

# SAME-SEX INTIMACY, INTIMATE CITIZENSHIP AND EXPERIENCES OF LIVED RELIGION OF NON-HETEROSEXUAL MUSLIMS: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF EXISTING STUDIES

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## Abstract

Recent decades have witnessed significant progress in the literature on religion, faith/sanctity and non-heterosexual intimacy/desire. Arising from the discussion of homosexuality and religion, many liberal theological perspectives have encouraged discussion of homosexual-friendly religious thought. Gay/lesbian and queer theologies have produced new religious discourse, providing a critical discussion on religious sacred texts, particularly Christianity and Judaism (Althaus-Reid, 2003; Ahmed, 2006). In addition to the wealth of journal articles, several narrative studies about religious activists and self-identified LGBTQ believers in a particular faith have contributed to the discussion. But what the general public think about the relationship between Islam and non-heterosexuality is mostly confusing and contradictory. Recent debates about same-sex intimacy and spirituality have raised questions about this relationship. There is now a greater understanding that people self-identify as non-heterosexual Muslims and their position in Islamic societies.

In this sense, a few scholars have made significant contributions to the literature regarding the discussion and recasting of the Islamic belief system through new liberal and queer theological perspectives. However, specifically regarding discussions on same-sex intimacy and intimate citizenship, the experiences of non-heterosexual Muslims are overlooked within Islamic sexuality studies.

Several questions follow. What are the experiences of non-heterosexual Muslims' intimate relationship and intimate citizenship? How do they negotiate their sexual identities and intimate citizenship with Islam? How can place and culture affect or reshape their perspectives on same-sex intimacy and intimate citizenship as non-heterosexual Muslims?

I examine the current discussions of non-heterosexuality in Islam before proceeding to questions on the position of same-sex intimacy. I focus on the relationship of same-sex intimacy and intimate citizenship from the non-heterosexual Muslim lens. In particular, I explore what same-sex intimacy means to the Muslim community and discuss the position of non-heterosexual Muslims within the Western European Muslim communities in terms of intimate citizenship.

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## 1. Introduction

In the late 1960s, Western Europe and the United States saw the emergence of several liberation movements. Gay and lesbian liberation movements gradually began to raise public awareness of gay rights. Though gay and lesbian liberation movements influenced many areas of study, the relation of religion and non-heterosexuality revealed notable discussions in non-heterosexual discourse.

Since then, the tolerance of non-heterosexuality has grown in Western Europe and the United States. The relationship(s) between same-sex sexuality/intimacy and religiosity have been criticized and discussed by gay/lesbian and queer theologies. These discussions contributed to a new analysis of the position of non-heterosexuality in the sacred texts in particular faiths. These discussions also defined and used the intellectual scopes of these theologies to create inclusive theological understanding within traditional religious thought, and engaged with non-

heterosexual identity in theological contexts by considering the geographical and cultural location of theologies. The contextual focus of these discussions related to more specific factors, viz. gender, the human body, sexuality, race and ethnicity. With this focus, some theorists highlighted that sex and gender norms are reconstructed by religions, which are socially constructed (Schneider and Roncolato, 2012: 8-9). Hence in these new theological discussions, non-heterosexual identity has been articulated in different ways, which focus on the interaction of theology and sex/gender identity or abnormality.

While these discussions have had positive effects on Christianity and Judaism, the position and experiences of non-heterosexual Muslims with an Islamic upbringing have been neglected. Arguably, Western public perspectives opine that Islam ignores sexual diversity and same-sex intimacy by being intolerant and condemning non-heterosexual acts with specific punishments. However, these theological discussions on same-sex intimacy and religion emphasise important contextual discourse in Islam to create an in-depth understanding of how Islam is diversely embodied in everyday life (Hoel, 2015).

In the traditional Islamic view, non-heterosexuality is a contradictive issue that is clearly condemned by orthodox Muslims, who mostly defend their condemnation from the Qur'an and their perspective of heteronormative sexuality in social life. Therefore, non-heterosexual individuals in same-sex relationships are likely to be stigmatized by traditional Islamic thought. Regarding this possible stigmatization, non-heterosexual individuals experience difficulties in finding a socially equal place to achieve their goals and needs for intimacy within Islamic-based societies because of Islamic orthodoxy (Hendricks, 2010: 31; Frost et al., 2016). While same-sex intimacy is considered an issue that is difficult to merge with Islamic belief systems, some Muslim societies have recently revealed discussions of diversity in sexuality by way of the liberal sexual-morality movement in Western societies. Thus, there are notable debates about same-sex intimacy and diversity in sexuality in traditional Islamic discourse.

As well-known studies on the rise of same-sex intimacy in Christian and Jewish theologies demonstrate, non-heterosexual individuals are able to redefine their position between goodness and sin in their particular belief systems. Moreover, non-heterosexual individuals are able to interpret religious texts about God and God's love to include non-heterosexual believers in the theological discourse. These new theological discussions have influenced traditional Islamic thought about same-sex sexuality. Recent studies show the experiences of non-heterosexual Muslims can demonstrate a variety of problems about multiple belongings depending upon geographies. For example, the discussions on same-sex sexuality include a multicity of voices: new lives, new communities and new political discussions. As Yip (2008: 1-2) and Fernando (2014) highlight, the discussions on same-sex sexuality in Islam are directly related to being a "minority within a minority" position for some geographies (e.g. Western European, Northern America). To be a "minority within a minority" regarding sexual orientation and engagement with Islamic embodiment defines non-heterosexual Muslims positions, their lived experiences in respect of social representation, preservation of identity, lifestyle and selfhood. In this position, we can understand a majority of non-heterosexual Muslims can experience different kinds of discrimination from both their religious community and the general public while they perform and interact in their sexual intimacy and religious identity.

In order to understand the contradiction within the traditional Islamic view of same-sex sexuality, many scholars, such as Hendricks (2010), Kugle (2010), and Najmabadi (2006), initiate the recasting of new debates from the Qur'an, hadiths and Sharia Law to find a place for non-heterosexual Muslims. Regarding this new wave of Islamic debates, these scholars' first objective is to investigate how non-heterosexuality is mentioned in Islamic religious texts in terms of gender, same-sex sexuality and sexual identity.

This critical review paper presents a reflective understanding of the experiences of non-heterosexual Muslims in terms of same-sex intimacy and intimate citizenship. The main aims of this review paper are to understand how non-heterosexuality is positioned as a contradictive issue for traditional Islamic discourse and examine the current discussion of non-heterosexuality in Islam in terms of lived experiences of non-heterosexual Muslims. I review and critique works on the diverse progressive efforts that represent relative discussions on non-heterosexual Muslims in contemporary life, and I evaluate the idea of how same-sex intimacy can be established in terms of intimate/sexual citizenship within the Muslim community and public gaze.

## **2. Critics of Same-sex Intimacy in Islam**

The presence of non-heterosexual Muslims has been a difficult issue for several Muslim societies and Muslim believers. Contemporary Islamic academic and general thought has been influenced by non-heterosexual Muslim activists and scholarly work that show Islamic texts can open new understandings for creating inclusive ways for sexually diverse groups (Hendricks, 2010: 51; Kugle, 2003: 194-195). Before looking at these new discussions on progressive Islam, it is important to review some examples of new interpretational methods for understanding the main thought of progressive Islam. I include some scholarly methods and reviews from the Qur'an and hadiths.

### **2.1 Qur'an**

The discussion on same-sex intimacy and diversity in sexuality is a censured issue for Muslim societies. While some orthodox Muslims defend their destigmatized views for non-heterosexuality by using the Qur'an, it is still the case that some parts of the Qur'an are used as a reference for condemnation and penalties for homosexuality and diversity in sexuality. Because of these opposing uses of the Qur'an, many contemporary Muslim reformers try to

provide new interpretational ways to engage the sacred texts (n.b. all quotes of Qur'an used in this section is cited from Hendricks, 2010). "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: Verily in that are signs for those who possess knowledge" (Qur'an 30:22).

*"O mankind! Verily We have created you male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes that you may come to know. Truly, the noblest of you, in the sight of God, is the most God-conscious amongst you. Verily God is the Knower, the All-Aware."* (Qur'an 49:13).

The first group of scholars, e.g. Hendrick (2010) and Kugle (2003: 200), claim the first action must be to ask what Islam and these specific parts of the texts say about "diversity" and "diverse nature of human being" before approaching homosexuality. Their focus is to examine the position of non-heterosexuality under three important concepts: same-sex sexual act, sexual orientation and sexual identity. Hendricks (2010) and others debate that the Qur'an is an essential and primary source for understanding and approving "*diverse nature of human being.*" Diversity among human beings is mentioned by the Qur'an in diverse ways, such as the diversity of culture, ethnicity, race, skin colour or languages. Hence, diversity and being different from others are disputable contexts, and they have been used as a bridge for relocating homosexuality. "Glory be to God who has created all the different pairs/partners from what the earth produces and from themselves (humankind) and from that of which they possess no knowledge" (Qur'an 36:36).

The other focusing point about homosexuality is that the offensive thought of non-heterosexuality in the Muslim world has been influenced in a negative way by a Western understanding of non-heterosexuality. At the end of the 19th century, contemporary Islamic scholars preferred not to use the term homosexuality until it had been considered in medical and clinical cases (Halstead and Lewicka, 2006: 60-61). Their first step was to investigate the term homosexuality in the Qur'an. The Qur'an does not have a clear explanation for terms that indicate human sexual orientation. The Qur'an only mentions female and male sexual acts as a performance; therefore, there is no supporting evidence for either homosexuality or heterosexuality. Hence, contemporary studies emphasize the new discussions surrounding homosexuality within the Islamic background need to confirm the importance of the differences between the sexual act and sexual orientation. Contemporary Islamic perspectives have created a new and positive assessment of sexual diversity consisting of same-sex sexuality, sexual orientation and sexual identity. Several Quranic texts, mostly indicating the sinners and sinful behaviours that would not be acceptable in terms of Islamic rules, make a reference to non-heterosexuality as a sin. For example, the parable of Lot in the Qur'an could be used as a condemnation tool against homosexuality. "If two men are guilty of lewdness, both of them should be reprimanded. If they repent and amend, leave them alone, for God is oft-returning, Most Merciful" (Qur'an 4:16). The defenders of the view that Lot indicates homosexual behaviour is sinful to argue that "two men are guilty of lewdness" means homosexual acts.

However, many Islamic scholars cannot agree with this view. They claim the parable of Lot lacks any words or expressions referring to same-sex-intimacy, same-sex desire, or any clarification about homosexuality as a forbidden act. This parable mentions other factors, such as sexual proclivity, social and economic injustice, and inhospitality to foreigners, the robberies on the trade highway, power through sexual gratification, and the crime of subjecting vulnerable men to coercive sex with the patriarchal elite (Hendricks, 2010: 33; Kugle, 2003). Thus, they argue the parable of Lot in the Qur'an cannot be used as a reference for the condemnation of homosexuality. In short, the Qur'an does not have clear and open information concerning non-heterosexuality as a sexual orientation or identity.

## 2.2 Hadiths and the Prophet of Muhammad

Hadiths<sup>1</sup> also have been used as references for punishment and condemnation for non-heterosexual individuals. Muslims who adjust Islam in their lives through traditional Islamic view have justified their exclusionary perspectives using verses of hadiths to find mainly social legislation against non-heterosexuality and non-heterosexuals. Recently, however, hadiths are considered contradictive sources by contemporary hadith scholars. Because these Islamic sources are often called "traditional" actions, the practice of the Prophet Muhammad has been expanded through the practices of the Prophet's followers and other Islamic leaders (Rehman and Polymenopoulou, 2013: 5; Kugle, 2010). The several reports of the hadiths were seen as insufficiently related to the Qur'an, and therefore not reliable references.

In the following centuries, some hadith collectors have produced significant discussions in terms of the accuracy of some hadith reports for modern issues (Rehman and Polymenopoulou, 2013). For example, the reports of hadiths that have been used for understanding the position of non-heterosexuality are recast regarding the modern social context. Even if many scholars have drawn upon some hadith quotes to understand the view of the Prophet Muhammad and find a relevant point to a discussion of homosexuality, there are big differences between the interpretations of hadith reports because of the reporting time of the quotes. According to Kugle (2010), hadiths could be evaluated in five different categories to address sexual orientation and gender identities:

*"...(1) reports that speak of divine punishment after death; (2) reports that in which God curses homosexuals;*

<sup>1</sup> Hadiths are appointed reports from the Prophet Muhammad. These reports were orally obtained from the Prophet Muhammad by his followers and were written down to help settle debates over the law. Hadith is often translated as "traditions" for Muslims on the basis of the teaching and practices of Muhammad.)

(3) reports that speak of criminal punishment by execution; (4) reports that condemn transgender behaviours; (5) reports that speak of cases involving historically known individuals who engaged in homosexual or transgender behavior" (Kugle, 2010, p. 91).

According to his interpretation, Islamic Law generally uses the third and fourth categories to instruct the social justice for non-heterosexuality, while the first and second categories are more often used against non-heterosexuals in the Islamic society. In the hadiths, following the Qur'an 56:16 and 26:165-173, several references mention same-sex intimacy with punishment, and the same-sex act or the practice of sodomy are avoided discussions in Islam. There are numerous reports of hadiths with varying degrees of originality addressing *liwat* to punish in a social context, and they have been referenced against non-heterosexuality/same-sex relations by several Islamic societies. *Liwat* is used as a definitional word for sodomy, mostly defining the same-sex male sexual activity under the topic of homosexuality. Notwithstanding, contemporary collectors of hadith have claimed these categories could not be based upon any evidence to understand what the Prophet Muhammad said about non-heterosexuality and non-heterosexual individuals (Rehman and Polymenopoulou 2013; Kugle, 2010; Hendricks, 2010; Siker, 2007).

*"When their brother Lot said to them, "Will you do not fear God? Verily! I am a trustworthy Messenger to you. So fear God and obey me. I ask no reward from you, for my only reward is with the Lord of the Worlds. Must you, unlike [other] people, lust after males and abandon the wives that God has created for you? You are exceeding all bounds" (Quran 26: 161-166).*

For several scholars, a more contradictive and unclear issue is related to finding a relational part concerning non-heterosexuality in hadiths. Even though many of the reports are not directly associated with non-heterosexuality or same-sex behaviour, they are cited for facilitating negative discussions about non-heterosexuality. For example, in some reports, men and women are forbidden from seeing and touching each other's genitalia. Other reports order that two men or two women should not be covered under one sheet or "skin to skin". However, these reports are no longer applied to sexual intimacy or same-sex orientation.

Historically, there are limited clear sources on non-heterosexuality in Islamic thought, but transvestites/effeminate men were well documented during the Prophet Muhammad's time. During Muhammad's term in Medina, the men who had similar characteristics with contemporary transgender people were called *mukhannathun/mukhannath* and were present in the city (Hendricks, 2010: 41). However, there is a critical discussion of the similarity of feminine men and transgendered behaviours. As Beckers (2010), Khan et al. (2009), and Rowson (1991) mention, these men played an influential role in arts and poetry, and their habits and attitudes were socially identifiable and acceptable. This part of the report in hadiths is mostly used by orthodox Muslims to demonstrate the issue of effeminateness in men and transgender behaviours, and in banning any person who conducts transgender behaviour in Muslim society. According to this report, Muhammad suggested Muslims should not admit these people into their family life.

Other versions of the reports have cited Muhammad's orders for effeminate men and transgender persons. Muhammad ordered their banishment from Medina, and he gave them permission to enter the city only to beg for food. According to Abu Dawud's collection of hadith, he emphasized the Prophet never ordered or suggested death, violence and hostility towards effeminate men and transgender persons. Recently, gay, lesbian and transgender Muslims have argued against the originality of hadith that are used against them. They have provided new theological discussions about the punishment of non-heterosexuality and Islamic reforms that are related to sexual orientation, gender identity and any other modern issue (Kugle, 2010: 265; Hendricks, 2010: 42).

*"A[n] effeminate man (mukhannath) who had dyed his hands and feet with henna was brought to the Prophet. He asked: What is the matter with this man? He was told: 'Messenger of Allah! He imitates the look of women.' So he issued an order regarding him and he was banished to an-Naqi.'" The people said: 'Messenger of Allah! Should we not kill him?' He said: 'I have been prohibited from killing people who pray.' Abu Usamah said: 'Naqi' is a region near Medina and not a Baqi'" (Abu Dawud, hadith 4910).*

Undoubtedly, Islamic texts and law consist of patriarchal influences and interpretations. These interpretations have shaped the meaning of femininity and masculinity in Muslim society. Muslim men's roles, especially in society, have been determined by masculinity and its perception. Hence, male homosexuality directly affects and damages the masculinity of men (Hendricks, 2010: 34). As far as we understand from the Islamic texts and traditions, male homosexuality was visible and acceptable in Muslim society only if it was admitted that the masculinity of the man was not threatened, viz. being the penetrator, not the penetrated. Thus, this situation clarifies why female homosexuality is not explicitly mentioned in the Islamic texts.

Clearly, hadiths are considered contradictive references in terms of developed and inclusive social justice for the diversity of human beings in the contemporary social context. Recently, however, the inclusionary interpretation of the Qur'an and hadiths have been influential for changing traditional Islamic perspectives on non-heterosexuality, such as making social contributions of not dismissing people who have different sexual orientations and gender identities and in further developing social institutions like marriage.

#### Current Discussions about Non-heterosexual Muslims in Islam

In articulating the position of non-heterosexual Muslims in Islam, same-sex intimacy has several ambiguous discussions. Some non-heterosexual Muslims are starting to recast and engage with inclusive strategies to find a place in Islam for "destigmatization". A small number of researchers, such as Yip (2004, 2005, 2008), Shannahan



(2010), El-Tayeb (2012) and Abraham (2009), have begun to investigate how non-heterosexuality progresses with Muslim identity. Their discussions indicate some non-heterosexual Muslims have discovered a way to connect their sexual orientation and religious identity while minimizing stigmatic views about same-sex intimacy. Before looking at the progress of non-heterosexual Muslims in an Islamic context, it is important to remember that gay and lesbian and queer theologies have encouraged these ongoing Islamic-based discussions.

Specifically, a particular feature of these theologies is to rediscuss religious texts via self-into reading. This method has a great impact on the progressive discussion of Islamic discourse. Some scholars highlight that these theologies emphasize a way to understand sacred texts by adopting a personal and individual interpretive lens. Reproducing theological interpretations has originated vast and new possibilities for negotiation and engagement with sexual and religious identity. In these respects, identity is examined by more inclusive approaches in contemporary theologies such as in Christianity, Jewish and, in more recent times, Islam.

In progressive Islamic discourse, non-heterosexuality is evaluated under three main methods by non-heterosexual Muslims. First, they argue the position of non-heterosexuality within Islamic theology. Second, they discuss the traditional Islamic texts via inclusive ways. Third, they focus on non-heterosexuality within the historical background of Islam and examine the heteronormative interpretation of the religious system from a cultural basis.

In studies that determine to reproduce inclusive Islamic concepts from non-heterosexual Muslims' perspectives, they examine the possibility of sexuality sensitive Islamic ethics and morals. Yip (2005: 51) contributes to this ongoing Islamic discussion. The most remarkable point of his works is the creation of a discussion of the possibility of "queer-friendly Islamic thought". He highlights how queer theology affects "queering" Islamic religious texts. The meaning of "queering" texts is "personalizing and individualizing the interpretation of texts by adopting a hermeneutic lens based on the authority of self." In this sense, queer believers are gathered around three inclusive approaches, which are "defensive", "offensive" and "creative". Regarding his critique, non-heterosexual Muslims are enabled to interpret the text in line with their lived experiences by bringing their self-into reading to Islam.

Similarly, Shannahan (2010) agrees the idea of inclusive Islamic discourse became stronger because of queer theological approaches. These approaches mainly consist of finding an alternative interpretation, and in deconstructing the hegemonic discourse of religious structure in Islamic thought and focusing on the use of the texts for spiritual growth. Yip (2005) and Shannahan (2010) assert these new theological approaches are seen as a new interactive way for non-heterosexual individuals to find a place in their belief systems. Nevertheless, while non-heterosexual Muslims and Christians engage their sexual intimacy and faith through these approaches, the third approach of "creative" is uncommon and has not been performed among non-heterosexual Muslims.

To this question, Kugle (2014) provides an idea on how to understand the interactions of non-heterosexual Muslims with Islam. Regarding his point, non-heterosexual Muslims could find a way to deal with the "condemnation of non-heterosexuality" or "gender ambiguity" in their particular faith. However, they do not reject and change the core of religious traditions; on the contrary, they presume to practice their religious rituals and religious loyalty.

"For many lesbian, gay, and transgender Muslims, religion is a potent force in life. Just because they struggle against interpretations that condemn homosexuality or gender ambiguity does not mean that they reject religion outright. Many Western observers and allies assume that transgender, lesbian, and gay Muslims must leave Islam in order to live with dignity and pursue social reform... Many activists retain their loyalty to their religion, pursue deeper knowledge about it, and practice its rituals to the extent of their capacity. Others mine the Islamic tradition for resources for a progressive religious interpretation"(Kugle, 2014: 52-53).

Earlier, I mentioned Kugle indicating the Qur'an does not have a clear explanation for same-sex intimacy. However, Islamic texts have been used as a tool for the condemnation of same-sex sexuality. Therefore, the focus of progressive Islamic studies is a reinterpretation of the story of Lot, Surat and hadiths through a hermeneutic lens. For instance, every individual demonstrates different strategies to engage in religious traditions. These strategies include three actions. The first action is "confronting" their religious traditions. In this action, non-heterosexual Muslims provide critical thinking to patriarchal interpretations obtained in the past. The second action is "finding a solution" in these patriarchal interpretations. They reflect on the resources in Islam for a more progressive practice of faith. The last action is "challenging" some theological positions on diverse sexuality and non-heterosexuals (Kugle, 2014: 187). During this action, they directly review the Islamic tradition through its textual sources and interpretive explanations. These three actions encourage a fresh, progressive theological discourse around the issues of sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity.

The idea of queer-friendly Islamic hermeneutics includes two basic actions. First, non-heterosexual Muslims reject the traditional hadiths which argue for a position of same-sex intimacy. Second, these people reinterpret the story of Lot, which is a major reference for same-sex intimacy or non-heterosexuality mentioned in the Qur'an (Habib, 2008). These studies acknowledge queer theology enables a debate on classical Islamic texts in terms of bringing in both non-heterosexual Muslims' self-into readings of the texts and their lived experiences.

The rise of the so-called knowledge of Queer theory/theology has been considered a relational element between "non-heterosexual Muslim identity" and "re-casting queer-friendly Islamic thought". Abraham (2009: 87) argues being non-heterosexual/queer and being Muslim means rethinking positions about sexuality, body image, ethnoreligious identity and race. He suggests the concepts of the complexity of sexual, ethnic and religious identities produce critical identity-based discussions. This situation impacts the overview of the nature of homophobia and

Islamophobia. El-Tayeb (2012) extends this view by creating a relational area with intersectionality. According to his explanation of intersectionality and globalization in evaluating references, queer positionalities integrate the contemporary discussions around race, religion and immigration, and queer Muslim gender and sexuality.

One important fact is to clarify the condemnation of same-sex sexuality in Islam, which essentially impacts the non-heterosexual Muslims' interaction and engagement with their sexual intimacy and their religious faith. With regard to liberal theological approaches, some of them would provide a new discourse to reposition their self-hood apart from accepting destigmatized traditional Islamic thought.

#### Needs and Goals as Intimate Citizens: Non-heterosexual Muslim Identity within Muslim Communities

Considering many theological discussions from the Islamic Golden Age, same-sex sexuality has been investigated by way of male homosexuality. Male-to-male sexual intercourse has not been clearly criminalized. According to El-Rouayhed (2005), Islam has never condemned same-sex love among men towards "young boys" in private places. However, Islam has not tolerated sodomy as anal intercourse, and it was banned mostly via death. As Jaspal and Siraj (2011) highlights, the Islamic belief system has different opinions, applications and enforcement on non-heterosexuality; therefore, giving one Islamic definition of same-sex intimacy is demanding. Islam inherently has a paradoxical perspective. Currently, with the aid of the Islamic progressive movements, non-heterosexual Muslim identity has been publicly visible, and these movements facilitate massive debates about non-heterosexual Muslim space in both Muslim communities and the general public. With this progressive effort, non-heterosexual Muslims have started to govern with more "positive personal identity" regarding human rights and sexual rights in the public scope. Even though non-heterosexual Muslim presence is historically new, their voices have influenced their position in society.

Non-heterosexual Muslim presence within Islam has revealed itself as a North American centred movement. In 2001, the Muslim Canadian Congress published an invitation to support minority groups that believe in a progressive, pluralistic, and liberal Islam. Their first aim was to provide a voice for freedom of religion in Islamic discourse. In 2003, the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD) provided inclusive political debates on Islam, and pluralism encouraged the non-heterosexual Muslims' public voice. Between 2007 and 2013, the progressive value of Muslims was recognized by official non-governmental organisations (NGO) (Liberal and the progressive Muslim movement, 2016). Followed by this positive step, Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV), Al-Fatiha Foundation and many others promoted public campaigning to deal with the Islamic regulations that cause discrimination for minority groups of Muslims. These campaigns included providing the social place for women and LGBTQ rights, and freedom in religion and belief in Islamic contexts.

In 2012 in Europe, non-heterosexual Muslim identity could be publicly visible after the action of Homosexual Muslims of France (a gay-friendly centre for prayer), who arranged a prayer room for non-heterosexual Muslims. This latest wave provided religious space-based discussions on non-heterosexual Muslim identity. For example, the possibility of "gay-friendly Mosques" or "openly gay Imams" have been discussed. While non-heterosexual Muslim identity has significantly improved in a social context, the orthodox Muslim communities condemn and criminalize progressive waves by accusing them of damaging the nature of Islam. Therefore, a few non-heterosexual Muslim activists still prefer not to identify themselves as non-heterosexual Muslims, and they prefer anonymity to ensure their own safety.

These progressive Islamic waves on non-heterosexual Muslim identity have brought several political and social concerns either in Muslim communities or in the general public. Notwithstanding, many non-heterosexual Muslims struggle to find a place and acceptance in their community. This ongoing self-definition or self-identification debate provides a new arrangement of non-heterosexual Muslim identity in terms of intimate citizenship. However, the important relational point of intimate citizenship has mostly been neglected. It is worth understanding the concept of intimate citizenship.

Over thirty years ago, sexual identity-based social and political movements revealed new conflicts and debates for equality and social rights. These debates have globally promoted new and broader definitions of citizenship (Richardson, 2017; Weeks, 1998). With these new conceptual discussions and sexual movements, the term citizenship enhanced its discursive line with social and political discussions by combining sexuality and citizenship. After two decades, the concept of citizenship has become an essential interdisciplinary area for several fields.

The new discussion of citizenship regarding sexuality emerged in the studies of Plummer (2001, 2003), Richardson (1998, 2000, 2017) and Weeks (1998) in Sociology. Their definitional understanding of sexual or intimate citizenship variably covers the "multi-faceted concepts". For Weeks (1998: 35-36), intimate/sexual citizenship, such as needs and pleasures with new sexualized identities, is a "sensitizing" notion that provides new concerns in terms of marginalization in public discourse. He also highlights the "hybrid being" of intimate/sexual citizenship. Sexuality links the various aspects of intimate personal life, which are "love and violence, pain and pleasure, power and resistance". Therefore, these personal links draw a line between "private and public". On the other hand, citizenship is also related to public involvement, namely "carrying rights in wider society, entitlements". Thus, this term draws the connective line between private and public, especially in Western culture. His definition of intimate/sexual citizenship underpins the concept of citizenship as a more comprehensive discourse, and it contains diverse categories like class, gender, race or binarism, equity and social justice for "sexual minorities". In this respect, Weeks suggests three relational arguments: the democratization of relationship, the emergence of new subjectivities, and

the development of new narratives or stories about personal life.

A broader definition of intimate/sexual citizenship is provided by Plummer (2003: 14). He highlights the individuals' choices, control and access associated with ten different, but relational, intimacies which are called "zones of intimacies". These different intimacies could affect individual personal lives with regard to internal and external "intimate choices", which could cause "troubles". These individual or private troubles also provide public and policy impact. The ten "zones of intimacies" contain self, relationships, gender, sexuality, the family, the body, emotional life, the senses, identity, spirituality concepts. His main aim is to elaborate these ten concepts in the public gaze.

Richardson (1998, 2017) provides further discussions on intimate/sexual citizenship based on sexual rights. She defines the concept of citizenship under three main categories: "Rights to participate in sexual activity (conduct-based), rights to pleasure (relationship-based), and rights the sexual self-determination (identity-based)". Yip (2008) borrows and expand on Richardson's theoretical views on intimate/sexual citizenship to develop further discussions. His more focused arguments are connected with the criticism of "the institutionalisation of heterosexuality" and development of the "de-heterosexualiz[ation] of the concept of citizenship" (Yip, 2008).

Intimate/sexual citizenship redefines the concept and understanding of citizenship within social and political contexts. In this sense, non-heterosexual Muslims obtain and adapt their self-definition and their development of their individual sexual identities within the public gaze. We can see several examples of the expression of their identity, self-definition (from Richardson's sub-categories) and development of new stories (Weeks' conceptual process) from their public presence.

Yip (2008: 59) contributes to several key arguments that provide details about how non-heterosexual Muslim identity is investigated within the concept of intimate/sexual citizenship. His analysis includes four different "inter-related" points, which are ethnic, religious, sexuality and gender. Orthodox Islamic thought confirms heterosexuality as acceptable and the ideal sexuality. Therefore, non-heterosexuality initiates a discussion compounding religious and cultural contexts. Non-heterosexual Muslims generally struggle to embrace openly and legitimately their "belong[ing] to their own community" and their "acceptance of their counter-normative sexuality". However, according to Yip, some non-heterosexual Muslim activists can switch their stigmatised identities and marginalised lifestyles with the engaging concept of intimate/sexual citizenship. This switch includes the queering religious texts, finding support networks, and approaching theoretical and social capitals.

From Yip's discussions, community plays crucial roles in the expression of non-heterosexual Muslim identity in terms of intimate citizenship. Scholars like Hamzić (2016), Kugle (2014) and Mir-Hosseini and Hamzić (2010) highlight the importance of "activism" or "belonging" in the community. I borrow "adopting religious politics" from Kugle to explain how activism and belonging in support groups can be utilized as another strategy to recast Islamic theology in terms of coping with hegemonic discourse and representing openly non-heterosexuals.

Religious beliefs and values can encourage non-heterosexual Muslims to take part in political movements and apply the conceptual thought of intimate/sexual citizenship in their political standing. Therefore, some transgender, lesbian and gay Muslims can engage in their religion by activism. They create "strategies" and "motivations" to interact among religious political movements, and adapt them to secure non-heterosexual/homosexual and transgender rights and their social presence. Thus, many activists from the United States, United Kingdom and Western Europe produce a more engaging way of representing their sexual and religious identities through the involvement in support groups for non-heterosexual Muslims.

Various studies have emphasized non-heterosexual Muslims have not engaged with religion through their sexual identity (Yip, 2005, 2004; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2014; Yip and Nynäs, 2016). Their lived religious experiences can be empowered with their ethno-religious background. Therefore, they are able to decompose religious practices (Naz Project, 1999; Yip, 2004). Islamic attitudes towards criticizing goodness and badness can be diverse depending on the cultural background in the Muslim world.<sup>2</sup> However, like other belief systems, there is a consensus among scholars about classical Islamic thought. Shannahan (2010) claims traditional Islamic perspective has historically represented the patriarchal body, so several queer Muslim communities have reviewed patriarchal religious texts and developed non-heterosexual friendly religious perspectives (Yip, 2004, 2005; Shannahan, 2010; El-Tayeb, 2012).

However, the important point is that faith-based queer communities have built a bridge between religious and sexual identities, linking queering groups and confronting queer communities. Nevertheless, non-heterosexual people who have a particular faith can come across bi-dimensional homophobia because of their sexual and religious identity from both religious and non-religious communities.

For Jaspal (2016: 74-75), "religious and cultural homophobia" encourages assimilation and causes negative emotional expressions such as "shame, guilt, anger and fear" in the lives of non-heterosexuals. They can be motivated by homophobia either in their religious community or ethnic background (Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010: 16). The main reason for this is "patriarchal social structure". Islam highlights differences between two sexes with dissimilar gender roles constructed by other cultural and religious structures. Therefore, even now there is a number of developing discourses about diverse sexuality in Islamic thought. For some Muslim cultures, e.g. in Middle

<sup>2</sup> One might desire more specific details regarding the geographical locations of these Muslim cultures. However, the theorists do not provide these details in their publications.

Eastern countries which follow Sharia Law, Islam and non-heterosexuality are “irreconcilable” and “incompatible” dimensions.

As seen from current discussions, there is still a huge academic gap in the discussion on non-heterosexual Muslim identity and intimate/sexual citizenship. Even though progressive Islamic discourse enhances new and inclusive places for non-heterosexual Muslims, non-heterosexual Muslim identity still seems contradictory and ambivalent in terms of the “rights to self-definition”, “rights to self-realization” and “right to develop new narratives about personal life” with their sexual identity and spirituality.

#### Conclusion and Further Direction Remarks

In this paper, I focus on diverse progressive efforts of non-heterosexual Muslims and reflect on how same-sex intimacy is re-concentrated in terms of intimate/sexual citizenship within the Muslim community and public gaze. In this respect, we can interpret the non-heterosexual Muslim identity as a form of citizenship.

The aims in this paper surround the presence of non-heterosexual Muslims regarding the concept of intimate/sexual citizenship. There is no doubt the traditional Islamic understanding of non-heterosexuality problematizes the non-heterosexual Muslim position in cultural and legal contexts. Therefore, the legal and cultural requests of non-heterosexual Muslims for intimate/sexual citizenship are underestimated with a sense of “acceptance” and “belonging” in both their community and in broader Western society (Yip, 2004, 2005, 2008). Nevertheless, these ongoing debates in progressive Islamic discourse establish their recognition by way of providing and improving sexually sensitive religious thought. In this sense, non-heterosexual Muslims obtain, develop and have rights to express their gender and multiple/hybrid identities, to interpret the Islam in an inclusive way and to provide discussions on destigmatized views about their self. These debates have contributed to new opinions and discussions regarding additional Muslim identities and have negotiated justices in “multiple”, “multi-dimensional” and more “integral” concepts. Related to these concepts, we also need to consider the impact of intimate citizenship on the level of cultural citizenship, the “right to be different and entitlements” (Richardson, 1998: 84; Pakulski, 1997: 83). The concept of cultural citizenship provides a new discussion based on intimacy, gender, social inclusion and exclusion. Several narrative studies of Muslim societies show younger generations opine the Muslim identity as integrated, coexisting and negotiable compared to older generations (Yip, 2005). Hence, there is a significantly diverse opinion on the acceptance of non-heterosexual Muslims within the context of their community. Although that gradual progress shows the citizenship of non-heterosexual Muslims with regard to their gender and ethnic backgrounds, their sexuality is still stigmatized and rejected by the religious community.

This paper also raises important questions concerning how intimate citizenship is used and interpreted as a concept in the Muslim community. The absence of non-heterosexual Muslim identity from studies on intimate citizenship, as in the case of sexual rights, provides discussions around their sexual identity and citizenship. Could non-heterosexual Muslims engage with ‘general’ institutional citizenship? How do these people negotiate their multi-dimensional identities in terms of the concept of citizenship? In this respect, which concepts of citizenship establish the discussion for such groups who are criminalized and refused in their community? Do Muslim communities seek to establish cultural rights and social justice for these groups concerning nationhood and cultural representation? These and many other questions need to be investigated in further studies to provide an in-depth understanding of the presence of non-heterosexual Muslims and their social and legal rights within private and public contexts.

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