Shifting Selves:
Queer Muslim Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the potential of the queer Muslim asylum seeker to confront the Dutch national imaginary. An archetype of homonationalism, the Netherlands faces rising tides of Islamophobia, waters which queer Muslims must learn to navigate. An asylum seeker's success in the system depends on their "credibility", hinging on the consistency of their self-representation which is constantly being reconstructed. These constant reconstructions, what Ewing (1990) refers to as "shifting selves", are not conscious or noticed by the individual; yet, in the context of asylum claim-making, reconstitutions of the self may rise to the surface, asylum seekers then engaging in conscious strategizing. I analyze these contexts ethnographically through informal interviews and participant observation, at the height of the so-called "Refugee Crisis" of the mid-2010s in Europe.

I find that as the figure of the queer Muslim asylum seeker confronts the Dutch national imaginary, it both confirms it—representing national commitments to human rights, to tolerance, and to protection of sexual minorities—and challenges it—embodying impossible identities, and evincing a failure of the nation to live up to its ideals: What is "tolerance" when it is weaponized against minority groups? What kind of queerness is being protected if deviation from a cultural norm is disqualifying? Whose human rights are being protected by a system that demands the subject of those rights conform to formulations inconsistent with lived experience?

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Acknowledgments

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to "Ayesha". Your strength and bravery will always astound and inspire me. Thank you for your story.

I also dedicate this to Derek, my life-long interlocutor, who left too many stories untold.

And to Sophia, my Nazi-fighting Oma (who, like so many of her generation, rarely told the stories); Sophia, my aunt, whose cafe was a place where stories of Holland were shared over koffie and pannenkoeken; and Sophia, my niece, whose stories I am so excited to watch unfold.

Preface

Black tulips in my heart,
flames on my lips:
from which forest did you come to me?
all you crosses of anger?
I have recognized my griefs
and embraced wandering and hunger.
Anger lives in my hands,
anger lives in my mouth
and in the blood of my arteries swims anger.

O reader,
don't expect whispers from me,
and borrowed branches
from the trunks of straight trees.
I will, then,
take pride in this wound of the city,
the canvas of lightening in our sad nights.
Though the street frowns in my face
it protects me from the shadows and malign glances,
and so I sing for joy
behind fearful eyelids.
When the storm struck in my country,
It promised me wine, and rainbows.

-Mahmoud Darwish
(Translated from Arabic by John Mikhail Asfour and Abdullah al-Udhari)

Ter Apel

It had been raining most of the day-- common enough in the Netherlands-- and by

the time we arrived in Ter Apel in the early afternoon, the shoulders of the small road

leading up to the asylum reception center were sunken with mud. The road was so narrow

I worried we'd accidentally driven up a bike lane, and as we got closer, the width of our car forced the increasing number of people, mostly brown and black, walking there, to either hug the edge of road or slog through the mud.

A loose queue of maybe three dozen people waited outside the gates—they sat on the strips of grass, on their bags, on the concrete. More continued to arrive via the lane we'd driven up. Some were in small clusters, others appeared to be on their own. There were groups of young men, families with small children, and a half dozen older women who'd collected their belongings in a pile and then seated themselves in a circle around it. There was no seating provided, and no cover from the rain or sun.

The security guard approached the driver's side window and asked if I worked there. I responded in English that no, I had brought my friend, Ayesha, who wished to claim asylum. Even after I told him she was fluent in English, he continued to address his questions and instructions to me. My partner, who is American of Middle Eastern heritage, got out of the car to help Ayesha with her bags, and the guard approached him with his clipboard and began getting his information as well. An amiable guy, my partner gave his name and birthdate before I realized what was happening and bounded over to stop him from being processed for asylum, too.

Ayesha would have to wait in this line to be registered, we were told, and would then spend the first night or two at this facility. She would undergo medical screenings before being sent to a location where she'd stay during the asylum proceedings. If Ayesha was scared, it hardly showed. Her life was taking a drastic left turn, and she held all she owned in an overstuffed suitcase and a few grocery bags. We'd chatted nervously throughout the drive from Amsterdam, alternatively talking about the fun weekends we'd

have together once she was settled in a center, and hazarding guesses about how this process of applying for asylum was actually going to work. As the sun began to break through the clouds, I tried to match its optimism—I assured Ayesha that the facilities here would be safe and comfortable, and that maybe the process wouldn't take that long after all. By the end of the drive, Ayesha was probably agreeing with my incessant conjecture more than anything to reassure *me*, and to stop my babbling. After unloading her bags near the entrance, we said our goodbyes. I would see her very soon, I told her.

As soon as I had driven out of her sight, I burst into tears. I was shocked by the conditions—the people sitting on the driveway, presumably all morning through the rain; the bags and belongings in smaller numbers than people. By then I'd talked with and interviewed several asylum seekers and refugees in the Netherlands, and certainly done plenty of reading on the subject. But still I was shocked, and shaken; and, feeling complicity as a Westerner, as someone of Dutch heritage who'd idealized the place as windmill-spotted utopic motherland, ashamed. So far, at that point, I'd met people much more stationary and settled. Most were still in precarious legal situations, but they had found homes of one sort or another; favorite parks and routes and people in the Netherlands. Ter Apel was a raw edge, where people had arrived but still were nowhere. And I'd left Ayesha there, my friend, just dropped her off with the collection of snacks and toiletries we'd bought earlier, nowhere to sit, no cover from the rain, scared, alone, with only uncertainty ahead.

I'd first met Ayesha less than two months earlier, at an intensive summer institute at the University of Amsterdam. She had come from Rwanda for the course and expected to

return directly after. The second-to-last day of class, just a few days before her flight home and before that university housing terminated, she received the voice and text messages from her husband threatening to kill her. He'd found the application essays in which she described her interest in the course's themes examining sexuality and culture; her experiences as a lesbian in Rwanda, and her volunteer work with LGBT communities there provoked her desire to study these topics. The prompt for a motivational essay had asked her what she would do when she returned to her home country after the course: she wrote that she wanted to work in the education of young people about sexuality. Her husband took that to mean she wanted to "recruit" young women and "promote homosexuality." Before she left, she'd been working with young women at her mosque to educate them on hygiene and issues of sexuality—that, he believed now, was proselytizing. This is how he got approval from leaders in their community to kill her.

1) Queer Muslim Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands

As a Muslim lesbian from Rwanda claiming asylum in the Netherlands, Ayesha inhabited a precarious position, an intersection of identities that was at once "impossible" or "illegible", and prized as a rarity, an exception. This illegibility comes from a conviction that one could not be both queer and Muslim; they must be mutually exclusive categories. With her presence and her statement that she is, indeed, Muslim and a lesbian, disavowing neither upon questioning, she becomes "one of the good ones", an exceptional figure that has been able to slough off the "Muslim culture" that the West has come to fear and to condemn for its supposed exceptional intolerance, while remaining a Muslim; demonstrating in her admittance that the Dutch are as they imagine themselves to be: an exceptionally tolerant people.

It is this fraught intersection that I explore here: the ways in which queer Muslims both confirm and challenge Dutch national imaginaries; the strategies for navigating the asylum system learned by queer Muslims through contact with other newcomers as well as Dutch organizations and institutions; and how the process of claiming asylum produces (contextually) the type of sexual subject it demands. I analyze these conditions in the context of the so-called "Refugee Crisis" of the mid-2010s in Europe, which began to crest about a third of the way through my year and a half research period.

The last thirty years in the Netherlands (as in much of the rest of Europe) has seen a resurgence of xenophobic, populist nationalism, along with continuing waves of migration, most notably from the former Dutch colonies as well as Turkey and Morocco. Dutch

nationalists warn of the threat to Dutch culture and its mythic tradition of liberalism, integral to its "national imaginary"[1], or collective representations of the nation and its values, with a particular anxiety concerning Islam and Muslim migrants (Ewing 2008). In the last decade or so, with the Muslim population exceeding a million, journalistic and scholarly reports on the supposed exceptional homophobia of Muslim migrant communities have ignited a public discourse and moral panic over "tolerating intolerance." This panic has been amplified by the dramatic increase in refugees and migrants to Europe since 2015.

In a social and political climate which has produced politicians such as Pim Fortuyn, who crusaded to end immigration of Muslims to the country, and his successor, Geert Wilders, who has campaigned to ban the Qu'ran and to "send Moroccans back," Islamophobia is a real political force. While both politicians are considered "far-right" and "extremist" by many, their platforms have allowed their messages about the threat of "Islamization of the Netherlands" to shape public discourse.

Despite proclaimed commitments to the universality of human rights, in practice, refugees are often met with suspicion. Muslim migrants in particular face the suspicion that their loyalty lies elsewhere, and therefore assimilation into the (presumed homogenous) "native" population's values and ways of life will be more difficult or impossible. Political controversies across Europe regarding "the veil" illustrate this suspicion, constructing a

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[1] As defined by Ewing, a national imaginary, "is a system of cultural representations that makes the contours of the nation-state emotionally plausible, in part by differentiating the nation-state from others," through the constructions of "us" versus "them" (2008:2). I further define the term on page 18, "The Queer Muslim Asylum Seeker Confronts the Dutch National Imaginary," and describe the Dutch context in Chapter 2.

woman's choice of dress as the ultimate symbol of un-assimibility (Asad 1993; Vertovec 1999; Wikan 2002; Cesari 2004; Silverstein 2005).

Meanwhile, "LGBT" asylum, it seems, may be a type of exception to this anxiety over Muslim migration. Even in a speech railing against "the rising tide of Islam," and calling for the halt of migration to the Netherlands, Wilders mentions homosexuals being jailed and threatened in Iran, and stipulates that, "when it comes to asylum seekers, it's a different story." (quoted in Dowling 2013) It may be that they are tolerable because they are seen to somehow manifest subversion of Islam, a religion that has been stamped exceptionally and uniquely homophobic in public imagination. What is seen as their exceptionalism within their faith makes them desirable members of the nation. Additionally, they work as a buffer against accusations of racism, as their admission seems to say: "*We're not racist against Middle Easterners—look at these queer Muslims we saved from their culture.*"

A 2011 report published in the Netherlands called "Fleeing Homophobia: Asylum Claims Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Europe" stated that approximately 200 asylum seekers apply in the Netherlands each year citing fear of persecution in their home countries for their sexual orientation or gender identity (Jansen and Spijkerboer 2011). The report estimates that some 10,000 LGBT related asylum applications are submitted in the European Union annually. How does the process of asylum exclude those who do not conform to a narrow set of identities and experiences? The Netherlands has done away with problematic *de jure* requirements that still function in other EU member states, including "the discretion requirement" (wherein an applicant's case will be denied if they are judged able to cover up their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid persecution,) and a requirement that the applicant's home country must

specifically legally criminalize "homosexuality" (while an individual may still be prosecuted for "crimes against religion" or "perversion," as is in the case in Egypt and elsewhere; or where non-state actors, such as community or militia members, constitute a threat to LGBT individuals). However, as these obstacles are removed, asylum cases have come to rely heavily on the credibility of the applicant (Jansen and Spijkerboer 2011).

There have been various cases reported across Europe and in the Netherlands in which an asylum claim is denied because the applicant's appearance and story did not fit stereotypes of what an LGBT individual must look like, act like, know about, and experience in their home country. A young Pakistan man's asylum claim was rejected because he did not cite any great personal struggle in a "coming out" process, and the courts did not believe that he could be gay in Pakistan without facing such a struggle (Jansen and Spijkerboer 2011). Others have been denied because the applicants were not familiar with the laws on homosexual behavior, or with the gay and lesbian bars in their home countries; applicants who are married to a person of another sex, or who have children, have also been denied (Jansen and Spijkerboer 2011). These examples, among others, show that not only are stereotypes about LGBT individuals used in adjudicating these cases, but also preconceptions about the home countries and cultures of the applicants.

These individual asylum decisions are not made in a vacuum but are informed and constricted by national discourses and policies. Refugees are exceptions to closed-door immigration policies, designated as such because of their perceived position as suffering bodies being denied their human rights, in need of compassion. They are, (if their stories are deemed credible) what Mariam Ticktin calls "morally legitimate": deserving of rights, worthy of refuge; and indeed the system is morally compelled to give it to them. Of course,

as Ticktin argues, from this system "noticeably absent are the laboring bodies, the exploited bodies: these are not the exception, but the rule, and hence disqualified as morally legitimate." (Ticktin 2011: 4) The mundane suffering of the poor and working class does not give one the right to asylum in Europe.

Whereas Ticktin sees "regimes of care" as imagining that a suffering body is a "victim without a perpetrator," I argue that the LGBT asylum claimant is intrinsically tied to a perpetrator: her/his culture. Sally Engel Merry discusses a troubling usage of the notion of culture in the "discursive world of human rights", in which "culture" seems to govern lives in "traditional" societies-- those that are presumed stagnant, non-secular, and resistant to change (Ewing 2008; Merry 2006, Volpp 2000, Kapur 2002). These discourses work to position "the West" as "the site for authoritative condemnation" (Puar 2007) from which it gains the authority to inscribe the definition of human rights for the rest of the world. Can we extend Gayatri Spivak's poignant phrase, "white men are saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1988) to "white liberals are saving brown queers from brown men"?

I examine these issues in a relative statistical void. *Fleeing Homophobia* (2011) reported that approximately 200 applicants apply for asylum in the Netherlands each year citing fear of persecution in their home countries for their sexual orientation or gender identity. The report estimates that some 10,000 LGBT-related asylum applications are submitted in the European Union annually. Yet more recent estimates are difficult to come by. Belgium is the only EU country that collects reliable statistics on numbers of people applying for asylum based on fear of persecution for sexual orientation or gender identity. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights recently published a report

estimating the number of asylum seekers "with claims linked to sexual orientation and gender identity" in the Netherlands in 2016 to be between 100 and 1,000 (EUFRA 2017). This is obviously a very broad and indeterminate range and the source for those numbers herself told me that the report only serves to "demonstrate the lack of reliable data" (Sabine Jansen, pers. comm., 2017). In any case, immigration and customs statistics nonetheless suggest that successful acceptance rates for asylum-seeking (for all reasons) in the Netherlands steadily rose from 40% in 2010 to 70% at the height of the European refugee crisis in 2015, then slowed back down to 54% the next year (IND). In this context, ethnographic work becomes all the more important in developing understandings of asylum as experienced by LGBT arrivals in the country.

Challenges faced by LGBT and Queer Muslims in the Dutch asylum system

Muslim LGBT asylum seekers come to the Netherlands from a wide swathe of the globe -- primarily North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, though my informants largely were Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian, and Ugandan. Only one person in the study was trans, and she was Moroccan. Gay men predominated among the asylum seekers from greater Middle East, but the asylum seekers I spoke with from Ugandan were more evenly split between men and women. Differences in mobility and family responsibilities between men and women may account for some of this gender disparity. Additionally, as a young Egyptian man put it, if parents find out a child is queer, "gay men are kicked out of the house; lesbian women are locked in." It may be that there are also stronger "pull factors" for men: globalized imaginings of "authentic" gay lifestyles are much more social than

images of lesbians. The image of gay bars of Western cities has become a potent symbol as a central space in gay life. Manalansan (2003) argues that the gay bar is increasingly seen as a universal "home" to gay men everywhere, limited though they may be as largely privileged, white gay male spaces. For queers imagining their options when confronted by fear and threat in home communities, some men may have a sharper image in their minds of a new "home" to which they can flee, making it a more thinkable terminus. Social networking and dating websites, very popular among young migrants, then provide a means for network migration. The image of the gay bar as universal "home" works against many asylum seekers, as their knowledge of and participation in such gay scenes in their home countries becomes often a critical piece of their asylum interviews. If an asylum seeker cannot name the gay bar in the capital city of their country, for example, they may be seen as less credibly LGBT, and rejected for asylum on these grounds.

Asylum seekers are often clustered by nationality and language in Dutch refugee camps, and LGBT or queer[2] asylum seekers, who arrive alone more often than non-queer asylum seekers, frequently find themselves housed with people they fear share the same homophobia they fled at home. Several incidences of harassment and aggression against queer asylum seekers living in the camps have been reported in recent years, resulting in the establishment of a residential center specifically for queer asylum seekers in 2016. However, not all queer asylum seekers are able to live in this particular center, and many find themselves afraid to be open about their sexualities or associate with other queer asylum seekers. As a result, these individuals do not form the social networks that connect

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[2] I discuss my use of terms like LGBT and queer later in this chapter. In general, I use "LBGT to refer to the legal category, and queer to as a more inclusive, umbrella term.

them with queer organizations in the Netherlands, which may have a detrimental effect on their asylum applications, since demonstrating participation in gay life since arriving in the Netherlands can be useful in establishing credibility as queer in an asylum claim. Queer Muslims have not been the only queer asylum seekers targeted by these attacks, but several I interviewed did report incidents of harassment, and the majority of media reports on this topic discussed violence against Muslim or Middle Eastern LGBT asylum-seekers.

Impossible Identities

As Muslims and Muslim migrants are positioned as uniquely and exceptionally homophobic, a threat to the sexual liberalism of Western nations, while LGBT/queer individuals are default white in public imaginaries, the queer Muslim is at a tense intersection indeed. El-Tayeb calls this "an identity that is declared impossible" (El-Tayeb 2013: 306) on an epistemic level, and Ewing term the queer Muslim's "uninhabitable subject position" one which forces them to choose between the two communities in order to be legible (Ewing 2011: 90). Many asylum seekers with whom I spoke felt this tension intensely and found themselves in numerous day-to-day situations in which navigating these choices was critical. Ayesha once remarked that she felt they were trying to trip her up, or "catch" her, by asking so frequently and in so many different phrasings how she could be both Muslim and a lesbian.

Many asylum seekers discussed feeling freer in terms of their sexuality and gender expression in the Netherlands; but most also experienced the opposite when it came to openly expressing their religious backgrounds, ironically finding themselves "back in the

closet" as Muslims. Almost all were asked in asylum interviews about their religion; for many, questions to the effect of, "how can you be both gay and Muslim?" (exact wording reported by one young woman) left asylum seekers with the sense that they must disavow their faith or face deportation. One young Iraqi man who had successfully received asylum several years earlier recounted how he'd felt that even his attorney didn't believe that he could both "really be gay" and "really be Muslim." His friend chimed in: "The Dutch, they don't understand this. It's like an impossible thing," to which the Iraqi man responded, "Understand what? I just *am*!" A Ugandan woman who did not want to disclose her legal status said several times that she thought asylum officials were "very suspicious" of any queer person who was a practicing Muslim. Several other queer Muslim asylum-seekers stated that they felt targeted, and that they didn't believe asylum-seekers of other religions would be asked such leading questions, or about their religions at all. Because asylum officials have flexibility in questioning asylum applicants in interviews, it was not possible to verify their suspicions with certainty. Not everyone had this view of asylum officials and procedures. Others reported feeling that their religious beliefs were "respected," in part because Muslim prayer schedules and dietary restrictions were honored, and because questions about religion in interview sessions were perceived as curiosity and "just normal," rather than intrusive or hostile.

Middle Eastern and North African asylum-seekers were acutely aware of the debates in the Netherlands over refugees. A Syrian man who was proud of how much Dutch he had managed to teach himself, mostly by watching TV and reading the newspapers that were offered at his asylum center, described the anxiety of feeling unwanted, and recounted a "crazy" moment in which he was trying to read a newspaper article – in Dutch

– about how Syrian refugees don't want to integrate and learn Dutch. While many –
perhaps conscious of their precarious legal and social position in the country – preferred
not to comment on it, others expressed some resentment that measures they had taken to
stay alive appeared as such an imposition in this host country. "I don't want to be here
either!" declared one young man, "of course I prefer to be in my country. But I cannot." This
position is made all the more poignant in light of the legacies European colonialism in the
Middle East and Africa, and the wars and military interventions of recent decades.

Queer Muslim may be an "impossible" identity, but the queer *ex-Muslim* represents a
triumph of the homonationalist state, perhaps more than any other subject position. Their
presence as mascots of homonationalism positions "the performative Muslim gay as an
embodiment of emancipated gayness symbolizing modernity, no longer really Muslim."
(Jivraj and de Jong 2011: 152). Jivraj and de Jong argue that "non-emblematic queers of
color", or those who do not perform the *ex*-position are rendered invisible, "or perceived as
not quite there yet, a kind of 'gay in progress' for whom the closet door still needs to be
opened fully." (Jivraj and de Jong 2011: 153) And yet—situationally—the active,
unapologetically-Muslim queer can also represent a sort of unicorn—rare, imaged
nonexistent—yet valuable in certain circles, particularly progressive social and political
organizations. It is precisely their presumed impossibility that makes them another type of
prize, or object of fascination for their (again, presumed) rarity and ability to transcend the
impossible. Relatedly, these unicorns are also sought after as exoticized sexual objects, as I
will discuss.

The Queer Muslim Asylum Seeker Confronts the Dutch National Imaginary

A "national imaginary" is a system of shared collective representations of the nation's values and culture. It is based on "an organized field of social practices" (Appadurai 1996:31) which include the media, systems of governance, educational practices, and other institutions, and is "generated and sustained through an ongoing process of myth-making" (Ewing 2008:2), meaning that the imaginary, like the self, is constantly being re-constituted, and experiences contextual shifts. Linked to the French *imaginaire*, a national imaginary involves a "landscape of collective aspirations" (Appadurai 1996:31) that "command profound emotional legitimacy" (Anderson 1983:4) and make the "contours of the nation-state emotionally plausible" (Ewing 2008:2). The Dutch national imaginary is composed of values common to imaginaries in much of Northern Europe and other wealthy, "Western" nations— including tolerance, defense of human rights, gender equality, and democratic liberalism—but the specifics of the rendering and arrangement may be differently configured. For example, "Dutch tolerance" is constructed as rooted in pragmatism, rather than a celebration of diversity or cultural relativism, and is linked to its economic history as a center of international trade. Pragmatism is itself central to the Dutch national imaginary, as is egalitarianism, sexual liberalism, and international leadership on issues environmentalism and LGBT rights (and, of course, bikes—see Kuipers 2012).

Central to the national imaginary are constructions of "'us' versus 'them'—a sense of exclusive belonging" (Borneman 2004:14, quoted in Ewing 2008). As the figure of the queer Muslim asylum seeker confronts the Dutch national imaginary, it both confirms it— representing national commitments to human rights, to tolerance, and to protection of

sexual minorities—and challenges it—embodying impossible identities, and evincing a failure of the nation to live up to its ideals: What is "tolerance" when it is weaponized against minority groups? What kind of queerness is being protected if deviation from a cultural norm is disqualifying? Whose human rights are being protected by a system that demands the subject of those rights conform to formulations inconsistent with lived experience?

The process of claiming asylum, and specifically the repetition of asylum narratives, is productive of the type of sexual subject it requires—but only so contextually. The asylum system demands a stable, unitary subject, one that is represented through consistent narratives articulating expected experiences and understandings of an essential "sexuality", which is constructed as incompatible with an Islamic faith. This demand for a stable, consistent subject is itself incompatible with human lived experience—as Ewing argues, "we can observe that individuals are continuously reconstituting themselves into new selves in response to internal and external stimuli. They construct these new selves from their available set of self-representations, which are based on cultural constructs." (Ewing 1990:258) Often, these reconstitutions of the self, or what Ewing refers to as "shifting selves" (1990), are not conscious or even noticed by the individual. In the months- or years-long process of asylum claim-making, when the stakes of proper self-representation are set so high, reconstitutions of the self may rise to the surface, asylum seekers then engaging in conscious strategizing. Strategies for self-presentation and narrative-making are discussed frequently, and the context of those discussions (the presences of other asylum seekers, representatives of LGBT and refugee organizations,

asylum officials, lawyers, and researchers) shapes the way the self is re-constituted. A stable subject of rights this is not; and never was.

Methods, Positionality, and Ethical Challenges

In this section, I discuss my methods and procedures during fieldwork, and examine ethical issues I encountered. My own position in relation to the people with whom I worked is a significant point of reflection, in particular as an American woman speaking with refugees who fled their besieged homes as a direct result of American military action. These interactions proved an important reminder that, "When I am present... the imagined 'West' is always present" (Ewing 1997:166).

The People and the Places

The government agencies with the most direct responsibility for asylum seekers are the IND (*Immigratie-en Naturalisatiedienst,* or Immigration and Naturalization Service), which handles the applications of all migrants to the Netherlands and those seeking Dutch citizenship, and COA (Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers, or Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) which is responsible for accommodation facilities and basic services. The VWN, (*VluchtelingenWerk Nederland,* or Dutch Refugee Council) is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that works closely with government agencies. It provides information and support to asylum seekers from the time they arrive in a reception center through their entrance into Dutch society, helping with everything from accessing healthcare, preparing asylum seekers for their interviews, and personal support.

Working with LGBT/queer asylum seekers specifically are the COC (*Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum)*, Secret Garden, LGBT Asylum Support, and Uganda Gay On the Move (UGOM). I will detail the missions of these organizations and my work with each later on.

Between 2014 and 2016, I took day-trips to reception centers in Ter Apel, Zweeloo, Drechten, Schalkhaar, two different facilities in Nijmegen, and the Amsterdam center at Marnixstraat. COA limits the numbers of journalists, researchers, and others looking to gather information about the centers, in order to minimize disruption and protect the privacy of residents. When I received a second official denial of my request to conduct research in their facilities, the COA official also cited the increased number of asylum seekers at that time as a reason they could not "assist with projects" (Personal communication, May 23, 2016.) However, I was able to visit COA centers during daytime hours as the guest of individual residents. In this way I was able to tour the grounds and view the living accommodations, including the bedrooms, dining rooms, and various recreational areas.

I conducted formal interviews with two IND officials (in an IND facility in Amsterdam), a political journalist covering asylum issues in the province of Flevoland (in his office), a trauma therapist (in his home in Amsterdam), two asylum lawyers (one via email and the second in his home), several activists and artists (at various events, including Queeristan, political rallies described, and social gatherings—these interactions included both formal and informal discussions), two activist researchers in Amsterdam (at universities and cafes), and heads and members of LGBT and asylum-oriented organizations (in their offices and in cafes).

I interviewed and spent time with 19 asylum seekers and refugees who identified as both LGBT/queer and Muslim (at some point in their lives), one queer asylum seeker from a Muslim-majority country who did not identify as Muslim, one asylum seeker who did not identify as LGBT/queer or Muslim, and one gay Muslim refugee in Ghent, Belgium. Five were women, including one transwoman, and all were between the ages of 19 and 49. Home countries included Syria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda. I had shorter interviews and conversations with an additional nine LGBT/queer asylum seekers or migrants of unknown legal status. During my pre-arranged, unstructured interviews with asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, I asked participants to choose the place they felt most comfortable talking, and offered suggestions if they had no preference (usually public places with opportunities for private conversation, like parks or cafes with outdoor seating). I arrived with a few questions listed in my notebook under a space for their name, preferred pseudonym if they had one, nationality/ethnicity, religion, and gender/sexuality (which was phrased, verbally: "Would you like to/do you want to identify your gender and/or sexuality?") Questions I had listed were somewhat dependent on how I came into contact with the person, and what information or relationship I already had to them, but I always included the following questions, variously phrased:

-When did you arrive in the Netherlands (NL)?

-What was your route, or original reason for coming to NL?

-When did you leave your home country?

-Why did you leave your home country?

-How have you experienced your time in NL? Is it as you expected?

If the person was or had been involved in an asylum procedure:

-What has been your experience of the AZCs? Do you feel comfortable/safe there?

-Have asylum officers asked you about your religion?

-Have any of their questions made you uncomfortable?

-What kinds of questions have you been asked in interviews?

-How do you like your lawyer and/or translator?

-Have you experienced any bias/racism/Islamophobia in NL?

-Have you had contact with any LGBT or migrant organizations in NL?

-How have you felt about doing this interview with me? Do you have any questions

for me?

These interviews were conducted inside asylum centers (listed above); at the Secret

Garden facility in Amsterdam; in cafés, bars, and restaurants in the towns and cities where

the asylum seekers lived, as well as three speaking events hosted by the University of

Amsterdam. In addition to these pre-arranged, sit-down interviews, I had informal

conversations at and participated in numerous events put on by the COC national and local

branches, Secret Garden, UGOM, LGBT Asylum Support, and universities, including parties

for asylum seekers and local communities, speaking and educational events, LGBT Pride

activities, political actions, arts and other cultural shows, and social gatherings with

friends. The majority of these events took place in Amsterdam, though I also attended

functions in Utrecht, Groningen, and Nijmegen. I had conversations with two people via

phone and social media who reported being queer asylum seekers but am omitting their

stories as I was ultimately unable to verify their identities.

My friend and study participant, Ayesha, met two asylum seekers in one of the

asylum centers where she was living who wanted to participate in this research but were

too nervous to be interviewed by me. However, they were open to talking with Ayesha, and

as she was interested in applying to Masters programs in the Netherlands, she was happy

to get some experience with conducting interviews. I met with Ayesha beforehand and we

talked about confidentiality and anonymity, interview protocols, and the importance of the

interviewees understanding that they could stop the interview at any time. I gave her my

Informed Consent documents, and highlighted the information on support services. As I

was unfunded at that time, I was only able to offer Ayesha 40 euros per interview, agreed

upon ahead of time, and money for any resources she might need (like notebooks,

transport, or cafes, if the interviewee wanted to leave the camp for privacy) but she did not

ultimately need these additional funds. I credit her work here when I discuss specific

information she gathered, but in several instances aggregate this data with my own, when

talking in generalities or mentioning experiences shared by asylum seekers.

Because the Netherlands does not keep records of the reasons for asylum claims

(whether someone had fled their country due to fear of persecution based on their race,

religion, nationality, or memberships in a political or social group—the final category being

the one to which LGBT asylum seekers belong), my access to asylum seekers was

exclusively through social and professional networks. As a result, I was able to speak only

with people who were "out" as LGBT or queer in their own social networks or involved

with LGBT or queer organizations in the Netherlands. Those who were not out and did not

come into contact with LGBTQ organizations were disadvantaged in the asylum system, as

these types of social connections are given as evidence to support a person's claim of being LGBTQ, and conversely, the lack of such relationships can be viewed as suspicious.

This project is grounded in an intersectional perspective, which most importantly serves as "a heuristic reminder that all categories are associated with power relations and cannot be neutral." (Phoenix and Bauer 2012: 492) It helps to describe the myriad ways that one's subjectivity is comprised of various types of subject positions (to do with gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, sexuality, legal status, ability and health status, and an ever-expanding list of other categories, any combination of which may be particularly relevant in a certain context), and to understand that these statuses do not merely "add" to each other, but "in fact help to constitute each other." (Epstein and Carrillo 2014: 260) Queer theory has found this perspective particularly useful, and as Martin F. Manalansan IV describes, it does not simply "add" homosexual identities to the list of categories, but is a "political and theoretical perspective that suggests that sexuality is disciplined by social institutions and practices that normalize and naturalized heterosexuality and heterosexual practices" and works to "expose these privileging and normalizing tendencies" (Manalansan 2006: 225).

The challenge then is to be attentive to the various intersections of each individual's subjectivity without reifying those categories or making assumptions about the ways they interact from context to context. Jasbir Puar argues for sexuality to be understood as an "assemblage," an analytic grouping with permeable boundaries, and something of a moving target. Puar quotes Amit Rai's concern with reformulating sexuality as "ecologies of sensation" – "as affective energies rather than identity—that transcends the humanist

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designations of straight and gay, queer and non-queer, modern and pathological." (Puar 2013: 60) I would like to apply this thinking to other constructed categories as well, and see, for example, gender and race as "assemblages of sensations, affects, and forces" (Puar 2006: 24) so that it may be possible to resist further naturalizing and reifying of constructs that constrict and potentially foreclose other ways of thinking and being in the world.

Positioning the Researcher

In the practice of cultural anthropology, for the most part, the anthropologist is the research instrument. Certainly, there are a variety of methods used within the discipline, including the surveys, focus groups, and structured interviews our cousins in other social scientists would find familiar. Anthropology's signature technique, participant observation, may be considered, essentially, a focused type of "hanging out." The rapport between anthropologists and those participating in their studies is at the core of data-gathering, but also how anthropologists learn what lines of inquiry are most relevant, allowing our work to be adaptable and versatile.

This means that the intersections in positionality of the researcher can be a significant element in addressing intersectionality in a population under analysis. Of course, long and meandering discussions of "positionality," particularly in ethnographies of the last four decades or so, have been criticized as post-modern self-indulgences, even narcissistic. Meanwhile the worst criticism one might receive in other disciplines for

including descriptive expositions of methodologies, involving paragraphs on confounding variables, detailed explanations of data analysis plans, and barely-legible-when-printed graphs might be that the section is tedious, never that it's indulgent or a bit of a personal vice.

My own intersection was a precarious one as well in these circumstances, though certainly materially comfortable. I'm an American young woman, queer-identifying-with-reservations (do I have much right to this identity as a cis, femme-presenting woman, married to a cis, masc-presenting man? I don't face any of the open hostility others who are visibly non-conforming may, or had my partnership dismissed as illegitimate. Yet, I'm uncomfortable with "bisexual" as well, denoting as it does some "third way" between two bounded sexualities and two genders.) My American nationality came to be a significant part of my interactions with people; I found myself in conversations not infrequently about the role my country played in the conditions that led to the necessary flight of many (if not, to varying extents, all) whom I interviewed for this project. My participants hailed from across the Middle East and Africa, all from countries where American intervention has been significant, and has had direct impact on the experiences of the people I met, particularly those from Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

In 2016, I was rather forcibly removed from a queer club in Amsterdam after accidentally using an emergency exit, and as I was escorted out, I was told, "this isn't America." Unless there's some popular misapprehension in the Netherlands that in America we use emergency exits flagrantly and with regularity, I believe the statement was rather just a way to inform me that my kind were unwelcome in their establishment. But "my kind" was not just American in this situation—it was an American who did not present

queer enough. I had come directly from a wedding, in a fairly conservative (or straight-laced, should I say?) dress appropriate for that occasion. I was grabbed by the arm by a man, the bartender if I remember correctly, and, in a bit of shock, told him politely that I was leaving but asked to be released from his overly aggressive grasp. This seemed to be something more than a censure of an "Ugly American," a long-lasting characterization of my compatriots, especially when traveling abroad, as being loud, rude, and ethnocentric. In the context of this queer club, however, the swipe seemed to voice a resentment toward the cultural hegemonic power, a particular force that perhaps most explicitly stands for the oppressive heteronormative, cis-normative, and even the strength of a homonormativity deeply complicit in capitalistic injustices, most strongly emanating from the world's last (for now?) superpower.

Of course, I could be reading too much into the 2am response of an irritable bar-back at the end of his shift. Maybe the interaction represented a global anti-Americanism and its history of cultural hegemony, as well as the aggressive defense of a limited definition of queer community… or this fellow might have been a prick.

Years before, I had been denied entry to a gay club in London called Heaven because the bouncers did not believe my friends (all lesbians but one) and I were indeed lesbians. We were a well-dressed and conventionally attractive group—which I mention only to exclude other explanatory variables, like a club practicing "face control" or enforcing a dress code. We weren't gay enough to get into Heaven, as it turned out. (As much as I've enjoyed delivering that punchline since, it was a hurtful example of the ways borders of gayness are policed in everyday life.) The stakes were much less high than those the asylum cases I will address, but nonetheless a frustratingly common disciplining of

sexuality. I had been visiting a friend, who'd been living in London at the time, and was excited to show off the city. Heaven's rejection cut her in an especially deep way, one which relates to the topic that I address here. She'd been "out" to our friends for only a couple of years at that point, and was still nearly a decade away from talking to her Indian-born parents about the woman she planned to marry.

While I was writing this section I asked what she remembered about that night. She recalled feeling "lost," and like "an imposter". The incident made her feel like she didn't belong anywhere; not an unfamiliar feeling for her. She remembers thinking, "if these professional [bouncers] at a gay club don't think so, and most people I meet say stuff like, 'I never would have guessed!'-- as if that were a compliment-- and other lesbians don't hit on me because they assume I'm straight—then am I the one who has it wrong?" She quickly connected those feelings to tensions she'd navigated since she was quite young. She told me that it was all "reminiscent of the classic 'child of immigrants' problem where you don't feel comfortable or welcomed anywhere." She concluded that the Heaven rejection was, "just a reminder: there's no place for you in this world." I suspect as well that in the quick moments these club bouncers had to access our group, they saw this brown woman who they instinctually felt did not belong in a gay club, viewing ethnic minorities and LGBT as mutually exclusive categories.

Complicities and Current Events

Critiques of the complicities of anthropology both from inside and outside the discipline that began in earnest in the 1970s, most significantly from Talal Asad (1993), forced anthropology into an overdue reckoning with the ways in which colonialism allowed practitioners access to certain spaces, as well as the ways anthropologists directly worked for these regimes and provided, effectively, cultural guidebooks to effective management and domination of specific groups. Though we may not be conducting fieldwork today in traditional colonies thanks to access granted by the British authorities in India, or Dutch in Indonesia, the mass migration that resulted directly from the economic exploitation, arbitrary border-drawing, and natural resource depletion (among other long-lasting atrocities) of the former colonies provides us today with populations where we can study "the other" "at home."

On more than one occasion, would-be-interviews became conversations about US interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. These were not conversations I audio-recorded, and in some cases I put down my pen, stopped taking notes, thinking the interviews had gone "off-topic." But they hadn't. This was part of their stories, this was part of my story, and it was certainly part of this ethnographic encounter. I'm not sure that I can share their stories of pursuit of asylum in the Netherlands, or claim to have an intersectional focus without acknowledging military histories as one of those intersections, and making mention of their urgent appeals.

There was urgency in the way a few Syrian young men responded to my Americanness. While about midway through my fieldwork period, the United States still had 30,000 troops in Afghanistan and Iraq (Kurtzleben 2016), the traumas in these countries have a histories of US interventions decades long. Two Syrians, in particular, took

the opportunity to talk to me about what, at present, my country was doing to theirs, or rather, was completely failing to do: "We are being slaughtered, and the USA sits and does nothing."

Issues of Language

In the Netherlands in the mid 2010's, in some (limited, contextual) ways, English operated as a language of queerdom. That's a complicated, tense and even paradoxical thought, of course, as it's also a language of imperialism, cultural hegemony, and has taken this position in queer communications via various historic processes foreclosing the possibilities for the spread of other languages as "international." Yet, queer spaces frequently used English as common language, even when most participants or attendees were native Dutch speakers. For example, English is the unofficial language of Queeristan, an annual arts and politics festival for "fucking cool queers who found themselves in Amsterdam." (Radical Queer Resistance, N.d)

Of course, this is partially a practical consideration: not many migrants or asylum seekers arrive in the Netherlands with a working knowledge of Dutch. Some 90% of Dutch people speak English, supposedly making it the most English-proficient country in the world (where English is not the primary official language) (Education First, N.d.). Why I tentatively float the idea that there is something particularly queer about the use of English, however, is because not all "progressive" inclusively-minded, or pro-migrant groups were quite so intentional with their use of language. When I first arrived in the Netherlands, at an opposition rally in response to Geert Wilders' 2014 speech in which he declared his intention to deport Moroccans *en masse* (for which he was later convicted of

inciting discrimination, though the judgement came with no fine or sentence) I was approached by young queer man handing out pamphlets. He began speaking quickly, and I responded, "I'm so sorry, I don't speak Dutch." He then handed me one of his pamphlets, all of which were in English, and told me emphatically, "*Never* apologize for not speaking Dutch." It struck me as one of the most simple and potent acts of authentic inclusion I'd personally experienced. It felt radical: an imperative statement, and so definitive: "*never* apologize." I was learning Dutch, and was still in an exploratory phase of research, and I *did* feel sorry. I would attend other rallies, usually based at Museumplein, but which had speakers who made what certainly sounded like impassioned statements, though in Dutch. The rallies were ostensibly for immigrants and refugees, yet by operating almost entirely in a language nearly no refugees arrive with any knowledge of, was the rally really for them?

It can be, (again, somewhat paradoxically given its hegemonic power and pervasiveness also in the corporate sphere) progressive and almost radical to operate in English. While it is widely spoken in the Netherlands, English is still a language of outsiders—and many queer folks know something about feeling like outsiders. It is perhaps the very outsider-ness of English that gives it an appeal to these queer groups, though in more practical terms, the transnational accessibility of English functions to promote inclusivity and solidarity, fostering the sense of transnational familial ties among LGBT and queer folks that can be central to queer identity. Heidi Minning, discussing the use of English words and references "clearly traceable to Anglo-American sources" in German gay and lesbian communities argues that the result of this development "is a richly expressive language that contributes to a sense of transnational identity at the same time it strengthens local, community-based identities." (Minning 2004:47) In the Netherlands,

with so few migrants arriving with a knowledge of the Dutch language, the use of English in queer communities does indeed facilitate the building of local communities. To the west, Denis Provencher found a similar adoption of "gay English"[3] linguistic and symbolic references in a country not (stereotypically) known for excitement about adopting English, suggesting a "vague English creole" is found in French gay and lesbian communities that is something more situational and complex than "gay English with a French accent" (Provencher 2004).

Editors of the volume that includes the pieces by Minning and Provencher, William L. Leap and Tom Boellstorff, strongly caution against the assumption that use of English or specific "gay linguistic practices" means speakers are moving toward an "unified, gay-centered political movement" (Leap and Boelstorff 2004: 6-7) or a homogenous, Anglo-centered queer culture. They emphasize that "affinities, coalitions, and linkages among non-normative sexual subjectivities worldwide" should not be mistaken to mean "all these subjectivities are on a single trajectory or that the trajectory automatically ends in an Americanist vision of sexual life, sexual politics, and linguistic performance." (Leap and Boellstorff 2004: 7) Just because Amsterdam's Queeristan festival is hosted in English does not mean its participants wish to align with even the most radical or progressive English or American cultural movements; and because a group of Ugandan asylum seekers I spoke with made jokes about RuPaul doesn't mean UGOM will center their concepts of sexuality and community on *Drag Race.* These references and "vague creoles", linguistic traces and thickly "accented" Englishes are contextual and conditional, selective and strategic.

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[3] Provencher examined French "gay press" and argues that the relevant English linguistic and cultural references are dominantly those of Anglo-American gay men.

Imaginings of a far-flung transnational queer community, a queer *ummah,* though useful in local community-building, suffer from issues of exclusivity and erasure. As discussed earlier, Manalansan's (2003) argues that the presumed LGBT "universal home" of this dispersed queer family is indeed fenced off for those who do not hold the keys of whiteness, cisgender maleness, and wealth. In later chapters, this discussion of queer transnational kinship will be further explored, examining the erasure of diverse gender/sexual/bodily practices and desires that universalized queerness can involve.

Sorting through the complexities of language choice in a given context was yet another challenge facing queer asylum seekers. Working to learn and use Dutch would advantage an asylum applicant, as it might demonstrate an interest and ability to assimilate, and successful asylees are expected to pass Dutch language courses and exams in order to maintain their residential status. And yet, the Amsterdam queer scene in particular, seemed to operate largely in English—flyers for events, menus in bars, organizer announcements, etc. Would an asylum judge know that queer spaces often use English primarily, and therefore that lack of Dutch language skills would actually not indicate that an individual has not been engaging with local communities? A focused examination of contextual English language use among queer communities in the Netherlands, along the lines of studies in the Leap and Boellstorff volume, could work to answer questions not only about diversity and change in language practices, but how the specificities of queer communities' choices and strategies impact the experience of newcomers and their navigation of Dutch administrative processes.

"Constituency, Accountability, Solidarity"

I am committed to working collaboratively in my research, and honestly considering my responsibility to "constituency, accountability, solidarity" (Sember 2015). Admittedly, I worry about "walking through the confusion" of this task, because true collaboration means giving up control. That's a difficult thing, given that I've received messages throughout my life that "encourage people to see themselves as individualized and active subjects responsible for enhancing their own lives." (Elia and Yip 2012:881). Truly letting go is difficult, especially for the anxiety-ridden modern subject, and it takes work, reflexivity, conscious attention. Sember's comment that, "we need *most* the understanding of how to work collectively," (Sember 2015, emphasis mine) rings particularly true here, and I would add that we need this understanding most but also *first.* We are taught young, "me first," and it is a difficult thing to re-orient oneself to "us, always." Before anything else, we need to teach that rather than competition, (the assumed natural instinct in the neoliberal order,) collaboration and contribution are the engines of creativity and true progress.

I am building a career on the lives of others—hard lives, in particular. Anthropologists are acutely aware of this fact (or ought to be) because we have not always acknowledged this, let alone worked to reimburse those with whom we work for their contributions to our financial and career success. For my study, eligible participants necessarily have lived hard lives-- from persecution for a sexual identity, a sexual practice, an object of desire, a way of presenting a gendered body, a way of being in the world; to their present hardship-- the asylum process and the neglect, the maltreatment, denial of humanity, denial of justice it so often entails.

Chapter Outlines

In Chapter 2, I explore the historical backdrop for the present "crisis", looking at how changing political and cultural landscapes have shaped discourses around migration, Islam, and the Dutch "national imaginary". I examine particular technologies for the codification of "Dutchness" activated in migration processes, and their connections to these historical currents.

Chapter 3 begins describing Ayesha's experiences in the government-run camps for asylum seekers, and then moves to sketching the landscape of nongovernmental organizations working most closely with LGBT and queer asylum seekers, including the COC, Secret Garden, LGBT Asylum Support, Uganda Gay On the Move (UGOM), Maruf, and Queeristan, and their different agendas and orientations. Next, I explore two of smaller organizations in that landscape-- taking a narrative look at the day-to-day operations of Secret Garden, and examining the development of LGBT Asylum Support through an extended interview with its founder and head.

Chapter 4, "Transit Narratives: Sexuality and the Other" expands my theoretical frame, looking at how "Western" understandings of sexuality have developed, the language we use to talk about it, and how these understandings are politically mobilized. In order to examine the central role of sexuality in constructions of the Other, but also the power and complicities of personal narrative in subject construction, I consider together different types of transit narratives: women's travel narratives of the colonial period, contemporary "escape narratives" of women fleeing violence, coming out stories as well as LGBT asylum narratives, and a documentary film on LGBT activists in Uganda.

Chapter 5, "The Credibility Trap" examines the issue of asylum claim fraud from multiple angles, including the ways the bar for "credibility" can unintentionally be raised, to the detriment of asylum applicants. I contrast the demand of the asylum system for a particular kind of consistent subject with the lived reality of a "shifting subject", and the "traces" of those shifts that can be seen in the context of narrative-telling.

Chapter 6 examines the possible "hierarchies of suffering" in asylum. A story about a community dinner confronts the Syrian refugee "crisis" and perceptions among asylum seekers about which groups the system favors. A look at how Europe has come to understand trauma informs a discussion of humanitarianism and its darker side. Questions about how telling stories of suffering might have wider social impact are explored. Descriptions of my trips to the refugee camp at Dunkirk, France, circle back to issues of ethical concerns in research, and the transnational character of the "refugee crisis".

The Queeristan festival and collective are the focus of Chapter 8. Intersectionalism in theory, activism, and art center this discussion. Queeristan as a collective works to push back against the homonormative and homonationalist currents in Dutch society through constant reflexivity and attention to inclusivity. Though they may not always hit the mark with precision, they aim to answer Gloria Wekker's call for inclusivity of diverse sexualities in the Netherlands through modes of "doing" rather than speaking (2009).

In the final chapter, I examine how notions of "queer futurity" and Muslim "backwardness" are tied together, and the possibilities opened up when we understand ourselves as temporally "shifting subjects". I conclude my exploration of the contexts, challenges and social worlds of queer Muslim asylum seekers in the Netherlands with a last set of snap shots, which find Ayesha in new living circumstances.

2) The Changing Landscapes of Politics and Culture in the Netherlands: Dutch History and its Role in a Dutch National Imaginary

"The resurgent power of racist and racializing language, of raciology in its new genomic form, is a strong link between the perils of our own time and the enduring effects of the past horrors that continue to haunt us in Europe."
-Paul Gilroy

"The analysis is clear, we have a great problem with Islam, in the Netherlands too. The solution is not so complicated; what is missing are political guts and a feeling of urgency. Immigration from Islamic countries should be forbidden. We must learn to be intolerant with the intolerant, in the street, in the mosque, in court. We must answer hatred and violence by terrorists with exclusion and intolerance and show who the boss in the Netherlands is."
-Geert Wilders, Dutch politician

The Dutch landscape: Recent social history of The Netherlands

The Netherlands at Mid-Century: Depillarization, Decolonization, and Secularization

The Netherlands, like many of its neighbors, underwent great social and political changes during the mid-20th century. As the Dutch welfare state replaced religious and ideological organizations as the central source of social and financial support in the 1950s (van der Veer 2006: 119), the 1960s saw the demise of the Dutch "pillar" system, representing a "fundamental change" of Dutch society (Balkenhol and Jaffe 2013: 9). While the Netherlands was still quite ethnically homogenous—96 percent of the population was born in the Netherlands, and there were "no significant ethnic minority groups living in the Netherlands" after the Germany occupation (Kuipers 2000: 141-142)—sexual revolution had shaken and dislodged the established rule of Christian political parties (van der Veer

2006: 118; Hekma and Duyvendak 2011: 625). "Depillarization", then, represented dramatic change both politically and culturally.

Indonesia achieved sovereignty from the Netherlands in 1949 after seven years of struggle, including the Japanese occupation during WW2. Decolonization occurred more peacefully in the Caribbean colonies. In 1954, The Netherlands Antilles and Suriname were granted some autonomy, remaining members of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Suriname negotiated for independence in 1975, and Aruba chose to remain a part of the Kingdom. The Netherlands Antilles dissolved into its constituent islands 2010, though also remaining part of the Kingdom. Emigration from the former colonies to the Netherlands was substantial, especially in the periods immediately following independence, but also continuing into the 1990s. People of Indonesian and Surinamese heritage currently each constitute a little more than two percent of the population in the Netherlands (World Population Review 2019). From Indonesia came mostly Indo-Europeans (those of mixed Indonesian and European parentage).

Though its roots go back centuries, the pillar system had formally organized Dutch society and politics since the late 1800s, vertically segregating the population and its activities into (approximately) four groups: Catholic, Protestant, Socialist, and Liberal pillars (van der Veer 2006:118). The pillar system dominated much of life, with each pillar encompassing its own institutions, from political parties and newspapers to schools and social clubs. The 1960s saw a drastic reduction in Dutch religiosity, and the nation came to see itself as highly secular (van der Veer 2006: 118). Left over from the days of pillarization were political tendencies toward consensus, as well as the much-lauded "tradition of

tolerance" which had been "part of a broader system of noninterference with other pillars" (van der Veer 2006: 118).

Depillarization was celebrated as a "liberation, especially from obstacles to enjoyment" (van der Veer 2006: 118), which, by the 1970s, led the Dutch to emerge "as the most liberal nation in the world on issues of sexual morality" (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011: 625). During the next decade, between 1970 and 1980, a "general tolerance of homosexuality" increased dramatically, and those gains have continued steadily since (Buijs, Hekma and Duyvendak 2011: 633). Absent such intense pressure from pillarized communities, egalitarianism, individualization, and "self-actualization as imperative" spread (Kuipers 2012: 26). This "egalitarian ethos", a central feature of Dutch national imaginary to this day, should not be confused with equality, cautions Gislinde Kuipers. She argues that, "the egalitarian ethos has not ended inequality but rather obfuscated it," and the social boundaries and exclusions dating back to the days of pillars have often remained powerful (Kuipers 2012: 27). The narrative of a trend toward secularization and dis-identification with religion, as well as other types of identification and association, however, did not include the reality that there was simultaneously a more "visible national presence of Muslims" and an increasing number of evangelical Christians in the country (Balkenhol and Jaffe 2013: 9). As the country secularized and depillarized, however, a growing interest in populism began to take the place of these institutions as a source of collective belonging.

The Century Begins to Turn: Immigration, and Rising anti-Muslim Sentiments

Stability had returned by the 1990s, along with economic growth, decline in religious identification, and general political consensus (van der Veer 2006: 115), but "[s]omething seems to have upset Dutch collective well-being at the end of the 1990s." (van der Veer 2006: 116) Van der Veer points to migration and asylum as the central concerns of this moment. A particular anxiety around groups over-staying their welcome seems pervasive: asylum seekers during the 1980s and 1990s would wait for five or six years for a decision on their cases, and in the meantime, they stayed in asylum camps, unable to work (van der Veer 2006: 116). Around the same time, the issue of "guest workers" (mainly from Turkey and Morocco) who had immigrated in the 1960s and formed "enclaves" came to a head: though these families had been in the Netherlands for decades, the country had not yet dealt with the idea that the Netherlands was now multiethnic and that these groups were here to stay. The second half of the century had also seen migration from former Dutch colonies, including many Muslims from Indonesia. As many asylum seekers (particularly from the former Yugoslavia) and guest workers were Muslim, increasingly Islam was "understood as the unifying symbol of these unwelcome foreigners" (van der Veer 2006:116). While mainstream political parties still avoided politicizing immigration, the far right put this issue at the center of their platforms.

In this context, the role of the *Dutchbat* (a battalion of United Nations peacekeepers from the Netherlands) in the massacre at Srebrenica in July 1995 during the Bosnian War is arguably an index of anti-Muslim sentiment growing in the Netherlands, with horrifying consequences. The extent of the *Dutchbat's* culpability has been hotly debated, but a 2002 report by the Dutch government concluded that the Netherlands bore partial responsibility for the deaths of some 7,000 Muslim men, in failing to protect them from the Bosnian Serb

army (van der Veer 2006:117). Van der Veer states that the "Dutch peacekeepers had developed a strong dislike for the Muslim population of the area" and considered them "poor, dirty, and cunning" (van der Veer 2006:117). The report by the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation represented the largest ever project by historians and social scientists in the country, and resulted in the cabinet of Prime Minister Wim Kok resigning. The matter had lasting effects on Dutch society and sense of moral standing in international politics.

Into the void created by these resignations, and a political landscape in which all but the far right worked to exploit frustration over immigration, stepped Pim Fortuyn. Openly gay, notoriously vulgar, and unapologetically anti-Muslim, Fortuyn was in a category of his own, and started his own party in 2002, the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (Pim Fortuyn List). His platform was considered extreme right on issues of immigration and criticism of Islam, and while he ostensibly supported civil liberties, he was solidly conservative in the rest of his political positions. He often pitted Islam against LGBT and women's rights and argued that Muslims were such a threat to the integrity of Dutch values that he would have liked to see all immigration from Muslim countries ended (Poorthuis and Winsink 2002). A favorite political move was to provoke conservative imams into making statements condemning him and Western decadence more broadly, which in turn gave his credibility and popularity a boost (Lesage & Asselberghs 2002). A frequent adversary was Imam Khalil El-Moumni, who in 2001 stated that because Europeans allowed same-sex marriage, they were "lower than pigs and dogs", sparking great controversy about religious freedom, freedom of speech, and the ability of Muslims to coexist with LGBTs (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011: 626).

Although Fortuyn "stood for gay rights, they were not included in the party's program" (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011: 626), and although he argued for women's progress, he famously told a female reporter to go home and cook. He wanted to end immigration from Muslim countries, but also, in another famous quote "recalling homosexual desires and orientalist fantasies about Morocco" (van Der Veer 2006:120) that he wanted to "fuck young Moroccan boys without having to deal with their backward imams" (cited in van der Veer 2006:120). Fortuyn was assassinated at the height of his career in May 2005 by a Dutch animal rights activist, just days before the general election. His effect on Dutch politics is hard to overestimate, and even now, his meteoric rise can be difficult to understand for many Dutch. He ushered in an age of populism two decades before academics and pundits began to talk (or warn) of a "populist revolution" in Europe and the United States. His credentials as a populist have been questioned; as a professor of sociology, he was not the archetypal image of anti-intellectualism, but was highly critical of another type of elite: the political elite (usually imagined as left-wing), and his anti-immigration and Euroskeptic positions cemented his place in history as a having fired perhaps the first shot in the "populist revolution" of the new century (alongside others, like old guard anti-migrant far-rightists like France's Jean-Marie le Pen, father of Marine Le Pen, former presidential candidate and part of the current cohort of populists in Europe, along with Fortuyn's successor, Geert Wilders.)

Not long before Fortuyn's assassination was another high-profile assassination. Theo van Gogh was a film director and producer, and descendant of Vincent van Gogh. His most notable work was a 2004 film called Submission, produced in collaboration with Ayaan Hirsi Ali (discussed in greater depth later-on), a member of Parliament and Somali

refugee. Both van Gogh and Hirsi Ali were famous critics of Islam. Van Gogh made many statements about the threat of the religion in Europe, and wrote a popular book, *Allah weet het beter,* (Allah Knows Best). Hirsi Ali, a former Muslim-turned-atheist, was very outspoken with her criticism of what she saw as the poor treatment of women in Muslim societies. Van Gogh was murdered in 2004 by a Dutch-Moroccan man who had been angered by their film. The assassination caused a nation-wide panic, with the Minister of Finance proclaiming war between Islam and the West, and much discussion on extremism, and Muslims' supposed lack of sense of humor, which recalled the Salman Rushdie controversy of earlier decades, in which the "terms of the debate" involved "Muslim illiteracy in satire" being identified as a "sign of deep cultural backwardness" (van der Veer 2006:112). There was fear of a backlash against Muslims living in the Netherlands, but state authorities were mostly able to deescalate any violence (van der Veer 2006:112).

Through the tumult of the mid-1990s through mid-2000s, certain trends and impulses seemed to solidify. There became a "general tendency" for world events and incidents like van Gogh's assassination to be seen through the lens of a "rise of militant Islam" (van der Veer 2006:112). Growing Euroskepticism since the introduction of the euro came to represent the "slow disintegration of Dutch national integrity" (van der Veer 2006: 116), a sentiment prevalent after the report on the massacre at Srebrenica as well. The country had lost its currency, and there was concern that further, it would lose its distinctiveness from its neighbors as the Eurozone gained importance. After Srebrenica, the country lost its sense of itself as a moral leader.

In 2001, the Netherlands was the first country to legalize prostitution, and the following year was also the first to legalize same sex marriage. Of course, neither

development meant social equality (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011: 625) for LGBT

individuals or sex workers, but sexual freedom and individual rights became more

increasingly central to the Dutch national imaginary, and a source of pride. A few years

earlier, in 1998, The Netherlands had reached another, more dubious "first", becoming one

of the first countries in the world to "make undocumented migrants ineligible for social

services and to exclude them from the labour market" (Mutsaers 2014: 837). Meanwhile, as

reactions against globalization generally and migration in particular grew more vitriolic,

political parties and figures (as well as media and some academics) took the opportunity to

politicize these issues for their own benefit. Pim Fortuyn embodied all of these trends, but,

as van der Veer argues, "[h]e capitalized on it but did not create it" (van der Veer 2006:

116).

Mid-2000s to the present: The "Crisis" of Multiculturalism in the Netherlands

Following the high-profile assassinations of 2004 and 2005, immigration and

multiculturalist policies begun decades earlier became open subjects of criticism and

debate. "Multiculturalism" was thought of as both a "social project and as a political

ideology" (Balkenhol and Jaffe 2013: 8), and both were declared failed by the mid-2000s.

The idea that multiculturalism was in "crisis" resonated widely and was spoken of

prominently (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012: 196). The Dutch "obsession" with

multicultural society ran alongside a similar obsession regarding the European Union

(Balkenhol and Jaffe 2013: 8); both issues seeming to highlight a growing panic over Dutch

national sovereignty, loss of power and prestige, and cultural threat. The country was slow

to recover from economic crisis that began in 2008, and the accompanying implementation of neoliberal economic policies exacerbated these anxieties (Balkenhol and Jaffe 2013: 8).

In 2011, prominent government minister Piet Hein Donner announced a "Farewell to Multicultural Society in the Netherlands" in a widely publicized letter (Kern 2011). The letter was submitted with a bill that sought to dismantle laws and procedures meant to assist migrants and refugees with integration, as integration "is not the government's job", while at the same time instituting new requirements for immigrants to conform in specific ways, including learning Dutch. Several propositions, like banning burqas, were targeted at Muslims specifically, and were often framed as economic issues—a woman would supposedly have a harder time finding a job if she wore a burqa (Kern 2001). The letter made clear that defense of the "Dutch way of life" had become urgently important, and that those who supported the bill saw Islam as an imminent threat.

Meanwhile, research into the realities of immigration and ethnic diversity in the Netherlands told a very different story. The popular notion that immigrants arriving in the Netherlands "hunkered down" in their own segregated communities and therefore failed to engage in social activities, or learn Dutch or any Dutch customs, would seem to support Robert Putnam's widely cited 2007 "hunker down hypothesis." However, Huijts, Kraaykamp and Scheepers posited that the Netherlands was "a particularly strong test case of Putnam's hunkering-down hypothesis" as levels of social capital were the highest in Europe (2014:42). They rejected the model as applicable there, finding that Putnam's conclusions "were based on models that were seriously limited in some respects" (Huijts, Kraaykamp and Scheepers 2014: 42). While Putnam argued that "ethnic diversity erodes social solidarity and social cohesion" and that ethnic minorities have less "social capital"

(quoted in Huijts, Kraaykamp and Scheepers 2014: 42), their study found no evidence for this. The researchers found high levels of social capital among ethnic minorities, and high amounts of social interaction, partly credited to the lack of strong neighborhood segregation (Huijts, Kraaykamp and Scheepers 2014: 42). However, they noted that while ethnic minorities interact frequently with other ethnicities, inter-ethnic interactions between ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities varied by geographic location within the Netherlands (Huijts, Kraaykamp and Scheepers 2014: 42). If anyone was "hunkering down" (as studies challenging Putnam in contexts across the world have found), it was the ethnic Dutch.

Ayesha's experience largely conformed to this trend. While living in the AZCs, she and other asylum seekers I spoke with reported feeling uneasy spending time in adjacent local communities. One woman said she had been stared at in a grocery store several times, and on one occasion a woman had approached her asking about her head covering in a manner she felt was aggressive. Ayesha experience a nearly identical situation, but interpreted the person as curious rather than combative. Once settled in her own apartment in a southern city, Ayesha made friends quickly with other migrants in her immediate neighborhood, chatting every morning with a Syrian man who always had coffee on his balcony, rain or shine, babysitting for an Iraqi family, and establishing weekly visits with an elderly man from somewhere in Central Asia ("some-stan" as Ayesha called it). While Ayesha noted that there were Dutch families in her area, they were less open and friendly. She explained it in a rather utilitarian way, saying that the other migrants knew how important it was to make connections in a new country, and that the Dutch families already had friends and family nearby to help them when needed.

Naar Nederland: Codifying Dutchness

The Dutch Civic Integration Exam Abroad

      The "crisis" of multiculturalism launched a new integration discourse and policy initiatives. This changing view on multiculturalism accompanied an intensified interest in defining what type of person was eligible to receive government aid and services. Documents produced by the Dutch government between 2003 and 2005 outlined a re-imagined "social contract" for the country, emphasizing self-sufficiency and "active citizenship", which it largely defines as citizens organizing to carry out initiatives for the common good, rather than making "demands" on the state (van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011: 415-416). Ostensibly aimed at all residents, these initiatives were clearly a response to anxieties about ethnic and religious integration, and targeted new migrants as well as young generations with migrant heritage.

      The Integration Abroad Act of 2005 tightened restrictions on immigration by increasing barriers to application. Political discourse around the act, as well as practical content and policy initiatives set out within, acutely affirmed the institutional secular liberalism of the Dutch state and its cultural agenda. At the heart of this type of secular liberalism is the disciplining of migrants in service of producing "'recognizable' and 'tolerable' citizens" (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:196)—at least, those who weren't excluded outright. Many of its measures focus on promoting the learning of the Dutch language, which serves both as a barrier and a way of "defending" a language many saw as

imperiled by migration (*Tweede Kamer* 2005). The financial burden of immigration grew considerably higher as well (though the fee for taking the exam was initially 350€, it has since been reduced to 150€). Implementation of the act immediately led to a large decrease in the number of applications for residency (Human Rights Watch 2008:2).

The Integration Abroad Act requires that those hoping to immigrate to the Netherlands pass the Basic Civic Integration Examination Abroad, and if successful, they must take another exam within three years of their arrival in the Netherlands. Courses to prepare for this test, as well as Dutch language courses, must be found and paid for by the individual. Because the exam may change year to year, the study packet (for purchase) for the exam also changes, a fact that many on internet forums addressing the exam complain about, as they cannot share study materials from other years. The exam must be taken at a Dutch embassy or other diplomatic mission in one's home country or country of residence, and no exception can be made if there is no Dutch representation in that country—the hopeful migrant must travel to another country to take the exam (IND). For the second test (taken in the Netherlands within three years) some loan money is available through the government for refugees. In some cases, the loan is forgiven if they pass the test.

The integration exams were touted by Dutch politicians as both a tool to promote integration and a "mechanism of selection" (Bonjour 2010: 306). At their inception, the integration exams in particular targeted the reunification of family members from Morocco and Turkey (two of the largest minority groups), and through the exemption of most "Western" and wealthy nations, also works to exclude migrants from South America, Africa, and Asia (other than South Korea and Japan). Since 2005, Turkish nationals and the close family members of Turkish nationals living legally in Netherlands have been made exempt

from the exam. Human Rights Watch argued that the Integration Abroad Act violates several international human rights laws, including "right to family life" and "right to marry and found a family" as well as prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, (which they argued was largely an indirect violation, as the act has "disproportionate impact on certain migrant communities") (Human Rights Watch 2008).

Naar Nederland (Coming to the Netherlands) is an hour and a half-long film produced as part of the Integration Abroad Exam, and meant to introduce its audience to Dutch history, customs, and values. In the 2017 iteration of the film, an attractive young woman, speaking Dutch, narrates the film, covering various topics. She describes the history of the country using background images of artwork and live-action video clips and describes Dutch government from inside Parliament. Scripted scenes demonstrate cultural faux pas, while interviews and scenes of real people attempt to give a view into everyday life, including healthcare and schooling. The language of the film is fairly simple and clear, which critiques have interpreted as "somewhat infantilizing, as if it was crafted for elementary school children" (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:197). However, as someone learning the Dutch language, like much of the intended audience, I found the simplicity, pacing, and accompanying visuals helpful in following along.

Women's emancipation and gay sexuality are central to the film, and the scenes of bare-breasted women at the beach, as well as men kissing, have gotten a lot of attention for highlighting these themes visually. While the film presents these freedoms as absolute, it glosses over the range of attitudes within Dutch society. There is also a significant gap for some between a socially desirable, abstract "acceptance" of homosexuality, and concrete human interactions. Survey research supports this assessment:

"though up to 95 per cent of Dutch people claim in surveys that they accept homosexuals, 42 per cent report that they dislike seeing two men kissing in the street (precisely the image used in the documentary *Naar Nederland* for the immigration test.)" (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011:626)

The same survey found that 31% of respondents dislike seeing lesbians kissing, and 8% dislike straight people kissing in public. The strictures of gender are still strong here, despite proclamations to the contrary; a gay encounter still involves emasculation, a threatening power disturbance, while two women are much less threatening and quite frequently, seen as frivolous or intended for the enjoyment of men watching. A 2011 report found that gay-bashing is a "severe problem" in Amsterdam, and that this type of violence is commonplace (Buijs, Hekma and Duyvendak 2011:633). Violence is often proceeded by the perpetrators fearing seduction or coming under peer pressure (Buijs, Hekma and Duyvendak 2011:632). The lead author, Laurens Buijs, told me that while he found that anti-LGBT hate crimes are committed just as often by ethnic Dutch as by Moroccans, Turks, or other groups of Muslim background, he felt immense pressure from various sources to confirm the supposition that Muslims were entirely to blame for anti-LGBT violence, and to frame his findings in this way. This is not to erase the problems of "pervasive anti-(homo)sexual opinions among many Muslims" (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011:627) but to challenge the assumption that they are exceptionally and uniquely homophobic. In surveys looking at attitudes toward homosexuality across Europe, the Dutch do (self)-report an acceptance of homosexuality more frequently than anywhere else (Buijs, Hekma and Duyvendak 2011:633). Still, the film *Naar Nederland* is often pointed to as an explicit

example of how gay rights became "close to a litmus test for eligibility to immigrate to the Netherlands" (Hekma and Duyvendak 2011:626).

Foreign clergy are among the targeted groups in the Integration Exam Abroad, partly in response to the media's "voracious coverage" of imams in Dutch mosques who supposedly refused to integrate, and a panic over radicalization of Dutch mosques by incoming foreign imams, which was reported to be greatly increasing (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:200). That new regulations have been put on foreign clergy is particularly strange because the exam was put into place ostensibly to reduce long-term migration and defend against demographic change, and these clergy generally come to the Netherlands on temporary contracts. No similar restrictions were put on Catholic or Protestant clergy in recent decades (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:204).

A second group specifically targeted by the exam are so-called "import-brides", often imagined as uneducated women from remote villages in Morocco and Turkey, and embodying stereotypes of Muslim women as subservient, dependent on men, and in need of "saving" (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:200). They were thought to poorly integrate once in the Netherlands, and to raise (many) children who were school drop-outs, public nuisances, and at risk of being criminals. Rita Verdonk, a prominent rightist politician, characterized these imagined women as "mothers of children", (cited in De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012) a clear call not to think of them as individuals, but as progenitors of an invasion, entire criminal gangs and sleeper cells just waiting to be born to them. Migrant mothers more generally were described by Dutch politicians as "both the actor and the victim of the 'problem'", both at fault for their families' supposed separation from Dutch society, and oppressed by the male members of their communities (Bonjour 2010:302).

Media and politicians' statements promulgated ideas of "import brides" as "governed by their essentialized culture" (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:201) and invoked notions of women as the bearers of culture (van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011). Of course, these stereotypes do not stand up to reality; Turkish and Moroccan women constituted only one-tenth of the total number of women who arrived in the Netherlands to marry a partner during this time period (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:201).

Most asylum seekers do not take the Integration Exam Abroad, as they arrive in the country either undocumented or on various types of short-term visas, and only upon entry and submission to the asylum authorities do they officially become asylum seekers. However, some attempt to gain legal temporary residency first, before they leave their home countries or enter the Netherlands, and later apply for asylum. A Moroccan man with whom I spoke was one such asylum seeker—he had originally entered the country at the invitation of his brother, who had come to the Netherlands years before and gotten residency. Once a resident, the brother was able to bring nuclear family members to join him. However, this particular man arrived before the implementation of the exam, so never had to take it; if he had been attempting to migrate after 2005, he would have been among those required to take and pass the exam before being eligible to apply to come to the Netherlands.

The Basic Civic Integration Examination Abroad generally and the *Naar Nederland* film more specifically are interesting as much for what they tell potential migrants they should know and further, what they should become, in order to be acceptable Dutch citizens, as it is interesting as a text of clear and deliberate identity construction by a nation in the midst of an identity crisis. Along with gender and sexual liberation, themes of

individualism and free choice are central. Free choice, of course, is a freedom to choose

liberal Dutch values (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:198).

Put succinctly:

"At work is an (ethno)culturalist ontology in which the disintegrated and over-
cultured dangerous migrant can simply make a neoliberal, individualistic choice to
'be like us'" (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:199).

Ewing contends that the film "reveals an idiosyncratically Dutch response to the

threat of Muslim difference": it forces the viewer to encounter a scene that would make

many—not just strict Muslims—uncomfortable, and perform "Dutch tolerance" by averting

their gaze (Ewing 2008:198-199). This averted gaze is so integral to Dutch tolerance that it

is, as Ewing points out, enacted in the everyday practice of leaving one's living room

curtains open. While the resident of the home shows that they are living cleanly, the

passerby averts their gaze (Ewing 2008:198-199). It is, like the famous tolerance of drugs

and sex, a pragmatic agreement—Dutch homes, from the slim, stepped-roof canal-side

houses to the efficient blocks of postwar apartments, have large windows to catch every

last ray of the scant sunlight. The light is a resource too precious to forsake in the name of

modesty, and so the onus is pushed street-side. So too with the famous "red lights"-- staring

at the women in the windows (and it is almost exclusively women, including transwomen,

in the windows as male sex workers are housed in brothels) is rude, and (as locals bemoan)

immediately flags a person as one of the swelling ranks of uncouth tourists clogging the

narrow walkways of the central city. In the Netherlands, establishing privacy is not the

responsibility of the doer, but the viewer, whose averted gaze bestows the privacy that the

doer requires to safely and comfortably do what they like.

Geert Wilders and "Fewer Moroccans"

Shortly after I arrived in the Netherlands in March 2014, Geert Wilders, the head of

the PVV (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, or Freedom Party), made his now-infamous statement at a

rally in the Hague: He asked the crowd of supporters if they would like more or fewer

Moroccans (who comprised 2% of the population) in the Netherlands, to which the crowd

responded with chants of "Fewer, fewer!" Wilders reportedly smiled and told them, "Then

we will arrange that" (Trouw 2014). Rallies were held across the country decrying Wilders'

bigotry, and expressing solidarity with Dutch-Moroccans. The statement later landed him

in court for charges of hate speech and discrimination, for which he was convicted (though

served no punishment) in December of 2016.

Less bombastic than his predecessor, Pim Fortuyn, Wilders was even more

ravenous in his campaign against Muslims in the Netherlands. His apocalyptic warnings of

the Islamization of the country, calls for banning the Qur'an, and declarations that Muslim

migration means "the end of European and Dutch civilization as we know it" have garnered

him international media attention. Vossen describes how Wilders snatched up the

opportune moment in the wake of Fortuyn's murder, and with populist xenophobic

rhetoric, offered the press "a whole range of spectacular storylines and events, such as the

release of his anti-Islam movie, *Fitna* (2008), and his detention at Heathrow Airport as a

consequence of the UK Home Secretary's ban on him entering the country" for extremist

statements (2010:23). For years, Wilders has been arguing for a ban on immigration from

Muslim countries, and his public remarks are so vitriolic that the 2016 conviction was not

the first time he had run afoul of hate speech laws. Curiously, his defense centers on freedom of speech, though one of Wilders' most famous platforms is a book ban: a ban on the Qur'an.

Wilders has often used the defense of women as justification for his anti-Muslim platform. Sadly, though not surprisingly, women bear the brunt of much of the legislation and other initiatives targeting Muslims. In 2004, the Vrije University (where I was a Visiting Researcher in the summer of 2014) banned certain forms of Islamic dress (van der Veer 2006:120), a move that ostensibly aimed to "free" these women from the supposed oppression of their culture symbolized in their clothing, but which only served to both make it more difficult for conservative Muslim women to achieve education by denying them the right to educational spaces where they can express their religion and their modesty, and to alienate Muslim women more generally from Dutch society. Headscarves, weighted heavily with symbolism foisted onto them by Western interpretations across Europe, North America, and beyond, are regarded as a total rejection of the Dutch way of life" (van der Veer 2006:120). Materially and symbolically, women are seen as bearers of culture, and in cases like this, are punished accordingly. Again, sadly but not surprisingly, feminists in the Netherlands (as elsewhere) have piled on:

> "…feminists have led the attacks on Muslims in the Netherlands. One leading feminist in the Netherlands recently declared that she would not allow a woman with a head scarf to become a member of the editorial board of a feminist magazine. In response, it was pointed out that immigrant women with head scarves surely cleaned the offices of that magazine." (van der Veer 2006:120)

A headscarf, in Dutch imagination, is a drawn curtain. Like a living room, a body should be able to be exposed, shown to be living cleanly. This relationship between the

politics of the headscarf and ideas of nudity and exposure is similar to that of Germany, where nudity has a significant social history. From the 19th century "back-to-nature" embrace of the body in response to industrialization, to the Nazi obsession with Aryan racial and bodily purity, to the leftist use of nudity in protest, the naked body has been a symbol of a natural purity (Ewing 2008:193-194). Like in Germany, debates over headscarves in the Netherlands have largely been centered around the idea of freedom *from* religion, casting the headscarf as an imposition against religious neutrality in public spaces (Ewing 2008). Unlike in France, where head-covering was banned in public schools in 2004 and face-covering was nationally banned in public spaces in 2010, and the constitutional requirement of *laïcité* (secularity) demands separation between the activities of government and religions, both the Netherlands and Germany require only neutrality in government involvement with religion. The Dutch government funds religiously identified schools, and several political parties are explicitly Christian.

This exertion of the power to decide what is liberation, and what is oppression; what is feminist, and what is regressive; what is cultural, and what is universal, has a long history, scarred with the violence of unforeseen consequences. The idea that "'we' can take away certain freedoms of cultural Others in order to defend 'real' freedom" (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:199) is a framework doomed to failure, and yet has real resonance in the modern secular liberal state.

The Saturday following Wilders' "fewer Moroccans" statement, I joined my friend Sofia's reading group/activist collective at a large Anti-Racism march. Sofia had helped me find an apartment when I first arrived in Amsterdam; she was from Spain, married a Dutch

man and had a seven-year old child who she always brought with her to marches and demonstrations. Most, but not all, of the members of this reading group were currently either teaching or completing graduate degrees at Dutch universities. The few non-academics were artists and self-described activists. It struck me that a Swedish visual artist, the Dutch-American co-founder of the group, and myself aside, all the members were Southern Europeans and/or Mediterranean: several Spanish and Greek, one Italian, one Turkish. Perhaps this had to do with the social networks that brought people to the groups, perhaps it was a function of the comparatively troubled economies of these Southern European countries at the time, or, as Sofia suggested, their Northern colleagues felt less marginalized in the university systems than did the Southerners, and needed this collective less. In any case, they were mobilized, and their voices were added to the thousands of Amsterdammers who were furious with Wilders' statement, and filled the streets to stand against bigotry.

We marched that Saturday from the Museumplein, the green manicured field behind the palatial Rijksmuseum, hemmed in by other monumental exhibitions of culture: the Van Gogh museum, the contemporary Stedelijk museum, and the Concertgebouw concert hall; down through the canal zone, through streets barely the width of a car, with signs, banners and chants, primarily in English. This march, on my first full weekend in the Netherlands, gestured toward a fact that keeps me hopeful: it can be tempting to discuss the Netherlands, still one of the world's most ethnically homogenous countries, as if it speaks with one voice, but in fact it chants "Fuck Racism!" up and over the canal bridges much more often than it does "Fewer! Fewer!" in response to a demagogue's vitriol.

Race, and Reckoning

Current panics around multiculturalism, immigration, and assimilation in the Netherlands are, in part, a product of unresolved debates and concerns from decolonialization-- grappling with their place among nations, historical (and current) wrongs, issues of race and ethnicity, and of the meaning of Dutchness. Though national discussions, legislation, and educational initiatives have been ongoing over the past several decades, the Netherlands "has not yet come to terms with this historical change, [decolonization]" (Balkenhol and Jaffe 2013:8). In a fairly explicit example of Paul Gilroy's concept, "postcolonial melancholia" (2006), Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende made a comment in 2006 at the House of Representatives (as well as other occasions) that the Netherlands should go back to a "*VOC-mentaliteit*" (VOC mentality), referring to the Dutch East India Company, a driver of Dutch colonialism. Though he was ostensibly speaking about renewal of an international economic presence, the fact that a Prime Minister could flippantly (or maybe not?) mention the colonial period so glowingly and so uncritically speaks (at least somewhat) to a lack of real recognition and reckoning with the country's colonial history.

"Race" as a term and concept remains highly contentious and even taboo in the Netherlands, as anti-racism is an important part of its national imaginary. Hans Siebers (2017), a scholar of migration and labor, expresses an argument I've heard often in discussion of racism and marginalization in the Netherlands: that the Netherlands is anti-racist, and that there is a significant difference between racism, which in the Netherlands is

inextricable from Nazism, (Siebers 2017:371) and the "cultural" and "ethnic" bias and

bigotry seen there. This unwillingness to consider the ideology of Nazism as at all related to

other, current systems of thinking about difference may be a result of the Second World

War and the Holocaust being "treated as 'evil incidents' that stand outside the systemic

structures of western modern civilization" (De Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012:200). In

discussions of bias against immigrant groups, some Dutch scholars (prominent sociologist

Giselinde Kuipers is one such author) use the term "ethnicity", even when examining

attitudes towards "blacks", a group which I do not believe anyone would describe as an

"ethnicity" if mentioned in a context in which no other immigrant groups are discussed. For

Siebers and others, that "anti-racism is among the prominent orthodoxies in Dutch post-

war public discourses and institutions" (Siebers 2017: 371) seems to absolve the

government, other institutions, and the populace against accusations of racism. He

complains that American Critical Race Theorists (CRT) attempt to export their terms and

concepts, inappropriately mapping them onto dynamics in Europe, not allowing the Dutch

their emic understandings of difference. Though my instinct is to side with the emic, I see

the rejection of CRT as either a misunderstanding of its contexts, or a dangerous denial of

the realities of systemic bigotry in the Netherlands. I fear that I may just confirm Siebers'

hypothesis, being an American-born scholar who believes Critical Race Theory can indeed

be relevantly applied to the Dutch context. While remaining clear-eyed and reflexive about

concerns of academic-cultural imperialism, which could map US social structures upon the

rest of the globe (certainly one of the greatest sins in anthropology) I find that I am also

concerned by a Dutch exceptionalism that haunts these arguments, which insists that the

Netherlands is so powerfully and uniquely anti-racist that any continued racism in the country is impossible, almost by definition.

Siebers argues that at the root of the split between race and ethnicity is the Second World War, which looms large in Dutch public imagination: "This trauma's impact on post-war Dutch public opinion and politics can hardly be overestimated. It has been among the most prominent topics in Dutch literature, arts, cinema, theatre, etc." (Siebers 2017:371) I do not question this assertion, but I would add that as an argument meant to illustrate the cultural and historical differences between the Netherlands and the United States, this particular issue of the Second World War in media does not carry water. US films about WW2 number some 500 (by my count) with ten currently in development, 36 television shows (and—quick plug!—one TV program in the works about the Dutch resistance written by my aunt, telling the story of the work my grandmother did in the organized resistance to Nazi occupation). At time of writing, some of the most popular and award-winning productions and literary works concern that very period (*Man in the High Tower, Dunkirk,* and *All the Light We Cannot See,* to name just a few in 2017-2018.)

Siebers sees this abiding fascination with WW2 in media and public discourse as evidence of the utter singularity of the war and of Nazism, and uses this notion as to imply that because race and Nazism are so intertwined in the Dutch imagination, that Critical Race Theory (CRT) and those who would attempt to speak of the structural and discursive marginalization of and even violence against people of color in the Netherlands are talking about a different phenomenon. They are not. A key contribution of CRT is the affirmation that "race" is a mutable concept and changes over time; it will look different at different moments and different places (Delgado and Stefancic 2000; Bonilla-Silva 2006; Omi and

Winant 2014). The absence of the racial foundations of colonialism in this conversation is also telling. That "race" is inextricable from Nazi ideology in the Netherlands may also be true, but that doesn't make the race concept un-expandable or inapplicable outside that context. Yes, Nazism was an ultimate evil. As was American slavery. The difference seems to be that American Critical Race Theorists are not afraid to link these past evils to present injustice, oppression, and further (if transformed) evils. By disavowing race as a category of analysis or a concern in the European context, I fear these this scholarship misses out on the contributions of Critical Race Theory, and the connections and through-lines it draws between biological and cultural racism.

These scholars and many likeminded people in the country are uncomfortable and unwilling to reckon with the implication that the ways Muslims especially are treated in the Netherlands (politicians threatening to send all Moroccans back, to shut all mosques, to ban the Qu'ran; and, legislating successfully the targeting of Muslims in immigration procedures, outlawing Muslim religious garb in public, to name just a few examples) is at all comparable to the philosophical and technological underpinnings of Nazi ideology. They need to get comfortable with this idea, and fast, so that this form of racism can be confronted head-on.

3) Organizations and Networks of Asylum

"At the end of the day, it isn't where I came from. Maybe home is somewhere I'm going and
never have been before."
-Warsan Shire, poet

:

"… defining a refugee as someone who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted
for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or
political opinion, 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; or who, not having a
nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or,
owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."
-Article 1(A)(2) of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, as amended by
its 1967 Protocol

This chapter sketches the landscape of institutions and organizations that work with

LGBT and queer asylum seekers, beginning with descriptions of the government-run

asylum facilities and procedures of COA, and then looking at the relevant nongovernmental

organizations. I use two narratives of Ayesha's experience at Ter Apel and another AZC

illustrate the day-to-day experience of the asylum process and conditions in the centers.

Two nongovernmental organizations, Secret Garden and LGBT Asylum Support, are

examined ethnographically to explore how asylum seekers make use of these groups to

learn and share strategies, get practical assistance in their legal and living situations, and

lean upon one another for support. A narrativized interview with the founder of LGBT

Asylum Support begins to illustrate how the sexual politics of LGBT asylum are bound up

with racial fetishization. The chapter concludes by looking at some disturbing allegations

against these organizations.

Reception

Four months after she entered Ter Apel, back at University of Amsterdam, Ayesha opened a speech about her experiences in the Dutch asylum system by saying, "In that one day, everything changed." In those days and weeks after she'd received the death threats from her husband, Ayesha was plagued by relentless anxiety and rumination.

"I didn't know what to do, I thought about everything," she told me later, "my life in Rwanda, my family there, my friends." Was it all gone now? She was terrified of her husband, of his threats, of his reach. "He works in intelligence, he can do anything, I don't know."

Ayesha's husband, an older man who'd spent much of their marriage studying Islamic law in Saudi Arabia, who she had married as a teenager largely to economically support her family and her education, accused her of all manner of offenses. She was a terrible wife. She was a liar and a cheat and adulterer. This was why she'd been delaying having children with him, he concluded. She deserved to die. More information began to trickle in from her sisters and some friends. Two young nieces and a nephew who were under her care had been kicked out of her house by her husband because she had infected them. He burned her things and demanded her bride price and school fees back. He drove her to work, showed the essays to her boss, and she got an email saying she was fired.

Fearing for her life, her friends begged her not to come back. Her husband began driving around town, pulling up in front of the houses of her friends and family and harassing them. Her girlfriend had to move houses. Her family disowned her; some, she

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told me, were ready to "lynch" her. One of her sisters thought she'd been cursed by her stepmother, and the others wouldn't even talk to her, so afraid they were that they could "catch it" from her.

She said she understood why they felt that way. For the most part, she didn't blame them.

For the first few days, Ayesha hadn't told any of the people she'd gotten to know in the Netherlands what was happening. Many of her fellow classmates, myself included, had headed out for end-of-course trips across the continent, and not wanting to bother anyone, not knowing what else to do, she'd befriended a man in a cafe and stayed at his apartment. She said she barely slept at all because she didn't trust him, and the room door did not lock. Finally, she contacted one of the course's instructors for advice, and he, knowing I had an apartment in Amsterdam, got in touch with me.

By the time she came to stay with me, it was clear she could not return to Rwanda, and she had nowhere else to go. She watched her world at home crumble on the tiny screen of her phone, sitting on my couch, bags piled around her. I told her she could stay as long as she needed, but after one night she concluded that she needed to go to Ter Apel as soon as possible. I rented a car. In the morning, we went to the grocery store and wandered through the aisles, uncertain. What would she need? What would be provided? When would she be able to shop again? We bought snacks, body lotion, and more data allowance for her mobile phone. Then we set out for Ter Apel, some two and a half hours northeast of Amsterdam.

Ayesha stayed at the Ter Apel facility for five days. She later reported feeling very distressed during her time at there. The uncertainty was deeply unsettling. From a contact

at Uganda Gay On the Move (UGOM), a group for migrants and refugees, she'd heard horror stories of violence, hunger, and years-long waits for any news. The time we spent the night before we left for Ter Apel on the website for the agency in charge of refugee administration, *Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers* (COA), had been somewhat comforting; the processual clarity of numbered steps and bullet points gave her hope.

The first few nights, she slept in a large sports arena with 300 people and was surprised to see the space was mixed gendered, which meant many women were forced to sleep in their head coverings, not feeling able to uncover in the presence of unfamiliar men. She said that too, the areas around the bathrooms were gender-comingled, and she had not wanted to shower there because of this. The drinking water came from bathroom sinks, which she found unhygienic. She tried not to drink much.

During her time at Ter Apel, all she could think was: "Oh my god, what will happen now?" Maybe, she thought, "it's better to go back. Go there and be killed with dignity."

At Ter Apel, the site where most asylum seekers entered the asylum system, people had found the end of one journey—their flight from home, in whatever shape it took-- and looked to begin something new. Walking hundreds of miles, hopping on and off trains and buses, tangled and circuitous routes, often in small and shuffling groups, family, friends, or strangers, stopped for a day or a month behind a fence or waiting for a boat or stored in a train station, or like Ayesha, simply stopped in their tracks by a message from home. Once they arrive at a *Centrale Opvangstlocatie* (Central Reception Location, or COL) they will be housed, fed, and given medical care; and they will enter a process that will take months or even years.

When an individual decided to formally seek asylum in the Netherlands, their official journey began at one of two places. If they arrived and claimed asylum at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport (the largest international airport in the country), they would likely begin processing at the Schiphol center. Most people, however, went first to the central reception location at Ter Apel. There they would be registered, have their identities verified, and undergo a health screening. According to the Centraal Orgaan Opvang Asielzoekers (COA), the organization charged with reception of asylum seekers, this facility is meant for short-term stays of maximum four days, but I have found that many people stay for weeks. Next they are moved to a "process reception location" for what is supposed to be no more than twelve days, and then an asylum center – also commonly known as "camps" – until the resolution of their asylum case (COA website:N.d.). During this time, they will be interviewed by asylum officials, have access to a lawyer, and be provided with healthcare, housing, and a small stipend. Conditions in residential asylum centers vary quite widely, and placement seems to be somewhat luck-of-the-draw. An asylum seeker may share a room with several others, or have a room of their own; some centers provide all meals; others have individual and/or shared kitchen facilities and grocery stipends; some are located in the outskirts of cities, and others are more rural and difficult to access by public transportation.

Ter Apel sits along the Northwestern border with Germany, about an hour drive from Groningen, the closest major city; remote, insofar as a place can be remote in a country only 16,040 square miles, or less than twice the size of the US state of New Jersey. A beautiful fifteenth century monastery is a focal point of the village, which is, like so many

Dutch towns, traversed by quiet canals. The asylum complex is located among agricultural

fields to the west of the village, and it takes at least 45 minutes to walk from the asylum

center to the commercial parts of the village, which asylum seekers must do for any grocery

or personal items not provided by the center.

Ter Apel's position as waystation for travelers is hardly new; indeed, it has served as

a place of reception for centuries. The tourism website for the monastery describes the

village thus:

> "It is located on a forested ridge of sand along the ancient trade route from
> Münster... (in Germany) to the city of Groningen. For passing travelers and pilgrims
> the monastery was a place of hospitality and dedication." (Klooster Ter Apel, N.d.)

While those in transit were once welcomed in the Medieval brick sanctuary, grand

monumental architecture the COL is not. In all fairness, the reception center was built

under immense pressure to accommodate increasing numbers of asylum seekers and was

completed in less than two and a half years. In April 2017, a €73 million expansion was

finished, increasing the number of people the center could accommodate from 1200 to

2000 (RTV Noord 2017). The expansion was built "energy-neutral" and all roofs are now

equipped with solar panels. Four different types of reception facilities make up the complex

at Ter Apel: the Central Reception Location, where asylum seekers are first processed; a

Process Reception Center (POL), the first stop after a COL, where they will meet with

immigration lawyer, and receive information from the Dutch Council for Refugees,

(*VluchtelingenWerk Nederland*, a non-governmental organization) and the umbrella

organization in charge of asylum procedures and facilities, the Centraal Orgaan opvang

asielzoekers, (COA); for those whose asylum claims are successful during the first phase

and must wait for individual housing, or those whose claims proceed to the "extended" asylum procedure (as most do) the next stop was the AZC, (*asielzoekercentrum*) the asylum seekers' center. VBLs are Freedom-Restricting Locations for those whose asylum claims have been unsuccessful and are out of legal options. Residents must report to the center five days a week. Ter Apel also contains an AMV, a facility which processes asylum seekers under the age of 18 who are unaccompanied by a relative (COA N.d.)

Klooster Ter Apel, http://www.kloosterterapel.nl/en/

Scattered throughout the country are several other types of COA accommodations and facilities with different functions and populations. In addition to the above four types of centers, there are also IBO (Reception Centers with Intensive Guidance), ostensibly a temporary housing solution for individuals who are "insufficiently able to function independently in a regular reception center" because of behavioral issues that have caused problems for residents or employees of the regular centers. The goal of these centers is to

for the asylum seeker to "learn skills and behaviour with which their self-reliance increases." Longer-term facilities for asylum seekers who are found to be a "nuisance" are Reception Centers with Additional Guidance and Supervision (EBTL). These accommodate up to 50 asylum seekers and involve "intensive day programs". Residents must report their comings and goings to the center. Finally, Family Centers accommodate those families with children under age 18 that have been rejected for asylum. Because minors have a right to shelter even if their application is rejected, the families may stay in these facilities until the children turn 18. These are also freedom-restricting facilities (COA N.d.)

Entrance to Ter Apel Reception Center. Google Maps Street View.

The placement of AZC's, often in the outskirts of villages, is "highly politicized and contentious." (Zorlu 2016:14). Per the Dutch "dispersal policy", aiming to spread the perceived burden, the centers spread throughout the country. A study of local attitudes

toward asylum and asylum centers found that while there is often resistance when an AZC first arrives in an area, over time, attitudes of those residents living near AZCs are no different than national attitudes (Zorlu 2016:14). Local residents tend to regard the populations of the asylum centers as "a single group", which the author of the study, Aslan Zorlu, attributes to the locals not having had experience with the diverse ethnicities living in the AZCs (Zorlu 2016:15). Zorlu then makes a bit of a leap in service of empathizing with (or excusing) local populations, saying: "asylum migrants have a drastically different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds and well as socio-economic positions and daily life habits" than locals (Zorlu 2016:15). What constitutes "drastically different" backgrounds, socio-economic positions, and daily habits is quite unclear, but perhaps more importantly, the statement is a homogenizing one. I'm confident that this author would agree that asylum seekers come from all walks of life. The vast diversity of education levels, socioeconomic positions, as well as cultural and social milieus from which these asylum seekers have come makes statements such as those made by the author about the "contrast" between ways of life of locals and asylum seekers quite dubious.

Ayesha was moved no less than 7 times in 6 months, sometimes with less than a day's notice. This made building friendships with people and connections with organizations more difficult, even while the asylum system demands proof that asylum seekers are open to assimilating, and in the case of LGBT asylum seekers, that they are participating in LGBT groups and social activities. Ayesha began to be invited by universities and NGOs to speak about her experiences at various events, but on at least two occasions she had to cancel at the last minute because she had received notice the evening before that she would be moved to a new facility the next morning, departing usually at

6am. Her anxiety over the day-to-day uncertainty, lack of control, and general precariousness of her situation continued to heighten.

The Birds

   Some four months into Ayesha's asylum procedure, during the winter, I visited her at her fourth AZC residence. It was the most remote of Ayesha's locations, miles from the closest town, in forested area, beautiful if bleak. The facility was like many others: a gated cluster of brick buildings, some outdoor sports facilities, minimal but thoughtful landscaping. A group of young and middle-aged men speaking a Slavic language were hanging out by the reception entrance, and as she came out to greet me, Ayesha also chatted with the men, referencing some earlier discussion of English lessons. Inside the building, I handed over my Dutch residence permit as identification and received a visitor pass.

   Ayesha offered a bit of a tour, and I told her I was excited to see her new room—after months of roommates and bunk beds, she finally had some privacy, her own space. I assumed she would be happy about this development and chirped on as we walked down the hall about how relieved I would feel to have a private retreat after all the commotion of the past months. On the contrary, Ayesha found herself both isolated and exposed. The space was small and cell-like, and the shared bathrooms made her uncomfortable. The room doors didn't lock, so whenever she left her room, she worried about her belongings being stolen—this was a big problem in the camps, she reported. One day she'd seen some boys milling outside her door when she came back from the shower, and not long after she noticed the same boys again acting suspiciously, she felt. Additionally, there was a man who

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had been constantly hitting on her. She didn't want to reject him too harshly and anger him; at the last camp, there'd been a man who wouldn't leave her alone, so she told him she was a lesbian, and he yelled vicious things at her. Alone in an unlockable room, she was more vulnerable than she'd been in the shared rooms at previous AZC's.

The WiFi only worked in the common rooms, so she'd often bring the netbook we'd fundraised for her down to check her email and social media, and to watch TV and movies, but she worried about too many people noticing her electronics. She motioned toward the nook in her closet where she hid her netbook when not in the room, and as we left, she quickly slid her fingers into a small space to confirm the netbook's presence. We closed the door to her neat and tidy cell and adventured out into the rest of AZC. Laundry room, game room, classroom largely for language classes, children's areas, a meeting room for appointments with lawyers and asylum authorities—facilities common to the AZCs. At the end of our tour, back near the reception area where I'd surrendered my residence permit, we came to a cavernous dining and living area, trimmed with artwork that stunned with its poignancy.

Birds, ascendant. Individual portraits painted on large sheets of drawing paper, beaks pointed high, wings just beginning to spread, their colors smudged the thick, black, impressionistic outlines. All anyone could tell me about them was that they'd been painted by a one-time resident, no longer there. Around and between these paintings were smaller drawings by children—mostly flags of Middle Eastern and central African countries, Syria appearing in about half, and figures of families.

I won't assume that these birds were painted intending to convey the symbolism I imagined, or that residents of the AZC viewed them the way I did. For me, the paintings

vividly illustrated the imagery and themes of the Paul Lawrence Dunbar poem

immortalized by Maya Angelou, "I know why the caged bird sings." Living in confinement,

fighting to ascend, to thrive. I asked Ayesha what she thought about them, and she found

them "happy", and "colorful, with this boring room here". She didn't think she was "good at

art" and so didn't feel particularly compelled to paint or draw, but she'd been volunteering

in childcare at the camps, and sometimes encouraged the kids to use the art supplies

available there. "They like it. I think maybe it helps, a little."

Photographs were not permitted inside the COA facility. As soon as I could I sketched

the paintings in my notebook.

The NGO Landscape

Most asylum seekers first came into contact with the organization and others like it

once they arrived in the AZCs, either through the organizations' outreach efforts in the

camps, through their own social networks, or through government agencies. Ayesha had

learned about the COC (*Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum*) during our course at UvA that

previous summer, and they contacted her for speaking engagements via someone from that

program. I also spoke with three individuals who had been advised by their appointed

lawyers and psychologists to get in touch with a local LGBT organization. As discussed

previously, COA, IND and VWN are the major institutions for asylum seekers and refugees— any of these agencies may refer an LGBT asylum seeker to one or more of the LGBT-focused organizations in the Netherlands. The COC recruited asylum seekers living in the camps as liaisons, who would give information about the COC to fellow LGBT/queer asylum seekers. Secret Garden had fewer resources to expend on outreach, and most members found out about the organization through social contacts and social media.

The relationship between these organizations had been described to me as a "tightly knit community"; leaders and members meet and work together on events and initiatives frequently. Unsurprisingly, conflicts occasionally emerged between organizations with different and sometimes competing goals and strategies, but when allegation of abuse were levied against two organizations and their leadership, deep divisions surfaced, and problematic understandings underlying their operations became apparent. Organizations and institutions aimed at serving, organizing and/or providing socialization for sexual minorities in the Netherlands (and well, very generally, in many countries) still worked with a majority gay male clientele. Organizations that targeted lesbians or trans* persons certainly existed, but they are often separate from these larger, more established, better funded groups, partly because of the latter's record of focus on representing a cis-male gay population.

The following is a brief overview of the major organizations involved with LGBT/queer Muslim asylum seekers in the Netherlands between 2014 and 2016, and my work with them.

The COC

Founded in 1946, the COC (originally the *Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum,* Center for Culture and Leisure) is one of the world's first, and now largest LGBT organizations, according to their materials. COC Nederland, the headquarters located in Amsterdam, had 7,000 members and federal funding, focusing on education, public policy advocacy, and international LGBT rights initiatives. Twenty regional outposts of the COC existed across the country to provide local services and programming. COC Nederland had a working group that examined asylum policy and had expanded programs that link asylum seekers to services. The national and regional branches also promoted social connections between newcomers and established communities, mainly through the "Cocktail" program (despite the name, it is not alcohol-centered), which paired newcomers with local community members as "buddies", and organized regular meetings, events and parties for their membership.

During the summer of 2014, my preliminary research period, I volunteered with COC Nederland in their projects focused on LGBT asylum seekers. The Pink Solutions project trained agencies involved with asylum (COA, IND and VWN) about the unique position of LGBT asylum seekers. The Pink Security project researched and made recommendations on safety measures for LGBT individuals in the reception centers and worked to strengthen the "social safety net" for LGBT asylum seekers. During that time, I did research and writing for these programs, and was able to do interviews with employees and participants. I also attended events organized by the COC. When I came back to Amsterdam in 2015 for my extended field work, I stayed in touch with my contacts at the COC and continued attending events.

Secret Garden

Both Secret Garden and the COC Nederland (the national branch) worked for the rights of gays and lesbians, but this fact, (as well as their geographic location), may be the extent of their commonality. Though it claimed around 100 members in 2014, at any one time there are no more than a handful of clients at Secret Garden, socializing, using computers, or sitting idly waiting for assistance from the volunteer staff. Secret Garden is aimed at advising and connecting LGBT individuals (mainly asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants) from Muslim countries, though they were open to people of other backgrounds. In mostly one-on-one meetings, they offered information and consultations on migration and asylum processes, as well as LGBT/queer social life in the Netherlands. A psychologist was available on occasion. As time went on, help with housing, including connecting individuals to homestays, became a larger part of their work. They hosted small dinners, documentary screenings, discussions and speaking events, occasionally co-sponsoring events with Uganda Gay On the Move (UGOM).

Secret Garden was the primary field site for my preliminary research. I volunteered for this organization, helping with their website, assisting with events, and generally making myself available for whatever tasks were needed. There, I was able to conduct interviews and participant observation with asylum seekers and three people who worked at Secret Garden. During my second stint in Amsterdam for extended field research between 2015 and 2016, I was able to use the contacts made there to find new participants, and also attended several of their events.

LGBT Asylum Support

Aart was the public face of the organization, founded in late 2015 by Aart and his partner, who also co-own an art gallery in the northern Dutch city of Groningen. Their stated focus was on connecting LGBT asylum seekers to resources and relevant organizations in the Netherlands, though much of Aart's time was devoted to lobbying for safer accommodations, both through the media and directly to members of Parliament. Because they had identified violence and intimidation within the asylum centers as the major area of concern for LGBT asylum seekers, the group also worked to get asylum seekers out of the camps and into private homes and homestays. I interviewed Aart, attended an opening at his gallery where I met asylum seekers he worked with, and followed the group's social media, a major part of their media and outreach strategy, closely. LGBT Asylum Support is exclusively funded through private donations.

Other networks of significance

Queeristan is an annual festival in Amsterdam bringing together arts, queer politics and anti-racist, pro-queer activism. Talks, classes, workshops, gallery displays, performance art and other creative modes address power, inclusivity, gender and sexuality, and community-building. Events range from discussions of radical queer politics, workshops on supporting assault survivors, POC (People of Color) community caucuses, to self-defense classes, DJ sets, and drag make-up tutorials. The festival takes place at

locations around the city. I attended in 2014 and 2015, participating in two events involving immigrant and POC queerness. I will discuss Queeristan further in Chapter 8.

Uganda Gay On the Move (UGOM) works to support Ugandan LGBT refugees and asylum seekers, largely by providing information on the asylum process, connecting people to relevant organizations, social networks, and other resources, and organizing in support of activists still in Uganda. They worked frequently with Secret Garden and cohosted events. I attended several events organized or cohosted by UGOM.

Maruf officially began in 2012, with the ambitious goals of eliminating homophobia and Islamophobia, and creating a strong international community of queer Muslims (Stichting Maruf N.d). By the end of 2016, the group began getting media attention for their participation in activism and Pride events in the Netherlands, and for opinion pieces and speaking engagements. However, during my research period, Maruf was still building itself into a network of activist groups, social clubs, and advocacy organizations.

The presence of Maruf blossomed in the landscape of LGBT asylum organizations toward the end of my fieldwork; propelled, it seems, largely by another strong personality, Cas. The most public face of the organization at the time, he was Bosnian, young, and seemed to have his hands in everything. Cas was a presence in any room—articulate, engaged, magnetic. It's little wonder that he'd found a niche a speaker. During a photoshoot for a magazine doing a profile on him, Cas was once asked by a photographer after a minute or so of snapping portraits, if perhaps he could try to look "more Muslim." Cas is tall, broad-shouldered and, as this photographer's view of him indicates, fair-skinned and standardly European-looking.

Networks of activists also mobilized as needed for various purposes relating to LGBT and queer asylum seekers. Example include a group farmed from various networks to greet asylum seekers at Amsterdam's Central Station; organizations and individuals came together to march the streets against Islamophobia and racism; student groups at local universities worked to put on events highlighting the challenges of LGBT/queer migrants, and provided platforms for them to speak out. Asylum seekers would hear about these types of events through social networks, organizations where they already had contacts, or occasionally, posters put up near asylum facilities.

Sharing Stories and Strategies at Secret Garden

Secret Garden inhabited a nondescript room in a Protestant-run community center on the east side of central Amsterdam. The room had two windows looking out onto Nieuwe Herengracht, a canal that divides the historic city center from the green and less dense Plantage neighborhood. Looking out across the water at the row of 19th century brick buildings, you would encounter the stylishly oversized, open-duplex windows of the COC Nederland offices on the north bank. Neither building advertised the organization loudly; the community center had taped a weekly schedules to their door, naming the groups who shared the rooms inside, and the times that they met. Even COC Nederland, the central office for the largest LGBT rights organization in the world, had only a small gold plaque

next to their doorbell. Past ideological conflicts (the details of which vary by who you ask) meant that at that time the two organizations had a tumultuous relationship.

Wall in the community center where Secret Garden shares space.

23 June 2014

Anneke, a Dutch woman in her 50s who volunteered at Secret Garden both Mondays and Fridays, the days the community center had allotted for their group, passed tea around to the three young men sitting around a long table in the center of the room. She tried to explain to me the role that Secret Garden plays in the lives of the LGBT migrants and asylum seekers that trickled into the center. Anneke asserted, "the COC... they miss the point."

She told me about a young gay Iranian asylum seeker named Naveed who came to the Netherlands just a few months ago, knowing no one. "At first, he was so nervous, like a

deer. If you tried to touch him, just put a hand on his shoulder, he would jump." Now, they communicated nearly every day while he waited for his appearance in asylum court at a reception center in the south of the Netherlands. Because of the distance, he was unable to visit Secret Garden frequently.

"One night I invited him to stay at my apartment so he didn't have to take the trip back late at night. We sat on my sofa, and he put his arms around me. He squeezed so hard, so tight. Then he curled up in my lap like a cat and we sat like that for hours," Anneke reported.

This seemed to illustrate "the point" that Anneke believed the massive COC Nederland organization missed—the emotional needs of asylum seekers, the human connection in their daily lives, the empathy and understanding of others in similar circumstances. It's doubtful that any COC employee would have claimed that this is their mandate or their mission, however—the organizations served different purposes. Where they overlap is where there seemed to be tension. According to a COC employee working on asylum issues, Secret Garden offered legal advice that they were unqualified to give, and has put their members in precarious, if not dangerous, legal and personal positions at times.

This shared room in the community center was a new location for Secret Garden, as they had recently moved out of their own private offices in the center of Amsterdam. The move meant having to cut hours down to two days a week, the loss of event space, and perhaps most importantly, the loss of privacy. With other groups (most of which cater to migrants) present in the same offices and people idling by their open door, visitors to

Secret Garden were less comfortable just sitting around spending time together socially, said Anneke. She and Salim, one of the founders of the organization, both told me that Secret Garden lost funding in 2012 when it was determined that the organization no longer served only asylum seekers and refugees in Amsterdam, but in various other parts of the Netherlands as well. Their funding program was specific to Amsterdam, and therefore Secret Garden was disqualified. When they had government funding, they were able to take small groups out on trips to the countryside, hold parties and social gatherings in their offices, and provide some financial assistance to clients for food or housing. Dependent thereafter on personal donations, they were still able to put on events monthly (more or less), sometimes co-sponsored with other groups. Between 2014 and 2016, the organization grew steadily, organizing and participating in events more frequently, and membership increasing (though I was never able to confirm numbers.)

Salim, the Algerian-born co-founder of Secret Garden, said that when they started twenty years ago, the organization was aimed at LGBT migrants from Muslim countries. While Muslims remained the great majority of the organization's members, he said they were now are open to anyone in need of help or social connection. Salim remained a shrouded figure for my first few weeks—Oz behind the curtain, queer pilgrims arriving to receive his wisdom. I was told that he met with individuals all day long, giving them advice regarding the asylum process, housing, and social life, as well as helping them with paperwork, and even booking flights for them. He breezed into the room every now and again, greeted those waiting with kisses on the cheek, and collected whoever was his next appointment. I continually told that he was very busy, so I tried to catch him for quick

conversations when things appeared a bit slower. I got the impression that he was quite wary of people coming into his organization asking lots of questions and pestering his clients. He mentioned that the week prior to my arrival, there had been university students crowding the community center, "putting cameras in people's faces." Anneke explained that they had been journalism students interviewing LGBT migrants about the violence they experienced in their home countries.

My first day at Secret Garden, as soon as I sat down and introduced myself as a researcher interested in the experiences LGBT asylum seekers, Abbas, a middle-aged man from Baghdad and regular at Secret Garden, warmly greeted me and launched into his story. He told me in Iraq he had been "terrified," worried that he would be "kidnapped and killed… as a prize [given to] an imam." From there I asked few questions—Abbas gave me a chronological account of his time in Iraq, starting just before the invasion by the United States in 2003. A younger Iraqi man sitting next to him (who preferred not to give me his name or home city) then told me that he had once tried to meet a man he had met on the internet, only to be ambushed by four men who drove him into the desert. I asked what happened then, and he shook his head and looked down.

While the second man was speaking, Abbas was searching for something online on his tablet. It was a video of a young transwoman crouched half-naked in the middle of a group of police officers who were yelling at her. Abbas translated some of what they say for me from the Arabic, as the audio on the video was muffled and my Arabic was limited. The next video he showed us is similar, but revealed the subject being beaten by a crowd. Abbas stopped translating and had to walk away midway through. His eyes welled up with tears

as he clicked to the last video—a young teenage boy in only red women's underwear, crying and clearly terrified as a group of people—some police officers and some in street clothes-- berated and grabbed at him. I was told that Abbas has showed others these clips before, and that sharing news and stories from home was common. Most people had smart phones, and occasionally they shared articles or videos by passing around their phones or grouping together to watch the small screens.

Frequently I arrived at Secret Garden to find Anneke with only one other person sitting around with tea and the cookies she brought weekly. Other times, there were a handful of people waiting to see Salim, but all were absorbed in their phones and doing very little chatting. However, when a few friends showed up together or happened to come by at the same time, the small grey room could become an energized place. They chatted about planning trips, foods they missed, and the challenges of maintaining hair or makeup in the heat. Often though, sorrowful stories were shared, and the room would be respectfully quiet. Like my first day, histories were told, videos circulated, wounds exposed, and support given.

The asylum procedures require these same stories-- life histories, dates and places, your first crush, your first beating, the last thing your father said, the last place you went before leaving for the Netherlands, and as much documented evidence as possible to corroborate it all. Asylum seekers are asked to describe in excruciating detail their moments of greatest fear and pain. Secret Garden was a community built around common identity—LGBT/queer and Muslim heritage—and grew into a place where traumas and struggles could be shared. Members reported this as a "bonding" experience, and "freeing."

Secret Garden aimed also to fight the social isolation faced by many LGBT asylum seekers. One young man stated succinctly the reason so many queer asylum seekers find themselves feeling alienated in their new surroundings: "Other queers haven't migrated, other migrants aren't queer." Abbas told me, "They're afraid of their community, people from their country, because of the rejection and the violence against them at home." He said that he felt this acutely when he first arrived in the Netherlands six years earlier. After the difficulty of learning to "be myself" in public in the Netherlands, whenever he would encounter fellow Iraqis, he instantly changed his behavior and manner of speaking. Because he already spoke English well, Abbas was fortunate in not having to depend on contact other Arabic speakers for logistical issues, as some migrants are upon arrival.

Others found it surprisingly difficult to relate to Dutch queer communities. Nour told me that after having idealized Western queers, when she arrived in Amsterdam and began participating various social and activist groups, she found herself disappointed. Money immediately became an alienating factor for Nour; used to spending time with friends in the park or public squares, she found that in Amsterdam, social groups often meet in cafes, where spending money is requisite for utilizing the space. She told me, "queerness was not affordable to me."

In this way Secret Garden filled an important gap in the social lives of many LGBT asylum seekers and refugees, providing support that larger, more prominent, and more formalized groups do not. Even with limited expertise, resources, staff, hours, and space, Secret Garden has been a lifeline to many. After facing a deep depression over the loss of his family as he migrated to the Netherlands, one young man told me, "without this place… I am dead." Abbas nodded in agreement. "Maybe not dead, but with no life. Here we get life."
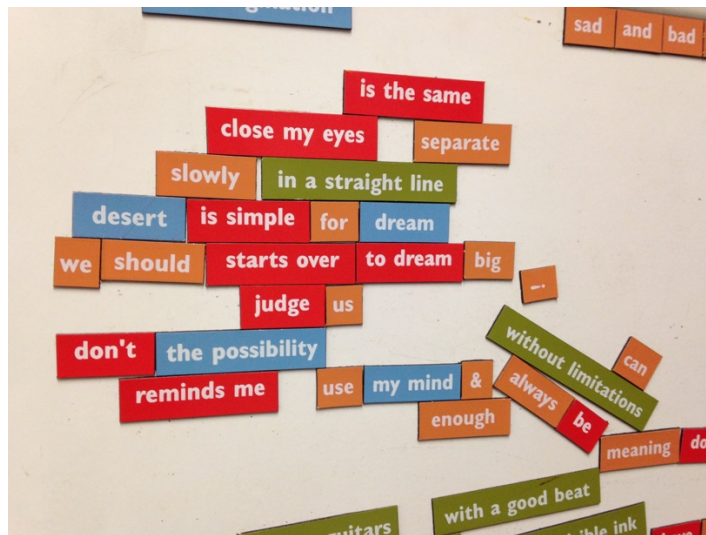
A poem someone in the Secret Garden office had pieced together from "magnetic poetry" on the shared refrigerator.

LGBT Asylum Support: A charismatic leader and allegations of abuse

3 May 2016, Groningen

I rented an apartment on one of the main commercial drags in Groningen, near the train station. Being near the train seemed important—I was anxious about leaving Amsterdam, a center of LGBT/queer life in the Netherlands, home to the organizations I'd been working with, and assumed I'd need to frequently go back to the capital. Moving to Groningen, a city that shares a name with its province, the northeastern most province in the Netherlands, was an effort to get closer to an organization called LGBT Asylum Support. My hopes of setting up shop at the organization as I had at Secret Garden, observing

meetings, events, and everyday activities, were quickly dashed, but the move proved to be valuable none the less.

It can it very easy to center your thinking around a metropolis like Amsterdam, hub of so much cultural activity. Once I'd moved to Groningen, where I stayed for a month and a half, I was surprised by how much the move re-oriented my thinking. (My mother, who spent a good portion of her childhood in Blaricum, a village in North Holland, would be appalled how much I'd begun to think all trains lead to Amsterdam.) In Groningen, I got a look at how the provincial branches of organizations worked, particularly the COC, and finally met an asylum seeker who was not hoping to live in Amsterdam, as so many other I spoke with hoped, but enjoyed the relative calm and slower pace of life in the smaller city.

It turned out that LGBT Asylum Support was not the field site I had hoped for, because at the time, it wasn't a physical site at all. In fact, it wasn't so much an organization as one very determined Dutch man and a few of his friends who helped him out occasionally. I'd been exchanging messages with Aart via the LGBT Asylum Support Facebook group for months before he was available and agreed to meet. In the meantime, the organization appeared on social media to be increasingly active, so I decided to move nearby to be a part of whatever was going on there.

When I first met Aart in Spring 2016, LGBT Asylum Support was just starting to hit its stride. It had gained official status just a few months before, but Aart said that helping LGBT asylum seekers and refugees had been his "whole life" since December of the previous year. The day I met him was also just a week after accusations of sexual abuse had been made against his organization and Secret Garden. The accusations had been printed in the largest newspaper in the country, *De Telegraaf* (2016). Having met a couple days

earlier with a student activist who had done interviews with some of Aart's clients, I'd been

made aware of the allegations and their fallout.

Aart owned an art gallery that he ran with his partner in Groningen. He had worked

on a volunteer basis with refugee organizations in the past, but decided it was time to start

his own operation when he heard about uninvestigated allegations of harassment and

assaults at the COA facilities against LGBT asylum seekers. A young man housed at the AZC

in Alphen aan den Rijn, in the west of the country, had been told to "come back tomorrow"

when he went to COA officials, and then was advised not to go to the police because he

didn't know who had attacked him. Aart wanted to get the man out of the AZC and to a safe

place as soon as possible.

There had been trouble at Alphen aan den Rijn for years—in 2011, a hunger strike

was staged to protest conditions in the former prison facility. Many of the prison staff

continued on when it was turned into accommodation for asylum seekers. Then, in January

2016, the facility made the news worldwide when an Iraqi asylum seeker committed

suicide there, reportedly devastated by having to wait so long to get his claim processed

and bring his family to the Netherlands (De Volkskrant 2016).

The Netherlands has implemented a somewhat controversial solution to the

problem of accommodating asylum seekers, turning defunct prisons into asylum centers.

As crime has dropped steadily in recent years, dozens of prisons have been closed. By

March of 2016, approximately one third of the country's 13,500 prison cells were empty,

and five more facilities were scheduled to be closed imminently (Rowell 2016). The drop in

imprisonment has been linked to a reduced crime rate, an aging population less likely to

commit crimes, and an increased focus on rehabilitation, electronic tagging, and reducing

prosecution for victimless crimes (Boztas 2016). Other creative solutions to the "problem" of empty prisons have been the leasing of prison space to Belgium and Norway, and turning one prison into a modern hotel: Het Arresthuis in Roermond (Boztas 2016).

A photojournalist for the Associated Press, Muhammed Muheisen, spent 40 days visiting three such facilities (Muheisen 2016). He reported initial discomfort with the idea of asylum seekers being housed in old prisons, but found during his stay that most asylum seekers were grateful to be sheltered, and felt safe. One man told the photographer, "If a country has no prisoners to put in jail, it means this is the safest country that I want to be living in." (Rowell 2016)

Aart said that at Alphen, "a group manifested" and he began talking with COA about getting these LGBT asylum seekers out of the camp and into an emergency shelter. According to Aart, COA didn't have to funds for this (a COA representative stated that the issue was more complicated), so Aart snapped into action. A Swiss client of his gallery was able to fund an emergency shelter for several months, donating approximately 100,000 euros.

LGBT Asylum Support started out by finding accommodation for LGBT asylum seekers outside of the camps, mostly in homestays. I asked if it was difficult to find people willing to let a stranger live in their home.

"With a sad story, you can find a lot of people who want a refugee in their house." He told me. This struck me as an honest and pragmatic answer, even if I found his directness about the utility of a "sad story" a little unsettling. I reminded myself that this was a distinct feature of Dutch communication style that I'd noticed: direct, pragmatic.

The organization had more recently moved on to lobbying Parliament and focusing on structural challenges. With an increasing membership, the group began participating in and organizing events, building its social media presence, as well as frequently making appearances in the traditional media.

Aart talked at length about his work with the media, and the different government officials who wanted to meet with him through the past few months. Of his media strategy, he insisted, "it's not about us, it's about them." Aart's reputation among others working with LGBT refugees wasn't exactly consistent with that sentiment— someone who had worked with him pointed out that Aart is in almost every photo he posts to the organization's social media pages, and another professional acquaintance cheekily called him a "media whore". Aart has been criticized for posting photos of asylum seekers and migrants without their permission, causing at least one to be "outed" to their family, and another to feel uncomfortable in asylum center where he lived. A researcher at the University of Amsterdam bemoaned Aart's brand of depoliticized, mainstreamed LGBT action: "This is what has become of LGBT politics in the Netherlands? Taking selfies with asylum seekers?"

Aart liked to emphasize how different his group was than Secret Garden, and went back and forth characterizing himself as alternately a pragmatic deal-maker with COA, and a rogue who COA saw as posing a threat. He'd met Salim, head of Secret Garden, some three years ago, and found him "very stubborn". He complained that "his way of working gives problems," and pointed out that Secret Garden had the benefit of a large gay community in Amsterdam. Salim favors Arabs, Aart told me—a Russian man who he'd met had received an "mean email" when he contacted Secret Garden in hopes of joining. (Officially, Secret

Garden is open to people of all backgrounds, but at the time, almost all its members were from the Middle East and North Africa, though not all Arab. Many were Afghani or Iranian. I don't know if this remark about "Arabs" was said in ignorance or simply flippant on Aart's part.)

Accusations of ethnic preference were lobbed back at Aart as well—several people noted to me that Aart only wants to work with young Arab men, implying that there might be some sexual motive. A young Dutch man, Philip, quite familiar with the organization and concerned about concealing his identity, spoke to me about his perception of the darker side of LGBT Asylum Support's reputation.

"Well, the organization is LGBT Asylum Support," he said, "but he takes only Syrians, Arab boys. Young men." He continued to say that while there were large numbers of LGBT asylum seekers from Eastern Europe and Russia, it didn't appear that Aart's organization worked with them, or for that matter, with women of any nationality. Indeed, in searching through the organization's active Facebook presence, photographs were almost exclusively of young Middle Eastern-looking men. (In the years since, LGBT Asylum Support has worked to bring attention to violence suffered by LGBT individuals in the Ukraine and Russia, and Aart is pictured on his social media with many young men from this region, as well as men and women from different parts of Africa.) Philip laughed that the organization's social media was exclusively self-taken photos of Aart flanked by attractive young Arab men, a comment I'd heard elsewhere as well, and an observation that wasn't exactly unfounded. The insinuation, of course, is that these types of photos reflected a self-

indulgence or self-aggrandizing motivation, at best, and a sexually exploitative racial fetishism at worst.

Aart described some of the asylum cases he'd been involved with. There was a young man with big bruises all over his face, who he'd picked up in his car from Alphen and taken to the police, but was told they couldn't do anything. Of an Afghani asylum seeker, he said, "I saw him go from cheerful young man to depressed" in a very short amount of time.

"I'm just trying to help refugees, and suddenly I'm under attack! My partner said this would happen." Finally, Aart began to talk about the specific abuse allegations against the two LGBT organizations. However, he only specifically mentioned a situation that was said to have transpired at Secret Garden: two young men had gone to a party thrown by Secret Garden, hoping to find accommodation outside of the AZCs. They were propositioned there, and reported that "they were expected to have sex," (De Telegraaf 2016). According to the allegations, a similar situation had transpired at a LGBT Asylum Support event. When the asylum seekers involved complained to the leadership at LGBT Asylum Support and Secret Garden, they were dismissed (De Telegraaf 2016).

"Never happened!" he said emphatically. The news report had only stated that the organization was accused of abuse, not specifically Aart. Aart could speak with certainty about his own behavior, but I found it concerning that he would so definitively deny allegations that anyone in his network who had come in contact with asylum seekers could possibly have engaged in misconduct. Salim, the head of Secret Garden, stated that he was

conducting his own investigation into the accusations, and argued in *De Telegraaf* that a criminal complaint should be made.

"Our standard is that sexual contact is not allowed," stated Aart firmly, but later allowed that, "the line can be very thin".

Throughout our talk, he circled back to the issue of the abuse allegations several times. He repeated that it "feels very bad" to have these accusations of "sexual intimidation, and rape, or whatever," made against him.

"COA is afraid of us, what we are doing," he said, bringing the conversation back around to the article in *De Telegraaf*. Airing these problems to the public was making the agency look bad.

"I could punish them for false accusations," he interjected, referring either to De Telegraaf, COA, or perhaps the individuals, still unnamed, who accused him of abuse.

"COA knows it's our Achilles heel," he said, talking about the personal relationships he and others in his organization develop while working with and housing asylum seekers. Rather than elaborate on why this might be a cause for concern or a weakness in his operation that he could work to mitigate, he continued on to argue that COA was perhaps acting unfairly against him. He complained that COA gives information to asylum seekers about Secret Garden, but not LGBT Asylum Support.

Nothing further was published in any mainstream newspapers, and the investigation into the abuse did not result in any criminal charges. From all appearances, no changes were made within the organizations to prevent future problems. COA would not comment on the accusations.

The safety of asylum seekers was ostensibly LGBT Asylum Support's highest priority, and yet Aart seemed unwilling to evaluate how his still-new organization that removed vulnerable individuals from COA housing and put them into private homes, often of relatively wealthy and older Dutch citizens, with little to no oversight, could create conditions for abuses of power. It is possible that he was conducting his own extensive investigation of these allegations, but if he was, he did not mention it, even though he brought up the topic several times. Salim reported initiating his own investigation into the accusations against members of Secret Garden, but I have not been able to view any results of that investigation. I was surprised to find only a few news articles published online about the allegations—this type of story would seem to be appealing for Dutch media, landing as it does at the intersection of several issues that got wide coverage at the time: refugees, violence against LGBT individuals, and conflict at COA.

The following chapter explores some of the historical and epistemic context for the troubling accusations against these organizations, by examining entanglements of race, religion, sexuality and imperialism. These discussions foreground analysis of the particular structures and complexities of asylum narratives, and interviews contexts more specifically.

4) Transit Narratives: Sexuality and the Other

"An identity is questioned only when it is menaced, as when the mighty begin to fall, or when the wretched begin to rise, or when the stranger enters the gates, never, thereafter, to be a stranger. Identity would seem to be the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self: in which case, it is best that the garment be loose, a little like the robes of the desert, through which one's nakedness can always be felt, and, sometimes, discerned. This trust in one's nakedness is all that gives one the power to change one's robes."

-James Baldwin, author

"I beheld and still behold in anger and agony the eagerness of the world to throw piles of shit on those of us who want to savage or simply cannot help but savage the norms that so desperately need savaging."

-Maggie Nelson, author

In this chapter, I discuss the how personal, first-hand accounts of travel, border-crossing, and other mobilities serve an important function in shaping understandings of the Other, confirming Western moral supremacy and constructing dramas that center sexuality as representative of essential dichotomies, activated more prominently in varying contexts: modern/primitive, secular/religious, Christian/Muslim. By examining together women's travel narratives of the colonial period, contemporary "escape narratives" of women fleeing violence, coming out stories as well as LGBT asylum narratives in the context of their legal process, and a recent documentary film on LGBT activists in Uganda, (which I will collectively refer to as "transit narratives") I want to highlight the role of sexuality in constructions of the Other, and how personal narrative can operate to reinforce nation-building projects.

Of course, this is a wide category and the groupings within may have very different subjects, audiences, and intentions, yet certain logics link them. These narrative modes are linked in how they are shaped and themselves shape the ways we talk about the Other. They are told from the perspective of gender or sexual minorities, but ultimately do not use their minority status to question the oppressive or marginalizing structures they describe (specifically colonial and post-colonial relations among states and the images of the Other that uphold Western supremacy). Instead, they serve to re-enforce those images of the Other, and often their wide appeal comes specifically from the ways they, as Ewing writes of memoirs by women escaping forced marriages, "honor killings", and other violence, "fulfill expectations that stir the moral outrage of their intended audience." (Ewing 2008: 2) Structurally, these transit narratives involve movement that is constructed as journeying from one world to another drastically different world, with descriptions of the emotional toll of that movement. They emphasize the otherness, and specifically the danger of the other place, confirming the expectations of the audience, titillating with sexual exoticism, exciting with the drama of inherent danger, and ultimately often concluding with a satisfying return or arrival at the safety of the West, again confirming for much of the audience their moral supremacy.

I begin this chapter by discussing the development of modern Western understandings of sexuality and categorization before moving to the first type of "transit narrative": colonial-era travel narratives, specifically of the Middle East. Contemporary "escape narratives" are then explored, focusing in on that of former Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali. This moves to a discussion of homonationalism in the Dutch context, and the role of the sexualized Other in understandings of the Dutch nation.

Arguing that there is something central about issues of mobility and border-crossing (broadly conceived) to the notions of queerness, and to narratives of coming out, I link travel narratives and escape narratives to the stories asylum seekers are made to tell, and essential piece of which is the "coming out" narrative. I then describe the experience of watching a film with Ayesha that, in certain ways, is a part of her asylum narrative as she worked with some of the film's featured subjects, and on its own, represents another type of travel narrative: a documentary following an activist LGBT community in Uganda, made by European and American filmmakers, and winner of an American GLAAD Media Award for outstanding representation of LGBT communities. Finally, I zoom in on part of Ayesha's asylum narrative as told in different contexts in order to highlight a constitutive feature of narrative itself-- "traces" of the "shifting subject" in self-representations.

"Management of the Intimate": Sexuality, taxonomy, and "the West"

In an effort to denaturalize these ideas about sexuality, Foucault famously traced modern Western ideas of sexuality to the Victorian Era, a time commonly imagined as sexually repressed. Foucault argues that this period was in fact a time in which discourses on sex proliferated; sex was an object of talk (in the confessional), but also of study (especially the medical sciences) and regulation (through criminal justice) (1978). Indispensable to the development of capitalist societies is what Foucault terms "bio-power", which refers to the relations and techniques used by the state for the regulation of bodies. Concern for "populations" arises, and the need to control them. He argues that homosexuality only became possible as an identity starting in Europe and the United States

in the second half of the nineteenth century, as individuals came to see themselves as subjects of sexuality. He describes how what had been considered sinful *acts* then became constitutive of a pathological *person*, or "species" due to developing juridical and medical discourses of the period. While, "as defined by the ancient civil codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage..." (Foucault 1978:43)

According to Foucault, there are two historical "procedures for producing the truth of sex": "*ars erotica*"— in which "truth is drawn from pleasure itself", as he stated in an Orientalist-style argument, was the case in "China, Japan, India, Rome, the Arabo-Moslem" worlds. "Our civilization", however, is the only to practice "*scientia sexualis*", which is opposed to *ars erotica*, and which is centered in the idea of the confession. Later, Foucault reformulated this dichotomy, arguing that the significant opposition in thinking about sexuality occurred within Western traditions, not between the West and the East (2007). From the Church, to the psychiatric couch, to the court room, truth is something to be extracted and examined. In the pursuit of universal truths, sexuality became an important object of study.

The impulse toward naming and categorizing is a productive development. David Valentine's *Imagining Transgender* (2007) takes up this Foucaultian concern by examining the productive power of the category "transgender" in the context of gender-variant people in 1990s New York City. Calling attention to the ways language gets adopted and resisted in communities, he argues that categories like transgender "are productive of the very phenomena they seem to describe" (Valentine 2007:30). Subtitling his book, "An

Ethnography of a Category", he highlights how various groups impact language use and development:

> "...the absorption of certain meanings by these terms is not a natural fact: it is the product of a constant, social reiteration (and contestation) of those meanings in a range of contexts—from the day-to-day assertions of gay, lesbian, and transgender identities and the activist strategies of LGBT movements, to the intellectual labor of scholars." (Valentine 2007:31).

In looking for a stable subject of study and of rights, activists and academics inadvertently inscribe (and re-inscribe) a name and a definition of what we purport to simply describe. Judith Butler recommends examining the processes, power relations, and regulatory functions involved in identity production rather than solely its products, to address concerns with the ways certain practices constitute identities (Butler 1990). She asks, "to what extent is "identity" a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of existence?" (Butler 1990:23). Wendy Brown joins Butler in questioning the inherent emancipatory nature of inscribing a subject of rights, arguing that though some protection from discrimination and violence may be gained through this type of encoding of the subject, "it reinscribes the designation as it protects us, and thus enables our further regulation through that designation." (Brown 2002:422.)

Labels are indeed contested terrain among the asylum seekers and within organizations where I worked. Again and again, I heard asylum seekers exclaim that, at some earlier point in their lives, they "didn't *even know* this word," referring to "gay," "lesbian" or their (very difficult to map) counterparts in Farsi, Arabic, Pashto, Swahili, Ganda, or other mother tongues. It seemed to be said with the expectation that I would be shocked to hear of such ignorance, almost as if they were confessing to a failing, that they

should have innately known, or in the process of "looking inside" to understand their sexuality, found it written on a kidney, or spelled out in white blood cells.

COC Nederland used "LHBTI" (LGBTI), and, perhaps simply a result of slower updating of the English-language side of website, "LGBT" in English online publications. Secret Garden also used "LGBT", as did (obviously) LGBT Asylum Support. I use designations as used by the particular individual or organization I am describing. In general, I find that "LGBT and/or queer" most effectively denotes the umbrella under which sexual minorities fall, without collapsing "queer", a more amorphous term that includes genderqueerness and other non-binary subjectivities, into the discreet identities of LGBT.

Contemporaneously with the developments of the nineteenth century Foucault describes was what Mary Louise Pratt has called a new "planetary consciousness", emerging in Europe in the mid-eighteenth century. The publication of Carl Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*, categorizeing all plants, known and undiscovered, by their reproductive parts, and the launch of European scientific expeditions which would send biologists, botanists, geographers and naturalists out into colonial territories to collect data and write home about their experiences, thrust European thought into an era of obsession with classification (Pratt 2008).

Ann Laura Stoler, examining late 19th century/ early 20th century Indonesia, then a Dutch colony, argues that colonial administrators saw "intimate matters as matters of state" (Stoler 2001:893-895). The "management of the intimate", or claiming control over sexual practices and family structures, was integral to the colonial project (Stoler 2002). "Taxonomic states," they were obsessed with knowing, defining and categorizing, and were

"concerned greatly with asserting their province over morality" (Stoler 2002:206). Stoler

terms colonialism's concern with the surveillance and control over matters of family,

sexuality and sexual desire, "the education of desire." (1995)

When this scientific gaze looked to the Muslim world, it found a useful foil by which

European identity could be constructed. During this period, as the "quintessential 'other'",

images of Islam and "the Muslim World" served to both form and affirm national identities

within Europe and of Western Europe, casting Europe as naturally and essentially Christian

and secular. (Bracke 2011: 98) Constructions and representations of "the Orient" "taught

Europeans how to be European more than it taught them anything about the "Orient."" (El-

Tayeb 2013: 310) Contrasting ideas about Muslim sexuality was and is central to this

project. A combination of "barbarity, climate, Islam, immorality, and primitive physiology"

made the people of this region embracing of sodomy and pederasty, and Muslim men as

"either overly virile brutes or decadent effetes." (Shepard 2012: 87)

Representation and the Travel Narrative

Representations of sexuality were fundamental to the ways Europe interacted with

its colonies, and images of the people and lands of the MENA (Middle East, North Africa)

region that circulate today have been accumulating for centuries. Jack Shaheen has argued

that contemporary representations are rooted in images brought back to Europe between

150-200 years ago by Europeans visiting the region as artists and travel writers,

capitalizing on exotic images and tales, and conjuring "the Oriental Other" (Shaheen 2007).

Since the colonial era, Joseph Massad has contended, Arab intellectuals, public figures and

artists of all kinds have been reproducing those images, reinforcing the narrative of what it means to be Arab using European parameters. A key component of the essentialized characters created by colonialism which has been expounded upon by Edward Said, is the notion of the "extreme licentiousness" of Arabs. In particular, non-heterosexual practices in Islamic countries were pointed to as further evidence of the sexual excesses of this region. Other Orientalist stereotypes popularized during the colonial era (and having resonance today) included hyper masculinity, tyrannical leaders, and "the harem".

Among the most famous and influential travel writing on Arab or Muslim culture, and sexuality in particular, is Richard Burton's Terminal Essay of his translation of *Arabian Nights* (which he called *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*), published in 1886. In it, he hypothesizes certain swathes of the globe as the "Sotadic Zone", which included the North and South Mediterranean regions and what would today be considered the Greater Middle East, as well as the Americas, parts of Asia, and major Pacific archipelagos. In these regions, Burton suggested, homosexuality and pederasty were accepted parts of social life.

Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*, through examples spanning some four centuries, demonstrates how popular travel writing from "contact zones" has made Europeans "at home" feel familiar with and entitled to the subjects written about (Pratt 2008:3-7). It has given them a personal link to global processes, and often (though not always) made these processes of exploration, invasion, investment and colonization "meaningful and desirable" (Pratt 2008:3).

Women travel writers of the period, widely-read in their time, but under-analyzed as sources of historical information, were deeply complicit in the colonial project, while also offering influential perspectives on what they observed (Roberts 2007; Mills 1991).

Certainly, they had access to spaces unavailable to male writers, but further, they were able to add an intimacy of interaction with other women that male writers either unable or uninterested in achieving. The "harem visit" became something of a subgenre in women's travel writing, interesting not only for the narrative and description, but as Roberts writes, "the feminine fantasy of the harem selectively appropriates and disrupts the more familiar masculine harem fantasy" (Roberts 2007:61). Here, "harem women" do not just laze fountains around all day in silk robes and elaborate jewelry; they are walking, talking women with whom our authors may interact. Meanwhile, these encounters were not without their social risks to the authors: "according to the logic of Victorian domestic ideology, the bourgeois woman was compromised by the eroticism intrinsic to the Orientalist harem fantasy" (Roberts 2007:80-81).

Still, while these Orientalist imaginaries of the Middle East conjured danger and excess, for women, travel outside of Europe held the "lure of uncivilized gender roles and unrestrained sexuality" and offered an "escape from restrictive gender performances for white middle- and upper-class women" (El-Tayeb 2013:310). Indeed, that allure remains today. El-Tayeb finds in colonial-era travel narratives that, for women, "[o]utside Europe, their whiteness granted them an authority and mobility unachievable within the civilized 'West'" and that specifically "[f]emale travel to the Orient thus often appears as travel in search of the self" (El-Tayeb 2013:310). These themes echo loudly in contemporary narratives of various genres composed by (nominally) feminist writers as well (El-Tayeb 2013:310). Extended travel experiences (in the recent decade or so, specifically non-Western travel) are a rite of passage for upper-middle class young Westerners, involving "finding yourself" and self-actualization through encounters with Others. For women, an

important but under-examined part of this is sexual exploration. Unmoored (somewhat) from the social constraints and contexts of home and emboldened by "authority and mobility" of their relative wealth and whiteness, traveling Western women are free to have encounters they might never attempt in their own ostensibly sexually liberal countries.

By the end of the Victorian era, and the dawn of the new century, the Western secular subject became, "a sexual subject free from the shackles of religion" (Ewing 2011: 91), while secularism and religion reached a synchronicity (Taylor 2007). This new sexual subject was ostensibly secular, though constituted of Christian epistemology. It is unsurprising, then, that the "Oriental Other" continued to serve as a consummate foil to the Christian secular West, it's exotic religion and sexual practices serving to better define what was the West was not, even through times of change and reimagining. And so, the paradigm flipped:

> "During the colonial period, the Orient lagged behind the West because of its
> dissolute nature and libertine sexuality. Today's Muslim world, in contrast, lags
> behind because it has not yet freed itself from the shackles of religion and the sexual
> constraints associated with tradition and Islam." (Ewing 2011: 91)

From Travel Narratives to Escape Narratives

These travel narratives are an interesting parallel to what El-Tayeb terms "escape narratives": accounts told by individuals (mostly female) who come to prominence in Europe by playing into discourses of the horrors of Islam. These two types of texts share a

strong impulse towards othering the "elsewhere" the author has journeyed to Europe from, often contain strong sexual themes, and serve an important role in the projects of colonialism (in the first case), and imperialism/anti-immigrant policy (in the latter). They also feature stories of the author or speaker's "journeys toward self-discovery and liberation" (El-Tayeb 2013:314), which resounds in LGBT/queer coming out narratives as well.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is the Netherlands' example of "escape narrative" par excellence. Characterized as a "refugee from Islam", she has positioned herself at the vanguard of a "[s]exual clash of civilizations" (Fassin 2010: 508-509). Born in Somalia, Ayaan Hirsi Ayaan was granted asylum in the Netherlands in 1992. She was elected to Parliament in 2003 as a part of the right-wing *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD) (Bracke 2012: 242). There she was hailed as both "insider expert and the victim of Islam" (Bracke 2012: 242). In 2004, Hirsi Ali wrote the controversial film, *Submission*, produced and directed by Theo van Gogh. In the film, selections from the Qur'an are written on the abused body of a woman. Just two months after the film's release, van Gogh was assassinated by a Dutch-Moroccan man who left a letter addressed to Hirsi Ali on his victim's body, explicitly tying the assassination to the film and both van Gogh's and Hirsi Ali's vocal anti-Islam public personas.

The film succeeded in garnering attention for van Gogh and Hirsi Ali, but failed to make any insightful comment on its subject, or contribute anything by way of artistic innovation. Packaging up a bunch of racist stereotypes and objectifying women's nude bodies is hardly avant garde, no matter how moody the lighting. The film dumps out the orientalist toolbox and puts its contents to work: the set, minimalist with only a carpet and

a wall hanging meant to evoke a timeless, decontextualized, and non-specific "Arabialand" or "Islamistan" (Hirsi Ali's term); the characters, highly sexualized veiled women, wearing transparent black robes that put their breasts and torsos on display, embody the Western obsession with the harem; the female characters are all played by one actress who is conventionally attractive (thin, pale-skinned, pretty face) and are interchangeable-- their single dimension is their victimhood. This, of course, does to Muslim women exactly what the filmmakers argue a highly heterogenous religious tradition of nearly two billion believers does—it flats women into homogenous, powerless, submissive victims, whose bodies and sexualities are there solely to serve another—in this case, their nudity (van Gogh was likely aiming for edgy and provocative) arouses trite titillation, and their bodies serve as blank canvases onto which a political agenda is literally painted. Toward the end, the actress, apparently representing all of the characters, states that she is "longing for the grave". The conclusion of orientalist and racist narrative more generally: these exotic, lesser lives are not worth living.

I am, of course, not attempting to minimize the pervasive and devastating effects of domestic violence in Muslim families or across the globe or arguing that van Gogh "had it coming" because he made a racist and uncreative film. Hirsi Ali undoubtedly believed that she was working to call attention to an important problem. However, in watching the film, "one is left with the impression that the text of the Qur'an leaves no space for women's emancipation and that there is only one version of Islam, a version irreparably misogynistic." (Jusová 2008:152) By engaging these orientalist tropes and painting the experiences of some billion or so women with the same brush (even if it reflected an image of her own painful experience) Hirsi Ali erased the efforts of Islamic feminists such as Leila

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Ahmed and Fatema Mernissi (among numerous other scholars) whose work interpreting

Islamic texts shows that this is simply untrue.

In 2006, Hirsi Ali was accused of lying in her asylum claim, after which her party,

VVD, and vocally Rita Verdonk, withdrew their support. She then went to the United States,

where she began working with the conservative American Enterprise Institute (Fassin

2010: 507) using her platform at the 2008 Simone Beavoir awards, where she was

honored, to ask for French citizenship (while she never ever mentioned intending to live in

France, and while immigrants living in the country long-term were still being deported)

(Fassin 2010: 508). Media intellectual Bernard-Henri Lévy came to her defense, saying,

"Ayaan Hirsi Ali is already French (yes, she is!) in her heart, her values and her mind."

(quoted in Fassin 2010: 508). Speaking against Islam seems to be her ticket to Frenchness.

Hirsi Ali's statements on refugees falls under the heading of closing the door behind

oneself. She sarcastically remarked: "You are vulnerable, persecuted? Welcome to Europe!"

(quoted in Fassin 2010: 510) Never mind that she has built her career in Europe on her

status of having been vulnerable and persecuted herself. She functions too as a buffer from

accusations of racism among groups against immigration or expanded refugee programs,

as she is a person of color, and therefore assumed not to hold racial or ethnic bias (which is,

of course, questionable.)

She also commented that, "a small country like the Netherlands cannot welcome all

the wretched of the earth," (quoted in Fassin 2010: 510). An interesting choice of words,

given Frantz Fanon's central arguments in his *Wretched of the Earth*, linking the violence of

European imperial exploitation and the mass poverty in (post)colonial states, from which many migrants now hope to escape in their journey to Europe. Indeed, Hirsi Ali may be just what Fanon described in that book whose title phrase she used so flippantly and uncritically-- a "colonized intellectual" behaving like "a vulgar opportunist." (1963: 13)

Ayaan Hirsi Ali in the Netherlands, and her counterparts Fadela Amara in France, and Necla Kelek, Serap Çiceli and Seyran Ateş in Germany have received "unprecedented media attention" and were "among the first minority women ever to be granted a public voice in European affairs, albeit only when speaking about the threat of Islam." (El-Tayeb 2013:313). El-Tayeb stipulates that she doesn't assume that Ates or Kelek are working maliciously (El-Tayeb does not give this same pass to Hirsi Ali) and Ewing notes that though their depictions of the Turkish family are "extremely negative", the work of Kelek, Çiceli, and Ateş, "echoed feminist activism in Turkey" (Ewing 2008:162). Çiceli stated that she was only able to find a publisher for her book after September 11th, when the lives of Muslims became a "hot topic", but before that, Germans did not take violence against Muslim women seriously because after the Holocaust, they feared being called racist (Ewing 2008:162). El-Tayeb contends that the stories they tell publicly, in the ways that they tell them, are "consciously presented as travel narratives" (El-Tayeb 2013:315). In this way, they are familiar and recognizable to a European public, and fit neatly into existing xenophobic agendas. They fill the role of "one of the good ones", the exception that proves the rule, or what Jin Haritaworn, et al. call "the exceptional Muslim" (2008).

Mobility and Sexuality

As detailed in the second chapter, progressive sexual politics, and specifically the wide acceptance of sexual diversity, is tied to the Dutch national imaginary of the past decades prominently, perhaps more so than any other country. The Netherlands was the first country in the world to erect a monument to homosexual victims of the Holocaust in 1987 and the first to legalize same-sex marriage in 2001, a year after legalizing prostitution (Hekma & Duyvendak 2011). Amsterdam is widely seen as the world's gay capital. And since the death of Fortuyn, homosexuality has had "an unprecedented centrality to Dutch politics" (Dudink 2017:3), making the Netherlands arguably the quintessential case of homonationalism.

"Homonationalism" is a term coined by Jasbir Puar (2007), and describes the paradigm through which Western nations have come to see themselves, via a proclaimed acceptance of "LGBT" identities, as exceptionally tolerant societies, protectors of diversity, and executors of "freedom" and "choice" in a neoliberal system. By casting other regions and cultures, for example the Middle East or Islam, as oppressive and repressive, and in particular drawing Middle Eastern or Muslim women and sexual minorities as in need of saving, the "West" (despite its inequitable legal treatment of LGBT communities within its borders) gains the political and moral authority to further imperial projects (Puar points specifically to Iraq as a key example).

Though homonationalism is without question a powerful force, normalizing a specific (generally white, male) sexual-social structure, it can be easy to overestimate the centering capacity of this phenomenon. Crucially, the concept of homonationalism highlights the contradiction of a nation trumpeting LGBT rights abroad, while debates are all but settled at home regarding how far the nation is willing to extend full rights and

citizenship to LGBT (especially trans) individuals. The status of queer or LGBT people within a nation is still always askew. LGBT people in the Netherlands are viewed as a product of their liberal, progressive society; but as a product, they are still decentered, "made by," rather than truly "of". As such, there is a transience to this notion of queerness, one that confirms Perez's statement that, "Being gay always involves, to some extent, being someplace else." (Perez 2015: 105)

The sense of being elsewhere, or existing in movement from place to place appears in the pivotal moment in a narrative of queerness—the coming out story. "Coming out" stories are essential to asylum narratives. They require certain plot points: discomfort in one's youth, a feeling of not being "normal"; realization, recognition, a great of awakening of consciousness; struggle against one's self, and against one's family and community (which, for asylum seekers, are required to represent much stronger forces both in the life of the individual, and against queerness than in imagined the West); and finally, flight (the flight is always from periphery to center—while the first flight might be from rural areas to a more cosmopolitan center, the later flight is from Third to First World. Of course, this sense of unidirectional movement erases or makes pitiable those who remain, or who move from periphery to periphery, rurality to rurality.) There is movement also in relation to biological families and communities where queer people grow up—often they must put distance, physical or emotional, between themselves and their families, to protect against rejection, or to live in contexts where are they able to carry out relationships with desired partners in relative safety and freedom. For trans people, the coming out script includes an additional line, and one with great stakes: Trans scholars have argued that for trans

subjects to get healthcare, and employment "rests upon the repetition of essentializing narratives about being 'trapped in the wrong body'" (White 2014: 977).

Of course, this kind of movement is not available to all, and takes place in the context of the major forces of the modern era: "Coming out of the closet, the canonized narrative for gay and lesbian identity, hinges on mobility, a globalized consumerism, and imperialism." (Perez 2015: 107) Ultimately, this means that closet narratives are exclusionary (violently so, as Perez argues), limiting access to gay and lesbian identity via "specific kinds of privacy, property, and mobility." (Perez 2015: 106) Coming out is tied up with historically and culturally-specific ideas about sexuality, focused on individual and a process of self-actualization that involves public exclamation in order to be fully realized and authentic.

Coming out involves delimiting sexuality, a "thing" that is located inside of a person, that can be found through "looking inward to the site of one's true self" (Ewing 2011: 93), and making it visible, categorizable, countable. In this way, it becomes, "the basis for a normal public identity" (Ewing 2011: 93). In the context of Western societies, where coming out became a key strategy for rights movements based on identity, it is also an issue of authenticity and morality. "In the closet," (and out of public view) a person is supposedly not being true to themselves or living authentically, they can be accused of deception or dishonesty, and further, they are seen to be forsaking a moral duty to come out and be counted, thereby strengthening community rights claims. While "sexuality" is seen as something internal to the self, "culture" is seen as external, and "something frozen, quantifiable, alienable" (Ticktin 1999: 27); and further, something that uniquely governs

the lives of racial, religious, and regional "others" (while the West, seen as a-cultural, is governed by reason).

However, those for whom "coming out" has been useful or salient to their experience, may find sharing these stories, which can be a near-ritual part of an evening with new queer friends, is cathartic and bonding. In the field, I never initiated these conversations, but they frequently arose, and I enjoyed the little bit of cachet I felt I received from telling others that I first came out when I was only 12 years old. I cling to that bit of validation, because, like so many queer folks currently partnered with the opposite-sex, or like other hybrids, halfies, people who have trouble checking boxes, I often feel like I'm not quite "real".

Watching *Kuchu* with Ayesha

12 September 2015

I would not have imagined that Ayesha would want to watch a film about homophobia in Uganda so soon after she'd come to realize she could not return to Rwanda. She'd seen *Call Me Kuchu* before, and recognized some of the featured activists. One had worked closely with her girlfriend, Sweetie. She'd received a text message earlier that week from a woman who claimed to be Sweetie's new girlfriend, and another message from a friend saying that this woman was planning a big birthday party for Sweetie. It seemed to be sinking in for Ayesha that it would be pointless to fight for her; in fact, she may never see Sweetie again. Her world was out there, still spinning on without her. For now, she wanted to watch this film, and so we found it online and streamed it on my laptop, sitting on my couch.

In response to the murder of prominent Ugandan gay rights activist David Kato, the 2012 film *Call Me Kuchu* shows a group rallying in New York City in solidarity with Uganda's LGBT community. A woman with a bullhorn demands that we "hold responsible every white minister, every black pastor who has gone from America and lied to the people," insisting that these religious leaders have "blood on your hands." In response, LGBT and human rights organizations also donated money to the country's pro-rights groups to combat the deadly campaigns against homosexuality in Uganda. Back in Uganda, Bishop Senyonjo tells the filmmakers that "the world is becoming one," a common understanding of globalization in the contemporary era, and specifically regarding the spread of LGBT sexual identities.

This alleged global "becoming one" has been centuries in the making: early in *Call Me Kuchu*, we hear a voice quoting British colonial laws against "carnal knowledge" and "unnatural acts," laws and discourses that constitute a legacy of colonial biopolitics that endures today across the globe, from India's Penal Code 377A, across the African continent, and beyond, used by contemporary governments to persecute and marginalize. Massad argues that these laws "sought deliberately to influence Arab concepts of sexual desire and practice" (Massad 2007:160) and this homogenization did not end with formal colonialism. This idea that homosexuality is a Western import can be seen clearly in the arguments in Uganda that homosexuality is "un-African." In the beginning of the film, we hear a man yelling over a loudspeaker, "Lord, we cannot allow the pillar of our culture to be destroyed by civilization from the West!" at an anti-homosexuality rally. MP David Bahati argues that homosexuality "is un-African because it is inconsistent with African values of procreation, of belief in continuity of family and clan." Here, homosexuality is seen as a foreign

intrusion, non-local, and therefore inauthentic in "African" culture. Ayesha confirmed that this was a discourse she encountered frequently in her work in Rwanda.

Others engage with the concept of homosexual authenticity by affirming that their experience and their expression of gayness is "real." In the film, David Kato described a moment in which he felt personal affirmed, having joined a gay church, and experienced gay bars in his community. He recalls thinking, "this is the real thing, we are not pretending." His wording is interesting; in the first phrase, he seems to invoke a notion of a "real thing," *the* real gay, that might stand in contrast to an "inauthentic thing." His second phrase suggests a rejoinder to a general accusation that gay people are "pretending" or acting inauthentically, perhaps mimicking a "Western" figure.

The idea that sexuality may be "becoming one" is expressed in Altman's "global gay hypothesis," which **"**anticipates a gradual homogenization of sexual identities along the lines of a hegemonic (Western) model of gay and lesbian identities" (Reid 2013:153). While there are demonstrably large numbers of people across the globe who "take on gay identities" and "aspire to be part of global culture in all its forms" (Altman 2001:93), there is also, as Altman highlights, ambivalence experienced in various sexually or gender non-normative collectivities toward "international" versus "traditional" labels and conceptions. This ambivalence may be, in some contexts, a response to the utility of "identity" in claiming human rights and international support, as well as a resulting heightened visibility and therefore violence experienced by people whose behaviors have previously been tacitly accepted.

By whatever means certain sexual models moved through space and time, they are now available across the globe to multitudes of people who may utilize them for practical

value, or as a way to understand their feelings and desires. Others may reject them in favor of "local" modes of non-binary gender and sexuality. These are available constructs (among many others) that individuals may consciously or unconsciously "try on", moving between different self-constructions in relation to gender and sexuality through the course of their lives, or even just a moment. The question is not which is more "real" or "authentic," but how "authenticity" is claimed, by whom, and for what purposes. Furthermore, "transnational flows and the dynamic interplay between global and local forms of gender and sexual identity formation" (Reid 2013:153-154) have resulted in creative and complex reformulations in unpredictable, ever-changing ways. Assuming that globalization or modernity is uni-directional or has a totalizing effect that is "so utterly transformative... as to create a fundamental rupture with the past" (Ewing 1997:3-4) is to conceive of these forces as too singular, and too deterministic. Ewing argues, "in most aspects of social life, the practices associated with modernity contribute fragments to individual experience. But these fragments also leave diverse traces in individuals, who themselves are historically specific conjunctions shaped by multiple others, of which the Western other is only one." (Ewing 1997:4)

Like other transit narratives, it centers on the inherent danger of the elsewhere, and in particular, the danger that place and culture represent to a sympathetic group (in this case, LGBT folks). We experience transit in this film in multiple ways which much less explicit that the previous types of narratives. The documentary is a journey of the filmmakers (though obscured as such) from the US to Uganda. The filmmakers, Malika Zouhali-Worrall, whose professional website describes her as "daughter of a Moroccan mother and British father" (Zouhali-Worrall, N.d.) was educated in the UK and US, and

Katherine Fairfax-Wright is a white American. While the other modes of narrative discussed here are written and autobiographical, the documentary obscures the primary story-tellers, the filmmakers, who nonetheless shape the structure and content of the narrative. The film depicts other border-crossings that put into contact what are constructed as two worlds, including the US evangelical ministers rallying in Kampala, and international leaders responding to events in Uganda. It shows US Christian missionaries working with Ugandan religious groups to stir up support for the "Kill the Gays Bill", but also argues that intervention from Western leaders was ultimately what prevented the bill from passing. In this way, it activates the secularism/religious dichotomy, showing the American religious group as marginal and Ugandan religious groups as thoroughly dominating discourse in the country.

Films in the "participatory" or "reflexive" documentary genres, those which feature the filmmaker on camera and explicitly center their subjective experiences, more obviously fit within the genealogy of transit narratives, but I include it here both because of Ayesha's connection with the film as a part of her own story, because it contains important elements of these transit narratives, and to extend the focus on how stories of the Other are told widely in Western societies today.

When the film was over, I thought that Ayesha had fallen asleep. Her face was turned away and she leaned on sofa arm. After a moment, she let out an expressive, "ahh" and clasped her hands. When I asked how she was feeling, she said she was ok, but worried for her friends at home. "They can't all just get here," she added, meaning the Netherlands. She mentioned her "friend" (before the film started, she was still calling Sweetie her

girlfriend) had needed to move houses yet again recently, having been outed and harassed because of Ayesha's husband. She might even need to flee to Uganda soon, where she had relatives. I made some joke about that meaning that at least Sweetie would have to leave the new girlfriend behind, and Ayesha laughed, then clicked her tongue and sighed. I found out later that Ayesha had worked to help Sweetie apply for a visa to come to the Netherlands around that time, but it was denied.

Conflict and Consistency: Narrative in context

Asylum seekers are required to provide a transit narrative in the context of their asylum process—a story whose arc moves from danger to safety, oppression to freedom, there to here. The context for the telling, including the speaker's goals and audience, reflects in small choices and "traces" in their word choices and story framing. Because Ayesha has told "her story", an explicit and situational statement of self-representation, so frequently since arriving in the Netherlands, I'm able to compare utterances made in several contexts. The structure of her asylum story was always loosely similar, and maps onto the structure I heard from many other asylum seekers:

1) Discovery: how and when the person first came to think of their own same-sex desire, often recounted as very innocent, explorative, and not explicitly sexual.

2) Coming Out, and/or First Encounter: often based around meeting someone else who is queer, and either becoming friends or beginning a sexual relationship.

3) Exposure: often a frightening event, a rupture, in which a family member discovers a sexual relationship, but occasionally a slower process of suspicion and realization by family.

4) Flight: the process by which the person left their home and came to the Netherlands. This section is often very matter-of-fact; emotions around the flight are described only later. This may be because asylum officials ask for particularly minute detail in a recounting of the flight story that can be reported to the IND for purposes of understanding travel patterns, and to identify if an individual qualifies for the "Dublin procedure", wherein they would be required to return to the first EU country they entered.

5) Life in the Netherlands: This element of the story usually only appears after prompting. Unprompted, it includes descriptions of meeting people through LGBT orgs.

I focus now on the "discovery" section of Ayesha's narrative in four different contexts.

During a class, not long after she first arrived in Amsterdam:

"[A friend] made the introduction… and she [Sweetie] told me she wants to date me, she was so good to me, and then we fall in love and I know, ok, I'm lesbian."

Here, Ayesha presents herself as a rather passive party: a friend takes the action of introducing the couple; Sweetie asks Ayesha out; Sweetie's treatment of Ayesha is good;

and then they both fall in love. Hardly anything of Ayesha's feelings, sexual or otherwise, are mentioned, other than "falling in love" at the end. It is also notable that Ayesha's sense of her sexuality is focused entirely on the person of Sweetie. At this moment, Ayesha's husband has not yet found her revealing essays and threatened to kill her, therefore she has not initiated her claim for asylum yet. She had never before spoken to a group of our size (about 15 people) about her sexuality, which I also suspect accounts for her distancing and passive language.

During her talk at a Pride month event:

> "I knew I was different than the other girls, even when I was a little girl. I might see a girl and think, 'oh she's nice, I think maybe I want to kiss her'. But I didn't do anything until later."

In no other telling (that I heard) did Ayesha discuss being a "little girl". It seems significant that this utterance was made at a Pride event, where historically, narratives referencing sexual identities as something entirely interior to the self and able to be excavated in personal histories, have been socially salient and politically powerful.

In conversation with me, a mutual friend, and my partner, in our apartment:

> "I never heard this word, 'lesbian', I didn't know it was an option! [Laughs] In Rwanda, you know, it's very different there. We have words for it, but not exactly

the same, and you know, they're all bad… bad words. And my family… [eye roll].

Then when I heard it, 'lesbian' and knew what it was, I thought, ok! Yes! That's me!"

A social context, Ayesha talked about beginning to identify as a lesbian with much more levity here. She was smiling as she spoke, and her jocular tone was somewhat distancing. She touched on her sense of linguistic identification with a lightness that made it sound like she had finally found a jumper that fit.

At a conference in Milan where we presented together, Ayesha skipped the discovery story all together, and started with her work in the LGBT organization in Kigali. For her first academic conference, she may have wanted to position herself as a professional, rather than beginning her talk with reference to herself as a naive young person.

Where a story starts, however, is significant—it sets the frame for the narrative, and establishes relevant elements to the story. In most of Ayesha's tellings, and more broadly, in the narratives told to me by most of the other asylum seekers, the story begins in an innocent time, usually not long after puberty, implicitly arguing that a person's sexual destiny, or fixed sexual identity, are rooted in this timeframe. It is difficult to parse here when and to what extent Ayesha was consciously and strategically selecting elements of her story to tell or highlight, and which to conceal or downplay. Her different accounts are not precisely consistent, but nor do they exactly contradict one another. That Ayesha omits a discussion of her first moments of sexual identification at the Milan conference, or that Sweetie is so central to the first telling, and entirely absent from the rest could be seen as a

contradiction by omission. It is understandable that Ayesha might fix on certain details and not others as her audience and context for speaking changed, and easy to see why Sweetie would figure prominently into Ayesha's sense of her story at a time when they were still in a relationship, and disappear from it after the couple split. This supports the idea that Ewing promotes, that "we can observe that individuals are continuously reconstituting themselves into new selves in response to internal and external stimuli." (Ewing 1990: 258)

It is universally true, argues Ewing, that "[i]n all cultures people can be observed to project multiple, inconsistent self-representations that are context-dependent and may shift rapidly." (1990: 251) Generally, people are unaware of this, and perceive there to be consistency in their statements about their lives, experiences, and beliefs. I found this true again and again in my discussions with asylum seekers—even going back and squinting at my notes, assuming I must have written something down wrong, and messaging at least two informants later for clarification. I argue that in the context of asylum seekers in the Netherlands, some individuals are indeed aware of this inconsistency, but view it as a necessary part of the process of claiming asylum, while others are indeed convinced of the wholeness; or, I suggest, become more convinced through the process of tell and retelling their stories in a certain structure.

Ayesha's comments and the statements of other asylum seekers on religion were more clearly and frequently contradictory. Ayesha told me that she believed God made her this way, attracted to women, and so it must be acceptable to him. In the same conversation, though, she added that homosexuality was "wrong under the religion" and that she knew she had to "account" for this failing. In one instance, Samira, a Ugandan

woman, said that when she was younger, she struggled greatly with understanding her sexual attraction to women in the context of her religion, Islam. Then, a moment later, she concluded, "that is difficult", no longer in the past tense.

Some confirmed that they saw conflict between their sexuality and their faith, and told me that they struggled with this. Some saw conflict, and that conflict made them feel a distance to their faith; others reasoned that no one is a "perfect Muslim" (even if they profess to be, as several told me with evident annoyance) and that almost everyone has a vice, whether it be drinking alcohol, having pre- or extra-marital sex, or failing to pray or fast at the appropriate times. Akram cited an outwardly pious Muslim man he'd grown up with, who often "yelled about the gays" but was also known to drink and smoke opium.

Ayesha's asylum narrative, in some tellings, it contained the essential elements of transit narrative: an oppressive existence in one's homeland (the discovery and "coming out" stages could be equivalent to moments in an escape narrative when the individual has enough, or realizes there is the possibility of escape); a dramatic flight from home (though in Ayesha's case, it was a dramatic event that caused her to be unable to make her planned return airline flight); and an arrival in a free new world. The elements to this narrative are easily intelligible to those in the West, as the substrate for them has been laid for centuries. Their familiarity makes them credible; I will take up the issue of credibility in asylum claims in the next chapter.

Personal narrative, a mode that aims to bring the audience in close, establishing empathy with the subject(s), in certain forms can ultimately function to create or expand other distances—specifically, distance with a cultural, national and/or religious Other. I'm

not the wife of a colonial administrator describing the forbidden mysteries of the harem

interior, and Ayesha is not Ayaan Hirsi Ali, crafting a career out of projecting her personal

pain onto all Muslim women. But here I am, a white woman attempting to tell the story of a

black woman and her journey, with all of the context, nuance, reflexivity, and complication I

can put to words-- a journey that, at least at this point in the story, left Ayesha on my couch

in Amsterdam, and Sweetie back in Rwanda moving houses periodically, and with some

new girlfriend planning her a birthday party.

5) The Credibility Trap: the double-edged sword of asylum strategies

"Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat."
-Audre Lorde

"I did not know if the story was factually true or not, but it was emotionally true…"
-Richard Wright

This chapter, focusing on issues of credibility, begins with a narrative of community event in which fears about fraudulent asylum claims suddenly take center stage. The next narrative focuses in on how concerns about fraud and issues of credibility have shaped the case of a young man from Afghanistan. Credibility is particularly important in cases of LGBT asylum, and any traces of ambivalence, change, or re-positioning—shifts people make all the time in conversation and self-representation-- can be read as fraudulent. I contrast the demand of the asylum system for a particular kind of consistent subject with the lived reality of a "shifting subject", and the "traces" of those shifts that can be seen in the context of narrative-telling. In describing the limited types of evidence LGBT asylum cases can view, I discussion of how anthropologists can work to challenge the credibility standard. Stories about Akram's "nail polish conundrum" and Ayesha's battles with her roommates focus on moments when shifts in self-representation become conscious strategies, the ways these strategies are shared through networks, and how the sharing of strategies might go awry.

Secret Garden Hosts UGOM

23 February 2016

When I arrive, two young men are sitting in the Secret Garden room, and Anneke leads me in. The guys are quiet and using their phones. When Aziz and Salim finally arrive, everyone jumps up and goes to bring in the groceries they've brought to make dinner. Someone has lent a car, and they also have a shopping cart to bring in massive bags of rice, vegetables, juice, tea, coffee, three bottles of wine, cookies, soda, and chips.

In the happy chaos, I assign myself the task of wrapping the wine bottles to be given as gifts to presenters, while other take things to the kitchen or to the building across the courtyard where the event will be held. Aziz collapses into a chair and declares that cooking will begin at three o'clock (in 45 minutes), when he catches his breath.

A small group of young Ugandan men arrive in the hallway, and Salim invites them into the room, welcoming them with a kiss on the cheek.

Aziz directs Assam to bring some drinks to the other building. As Assam is bent over picking up the bottles, Aziz picks up a stray cucumber lying on top of the orange juice boxes.

"One more thing--here, you need this."

Assam looks up at the phallic veggie and without missing a beat replies, "I *always* need this."

Dutch, Arabic and English criss-cross the kitchen.

"Ik bin Queen of Drama!" Aziz declares.

Assam queries Amir: "Izzay, ya Amir?"

"Goed." Amir replies.

This is not a day when Secret Garden usually inhabits the building, so many other groups are in and out of the computer room. Before the cooking begins, while several of us sit around the table in the Secret Garden's usual room, Anneke comes in and asks me to stand guard by the food that was purchased to make dinner. She says people from the center are eating it, "because they are used to eating whatever they can." I walk into the kitchen, finding an older man grabbing handfuls of leaves from the head of iceberg lettuce, and a younger man taking a bite of a tomato. I begin to wash the rest of the tomatoes and other produce to demonstrate that they are being used without being a threatening presence. The two men leave shortly after.

An hour and a half later, the event is in full swing. A collaboration between Secret Garden and Uganda Gay on the Move (UGOM), a church attic is filled with plastic chairs and interested audience members from wide swathes of the globe. On the improvised stage are

four Ugandans, one by one telling their stories. Each has fled Uganda, fearing for their lives after being "outed" in some way as LGBT. When they finish, the event opens up to audience questions. The second question is from a young Iranian man, who tells the assembled group that he, too, left home because he was gay. However, he wanted to bring to the attention of all gathered what he saw as the greatest problem facing LGBT asylum seekers in the Netherlands: fraud. There were people, he said, who only pretended to be gay in order to get refugee status. These people were making it harder for "real" LGBT refugees. When one of the presenters responded by saying that fraudulent claims were very small in number, and most certainly did not represent a major issue, or warrant the group's attention, the Iranian man interrupted to insist on his point. Murmurs rumbled through the audience. Another speaker tried to change the topic, but the Iranian man continued on, asking how the community was going to address this urgent problem.

As this narrative demonstrates, LGBT asylum (and asylum in general) involves moral panics of its own—in particular the specter of the fraud: an individual (often imagined in large numbers, or as an impending onslaught) who lies about their experiences (in this case about being LGBT) in order to take advantage of European welfare systems and economic opportunities. Much of the resistance among the Dutch population to changing current asylum law seems to center on this anxiety over "the fraud." Underlying this moral panic are ideas about who is entitled to what resources, what are "authentic" expressions of sexuality, and an anxiety that the admittance of an individual is somehow directly "taking" from another. This next narrative looks up close at what happens when an asylum seeker is not believed.

Dizzying logic

Aziz: Not gay enough to stay, not straight enough to deport

May 2015, Nijmegen

Aziz wanted to meet at a small gay bar in the center of a Dutch university town that was the closest population center to his asylum center (AZC), but the bar was closed. After I suggested we check out a café across the street, said he knew of only one other gay bar in the town, but when I looked online, it too was closed. He followed me and our mutual friend, Gloria, into the café, but finding the seating too close to the well-populated bar area, we moved outside to brave the chill and wind in order to do our interview. I asked if he was comfortable sitting there.

"I have been uncomfortable for more than four years," he replied, smiling only after a moment.

Aziz was from Kabul, and left after his boyfriend was murdered by his own family in early 2014. The boyfriend's family had threatened to kill Aziz too, and after he fled, they beat Aziz's mother and siblings. He applied for asylum in the Netherlands, but was rejected. After his rejection, while still in the asylum camp, he got into contact with an LGBT organization on the advice of a psychologist. They told him that he could apply for asylum based on his fear of persecution for being gay, and so he appealed his asylum decision on these grounds. He was told to gather as much documentation as he could; this was the way to build credibility for his story. He retrieved documents verifying that a tribal council had approved his boyfriend's family's request to kill Aziz on sight.

Again, his application for asylum was rejected. The letter he received from the asylum judge outlined the reasoning for the decision: The judge had deemed his story not credible because he doubted the authenticity of Aziz's claim that he was gay, as he only informed the court of this fact after he had been initially rejected for asylum. Also, the court did not find credible the document Aziz's family member had sent regarding the mortal danger of his return to Afghanistan because the judge did not believe an Afghani family member would help and support Aziz in this way, because he is gay.

The last I was in contact with Aziz, he had been sent to a "Freedom Restricting Location," one of the facilities housing rejected asylum applicants while they await deportation from the Netherlands. However, Aziz's case lies in limbo for now: he cannot be legally deported because Afghanistan is considered by the Dutch government to be unsafe for LGBT individuals.

"So, what, just believe everybody?"

The logic is dizzying, (nauseatingly so,) but not unusual. To avail one's self of the protection afforded by asylum involves the telling of a narrative credible to the asylum system, using the ideological idioms of sexuality, experience, and culture that are intelligible and recognizable to Dutch officials. Additionally, for a narrative to be read as credible, it must be consistent. A central method of juridical systems, including asylum, is a demand that the subject repeat a narrative consistently, including minute details whose relevance is amplified if they are omitted, added, or modified at any stage of the process. LGBT asylum cases are particularly burdened by this problem, as other types of legal

evidence are often unavailable. Additionally, traumatic experiences, and feelings of shame and ambivalence are likely to amplify the traces of their "shifts" in relation to their own subject positions. What asylum officials take as evidence of deceitfulness or un-credibility, are not only misreadings with regard to diverse experiences of gender, sexuality, and culture but also fundamentally how individuals experience and move through the world.

    I interviewed a journalist who was suing a town's mayor for barring him from covering protests by asylum seekers at a nearby asylum center, and he wondered aloud what the solution to this credibility problem in admitting refugees might be. We had just been laughing at the idea, an image we'd described together, of a judge telling an asylum seeker, "you're not gay enough. Sorry." It is laughable, indeed, on many levels.

    Of course, it's not as simple as "believing everybody," and the problem goes well beyond the particular and peculiar position of asylum seekers who are sexual minorities. This is the problem that mid-2010s Europe faced with the so-called "Refugee Crisis" (and other countries across the Middle East, Central Africa, and South Asia in particular have been facing for quite some time). Who gets to stay? To borrow Agamben's phrasing, who is "let live"? Who is left, and let die? The only humane answer that can be given is summarized by Melissa Autumn White:

    "...the solution to the geopolitical disparities organized through the nation-state form and its hierarchies of citizenship cannot be 'citizenship for all.' Rather, it must be the dissolution of borders and the dismantling of the differential rights that the categories of citizen, migrant, refugee, undocumented, and so on hold in place. To put it succinctly, as Nicolas De Genova does: 'if there were no borders, there would indeed be no migrants— only mobility." (2014, 985)

Citizenship and refugee status are necessarily and by nature exclusionary. Working to expand the definition of a refugee, to expand our definition of who fits in the categories of "LGBT," still reproduces the hierarchies inherent in this system. Such limited reform still has us sorting piles of the worthy and unworthy, the "morally legitimate" and illegitimate, and credible and the frauds.

While the prospect of such radical structural change may be remote in the near-term, there is work that can be done in the meanwhile to move systems toward more just outcomes. As ever, such work involves compromise, reckoning with tensions, and the need to frequently consider possible unintended consequences. Next, I discuss the ways anthropologists can work to support asylum seekers, and the difficulties of working around the credibility trap.

Lending Credibility? Letters of Support and Country Reports in Asylum Claims

During the course of my fieldwork between 2014 and 2016, I worked with several different groups and organizations that overlapped their advocacy, support services, and social networks at the intersection of my focus. I stumbled around trying to make myself useful to these groups in various ways in the beginning: from making liters and liters of tea to writing website content and setting up for events. Progressively building relationships and better understandings of the organizations, I started to think and talk through how an anthropologist could best serve these goals of these groups and the individuals they serve. I was directed toward two areas where we may have the potential to make the process of

asylum more just, though neither is without troubling entanglements. The first route is aiming to make sure asylum officials have access to nuanced and up-to-date information about diverse understandings of sex and sexuality across the globe by contributing to the "country reports" and background information given to asylum judges. The second involves working with individual asylum seekers and supporting their applications. Both avenues raise questions about how we should respond when asked as anthropologists to provide assistance in asylum cases, that may include requests for essentialized portraits of places and people that run counter to our anthropological understandings.

I hadn't actually ever heard of anthropologists or other social scientists contributing reports or testimonials for asylum cases when I first wrote a letter in support of my friend's asylum claim. It was early in my fieldwork, and I thought only that I might be able to write as a witness to certain parts of Ayesha's timeline: she'd been staying in my apartment as the text messages from her husband threatening to kill her when she returned to Rwanda beset her phone. I sat next to her as she received messages from friends begging to stay away Rwanda, fearing for her life; and as she heard from family members that her husband had thrown the nieces and nephew under her care out of their home. I could also attest to her describing in the summer institute where we'd met her experiences being a lesbian in Rwanda and working in LGBT support organizations there. The two others for whom I wrote letters of support I knew less well; through Ayesha I'd met them and interviewed them (see Appendix for example letter).

Another area where anthropologists may specifically be able to improve the asylum system is in language and translation. Ostensibly, each asylum seeker is allowed to choose the language in which their interviews are conducted; however, I spoke with several people

who had not be given that choice and may have wished to work in a language other than the one used for their interviews. This is particularly significant issue for LGBT asylum seekers for two reasons: if they are forced to speak through a translator from their home country or region, the asylum seeker may be hesitant to speak freely in front the translator, fearing (accurately or not) the same harsh reactions as those they faced at home. One person even reported that their translator made derogatory comments as she talked about her relationships with women, and she suspected that he did not give an accurate translation of her remarks to the Dutch interviewer. Hani, a 24 year-old Syrian man who identifies as bisexual, said that he had requested a new translator for his second interview with the IND, after he determined that the first translator was "stupid" and had started "acting mean" after Hani declared in the interview that he was "ex-Muslim"; he also felt that the translator had a bad "attitude" toward him because of his sexuality.

Secondly, the entanglements of language culture make the articulation of thoughts, feelings, and experiences of sexuality especially difficult. One young man, Ahmed, worried that if he spoke in English, the judge might think he was less credible or less authentic; just parroting English-language media, for example. However, English was the language in which he felt the most comfortable speaking about his sexuality; "I learned gay in English," he said.

When I originally typed up my hand-written notes from his interview, I copied this phrase as "I learned [to be] gay in English". Generally, the use of brackets is my preferred way to clarify the meaning of a quote while still noting that some interpretation was done by the author. I inserted the infinitive "to be" to resolve the error I perceived in grammatical construction, but in doing so, I locked in my interpretation; that is, that Ahmed

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was saying that he experience induction into a "global gay" culture (obviously, a highly contextual and contestable notion) through the use of English vocabulary, and English-language media and interpersonal communications. I inferred a touch of facetiousness here; his other comments on his view of sexuality lead to me believe he would not characterize gayness as something one learns as a skill like woodworking or crochet. This led me to consider both the ways (seemingly) small choices in note-taking and translation on the part of the interviewer, and (again, seemingly) small choices in words and order on the part of the interviewee can affect meaning-making between interviewer and interviewee, sometimes in ways that may seem contradictory—and importantly in the case of an asylum interview—questionably credible.

While Ahmed worried about conducting his asylum interview in English might make him appear less credible, it is also possible that if a person attempted to split the difference and use two or more languages during the course of their asylum proceedings, the direct translation of their words and, further, the cultural meanings of their descriptions may be seen by Dutch authorities as inconsistent with one another. An Egyptian woman argued that when she speaks about her queerness in English, she talks about it as something ingrained and biological, "who she is", because this is the vocabulary of queerness she has been exposed to. Meanwhile, when she speaks in Arabic with friends, she speaks, and indeed thinks, of it differently, as something she does, and in a less identitarian sense. She said she thought Westerners have trouble understanding this difference and see the two articulations as contradictory.

As we saw with Ayesha's variable "Discovery" narratives in the last chapter, variation does not necessarily mean contradiction (or deception). Nor is this ability to

understand oneself, even core facts or qualities of oneself, differently across contexts, and

across time, a specifically non-Western dexterity:

> "Though in certain contexts individuals may identify themselves in terms of clearly defined, labeled categories…such categories may be relevant only in certain social situations or only for certain purposes. The same individual may shift frames of reference from one context to another, even from one moment to the next, and may tolerate considerable inconsistency in his or her own beliefs and opinions, often without realizing it" (Ewing 1990: 268)

Though people usually experience their narrative-telling, or self-presentation as

consistent, and a "symbolic, timeless whole", Ewing argues that representation in fact shifts

situationally (1990). This timelessness is central to narratives of homonormative sexuality-

- in certain ways a backwards-oriented identity-- which I will expand on in a later chapter.

In efforts to validate its existence, queerness often projects back to the past, declaring

historical figures gay; or looking for artifacts of queerness in other times and places; and

more commonly, including in "coming out" stories a consistent element of personal history

excavations to collect evidence of that one was once a "baby queer" or "pre-gay" (often

symbolized by a favorite toy or outfit as a child that was not gender-conforming, a

relationship with a friend that is now read as a crush, and so on.) Of course, absent from

these recounting are the moments, stories, bits of evidence that do not support the final

conclusion. I take a closer look at the "traces" of shifts in self-representation of opinions

and beliefs in the following narrative.

Revealing Traces: Examining indexicals in the context of the interview

When I asked Aziz to introduce himself, he identified himself as Muslim, and added after a beat that he was not very religious, and then a moment later, "I pray." At this stage, he seemed still a bit uncomfortable with me and with being interviewed, but this vacillation in how he talked about his faith continued throughout our talk. His shifting use of language that first included himself in the faith community, then distanced, and then included again revealed his ambivalence about his belonging. Ewing (2006) calls for anthropologists to attend more closely to the "traces" left in statements made during the interview (both by the interviewee and the interviewer, and indeed made *by* the relationship between the speaker and the hearer) which can reveal in greater depth the speaker's purpose in making the statement and positioning within a certain context. Aziz's varying descriptions of his relationship to Islam reflect not only some interior spiritual connection to a belief system, but his interest in positioning himself in relation to others of that faith in different geographic and social contexts during the course of our interview, as well as the changing relationship between the interviewer (me), Ayesha (acting as an observer sitting next to me), and himself.

Aziz's use of pronouns drifted as he moved from Afghanistan to the Netherlands. In Afghanistan, the language Aziz used to talk about Muslims included phrases like "they don't believe I should exist" and "for them, this is how it is". When his story gets to the Netherlands, Muslims become "we"— Aziz reports that "we are looked at" by native (assumed non-Muslim) Dutch, and he mentions "our holidays". The shift may also represent a need to mark group belonging in this new place. Ewing specifically notes that "traces of conflict and ambivalence" can be found in "inconsistent use of pronouns," as well

as "syntactical constructions, disruptions in speech such as repairs and silences… and the use of other indexicals (such as 'here' and 'there,' then and 'now')" (Ewing 2006: 93).

Hani followed a similar pattern. At the start of his interview with Ayesha, when he discusses living among fellow Syrians, Muslims are "them": he says, "I do not have a problem with them, I love Muslims and Arabs." Later, talking about his life in the Netherlands, he mentions a "gay friend here" and says, "he is Muslim, he loves Allah. He says Allah hates him, but he loves him. I always sympathize with him." "Muslim" is no longer distanced from Hani, his friend's conflict is one with which Hani relates. A moment later, he states: "I will stay forever scared of Muslims… I do not hate them, I hate the texts that they read." Hani reported that he called himself "ex-Muslim" to his Moroccan translator in an interview and referred himself as "atheist" in a conversation with his attorney. These word choices, too, reflect Hani's need to distance himself from his former faith when discussing a context where his company (the translator) may be presumed Muslim, or at least Middle Eastern broadly, while he does not need to position himself immediately in opposition to Muslims when in the company of (presumed) non-Muslims (his attorney).

Letters, Reports, and Cumulative Effects

Ayesha received asylum in the Netherlands. Amir, for whom I also wrote a letter, did not. The judge had found his story not credible: they didn't believe the document his brother-in-law had retrieved for him from Afghanistan were authentic, because they didn't

believe that an Afghani family member would be so supportive of a gay man that they would help him in this way. All Afghans were universally homophobic to the point of wanting their loved-ones dead. Last I heard from or of him, Amir was in a "freedom-restricting location" awaiting deportation. I never found out what became of the third person for whom I'd written a letter of support, Akram.

Of course, I wanted to do anything I could to help my friend, and the others who had helped me by sharing their stories and participating in my research. The feeling has nagged me that by contributing my (in some way) "expertise" or privileged voice in support of these individuals I was complicit in disadvantaging those who do not have access to authoritative or otherwise "credible" persons, setting the bar for credibility just a bit higher for them. Additionally, I was concerned that I was improperly advantaging those who happened to be contacted by, and would agree to speak with, a researcher. In 2013, several prominent UK news outlets reported on the increasing number of white gay male asylum seekers submitting photographs and video of themselves having sex to asylum authorities as evidence in support of their asylum claims (Lewis 2014: 959). Rachel A. Lewis argued that this trend served to heighten "the burden of proof and exacerbate[e] the credibility issues for future gay and lesbian asylum applicants"; additionally, as word spread among asylum seekers that such images were expected by officials for a claim to be seen as credible, asylum officials increasingly viewed self-made pornography as "fake" (Lewis 2014: 962). I found a similar "damned if you do, damned if you don't" paradox in the question of whether a gay male asylum seeker ought to paint his nails, illustrated by Akram's story further in this chapter.

Asylum judges in the Netherlands receive and can request information about the origin countries of asylum cases they have been assigned. These "country reports" are compiled from the work of large NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, government projects and embassies, as well as reports by scholars and smaller organizations operating in these countries. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons these reports are not always comprehensive or nuanced, may contain outdated information, or rely largely on stereotypes. Additionally, individual judges, who often have heavy caseloads and are not expert in fields of sexuality and gender, are left to make inferences based on their own ingrained biases and cultural understandings. Many judges and asylum attorneys, of course, do work to improve their knowledge base of these cultural contexts, but at present the availability of concise and comprehensive information is lacking, and the desire or appreciation of the *need* for more comprehensive reports among judges and attorneys may be too.

Manalansan describes the complex terrain that entangles activism for legal changes, the production of identities, and the role of "culture" in the United States:

> "Political organizing around AIDS and gay rights enabled the establishment of immigration provisions for refugee/asylum cases based on sexual orientation. This legal development was double-edged. The laws required petitioners to assert and document horrible conditions that existed in their home countries. Of particular importance are the dossiers developed based on social science expert testimony on the conditions for nonnormative sexualities in Muslims societies and other non-Western nations. This created a dilemma because it appeared to effectively demonize specific societies..." (Manalansan 2006: 232)

In writing these letters of support, was I contributing to a reification of sexual and cultural stereotypes in my efforts to construct successful asylum narratives? From research

in this area, I certainly had a sense of what officials were looking for in an LGBT asylum case, and I could shape my characterization (not implying that I would lie, but carefully consider word choice and narrative, perhaps what David Murray would call a "strategic translation") to fit officials' expectations in order that the applicant would have the best chance at success. In producing what David Murray calls, a "bureaucratic archive of sexuality" (2017: 522) do we, "reinscribe or trouble hegemonic discourses of national sexual cultures and subjectivities, which carry within them older colonial tropes and their deeply entrenched racialized gendered and classed hierarchies?" (Murray 2017: 522) Is it possible or desirable to contribute to such an archive, limited as it inevitably must be, without re-entrenching imaginings of an exotic other?

Murray argues that we must consider the "cumulative effect" of this type of work. Rather than being asked to write letters for individual asylum seekers, Murray has received requests "to write about the general social conditions for gay and/or transgendered people who live in English-speaking Caribbean nations" (2017: 520), and his publications have been quoted by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board's "National Documentation Package" for Barbados, a collection of documentation that would appear to be similar to the "country reports" received by Dutch asylum judges. Other anthropologists and social scientists who have submitted expert reports include Good (2006), Swink (2006), Cohen (2009), McGranahan (2012), Good and Kelly (2013), and Offord (2013).

Country reports constitute only a portion of the documents produced for and during the course of asylum cases; there are written statements by the asylum seeker, notes from admittance officers at the asylum reception centers, and every encounter between asylum officials and the asylum seeker thereafter; letters of support from friends, family,

coworkers, and others who can corroborate; and various other documentary forms of "proof" of events, timelines, experiences, relationships, and so on, including travel documents, police reports, private correspondence, social media screen shots, and photographs. Of course, many of the asylum seekers asked to submit these kinds of evidence have gone to great lengths in the past to hide or never produce any such documentation of the sexuality, lest it be used against them.

This not only privileges those who identify with and fit into certain categories, often of hegemonic Western origin, but those whose economic and geographic circumstances allowed them access to the landmarks of queerness for which the asylum judges are looking—knowledge or experience of gay bars in urban capitals, or even access to information about the existence of queer spaces and organizations in their home countries. In this way, as Murray argues, the "documents that form the SOGI refugee archive reduce the complexity of everyday social life to a set of coterminous sexual, cultural and political borders." (Murray 2017: 533)

Murray concludes: "I have chosen a compromised path" in that his work will "assist the individual claimants" while being "aware that these reports reproduce troubling homonationalist features... "in ways that downplay transnational political-economic linkages" (2017: 539). His calls his "moral counter-weight" what we're doing now: giving presentations "which draw attention to the larger inequalities of the refugee apparatus." (2017: 540) I find myself in agreement—inasmuch as I am able to put weight on the scale, I hope that in discussing these entanglements with other anthropologists and activists, I can work to develop arguments that may be salient for those charged with deciding the fates of LGBT and queer asylum seekers.

Akram's story illustrates another "double-edge": the difficulty asylum seekers face in navigating advice and strategies shared through their networks, when too much conformity or too much deviance can both represent a challenge their credibility.

"Getting Word": Scripts and Strategies

Akram and the Nail Polish Conundrum
2 May, 2016

Akram was an enthusiastic host. He welcomed me to the asylum "reception center" in western Amsterdam, a cold, modern behemoth of a building, as if it were his family home. He led me through the hallways, long, white, un-offensively minimal, pointing out the dining room, entertainment room, and laundry, until we arrived at a wide, dead-end hall with just a few doors. After reports of harassment by other residents at the center, this hallway had been recently designated for queer asylum seekers. Akram hadn't experienced the harassment. He knew his hall-mates but didn't much socialize with them. They kept to themselves a lot, he told me, and hadn't been in the Netherlands for very long. Akram's social life appeared full, however, and his phone didn't stop tinkling with messages the entire time we spent together that afternoon. He had a room to himself with a bathroom, small refrigerator and water boiler. This was certainly the best accommodation I had seen at a reception center; the conditions vary widely across the country, but everyone else I'd spoken with shared a room with at least one, and up to six other asylees.

The center's location in Amsterdam rather than elsewhere in the country, and quite central in the city as well, made it a coveted spot, mainly inhabited by those whose first arrival in the Netherlands had been Amsterdam Centraal Station. Being in Amsterdam was a particular advantage for queer asylum seekers, as most arrive alone, and queer social organizations tend to be based there, though smaller organizations existed in medium-sized cities with universities, such as Groningen, Utrecht, and Leiden. These organizations were true lifelines to some as lonely month after lonely month of waiting and uncertainty crawled past.

He'd been moved from reception center to reception center, as so many asylum seekers are, but this center would likely be the last place he'd be housed before either having his asylum claim accepted or being sent to a detention center to await deportation if his claim was denied. He'd done his interviews, told his story, gone before the asylum judge, and now he just waited.

Akram offered me tea, triangles of foiled-wrapped cheese, white bread and a variety of other biscuits and condiments that he squeezed onto a small plastic table next to his bunkbed. Unoccupied, the top bunk served as a larder. Once we were both seated and well fed, Akram began his story. He suddenly seemed tired. He started by talking about the first time he had sexual feelings about another boy. The first time he kissed another boy. His mother's reaction when she caught him in his bedroom with a friend. Harassment on the street. His departure from Syria. Midway, he apologized to me. He had told this story so many times since arriving in Amsterdam about 9 months ago, and he found it difficult.

I told him we didn't need to continue. He said he wanted to tell his story, but to always be looking "back, back, back," made him feel... something he couldn't articulate in that moment. He rubbed his face with both hands.

He said he was worried. He'd met some asylum seekers who'd been rejected, and sent back home; he knew others who'd been successful and now lived in their own apartments; but he also knew people who were stuck in limbo, their cases dragging on for months and even years reportedly, without much indication why. Akram had been advised to disavow his faith because "people here, they don't think you can be gay and Muslim."

He wasn't sure he looked "gay enough." I asked what he thought that meant. He smiled, shrugged. He'd heard something about painting your nails being convincing to asylum authorities, but he didn't want to. He'd painted his nails once but didn't like it. I asked who had told him to paint his nails, and he was quite vague at first. He thought maybe he'd talked to someone at Secret Garden. There, he'd met a few other young men who invited him to join a group chat on the messenger platform WhatsApp, and every now and again someone would share a strategy for success in asylum interviews. Often, he said, as soon as someone made a suggestion, another person would follow by pointing out a reason that strategy wouldn't work. These examples usually referenced the case of a friend or a friend of a friend. At one point, someone had written in the chat that now, asylum officials would reject you if you painted your nails, because they saw it as a sign you were "trying too much". A friend of Akram's regularly painted his nails but removed the polish for his interview for fear that it might be seen as inauthentic.

"So, I don't know. Maybe I paint my nails. Maybe no. What do you think?"

I told him I didn't know. "I think you should try to be yourself," I said, feeling the emptiness of the words even as they left my mouth.

Suddenly, he snapped back into host mode: "More tea? Please, take more tea."

Among the gay Mexican migrants that Epstein and Carrillo worked, several "had gotten word about which kinds of gendered self-presentations or bodily performances were likely to translate into successful asylum claims and which were not." (Epstein and Carrillo 2014: 265) They found that how various types of migrants and asylum seekers "get word" relates to their intersectional subjectivities: specifically, gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, health status, and legal status. One's health status is likely to impact the types of networks they tap, but if the individual has legal status they are more likely to access information from formal networks through healthcare providers; whereas someone without legal status may be fearful of accessing official services, and may "get word" more through social networks and support groups. Epstein and Carrillo look to the government of the Netherlands as a prime example of institutional speech acts in which "processes of subject formation are evident in the efforts… to instruct immigrants from certain regions of the world to embrace, as a prerequisite to belonging, an open-minded pluralism with respect to variations in sexual identities and practices." (Epstein and Carrillo 2014: 261.)

By whatever avenue they "get word," asylum seekers must develop strategies in order to navigate legal institutions and their specific demands. Scholars have had varying perspectives on the power of institutions to produce the types of subjects they require— those that are intelligible to that institution. Jasbir Puar warns against overestimating the power of legal systems in shaping popular social views, specifically "measuring… social

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change and… 'progress' in terms of legalization" (Puar 2013: 24). She argues that, "'the law' is limited in what it can convey and create" (Puar 2013: 24). Still, Puar is attentive to legal "performative language that produces that which it simply claims to regulate, including the ascription of a subject of that law." (Puar 2013: 24) Maria Lugones, discussing Julie Greenberg's work, states that, "legal institutions have the power to assign individuals to a particular racial or sexual category." (Lugones 2007: 194) This is the power of naming, categorizing, taxonomizing—which Lugones (and others such as Stoler 2002, Cohn 1996, and El Shakry 2007) discusses as a colonial/modern imperative.

Non-legal institutional language, speech acts such as those examined by Sara Ahmed—"those that make claims 'about' or 'on behalf' of an institution" do not bind an institution to any specific action, but work to give the institution a "face"—certain characteristics or qualities, and may nod toward future action (Ahmed 2006). While the types of speech acts Ahmed discusses tend to be vague ("we're a diverse company;" "this is an anti-racist campaign") and noncommittal, it is the reading of the speech acts that is where the performative work is done. The Dutch government does not need to write into law that the Netherlands is "LGBT-friendly"—speech acts such as bus stop posters showing two men kissing, or proclamations celebrating Pride, and more specifically, the reiteration of such speech acts, have the effect of shaping what is and what isn't a desirable subject. Manalansan, discussing Eithne Luibheid's work on sexuality and borders (2002), notes that the state regulates migration through a wide variety of legal, political, cultural and economic means that "in turn reproduce sexual identities, practices and categories." (Manalansan 2006: 235)

Utrecht "Canal Pride" parade 2015, sponsored by the COC

Ayesha's roommate drama connects this fraud anxiety to a discussion of how asylum seekers share information on the asylum process and strategies for getting through it with their social networks. These are instances of moments when the "shifting subject" comes to the surface, and conscious strategizing about self-representation occurs.

Ayesha and her roommates

7 March 2015

Ayesha came to our apartment around 22:00, having received a free train ticket only good for today. She was speaking in a class at the UvA the next day, and I'd planned to go after my dentist appointment. It was raining hard, and she arrived wearing a gorgeous rainbow headscarf. As soon as she sat down, she seemed to explode in frustration about her new roommates.

The center of Ayesha's rage was Fariba, who had been advised by a lawyer to claim she's a lesbian on this, her second asylum claim. She apparently showed Ayesha a list of questions the lawyer gave her to rehearse, and said Fariba went through her answers with the lawyer, who corrected her by telling her, "a lesbian from Burundi wouldn't say this, they would say that," etc.

Fariba told Ayesha that she's originally from Rwanda, but had been living in the Congo before she came to the Netherlands. She applied for asylum as Congolese, but the "background" checks found that she was from Burundi, which Fariba says she has no connection to. She was even taken to the embassy of Burundi, where the embassy officials confirmed to the Dutch officials that yes, she is from Burundi, but Fariba doesn't know why. She said she now just accepts it and doesn't argue. Ayesha said they did some language testing to determine that the woman was from Burundi.

Ayesha was angry that Fariba had such a good lawyer, and only secondarily that she is not a lesbian but is applying for asylum as one. Fariba apparently met a lesbian at her previous refugee camp and they agreed to say they met and fell in love at the camp. Fariba

planned to say that she discovered herself while living in the Netherlands. Ayesha told me

that Fariba's lawyer advised her on the "discretion" question: if she was asked, whether she

would continue to live "out" as a lesbian if she was returned to Burundi, or if she would go

back in the closet, she should say she will live out. Asylum officials did not expect to hear

that after living in the Netherlands for two years (as she has) that someone could then

continue to live in the closet. (Officially, the Netherlands no longer deports LGBT asylum

seekers who would be able to "live discreetly" in their home countries, though many

asylum seekers suspect that the "discretion requirement" still plays into negative asylum

decisions, either because officials think the asylum seeker will be safe if deported, or

because simply declaring that you could hide your sexual identity casts doubt on one's

credibility.)

    Ayesha and I talked about how ridiculous that expectation was. Ayesha said it would

be really difficult if you've lived your whole life in a place in the closet, to then go back and

be out. I added that it also seems strange that officials would expect you to be out, because

it would seem to suggest that you don't fear persecution, the other piece of the asylum

claim. Ayesha continued, and said it's silly that while they wouldn't think it was strange for

straight people to behave in all different ways—for example, some people don't like public

displays of affection—gay people are expected to all behave the same.

    Ayesha also complained about another roommate, Beatrice. I'd met this woman on a

visit to the camp a couple of weeks earlier. Recently she had been waking up at 6am to play

gospel music and to dance. Ayesha had been going to bed late, 3am, because the nights

were the only quiet times at the camp. With Beatrice's early morning festivities, Ayesha

wasn't getting much sleep anymore.

She also mentioned that a Nigerian man who Beatrice brought into the room once had been bothering Ayesha at night. She had been sick and asked the man to leave so she could sleep, and he said no, "I won't leave my love." She said told him she was married, didn't want his love, and he kept pressing. She seemed upset. She said that Nigerians are over-confident and think all the women want them. He apparently bragged about knowing tricks with the asylum process—a common seduction technique she'd observed.

A new friend she'd made was a Syrian man who told her he was bi. She brought him to their room and Beatrice started evangelizing to this man (who had grown up Muslim but was now atheist) and wouldn't stop despite Ayesha repeatedly asking her to respect her guest. She told her that if she wanted to talk about Jesus she should do it in English, because she refused to translate for her anymore.

Ayesha would extrapolate from her experience with Fariba that people pretended to be LGBT to get asylum "all the time." She thought that this was more common among women than men, because women are able to fake attraction more easily than men, and she thought it was easier for a straight woman to pretend to be a lesbian than for a straight man to pretend to be gay. I asked if she thought it was easier to be an out lesbian in the camps than an out gay man. She told me no; out lesbians worried about being targets of "corrective rape", an assault carried out ostensibly with the goal of "turning" the woman straight. Though I did not find incidents of corrective rape in the AZCs reported in the media at the time, rape is a notoriously underreported crime worldwide, and many asylum seekers did not have faith that authorities in the camps would investigate crimes or protect them from future violence. I suspect that a woman would be even more hesitant to come

forward in the camps if she thought it might risk her asylum claim. Survivors of this kind of violence often worry that they won't be believed by authorities, and an asylum seeker may additionally be concerned if indeed she is not believed, the incident would be recorded as a consensual encounter that could be referenced in asylum proceedings as evidence that she is lying both about being a lesbian and about her attack.

This anecdote highlights the ways issues of credibility and fraud haunt the lives of women in the camps in particular— women's credibility when it comes to their sexuality is always critical question. The only verifiable lie told here was not Fariba's, who Ayesha much later revealed was actually in a relationship with the woman she met in the camp-- Fariba originally told Ayesha that this was a front because Ayesha's religious piety (she kept to her five daily prayers during that time) made her nervous—and, Ayesha added, she suspected Fariba was still having trouble admitting the truth to herself. The lie was Ayesha's, when she told the Nigerian man she was married in the vain hope that he would respect another man's property rights more than a woman's wishes—by then, Ayesha was divorced.

6) Hierarchies of Suffering: Understandings of suffering and trauma, and perceptions of preference within the asylum system

"later that night
i held an atlas in my lap
ran my fingers across the whole world
and whispered
where does it hurt?

it answered
everywhere
everywhere
everywhere."
— Warsan Shire

"I hope not to define myself by suffering."
Frank Ocean, musician

Syrians in "Crisis"

A Secret Garden Gathering

13 February, 2016

Ayesha and I hustled through the rain from the tram stop. Fat drops of rain steadily landed on my little mobile phone screen, making reading our map a bit of a timed memory game. The tram stop was only few blocks from our destination, but we were still helpless without that little blue dot paralleling our movements, assuring us that we were on the right path. A residential neighborhood in Amsterdam's postwar West, thoughtfully if hastily constructed to accommodate the city's swelling population after over two centuries of stubborn resistance to urban expansion, the buildings' egalitarian homogeny made for

frustrating navigation. Ayesha and I hustled from block to block, expecting a large commercial space to reveal itself among the residential blocks, passing by the address at least once.

To our credit, the community center hosting the event looked very much like any other home on the street. We were both a bit nervous to barge into what looked like a private residence without being certain, so we milled about the intersection even after confirming the address, apparently more willing to soak ourselves in the rain than risk an awkward entrance. Through the window, I saw a familiar sprig of platinum hair, and knew that I had been spotted by Anneke. We entered. The door opened directly onto the square sitting room lined with chairs facing center, looking a bit like the waiting room of a doctor's office. Each chair was occupied by a young man, most holding plastic cups between their legs, some chatting to the person sitting next to them, all looking expectant. I suppose many of them had quite a lot of experience waiting patiently and uncertainly in room such as this; and while this night was a party, it struck me that the situation had a few structural commonalities with the bureaucratic routines any asylum seeker would be familiar with. While they waited patiently on their folding chairs in the bare room, there was a hustle of activity in the kitchen behind them, Dutch hosts busily preparing for their guests' next undertaking.

There was an odd formality in this early hour of the event, while people were still drying off and warming to each other. Thankfully, one of Anneke's great skills was making people feel at home, so I quickly went to her, and introduced Ayesha, who was greeted with a big hug. Salim entered from the kitchen, busily chatting with other guests.

Two different people had put it to me in the exact same words: "he likes who he likes." I was pretty sure I was not one of the people he liked, but felt certain Ayesha would be, so I presented her to him, like an offering to a king. He welcomed her warmly.

An older man wearing a prominent Star of David made an introduction around 8pm. He explained that he used to host a group for LGBT Jews, but over time the need for the group disappeared. More, recently, the community space had hosted event nights for refugees in the area, specifically reaching out to the AZC at Marnixstraat, the only AZC located in the center of Amsterdam. The events usually centered around a meal, and provided time and space for socializing.

The attendees were largely men, and largely Arab or Middle Eastern. The only women were Ayesha, Anneke, another Dutch woman born and bred in Amsterdam named Nancy, and three Middle Eastern women who I read as being trans. In general, the hosts were older than the guests—probably 50s and 60s, while the guests looked to be 20-35 years old. It became clear that the proportion of Syrians was far higher than it had been when I attended Secret Garden gatherings the year before, and this observation was confirmed by two people at the party. Anneke told me that in addition to having more members in the last five months, Secret Garden had seen a large uptick in the number of Syrians.

We mingled in the front room until the man who'd made the introductory speech asked for volunteers to come cook. I went back with Ayesha, Nancy, a Syrian dancer named Mahmoud, and Abbas, the boisterous professional chef from Baghdad who I'd interviewed and spent time with at Secret Garden. A few others were in and out of the kitchen.

While we prepared the salad, I tried to chat with Mahmoud. He was slim a strong, and quite serious. It was hard to get much out of him at first, though his English was fluent, and he seemed tolerant of my attempts to speak Arabic with him. (Bemused is the more common response to my awkward blend of classroom-learned Modern Standard Arabic, and Egyptian street colloquial.) Hoping to get him to open him up by offering information about myself, I told him that I was American. He'd already mentioned that he was Syrian, and given the role (or lack thereof) of the United States in the conflict he'd fled, I also wondered if he might have some sort of reaction to me being American. He did.

His eyes panned up slowly from the salad and met mine for the first time since I'd introduced myself. His jaw clenched noticeably. It felt like a tense, dramatic moment. We launched into a conversation about the war, the modern history of Syria, and the involvement of Western powers there. He said nothing about himself or his experiences for a long time. It was only later, when we were sitting on the plastic chairs in the living room, that he talked about his departure from Syria.

He had been planning to leave with his family, but when the time came, they urged him to go on his own. He didn't elaborate on why at first, but his mother and other family members stayed behind, and he joined with a group of other young men heading for the Turkish border. He seemed to have a lot of guilt about leaving his family, but emphasized that they told him go. Later I gathered that his mother knew he was gay, and that perhaps she had pushed him to go because he would be more of a target for the Islamic State as a result of this. He didn't seem uncomfortable talking about his sexuality, but he also didn't say much about it. He kept the conversation on the war. As our talk tapered, I asked him

what he wanted Americans to know about Syria. He paused, looking at the ground, and then up at me. "We are being slaughtered, and the USA sits and does nothing."

In line for a second helping of some truly delicious *baba ghanouj*, I met another young Syrian man. He was cheery and energetic, almost manic, but had a similar message for my compatriots. And again, he had little he wanted to say about his sexuality, which was notable because every other conversation I had that night (that didn't involve praising the food) centered around coming out stories, experiences finding partners in one's home country, and favorite gay clubs in Amsterdam (Soho, in the canal ring, got the highest marks.)

Ayesha had been increasingly complaining about the preferential treatment she felt Syrians received. In the camps, she said, people talked a lot about how Syrians were moved to the "front of the line", which was frustrating to those who had already been waiting months for their cases to progress. She added that she thought gay Syrians had the best chance of getting asylum.

"It's like this," she said. "there is a war, it's in the news, everyone knows about Syria, they feel bad for them. And if he's gay, she's a lesbian—it's perfect!" Afghani gay asylum seeker Aziz made a similar comment, saying that Syrians were "preferred" because Afghanistan was now old news, and that LGBT Syrians had a "double chance" of success in the asylum system. Aziz reported that it was common knowledge that Syrians had their asylum cases expedited. Both Aziz and Ayesha had anecdotes about groups of Syrians who arrived in their AZCs and were moved along shortly after, while Aziz and Ayesha continued to wait. There are many reasons asylum seekers might be moved from one camp to another, and this does not necessarily mean their cases were moving forward.

Officially, Syrians must follow the same procedure as asylum seekers from any other

country. Whether the belief that Syrians have been able to "cut the line" is based in any

statistical truth is hard to say. In 2016, Syrians made up 34% of the total 31,600 asylum

claims in the Netherlands, followed by Eritreans at 9% and Albanians at 5% (IND Asylum

Trends 2016). Successful asylum applications dropped from 70% in 2015 to 54% in 2016,

suggesting a decreased public enthusiasm for accepting refugees (IND Jaarverslag 2016).

Hierarchies of Suffering

Walking home from a café in Amsterdam's stylish South, just below the museum

district, a young man called out to me, in English:

"Help, I'm from Syria." His skin and hair were both light brown, his clothes

unwashed, his feet shoeless. In Arabic, I apologized, telling him I had no money with me. No

response. I said it again in English. He frowned and tilted his head, looking confused. I

figured I must have said something that didn't translate from Egyptian dialect, which I had

studied, to Syrian dialect, so I pulled out my phone and brought up a translation app. I

scrolled to Arabic, and showed him in writing what I wanted to say. He then touched the

"translate to" menu, and scrolled himself down, past Arabic, to Romanian.

"You are from… Syria?" I asked.

"Syria. Help." He motioned toward his mouth, communicating that he wanted food. I

started thinking about the handful of times in recent months that I'd seen people, mostly

women with a child in their laps, with multilingual cardboard signs reading, "*Syrisch*.

Syrian. *Syrien*. Help." or something similar. My first assumption was that the young man I

spoke with may have been Roma or Sinti, groups with long, complicated histories in the Netherlands, but whatever the background, it seems significant that this man believed he would be more successful finding donations if he presented himself as Syrian. It's anecdotal, but I while I didn't notice an increase in the number of people begging in the streets (which is officially outlawed in the Netherlands) from when I first arrived in March 2014, I did see signs such as these, asking for money and claiming that the holder was a Syrian refugee, much more frequently by the end of my fieldwork. This suggests to me that the increased prevalence of beggars with signs referencing Syria was not a result of an increased number of Syrian beggars, but that those who panhandled in the streets of Amsterdam found Syrians to be more sympathetic.

The so-called "refugee crisis" had by then hit its numerical and discursive zenith, as some four times as many refugees entered Europe in 2015 as in 2014. I offer this short anecdote not to imply anything about opportunism among individuals asking for money on the streets of Amsterdam, but to illustrate how quickly it became clear that not only is all need and suffering not equal, but that there may be a hierarchy among refugees as well. Violence, trauma and suffering are foundational elements of an asylum claim, and understandings of these concepts shape both how narratives are presented, and the expectations of asylum officials (as well as the expectations of helper organizations and media publics). Because trauma has profound effects on both memory and self-understanding and because recounting narratives of traumatic events is expected in an asylum claim, the context of the asylum claim has the potential to intensify the visibility of the "shifting subject"-- and therefore, make the subject less credible by the logics of the asylum system.

How have these concepts become understood as universal (much the same as notions of culture and sexuality) and how might these understandings impact the asylum process for LGBT asylum seekers? Mundane economic suffering does not entitle a person to asylum in the Netherlands; what types of suffering are meritorious in the asylum system and public imagination more broadly, and how has suffering and trauma come to be understood through psycho-medical, juridical and humanitarian discourses? A "hierarchy of suffering" would not seem to fit within the national imaginary of the Netherlands, in which ideas of rational, fair, and equal treatment of individuals, as well as the proper administration of human rights, are central—and yet, this seems to be another crack in the national imaginary into which asylum seekers fall.

The idea that there are hierarchies of suffering has been explored in medical contexts and examined in psychological studies of how physical proximity affects how suffering is perceived and valued. Here, I look at the sense that some suffering bodies are treated differently by the asylum system and by political discourses, as well as how asylum seekers perceive favoritism operates in the camps, giving preferential treatment to individuals coming from the most current global disaster zones, as well as individuals who the Dutch may find desirable as members of the national because of their sexual, gender, or political identities.

Understandings of Trauma and Suffering: Law, compassion and their brutal exclusions

A modern Western perception of trauma and suffering, certainly in legal terms but in public understanding as well, has partly grown from the experiences of the Second World War. The "shattering enormity of the Holocaust" (Robbins 2013: 453) came to be the towering referent for trauma, and with the advent of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" as a psychological classification, trauma also became an issue for society to address and alleviate. A Dutch psychiatrist coined the term "traumatic stress" in 1954, interested in the emotional aftereffects of the war on resistance fighters (possibly himself included). He thought of this condition as a failure to return to homeostasis, resulting in "chronic psycho-somatotraumatic stress" (Olff and Vermetten 2013). Around the same time, largely in response to the displacement caused by the war, the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees laid out a definition of refugeeism, as well as the rights of refugees and responsibilities of states to protect them. In this way, contemporary understandings of trauma and suffering are deeply interwoven with the figure of the refugee.

In the Netherlands, it took some 30 years for the psychological impact of the war to gain visibility (Olff and Vermeeten 2013). By the 1980s, PTSD had become a universalized category of suffering, and more broadly, the concept of trauma had universalized: "the human being suffering from trauma became the very embodiment of our common humanity" (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 23). Refugees (those displaced by the Second World War held up as the gold standard) came to be understood and defined via their experience of suffering, and came to be a central category of persons through which trauma was more widely understood. Robbins calls trauma "the bridge between cultures" as in its universalization, "any person anywhere can be expected to suffer traumas of essentially the

same kind in the face of certain kinds of violence and deprivation" (Robbins 2013: 453). This

These understandings were part of the evolving ways postcolonial Europe (and the West more generally) began to see itself within a "global community", and its relationships and connections to other regions and peoples. These psycho-medical and juridical discourses around suffering and trauma folded into the burgeoning fields of humanitarianism and human rights, and their respective discourses (the former relating to an "ethical and moral imperative to bring relief to suffering" (Ticktin 2006: 35); the latter, rooted in legal precepts focused on the responsibility of states and other actors, and the rights of suffering persons). Concurrently, the NGO emerged "as a key feature of global social organization" (Robbins 2013: 453).

Mariam Ticktin's (2006) study of humanitarianism in France found that physical ailment made individual *sans papiers* most likely to receive legal status, leading the desperate to feign or even inflict injury and infection upon themselves in order "to claim the basic rights supposedly granted to "all human beings". This highlights the unintended consequences of discourses surrounding compassion, humanitarianism, and which persons and which types of suffering are the most sympathetic and meritorious. Such hierarchies are inevitably implicated in racial, ethnic, and sexual discourses and biases.

Ticktin argues that "when humanitarianism, often enacted through a moral imperative of compassion, fills in for the failure of political rights discourses and practices, the exclusionary effects can be brutal" (Ticktin 2006: 34). Compassion, of course, is no neutral or objective force, (though neither is law in practice, though it may arguably be more stable over time) and a "moral imperative of compassion" is susceptible manipulation

in the face of media characterizations, political discourses and other popular currents. Though the asylum system ostensibly operates on a politically neutral basis, examining only the merits of each individual case, the system works as a part of government agencies which often come under political pressure. Public perception of and sympathy for specific groups can impact this process. A stark example from the world of medical research which illustrates similar problematics in the practice of human rights is the funding disparities between types of cancers. Breast cancer research receives twice as much funding in the United States as does lung cancer research, even while lung cancer takes the lives of more than three times as many people per year as does breast cancer. A partial explanation for this disparity is that lung cancer is seen as occurring through the fault or moral failing of the its victims, as it is popularly associated with the choice to smoke, whereas breast cancer has no moral associations. In this example, it is clear that there exist public perceptions of moral hierarchies in cancer.

If there is a hierarchy of suffering, or as Clifford Bob (2002) terms it, a "global meritocracy of suffering", it is a dynamic one. (I like the cynical evocation in "meritocracy" of the best, most credible, most deeply suffered and clearly desirable people naturally rising to the top in this system. However, with "hierarchy" there is a more visual reference for me, a familiar triangle, and it comes with the clarity that there are the largest numbers of people at the bottom.) The hierarchy responds to current news events, patterns in popular discourse, and certain policy initiatives. Asylum seekers complained to me that Syrians were the most sympathetic in Dutch eyes all the sudden in 2015. Syria was the shiny new crisis in all the media, and that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that had made their homes unlivable were just old news. Other global armed and political conflicts settle

in lower than these popular recent wars, and environmental or economic displacement, as well as structural poverty put one at the bottom of the hierarchy. Factors like feelings of national responsibility for conditions elsewhere, or the particulars of a catastrophe and images of its victims, also figure in to positioning. Again, it is a changeable thing, a political thing, and sometimes one's intersectional identity (for example, being both queer and Muslim) puts individuals and groups in a precarious location within the paradigm.

Because the Netherlands does not collect or publish statistics on the reasons for asylum claims (i.e., persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity-- which falls under membership of a particular social group-- or race, religion, nationality, political opinion) it is not possible to say whether LGBT asylum seekers have a better chance of receiving a positive decision relative to other groups, and the panic over fraud is likely to somewhat balance out any advantage an LGBT asylum seeker might have. Perception of relative advantage LGBT asylum seekers might enjoy was mixed. Several asylum seekers spoke about the added burden of having to prove their sexual orientation, in addition to proving what other asylum seekers must demonstrate: that they are from when they say they are from, and that they face persecution there.

While Ayesha reported to me that other asylum seekers (who were not applying for asylum on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity) in her camps grumbled about what they saw as preferential treatment of LGBT asylum seekers, only one LGBT asylum seeker with whom I spoke described this as an advantage. Most people—asylum seekers and people working either with or within the asylum system—believed that the challenges of being an LGBT asylum seeker balanced any preference the system might have for them, or said weren't sure if there was an advantage or not. Two Dutch NGO employees supposed

that it may depend on the region where the asylum seeker was processed, (certain, often more rural, regions being less concerned with LGBT issues) and the specific judge making the final decision.

At least two of my informants did not originally tell asylum officials that they were LGBT. Sherif, a young man from Syria, did not realize it was relevant, and sought asylum on other grounds in his first application. This claim was refused, the judge determining that he would be able to safely live with family in Lebanon. By then, Sherif had learned from social media that he might be eligible to apply for asylum in the Netherlands as a gay man. He said he was subjected to "a lot of hassle" because of this, and that he felt no one believed that he was gay because he hadn't disclosed to authorities sooner. "Why would I do this?" he asked, referring to telling authorities that he was gay. A friend sitting with us during our talk quipped: "I always say, 'Hello, nice to meet you, I'm gay. Hello, nice to meet you, I'm gay.' All the time!" Late disclosure often means that asylum seekers have less opportunity to make this important contact with Dutch organizations.

Not all differential treatment is necessarily an indication of preference. On a practical level, queer asylum seekers do have unique needs, and may face specific danger in asylum reception centers. In December 2015, in response to the COC's reports of violence and harassment faced by LGBT asylum seekers in the camps, a separate shelter was created for several LGBT asylum seekers. The first residents of this new shelter were all gay men from Syria, Iraq and Iran. Subsequently, a wing of an existing camp in Amsterdam was designated for LGBT asylum seekers, and members of a group of LGBT asylum seekers who had been fasting at the camp in Alphen aan den Rijn in protest of harassment there, were moved to the camp in Amsterdam (Het Parool, Dec. 14, 2015). One of these young men gave

me a tour of the facility in the spring of 2016. The wing was a terminal hallway toward the back of the building, with individual rooms for each asylum seeker. The young man from Syria said that after his experiences at the last camp, he was hesitant to use the common facilities in the rest of the building, as he was worried about further harassment. He was pleased to have been placed in Amsterdam, however, where he was close to large LGBT communities and plenty of gay bars and clubs that he had begun exploring.

While efforts are made to ensure that the asylum process is an objective as possible, this goal is clearly an unachievable one, as each judge and other official comes to these individual cases with myriad preconceptions based on their own experiences. Types of violence (physical, emotional; domestic, state-sponsored; sexual, or otherwise), intersectional identities of the survivors, and pervasive political discourses, all influence the ways an asylum claim is considered and processed. Protections for LGBT asylum seekers living in the reception centers were certainly necessary; the question arises, however, of who, or which groups, are not extended such protections, perhaps because their specific hardships are less newsworthy, or fit less well in conceptions of meritorious suffering? It is notable that the new residence specifically for LGBT individuals was approved by the parliament only after a right-wing minister insisted that they also extend protections for Christians in the camps. When some asylum seekers receive the benefit of the "moral imperative of compassion", which others suffer the brutal exclusions, are pushed to the bottom of the hierarchy?

"Selling Suffering" and Pathologizing Culture

Analyzing the autobiographical narrative of a South Asian "battered wife turned husband-killer", Mariam Ticktin examines how "selling suffering" in both the courtroom and marketplace might alter the story of violence experienced by this woman, as well as other South Asian women in Britain whose lives the book comes to represent to the British public (Ticktin 1999). To be palatable to readers and understandable to the legal system, the truth is translated into the languages of dominant discourses around South Asian women, with roots in cultural essentialism and colonial understandings of the region. Ticktin is also concerned with the ways violence and suffering are represented and mobilized in service of creating narrative intelligible to these systems, and if, ultimately, it is possible that this type of autobiography can be called empowering. She finds that any positive contributions toward self-representation of South Asian women are out-weighed by the negative impacts of participation in racialized discourses of suffering, and by the ways that the commodification of one specific type of suffering obscures other types of suffering, including, "the violence of poverty, racism and… Western hegemony," (Ticktin 1999: 37).

Similar questions apply to LGBT asylum. Does the translation that their stories undergo in order to be intelligible to the asylum courts and to the organizations and institutions working on issues of asylum, ultimately further entrench specific definitions of sexuality and images of certain cultures and regions, and foreclose other ways of being and understanding? How might this type of "selling suffering" do harm to those who do not conform to specific sexual and/or racial/ethnic standards? Does the success of an

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individual asylum claim (which in some cases, is indeed a life or death question) exceed in import the possible exclusion (also potentially life and death) of those who do not or cannot conform, and more broadly, the possible ripple effects of participation in hegemonic discourses around sexuality and culture? In the previous chapter, "The Credibility Trap", I consider Murray's (2017) position on writing "national reports" or "country reports" for asylum cases, from which he finds, "I have chosen a compromised path" for the same reasons Ticktin discusses. Of course, Ticktin was not directly involved (at the time of that publication) with writing these kinds of documents (country reports, letters of support, or autobiography). My path was certainly compromised as well, but what decided my route was that I was being directly asked by asylum seekers, (some of them my friends and all of them informants who had sacrificed time and rehashed painful memories for my benefit) to help them. With the ethnographic encounter as asymmetric as it was, I could not say no. I could not say to a woman who had just finished telling me about the "corrective rape" she'd survived, or to the young man whose boyfriend had been murdered when they were caught together, that no, I wouldn't write a page or two in support of their asylum application, because I was worried about entrenching hegemonic discourses on culture and sexuality.

The following ethnographic account turns the critical eye to the researcher and the process of data collection. How does the imperative of compassion operate in problematic ways in the context of participant observation, and how might the encounter inflict types of violence upon those who have suffered greatly already?

Violence in Research: International efforts in Dunkirk, France

Raha approached Ayesha after a university event in 2015 where Ayesha had shared her experience of seeking asylum. She wanted to have Ayesha and me over to her apartment for dinner; she too had not so long ago been new to the Netherlands, and had found that building family and community was both her great talent and her salvation. It was not long before Raha was introducing Ayesha and me to others as her sisters. She was sharp, opinionated, and passionate, and liked her dinner table swelling with the people she made her family, as well as new, soon-to-be family, people charmed and captivated by her willfulness and warmth. She made big pots of vegan *gormeh sabzi* and gathered groups of (often queer) Dutch and international students, activists she'd come across at events, and friends of various Middle Eastern heritages around a table in her West Amsterdam bedroom. When the weather finally allowed by late May, we spilled out into the backyard (only to retreat back indoors when that fickle Dutch sunshine turned to rain.)

She was open but non-specific about the emotional and mental health troubles she'd endured since starting graduate school in the province of South Holland four years ago. When the topic of mental health arose, it was most frequently related to a discussion of the dissonances Raha felt regarding life in the Netherlands, and what she perceived as incongruities between how "the Dutch" discussed sexuality, religion, and diversity, and the country's position as a colonial/neocolonial power. Raha's mental health suffered as a result of isolation, which she felt was connected to a general marginalization of migrants from the Middle East and Africa. In her doctoral program, she had hoped for a supportive intellectual community, and found mostly an icy, competitive grind.

By Februrary of 2015, Raha had been going as often as she could and for as long as she could to the Dunkirk refugee camp in France. Back in Amsterdam, she helped to organize events raising awareness of the dire situation there, projecting photos she'd taken onto the walls of cafes afterhours, collectivist event spaces, and an old car garage-turned squatter territory. A February 29th event in the garage, Raha served Persian food she'd made at home, while her friend, an Irishman named Liam who had accompanied her several times to Dunkirk, set up the projector and alerted the assembled audience of some 80 young people that they'd be starting the presentation soon. This time, they'd put together a short video of the camp as well—scenes of abandoned rain boots sunk in mud; pathways made of matted clothing and old towels winding through tents; a community center pitched with reclaimed slats of plywood, beach towels draped as doors.

A couple minutes into the film, a voice cracked in the audience:

"This is *France*?" A stunned murmur went through the rows of folding chairs behind me. This is a wealthy country, a Western country, where scenes of such visually trenchant suffering are not supposed to be set? Are you very certain this is not a Third World location where we're used to seeing such ruin, such filth, collapsing temporary structures and children playing in pools of god-knows-what? (I don't mean to criticize the woman as naïve; I was thinking the same thing.)

Liam began explaining how the asylum seekers had collectivized to pool resources and child care; volunteers from neighboring countries helped to build community structures, and organized donation drives in their home countries. A German group ran a food tent; a few Swiss friends put up another tent specifically to serve breakfast; an English

woman was working to organize a school; a Dutch collective was in charge of replacing tents. I was told that most French volunteers end up in the neighboring camp at Calais, and that Dunkirk is largely a "forgotten" and overshadowed by the catastrophe of Calais. During one of her two-week stints in the camp, Raha had taught an English class—most of the asylum seekers here were hoping to get to the UK eventually. In the middle of one of her lessons, a French woman "barged in and yelled" at her for teaching English, not French.

The efforts of these volunteers highlight the (sometimes) transnational character not only of the "crisis" but the response— volunteers from all over Northern Europe hopped into cars and trains heading for a port city in France as quickly and easily as a neighboring town in their own countries. I won't attempt to theorize such a thing as a "supranational imaginary" here, but despite the growing Euroskeptism during this time, (the "Brexit vote" occurred just a few weeks after I left the field) the imaginary of "Europe" continued to have great relevance in popular discourses and understandings of the "Refugee Crisis", and the role of national and EU bodies in the response. While the political right in many parts of Europe seized on the opportunity to mobilize Islamophobia and fears of demographic threat against the refugees, and to pull up the drawbridge at Fortress Europe, others understood themselves to have a responsibility as Europeans to aid in the camps scattered across the region. Of course, not all European countries have shared equally in the economic costs of hosting refugees, a fact that has worked to continue the fracturing of whatever supranational imaginary there might have ever been.

Twice in the Spring of 2015 I rented a car and drove with Raha and my partner to the refugee camp at Dunkirk, some four hours from Amsterdam. After a year of researching

asylum centers in the Netherlands, and being frustrated about conditions there, I was utterly unprepared for what I saw in Dunkirk. I'd seen Raha's pictures, heard her stories, but the camp sprawled so much further, the mud was so much deeper, and the workings of makeshift community so complex, and occasionally, so uplifting. "So much love, so much compassion… it makes up partly for the insanity," Raha voiced later, on our drive home.

The first time we went, I brought a bag of small chocolate bars along with the blankets, clothes and shoes we'd collected in donation. I tried to give the chocolate to the children who swarmed us as soon as we made it inside the "gates" (a gap in wire fence guarded by armed French officers), but the children refused it. They were tired of sugary hand-outs from well-meaning volunteers, it wasn't what they needed or even wanted at this point.

But first, before we entered the camp, we had to go to garden supply big-box store nearby. Raha called a friend in the camp first to see if today the guards were allowing wood pallets to be brought in—they weren't. Raha informed me that for the past few months, only every few weeks would they allow any wood or metal products through the gates. It had been decided that these materials would allow the asylum seekers to build shelters that appeared too permanent. As a result, the wooden pallets that broke or fully sank beneath the mud after weeks of rain, had been replaced with layers and layers of cloth for walkways. As wood was disallowed, we scrapped plans to bring pallets and boards in, and grabbed as many rain boots as we could—the taller, the better, Raha advised. I soon found that the mud was so deep in places that it came up almost to my knees. There were 3 showers in the camp for some 3,000 people.

I thought of the woman's stunned question at the garage presentation: "This is *France*?"

There was no effective way to wash clothes in the camp, as anything wet would take a week to dry, and would probably be blown off the lines strung between tree branches anyway. When a shirt or pants got too dirty, it would simply be added to the cloth mille-feuille streets. New bags of donated clothes arrived from across the continent with enough frequency that this system of disposable clothing and quilted walkways was relatively sustainable. Raha observed: "I never thought mud could be so traumatizing". Everything in the lives of these asylum seekers was temporary and, transitory, day-to-day, including the clothes on their backs.

Raha's project on a recent visit was to ask residents and volunteers what they needed, and we continued to compile those lists. Pallets, basic medical supplies, tents—one asylum seeker from Iraq told me he'd left his tent to get breakfast one morning, and returned to find it had been demolished by the authorities, who thought it was abandoned. Everything he owned was gone, and now he shared a small tent with a cousin. Volunteers said they needed dictionaries for Kurdish, Farsi and Arabic- to- English, and ideally some volunteers who could serve as translators as well. They needed volunteers to stay longer, commit to projects, become fixtures that residents could recognize and count on for various needs. While I was with Liam, he was introduced to a couple who worked for a deaf organization. A Kurdish family with a deaf child was in need of a power source-- There is no electricity in the camp at night, other than at one point in the center, far from their tent. The only time the family could charge his cochlear implant was at night when he was

sleeping, but they worried he would wake up while they were gone. In the dark he couldn't read lips or sign.

A Dutch group had helped to put together a women's community center with a television screen and intermittent wireless internet. Despite the bleak exterior, inside, the massive tent was happy and colorful—scarves and textile lined every surface. A long entrance hall with benches and a forest of muddy boots was enough to keep the interior shockingly clean. Half a dozen children watched an animated movie, and women circled up nearby to repair bags and weave fabrics.

A corner of the massive camp housed the long-term volunteers, some of whom were sitting outside on stumps and rickety furniture drinking Amstel beers. One told me that he'd been coming for weeks at a time for the past year. The camp was partly constructed to ease the burden of Calais, an even larger camp not far west of Dunkirk, which was experiencing violence and protests, and was widely called "the jungle", a name people in Dunkirk had started using for their own camp as well. In the first month of its existence, the volunteer told me, the local community had cooked meals in their homes for the asylum seekers; now, he said, "they shout in the street for everyone to leave."

I talked with a young Iraqi Kurd named Rebin while he waited to speak with Nige, a British man whose seniority among the volunteers had translated into him becoming a de facto leader. He started out in good spirits; he had ideas for a project he wanted to share with Nige. I asked how he'd gotten to France, and he told me that he'd walked 15 hours in the snow. Suddenly, Rebin stopped and shook his head vigorously.

"Don't make me talk about it, I don't want to remember." I changed the topic immediately to something innocuous—the tea they were serving in a nearby tent was delicious. He perked back up—real Kurdish tea, he told me.

The pain of remembering had contorted his face for that moment; the clenched jaw muscles and tightly squeezed eyes, deep lines crumpled across his forehead, the forcefulness of his head shaking, was an image that truly stuck with me, and nagged at me. It returned later, when Ayesha told me about the brutal migraines she got during her official asylum interviews, and when Salim exhibited protectiveness over the members at Secret Garden. When does asking someone to remember and recount amount to an act of violence? When is the psychic pain, or the somatized pain, become too great a price for the intelligibility required by asylum systems, journalists, and academics like myself? Of course, speaking with journalists and researchers is voluntary, but my assumption that individuals weighed this cost against the benefit they saw to publicizing their stories needed to be more carefully considered. Sometimes, published interviews were submitted with other supporting documents as evidence corroborating as asylum seeker's story, which, when one's life is truly on the line, may make this type of interview more implicated in coercion than I wanted to think.

Ethical standards demand that we tell the people we work with that they may stop an interview at any time. I attempted to be vigilant about a person's emotional state as we talked about painful memories, suggesting breaks or a stop if someone seemed distressed, so any feelings of pressure to continue might be mitigated. In such a scenario, when an interview is stopped, by then, is it too late? The pain is already current. To say that I inflicted the pain may be overstating my impact, but did I incite, create space, or beckon to

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it? Valentine (2003) discusses the "slipperiness of violence", how it resists adequate or universal definition, describes (without conflating or equating physical violence) what he calls "representational violence", which addresses the power certain people have to define and describe groups of people, excluding other ways of thinking of oneself in relation to social worlds (2003). He argues for better understanding of the width and breadth of violence; the hurt and pain, both acute and enduring, that we may inflict on others, often collective others rather than an individual, even when we have the best of intentions. Arthur and Joan Kleinman have also argued that the experience of violence is not the same across contexts (Kleinman and Kleinman 1996:3) and so may not be immediately recognizable. Is it not violent, then, not in the sense of a punch in the gut, but rather in asking for pain to be surfaced for my own curiosity? Perhaps it is also something akin to representational violence, as I am *another* person inviting an asylum seeker to narrate themselves *again* through the lens of the specific suffering that took them from there to here, prompting individuals to constitute identities around experiences of violence. I never felt I had a satisfying answer to these questions.

Dunkirk, Spring 2015

Dunkirk, Spring 2015

Dunkirk, Spring 2015

7) Queeristan: Activism, Anti-racism, and Queer Intersectionality

"I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails..."
— Gloria Anzaldua

"It's the price of rootlessness. Motion sickness. The only cure: to keep moving."
— Tony Kushner, playwright

This chapter looks at dimensions of intersectionalism in theory, activism, and art through a discussion of the "Queeristan" collective and festival. As a collective, Queeristan explicitly works to push back against Dutch homonormativity and homonationalism through constant reflexivity and attention to true inclusivity. They have faced difficulties meeting their lofty ideological goals but work to be transparent about their processes of self-assessment. I then discuss how "homo-emancipation" discourses of the Dutch national imaginary work to further marginalize queers of color.

A festival for "Fucking Cool Queers"

I was thrilled when I first came across a poster on social media for Queeristan—a group coming together to explicitly discuss, creatively explore, and deliberately create community for queer ethnic and racial "others" (or so I assumed from the name)— scribbling the dates down in my calendar, I titled it, "JACKPOT". In hindsight, I shouldn't

have been surprised to find that this site, rich though it certainly was, did not turn out to be quite what I expected.

Queeristan 2014 poster, taped near the entrance to the festival.

I emailed a contact address on the festival's website two weeks before their 2014 event, inquiring about policies on research being done at the venue, and possible interviews with organizers. The response came quickly and illustrated the collective's impulse toward protectiveness over their space. They emphasized that Queeristan needed to remain a "safe space" for participants, and that they were concerned about people feeling "objectified" by a researcher's eye. However, I was welcomed to attend the festival

and participate, and told that any "awarenesses" and "perceptions" resulting from this immersion belonged to me, and I could do with them what I liked. They invited me to stay "in the moment" while there, which is what I tried to do. No notes, no recording, no pictures-- accustomed to anxiously recording copious details of every moment for later reflection, this directive proved more difficult than I would have guessed.

Queeristan, as a collective, was struggling with the desire to manifest the identity borderlessness of queer, and the impulse to enumerate the identities that individual participants found salient. For each event of the festival there was written a description which often included as much text detailing the identities of the organizer as it did description of the session's goals and activities. The presenter/artist/speaker/facilitator had a short biography in their event description, most of which detailed their gender identity and presentation, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, nationality and/or citizenship status, and often physical or neurological difference, and political perspectives. There was an emphasis here on acknowledging one's privilege, and/or affirming the marginality of a specific aspect of that person's identity. This included specifying "unmarked" categories, by describing oneself as "cis", able-bodied, or "passing".

The festival and its program also involved plenty of playfulness and levity, balances to the seriousness and often painfulness of many topics they addressed. Talk of participants as "cuties" and "lovelies" can be affirming for those who frequently feel unattractive, "freakish" or rejected by cultures in which they grew up. The lead description of the festival as being for and by "fucking cool queers" also highlights these priorities, and nods toward its youth-oriented programming. Visual aesthetics also range from earthy and bohemian to flamboyant "camp", an (increasingly transnational) aesthetic involving humor,

irony and "blatantness" (as described in Esther Newton's seminal 1979 book, *Mother Camp*). Newton states that, "campy productions and performances are a continuous creative strategy for dealing with the homosexual situation" and quotes an informant who says that in one performing camp, he "makes the other homosexuals laugh; he makes life a little brighter for them. And he builds a bridge to the straight people by getting them to laugh with him" (Newton 1979). For Queeristan, the latter sentiment with regards to creating connections with straight people, is less salient. This is at least in part because while "building bridges" with non-queers was politically strategic in the time of Newton's observations, it was less of a priority in the Netherlands of the mid-2010s. There was also a feeling at Queeristan that participants were tired of the expectation that they educate others, according to one, about "why they shouldn't oppress us."

Beginning in 2016, the festival held a night exclusively for QPOC (Queer People of Color); the program explained that this designation is built around self-identification, and it stated they, "are not out to police identity" (Radical Queer Resistance N.d.). A footnote on the schedule for the QPOC night advised that there would not be an alternative night for white queers, as the struggles of white queers are not a result of their being white, and that in order to be allies, white queers need to respect the need for QPOC space.

In many events and website content, attention was focused on intersections with economic and political systems, most prominently (neo)colonialism, fascism, capitalism, anarchy, neoliberalism, and Zionism. These topics might be central to the topic addressed in a session, or simply noted as a personal creed of the presenter(s). The festival is vegan, and participates in the boycott against Israeli-made products, in solidarity with occupied Palestinians.

In a session for queer migrants I attended in 2014, a participant questioned the name "Queeristan" and whether it was deliberately trying to invoke the countries of the Middle East and Central Asia with the "-stan" suffix, and if so, for what reason. The comment seemed more curious than critical. There was no consensus then, but by 2018, there was a "Festival Name Discussion" on the schedule for the last day of the festival. The official name of the collective had by then been changed to "Radical Queer Resistance", (though the domain name remained queeristan.org.) In 2014, the website explained the name Queeristan:

> "We chose the name because the connection between Queer (as a political practice, appropriated from a US context of reclaiming non-normativity) in combination with the suffix –Stan (which refers to ideas of space/place/home across different language groups) reflected our desire to generate queer spaces in the city of Amsterdam and to queer ideas of space/home/place/belonging. We were also fed up with the militaristic imposition of a global politics of "war on terror" that relegates the word –stan to a sphere of negativity. The combination queer+i+stan in our ongoing conversations felt like a disruption of homonormativity and homonationalism, politics of fear and terror, and ideas of ownership over spaces/homes/borders/places. And it still does today." (Accessible as of 2018 at: https://queeristan.org/about-queeristan/the-name-queeristan/)

Themes of homonationalism, anti-war/imperialism, etymology, reclamation, and space and belonging are emphatically presented here. The desire to re-appropriate "-stan" as a positive, anti-normative morpheme is precarious territory (as the group would discuss openly by 2018) as it can be read in the immediate as an Orientalist-style allusion to ultimate otherness, in opposition to a natural center. Indeed, I entered the space of the festival fully expecting core organizers to be of Middle Eastern or Central Asian background, which was not the case.

Explicit discussion of issues of class are noticeably absent, though touched on in conversations regarding the festival's strong anti-capitalist stance. Events were free, and prices of food and drink were kept very low. One attendee's remark in a 2014 session that "queerness is unaffordable to me," referring to Dutch café and bar culture and the difficulty of accessing commercial queer spaces, highlighted practical needs for the festival, both to remain free to the public, but also to begin more directly addressing questions of class in their programming.

Separated by a decade, Strange Fruit was an Amsterdam collective active between 1989 and 2002 that in some ways represents a predecessor to Queeristan. Founded by queers of Muslim and Afro-Caribbean background, Strange Fruit, like Queeristan, worked to highlight racism within Dutch queer communities (El-Tayeb 2012: 86). Like Secret Garden, Strange Fruit ended up butting heads with the COC over differences in agenda and strategy, though it originated as a subgroup within the COC (Colpani and Insenia 2018:216). Both Queeristan and Strange Fruit operated in opposition to hierarchical organization, and focused on educating their communities to fight their own marginalization. Exploring diverse ways of thinking about, communicating, and expressing one's relationship to sexuality and social context have been important to both collectives. Strange Fruit presented a large-scale poetry project by lesbians of color at a 1996 conference on feminism (El-Tayeb 2011:134).

Strange Fruit, however, was founded largely by groups who were economically marginalized in multiple ways, while Queeristan includes a much greater presence of highly educated individuals from more privileged backgrounds. This is certainly not to say

that Queeristan's members and participants are all or even mostly economically privileged, or that all Queeristan participants display the advanced formal education evinced in the content and style of writings and presentations at the festival (nor do I assume that Strange Fruit founders were entirely uneducated). Founding members of Strange Fruit were largely sex workers, and/or recipients of welfare (El-Tayeb 2012: 86); as a result, issues of class and economic oppression represented core concerns for the collective, arguably placed more centrally than they are at Queeristan.

While Queeristan's activities are largely, though not entirely, confined to their annual three-day festival, Strange Fruit operated year-round, and in this way was more similar to Secret Garden's presence. Like Secret Garden, they offered discussion groups, educational events (notably, many of these had to do with safe sex and HIV/AIDS) and gave assistance to queer asylum seekers. Strange Fruit worked with the Dutch Refugee Council in some of the latter endeavors (El-Tayeb 2011: 133-136). It's unclear why the group was no longer active after 2002, but the contributions of their intellectual labor, specifically in regard to intersectional activism, have been significant in the Netherlands (Colpani and Insenia 2018) and have blazed a path for the queer and POC organizations in existence today.

Troubling Ourselves

In 2015, Hiram Pérez lobbed a scathing critique at queer theorists, arguing that for most of its history, queer theory "actively untroubles itself" with problems of race (Perez 2015a: 97). This is a lacuna that it now being addressed by scholars (see: Douglas, Jivraj

and Lamble 2011; Jivraj and de Jong 2011; El-Tayeb 2011, 2012, 2013; Hector Carrillo and Jorge Fontdevila 2014; White 2014; Shakhsari 2014) though it can be difficult to say if all of these authors would consider themselves queer theorists strictly speaking, as so many who work in this area are spread throughout various university departments. That queer intersectionality has been relatively neglected both in academia and in queer movements in Europe and North America, means that the pervasive sense of the exclusive mutually of queerness and Muslim faith has largely remained unchallenged in public imaginaries.

For queer asylum seekers, it is widely felt that one must disavow their religion to be legible in their host country, and credible in the eyes of asylum authorities. Without understanding the tense intersection of sexuality and culture, the ubiquitous focus on visibility and "coming out" is not seen for the often-marginalizing hegemonic force that it can be. Finally, even when queers of color are welcomed into European queer communities (in which they are frequently met with suspicion, or again required to disavow their faith) the racism they face within the community and the greater society is sometimes dismissed, so strong is the image of the Netherlands as a place beyond racism, bias or inequality.

Examining the multiplicity of sexual norms, structures, experience and presentation across cultures has been a great strength of anthropology (though certainly not without its problematic assumptions and complicities either.) Starting in the 1970s and early 1980s, anthropology took up the study of homosexualities in diverse cultural contexts, partly in an effort to affirm the universality of homosexual practices (Vance 1991; Weston 1993). Weston argues that in examining age-graded socialization practices and formalized "third genders", "traditional" sexualities were often imagined as antecedent of "modern" homosexuality. The reckoning of complicities with colonialism faced by the discipline in

these years, however, forced anthropologists to confront the connections between, as Talal

Asad, a major figure of this critique period, wrote:

> "the practical pre-conditions of social anthropology; the uses to which its knowledge
> was put; the theoretical treatment of particular topics; the mode of perceiving and
> objectifying alien societies; and the anthropologist's claim of political neutrality"
> (Asad 1973: 17).

Following this period of focused critique, reflection and confrontation,

anthropologists worked to prioritize complicating and denaturalizing notions of "gender",

"sexuality" and even homosexuality (in the way it has been understood in the West) as

universal categories of experience (Stoler 1997, 2002; Puar 2002; Manalansan 2003, 2006;

Binnie 2004; Valentine 2007; Haritaworn 2008; Boellstroff 2007; Cruz-Malave and

Manalansan 2002; Ewing 2011.) Still, as discussed earlier, the focus on the "coming out"

narrative remained dominant and central to understandings of sexual development and

"authenticity" of LGBT/queer experience. The assumed "transformative process, that

coming out is supposed to have" (Jivraj and de Jong 2011:152) is not universally

experienced, nor is it experienced in the same way across contexts. As Foucault documents,

the naturalization of the confessional paradigm has specific historicized roots, and it is vital

now to "question the assumption that speaking necessarily equals emancipation" (Douglas,

Jivraj and Lamble 2011: 113).

In the Netherlands, (and elsewhere) the material effects of this over-emphasis on

this specific speech act and narrative expression are felt acutely by many queers of color, as

"the focus on coming out exacerbates the pressures already felt by queers of color to

choose between their culture and kindship loyalty on the one hand, or the Dutch culture"

(Jivraj and de Jong 2011:152). The Dutch context is particularly poignant in this regard, as sexual liberalism and queer-friendliness are such a strong part of the national imaginary. The Netherlands, argue Jivraj and de Jong, is "unique in developing an explicit 'homo-emancipation' policy and is often looked to as the model for sexuality politics and legal redress" (2011:143). However, this context "reproduces a paradigmatic, 'homonormative' model of an 'out' and 'visible' queer sexuality" (Jivraj and de Jong 2011:143) that in recent decades has become deeply intertwined with Islamophobic, and anti-immigrant more generally, discourses, political platforms, and moral panic.

While ostensibly aware and accepting of the idea that other cultures have diverse understandings of gender and sexuality, and associated social structures and practices, many of the organizations and institutions that work closely with LGBT/queer asylum seekers have difficulty dislodging the centrality of "coming out" to queer authenticity and universal experience. In the Netherlands, there is a "state-backed emphasis on the utterance of queerness" (Douglas, Jivraj and Lamble 2011: 115), that is, "coming out" and being out. This marginalizes, makes invisible, and casts suspicion upon non-Western, and Muslim specifically, ways of understanding, expressing and living their sexuality (Massad 2007; Douglas, Jivraj and Lamble 2011) to the dire detriment of asylum seekers in their asylum claims. Jivraj and de Jong highlight this as the "paradoxical silencing of this speaking out" imperative (Jivraj and de Jong 2011:143). Gloria Wekker argues for understanding sexuality of certain migrant groups in the Netherlands through modes of "doing" rather than speaking (Wekker 2009), thereby working towards disrupting the homonormative and homonationalist understandings that ultimately function to exclude and preclude other modes of expression.

8) Conclusions: Queer Muslim Futurity

"But there are no safe spaces. 'Home' can be unsafe and dangerous because it bears the likelihood of intimacy and thus thinner boundaries. Staying 'home' and not venturing out from our group comes from woundedness, and stagnates our growth. To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without."

-Gloria E. Anzaldúa

"I don't hate Islam. I consider it a backward culture. I have travelled much in the world. And wherever Islam rules, it's just terrible. All the hypocrisy. It's a bit like those old reformed protestants. The Reformed lie all the time. And why is that? Because they have standards and values that are so high that you can't humanly maintain them. You also see that in that Muslim culture. Then look at the Netherlands. In what country could an electoral leader of such a large movement as mine be openly homosexual? How wonderful that that's possible. That's something that one can be proud of. And I'd like to keep it that way, thank you very much."

-Pim Fortuyn, Dutch politician

The Groningen Gallery and its Displays

"Can you see your future here, in Holland?"

Tall white men holding glasses of white wine and interested expressions waited for an answer. The younger man, whom they watched expectantly, did not respond, his face frozen. I was eavesdropping (not subtly.) There was plenty in my surrounds-- an elegant exhibit opening at a "gallery of gay art" in a northern Dutch city, the Spring of 2016—for me to feign attention.

The gallery owner approached the group from behind, touching the small of the young man's back, smiling at his questioners. It's likely the gesture was only meant to reassure the young man, but there was something about the moment that, from my

vantage, presented like our host, a middle-aged man whose work outside this gallery focused on aiding queer asylum seekers, exhibiting his finest acquisition. Perhaps this is an ungenerous interpretation. But, the young man-- Syrian, I learned-- encircled by tall Dutchmen, and glossy photos of naked dark-skinned bodies behind him-- stood statue-still.

I don't know how, or if, he answered the question. I'd often heard inquiries like this addressed to asylum seekers, and while this moment seemed be to an explicit incitement to a bit of performance art, questions of future and futurity intertwine multifariously in the lives of queer Muslim asylum seekers. How does futurity work for and against queer Muslim asylum seekers in the Netherlands?

I cannot speak of the artist(s) themselves, and whether the context for the photographs and other visual pieces was collaborative or could be in some way characterized by a "'mutually' between the artist and [their] models... more than just photographer and passive objects" (Perez 2015: 121-122). Such mutuality, argues Perez, could enable potential political alliances, and represent empowerment rather than exploitation. The gallery display itself set my spine tingling— as the "brown body provides ornamentation" and is "reduced to spectacle vis-à-vis white gay male" gaze. (Perez 2015: 122) Sex-shaming the artists or audience is not my intent, as "racial difference can be and often is erotic." (Munoz 2009:111) Munoz cautions that fetishization does not exist in a cultural vacuum—the eroticism of the images is inextricable from the racial system of their context. For this reason, the "erotic value bestowed on men of color" by white male audiences, "is often linked to devaluing them in other aspects of their being" (Munoz 2009:111)

Militarizing the Future

When the populist provocateur politicians, (currently enjoying triumphant moments across Europe and the United States,) such as the Netherlands' Geertz Wilders, speak ominously of demographic threat and particularly "Islamization," they pit the futurity of Muslim asylum seekers against the future of the nation-state, and, in explicit instances of homonationalism, against a white-washed queer futurity. Often in the apocalyptic imagery alluding to a drowning native population, "surges" and "floods" of refugees "pour" into the small country, Muslims are described as constituting a threat to "Dutch culture", liberalism, sexual freedom, and gender equality.

In 2008, populist politician Rita Verdonk – having recently founded her own short-lived party, Proud of the Netherlands (*Trots op Nederland*), after splitting from the liberal rightist VVD – opined that "Dutch people simply do not have it in them to discriminate! We have been a hospitable people for centuries" (cited in Balkenhol 2016: 278). However, echoing a sentiment that has resonated deeply with the right yet become dispersed throughout the political spectrum, she continued by declaring: "Enough! There are limits." (Balkenhol 2016: 278) Those limits and the qualifications for inclusion within are questions of great contention and enormous consequence. There seems to be a sense that *this* is the moment when a crest has been reached. The other moments in history when demographic panics have struck—they weren't right, but now, now we're right—like the doomsdayers, the cults that have long announced that *this* is the end of time, calculating exact dates on which they stand with anticipatory elation to be lifted by the heavens— Verdonk, Wilders and the rest of the xenophobic prophets of doom tell us that this, *this* is

the time when we have finally reached *too much*, and we stand at the precipice of

overwhelming disaster... unless we purge our lands of these backward outsiders.

Futurity and Backwardness

"Asylum seeker" (*asielzoeker*) is a future-oriented term—the status, I found, is

primarily characterized by the experiences of "seeking", hoping, waiting. Once processed,

asylum seekers either become refugees or deportees. Among the 83,070 first-time asylum

claims in the Netherlands between 2014-2016 (IND), it is difficult to estimate how many

apply on the basis of sexual or gender identity, as the Netherlands, (and most European

countries) do not collect data on the specific reasons for asylum. Among these

indeterminate numbers of queer asylum seekers are many of Muslim faith and/or

background. They face the fear and uncertainty of all asylum seekers, as well as the

isolation and extreme difficulty proving their cases so common among queer asylum

seekers; on top of this, they face alienating and sometimes violent Islamophobia in the

country where they ultimately hope to find safety.

If notions of queer futurity have grown in part as responses to the queer death drive

(Edelman 2004) and historic associations of queerness with death, disease and

discontinuity, queer Muslim asylum seekers represent a troubled queer futurity. By

classification they are backward-focused: forced into telling and re-telling narratives

casting them as eternal victims, chased out of their homes by death; named asylum seeker,

a label exclusively responding to a past. According to Edelman (2004), queers are seen to

embody "future-negating", in opposition to heterosexuals, whose ability to reproduce

children is seen as future-affirming. Queer asylum seekers present an interesting addition

to this problematic of queer futurity: Queer asylum seekers themselves contribute to the growth of queer populations (*if* they are allowed to stay.) The "queer death drive" in this case, may be reworked to apply to failed asylum claims, whereby individuals are sent back to life-threatening conditions. If, as Muñoz (2009) declares, "queerness is not yet here"[4]— well, neither are asylum seekers. Those suspended in asylum systems are not here, and not there, and they will not be granted asylum as "queer" but as the circumscribe identity LGBT.

In "the West," Muslim asylum seekers are tied, oppositionally, to futurity-- the supposed exceptional homophobia and backwardness (or anti-futurity) of Muslim migrant communities is reported upon and fretted about frequently in public discourses on migration, refugees, religion, and what it means to be Dutch. While in public imaginations, Muslims are stuck in an earlier century, Dutch national imaginary takes great pride in being future-looking-- "first" on myriad issues, from sexuality to environmentalism. First to legalize same-sex marriage, first monumentalize homosexual Holocaust victims. Dutch engineers are sought globally for their expertise in defending land that is largely below sea level, to prepare other countries for coming environmental crises.

In neighboring Germany, with the native birth rate declining, fears of a population aging with a labor shortage have led the government to spend billions of euros explicitly encouraging citizens to have children—all while debates rage on about the country's inability to accommodate refugees and other migrants. These echoes of eugenics make

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[4] Munoz discusses queerness as being an "ideality" which can be used to imagine the future, a horizon we may never reach but can continue to move towards.

clear that the futurity of Germany is dependent on the biological reproduction of only certain groups.

When public figures fret about the demographic threat of migration to the Netherlands, they often mention the size and density of the country. At 16,000 square miles, the Netherlands is about half the size of the US state of Maine. It's is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, and yet, with just a short (reliable, and immaculately clean) train ride outside of Amsterdam, and you can find yourself in the middle of green pastures as far as the eye can see, (which is quite far in a place as flat as the Netherlands,) dotted with happy cows and the occasional idyllic windmill. "God created the world, but the Dutch created Holland." I can't seem to find the exact origin of the phrase, but heard it everywhere. The country also has a history of building dikes, seawalls, dams, and dunes, consciously constructing its own borders. Indeed an entire province of the country was "reclaimed" from the sea.

The Dutch have--quite literally--made room throughout their history. Is this ability to create physical space really so different than the questions they now face regarding cultural space? The impediment to honoring their human rights commitments and homonationalist claims seems to come down to a fear of not having this *cultural space* to welcome people of Islamic faith. The exclusion of many queer Muslims asylum seekers is justified by the specter of the fraud-- an individual (again, often imagined in large numbers, as an impending onslaught) who lies being queer in order to take advantage of European welfare systems and economic opportunities—because of course, the mundane suffering of poverty does not entitle one asylum. And so, if you cannot perform gay, lesbian, bi, trans, properly, as expected, you'll be sent back, and you have no future, not in the Netherlands,

and if the fear that led you to flee in the first place was indeed well-founded, perhaps you have no future at all.

And so, what is the value of a queer Muslim asylum seeker in the Dutch national imaginary? Does this figure bolster the argument for the Netherlands as a tolerant, gay-friendly, bastion of liberalism and human rights? Or does it expose the cracks in that imaginary, fractures where abstractions of national fears (fraud, demographic threat, and the inherent homophobia, intolerance, and un-assimiability of Muslim migrants) create gaping holes through which asylum seekers fall? The queer Muslim asylum seeker is both a confirmation of the imaginary and a confrontation of it; representing both a prize and a threat; always backward and future-facing. While the figure is one of ambivalence and duality, the living personages, individual queer Muslim asylum seekers, are allowed no such inconsistency. To be credible, they must tell narratives that walk a tightrope of consistency and cultural intelligibility, to represent experience and the self in terms that defy lived realities. A consistent subject is a frozen subject-- frozen in time, unable to look backward or move forward, unable to take in breath. We can start to release these subjects from this impossible bind by considering that all human lives are multitudinous, and all narratives of those lives are dynamic, inconsistent, shifting—in short, full of life.

Ayesha's Epilogue, in two parts

June 1st, 2016, Ayesha moved into her one-bedroom apartment in a medium-sized city in the eastern part of the Netherlands. She had been hoping against hope for a placement in Amsterdam, but knew it was unlikely, and was much relieved to find she

hadn't been forced to live in one of the small, remote towns where she'd be shifted around for months between AZCs. The towns themselves could be quite charming (or so I'd thought when I visited) but the refugee accommodations had a habit of being positioned far from public transport and poorly connected to the facilities I found so charming in these towns, like the quaint cafes in town squares (not that they are affordable to most asylum seekers anyway) or even basic supermarkets.

Ayesha's apartment complex was fairly nondescript, but in the Dutch aspiringly-egalitarian way; the buildings were low and brick, sturdy and homogenous, equipped with the fully livable features expected in a Dutch home: a reasonable kitchen space, nice bathroom and separate room for the toilet, a big bright living room and bedroom (ready to capture and exploit sunlight that can be depressingly rare, especially in winter) and a garden in the back nearly as big as the apartment plot itself. Mint plants were already beginning to conquer a section of the garden, held back by the brick patio that stretches from the back of the house, creating a little grotto that begs for a small deck table and chairs in the center (furniture I had no doubt the industrious Ayesha would scrounge up for cheap or free, either from friends of friends, or her ventures into online sales-by-owner at the *Maarktplaats* (a Dutch version of craigslist.com), as she'd done with all of the furniture she already owned.)

I felt closure for a moment—some ten months before, Ayesha and I had traveled to Ter Apel, the starting place for most asylum seekers in the Netherlands, and just days before I was to leave the country, she had finally been "settled" in her own apartment, equipped with her residence permit, living stipend, and even a new girlfriend to begin her "real life" in the Netherlands. For her, I know it was relief to be done with the spur-of-the-

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moment moves from camp to camp, the interviews and meetings with various officials of the asylum system, and to have some privacy after nearly a year of sharing rooms with a half dozen other asylum seekers. But while it was an end for me, it was a beginning of a new unknown for her. She's here now. This is the real life she's been waiting to get back to. And what is it? What is it made of, and who is she within it? She was taking Dutch language classes at nearby university. She saw her girlfriend, Lena, a migrant from Eastern Europe who worked hours and conditions that were almost certainly illegal, on weekends. Once or twice a week she was contacted by a LGBT, refugee, or university group about the possibility of telling her story at one of their events. They'd pay her transit costs and probably gift her some flowers and maybe chocolate.

She had started to grow resentful, however, after applying for a job with the COC. Not a week after she found out she didn't get the job, someone from another branch of the COC contacted her about coming to speak at an event the next month. They wanted her voice, her experience, her story, her labor—but not on salary.

About a year later, two and a half years after she first arrived in the Netherlands for a month-long course at an Amsterdam university, Ayesha's two young nieces and nephew, children for whom she had been primary care-taker for most of their lives and who had been tossed out by her ex-husband when she was outed, arrived at Schiphol Airport. Ayesha had been unable to go to Rwanda herself, so her girlfriend was sent to retrieve them. Lena flew down, collected the three children, and returned to the Netherlands within three days. Lena said they were shockingly calm and well-behaved through the whole journey.

The Refugee Council helped Ayesha to find a new apartment with bedrooms for each of the children. She liked that the neighborhood was largely other immigrant families, because she felt her kids were better accepted and didn't stick out. Just down the street was a playground— like many urban Dutch neighborhoods, blocks of apartment buildings are stacked in rectangles around a long patch of green space—and the kids were able to come and go as they pleased, playing with other neighborhood kids in an area separated from all but the minimal local traffic.

The neighborhood is accessible to public transportation and only some 10 minutes by bus from Nijmegen Central Station, making Ayesha's trip to Utrecht for graduate school fairly painless. She still hoped to move to Utrecht at some point, as it would shorten her commute, and because of Utrecht's geographically central location in the country, would also make it easier and cheaper to travel elsewhere in the Netherlands. Her friends are spread around now, and when she still engages in public speaking about her experiences in the asylum system, the events are often in university towns further north. However, she'd been turning down speaking invitations recently, as she was expected to pay back any money she earned, euro-for-euro, against her government refugee stipend. If she made 200 euro for an hour's lecture, she would report it, and her next stipend would come 200 euro short. With three young children all under her care now, it wasn't worth her time.

When I visited her in the summer of 2018 I finally met her children, and when we sat down to the big dinner of chicken with green bananas Ayesha hadn't allowed me to help prepare, she announced she and Lena were engaged.

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Appendix: Letter of Support

Letter of Support for ████████████████████
02 December 2015

To whom it may concern:

I met ██████████████ during our summer course, "Sexuality, Culture and Society," at the University of Amsterdam, in July 2015. I am a PhD student at Columbia University, and am living in the Netherlands while I conduct research for my dissertation. In class, she was somewhat shy, but spoke about some of her experiences working for an LGBT rights organization in Uganda. Several times, when introducing herself to the group and a new professor, she mentioned her desire to learn about issues of sexuality and bring that knowledge to bear on her work in Uganda.

A few days after our class finished, I got an email from one of our professors, Robert Sember, who told me that ████████ contacted him after receiving death threats from her husband. He had found her application essay to our course, in which she talks about the challenges of being a lesbian in Uganda and her work at the LGBT organization. I immediately contacted ██████, and told her she should come stay at my apartment in Amsterdam. When she arrived, she was very visibly upset, and started to tell me what had happened. She showed me the text messages on her phone from her husband, in which he threatens to kill her when she returns, and tells her that he has told her family and community that she is a lesbian, and community members have agreed that she should be killed. She also showed me messages from a friend who her husband had also threatened, and who told her that she must not come back to Uganda. Over the next couple of days, she showed me new texts from her friend as she received them, updating her on what her husband, family and friends were doing and saying. ████████ was clearly frightened and unsure what to do. Her entire life, including her partner and family, all of whom she loves very much, are in Uganda, and to stay in the Netherlands means leaving them all. However, it was increasingly clear that to return would be to put her life at grave risk.

I drove ████████ to Ter Apel once she decided that her only option was to seek asylum in the Netherlands. Since then, I have remained in contact with her, and have tried to support her in whatever way I can. Often that means listening to her worries, fears, hopes and memories. I can attest that her desire to seek asylum is genuine: she is a lesbian who has a loving female partner, she has told me about crushes on women about learning at a young age that she was attracted to other girls, and about her work at ██████████████████ an LGBT organization in Uganda. I can also attest that her fear of persecution is genuine: I have seen the messages from her husband and friend on her phone, I have heard her talk about what he and her community would do to her if she were to return, and I have felt the fear in her eyes and voice when she talks about this. I have also studied the situation for LGBT individuals in Uganda, where life is dangerous for even those were are in

the closet. Many have been murdered, and many have had their lives threatened and destroyed in many ways.

I saw her speak to an undergraduate class at the University of Amsterdam on ████████████████████ where she discussed the history of homosexuality in Uganda, the LGBT rights movement there, and ended by telling her own story. In her time in the Netherlands, she has shared her story with many people, and has already become an important voice for LGBT Ugandans, and an inspirational educator. When talking about the future, she expresses ambition to sit in on courses at the University of Amsterdam, excitement about learning Dutch (we plan to study together), and a deep desire to help change come to Uganda. She has started work towards that goal already while waiting on her asylum hearing in the Netherlands, and will continue as long as she is here. She is and will continue to be a great benefit to Dutch society and as well as to Ugandan society, and should be granted asylum immediately.

I am happy to answer any further questions you may have about my contact with ██

sfb2129@columbia.edu.

Sincerely,

Sarah French Brennan

Sarah F. Brennan

████████████████████████