefined for him, and thereby took control over his social positioning, which lead, however, to his migration.

Lina had to stay at home for her own safety as well as not to cause further shame to her family. Being afraid of her brother at home, Lina tried to be as harmless as possible and avoid the presence of her father and brothers. Further, she gave her contribution to the household by participating in domestic work:

> [A]nd I am between mother and sister helping to do stuff inside the house. My father more of the time at work so I don't see him a lot…and other brother, everyone going to work….More of my contact is with my sister and my mother…like helping doing stuff at home, cleaning vegetable or something so I clean with her and things like that.

Regardless of Lina fulfilling the role that was in line with her gender identity, no matter how "good girl" she was, being transgender prevented her inclusion and made her even more vulnerable to violence.

"I Have Made Other Kind of Decision"

The participants strived to comply with the norm and compromised their sexuality to large extend. Further, they tried to excel in different areas of life to "legitimize" their belonging. Nonetheless, at some point, the situation escalated to the point they had to leave. Kasim's discerning aunt helped him to flee the country after he told her that it was impossible for him to stay:

> My father's sister, she asked me why…I said I am not happy here. She said: "that's it, I am not going to ask more."

When Sami was caught in a suspiciously intimate situation with another boy and was closed to his room by his father. His mother wanted to safe him from eventually getting killed in the name of family honor and let him free. Sami first fled to another city, where he soon came to the conclusion that leaving Iraq is the only way:

> [A]nd I, then, wrote a letter to mother…just explaining, that, as the situation is such that they are ready to kill me, so, I have made other kind of decision…that she doesn't have to be worried about me.

Lina, too, had moved to a rental flat hiding her family before her sister, who had been supporting and defending her, thought it was time for Lina to leave:

> I be living there and only contact with my sister, my sister helping me a lot with my paper and all the paper I needed to leave the country. […] My sister she be pushing me to left the country, and she tell : "You need to left, you don't need to stay here anymore

> because your brother, he seems like he’s serious to take the decision to kill you, so it’s not anymore safe for you. Go out from here. “

In the case of Lina, her sister was a trusted ally, who accepted Lina as transgender although she did not approve Lina having sexual relationships with men:

> [S]he has been seeing how much I have been suffering and how much really people hurting me and doing bad things so for that she’d more like the person to take part in my life and protecting me in this way. […] She all the time tell, you are, and the other, it’s the creation of God. […] If you have sex with same sex person, she doesn’t like it and she’d say all the time : “this is *haram,* this is not accepted, it is true the God create you like that and you are someone, you look like this but you can’t have sex”. I felt little shame, sometimes I smile, sometimes I just turn my head somewhere, my face but I never answer anything.

Lina’s sister’s stance towards transgender further illuminates the narrow role that the Iraqi society is able to provide for LGBTQI people at best. To be able to *somewhat* survive in Iraq, Lina’s life was limited to the private female sphere of her home where she was tolerated but still vulnerable to signs of disapproval and random acts of violence of his brother. Further, even if it was accepted that she was “God’s creation”, her experienced gender was not respected, instead, she was considered more as a freak. Hence, Lina’s femininity confined her similarly to cis-girls but without possibility to ever marry. On the other hand, even if she was still regarded as a male, her femininity prevented her from the privileges of men. The gay participants, too, were assigned with such an “impossible life” were they to stay in Iraq. As the society does not provide any such role that would enable homosexuality to actualize in a conventional or normative way, the homosexual individuals are forced into margins in case they do not fully adopt heterosexual male role and successfully comply with it. However, as apparent from the above, such compliance is rarely possible.

Nevertheless, other categories that define subject’s social location have given the participants relative and/or situational privilege in relation to each other. The gay participants are male, which gives them more leeway to work and move outside home regardless of being disadvantageously positioned within the heterosexist power system. However, as a transgender woman, Lina’s possibilities are more restricted as she does not comply with normative gender roles and due to her feminine appearance, she was unable hide her nonnormative gender identity. Socioeconomical class is referred to, when noted how wealthy men have more freedom to carry out their same-sex desires, or how their economic situation privileges them. Further, in Iraqi social context, tribal affiliations define individual’s social location and has an influence on how he is positioned in the social hierarchy. Tribal system is touched upon above in the case of Sami, whose affiliation to a prominent religiously profiled tribe gave him situational benefit. Belonging to either major branch of Islam was mentioned by the participants at few occasions pointing towards the idea that the Sunni/Shia division does have relevance to the social structure in Iraq; however, the participants did not consider it as major factor to their experience. By contrast, "mixed families" with Muslim father and Christian mother were looked down upon. Furthermore, Kasim's education and professional status bettered his social status and added to is his personal ability to cope with the aggression he was subjected to due to his sexuality.

4.2 New Cross-Roads

"Once I Left Iraq, the Feeling of Fear Was Gone"

After the decision to leave Iraq was made, the participants first fled to Turkey and Istanbul. Someone from their family, typically female relative such as mother, sister or aunt, helped them to gather necessary travelling documents and provided the participants financially. Further, all the participants entered Europe by crossing the sea to the Aegean Islands in eastern Greece. Akram and Kasim described the boat trip in detail. After the first attempt had failed because the boat sank just after departure, Akram managed to cross to Greece the following night. For him, the experience was traumatic:

> It was really horrible. I cannot remember it. I don't want. But I remember that…I don't know what I feel. It's really horrible. It's not normal. There was a lot of people and women and kids. They were screaming inside the water, I don't know exactly when you will die or will you arrive, you don't know…The waves was so high and the water was coming inside of the boat…always like going right and left…was trying to take out the water out from the boat…and after five hours we arrived is was the island was so close for us…like, the boat was, like, completely full of water, we trying to take it out…and then we, we went out of it and then we arrived. […] And I wasn't like believe that we just arrived.

The boat Kasim took almost sank, also, as it was overloaded, and the sea was rough. Nevertheless, he describes how feelings of relief bypassed the fear:

> Once I left Iraq, the feeling of fear was gone. […] I was drowning there, and I was smiling…because I am so proud what I did, and I said no matter what's waiting for me, even if I am dead, at least wasn't killed like by some people they want kill me because I am gay. You know, that kind of feelings.

For Kasim, the crossing marked the culmination of his struggle. He was no longer subjected to the oppression by people but was *equally* with the others at the mercy of the sea. He had managed to brake the shackles that kept him from self-realization. The way Kasim describes how he felt reflects the fundamental value of sexual orientation to his self-understanding: suppressing it would threaten the existence of his whole self as much as expressing it in Iraq threatened his physical life.

“Like You Were a Yard Bird”

After the participants had made their way to Athens, they continued up north with busses and by foot. As they were travelling with mixed crowd of other Muslim refugees, they were careful not to draw attention to themselves or their sexuality. Thus, during the journey, they were still positioned according to the norms of their native society whilst at the same time finding their way as homosexual (Muslim) refugees trough Europe and the migration system. Sami describes how Islam continued to influence negatively his life:

> Religion was a still a problem because we were moving in, like, this group of Iraqis and similarly they belong to that society I was running way…so, I was battered…and it was dangerous because they anyhow sensed that I was different […]

Not to raise any suspicions, Kasim also tried to stick to himself. Further, he recalls feelings of certain detachment or self-reliance, adventure even:

> I don’t…err…like…don’t talk with people unless they talk with me. I never talk with them…because I don’t know, what they are going to ask, and I don’t know […] yeah…so it was quite…hard…but it’s funny, some way… it’s experience, like when you left home and nobody know about you, there is no phone, there is no anything.

Despite all the hardship, the participants speak about the journey with some nostalgy, as something that they are proud of and as something that made them grew as human beings. Sami describes how, in contrast to Kasim above, a sense of belonging developed en route and how he felt free:

> There were many people…it was kind of companionship on the way…with who we travelled. The crossing was tremendously impressive, of course…but the whole journey, really, in that same group…we went to Austria and Sweden…and you felt like, like you were a yard bird that is now free to fly from place to place.

Despite the constrains that travelling within a group of Iraqis set upon them, the participants describe how certain promise of freedom prevailed during their journey. The narrative of transiting from oppression to freedom is shaped by actual geographical movement underlining the pivotal nature of the experience. Akram speaks about his feelings after exhausting trip from Serbia:

> You know, the thing, I was dreaming about freedom, all of my life. When I arrived to Austria, I just said: that’s it, that’s all. I did, what I should do. I just finished 80 per cent from my way. Then I just saw Finland in front of my eyes: I want to go there. And I want to do that.

In addition to the physical hardship and freedom, the journey was generally described, again, in the terms of fear, violence, exclusion and loneliness; moreover, feelings of sadness for leaving their homes alternated with the hope of possibilities future may entail. Lina mentions how she missed her family:

> During the trip I didn’t have no friend at all, just I walk by myself and following. It is so difficult to be separate from the people you love.

“And He Took Me to the Barber”

Language skills benefitted Akram and Kasim to manage the journey more in their own terms, whereas Lina, Sami and Samer had to trust the people they were travelling with. The participants’ disadvantageous position as refugees, or rather as asylum seekers in migration, was exploited for economic gain. The participants had relatively decent budgets; however, they had to use most of their money for the boat trip to Greece and special bus or truck rides that took them across the Balkans. Kasim did not want to spend the little money he had left, which made travelling harder:

> [T]here is too hard…if you get sim card, you have to buy phone too and I was too scared to spend money because if I…some people, if they don’t…if they need money, their family send to them…actually, I don’t have that at that time…and I have to save that money.

Kasim refers to the unequal economical basis that affect the possibilities migrants have on their journey. Further, he implies how gays as “disowned” by their families do not have similar possibilities to receive money from them. Having very little money meant lots of walking, sleeping on the streets and forests, occasionally refugee shelters. Akram, however, managed to get a sim card which enabled him to make contacts with local gay men in various dating applications. Akram thinks the hardest thing was to trust people but he has good experiences of what could be called gay solidarity:

> And then I…like in Athens, also there is a one guy, I met with him on Grindr [a smartphone gay dating application] …so we was talking and he was saying let me help

> you and these kind of things. […] Like three or four days in the forest and one day in the water, in the sea and nine days in [the island] and one day from there to Athens…was looking really horrible. And he took me to the barber, we cut my hair and cut a little bit from my beard. And then we went to have a lunch together and he just told me where you want to go. I told I want to go to Thessaloniki […] and yeah, then he got me ticket for the train. He bought it for me.

In a similar manner, Akram met with a gay couple in Vienna who let him stay for two nights at their place so he could sleep and rest. Akram was suspicious at first, though, as he understood his vulnerable situation and the consequences trusting wrong people may have. However, Akram trusted his instincts:

> I don't know, you know like, there is some people when you are looking at their pictures…and for example I came to meet with them first…I put [something] between me and them. Talking to them about many things, just to start to feel more comfortable […] we are not stupid, we can know the people like them.

Thus, being a homosexual man worked for Akram's benefit as he was able to deploy his gay identity and relate with other gay men:

> Actually, the gay applications helped me, yeah, helped me…without the gay application I was sleeping on the street for three days more than three days.

These first encounters may have contributed to Akram's near to idealized image of Western gay life and to his willingness to identify with it despite the negative experiences that he also has encountered.

At first, Samer was travelling alone but in Hungary he joined people he knew from old. He emphasizes their heterosexuality and the threat it poses:

> I met guys from my neighborhood, two guys of my age, and we continued together all the way here. They were much straight, this is important. […] Those people are, like, ready if they see me with someone gay, he can call easily to my family to tell…he is proud to do it probably…and my family would tell him, "kill him now" and he would do it.

Hence, Samer was still restrained by the norms of his native society and did not share the hope of freedom experienced by other participants. Instead, the past local stretched far on his journey keeping him hypervigilant in hiding his sexuality. The ways the other participants speak retrospectively about their journey reflect its symbolical importance as marking the new beginning. Akram was describes empowerment:

> The journey teach me many things, […] teach me like to be strong and always put goal on your mind. That's what I learned from it. Yeah…but it was like big challenge in my life. I am very proud about myself. Like, I just did what I should do, and I was looking for my, for my future.

"Yeah. My Sexuality and Homosexuality"

After arriving in Finland, the participants were officially introduced to the migration system for the first time. Suddenly, after being subjected to oppression and discrimination for all their lives because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, they were faced with a situation where they were actually privileged because of it. Their reactions varied. Lina had a positive encounter with the officials:

> I felt little bit afraid because I don't and know anyone and I don't know what's this country and what's people here think about us but the time I speak with some woman, I remember he be a woman, and I tell her I am this and this and this… "don't really be worried, you are safe here and it's fine". So, I explained her my situation and she says: "normal this", and she was smiling little to me.

Above, Lina describes a short but meaningful moment of identity affirmation. Akram, too, felt comfortable enough to mention his homosexuality. Further, he was consistent throughout the asylum process:

> [The officials asked:] "Why you came here?" I just told them because of my sexuality. Yeah. And they didn't go through that on the immigration, first interview and the second interview they just asked me like, shortly…to just said like…the reason…that let you leave your country…I said, my sexuality…that I am a gay guy. Yeah. My sexuality and homosexuality.

The manner Akram refers to his sexuality in his speech suggests solid gay identity and sexual identity ranks high in defining himself. At many occasions, like Akram, Kasim refers to his self-reliance and agency. He brings forth his English skills again when describing the first meeting with the police:

> This officer, he came and said, wait for the translator…we have to make…like some kind of file to you or something. I said, please, I don't want any translator. […] He said, why. I told him I just don't feel safe, okay. And I ask him if we speak English, he said

> of course, then he start the interview without translator, yeah, and after that he shake my hand and said welcome here, you are safe here, and being gay here is normal.

Kasim was aware that translators often come from similar background with him and did not want to make himself vulnerable for pejorative attitudes and being represented unfavorably by the translator. Further, the fact that Kasim mentions the handshake underlines the importance of the identity affirmation he experienced.

Samer and Sami had a different experience. Because Sami could not speak English, a translator was required:

> When we were first talking with the police…there…this translator came, a female translator who was Muslim, she was even veiled, this [name of the translator]…and I felt right away that I can't speak about this thing…however, during the situation I thought that no, I have to say it in a way or another…so in the end, when the police asked if there was something I'd like to add, I said to the translator I am a homosexual in Arabic…and she asked me, what does it mean, she had absolutely no idea…and the subject was dropped.

Earlier Sami mentions being afraid and wondering what he should or should not tell the police. Despite the fact that the translator was obviously ill-equipped and unable to translate such important matter, Sami was too afraid to continue with the topic as he considered the translator religious and thus conservative. Not to mention the power positions at play in the situation: translator's disapproval could well affect the officer's attitude towards Sami. When Sami told about his homosexuality in the following interview with Finnish Migration Service, he thinks that he was not believed. Sami describes the experience:

> It seems there are racists working in Migri, like, it is them who are so harsh, like, there is no humanity…and talking about homosexuality, it is unbelievable, like, how do you prove that you are gay, and at least to my knowledge, it is illegal to ask such specific details…but it is written even in the record… […]I think the questions were totally inappropriate…when I said, yes, I have sex with men, they were, like, fishing more explicit details, like, what happened then…like, I should tell things like who sucks who and what way and what way I surrender and do what I do. Like, it's not even possible to do such tests to anyone.

Sami’s example shows how LGBTQI refugees may be subjected to degrading interrogations whilst trying to “prove” their sexuality even in such liberal Western countries as Finland.

Samer’s first interview was further complicated by the presence of his two straight companions:

> The room was same like this, you have this table…me, the police, the translator and [name] we have like a small thing to separate…the same room but without any door, without any curtain, nothing…and just in the next table there was my friend, [name], the other one of those two straight guys…so he could hear and hear each other very well.

Samer did not want to take the risk of his friends hearing what he says so he left his homosexuality unmentioned. Consequently, Lina, Akram and Kasim were granted asylum following their first application. At the time of interviewing for this study, Samer and Sami were waiting for decision for their appeal. Thus, the migration system failed to provide the participants equal opportunities to articulate their particular situations that position differently and makes them especially vulnerable. However, the system was favorable to the participants who were able to represent themselves according to what is expected. For Akram and Kasim, strong identification as gay in “Western terms” and the pride they felt in themselves enabled consistent narration from the very beginning. In Lina’s case, too, her firm transgender identity, and the way she managed to articulate it, supported her claim. Further, how Akram, Kasim and Lina describe the situation suggests some level of positive identity affirmation and empowerment. However, it is left uncertain whether the experience would have been as positive, had the situational factors in their interviews been different.

“Nothing Had Changed”

After the first contact with officials, all participants were faced with long period of uncertainty and residing in various reception centers. This meant life among other Iraqi/Arab/Muslim refugees and in a multiply vulnerable position. Samer speaks about how it was:

> So bad. I had to play this game that I was straight person 24/7. I had my phone in my hand all the time and I tried to speak with people outside but without anyone to see what I was writing or where I am in my phone. Even if I just made my hair in the room, my roommate would say I look like a girl doing my hair like that.

Further, Samer describes his frustration:

> At some point I was planning to go back to Iraq. I was living in Iraq with the same people I had found here, nothing had changed, I cannot tell anyone that I am gay so what do I do here, I return back to Iraq.

Samer could not trust the personnel, either:

> All the group of security were Finnish Muslim people or foreign Muslims. Really like kind of…extremists. Some instructor there called [Arabic name], she is an extremist […] she wears Arabic dress, I mean religious dress, like Salafist woman…usually it's one color, blue or black or, you know, brown…Islamic Sharia woman.

Samer connects his oppression to Islam and its extreme forms particularly. Samer considers himself as a believer and at many occasions he mentions talking to God, praying, and trying to be a "good Muslim". Thus, by projecting homophobia to extremist Islam, he facilitates his own Muslimness as gay. Moreover, Samer's observations point towards a tendency to see Islam as a monolith; the reception center had failed to recognize the diversity and dividedness of Islam and the complex power relations it entails and further, the consequences this may have to the center's dynamics.

After a while, Lina was transferred to a reception center that had a special unit for LGBTQI refugees where she could feel safe. However, before the transfer, her situation was hard:

> [T]he people living in the reception center…doesn't like gay or trans… or like try to hurt me, or like pulling me in the wrist or hurting by his hand, or something like that.

Kasim thought he was lucky to be designated first a reception center where there were no Arabs:

> They don't speak English, so I don't say, I don't tell... and they don't ask anything, I was quite safe....but then when I moved to [reception center], the same situation but when I came to [city], a lot of Arabs...they asked, if something, I don't want to answer. Always keep quiet and alone.

Again, Kasim stuck to himself to stay out of trouble. Akram, Kasim and Lina were granted asylum relatively soon, which meant they could move out from the reception centers and were no longer subjected to immediate threat of their countrymen or other asylum seekers. For Sami and Samer the torment went on, however. Sami reports how he was transferred from center to center:

> It was very hard, yes, in [city] I was in three different reception centers specifically because I got into all kinds of trouble because I'm different…It was really horrible when you had to share a room with three other people in a same little room.

Sami, too, was later transferred to a reception center with the unit for LGBTQI refugees; however, it was soon closed:

> Yeah, it was really great there because everybody was not afraid to be who they are…but it was closed soon, and all others found a homestay quite soon…but there were two of us who were first moved to [reception center] for a short while, and it happened there once that I was alone in the room and I knew if it was someone from the personnel, they always say that they want to talk…and then I went to crack the door and two of the Iraqi guys who lived there came and started to hit me.

During his stay in the reception centers, Samer had met his boyfriend, a native Finn. Dating turned out to be difficult under the eyes of the other residents:

> All my room mates were asking me where I was going every day, where did I go from morning to evening. I told them I had a Finnish course and that I am meeting with a girl who is giving me private course...and it continued like that until we moved to [other location], to the other reception center. I am there without this group of friends, those two boys [his travelling companions] but even there, when [his boyfriend] was driving me there with a car I didn't feel comfortable.

Again, the Iraqi social control stretched to pertain Samer, and he told his boyfriend that he might return to Iraq as his situation did not seem to get any better:

> [The boyfriend] told me not to do that and that I should go to his work place, [name of the work place], and he'd do a small test to see how I work and if it was fine he could do a contract with me so I could stay.

However, when Samer mentioned his work place to the lawyer, that he shared with his two straight travelling companions, he was faced with a prejudiced reaction. Samer reports:

> [T]he lawyer said "hey, be careful this is [popular amongst gays]" I said, "yes I know, and she asked how did I find it…I said, I know a person who works there…She said that he is gay too, and I said, "yes I know that"…Then she asked me if I am gay or straight…I said I am straight and she said be careful with those people as they might want to have something with you and…at this point I felt like everybody is against me and like I don't need to tell nothing.

Despite the fact that their sexual and/or gender identity gives certain LGBTQI refugees relative benefit in asylum decision-making process, the experiences above point towards prevalence of heteronormative assumption within the refugee system that discriminates LGBTQI asylum seekers if they fail to articulate their sexual orientation unambiguously. In the case of Sami and Samer, situational factors prevented them from making such *coherent identity articulations that are only expected from a nonheterosexual asylum seeker*. Further, even when the sexual or gender identity is acknowledged, the system does not recognize LGBTQI refugees' multiply vulnerable position; on the contrary, it subjects them to further discrimination and violence in the reception centers for long periods of time. Moreover, the system expects considerable ability and agency from the often multiply traumatized individuals and hence favors those with higher resilience.

"I Can't Recognize Myself"

At the time of interviewing, Sami had found a place to stay through a volunteer-based homestay program and Samer had moved in together with his boyfriend. However, their agonizing anticipation to hear from the appeal they had made after their first asylum claim was denied continued. Further, their asylum seeker status limited their possibilities to work and participate in "normal" life hence affecting their motivation to integrate. The consequent uncertainty and stress are reflected in their speech. Samer expresses his frustration and continuation of his identity crises:

> I move from Iraq because I can't be myself, or recognize myself, there as I am and even here in Finland it's the same problem, I can't recognize myself or tell who I am. I am 25 years old…It's the same problem I find in Iraq I find it here again […] near to me and around with the same mentality with the same problem there. I mean, like, all those Iranian, Iraqi, Afghan… all those same. All the Muslim

Samer is faced with an identity conflict as he "can't be himself". He does not want to jeopardize the relationship with his family by being "outed" as gay by some of his countrymen in Finland. At the same time, he recognizes the need to live out his sexuality. This requires troublesome strategies:

> I live two person, I am two persons…at the same time this makes me tired but I think I am clever because I am two persons, two people and I can find myself between both ways…I can't lose both side, my straight people, contact with friends and family…and the other side, myself, like gay and the gay friends…so I need to be two persons at the same time

However, the double life does not refer to two different *and* equal lives:

> I find it more clever to keep this balance I believe in straight community or straight society…or male society…and I am staying here, I am in straight people society so I need to keep this balance and I need to keep the contact with…

In the excerpt above, Samer considers “good” straight society as oppositional to “bad” gay life, in between which he has to balance. Further, Samer finds the two identity categories delimiting but rather than seeking “a third way”, he strives to adhere to both. He explains:

> I don’t think these kind of things can change because people are afraid of…it’s here and near to me…so I feel people are looking at me all the time and following me.

Samer emphasizes that in Iraq, he had a sexual relationship with a girl:

> If I get another negative and the police takes me back to Iraq, I need to find myself as straight, return back really like straight to protect myself, it’s the only way to protect myself.

Samer’s speech signals internalized homophobia and understanding sexual identity in terms of *doing* rather than *being*. In striving to be a “good” Muslim, having sex with men “only” complicates his efforts, whereas identification as gay would refer to a state of being that would make him “bad” per se, and hence, a *luti* (see 1.3 above). However, he understands the use value of gay identification in his current situation as well as the necessity of straight identity in his native context. Despite the double life strategy that he has deployed, Samer expresses strong discomfort as he “can’t be himself”, suggesting some kind of core-self that cannot actualize. Although being less vulnerable to persecution and violence in Finland, migration did not solve his identity trouble that started in Iraq. His contradictory position reflects the powers embedded in the practice of exclusion and further highlights the “impossibility” of the lives of queer Muslim refugees.

“The Most Natural Way to Be”

Sami feels more comfortable with his homosexuality and he clearly identifies as gay. Sami describes what “being gay” is:

> Well, it’s just, like, way of being, an identity…maybe more like that feeling what comes to your mind…that, what kind is the emotional reaction to people and life…and especially, like, in relationships between two people and when sex is involved, so, you just find it the most natural way to be.

For Sami, identity appears to be an inherent trait that defines who he is, and he also refers to “identity”. He does not see it as merely sexual desire but rather emphasizes emotional aspect. Further, Sami feels more at ease with Finnish gay people than with straight Iraqis:

> With Finnish [gay] people have only begun to learn and, like, get to know a little, but is has been pretty natural…. but with Iraqis… I haven’t, in addition to those other gays, got know… I don’t really know how to be with them, it’s always troublesome somehow.

Sami’s description suggests that his homosexual identification is surpassing his Iraqi identity as belonging to gay community better allows self-actualization. For Kasim, the question of sexuality appears to be unambiguous:

> I think it's just like straight people...there is level of sexuality, and gay, it's one of them.

Except for Samer, the other participants as well express feelings of being free, or rather, “freedom to be”. Lina’s statement is descriptive:

> “My real name is [Arabic male name] but now I change to Lina because I have the freedom, and I see the freedom and I want to be Lina.”

Freedom to be does not come easy, however. Participants speak about exclusion; being left alone and how they miss their beloved ones, nevertheless. Further, they express sadness for having to leave everything behind. Except for his mother, Akram has no contacts to his past life in Iraq:

> I just lost everything. I lost my friends, there was no one staying with me. Just my mother, my mother, she is always important for me. I am not in contact with anybody else.

Lina has not been in contact with her family.

> I just remember the last thing, it’s my sister and my mother but no more important people for me. I still remember my last call I have with my mother and my sister …and probably I can’t speak together and even what happened and I am here but still don’t feel well about that and if I wasn’t like that I’d still be with my family. It is so difficult to be separate from the people you love.

Lina misses her beloved ones but thinks that because of her transgender, life in Iraq with his family is not possible.

“They Take Me as Piece of Meat”

The participants had varying knowledge of life in Europe; however, they all had an understanding of Western countries as liberal and tolerant towards LGBTQI minorities. Overall, the experiences after arrival were generally described in a positive manner. However, sometimes the reality did not meet the expectations discriminating attitudes were encountered in unexpected situations. Samer reports:

> The people who used to live here before, make Finland like paradise…everyone said like come here, people are nice, Finnish people so friendly, the system is so easy, the procedure is so fast…but when I was here I was in shock […] Many people here are against homosexuals.

Nevertheless, all participants report experiences of racism, homophobia, and discrimination due to their refugee status and certain forms of structural racism have been touched upon in the context of migration system above. Kasim has observed homophobic attitudes in everyday interactions:

> My [Finnish] ex was visiting his relative, she is old and she told me I am ok of you both gay but don't kiss, I don't like...really, I just don't like...she was drunk but she said that...like from her bottom...but she said that do whatever what you want but not in front of my eyes.

Further, Kasim reports an incident in a restaurant that reflects the prevalence of racism in the Finnish society and the ways it disciplines immigrants to the desired role as inferior. Kasim describes helplessness in facing such aggression:

> I was eating in a restaurant, and there was a man, drunk, and he came...it was really really embarrassing, talk very bad and, I just keep smiling, what I should do?

In addition to the everyday manifestations of racism in the “general” society, such as described by Kasim above, and the homophobia amongst the Iraqi/Arab/Muslim immigrants, the participants have encountered racism within the gay community as well. Akram speaks about his experiences:

> They take me as piece of meat. Yes. Sexy guy. Looking they are excited about you […] because of my style…so how I look like. Yeah. I had many things with them…of course I have sex but also want something else like…there’s some people, that are really making me loving.

Akram’s example points towards exotification of the gay Muslim immigrant whereby he is seen primarily as a sexual object. Akram has acted according to the role, but also implies discomfort of being reduced to “piece of meat”. Objectification of this sort “disarms” the gay Muslim refugee who appears as a threat to the homonormative. When the subject, then, shows agency in resisting marginalization, he becomes the disruptive figure that exposes the racism, xenophobia and islamophobia present in the gay community pampering *Western* “gayness”. In addition to erotic admiration, Akram was met with outright racist attitudes:

> [O)ne guy, in [a gay night club], he tell me like, hey are you Arabic. I say I am from Middle East. And he just said, oh I hate this kind of people. I said like ok, what do you want. He, and many many many other.

On another occasion, Akram was met with racist insults in a gay dating application:

> This guy was talking to me on Grindr, you are just a shit, you don’t need to stay here, go out of my country […] He was talking to me like I’m a very dangerous person: go out of my country.

Samer reports similar experiences:

> Even within the gay community some people hate me because I am an Arab and a Muslim…for example in the […] place I work, one old man came there […] in the beginning he was really friendly with me but after a while, many times I say “moi” or “hi” and he never answered me…he doesn’t want to speak with me at all…and I found it strange why he is like that…I was asking my colleague, why is he like that with me and he told me that this man hates Arabs and Muslims so just stay away from him.

The advice to stay away from the man exemplifies well the complexity of convert racism. The colleague may have had good intentions to keep Samer away from trouble; however, at the same time, he participated in reinforcing racist power relations. It was Samer who had to accommodate himself, whereas the man was left unchallenged.

Despite all the described hardship, Lina’s conclusion brings forth the importance of home for self-actualization:

> It’s true I am far away from my sister and my mother, but I feel better and I can sleep in safe. I will find my place here of course…. because we have bar for us and because we have life here…but yes, I am sure about that because from the beginning I feel like those people accepting me. No one judge my…me so those people already be, like, so welcome…and I think I have found my place. All the time I thank God about how I am.

5. Conclusions

Participants' experiences resonate with the overview given in the contextual part of this dissertation. Further, their stories reflect the complexity of understanding homosexuality in Arab Islamic society as well as the challenges for applying identity cross-culturally; however, at the same time, their lived experiences point towards induvial life contexts that are modified by the global at least as much as they are constructed locally. However, the analysis of the collected data suggests that, already prior to emigration, the participants understood their homosexuality much in terms of being rather than doing. In addition to the same-sex desire, experienced as intrinsic, their sexual self-understanding includes consciousness of belonging to a particular sexual category, the characteristics socially attributed to it and the ways it positions individuals sharing it. Further, the participants were aware of the (sub)cultural practices and codes used to make contact and socialize with other "gay" men, which points towards existence of a community of a kind. Thus, the appearing self-understanding is not so unlike "identity". However, participants' narratives emphasize the impossibility of living their sexual selves in Iraq in any meaningful way, as hiding and suppression do not allow self-actualization, or guarantee neither integrity nor emotional or physical survival. The social role, such as represented by the figure of the Quranic *luti*, the arch-sinner and buggerer, that positions homosexuals to the very *bottom* of the society, is forced upon them. However, to what extent participants have internalized this identification vary. The experience of being different from other boys as a child and becoming aware one's sexual and emotional attraction towards other men in adolescence in Iraq reflect the similarities with the trajectory of gay identity in the West. However, the strong religious and social demand for conformity and the violence traversing the society amplify the feelings of exclusion and abnormality and leads to aggressive forms oppression and marginalization of the sexually noncomformative. Nevertheless, participants show considerable agency in prioritizing their sexual self-actualization as salient factor to their over-all well-being and survival. Hence, identifying as gay in "Western" sense and emigration to an environment where it gives relative benefit appears as a reasonable strategy.

Although other social markers, such as tribal affiliation or educational background, gave some of the participants relative benefit, their nonnormative sexual orientation or gender positioned them subordinately in Iraqi context. However, participants came across new intersections during their journey and after arriving in Finland, as refugeeness added a significant axis to their experience. Status of a "migrant on the move" positioned them in the fringes of the nation state system that privileges citizenship making them close to outlaws and thus vulnerable for financial exploitation by shady transportation providers or human traffickers. Further, being subordinated in a sexist, heterosexist and cissexists power structure *and* being dislocated in system that expects national locatedness create new vulnerabilities. The participants describe how, during their journey, they would have been subjected to discrimination by other refugees had their homosexuality or transgender become disclosed. Thus, had they been sexually abused en route, for example, the participants could have not counted on the support of the Iraqi migrant group they were travelling with. On the contrary, the participants report how the threat of being "outed" or exposed as gay to the Iraqi Muslim community has followed them all the way to Finland. Moreover, during his journey, Akram successfully turned to gay community to better his situation not only showing agency but also exemplifying how in-group solidarity may work cross-locationally and serve as a source of empowerment.

After arriving in Finland, the asylum process proved to be relatively untroubled to the participants, who managed to present themselves in accordance with Western perception of sexuality from the beginning. However, Finnish Immigration Service failed to recognize the vulnerability of the migrant group in question. For various reasons, some of which are discussed above, matters of sexual orientation are complex, sensitive and intimate. Participants background in a society highly hostile towards sexual minorities and their traumatic experiences make them especially vulnerable; moreover, having had to hide their homosexuality for all their lives, mentioning it to migration officials requires considerable ability. The expectations of being able to present and "prove" one's homosexuality in any coherent way whilst in the phase of multiple transition, such as experienced by the participants, appear overwhelming. Thus, the less-abled are further discriminated instead of recognized as more vulnerable, which argue for understanding ability as an intersectional category contributing to inequality. Further, due to the prevailing heterosexual assumption in the system, a genuine possibility to be heard was first denied from Samer and Sami, which positioned them even more unfavorably. Furthermore, participants' experiences in reception centers demonstrate that the extent to which their, unrecognized or recognized, homosexual orientation makes them vulnerable in the given context was not properly understood.

In Finnish context, the configuration of the social markers that added to the participants marginalization got restructured. Now, the immigrant status became the traversing axis influencing participants' experience and positioning them subordinately in a fundamental way through structural power mechanisms. Further, participants encountered prejudice due to their origin, religion, sexuality and race/ethnicity pointing towards the various power systems at play in constructing the image of a standard Finn; most significantly nationalism, racism and heterosexism. Not only are the participants subjected to discrimination in the society at large as gays *and* Muslims *and* immigrants separately but also as *gay Muslim immigrants*. Furthermore, they are looked down on by the Iraqi/Muslim community as well as the Finnish gay community. Being gay alienated them from the (heterosexist) Muslim community, and, as a Muslim immigrant, they do not fulfill the role of a homonormative gay. Consequently, a gay Muslim refugee finds himself in an impossible location, marginalized differently in three overlapping contexts: Iraqi Muslim community, gay community and the Finnish society at large resulting in novel discriminations in unexpected situations. Further, gay Muslim is shaking the normative in all these contexts if he refuses to comply with the respective power relations and does not position accordingly. Participants showed considerable agency in that they left the hostile environment and prioritized their survival as a whole individual rather than diminish themselves to comply with the norms that would still leave them in a precarious position. In other words, internalization of the identification that is “forced” upon them would still be in line with the normative reaffirming the existing power relations, and the burden of “impossibility” would be bore by the individual alone. However, self-identification nonnormatively outside the discriminating power system(s) and struggling towards the possibility of self-actualization poses a threat to those with privilege. Consequently, the “impossibility” shifts to challenge the normative, which is exactly why Muslim *queers* are marginalized, silenced, killed or forced to exile, and conceptually excluded by refusing their “identity”.

However, discrimination is always relative. Participants of this research were all literate young adults who had grown up with access to sky channels, Internet and new media, which expanded their social world from immediate environment to cyber space and transnational networks. To what extent participants’ past traumatic experiences and personal resilience affect their self-understanding or abilities, is left unknown, as is the experience of the less abled. Further, due to the scope of this study, many interlocking themes were left out and many were only touched upon. Finally, acknowledging the intercultural challenges of this work and despite the “epistemological anxiety” it may have caused, I hope I have managed to shed light on the social location considered “impossible”.

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