The closet, encounters and lived religion: reflections on the experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the paucity of research at the intersections of geographies of religion, ethnicity and sexuality by exploring the lived experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims. Discourses concerning British Muslim sexualities all too often frame British Muslims as antithetical to the celebration and progression of sexual minorities, while rarely providing the space for them to share their own accounts and practices. Drawing on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 19 LGBT+ British Muslims, I use an intersectional approach informed by black and postcolonial feminism to analyse how they experience and negotiate what are often framed and judged as oppositional minority religious, ethnic and sexual identities and communities. I contend that LGBT+ British Muslims understand and respond to the conflicts and relations of power across different spatial contexts and their scalar relationships in ways that are meaningful to them without subscribing to linear, teleological constructions. I highlight the discursive, spatial and embodied contexts that regulate their sexualities and develop understandings of closet geographies by attending to the multi-scalar, intersectional and intergenerational relations of LGBT+ British Muslim experiences that disrupt binary and individualised notions of the closet. By paying attention to how power operates across different domains and social and political contexts, I show how urban encounters make difference, aggregate temporalities and condition senses of belonging and their assertions. Further, I problematise secularist representations of LGBT+ identities and institutionalised and cultural logics of religious homophobia by analysing how LGBT+ British Muslims maintain affiliation with Islam through everyday practices of faith that may not be theologically ordained but nevertheless develop capacities for developing religious agency and affirmation of their different identities. By highlighting experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims, I address their extant absence within geographic research and demonstrate their negotiations of different everyday contexts that contour exclusion.

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the value of critical insight and education. For insisting I take food back to university when I was back home. For offering fantastic grants at the bank of Mum! For showing patience when I incessantly asked 'Why?'. Most of all, for love. Always, x

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Since January 2019, a group of Muslim parents in Birmingham, England have waged campaigns against lessons on Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender+ (LGBT+) relationships and identities at the primary schools that their young children attend (BBC, 2019a). Seeking to protect them from education they see as opposing Islamic principles, the parents have relied upon and circulated discourses of Islam that sanction only heterosexuality, constructing other sexualities as morally and theologically abhorrent. The concerns and protests spread across both the city of Birmingham and nationwide, and one parent referred to the lessons as 'proselytising a homosexual way of life to children' and claimed homosexual relationships are not valid (BBC, 2019b). The loaded language used is deeply disconcerting but positioning LGBT+ identities as incompatible with Islam is, however, neither clear within the Qur'an, as different interpretations lead to theological ambiguity (Kligerman, 2007; Kugle, 2010), nor an inherent characteristic of Muslim subjectivity. The inclusion of lessons about LGBT+ relationships and the protests against them, framed through rhetoric that marginalises LGBT+ identities within Islam, demonstrates that homophobia remains a pertinent issue to be tackled in the UK, particularly among British Muslim communities that may construct homosexuality as unacceptable (Siraj, 2009).

Writing about the incidents and homophobia in the UK, Llewellyn (2019) warns that 'many of the headlines have focused on the apparent polarisation of religious and LGBTQ+ rights…which makes the dangerous assumption that LGBTQ+ and religion are mutually exclusive'. Relatedly, the Islamic Human Rights Commission (2019) has voiced concerns over the media's reporting of the row, suggesting a reliance on Islamophobic tropes of Muslims being intolerant and rebellious. The misreporting of Muslims and Muslim sexualities is hardly a recent phenomenon though (Kabbani, 1986; Said, 1997; Phillips, 2012). Indeed, widespread representations and stories abound of the apparent sexual difficulties and anxieties of British Muslims (Chambers et al., 2018). Erroneously posed between the sexual repression of Islam and a sexually liberated, secular British society, critical accounts of their sexual identities, practices and desires are, however, seldom grounded in first-hand, empirical accounts. This

presents a troubling paradox where their experiences are misrecognised, misrepresented and misunderstood, yet amplified and distorted within a media canon that uncritically, and all too often, perpetuates a sense of absolute cultural and religious differences. Clearer still is that such rhetoric paints Muslims as sexually illiberal and tends towards a culturalisation of sexual rights and identities that can *other* Muslims, on grounds of their religious backgrounds and 'backwards' heritage (Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens, 2010). Such contexts are laced with the potential for far-right groups to make the instrumental move to misappropriate these representations and propagate the sense that Islam is 'intolerant of sexual minorities' (Pilkington, 2017: 250). Mughal (2019) warns us of this in his critique of the hypocrisy espoused by Muslim parents defending the protection of race and religious discrimination but calling for the removal of lessons about LGBT+ people.

In such a tense political and social context, it seems Muslims that identify as LGBT+ are betwixt and between such representations and positions and they have been largely absent in these debates. Looking to counter this absence, Mir (2019) reported from four LGBT+ British Muslims who highlight the importance of having LGBT+ lessons, with one interviewee feeling 'caught in the middle between the Muslim community and the LGBT+ community'. Similarly, a BBC (2019c) feature included a short video with LGBT+ British Muslims who suggest they have unique voices because of their identities as sexual and religious minorities caught in such crossfires. The limited number of narratives from LGBT+ British Muslims in the national press during these protests are symptomatic, I feel, of their more general invisibility within religious, ethnic and LGBT+ communities. Existing work on LGBT+ British Muslims (Yip, 2008; Jaspal, 2012; Siraj, 2012) highlights the invisibilities they experience within these different communities and the challenges and inequalities they resultantly face. This work has demonstrated that representations and positions that depict Islam and LGBT+ sexualities as incompatible are inconsistent with the narratives of LGBT+ British Muslims. Nevertheless, this existing work makes clear that such experiences are fraught with homophobia, racism, Islamophobia and the concomitant relations of belonging and inclusion.

I highlight these examples because they demonstrate the politicisation of sexual rights and the contestations against these. But importantly, the history of celebrating LGBT+ rights or at least promoting these as part of British values is relatively new (Vanderbeck

and Johnson, 2016) . Forgetting these histories or the hypocrisies when considering the Birmingham schools row is symbolic of widespread amnesia within the national collective. As Gilroy argues (2004), but more specifically in relation to race and ethnicity, British colonial and postcolonial histories are largely mystified and absent from mainstream historical narratives and there is a large-scale refusal to consider how these structure contemporary Britain. Similarly, to disregard the convoluted histories of sexual rights but to then broadcast and contrast these against essentialised representations of Islam and Muslim communities, as the media depictions might do and the far-right certainly do, only works to signify difference and division (Phillips, 2012). Using these to distinguish British values against Muslim communities repackages racism as concerned with unbridgeable cultural division and difference. Static images of these communities are formed then that mark sexual minorities within these as potential victims of illiberal religious and cultural mores (Puar, 2007) and as further proof of their insurmountability within Britain.

But as the features by Mir (2019) and the BBC (2019c) that I mentioned earlier highlight, LGBT+ British Muslims may experience being caught in the middle of these discourses and misunderstandings but their consistent affiliation with Islam and faith is important, as are their ethnic communities. The academic work that I explore later attests to this too. LGBT+ British Muslims do not simply shed religious and ethnic identities and communities in order to reveal and revel in their sexualities, and fold into the models of sexuality or Britishness espoused by the historical amnestic representations that travel. Such representations are further limited as well where they lack the voices of LGBT+ British Muslims and the plurality of their experiences. Protecting children from homophobic rhetoric is deeply important, but just as necessary is the case to protect them from simplifying tropes and discourses that position Islam and Muslim communities as backwards and in tension with British values. A necessary way forward therefore is including more voices from those within these crossfires; put crisply, that is what my thesis is interested in. It seeks to explore how LGBT+ British Muslims, as religious, sexual and ethnic minorities, negotiate and manage intersecting discourses and identities, and lived contexts of homophobia, racism and religious discrimination within contemporary Britain. It works to highlight their belonging and exclusions, their contradictions and assertions, and their workings of power to manage identities and divisions.

By challenging simple depictions through an empirical account of the lived experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims, I present an altogether more textured analysis of how their identities and practices intersect with each other and their social and political contexts. My aim is not to provide a corrective of representations of LGBT+ British Muslims, however important such a task may be. Rather, I seek to provide windows into and grounded readings of the complexities, contradictions and nuances of the lives some LGBT+ British Muslims lead. Thus, this thesis is an endeavour that seeks to provide new geographic understandings about particular forms, negotiations and intersections of Muslim sexualities. Having introduced some general context, the remainder of this chapter provides the research questions, and academic context and anchoring of the project, before moving on to outline the arguments and structure of the thesis.

1.2 Research questions

1) *How do LGBT+ British Muslims experience the heteronormativity of Islamic sexual discourses and their religious and ethnic communities?*

2) *How do the intersections of LGBT+, Muslim and ethnic identities form experiences of being in 'the closet' for Muslims, and how does this shape, and is shaped by, spaces and processes of in/exclusion?*

3) *In what ways do encounters of difference shape perceptions of belonging to different communities for LGBT+ British Muslims?*

4) *How do LGBT+ Muslims practice Islam to reconcile marginalised identities and the discriminations they face?*

1.3. Islam and LGBT+ sexualities

1.3.1 Interpreting Islam's position on homosexuality
According to Eidhamar (2014), Islamic traditionalists justify the explicit endorsement of heteronormativity via the Qur'an and its authoritative stance on the sanctity of heterosexual marriage (*nikah*). As the main source of Islamic jurisprudence, Muslims are expected to abide by the teachings of the Qur'an, with deviance from it deemed to be a revolt against Allah (Bouhdiba, 1998). The story of Lot is often used to justify Islam's disavowal of non-heterosexuality (Habib, 2010) and it is worth providing a short

overview to provide some context to its interpretations. In the Qur'an, Lot is recounted as a prophet sent to Sodom and Gomorrah, twin cities within which the inhabitants engaged in deviant behaviour that violated the morals laid down by Allah and his messengers (Noegel, 2010). This included theft, rape (including male rape), adultery and violence, as well as inhospitality towards visitors. According to El-Rouayheb (2005), many Islamic scholars include same-sex male relations as vices the residents engaged in for justifying the condemnation of homosexuality, while others argue it was male rape rather than same-sex male relations that were examples of deviant behaviour (Kugle, 2010; Shannahan, 2010). Having being sent to the cities to encourage the inhabitants to halt their immoral ways and acting as a forewarning, Lot's preaching was not met with the intended outcomes of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah changing their ways and, as a result, two angels were sent to Lot disguised as handsome male visitors that piqued the lustful fantasies of the people of the two cities (Noegel, 2010). Due to the assertions by the residents that the two visitors surrender themselves for sexually licentious motives, Lot offered his two virgin daughters which was met with refusal. This resulted in the angels revealing themselves to Lot and commanding him to leave with his daughters for they were tasked with destroying the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as a result of the refusal of the residents to change their improper ways (Noegel, 2010).

Heteronormative readings of Lot define homosexuality as sinful, revolts against Allah and defilements against the true nature of sexuality which is outlined in accordance with a dualistic model of the roles of the sexes- the notion of *zawj* which refers to the complementarity and unison of men and women (Yip, 2004). This binary model, as Yip (2004:338) suggests, reflects the understanding that the 'Islamic worldview is that of bivalence and dual relations, which upholds the opposition of contraries'. As such, for strong literalist readings of the Qur'an, same-sex acts and sexualities contrary to the norms of heterosexuality are rejected and deemed unlawful within Islam (Kligerman, 2007). Aligning with such a stance, Bouhdiba (1998) suggests *zina*- heterosexual acts and intercourse outside of nikah- and homosexuality are opposite poles along a spectrum of deviant sexual practices. Though he suggests zina is morally wrong, it superficially does not resist the Islamic rules surrounding sexual acts to the same extent as homosexuality, which is seen to challenge the complementarity of the two sexes and resist the fundamental aspect of Islamic sexual conduct which is procreation within nikah (Bouhdiba, 1998; Green and Numrich, 2001).

However, outside of strongly traditionalist standards of approaching non-heterosexuality within Islam, efforts have been made to develop milder, as well as more positive understandings of LGBT+ sexualities interpreted through Islamic theology (Jamal, 2001; Kugle, 2010). For Jamal (2001), the story of Lot is misappropriated and Lot's people were punished for a host of immoral sins, suggesting they were not just condemned because of same-sex relations but also their negative stance and inhospitality towards the Prophet Lot. Jamal's (2001) position is more moderate and does not present as trenchant a position as Bouhdiba's but is still somewhat negative. Similar to some positions within Catholicism (Jordan, 2000) and Anglicanism (Andersson et al., 2012), there is a distinction made between predilection and practice, sin and sinner: for Jamal, 'the focus of the Qur'an is on the sexual act or behaviour itself, and not necessarily on the orienatation' (2001: 70). As Andersson et al. (2012) assert though, such positions and discourses are hardly positive and indicate a power imbalance that is predicated upon quelling homosexuality rather than an acceptance and celebration of it in its various guises.

Kugle (2003, 2007; 2010), on the other hand, interprets homosexuality within Islam positively through highlighting the lack of condemnation of homosexuality in the Qur'an. For Kugle (2003), the parable of Lot and punishment is less concerned with same-sex relations than it is greed, rape, violence and inhospitality. Instead, Kugle (2010) argues that the ambiguity of the parable of Lot, with regards to same-sex relations, and the absence of wholly clear disapproval within the Qur'an means there is space for LGBT+ Muslims to live without fear of condemnation through appropriations of classic Islamic theology. Furthermore, Kugle (2003; 2010) argues that homosexual predilections are Allah's conceptions and views the Qur'an as sex-positive, extending its positive evaluations across Islam more generally. By doing so, Kugle (2010; 2014) works to provide more affirming standpoints in the hope that LGBT+ Muslims can develop such positions to help them resist the heterosexist biases of mainstream Islamic hermeneutics. However, despite Kugle's (2003; 2007; 2010) endeavours opening up hegemonic stances to critiques and (re)interpretations, the diffusion of his assessments within mainstream Muslim spaces and communities has been rather limited and reluctantly embraced, as existing work on the lived experiences of LGBT+ Muslims that I now turn to subtly reveals.

1.3.2 Exploring extant work on LGBT+ Muslim lives

The normative framework of sexuality in Islam focuses on the complementarity of men and women (Bouhdiba, 1998; Eidhamar, 2014) and work with LGBT+ Muslims in the West has highlighted the complex relations and practices that must be negotiated due to such a framework and how it intersects with other contexts (Yip, 2004; Minwalla et al., 2005; Rouhani, 2007; Abraham, 2009; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011; Siraj, 2016). Within much of this work, there has been a broad understanding of the concurrence of ethno-religious factors- such as marriage, respect for elders, izzat (honour) and close kinship networks- and theological condemnations that constitute the frameworks through which LGBT+ Muslims in the West negotiate their sexuality. According to Siraj (2012: 450), LGBT+ Muslims 'inhabit a social, cultural, and religious context that is deeply homophobic' and being LGBT+ is positioned as oppositional to the values and practices of their ethnic cultures. Reconciling Islam and their sexual identities, as well as how the latter problematises expectations of their ethnic communities, is therefore complicated (Siraj, 2016), made more so given how Muslims are often portrayed as homophobic, as well as the growing ills of Islamophobia and racism within the West- social and political contexts that LGBT+ Muslims must navigate (Abraham, 2009; Sabsay, 2012). Religious and cultural discourses of sexuality and their lived experiences intersect with Islamophobia and racism, and homophobia more broadly, and how LGBT+ Muslims work to reconcile these oppositional discourses and challenges is not so conducive to the normative representations and understandings of LGBT+ and Muslim identities (Rahman, 2010).

The heteronormative model of sex complementarity problematises LGBT+ practices and identities for Muslims (Siraj, 2009). Minority sexual identities and gender diversity pose a challenge to normative gender roles within Islam which determine marriage as a social and religious obligation (Yip, 2004) and men as the head of the family (Siraj, 2010). LGBT+ Muslims must negotiate such a challenge carefully. According to Yip (2008), the prospect of heterosexual marriage is a significant barrier for Muslim lesbians and bisexual women because it is entrenched within both the religious and ethnic communities of most Muslims. As per the complementarity of the two sexes (men and women) in Islamic sexual discourses (Yip, 2004; 2008), there are particular roles and expectations of Muslim men and women. Foremost in these are expectations of heterosexual marriage and linear understandings of what this entails such as procreation and the maintenance of religious ideals within the home and through

younger generations (Bouhdiba, 1998). Traditional ideas or interpretations of the Qur'an with respect to gender roles place importance upon highlighting what Dahl (1997) suggests is the naturalness of the heterosexual, nuclear family, with men deemed to be heads and protectors of these and positioned as breadwinners, whilst women are expected to situate themselves within domestic spaces and family labour. These rather conservative interpretations, therefore, create gendered hierarchies that have implications for how Muslim men and women understand, negotiate and do gender. Siraj (2010), for example, notes how both Muslim men and women enacted gender hierarchies in the context of the family home to maintain order within this space.

Widespread interpretations of sex complementarity mean a formidable barrier is presented for LGBT+ Muslims. However, other contexts also intersect and breed complexity with regards to negotiating their sexual identities. Unlike individualised models/notions of 'coming out' which can problematically assume linear progressions of sexuality towards disclosure, celebration and relationships (Shapiro, Rios and Stewart, 2010), religious, social and cultural norms can not only condemn LGBT+ identities and practices for LGBT+ Muslims themselves, but also family and kinship networks that might be shunned or rejected on the basis of honour being compromised as a result of a family member's non-heterosexuality (Hooghe et al., 2010). According to Siraj (2009), understandings and representations of homosexuality are generally negative, complementing Yip's (2004; 2008) assertion that in Muslim communities, perceptions that expressions of gay identity and culture are symptoms of a promiscuous and morally degenerate Western culture are widely held. Yip (2008: 105) states that an out LGBT+ Muslim may not only be viewed as 'morally corrupt, but also a traitor…of cultural and religious purity'. Thus, a religious and ethnic context of homonegativity (re)produces relations of power that mean LGBT+ Muslims may be hesitant to disclose their sexualities (Jaspal, 2012; Siraj, 2016). Across the work with LGBT+ Muslims, reflections on their ethnic communities, as well as religious discourses, highlighted that these could work to limit their sexual subjectivities (Yip, 2008; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011; Siraj, 2012). Fears of rejection, shame and even violence underscored decisions to limit disclosure of their sexual identities to parents and wider family/community members (Jaspal, 2012).

Intersecting religious and cultural contexts of belonging are therefore carefully sustained, for fear that disclosure could negatively affect their families and kinship

networks. Some of the gay Muslim men that Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) worked with also suggested gay identities and practices were components of British culture, engaging with similar discourses that Yip (2004; 2008) outlines are common. For these participants, positioning gay identities within the socio-cultural context of the West helped them to rid themselves of guilt. Such perceptions of guilt and shame are common across the work with LGBT+ Muslims (Yip, 2004; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010; Siraj, 2012). A belief that Islam is wholly disapproving of same-sex relations is consistent and can be a significant cause for the conflicts between their religious and sexual identities (Siraj, 2012), conditioning a sense of incompatibility of Muslim and minority sexuality identities. Despite many LGBT+ Muslims signaling such a viewpoint in these studies, others also reflected that their sexualities were made by Allah (Kugle, 2014) and such essentialist thinking enabled them to contest the rigidities of oppositional discourses that are normatively applied and spread (Yip and Khalid, 2010). Adopting this thinking may work to help them reconcile their identities within more positive interpretations but also reduces the friction or distance between Islam and their sexualities, at the same time as being alert to the incoherence that may still exist in discourses of LGBT+ sexualities in Muslim communities and their own LGBT+ identities (Yip and Khalid, 2010).

Although the work cited within this section helpfully demonstrates the religious and cultural factors that inhibit LGBT+ Muslim subjectivities in Britian, while simultaneously providing more visible and accurate representations of these, they largely do so with regards to specific focuses on the individual or with little insight into the spatial relations of social structures (Yip, 2004, 2008; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011; Siraj, 2011; 2012; 2016). Indeed, the social and political contexts within which LGBT+ Muslims live their lives are rarely explored in great detail beyond cursory nods to them (c.f Rouhani, 2007; Abraham, 2009). Here, the emphasis has been on individual aspects of identity formation and identity reconciliation despite brief acknowledgements of experiences and backdrops of racism and Islamophobia. Such settings are very important to understand and inattentiveness to how specific power relations work within and across different social and political contexts means the lived experiences of LGBT+ Muslims are not as fully comprehended. In this respect, developing deeper analysis as to how LGBT+ Muslims negotiate different contexts of belonging and communities, and how these intersect with religious discourse, is important to establish.

Providing insights into the religious discourses and interpretations that censure non-heterosexuality for LGBT+ Muslims, as well as highlighting the cultural expectations and values within the ethnic communities that intersect with these, existing work has also sought to demonstrate the understandings, strategies and practices that LGBT+ Muslims use to affirm their identities (Yip, 2008; Yip and Khalid, 2010; Siraj, 2012). As touched on above, asserting that their sexualities are made by Allah can help LGBT+ Muslims come to terms with these identities, rather than seeing these as stigmatised effects of Western culture. Through this understanding, LGBT+ Muslims can work to contest the backlash against their sexual identities by their ethno-religious communities through posing themselves as creations of Allah and positing that they are part of Allah's will (Yip, 2008). Likewise, seeing their LGBT+ identities as part of a struggle or test laid down by Allah can help LGBT+ Muslims apply Islamic religious discourses to establish understanding less marked by homophobic censure and distaste (Siraj, 2012). Situating Allah directly as a way to help explain their sexualities means LGBT+ Muslims are not necessarily compelled to exclude themselves despite the othering rhetoric from homophobic members of Muslims communities that straying from heterosexuality is haram (Siraj, 2009). In this respect, LGBT+ Muslims are able to develop more spiritual relations with Allah (Yip and Khalid, 2010) and dismiss a sense that being LGBT+ and Muslim are mutually exclusive identities.

The journeys to affirming the mutuality of LGBT+ and Muslim identities are characterised by working to dispute the disparaging stances on homosexuality. Specifying the ambiguity of the Qur'an's stance on non-heterosexual relations and querying the religious authenticity and translatability of homophobic discourse develops this achievement (Yip, 2008; Kugle, 2014). Concerning the Qur'an, as mentioned before, the story of Lot is used to justify the condemnation of homosexuality. However, given the absence of explicit condemnation of homosexuality within the Qur'an (Kugle, 2010; Ali, 2016), some LGBT+ Muslims do not simply passively consume homophobic discourses but contest them to support their beliefs of being made by Allah (Yip, 2008; Yip and Khalid, 2010; Siraj, 2012). Rebuffing heterosexist analyses of the Qur'an, LGBT+ Muslims develop alternative interpretations of sexuality in order to negotiate the heteronormativity of Islamic sexual discourse. Yip (2005) suggests LGBT+ Muslims do not have the 'theological capital' or support with respect to affirming their sexualities relative to their Christian counterparts, but they are

demonstrably able to reformulate both religious discourse to suit their needs and contest the rigidty of heterosexist and homophobic interpretations of the Qur'an to maintain the importance of faith and affirmation of their sexualities.

A key method for LGBT+ Muslims to develop inclusive interpretations of their identities is through establishing contact with other LGBT+ Muslims (Rouhani, 2007; Yip and Khalid, 2010; Siraj, 2012). Reinterpreting heterosexist social and political discourses of sexual ethics included in the Quran or simply as a way to contest isolation, joining LGBT+ Muslim groups can help members to support one another and may act as safe environments in which to explore the intersections of Islam and sexuality (Siraj, 2012). According to Yip (2008), emergent LGBT+ Muslim networks are more useful for attending to the specific issues of LGBT+ Muslims than the broader, generally secular, LGBT+ community (Yip, 2018). Some of the participants that Yip (2008) interviewed joined a group set up to support lesbian, bisexual and transgender Muslim women, and online and print resources helped empower members and raise awareness of their distinct needs and issues. Such spaces can help them develop theological and religious-social capital, both of which are largely embryonic.

Heterosexist biases which influence life for LGBT+ Muslims may be somewhat mediated by seeking to reinterpret religious discourse and developing supportive LGBT+ Muslim networks. However, environments of the latter still have their own prejudices and power relations that may construct exclusion for some LGBT+ Muslims. Yip and Khalid (2010: 107) found that religiosity, gender and sexuality were all policed within one of the support networks for LGBT+ Muslims. Female members experienced disdain at an alleged lack of piety, as well as gender inequalities that imitated the patriarchal moral governance by heterosexual Muslims in respect of veiling and expecting female members to conform to repressed sexualities. Men, on the other hand, could 'check out men'. According to Yip and Khalid (2010), masculinity and femininity were structured along hegemonic gendered expectations which had the resulting effect of excluding transgender Muslims. Despite the aims of being communal spaces, the promotion of idealised Islamic norms of gender and piety alert us to the conflicts and challenges that may occur within existing support networks aimed explicitly at LGBT+ Muslims. Developing support and representation for LGBT+ Muslims is patently important given the exclusions they face within their religious and ethnic communities, as well as within LGBT+ spaces. However, the exclusions and

inequalities that they face inside and outside of these networks can complicate belonging to different spaces and communities and problematise their experiences further.

This section has explored some of the key literatures on the interpretations of LGBT+ sexualities within Islam, the expectations and importance of dual gender roles in Islam, and the experiences of LGBT+ Muslims and their composite attempts to merge heterosexist theological interpretations, family pressures, and cultural and religious values expected within their communities. These have been significant for offering understandings of the condemnation of their sexualities- practices that are not explicitly religiously endorsed- and the marginalities that LGBT+ Muslims face in their everyday lives. Existing work has helpfully pointed out the complex experiences of LGBT+ Muslims having to negotiate significant structural, theological and interpersonal domains of power and the ways in which they seek to overcome these. However, within much of this empirical research- though filling empirical and conceptual voids- there is limited understanding about how geographic considerations of space and scale can shape social phenomena. In respect of this, I agree with Hubbard (2018: 2) who states that 'At times this occlusion is unproblematic, but at others it appears that sexual practice and identity are being subject to a violent abstraction, with the researcher forgetting that sexuality always has a geography as well as a biography'. The important contributions that geographers of sexualities have made in relation to the socio-spatial dynamics of sexualities is vital to foreground in considerations of LGBT+ British Muslim experiences- to better situate and understand their lives within their spatial and scalar contexts and intersections. Furthermore, reflections on how contemporary social and political contexts are shaped by postcolonial questions, encounters and relationships are largely left unobserved and so limit the specificities of the important understandings that these contributions have offered forward in exploring the lives of LGBT+ Muslims. Before expounding upon some of these critiques further, I synthesise how geographers working to explore Muslim lives have charted their experiences in order to more persuasively support my critiques of the existing work on LGBT+ Muslim lives, and how my thesis builds on combining both strands of this extant work.

1.4 Geographic work on Muslims

1.4.1 Gendered Muslim identities and understandings

Research on Muslims in the West represents a key engagement with religious individuals within the sub-field of geographies of religion (Aitchison, Hopkins and Kwan, 2007; Hopkins, 2009; Hopkins and Gale, 2009). Since the new millennium, negative representations and discourses have refreshed their 'Other' status in the West and shaped the racialisation of Islam (Dunn, Klocker and Sabsay, 2007; Meer, 2013a), though negative representations and (mis)understandings of Muslims has been a long-standing concern (Said, 1997). Within geography, researchers have sought to explore the lives of Muslims, influenced by feminist geographic analyses of multi-scalar geopolitical issues, everyday spaces and gendered relations (Hopkins, 2008a; 2009). These have focused on a range of issues, such as veiling (Secor, 2002), neighbourhood spaces (Phillips, D 2006; Phillips, Davis and Ratcliffe, 2007; Ehrkamp, 2008; Gale, 2013), Muslim femininities (Dwyer, 1999a,1999b; Najib and Hopkins, 2019) and masculinities (Hopkins, 2004; 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2008a), homes (Mohammad, 2005; Phillips, 2009), university experiences (Hopkins, 2011; Peek, 2003), mosque spaces and constructions (Dunn, 2005; Gale, 2005; Simonsen, Neergaard and Koefoed, 2019), and transnational flows of religious identities and moralities (Silvey, 2007) amongst others. As such, existing work has attentively explored how Muslims experience everyday spaces and the implications for their understandings of religious identities, as well as other identities and the specificities of space and place in shaping these.

A focus on the gendered nature and relations of Muslim identities has been a chief trend in geographic work with Muslims. In the context of the spaces of the home for Muslims, for instance, gendered expectations and practices can dominate. Homes have been increasingly important to understand within geographic work which acknowledge them as both material sites of dwelling and also spaces of meaning, emotion and memory that are simultaneously lived and imagined, and may be within one place or numerous (Blunt and Varley, 2004; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Whilst the space of the home is often represented as a private space that is comforting and crucial in forging a sense of self and identity (Blunt and Dowling, 2006), feminist geographic literature has also highlighted the blurriness of public/private divides in the home, the spatial divisions of labour that might occur within it and the potential for it to be constrictive, and co-constitutively conducive to oppression and inequality (McDowell,

1999; McNamee et al., 2003; Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003; Blunt, 2005). Work on experiences of home for Muslim men and women by geographers has demonstrated some of the inconsistencies and multiple meanings of home that the above work has also highlighted.

For Muslim women, the home is often represented as a crucial space for the downwards-generational transmission of religious and cultural values and expectations in which religious agency- which for many Muslim women situates itself at home- and capital can often be built. (Mohammad, 2005; Brown, 2006). According to Ansari (2004), discourses about Western Muslim women in the space of the home generally depict them as passive, docile and lacking agency. Efforts to contest such representations have highlighted the contextual negotiation of gendered expectations and discourses of Muslim femininities in the space of the home. Mohammad's (2005) work suggests that though Muslim women are expected to perform religious and cultural identities and practices in the space of the home, many do so in ways that skillfully negotiate the complex connections of 'a matrix of discourses' (2005: 180), and lend themselves to varied emotions and senses of home, local, national and religious belonging. Thus, whilst upholding discourses of gender complementarity rooted in traditional interpretations of Islamic theology (Bouhdiba, 1998), Muslim women's gender identities are not solely configured through religious ideals, but by local and national affiliations too and senses of belonging through which they project a modern sense of what it means to be a British Muslim woman (Mohammad, 2015). This also relates to work on arranged marriages that demonstrates the shifting contemporary contours of practices of marriage and love through which national and transnational identities and forms of belonging have been highlighted as central to the modernisation and design of arranged marriages to suit younger South Asian women's needs and aspirations (Pande, 2014; 2015). Such work by postcolonial feminist geographers highlight erroneous representations and the multiple discourses at play, negotiations of these, and the need to respond to simplistic stereotypes in order to capture how young British Muslims negotiate experiences of home and the expectations that go with them.

Cognisant of the way in which experiences and meanings of homes are underpinned by a complex set of relationships between different identities, Phillips (2009: 25) suggests Muslim women's senses of belonging at home are formed relative to 'local

and national media and political discourses, which have variously constructed Muslim women as victims of an oppressive Islamist regime and unaccommodating cultural. Through focus groups with Muslim women from Bradford, Oldham and Rochdale, Phillips (2009) builds on her earlier work on British Asian and Muslim narratives of urban spaces (Phillips, D 2006; Phillips, Davis and Ratcliffe, 2007). Highlighting how Muslim women expressed multiple notions and evocations of home that buttressed Islamic identities, whilst also showing agency in setting up homes away from established neighbourhood spaces amongst other practices, Phillips (2009) stresses how expressions of self are intimately bound up within both material and affective/imaginary spaces of the home.

Importantly, Phillips also demonstrates the gendered relationalities of home: 'The young men in all of the groups presented gendered discourses on…the everyday dwelling-spaces of the home as 'women's space' (2009: 26). Thus, Phillips' work on the gendered space of the home not only highlights how different geographic scales relate to and connect different places to one another to influence experiences of home as noted earlier, but also complements Hopkins (2006; 2008) work on the relationalities of Muslim masculinities and intergenerational relations within the home, whereby young Scottish Muslim men suggested the home was primarily a space for Muslim women. Further, both Hopkins (2006; 2008) and Phillips, D. (2006; 2009) show how local, national and global events have shaped geographies of home in particular ways such that some of the Muslim men in Hopkins's study, for example, retreated to the material site of home in the face of perceived and real cases of racism and Islamophobia.

Another important spatial context through which gendered Muslim identities have been approached is through the site of the neigbourhood and communities within these. Muslim communities can be vital sources of social, political and religious capital for Muslims (Khan, 2000: Phillips, D. 2006; Phillips, Davis and Ratcliffe, 2007). Work by Dwyer (1999a) highlights contradictory understandings of Asian communities for young British Asian Muslim women. Dwyer explored how her participants expressed positive attributes about their local Asian community- through perceptions of not feeling 'out of place' and safety, local provisions, and friends and family- whilst also voicing concerns over the gaze of the local community and the masculisation of neighbourhood spaces through Muslim men, who were seen to construct certain

gendered expectations of how young Muslim women should conduct themselves in public. Recent work by Phillips (2015) on British Muslims negotiations of urban citizenship has also demonstrated the gendered nature of Muslim men's territorial practices of reclaiming urban spaces in Bradford from newly arrived Eastern European migrants and expressions of dominant masculinities in relation to these.

Much work has also highlighted the role of the body in shaping understandings of local spaces and Muslim identities. Dwyer's (1999a; 1999b) work on veiling and Asian dress highlights how assumptions of these take on ideas of identity that are invariably spatial and linked to the relationships between different local scales such as the home, neighbourhood and schools. Dwyer (1999a; 1999b; 2000) explored how young Muslim women negotiate veiling and Asian dress choice and demonstrated the manner in which ethnicity, gender, religion and sexuality intersect in their everyday lives through the site of the body and how discourses of these shape the materiality of their everyday lives. Dwyer (1999a; 1999b; 2000) argues that young Muslim women attend to these in various capacities that disrupt the discursive binaries that are often represented and thus destabilises the homogeneity of the categories imposed within these debates. Rather, young Muslim women were aware of the context-specific nature of when and where wearing 'Asian' or 'Muslim' dress was deemed suitable; embodied performances of multiple and hybrid identities reworked some of the assumptions and expectations of these in creative ways. Thus, Dwyer's early work earmarked the potential for geographers to explore Muslim femininities and sexualities, and while the former has been suitably recognised and responded to, understandings of the latter and how these intersect with religion, ethnicity and other markers are comparatively and curiously limited.

One of the key issues has been on how young Muslim women understand practices of veiling that potentially earmark them as 'Other' and antithetical to Western societies (Zine, 2006). Anxieties about veiling have reflected long-standing questions about the congruity of Islam within the West and seemingly fix deeply erroneous ideas of a 'clash of civilisations' (Huntington, 1987). However, as Dwyer (1999a; 1999b 2000) demonstrates, young British Muslim women used practices of veiling strategically in order to resist simplistic dichotomies of Islam as oppressive, backwards and conservative and the West as modern and progressive. In doing so, Dwyer highlights the contingent nature of embodied national and ethnic identities within these

negotiations of everyday spaces. However, the young women also demonstrated the relationalities of such identities and representations; young Muslim men were seen to be 'policing' local community spaces and, implicitly, the bodies of young Muslim women. Thus, these reflect how multiple Muslim femininities and masculinities can be conceptualised through ideas of mutuality and relationality, with other social identities intersecting in the processes of identity formation (Hopkins and Noble, 2009).

In parallel, work on Muslim men has also expanded. By understanding the negotiation of religious identities through the specificities of spatial contexts, Hopkins suggests these provide greater insight into 'the complex, multiple and multi-faceted nature of youthful Muslim masculinities (2007a; 338). Unsettling dichotomies of Muslim men as either troublesome, patriarchal and folk devils partaking in gang culture (Alexander, 2000; 2004) or effeminate and academic (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Archer, 2001), Hopkins (2007a; 2007b; 2008) points to the intersections of ethnicity, gender, religion and age as constitutive of everyday Muslim male experiences, highlighting how gender, generation, religion and culture impact upon their understandings of their subjectivities (Hopkins, 2009). The significance of scalar relationships when thinking about how young Muslims experience everyday relations and local and global politics is also emphasised (Hopkins, 2007a; 2007b; 2008).These issues highlight the need to think about the intersections of identities, and beyond these to think about their systems of power and oppression, as they play out in everyday life and the scales at which these are most significant for Muslim men and women. Altogether, though much work has gone into looking at how different identities influence gendered experiences of Muslim identities (Dwyer, 1999; 2000; Hopkins, 2007a; 2008; 2009) and this has been arguably the main direction of research, less work has paid attention to sexualities and how Muslims negotiate these, particularly for those identifying as LGBT+. Plugging this gap is essential to developing further understandings of contemporary British Muslim experiences as I demonstrate further.

1.4.2 Islamophobia, encounters and the everyday geographies and geopolitics of difference

Another key strand of work within geographies of religion has focused on how Muslims experience Islamophobia and racism more generally. According to Hopkins (2019b: 2), 'Geographical studies of Islam and Muslim identities largely emerged from studies of race and racism' and that 'it was only in the late 2000s when we started to see

explicit references to Islamophobia in the geographical literature'. Islamophobia entered into the public lexicon primarily via a report by the Runnymede Trust (1997) and has now become a well-known- if not always particularly well supported- term to describe negative experiences of hostility towards Muslims (Allen, 2010). Key factors that have shaped the usage of the term and its mainstreaming in public and political discourses have been increasing levels of discrimination and prejudice towards Muslims post 9/11 (Karlsen and Nazroo, 2015; TellMAMA, 2016; APPG, 2018), as well as the related securitisation of Islam and Muslims that has had negative consequences for how these are portrayed and understood (Croft, 2012;Hussain and Bagguley, 2012). Anti-Muslim is sometimes used in place of Islamophobia (Scott, 2014) but, while useful for describing interpersonal encounters, omits structural oppressions and inequalities, e.g. those of the securitisation agenda. However, Islamophobia does not only affect Muslims, with followers of other religions and ethnic minorities also having been targeted on account of being misrecognised as Muslim (Hopkins, 2014: Hopkins et al., 2017), while white converts to Islam have reported effectively being 're-racialised' and targeted for being Muslims, hence losing the privilege that their white skin had previously afforded them (Moosavi, 2015). Such experiences highlight the racialisation of Islam and that 'Muslims are perceived as a racialised group…with attendant hostility and discrimination that targets people on the basis of their Muslimness' (Carr and Haynes, 2015: 4).

The definition of Islamophobia offered by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) is somewhat similar. According to the APPG (2018: 11), 'Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness'. I am in agreement with the need for a public definition to help challenge the issue and the necessity to recognise the interrelated issues of religious prejudice and racism. Taras (2013: 431) argues for recognising Islam, ethnicity, race and culture tie together to shape Islamophobia and 'racialization as a category fusing these variables can serve as an explanatory device'. Supporting this contention, Garner and Selod (2015) argue that understanding Islamophobia as an example of the racialisation of a religion and its followers can be used to identify negative beliefs that package Muslims into a monolithic bloc and the outcomes of the processes of racialising heterogeneous groups. Appreciating Islamophobia as intimately connected to racial understandings helps to portray the intersections of religious discrimination, racial, phenotypical and embodied differences, and Otherness shaped by cultural racisms

(Dunn et al.,2007; Meer, 2014). These processes and representations are not new however (Meer, 2014); contemporary forms of Islamophobia build upon a lineage of Orientalised difference and historical interactions where Islam and Muslims are concerned as incompatible and in competition with the West (Said, 1997).

Nevertheless, the term itself is a contested one. Halliday (1999), for instance, claims the term curbs valid critiques of Islam, while defining Islamophobia as a form of racism and approaches towards it that recognise the processes of racialisation have received criticisms for limiting freedom of speech and expression, press freedom, and potentially endangering counter-terrorism policy (Jenkins, 2019). Concerns that the term has the potential to restrain freedom of speech and expression must be noted with the caveat that such freedom must not be regarded as an absolute value, despite these being a necessity of democratic life, but exercised within the appropriate legal frames (Lorente, 2010). As Bangstad discusses (2014: 266-67), disputes over freedom of speech in much of Western Europe are often implicitly relayed as 'zero-sum' games of for or against, where those that argue 'that there are (as a matter of fact) and should be (as a normative point of view) certain limits to expression' are rendered adversaries of freedom of speech and expression. Thus, while people should be free to critique Islam as a religion, doing so in a way that invokes or includes vocabularies of racism, xenophobia and religious prejudice is clearly discreditable. Waldron (2010) argues against conflating efforts to protect against restricting hate and prejudice with restrictions on freedom or presenting such efforts as symptomatic of 'political correctness' or the 'thought police'. In such a vein, working to outline definitions of Islamophobia that protect Muslims and other victims of it by restricting hate speech and expressions are not then projects for opposing freedom of expression, but necessities for ensuring that legal and political responsibilities of safeguarding their equal standing are upheld.

Suffice it to say, the term of Islamophobia is contested but it is one borne out of a requirement to protect against increasing prejudice, discrimination and vilification against Muslims. Geographers have largely explored Islamophobia through researching Islamophobic experiences and encounters. This work complements rather than compete with secondary forms of analyses of Islamophobia such as those offered by Allen, (2010), and Meer and Modood (2009). In a Scottish context, Hopkins (2004; 2008, see also Hopkins and Smith, 2008), explored how embodied markers of

Muslimness meant Muslim men experienced discrimination and racism in local contexts, but that such experiences were contextualised through national and international events and discourses. According to Hopkins (2004: 261), 'These markers have a powerful influence in determining the experience of young Muslim men's everyday lives in Scotland'. Recent work by Hopkins et al., (2017), Finlay and Hopkins (2018) and, Najib and Hopkins, (2019) has demonstrated how Islamophobia intersects with discrimination along other axes of social difference and marginalises victims. While Muslims in Britain consistently claim a strong sense of loyalty and belonging to the nation (APPG, 2018), experiences of Islamophobia can problematise such affiliations and those of cultural citizenship. In an Australian context, Dunn, Klocker and Salabay (2007) demonstrated the multi-scalar racialisation of Islam that has had negative implications for Muslims in Australia in terms of Islamophobic violence and their perceptions of citizenship and belonging. Being made to feel out of place because of racism and Islamophobia can shape and (re)produce feelings of strangerness within local and national spaces according to Noble (2005, see also Noble and Poynting, 2008).

Such scholarship has proved vital to extending understandings of the co-constitutive nature of race and religion in experiences of Islamophobia. Moreover, it illuminates that Islamophobia is most felt in 'the less explicit and everyday relationships of power' (Allen, 2010: 196). Geographers have developed understandings of Islamophobia that elaborate on multi-scalar experiences and analyses in order to address how Muslims experience hatred, a bedrock of feminist geographic/geopolitical scholarship that highlights the intimate and everyday intersections of scale and space (Hyndman, 2004; Pain, 2009; Pain and Staeheli, 2014). As mentioned, Hopkins (2004; 2008) has focused on how experiences in local contexts intersect with events, discourses and policies at other scales, disrupting hierarchies of scales and instead demonstrating the multi-scalar politics and emotions of fear, marginality and violence (Pain, 2009; 2010). A focus on everyday encounters and experiences of Islamophobia can show how events at a global scale network with national and local events and concerns (McGinty, 2012), so policies and representations 'are not merely discursive but also lived, felt, and embodied in people's everyday lives' (McGinty, 2018: 9). Everyday personal forms and experiences of Islamophobia are examples of 'practical Orientalism' (Haldrup, Koefoed and Simonsen, 2006) that 'Other' Muslims in embodied encounters, relying on both histories and geographies of difference.

Charting the embodied and everyday experiences of Islamophobia has been a key concern for geographers researching Islam and Muslim identities (Hopkins, 2017). The gendered nature of discursive and material forms of Islamophobia, with Muslim women often the victims of these, has also been sharply presented (Lambert and Githens-Mazer, 2010; Hopkins, 2016). Muslim women have been subject to strident media debate, contestation and visceral, physical violence (Listerborn, 2015). Islamic dress, particularly different forms of the veil, is often misread as a determinant of racial and cultural traditions and practices that separate Islam from the West. As Dwyer's work highlights, and mentioned in the previous section, dress and veiling is often 'a contested signifier for young Muslim women' (Dwyer, 1999b: 5) and essentialist representations of these reproduce naïve binaries and stereotypes, and the implications for these in encounters in institutional spaces such as schools (Zine, 2006) and universities (Peek, 2003) can be negative.

Much of the work on British Muslims focus on urban landscapes and encounters with the majority white British population (Phillips, D. 2006; Hopkins, 2004; 2008). Though retaining an urban focus, Phillips (2015) also provides insight into how Muslims in Bradford have engaged with new Eastern European migrants. Understanding the context of the neighbourhood in a city as an important site for multicultural citizenship (Staeheli, 2011), Phillips demonstrates how for British Muslims it is 'the street and neighbourhood that set the…stage for everyday lives and experiences of Britishness for many' (2015:69) and that young men's performances of dominant masculinities is a form of territoriality in the neighbourhood. The polyvalent, contested and everyday encounters within much of this work on Islamophobia show that encounters in urban spaces feed into and can engorge certain discourses of Muslim identities that are experienced and contested at the everyday, embodied scale. Attentiveness to multiple scales of belonging and citizenship, as well as awareness of the intersections of identities, their emotions and embodiment, remains a crucial aspect for geographers to engage with in research on Muslim identities in urban spaces.

1.5 Missing accounts of LGBT+ Muslims
While the proliferating geographic work on Muslims has developed new, grounded understandings of their everyday experiences, disappointingly little research has explored the lives of LGBT+ Muslims or focused much on the sexualities of Muslims

(though see Rouhani, 2007). This also reflects a broader situation in that the intersections of religion and sexuality have only slowly been examined by geographers (Brown, 2012). The scarce literature on the intersections of sexuality and religion within geography is crucial to remedy in order to pay attention to the heteronormativity within geographies of religion and the secularist biases within geographies of sexuality, and to consider more broadly, how sexuality and religion intersect in the lives of sexual minorities who may face constraints and growth in diverse ways. Referring to the intersections of religion and sexuality, Yip (2018: 2-3) suggests 'Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that, whilst stories of tension and conflict continue to persist, there are also the less-frequently reported narratives of integration, transformation, and growth'. However, considerations of how LGBT+ Muslim subjectivities are shaped by socio-spatial relations are not foregrounded within existing research in geography. This is rather disappointing given geographic analyses of how sexuality is shaped by space and spatial relations, and vice-versa, and how these intersect with different scales of spatiality and identities have become increasingly incorporated into mainstream geographic thought (Brown and Browne, 2016).

Rouhani's (2007) contribution, however, uncovers and recognises questions of geography and politics with regards to LGBT+ Muslims. Focusing on how LGBT+ Muslims sought to develop affirmative transnational movements that resisted sexual and religious discourses of incongruity and otherness, he demonstrates how they positively interpret Islamic scripture to shape more progressive activist spaces of hope. In doing so, Rouhani (2007) shows how LGBT+ Muslims rely on and work with LGBT+ members of their faith through transnational networks that challenge the heteronormativity of Islam and Muslim communities. Challenging oppositional discourses of LGBT+ and Muslim identities, LGBT+ Muslims subjected to ethno-religious censure of their sexualities apply faith-based practices to tackle theological oppression and grow as individual and collective religious actors. By adopting more reflexive and pragmatic interpretations, they fashion spaces and narratives of tentative inclusion, while simultaneously grappling with structural oppressions. Rouhani's (2007) research evidently challenges assumptions about a dichotomous model of social and religious structural relations on the one hand and the individualism of sexual freedom and expression on the other, and is more alert to the social and political contexts surrounding LGBT+ Muslims in the West. Nevertheless, reflections on how LGBT+ Muslims experience the regulation of their sexualities and their relationships with non-

Muslim or non-LGBT+ groups are absent in his account and could develop further by opening up more avenues for relaying experiences and notions of belonging to other communities too, e.g. LGBT+ communities and the nation-state. As well as this, questions about how LGBT+ Muslims experience and negotiate the closeting of their sexualities are largely left unanswered.

The absence of empirical research with LGBT+ Muslims in geography is stark, almost in unrequited correspondence with the growth of literature on Muslims more generally. This is reflective of the aforementioned dearth of work that explores intersections of religion and sexuality within the sub-fields of geographies of religion and geographies of sexualities. Welcome contributions that respond to this latter lack are a series of papers that emerged from a research project on the contested debates about homosexuality within the Anglican Communion (Valentine et al., 2010; Andersson et al., 2011; Vanderbeck et al., 2011; Sadgrove et al., 2012; Valentine et al., 2013a; Valentine et al., 2013b). Exploring the complex relationships, moralities and divisions within the Anglican Communion over homosexuality, the research project focused on the nuanced perspectives of parishioners and clergy in five different national contexts- Lesotho, South Africa, Uganda, UK, and USA- and revealed how discursive and material flows across scales shape different viewpoints over the place and inclusion of homosexuality.

By using an intersectional approach (Valentine et al., 2010) to explore sexuality and religion, the focus on a particular event- the Lambeth Conference- helps to foreground how transnational religious networks are reworked and emplaced. The interactions of sexuality and religion, and how these shape and are shaped by other relations and systems of power such as colonialism and racism is made visible. Furthermore, focusing on encounters between LGBT+ people and members of Episcopalian churches in New York demonstrates the value of considering how encounters can influence the ways in which homosexuality is viewed by both theologically conservative and theologically liberal Anglican camps (Andersson et al., 2011). Responding to Valentine's (2008) call to reflect more critically on how encounters mediate and problematise tension and prejudice to avoid the romanticisation of encounters of difference, Andersson et al (2011) demonstrate the situated understandings and views that emerge from encounters of sexual difference and Anglican belief. The focus on church sites as micropublics provides specific understandings of institutionalised

relations and how these can be expressed and limited with contact with LGBT+ others. Paying attention to debates about sexuality within the Anglican Communion and lived experiences of the intersections of religion and sexuality, this body of work has importantly challenged the lacuna of work considering the intersections of sexuality and religion within geography (Brown, 2012) and demonstrates plural adaptations and interpretations of theological discourses over the place of homosexuality within Anglicanism. These developments are much welcomed because they generate more nuanced considerations of the intersecting geographies of religion and sexuality and stimulate interesting discussions about the lived experiences of religious discourses and the practices that are shaped by these and rework them.

In respect of my own thesis, the reflections on religion and sexuality in the Anglican debates over homosexuality (Andersson et al., 2011; Sadgrove et al., 2012; Valentine et al., 2010; Valentine et al., 2013a; Valentine et al., 2013b; Vanderbeck et al., 2011) help develop intriguing grounds to work on in my response to the empirical absence of LGBT+ Muslims within the discipline, and the aspatial and socio-political context-lacking extant literature on LGBT+ Muslims that fills important voids but is limited with respect to concerns highlighted earlier. The papers offered through the project on homosexuality debates within the Anglican Communion extend understandings of discourses and experiences of sexual moralities informed by religious belief, through considerations of the multi-scalar relationships of these and their emplacements within particular contexts. Generally repressive theological interpretations of homosexuality within Islam, by and large a homophobic religion according to Kelly (2010), have been seen to regulate the sexualities of LGBT Muslims (Yip, 2004; Siraj, 2012). In respect of this, considering how the institutionalisation of heterosexist and homophobic discourses within their broader social and political contexts and their concomitant effects of structuring sexualities of LGBT+ Muslims into the closet, both metaphorically and materially in space (Brown, 2000), is one way to explore how LGBT+ British Muslims negotiate intersecting identities that are seen to be at odds.

Furthermore, whilst there are progressive interpretations of the Qur'an linked to homosexuality (Jamal, 2001; Kugle, 2003; 2010; Ali, 2016), whether these more liberal interpretations factor consistently into LGBT+ British Muslims lives is worth understanding and in what spatial contexts. As well as this, and aforementioned (Rouhani, 2007), LGBT+ Muslims have been seen to use religion as a source of

comfort, pragmatically adopting beliefs that counter the views of the tragic homosexual that must choose between either a religious identity or a sexual one. The extant literature usefully provides openings into these practices, but could be supported with reference to space, social and political contexts, and the intersectionality of these with identities and power relations that shape everyday life for LGBT+ British Muslims. Using McGuire's (2008) concept of lived religion, which explores religious belief constituted through everyday practices and spaces, how might they produce strategies of reconciliation and education, and what are the spatial relations of these and their tensions?

Considering LGBT+ Muslim lives, the preceding discussions have demonstrated the necessity to consider the gamut of identities, experiences and histories that make up their subjectivities and challenge inclusion and belonging, as well as placing these within wider historical, social, spatial and political contexts. Work on British Muslims (Dwyer, 2000; Hopkins, 2007a; 2007b; 2009) has demonstrated the relational and processual nature of their identities and understandings, as they are shaped by and negotiated through everyday spaces. Understanding this, I also suggest a postcolonial intersectional framework to underscore analyses of LGBT+ British Muslim lives provides an opening into interlocking experiences of systems and practices of exclusion and inclusion across different communities and spaces because of the divergent but interconnected spaces, relations and legacies of different identities and systems of power. Exploring how these shape experiences and belonging for LGBT+ British Muslims helps further situate the thesis and contextualises the work within specific moments and spaces. Altogether, work on the lived experiences of LGBT+ Muslims outside of geography has developed, and geographies of sexualities and geographies of religion have become important sub-fields, but the largely absent voices of LGBT+ British Muslims need to be further attended to in the hope that this might open up spaces for voicing their experiences. Having established some contemporary context, academic rationale and clarified where my thesis sits in respect to my discipline of human geography, I succinctly outline the arguments and structure of the thesis with respect to providing an overview of each chapter before explaining my application of a postcolonial intersectional framework for understanding LGBT+ British Muslim lives in the next chapter.

1.6 Outline of thesis

Chapter two*:* This chapter explores the framing of the thesis in terms of its theoretical underpinnings. A postcolonial feminist framework of intersectionality is drawn upon in this thesis and I explain why here. Initially, I explore the roots of intersectionality in early black feminist thinking in order to help situate contemporary understandings and uses of intersectionality within more accurate genealogies of black feminist activism/praxis and theory. I highlight how black feminists have long-recognised the need to consider the irreducibility of their identities and the complexity and simultaneity of their wider relations and social and political contexts. By doing this, I show how Crenshaw's (1989; 1991) coining of the terms and principles are largely a redux of black feminist thinking. I then highlight key principles of intersectional thinking before moving on to consider how incorporating a postcolonial lens helps me make sense of LGBT+ British Muslim lives. By attending to different social, spatial, historical and political contexts, I altogether demonstrate the value of a postcolonial intersectional framework.

Chapter three: The methodology of the research project is highlighted here to explore the practical and ethical issues of doing research with LGBT+ British Muslims. I begin this chapter by first exploring the rationale for using semi-structured interviews with LGBT+ British Muslims, advocating for their use because of their flexibility and conversational tone. I move on in this chapter to describe how I recruited participants and demonstrate the difficulties I had in accessing LGBT+ British Muslims and how I sought to respond to this by developing a Twitter profile for the project through which I organised most of my interviews. I then explore the research sample and highlight the ethical issues of interviews with my participants and how I sought to negotiate these, as well as how I analysed the data. Chapter three concludes with a reflexive account of the situated knowledge produced through the project and explores my positionalities in order to help clarify this.

Chapter four: This chapter explores the first findings of the study in terms of looking at how LGBT+ British Muslims understood and negotiated the regulations of their sexual identities. First, I review key literature that helps situate my understandings and analysis of how LGBT+ British Muslims narrated their experiences. I highlight how heteronormativity regulates LGBT+ sexualities and diverse genders and explore the closet as a metaphor that is used to highlight the regulation and non-disclosure of

minority sexual and gender identities, as well as some of the limitations of this model. I then highlight Brown's (2000) work that importantly moves the closet beyond merely metaphor to highlight its materialities of power/knowledge, before finishing this short review of literature with a focus on how geographers have explored sexuality at the scale of the body and the home. By presenting these literatures, I am able to explore how LGBT+ British Muslims experience the discursive and material regulations of their sexualities. In the first instance, I present differing narratives of how LGBT+ British Muslims viewed their sexual identities through Islamic theology and how some of them came to validate these through signaling themselves as Allah's creation, as well as (re)interpreting the Qur'an. I then highlight how family and community relations constructed closet experiences and spaces that show how the individualism and linearity associated with coming outing is not applicable to the lives of my participants because of how love and the complications of honour within the community work as social and spatial controls of sexuality, while highlighting how parents could construct LGBT+ sexualities as 'Other'. The spectre of gendered expectations of marriage and children that my participants experienced, as well as how they negotiated these and disclosed their sexual identities is explored. I finish this chapter by exploring how the closet was experienced at the scale of the body through highlighting how discourses materialised on to the body through policing gendered performances and clothing, before also exploring how emotions of love, sex and sin and on/offline bodies were negotiated and (re)produced the closet.

Chapter five: In this chapter, I reflect on findings from participants that highlighted the significance of encounters in community and urban contexts to regulate perceptions of belonging and inclusion. Initially, I synthesise key geographies of urban encounter literature to help contextualise my findings, looking at how geographers are well-placed to explore encounters because of their multi-scalar nature and how they make and (re)produce difference before looking at how encounters with Muslims in the West have been approached. Having succinctly provided an overview of the relevant literature, I show how LGBT+ British Muslims narrated living in their communities. While these were useful for developing kinship networks, they had drawbracks related to how limiting encounters with white populations constructed difference, as well as with how fears of being the subject of gossip and heterosexist biases influenced ambivalence within these communities too. I then explore how my participants voiced common-place, racist encounters in urban contexts. Though these might be superficially fleeting,

they fold in different temporalities (Wilson and Darling, 2016) and regulate perceptions of belonging. I highlight the importance of taking into account social and political contexts, such as Islamist terror attacks, Brexit, and governmental policies when considering how LGBT+ British Muslims encounter others because of Islamophobic experiences, as well as how mediations of belonging and assertions of these are developed through a long, genealogical othering of non-white groups in Britain.

Chapter six: Throughout this chapter I develop understandings of how LGBT+ British Muslims work to incorporate religious practices and understandings for affirming a reconciliation of Islam and their sexual identities, in spite of the limits of theological doctrine and the rhetoric espoused by mainstream Muslim groups and spaces intolerant of sexual identities and practices deviating from heterosexuality. I firstly explore the lived religion literature to help explain its usefulness in considering diverse practices of faith before exploring how geographers have also moved beyond solely exploring institutional spaces of religion. I then present how LGBT+ Muslims experienced attendance at the mosque and explore how they sought to individualise these to an extent. I also analyse their critiques of the social and spatial relations of mosque spaces before highlighting how they encountered homophobic debate with Muslims and how they negotiated these. Such experiences and the response of my participants are indicative of how they construct religiosity and agency simultaneously in a way that fits the religious and cultural contexts of their lives. The value of online spaces is then explored, and I look at how LGBT+ British Muslims search for and find both alternative and affirming hermeneutics, as well as the value in sharing experiences with others in similar predicaments. Though the value of forming networks is stressed, I also highlight the pitfalls of relational online-offline geographies where attending group meetings and events were limited, disclosure of locations were necessary and tensions with other Muslims about LGBT+ identities and Islam occurred.

Chapter seven: I conclude my thesis by presenting summaries and key arguments in relation to my research questions and consider the contributions I have made in relation to offering a postcolonial intersectional framework for understanding LGBT+ British Muslim lives, filling an empirical gap at the intersections of geographies of religion and geographies of sexualities, developing relational understandings of experiences of being in the closet, and the value of considering lived religion for

understanding and diversifying religious practices and understandings. I finish with reflections on the possibilities for future related work to be developed in what is an exciting and growing area of research.

Chapter 2. Applying a postcolonial intersectional framework

2.1 Introduction

A postcolonial intersectional framework provides the theoretical scaffolding for the study. My application of intersectionality emerges from the connections between postcolonial and black feminism and is used to explore the contexts and relationalities of difference that emerge from the narratives of my participants. Intersectionality offers a framework for attending to the exclusions and gaps that emerge in feminist theories that have historically reduced the complexity of women's lives to single-identity issues and universalised women's experiences across the globe (Collins, 2015). An intersectional approach accounts for differences between and within social categories and systems of power that lead to diverse experiences of oppression (Hancock, 2007). Its origins lie in a rich vein of black feminist thought that has historically called for attendance to the complexity and simultaneity of different positionings and their systems, structures and contexts that shape everyday life (Belkhir, 2009).

Feminist epistemological frameworks that contextualise lived experiences of women as produced through intersecting, relational and overlapping systems are now rather familiar, and theoretical and practical intersectional approaches are utilised to plug the long-standing exclusions of white, liberal feminist movements (Davis, 2008). However, the genealogy of intersectionality as rooted in black feminism can be somewhat curiously overlooked and buried through its contemporary mainstreaming, depoliticisation and endorsement. Cognisant of the common overlooking of intersectional thinking as fundamentally shaped by black feminist thought beyond superficial citations, I seek to highlight the early 'do-ings' and cogent theorisations of black feminism (May, 2015) that provided the fertile grounds for intersectionality to emerge as a way to explore and analyse experiences and subjectivities away from privileged centres and to critique the solipsism within the mainstreaming of intersectionality in feminist thinking that patently has historical precedence. By highlighting these origins, I am then able to offer more historically located readings of the insights and benefits that intersectionality affords. In order to tie up the theoretical ambit of my thesis, I explore how postcolonial thinking and principles complement black feminism in order to adduce these nodal points for scaffolding a perceptive analysis of the narratives of LGBT+ British Muslims.

2.2 Situating black feminist thinking

As mentioned, intersectional thinking has gained a dominant footing within feminist social science approaches (Davis, 2008) but it is necessary to trace its historical underpinnings and empirical sites in order to prevent the whitening of its deployment and the indifference to its displacements in liberal feminist theories (Lewis, 2013). Historical arguments in the nineteenth century over the social and political subordination of black American women offer some of the early foundational developments of an 'intersectional' knowledge project and social justice activism. This early 'praxis' of intersectionality was evident in some of the contestations against the enslavement of black American women. Such a historically specific context is important because it indicates the foreshadowing of social resistance against multiple and intertwined social oppressions and inequalities, while simultaneously highlighting the ongoing need to contest the dominant spaces and politics of feminist theories that intersectionality is deeply predicated upon and justifiably critical of.

One important figure in the nineteenth century abolitionist movements was Maria Stewart, influenced by a strong attachment to Christianity, who called for resistance to the mutually constitutive relations of sexism and racism, and who implicitly subscribed to early black feminist values of making visible related forms of inequality and subordination (Cooper, 2011; Hancock, 2016). Stewart's activism questioned the hypocrisy evident in the sermons that oriented towards social justice in white churches and the actualities of the lived experiences of much of the African American population (Cooper, 2011). Her politics yearned for the establishment of Christian moral values that were centred on the idea that all of God's children were made equal. This reflected a long history of black American women connecting their liberation from the connected evils of racism and slavery, and the marginalities of their positions, to their (largely Christian) faith (Smiet, 2014).

Sojourner Truth (1851) was also an early matriarch of black feminist thinking in so far as she sought to highlight the constitutive relations of slavery against black people *and* gendered inequalities as pivotal to the subordinations of enslaved female subjects such as herself. Her fight was similarly inseparable from her Christian faith as Stewart's. This early struggle for black women's suffrage that necessitated combining it with an anti-slavery outlook highlights that thinking of categories and the inequalities surrounding them as naturalised and independent of one another is a fictive stance at

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odds with the historical experiences of black women and early black feminist 'doing' (Zackodnick, 2004). Truth's critique of the ontological coherence of 'womanhood' that was being championed in a suffragette convention she attended reveals the exclusivity of early feminist movements. It also implied that discursive and material oppressions were not the outcomes of a singular process or dichotomous social/political relations, but rather that different systems of oppression converged, so single-axis frames of thinking and justice, on the basis of largely objective positions, were inadequate in meeting the emancipatory demands required (Smiet, 2014). Of concern to Truth was how discursive representations of African American women, or lack thereof, relegated the sphere of women's rights to white women and thus who was speaking for whom biased towards the latter at the expense and inclusion of the former. The endurance of the dominant positions of white women in feminist movements is a key political charge of intersectional thinking, highlighting how race and gender are implicated within hegemonic identity politics that subsume intracategorical positions

Racial and gendered ideologies and processes were closely bound up in formidable systems and contextualised, and were constitutive of, social and political inequalities. The inherent relationality in early thinking espoused by the likes of Stewart and Truth is also evident in Anna Cooper's writings (1892) that, like her older allies, embraced a fuller picture of simultaneous, connected forms of oppression and power relations related to gender and race. This antecedent nod to contesting positivist positions of social relations and locations along such grounds indicates the need to consider that contemporary thinking of overlapping systems of power and subordination has roots long before even the coining of intersectionality (Collins, 2000). Concerns over how liberatory movements could often work to displace the situated experiences of black women are traceable in the speeches and memoirs of figures such as Stewart, Truth and Cooper and these held that the discriminations they experienced could not be combatted in knowledge and political projects based upon singular and oppositional approaches alone.

Recognising the importance of linking lived experiences, representation and knowledge is a key tenet of black feminism. Holding that knowledge, representation and truth could not be separated out from the simultaneity of 'the sensations and experiences of our personal environment' (Cooper [1892], 1988: 183) highlights the early thinking that demonstrates the importance of standpoint theory in the generative

traits of black feminist epistemology. Standpoint theory emerged as a feminist theoretical tool and refers to championing the experiences of marginalised groups as fundamental to understanding knowledge as situated and deeply embedded in the social locations of people- in this way, centring the relations between knowledge, political action, power and marginalisation is key to developing resistance against subordination (Harding, 1991; Collins, 2000). Departing from mainstream feminist thought, Collins (2000:33) demonstrates that 'US Black women's collective historical experiences with oppression may stimulate a self-defined Black women's standpoint that in turn can foster Black women's activism'. Contextualising the historical specificities of black women's experiences in the US, Collins (2000) also explores Sojourner Truth's unravelling of universalised concepts of womanhood and the undermining of male-dominated, objectivist and white forms of social knowledge.

A black feminist consciousness is therefore mindful of the value that specialised knowledge of different, multiple and connected oppressions can play in determining political and social change. There is a common thread of recognising diverse relations of power and therefore different standpoints that may challenge existing social relations and knowledge claims and enacting change in opposition to these (Collins, 2000). The emergence of a black feminist epistemology is an alternative to mainstream considerations about the position of women and the attendant ideologies, power relations and contexts that can work to suppress them in varying degrees (hooks, 2000). Developing these important interventions knit together experience, practice, politics and dialogue in order to demonstrate the contingencies and (in)adequacies of conventional and scholastic feminist knowledge and masculinsed anti-racist claims to knowledge that do not sufficiently recognise the perspectives, specificities and transveral politics requisite in signaling change against the suppression of black women's lives.

As an alternate way of knowing, black feminist thinking is located in a genealogical context of experience and interpretation that seeks to unfold the importance of the 'the everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by African-American women as a group, the more specialized knowledge produced by Black women intellectuals, and the social conditions shaping both types of thought' (Collins, 2000: 288). Problematising the marginalities and inequalities faced- and projects seeking to contest these through monistic interpretations of lived experience and social

categories- the importance of historicising both experience and knowledge is a response to the limits of the universalising tendencies of single-category analyses and activism. This gestures towards a terrain of thinking that quilts together critique of the multiple, simultaneous and complex systems, relations and contexts that shape everyday life. Stressing this historical context of black feminist thinking in relation to the deficiencies of dominant discourses and theories of race and gender, and political movements towards these, opens up the space for further engagement with more recent black feminist thinking and the rearticulation of- rather than a radical departure from- black feminist principles through the use of intersectionality.

2.3 Intersectionality: redux and key principles

The ethos of engaging with relational oppressions is a characteristic of black feminist scholarship that earmarked the intellectual auguring of intersectionality. Sketching the value of tackling 'interlocking oppressions' was noted by the Combahee River Collective ([1977]1995) as fundamental to addressing the struggles of integrated systems of power. This collective of black American women circulated important insights into the interlocking and multiple realities and inequalities that shaped the lives of African American women. In doing so, they problematised the partiality that dominated in mainstream feminist movements and antiracist justice movements. Advocating for more complete and inclusive social justice oriented projects, they brought to the public fora a plea to combat experiences of sexism, racism, homophobia and class inequality through more coalitional political projects that could better challenge their interacting oppressions and inequalities. Exploring Valk's (2008) reflections on feminism and black liberation that detailed the development of community groups and coalitional politics engaged with interlocking systems of oppression also contextualises these frameworks through which the Combahee River Collective developed critical thinking and praxis on tackling the oppressive complexities of black American women.

Continuing a common line of African American women drawing attention to the importance of adopting a framework to challenge simultaneous and multiple oppressions, the edited collection by Hull et al (1982) challenged the sidelining of black American women in feminist thinking. Simultaneously, it revitalised a critical perspective on the linkages between and of race, class and gender, fashioning a space for anti-racist feminist critique. A lack of sensitivity to the convergence of different

systems of power is also a feature of bell hook's (1984) critiques of mainstream feminist theories that lacked comprehensiveness in their articulations because they were largely developed from relatively privileged women at the 'centre' rather than incorporating the perspectives of both men and women at the sidelines, particularly African American populations. By broadening out and complicating social justice movements and theories, American black feminist thought reclaimed an empowering endeavour to challenge conventional forms of knowledge projects, analysis and politics in order to better reflect the lived experiences of marginalised groups.

Black scholar-activists therefore developed the groundwork for intersectional thinking through their analyses of interlocking oppressions that increasingly anchored intellectual-activist sensibility towards recognising the relationality and complexity of systems of power and their relations (Hancock, 2016). While perhaps remaining unnamed as intersectionality at the time as such, ideas about interlocking oppressions and considerations of how categories of race, gender and class, and their different but related domains of power interacted did proliferate in the early 1980s (see work by Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981; Moraga and Anzaldua, 1983; Lorde, 1984) and provided the basis for Crenshaw's 'coining' of intersectionality. Crediting this lineage of black feminist thought is necessary in order to cherish intersectionality's rich origins and not to problematically eschew its situatedness within recursive relationships between academic theory, lived experience, and social movements that are guiding lights of black feminist thought.

A humble acknowledgement that she did not establish the underpinning principles of intersectionality's theoretical positionings, but rather developed a new insight that tweaked its antecedents is something that Crenshaw herself identifies and is concerned with (Guidroz and Berger, 2009). Her development of intersectionality was built up through the insights afforded by black feminist thinking in both academic and activist circles, and draws on the interactions between these rich spheres. Crenshaw reminds us of this by stating that it was her involvement with anti-violence activism that helped inspire the development of her theory of intersectionality (Guidroz and Berger, 2009: 65). By examining three different legal cases on employment discrimination against black women, Crenshaw (1989) exposed the exclusions that presented themselves when considering anti-discrimination policies and laws- according to her, 'sex and race discrimination doctrine are defined respectively by white women's and

black men's experiences (1989: 143). Using the metaphor of a traffic intersection, she demonstrated conventional approaches to discrimination that developed along neat, single axes of difference had the effect of failing to comprehend the simultaneity of discriminations that could occur for black women who were discriminated against. In this regard, Crenshaw (1989: 140) states that the 'intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism'. Problematising an additive approach to challenging discrimination, Crenshaw appealed for polishing such endeavours by developing frameworks that could better capture the range of minoritised experiences of discrimination.

In 1991, Crenshaw followed up this intervention by conceptualising intersectionality in a three-fold manner as it applied to the 'real-world'. She distinguished between structural, political and representational intersectionality to demonstrate how their contingencies and relationships produce subordination, erasure and misrepresentation. Structural intersectionality illustrates how 'women of colour' negotiate complex forms of structural discrimination that are qualitatively different to white women. Contextualising understandings through an intersectional approach therefore paves the way for challenging systems and structures that produce routinised oppressions in far more comprehensive and inclusive ways. Political intersectionality, on the other hand, refers to how black women, through being 'situated within at least two subordinated groups' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1252), had to follow different political goals related to these- ones that conflicted with each other and led to further marginalisation through the solipsism within these perhaps competing agendas. Finally, Crenshaw commented that representational intersectionality refers to how 'women of colour' are represented in images through a typical dependence on racist and sexist ideas, and how these, as well as assessments of these, could neglect, exclude and reproduce the subjects in question. The three aspects of Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality shed light on the necessity for an analytical framework of understanding the complexity of people's lives through the dialogues of their representations, structural contexts and social movements. These cogent rearticulations of black feminist thinking and conceptual developments that Crenshaw framed have become rather absorbed into many different locations and projects (Davis, 2008; Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013), in both inquiry and praxis (Collins and Bilge, 2016). So, in light of the increasing use of intersectionality as an analytical tool, it is useful to explore some of the key principles

of intersectionality that are important to understand and develop when analysing the lived experiences of minority groups.

According to Collins and Bilge (2016), there are six key themes of intersectionality that emerge when using intersectionality as an analytical framework in research: *social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity and social justice.* These six principles are the core ideas that underpin intersectional evaluations of inequality and exclusion, but it is important to note that such 'ideas are neither always present in a particular project, nor do they appear in projects in the same way' (Collins and Bilge, 2016: 25). Such principles can also be explored at micro, meso- and macro-levels and the interactions of these (Collins, 2003), and so, intersectionality helps catalyse more inclusive analyses of the scalar dimensions of social lives that are difficult to understand and compounded by 'the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power' (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013: 795). By problematising different aspects of identity, power and knowledge, and the interrelatedness of their domains, an analysis sensitive to and inclusive of the principles outlined by Collins and Bilge (2016) can better respond to experiences of inequality and exclusion. Further, as Phoenix and Pattynama (2006: 187) note, an intersectional framework attends to making 'visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it'. An intersectional lens therefore encourages and encompasses a commitment to understanding the different processes and power relations that influence subjectivities and identities in specific contexts. Having introduced some of the key understandings and principles of intersectionality (Collins and Bilge, 2016), I now move on to discuss how postcolonial framings of these knit together the work engaged with in this chapter to provide an overall theoretical context for my research with LGBT+ Muslims.

2.4 Applying a postcolonial intersectional lens to LGBT+ British Muslims

Returning to some of the themes outlined in section 1.3 (pp.5-13), LGBT+ British Muslims experience largely intolerant attitudes towards their sexualities through both theological discourse and the homophobic tendencies that develop through these from heteronormative Muslim communities that are also influenced by ethnic and cultural values. Complicating such experiences further is how racism and experiences of Islamophobia- situated within a national context of postcolonial immigration and neo-imperialism- can also serve to exclude LGBT+ British Muslims through marking

Muslims as racialised others, who are often positioned as incompatible with the social, religious and cultural ideals of Britain, and Europe more generally (Colpani and Habed, 2014). Yet, their experiences at the intersections of these oppositional categorisations and understandings must be understood in a way that is sensitive to their lived experiences and an application of a postcolonial intersectional sensibility is a constructive way forward as I now argue.

LGBT+ Muslims in Britain negotiate complex social and political contexts that not only shape their identities and subjectivities, but the binary, monolithic representations of LGBT+ identities, on the one hand, and Muslims, on the other, lead to a loss of their experiences, and work to fix them outside of these antithetic constructions. Mainstream representations and understandings of LGBT+ identities/communities and Muslim identities/communities qualify LGBT+ Muslims as absent subjects because they elide differences and complexities *within* different social groups. As McCall (2005: 1774) argues, an intracategorical approach of intersectionality can 'reveal the complexity of lived experiences' of members of social groups abandoned at intersectional gaps and failures (Crenshaw, 2016) that occur when single-axes approaches are used to explore experiences of structural and political inequalities and power relations between, among and within social groups. Such an approach can also highlight how accounting for and exploring lived complexity means challenging monistic categories imposed, contested or represented. A benefit therefore for understanding how LGBT+ Muslims experience everyday life and structural inequalities is approaching categories of social difference through an acknowledgement of their irreducibility. Rather than simply seeking to use a single identity marker as a foundational category of analysis for shaping their subjectivities and perhaps as an explanatory centre for how this shapes their sexual identities, practices and relations, and privileging such a category in a reductive manner, it would be more advantageous to better comprehend the gamut of complex experiences through considering all oppressions, as King suggests is a hallmark of intersectional thinking (1988). In this way rather than condensing experiences of inequalities through a singular explanatory axis and then treating this as a causal/explanatory variable prior to others- a hallmark of additive thinking-, recognising the irreducibility and simultaneity of inequality can better portray how different categories can interact in diverse ways and shape, decentre and address intersectional inequalities.

The inequalities that LGBT+ British Muslims face and endure with include homophobia within Muslim communities and outside these, different and spatially contingent forms of Islamophobia, as well as cultural racisms (in both individual and systemic forms), and all these may be invoked, institutionalised and represented at different scales and contexts. Exploring how intersecting ideological positions that constitute different relations and systems of power shape and are exposed in the lives of LGBT+ Muslims is ostensibly a challenge, yet deeper analysis of these power relations and systems and the effects of how their simultaneity can structure LGBT+ Muslim experiences require urgent attention given their absence and silences. In order to develop an understanding of the structures and processes of subjugating different social groups and subjects, and one which captures complexity, simultaneity and irreducibility, Yuval-Davis (2011) argues for an intracategorical approach in unison with an intercategorical approach, with the latter broadly focused on variances between different social groups. Advancing a 'mutually constitutive approach to the relationship between different social groups' (Yuval-Davis, 2011: 7) challenges the stabilities and fixities that can present themselves when representing and analysing different social groups in a homogenous fashion. To posit how LGBT+ Muslims may face cultural and religious homophobia, racism and Islamophobia in additive ways is to simply overlook how these relations and systems of power work at different domains/scales and the constitutive ways in which their processes maintain asymmetries of equality.

An intracategorical approach addresses the complexity of LGBT+ British Muslim experiences and challenges essentialist representations and understandings of these, endeavours that are part and parcel of black and postcolonial feminist thinking. Both schools of thought have reflected upon challenging the universalising approaches that can slip into positivist thought, seeking instead to identify the entanglements and contingencies of intersecting oppressions. I introduced the thesis with a brief overview of how LGBT+ Muslims were largely invisible in initial debates surrounding the protests against the teaching of LGBT+ relationships and families which was part of a broader teaching programme aimed at primary school children. This to me was largely unmarked by references to the historical and cultural contexts that are necessary to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Contemporary intersections of race, religion, sexuality and gender that infused those episodes of protests, counter-protests and media coverage were not only reflections of current-day issues but also a fusion of their historical and cultural contingencies. LGBT+ British Muslims are situated within

specific histories of British colonialism and imperialism, revitalised Islamophobia operating at any number of different geographic scales, postcolonial immigration, multiculturalism and 'British' values, and the complex substitutions of bad/good sexual deviants.

Referring to histories of colonialism, race and immigration, Gilroy (2004: 12) claims that the British have an apathetic 'disinclination to address these dynamics' that are discernible in refutations of how these contemporaneously structure modern day Britain. A reluctance to understand how the histories of British colonialism shape contemporary British society reflects ahistorical and aspatial considerations that reproduce unequal social and institutionalised imaginations and beliefs. Incorporating black feminist and postcolonial scholarship, Mollett (2017: 3-4) develops a 'postcolonial intersectionality as a way to attend to multiple kinds of power ongoing since the colonial period' which problematises unitary identity categories and challenges Western frameworks 'so as to illumitate the endurance of contemporary globalized social inequalities and their colonial and postcolonial contingencies'. By applying a postcolonial intersectional lens that attends to historical and cultural contexts and their continuities, and evaluates the asymmetries of power relations and representations, the subjugation of othered populations and the underlying interlinking processes can be more sensitively approached. As Mollett and Faria (2013) suggest, a postcolonial intersectional framework can demonstrate how these processes are continuously roped within a genealogy of nation-building and markings of racialised, cultural differences. Postcolonial feminist analyses have consistently focused on gender and sexuality within the colonial period, their intersections and legacies- representations and imaginations of the agency and power of non-Western women and sexual minorities (Spivak, 1993; McClintock, 1995)- as well as debates about the viability of Western feminist movements and theories (Mohanty, 1988; 2003), and diasporic identities and subjectivities (Brah, 1996; Mohammad, 2015; Pande, 2015). Thus, postcolonial feminist scholarship has attended to highlighting 'multiple subjectivities and forms of power' (Mollett and Faria: 2018: 566) and problematised both Western forms of representing non-Western women and the whiteness of these interpretations and activism.

Mohanty (2003) critiques how 'Third World' women are represented in Western feminist scholarship as a coherent group with the same anxieties and experiences, as

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well as the lack of context in understanding differences that leads to supposed definitive truths and universal applicability. The homogenising of an aspecific Third World woman as a representational strategy of Western feminism indicates a lack of 'self-consciousness' about the West and avoids understanding and theorising difference within specific national, regional and local contexts (Mohanty, 2003). A way to prevent the consequences of these representational issues is to contextualise understandings of these groups through 'careful, politically focused, local analyses' (Mohanty, 2003: 32) through which interpretations of intersecting gendered relations and inequalities can be more ably understood and effectively challenged. This challenge of contesting universalising assumptions and homogenising effects is important in the context of LGBT+ Muslims, as well as how to better respond to these through more inclusive or coalitional political actions. By challenging the conflicting representations and positionings of LGBT+ rights, conservative Muslim communities and their various cultural and ethnic traditions, we can better comprehend the ways in which both Orientalist and Occidentalist tropes thrive and the meaning of these for LGBT+ Muslims who can be caught between these opposing stances.

As well as considering those two nodal principles of black and postcolonial feminist thinking, it is also clear that both are also closely connected in two other ways; connecting feminist scholarship to political activism and change, and an emphasis on the alterities and intersectional categories within structures of oppression and dominance. The invisibility of LGBT+ Muslims within the Birmingham schools row demonstrates the importance of incorporating this thinking and analysis to their inherently lived intersectional experiences where sole focuses on a single system of oppression cannot adequately capture the specificities of their experiences, perspectives and goals. As I highlighted in the sections on black feminist thinking and Crenshaw's (1991) interest in political intersectionality- where black women and other women can fall in the gaps of social justice-oriented groups- homogenising understandings of minority groups can fail to acknowledge specificity and does not lead to changing hegemonic structures and relations. In this way, exploring how LGBT+ British Muslims can be caught between the positionings and goals of different groups which can complement, rather than challenge, structural experiences of intersectional inequalities is vital. This therefore helps to highlight the pluralities of LGBT+ groups, Muslim and Asian communities, as well as those identifying with a belonging to Britain and challenges both Orientalist assumptions about Muslim and

non-white communities, and unpacks Occidentalist thinking that ideologically positions LGBT+ relations and practices as signifiers of Western degeneracy.

Contextualising understandings of the lived experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims within a postcolonial feminist framework of intersectionality is critical to understanding their multiple absences and differences within a long-term perspective. However, it also challenges Western frameworks of sexuality where representations about disclosure, secularity and politics can universalise oft-contested non-heterosexual relations and practices. The increasing visibility of LGBT+ people of faith is one important way in which to challenge conventional representations of LGBT+ people and those of faith, and how they contest unequal power relations at interpersonal and cultural levels. Using an intersectional approach in a postcolonial context, Valentine et al's (2010) work on the experiences of pro-LGBT+ groups belonging to the Anglican Communion demonstrates how different positionings and (dis)identifications of sexual identity and faith intersect with each other and other systems of power such as racism, patriarchy and colonialism. This approach to understanding pro-LGBT+ Anglican group experiences contextualised how power relations between differently positioned groups are encountered and reworked through the constitutive nature of space and social relations. Importantly, and something that is somewhat lacking within the extant work on LGBT+ Muslims, this appreciation of the relationality of power relations and scales is foregrounded to understand how tensions can be produced, unfolded and rejected in palpable ways.

Relationality is a key principle of intersectional thinking and a way to understand how power and inequality works in diverse ways and at different scales. According to Collins and Bilge (2016: 27, original emphasis), relationality refers to a rejection of '*either/or* binary thinking…Instead, relationality embraces a *both/and* frame. The focus of relationality shifts from analysing what distinguishes entities…to examining their interconnections'. This opens the possibility then of thinking about the experiences of LGBT+ Muslims in a manner instructive to the complexity of their lives and the power relations that manifest within them. According to Hopkins (2019a), geographers are well placed to consider the principles of relationality and context in intersectional frameworks. I have already noted the importance of considering historical and cultural contexts with regards to the lives of LGBT+ British Muslims in order to explore how they negotiate the frictions of contesting monolithic discourses and interpretations of

racialised, sexualised, gendered and religious Otherness within postcolonial Britain. Staying alive to the historical and contemporary social contexts is one way in which this relational way of thinking is underscored. In the current political situation in Britain where national, ethnic and religious differences are used as a self-protective strategy against racialised and religious others, LGBT+ Muslims must navigate positionings and relations of power that see them as either/or and so challenge authorities of commonality and normativity.

LGBT+ British Muslims of ethnic minority backgrounds, as mentioned, contest the secularity and whiteness of LGBT+ identities and communities, the heteronormativity of Muslim communities and the whiteness of British national identities- all of which can be presented by those ideologically purporting either/or distinctions. Yet, as Rahman argues (2010), LGBT+ Muslims are inherently intersectional subjects and expectations that LGBT+ Muslims must essentially fragment their identities and subjectivities at the various doors of different spaces and communities serves to organise their invisibilities. It is important to therefore recognise the relationality of power relations and encounters in these postcolonial contexts to highlight the significance of contradictory and intersectional senses of belonging and incorporation that may shape how LGBT+ British Muslims navigate these tensions. My application of a postcolonial framework (Mollett, 2017) seeks to therefore foreground the multiple, relational functionings of power that shape LGBT+ Muslim lives, as well as how they seek to resist such inequities and may also unwittingly reproduce such relations while attempting to negotiate the relationships of structure and agency.

Yet, the power relations of everyday life that constitute diverse experiences for LGBT+ Muslims must be understood with care and consideration for how they are rationalised and resisted may lead to harmful effects, as well as positive. In one sense, as the literature on 'coming out' for LGBT+ Muslims highlights (Yip, 2004; 2008), fears of rejection from family members can be interpreted as a key concern that closets their sexual identities. However, power and agency may not necessarily 'manifest in spectacular expressions of resistance…but rather in everyday acts of resistance and negotiation' (Pande, 2015: 182), and so the relations of power that LGBT+ Muslims navigate and work with can shape their experiences and subjectivities in ways that contest normative assumptions about different identity categories and their community norms. While different and perhaps contradictory feelings of belonging may lead to

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LGBT+ British Muslims dealing with fraught questions and problems of authenticity concerning their different minority communities, specifying these in relation to concerns about their intersectional invisibilities is key to cautiously contesting the processes that seemingly naturalise their oppressions.

Notions of belonging are therefore inherently political and intersectional, as argued by Yuval-Davis (2006b; 2011), but the different conditions and relations that shape these can simultaneously make multiple differences more visible but also challenge how LGBT+ Muslims are expected to orient around an absorption towards normativity with regards to their various communities. Pande (2015) highlights that the 'soft power' in challenging unequal relations or structures can be more reflective of how social relations are enacted and reworked in these contexts. Reflections of how LGBT+ Muslims challenge dominant discourses and create alternative ones may provide a platform for understanding the processes of change and resistance in light of intersectional legacies and incongruences. Implicit within a relational understanding of power relations and keeping in mind the postcolonial context is a consideration of the collapsing of hierarchies of scale at which power is challenged and reworked. According to Mollet and Faria (2018: 566), black feminist thinking draws upon an understanding that 'power is spatially contingent' and intersectional analyses necessitate 'a conceptual and geographic bridging of the scales of the body, home and state'. In this vein, black feminist thought complements postcolonial feminist thinking too with the latter's concerns about the role of gender implicit in nation-building and considerations more generally about the globalised and asymmetric power relations between North-South and the effects of postcolonial cultures in diasporic settings etc. Thus, understanding the entanglements of power relations that shape change and belonging requires an intersectional analysis sympathetic to relations of different scales by considering how discourse and difference is mediated by the intersections of these.

Valentine et al (2013a; 2013b) draw on such thinking too in relation to religious networks and discourses concerning the permissibility and presence of LGBT+ Anglicans within the Communion. Considerations about the intersections of multiple scales is a key development that both feminist and anti-racist geographers have contextualised understandings through. According to Hopkins (2012: 1232) 'space-time embodied experiences are also orchestrated by different relationalities and

intersectionalities' and his early work on young Muslim men (2007a; 2008a) demonstrates the entanglements of different geographic scales and different senses of belonging in relation to these. In this vein, understanding how difference is identified, transmitted, read and traversed through the body and encounters is one context of appeal, for the body, according to Simonsen (2009), can be a contested site of shifting social, political and historical discourses that are experienced and lived out across various everyday scales (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014). Calling for recognition of embodied intersectionalities, Mirza (2013: 7) argues that applying such thinking 'not only seeks to theorise the complexities of…positional social divisions as lived realities…but also interrogates how this experience is affectively mediated by the body'. By recognising how identities and encounters are situated within a specific scale but are shaped by lived discourses and subjectivities of multi-scalar contexts and domains of power, the relationalities of power can be identified as encompassing a range of sites that underscore how identities, inequalities and oppressions are contingent on spatial relations (Valentine, 2007).

Clearly, the lived experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims are fraught with struggles over belonging and with regards to authenticity to different identities and communities, where they may be expected to splinter out their identities, at least by the discourses upheld by dominant voices. Reflections of their identities as inherently antagonistic are prevalent within the media canon and can be upheld by oppressive discourses of race, sexuality, religion and nationality. Despite the negative conditionings such expectations and realities may have for LGBT+ British Muslims, understanding their forms of challenging and negotiating the power relations embedded within these inequalities is paramount to developing more visible and contextualised analyses of their experiences. Thus, a postcolonial intersectional framework and its principles that I have highlighted here can work to bring attention to the relational processes and practices, and their embedded and contested power relations that LGBT+ Muslims experience daily. Such a framework of intersectionality emphasises the inherent postcoloniality within different discourses, encounters and relationalities that LGBT+ Muslims negotiate in complex ways, while drawing attention to and extending the scrutiny of how social, geographical, cultural and historical contexts situate the experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims in diverse ways, allowing for more inclusive analyses.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to outline the theoretical framework of the study, knitting together postcolonial and black feminist thinking in order to situate my interpretations and analysis of LGBT+ British Muslim experiences in contemporary British society. I propose a postcolonial intersectional framework to situate and develop my analyses because such an endeavour helps uncover the complexity of their identities and lived experiences. In the first section, I laid out the long history of black feminist thinking and clarified how Crenshaw (1989; 1991), though often credited with theorising intersectionality, built her understandings through this lineage of black feminist thought. I then highlighted key principles of intersectional thinking (Collins and Bilge, 2016) and considered nodal points between black and postcolonial feminist positions. In wanting to explore how these could shape LGBT+ British Muslims' lives, I sought to highlight how black and postcolonial feminist epistemologies and principles that shape intersectional thought are useful to guide understandings of their lived experiences

A postcolonial intersectional framework contributes to a situated analysis of LGBT+ British Muslim lives through a focus on social and political inequalities and contexts that construct and contour complexity. How the complexity of their identities, inequalities and experiences can be reduced to essentialised differences invoking binary identities and understandings need to be attended to by providing voice and expression to challenge misrepresentations and misunderstandings of LGBT+ British Muslims in respect of their different identities and communities. An intersectional framework that grounds my understanding helps uncover the importance of context and relationality. The postcolonial setting of contemporary Britain is shaped by colonialism, immigration, neo-colonialism, whiteness and multiculturalism and overlooking these intertwined histories only serves to limit understandings of how the past, its legacies and geographies, shape the lives of all British citizens, privileged or otherwise. Attending to these, a focus on power relations can demonstrate how LGBT+ British Muslims experience, negotiate and contest dominant discourses and challenge power at interpersonal, cultural and systemic domains, not necessarily always rooted in activism but grounded in everyday experiences and encounters. These principles of a postcolonial intersectional framework develop my analysis and arguments and demonstrate the complexity and diversity of the lived experiences of my participants. In the following chapter, I explore the methodological approach of the study and

critically reflect upon my own experiences in order to help situate the knowledge gleaned from research encounters with my participants.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Across both chapters so far, I have argued that a lack of geographic work with LGBT+ British Muslims is discernible and while work with this group in other social science disciplines is welcome, issues concerning the spaces, legacies and wider contexts of their lives is largely absent in the latter strand of work. As such, my project emerges from this gap and I now seek to highlight the development of the thesis by exploring my research design and practice in relation to using in-depth, semi-structured interviews for the research project, justifying their use and also exploring the ethical and practical issues that arose, and that I sought to be aware of and mediate. I also focus on the research sample and my difficult experiences of recruiting LGBT+ British Muslims across the UK, and how I endeavoured to respond to these issues. Highlighting the latter helps to provide some context to the pool of 19 participants that agreed to be part of the project. The chapter also reflects on issues of data analysis and finishes with some grounded considerations about power and positionalities in order to situate the knowledge developed through the thesis.

3.2 Research design

Using the concept of intersectionality within my research helps explain the diversity and invisibility of LGBT+ British Muslims' identities, positionalities and subjectivities, and is understanding of how LGBT+ British Muslims experience and negotiate their social realities and locations relative to the social and political circumstances they might experience, and the events and life-stages they may have to negotiate. Explicit in my work is the acknowledgement that popular understandings of gender and sexuality as they relate to Muslim identities and communities are often framed through binary terms, and subsequently, such groups are invariably 'othered'- particularly so in thinking about ideas surrounding sexual citizenship and politics (Sabsay, 2012). Although Muslims in the UK may be brought up in a Western context, they can sometimes be viewed and/or stereotyped as different, monolithic and outsiders, belonging to certain ethnic and religious groups that may be foreign to a certain imaginary of British society (Wardar and Ahmad, 2012), and be perpetuated through media conflations surrounding issues such as gender equality, arranged marriages and sexuality (Phillips, 2012; Pilkington, 2017).

Gendered and sexualised dimensions of the 'other' are therefore frequently thought about in essentialist terms, or ignored altogether, with limited understandings of the sexual diversity within Muslim communities and societies. Thus, research into Muslim sexual minorities must be grounded within an empirical approach that draws on the complex, and often different, axes or understandings of culture, religion, sexuality, gender and ethnicity. It was therefore necessary to adopt a methodological approach which was sensitive and responsive to how and why LGBT+ Muslims experience their everyday lives in relation to the intersectionality of identities and their spatialities, as well as the influence of interconnecting geopolitical events and contexts that take place across geographic scales. Certainly, there would be variations in terms of such positionings, regarding understanding, negotiating and transforming ideas, identities and traditions, and a perceptive awareness of the dynamism of these necessitated in-depth qualitative interviews, enabling participants time and space to narrate their experiences, while also allowing me to respond to these.

3.2.1 Exploring the rationale for using semi-structured interviews

Kvale states that 'a qualitative research interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest' (1996: 2). Interviews are arguably the most frequent approach for the collection of qualitative data across the social sciences (Punch, 2005; Heath et al., 2009) and they facilitate the ability to tease out data that is 'rich, detail and multi-layered' (Valentine, 2013: 111). More specifically within social and cultural geographies, their usefulness in eliciting data that develops 'understanding of people's relations to, and shaping of, place' (Dowling, Lloyd and Suchet-Pearson, 2016: 680) means that they were most appropriate for my study on the everyday lives of LGBT+ Muslims and their negotiations of intersecting identities, positionalities and spaces. I felt they would allow me to explore the concerns, meanings and complexities of their lives for in-depth constructive and critical understandings and conceptual insights of socio-spatial relations, (Kitchin and Tate, 2000; Dwyer and Limb, 2001; Moss, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews enable researchers to engage with participants with pre-determined questions that can help organise the discussion and explore key themes of interest, but also allow for researchers to react to themes emerging out of the interchange with participants that were previously unanticipated, and rethink and

explain points of confusion or surprise (Cloke et al., 2004). Semi-structured interviews are generally more informal and conversational, compared to structured interviews, which are relatively standardised- questions determined and scholars mainly staying true to these, usually at the cost of flexibility and alertness to themes previously unexpected (Valentine, 2013). The former approach can help breed rapport between researchers and their participants (Sears, 2001; Davies, 2006), through empathy and specificity to the issues being discussed. In order to develop rapport however means those managing these exchanges should adjust to individual contexts and experiences of their participants. Therefore, regarding their hopefully more dialogic spirit- through which interviewees should have more scope to express their experiences or opinions (Hopkins, 2010)- semi-structured interviews mean interviewers can offer probing questions more affixed to the narratives being presented by those taking part.

However, grasping and interpreting these conversational settings crucially means bearing in mind and reflecting critically upon how the experiences and opinions of an interviewee are shaped through specific geographical, cultural, historical, social and political contexts and their identifications, as well as the researcher's. Kvale (1996) proposes that individuals live in conversational worlds; our constructions, understandings and analyses of social life are contingent upon conversations and vice-versa. Thus, interviews ought to be contextualised within the precise social domains of people so that the accounts that are supplied by participants for the intentions of analysis and knowledge can be made sense of and examined further. Feminist researchers- a group I locate myself in- stipulate cognate demands by emphasising that researchers have to interrogate 'whose story the interview is asked to tell, who interprets the story, and with what theoretical frameworks' (Anderson and Jack, 1991: 11).

According to Maynes, Pierce and Laslett (2008) women's experiences of their social lives have often been through analysis of categories of race, gender, class and sexuality within qualitative methodologies in the social sciences. Thus, they propose that such frameworks might lead to their 'agency being reduced to social position' and concomitant analyses might transmit their social experiences as static in time and space. In-depth semi-structured interviews, however, enable participants room to relate personal narratives within their own specific socio-cultural contexts, where these life histories 'emerge from their lived experiences over time and in particular social,

cultural, and historical settings' (Maynes, Pierce and Laslett, 2008: 16). This is desirable as they allows researchers to: make sense of participants' lives and experiences; recognise the divergences and connections of experiences and identities; and, puts the researcher in a position in which she/he/they can relate the oral testimonies to the broader contexts of social and political structures.

The practice of semi-structured interviews indicates, therefore, the opportunity for the researcher to recognise considerations and materialisations of agency, as well as multiple and intertwining positionalities. Secondly, they open up the possibility to reduce the conceptual or analytical fracture, as it were, between individual experiences and the social, with attention paid to the specificities of meanings within particular geographical, social, cultural and political events, through commonalities of experience and saturation in data through which participants' narratives are grasped as reliable. These meanings are therefore not aground in conversation but experience too, and understanding this within my project has proved vital to grasping and analysing the identities and experiences of those who participated in my project. Noting the rationale for the use of semi-structured interviews, I now describe my process of data collection through outlining how I sought to recruit LGBT+ British Muslims, highlighting the sample of participants and then using interviews with them.

3.3. Research practice
3.3.1 Accessing participants

My fieldwork took place across September 2016- late October 2017. Bearing in mind British Muslims tend to be concentrated in specific urban locations in the UK (Peach, 2006), I felt it was more convenient to focus particularly on LGBT+ groups catering for these urban populations, though I did send emails across other groups in cities and towns with smaller Muslim populations. At the outset of the project, I considered major cities such as London, Birmingham and Manchester to be the primary source of interviewees as I thought it would be within these cities that I would see a more diverse LGBT+ British Muslim group, and a context in which different ethnic and sexual backgrounds could be identified, given the mix of cultures and demographics within them. Perhaps, on the other hand, samples from regional towns and cities such as Bradford, Blackburn, Huddersfield and Middlesborough could be more homogenous and less diverse, as these areas may have less diversity in terms of sexual and ethnic background- in the case of these areas, British-Pakistanis make up the largest ethnic

minority group. Due to the difficulty in recruiting LGBT+ British Muslims as the project grew and ran in to recruitment difficulties, it was deemed more practical to base my fieldwork across the UK, rather than restricting myself to a particular urban region.

My sample group resulted from a number of different approaches that I used in order to recruit LGBT+ British Muslims, these included: emailing the limited number of groups that work with LGBT+ Muslims, such as Imaan, Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI), and Hidayah; emailing support groups that support LGBT+ people from minority ethnic backgrounds, such as NAZ, Spice Bradford, Lesbian Immigration Support Group, Rainbow Noir, Unmuted Brum, The Gaysian; emailing generic support groups for LGBT+ people across the UK and university LGBT+ societies, as well as for instance, LGBT+ football teams, walking groups and reading groups. Within these emails I attached my information sheet for the project (appendix A). Many of these emails were fruitless ventures however, with organisations and groups not replying to emails, so I often followed these up with emails again, as well as phonecalls where these were available on website contact pages. While I developed a checklist of organisations to help keep a register of organisations that I had contacted and reflecting on their replies through the checklists reveals a disappointing outcome of these efforts. Further, an email from a group catering inclusive of LGBT+ Muslims laid bare both my difficulties and disappointments, as well as the researcher fatigue (see Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008) for minority groups that academics and other researchers attempt to recruit from.

I also used internet forums to approach LGBT+ British Muslims. However, though attempting to get in contact with people, the use of the forum was sporadic and, in many cases, having initially corresponded with people about my project, especially with those with a tentative interest in it, users would suddenly become inactive for weeks on end and not reply back to messages; thus, I was only able to interview one person towards the latter stages of data collection. In order to supplement some of these recruitment strategies, I also set up a Twitter profile for the research project so that I could contact people who identified as LGBT+ Muslims in their short Twitter profile biographies. Though initially hesitant, given I do not have personal social media accounts, this strategy proved to be the most effective way to recruit participants, with 12 of the participants having been recruited from message exchanges on Twitter. In their work with sexual and gender minorities online, McDermott and Roen (2012) note

the increasing value of digital methods to engage with young people. Though my project did not use digital methods beyond recruitment it does demonstrate the increasing value of the internet to shape the lives of minority sexual and gender groups (Gray, 2009), particularly where it helps those who have not disclosed their identities given the relative anonymity internet spaces can present (Friedman, 2007). That most of my participants were recruited through Twitter demonstrates that the internet has proved useful for LGBT+ British Muslims more specifically, providing them scope to actively post and blog views about LGBT+ sexualities and Islam, or to retweet news and opinion articles relating to these. In fact, for the participant that identified as pansexual, his Twitter profile was the only space in which he felt comfortable to debate issues and rights linked to sexuality and a critical stance on Islam; he had told neither family, friends nor work colleagues of his sexual identity and issues with Islam.

As well as recruiting through Twitter, I attended an IMI event on LGBT+ Muslims in Manchester in October 2016, through which I was able to contact and gain access to LGBT+ British Muslims. Through attending this, I was able to talk to people and recruit 2 of them over the course of 6 months. Organising interviews with one of the participants from the IMI event was a laborious exercise in consistently broken promises and excuses that often proved rather vexing and also challenged my enthusiasm for the project at times. Of the other 4 people who kindly participated in the interviews, one was a personal contact that I knew was gay and Muslim, two participants were recruited from different friends and were happy to participate in the research, and one person was recruited through word of mouth from another research participant.

Clearly, it was quite difficult to recruit participants and there are limitations to both the recruitment approach and the research sample. The latter was fundamentally shaped by my recruitment strategies which impacts upon the strength of any findings in a number of distinctive and related ways. Using Twitter meant that I was only able to access those who explicitly stated that they identified as LGBT+ and Muslim, so affected my ability to talk to those who may identify as such but were not comfortable speaking out about this in the public domain. Though there is a somewhat small group of 'loud and proud' (McLoughlin, 2000) LGBT+ Muslims, it is unclear to what extent their views and experiences correlate with the larger silent majority. Further, those attending events such as the IMI one have to be 'in the know' and others may not have

the capacity to travel, or in the instances of those who are not 'out', there could be careful policing of internet and social media activity according to some participant narratives. Such difficulties in recruitment demonstrate that despite the increasing political and social recognition of some LGBT+ groups (Plummer, 2003), there is a long way to go yet in terms of the visibility of LGBT+ Muslims in the UK.

3.3.2 Research sample

According to the UK 2011 census, after Christians, it is Muslims that form the largest religious group in the UK (not considering those who identify as atheist or agnostic and those who did not state a religious identity), with 4.8% of those taking part identifying as Muslim. The majority of this Muslim population traces its roots from South Asia- namely India, Pakistan and Bangladesh- reflecting British colonial rule over the Indian sub-continent, and also echoed in my sample. There are smaller numbers of Muslims from other parts of Asia in the UK as well, such as the Middle East, and Africa, as well as Muslims from other ethnic and national backgrounds. Of the 19 participants that participated, 12 were of British Pakistani ethnicity, 3 identified as British Indian, 1 was of British Black Arabian ethnicity, 1 was a white British transgender man who converted to Islam, and 2 were British Bangladeshi. Ages ranged from 21-47, with 15 of the participants identifying as male and 3 identifying as women, 1 participant identified as a transgender male. With regards to sexual identity- which participants were asked to self-define, as with the gender and ethnicity questions (appendix C) -the 3 women who took part labelled themselves as lesbian, 13 participants identified themselves as gay, 2 stated they were bisexual, and 1 participant identified as pansexual (appendix D).

Having described the sample group in relation to their sexual identities and before going on to explore the use of semi-structured interviews with LGBT+ British Muslims, it is helpful to summarise why I use the LGBT+ umbrella term to explore collective experiences of my participants. It can be difficult deciding upon the appropriate terms to embrace to describe sexual minorities given the range of terms available and contestations over the correct terminology. However, though alert to the lack of diversity of sexualities and/or different genders, my use of LGBT+ across the thesis was settled by terms that the participants used to describe their sexual identities and sexual minorities as a collective, as well as their accounts of their experiences, additionally being informed by a critical reluctance towards other descriptor terms for sexual minorities. Not so much to package all Muslim minority sexual and gender

identities together but to understand points of connection between individual experiences of being sexual and gender minorities while simultaneously being Muslim. The sample group that participated in the research project is dominated by gay men but there are voices from other members of the LGBT+ community included, with lesbian women, bisexual men, a transgender man and a participant that identifies as pansexual (the latter is represented by the inclusion of the + symbol) all participating. As such, with strong common experiences of the regulation and contestations of their sexual and/or gender identities, the LGBT+ umbrella term is appropriate in respect of relaying and analysing their experiences, though in some contexts I have highlighted more precisely the sexual identities adopted by the participants.

Other popular terms to understand the experiences of sexual minorities include non-heterosexual and queer. The non-heterosexual label is widely-accepted in academic circles where it is mainly applied but may be regarded as a 'negative derivative of heterosexuality' (Browne, 2003: 133) and, as Yip (2005) highlights, reinforce a heteronormative standard with minority sexualities angled against heterosexuality. Despite their concerns, both Browne (2003) and Yip (2005) continue with the label, finding merit through its ability to incorporate the labels that their participants used to describe their minority sexualities. Furthermore, non-heterosexual may also be regarded as a 'cleaner' term, free of the 'too' political baggage of other labels, such as LGBT or homosexual, and the collective struggles that come to mind (Weeks et al., 2001). Using terms that are ostensibly clean from the important histories and struggles of acceptance and recognition of LGBT+ individuals and groups, however, does a disservice to them and the forms of contemporary activism indebted to them.

Therefore, I was apprehensive about adopting the non-heterosexual term widely across the thesis and such unease was similar with questioning whether to adopt the queer umbrella term. My discomfort with using queer stems from its use within primarily scholastic, privileged circles and sexual politics- perhaps reflected in none of my participants using the label- and its associations with 'disruptive avant-garde activisms and performances' (King, 2008: 512), as well as that much of its intellectual roots in queer theory have historically lacked the grounding of discourse in everyday, material contexts for developing understandings of sexual minority experiences (Edwards,

1998). Queer theory and politics have also been criticised for marginalising the voices of sexual minorities from non-white, as well as working-class and gender-non-conforming backgrounds (Cohen, 1997; Butler et al.,2010). Consequently, using queer would have been incompatible with both the research sample- in respect of considering intersectional experiences- and my own understandings of an inclusive sexual politics. The critiques of the umbrella terms succinctly discussed here demonstrate the contentious politics of naming and identity but I have sought to use the terms identified by my participants, evaluations of popular terminology, as well as an understanding of the history of sexual minority and trans activism as, mainly, a shared one and so chose to adopt the LGBT+ term in my thesis. Having explored my research design, strategy and participant sample, in the next section I focus on the interviews carried out before revealing some of the ethical issues of the research.

3.3.3 Using interviews with LGBT+ British Muslims

Naturally, interviews, as with any research method, have both their strengths- outlined in 3.2.1- and limitations, and so I want to talk about some of these in relation to the research. As said, my project covers quite sensitive material, and perhaps especially so for those participants who had not disclosed their identities to many people, or who had not told anyone besides me (which was the case for 3 of them) or people on digital media. Thus, I supposed these issues and themes would be most comfortably discussed in one-to-one interviews with me, in spaces and times of participants' own choosing. The custom of open-ended questions in these encounters also, I felt, gave participants the opportunity to reveal their experiences freely.

Some of the key themes I wanted to focus on in my project and interviews were: understandings of ethno-religious discourses and expectations of gender and sexuality; LGBT+ identities and their connections between Muslim and ethnic identities; the closeting of sexuality (specifically, the manifestations of this power-knowledge nexus in different spaces and times, and strategies and performances that were both complicit in the reifications of these manifestations and ones that contested these); and finally, perceptions and materialisations of belonging and forms of national, urban and sexual citizenship- at different scales and spatialities - in an uncertain geopolitical world (particularly in light of the growth in Islamist terror, securitisation agendas, the racialisation of religion, and reactionary (far-right populist) politics).

I attempted to catalogue my research interview questions within these general themes. The interview schedule focused on how participants perceived different identities and the structures surrounding these: how, for instance, do religious and ethnic identities impact upon the regulation and performance of LGBT+ identities, and vice-versa? How do encounters with people from both similar and different sexual, religious and ethnic backgrounds offer different modes and strategies of management and negotiation? How are cultural and religious discourses and expectations of gender and sexuality mediated and responded to? More specifically in terms of the order of the interview schedule, I initially tried to gain an understanding of the family and home lives and backgrounds of the participants which then enabled me to ask more specific questions about their religious and ethnic identities, before often moving on to the sexual identities of the participants (labels, performances, disclosure) and encouraging participants to consider how certain identities influence their sexuality etc. I also wanted participants to reflect on how they set about managing certain conflicts between identities and spaces, while I would often start analysing how these active processes and strategies of management and negotiation were assessed and evaluated by the interviewees, and to what extent the contradictions and reifications of certain practices helped them to construct narratives of identities and meanings, and the importance of space, scale and social relations in shaping these.

Though I often started these interviews with relatively straightforward questions about their home and family life, or questions about education, they often helped to put participants at ease generally, so I was able to more freely move on to questions about sexual identity, performance and regulation, disclosure etc. I was able to maximise the strengths of the interviews by appropriately changing them in relation to what had occurred in previous interviews and what was deemed important, and to consider some new themes that emerged (appendix E). As such, interviews that are flexible and observant to participants' experiences, emotions and meanings are more useful in obtaining richly detailed insight into various subjectivities and positionalities (Dunn, 2005).

For instance, using social media, such as Twitter and internet forums, has been instrumental for participants' understandings of Islamic discourse on sexuality and their interpretations within Muslim communities, as well as for engaging with other LGBT+

Muslims. In fact, the Internet and digital media, more generally, have been fascinating and important spaces for expression and development- a theme that the thesis explores in chapter 6. Interview schedules were sometimes changed to become more efficient means of yielding data, specific to what was being exchanged. This allowed me to occasionally occupy a position of naivety, which balanced power relations somewhat in the interview encounter and gestures towards a co-production of knowledge in which I was happy to take on the position of an eager pupil and review collective understandings and interpretations that I had gleaned from previous interviews.

However, though the relative merits of conducting semi-structured interviews have been noted in the previous discussion, this form of research method naturally also has drawbacks. Though I do not agree with positivist critiques of interviews as unscientific and 'too' subjective (Cope, 2002) and that thus, the data that is generated might be viewed as not particularly valid or reliable (Valentine, 2013), I agree with Longhurst's contentions that interviews 'offer a partial insight into what people do and think' (2010:112). However, perhaps participant statements can also be ambiguous at times or even my own questions. As well as this, there might be inconsistencies within an individual interview and perhaps there is a worry that these are too person-specific/dependent and that this does not lend itself to uniformity in the research process. I tried to offset this by ensuring I had made a serious attempt to understand a participant's personal and social worlds in the interviews I had with them.

As well as this, assumptions that participants might doctor their narratives in order to fit their preconceived notions of what their accounts should reveal or what they presume the interviewer might want to hear, or just outright lie, might be more difficult to engage with and reveal, but I believe that the force of things which are said (which was helped by noting the emotional and body language of participants in a notebook and in the transcripts), as well as a commonality of responses across numerous transcripts suggests that there is veracity to the qualitative interview data held. I have not yet walked away from an interview and been disappointed because I thought a participant had produced inauthentic versions of their life, though this is never fully knowable, and, in some cases, a participant may be doing so for reasons of protection and anonymity. Thus, criticisms of interviews as limited by their lack of objectivity, generalisability and representativeness are inherently flawed. With such critiques,

there is a lack of engagement with understandings that the aims of interviews are to produce explorations and analyses of people's experiences, behaviours, opinions, and the meanings behind them, and not to be representative (Valentine, 2013). A qualitative interviewer's aim should be to look for depth rather than breadth of understanding and knowledge. My research, as mentioned before, understands that multiple truths, subjectivities and knowledges are different and vary for people across social markers. This makes clear that interviews are not able to be fully replicated (nor should they be) for each will take on specific formats in response to the researcher-participant relationship and the narratives that emerge from these.

3.3.4 Ethical issues in interviewing LGBT+ British Muslims

Before fieldwork could proceed, I applied for and was granted ethical approval by Newcastle University's Ethics Committee (appendix F) and I turn to explore some of the ethical and practical issues that arose from conducting interviews with my participants. Some of these ethical issues were mediated with careful consideration and thus, they may be somewhat more contextual and specific rather than broader limitations of interviews. It is also important to note that it can be rather difficult to outline ethical conduct in ethical approval forms- prior to doing interview research because:

> Moral questions can arise at any time, research being determined by changing levels of competence, types of disclosure, and the unintended consequences of growing emotional intimacy. From study design to data collection and publication, ethical conduct is not fixed, but needs to be continually responsive to personal, social and contextual constructions (Hewitt, 2007)

When participants agreed to take part in the interviews, it was important to obtain informed consent that was provided willingly and confirmed through singing a consent form (appendix G), as well as being verbalised by participants (Plummer, 2001). I achieved this by trying to make sure the aims, motivations, methods and outcomes of the research project were laid out in sufficient lay terms. This was important to do as participants and groups often questioned me on my motivations and identities. I also made clear to the participants that they were able to opt out at any point of the project, both on the consent forms and verbally (Gallagher, 2009).

It was important to think through these ethical issues and the practicalities of how informed consent was going to be attained for the interviews. However, I was also

careful to note that obtaining informed consent should not just be viewed as a box-ticking exercise on an ethics checklist (Cloke et al, 2000). Instead, I perceived informed consent as an iterative process, agreeing with Hopkins' (2010: 58) assertion that the 'negotiation of ethics is a constant process throughout the entire research process'. Thus, harm was recognised as part and parcel of seeing individual participants as autonomous, but I sought to be careful due to the sensitivity of the topics being discussed in the interview process and the social contexts of these (Lee and Renzetti, 1990). It happened that participants sometimes found it difficult to talk about issues surrounding conflicts between religious, ethnic and sexual identities, closeted sexualities, relationships and heterosexual marriage, and distressing racist encounters. I often wondered what the effects of talking about quite personal and sensitive material could have been for the participants; in such instances, I think it is fair to acknowledge that emotional involvement within the research process cannot be avoided, nor do I think it should be. Had it been appropriate, or asked for, I would have tried to help point participants to services that they may use, but this never arose in the research encounters.

One way in which distress or harm may be potentially mitigated for participants is through confidentiality and anonymity, which are important ethical principles to consider in interviews and are often seen as a given in such contexts (Walford, 2005; Wiles et al., 2008). However, I was alert to treat privacy as an ethical issue in its own right and not merely as a constitutive element of confidentiality (Chaitin, 2003; Shaw, 2003; Wood, 2006). Anonymity in my project was arranged through prescribing pseudonyms of names which signified the protection of identifying features of participants and their narratives. Relatedly, confidentiality 'refers to promises not to pass on to others specific details pertaining to a person's life (Hopkins, 2010: 63) and this was outlined. Both principles are 'closely connected…in that anonymity is one way in which confidentiality is operationalised' (Wiles et al., 2008: 417).

Harm and distress, thus, may be curtailed through anonymity and the promise of confidentiality which might allow for the creation of safe spaces in which participants might 'open up' (Ni Laoire, 2007). However, it is difficult to get a clear sense of how talking about some of these issues might have impacted in the long-term for participants (Valentine, 2013). Additionally, some participants may have seen the research interview as a cathartic/therapeutic-like space in which to open up about

personal issues (Richards and Emslie, 2000; Richard and Schwartz, 2002). In pretty much all the interviews carried out, participants were extremely co-operative; willing to share detailed personal experiences and seemed to have a genuine interest in the topic, as many of them often felt their voices were not represented well in either religious, ethnic or LGBT+ communities. The interviews were enjoyable exercises and helped develop greater awareness through the process of analysis that I explore now.

3.3.4 Analysis of interview data

The interviews generated a sizeable amount of rich data. While most of the data analysis occurs after interviews have been completed, it is flawed to suggest that analysis of data is solely completed after data collection and that one does not engage in analysis of data during the collection of fieldwork and the immediate aftermath of this, as it pertains to thinking about the research encounter and later transcribing interview material. Researchers are also involved in analysis in the field, while transcribing interviews means tentative ideas and themes are being mentally framed, as acquaintance with the interview data becomes increasingly formulated (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is not only what is said that researchers analyse, but also the spaces, relations and body language that come to inform and influence interview data collection and this also comes to shape analysis. These initial and provisional experiences of data analysis highlight the research endeavour as one characterised by its itinerancy, where informal and formal stages of work complement one another to strengthen the ideas and explorations envisaged and formulated.

Regarding the more formal stage of data analysis, the first step was to transcribe the recordings which was a slow process but ultimately allowed me to get closer to the data, as Crang (2001) highlights. While transcribing I sought to consider some of my written reflections during and in the aftermath of interviews, with these notes laid on my desk, as was the relevant demographic form for the interview. Doing this allowed me to further contextualise my nascent analysis and understanding of the data (Wiles et al., 2005; Berger, 2015). What also helped after transcribing some of my earlier interviews was exploring some of what I felt were key themes with other participants. Though being careful not to reveal identifying information, I did consider some of their thoughts on my early interpretations, and so later participants did provide a 'member's' check of sort which also helped to refine interview questions and was a form of early analysis (Koelsch, 2013). Once transcribed, the data was subject to further analysis

and interpretation through initially reading the transcripts and developing broad themes. My coding practice was freehand, using pens and highlighters, and was a fairly simple strategy with little analytical thinking or processing involved at the preliminary stage. I chose to proceed with a freestyle method as I felt that this would allow me to become closer to the data and could counter issues with using software like NVivo, such as a lack of contextualisation (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) which may have led to impeding the depth of analysis (Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor, 2003).

With these main themes established, I then set about trying to locate sub-themes and so on, in order to establish the connections between them so as to express the richness and diversity of the lived experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims. This meant continuously reading and re-reading emergent relationships between different themes, - an example of axial coding where the relationships between themes and sub-themes are established and explored. Some of the themes emerged from specific questions- e.g. what do you think are the expectations for Muslim men/women? - while others emerged through the connection of several questions and the topics/experiences relayed in response to these. Some initial themes included: Islamic sexual discourse; gender roles and expectations; LGBT+ Muslim urbanisms; disclosure or lack thereof; spatial in/exclusions; racism. From these, sub-codes were generated, for instance: digital spaces and connectivities, the role of izzat (honour) and morality shaping the policing and regulation of LGBT+ disclosure, time-space strategies to protect, out and negotiate sexualities; encounters etc. This approach to analysis was largely informed therefore by grounded theory which means that researchers use the themes and concepts that emerge from the data rather than an imposition of preconceptions and prior conceptual thinking (Glaser and Straus, 1967). However, this was a modified approach to it (Charmaz, 2014), balancing an inductive form of reasoning with extant theories and work to provide analyses that are empirically grounded which simultaneously take in and build existing work (Urquhart, 2013). This was developed in line with reviewing the existing literature but also through the writing-up stage. In order to further help understand and situate the process of data analysis, it is useful to explore my multiple positionalities throughout the research process in the following section.

3.4 Thinking about reflexivity, knowledge and positionalities

Perceived limitations of interviews as biased are rooted in masculinist/empiricist approaches to 'scientific' research that problematically privilege flawed notions of objectivity and impartiality, while not recognising the subjectivity and specificity of multiple and competing truths (Cope, 2002). Feminist epistemologies, on the other hand, highlight the importance of acknowledging the research design and method as built upon and through researchers' multiple experiences, identities and motivations for the research (England, 1994). Assuming objectivity in social research is consonant with signifying incorrect notions of rationality and a singular truth that emerges from a fictive academic distance (Haraway, 1988). Thus, the importance of accommodating the aims, questions and interpretations of interviews as contingent upon a researcher's multiple positionalities (Hopkins, 2008b; 2009) offers a counterbalance to accusations of interviews as subjective and seemingly 'less scientific'. Harding (1991) suggests the masculinist nature of 'objective' research replicates and reproduces problematic power hierarchies within the performance of research, whilst she also demonstrates the importance of standpoint theory in understanding diverse versions of truth and accounts of individual and social worlds as valid. Similar in some regards in confronting claims of neutrality and the performance of the god-trick in research, Haraway (1988) suggests accepting knowledge and research practice as situated; specific to each context of the researcher and participant; and a need for researchers to acknowledge these many biases, viewpoints and values inherent in the research process from the research design at its inception to its dissemination.

Feminist scholars have challenged the taken-for-granted knowledge claims of positivist epistemologies and highlighted the situated nature of the co-production of knowledge (Haraway, 1988: Rose, 1993), drawing attention, thus, to the ways in which identities and experiences shape our positionalities and interactions with research participants and vice-versa (England, 1994; Valentine, 2002). As Skelton (2001: 90) suggests, it is vital to consider the existing and changing 'differential power relations' between researchers and participants. Any efforts to be aware of these and their possible impacts on the way in which interview data is approached, carried out and interpreted, through being critically reflexive (Rose, 1997), allows for a better understanding as to the partiality and rigour of the interview data, but also the complexity of the research process.

To be aware of the power dynamics within research encounters means seeing the researcher 'not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete specific desires and interests' (Harding, 1987: 9, see also Haraway, 1988 and Valentine, 2002). As the relationship between participant and researcher is carried out within interviews and whilst participants' narratives are being told, being critically reflexive helps provide the 'possibilities for negotiation over what knowledge claims are made, for whom, why and within what frame of reference' (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 119). As Valentine (2002: 118) suggests, the power dynamics between researchers and the researched are unethical if those conducting research take the place of the expert and extract information from a passive subject. Rose (1997) suggests a reflexive landscape of power stimulates important questions about the authenticity of the knowledge produced.

Throughout the fieldwork, it was clear that the power relationships between participants and me were dynamic. Though I may have been the one willingly in possession of a voice recorder and notebook, participants had the ability to withhold information, or the possibility of withdrawing from the research completely, as outlined before. I relied deeply on their willingness to participate and on their authenticity of opinion and narrative in order to conduct and understand the work. In many cases, questions that I asked were often put to me, and sometimes the potential for power relations to embed themselves at the recruitment stage also occurred. A particularly striking email exchange I recall was with a member of an organisation who put forward questions as to why I chose to research the topic, with the group in question having previously been in contact with individuals interested in researching the experiences of LGBT people from ethnic minority backgrounds but without sharing the identities of those they sought to research.While outlining my own motivations, identities and objectives of the research project, it was important to try, as best I could, to maintain a non-hierarchial tone to my conduct by answering and revealing these in order to develop a fair exchange of information. Self-disclosure helps ensure a balance between those researching and those researched (Abell et al., 2006) and it was essential to create some shared positional spaces, where potential gatekeepers and participants were provided with a transitory shared space in which to relate. Such exchanges and encounters were then informed by identity-based similarties and differences.

To be self-conscious and to pronounce myself and my role in the research may help readers engage in an emblematical dialogue with me and convince them of my aspirations, aims and motivations for the project. It is important, therefore, to address my own identities and positionalities within the research project. I am a young, gay man from a British-Pakistani/Indian, liberal/cultural Muslim background, educated to MA level and working towards a doctorate. As a gay man growing up, I often did not think it was possible to be gay and brown, nor to be brown and gay and come from a Muslim background (however liberal that might have been), nor to be a gay boy that liked football, tennis and rugby, or enjoy the kind of rock and indie music I was into. Could I be properly thought of as a Yorkshireman as well, as belonging in Britain too? My thoughts were undoubtedly concerned with this seeming contradictory sense of being gay, male, Asian, and from a Muslim background. However, doing research around geographies of sexualities and religion, and postcolonialism and feminism, generally proved cathartic as I transitioned through my undergraduate years and certainly helped me reconcile these intersections of identities, as I became more perceptive and self-aware, recognising the importance of carrying out work on minority identities and group. Thus, it would be fitting to describe my work and research interests as rooted somewhat in the following passage Rich eloquently puts forward and something that certainly struck a chord with me:

> When those who have power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium…Yet you know you exist and others like you…It takes some strength of soul- and not just individual strength, but collective understanding- to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard. And to make yourself visible (1986: 199)

I cannot say that many of the things that I have read, heard or felt about my different identities have been true, whether that be about gay men, Asian men, or people from Muslim backgrounds, for I seldom came to recognise anything in the media as related to me because it never spoke about the connections between my identities and their nuances. Such anxieties have powerfully stimulated my research project and perhaps

it is rooted in a politics of identity and community that I have occasionally been uncomfortable with, and perhaps my work has been a result of acting against that, however minor that political act might be. So, thus, my project then is also about LGBT+ Muslims because of my own identities, my own misgivings and uneasiness, my own partially and spatially closeted experiences, as they were. As well as these, there is also a recognition of the overwhelming invisibility of LGBT+ Muslims within both the media and academia (as well as their misrecognitions in some limited accounts) and also to a degree my 'insider' status, though this status might be a dangerous one to take for it is inherently essentialist and risks reifying the categories I hope to unpack. Overall, I do not suggest this knowledge of being gay, Asian and coming from a Muslim background is a claim to legitimacy and validity in my research, but rather that there is an intensely profound relationship between my subjectivity and my study, that any knowledge I have now and throughout the project has been and is situated.

However, it is not enough to highlight my own identities and describe how these have shaped my research interests, motivations and questions, but to also critically demonstrate how I was variously positioned as an insider/outside in an interview setting and how this might impact upon the power dynamics of the research encounter and the concomitant forms of knowledge produced (Mohammad, 2001; Valentine, 2002; Hopkins, 2008a, 2009). It is important to recognise that positionalities are fluid and relational, rather than fixed and many researchers have highlighted a sense of 'betweeenness' in these contexts (Nast, 1994; Mohammad, 2001; Hopkins, 2008a; 2009; Tarrant, 2014). Mohammad's (2001) work on Muslim, Pakistani women in the UK meant she felt she occupied positions of both sameness and difference; whilst being assumed to be an insider because of her ethnic and religious background, Mohammad negotiated positional spaces (see Mullings, 1999) of outsider as well because of other features of her life and identities. Hopkins' (2008a) research with young, Scottish Muslim men in Glasgow also points to the fluidity of the insider/outsider binary and perhaps its futility given the various positionalities that placed him within differing degrees of similarity and difference with his participants.

This space of betweenness naturally points to the ineffectiveness of the homogeneity of insider/outside categories that potentially conceal the power dynamics of research encounters (Naples, 1996; Nast, 1994). Sameness might be viewed as having a

commonality of experiences and circumstances that might apparently generate 'authentic and moral authority to personal history' (Mohammad, 2001: 104; see also Herod, 1999). Whilst being an outsider, it might be expected that researchers have more social and cultural ideas and terminologies to grapple with that might limit understandings (Valentine, 2002). These unfortunately fix and essentialise identities, but through seeing these positionalities as fluid, we highlight the contingency of the experiences and knowledges we uncover.

During my fieldwork, as the researcher, I shared positions of similarities and differences with my participants. In terms of ethnicity, minority sexual identities and cultural background, I was viewed as similar to my participants, and was also often presumed to be a Muslim (though I identify as agnostic and revealed these in many encounters). These similarities and differences influence the way in which knowledge or meanings are analysed and interpreted as well. Given the dynamic nature of conducting research with people, and the complexity of the researcher's and participants' identities, 'truth claims can hence only be grounded in a real recognition of the limitations of vision and knowledge, and the existence of multiple truths' (Mohammad, 2001: 113). Conducting research with LGBT+ Muslims, I had to pay particular attention to the politics of difference, representation and identity, so as to acknowledge that my knowledge and experiences gleaned from it can generate multiple truths that may not necessarily have the same value or worth, as Mohammad (2001: 113) states: it is useful to ask 'which/whose truth?' is being shared and told.

There were times I felt wary about participants asking about my status or sharing my experience, not because I was unwilling to share them, but perhaps I had certain misgivings about the impressions I would leave with them. An exchange below is telling in some respect given the eyebrows raised by a participant when I replied with a statement contrary to his about my own sexual experiences with men:

> *I still feel it's wrong, but I know I don't want to get involved in all these things like meeting, the thing is with men they want to have quick, short meets and things like that, and I know I'm not interested in that* (Amir, 37)

I remained quite conscious, but open, about my positionality, and perhaps there were times when I managed notions of these in order to avoid essentialist or stereotypical notions of views and experiences.

Clearly, highlighting and interpreting these contradictory states of 'betweeness' in which researchers are positioned at simultaneous intersections of identities in different contexts and are never completely insiders or outsiders (Nast, 1994; Mohammad, 2001; Hopkins, 2008a; Hopkins, 2009) remains a difficult endeavour, and imbalances across positionalities and power hierarchies can be controversial. However, in some cases, it can be difficult to outline exactly how our positionalities impact upon the complex negotiations of power relations in an interview setting given these are never 'fully knowable' (Rose, 1997) and could be somewhat beyond our understanding (Valentine, 2002). However, though some may critique the usefulness of self-reflexivity as a practice in solipsism, it does not mean we should overlook or forget about the notion and realities of reflexivity. Knowledge production is not static but a merging and weaving of identities, performances and positionalities, and reflecting on these helps render the relational dynamics of these encounters visible and embeds the knowledge produced in them, whilst highlighting at the same time how these subjectivities encroach across the whole process of qualitative research (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2002). Thus, my research does not perhaps uncover pure and sanitised truths, but rather provides a version or way of seeing the world through *particular* LGBT+ British Muslim eyes.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the methodology of the research project. First, I justified my use of semi-structured interviews in respect of their flexibility and conversational tone, understanding that these would provide rich data that would allow me to step into the socio-spatial worlds of my participants in the hope that I could present insights into their lives. I then highlighted my approach to recruiting participants and the difficulties that I encountered in doing so. This problem in gaining access to this 'hard-to-reach' group was met with developing a Twitter account for the project through which I was able to recruit most of my participants, indicating the value of online communications, as I showed. Using interviews with LGBT+ British Muslims meant I was able to gather rich data and the steps involved in data analysis were shown to demonstrate how I came to understand their experiences. Finally, I sought to be reflexive about the

research process with regards to situating the data and knowledge produced and highlighted my positionalities in order to do this. I now present the findings from my data analysis in subsequent chapters, starting with how LGBT+ Muslims understood experiences of closeted sexualities.

Chapter 4. Exploring closeted LGBT+ British Muslim sexualities

4.1 Introduction

This chapter draws from my participants' narratives surrounding the regulation of their sexual identities and practices, and explores these in relation to their various discursive, embodied and spatial characteristics and forms. Before doing so, I review the literature on the regulation of LGBT+ sexualities and the idea of the 'closet'. The belief of the closet as a material space of ambiguity, as well as of metaphor, is highlighted in order to account for a consideration of this materialisation of power (in its many forms). Following Brown's work (2000) on the closet as both metaphor and a spatial practice of secrecy, denial and negotiation, I explore these in relation to understandings and spaces of sexual exclusion that are provided in some of the work in the geographies of sexualities sub-field.

Highlighting the existing literature helps provide a grounding for the analysis of how my participants experienced discourses and spaces that worked to regulate their sexualities. After reviewing the literature, I first analyse the discursive regulation and closeting of the sexualities of my participants, as these related to interpretations of Islamic sexual ethics- in these instances what is provided is an account of the considerations of religious discourses that participants felt they had to live their sexualities through, and I present understandings of how they understood these. Following this, I explore how how my participants negotiated parental relations and their understandings of sexualities that developed closets around their sexualities before looking at the notion of izzat and community relations, as well as how gendered expectations of marriage and procreation constructed experiences of being in the closet.These experiences are concerned with how sexual morals and discourses related to different identities and their associated power relations shape the experiences of my participants. How these unequal relations of power materialise on the body, and are shaped by it, and my participants' understandings of these is the focus of the final section on how LGBT+ British Muslims experience being in the closet. Altogether, experiencing and negotiating the closet has spatialities to it for the participants and this is accounted for throughout the analysis of their accounts.

4.2. The regulation of sexuality and the closet

Heteronormativity, according to Berlant and Winter (1998:548), refers to 'the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent…but also privileged'. Such a system comprises and arranges tactics of power and knowledge that lead to perceptions of a 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980) and relationally position LGBT+ groups as transgressing social norms (Weeks, 1995). This is because heteronormativity presents and relies upon the assumption that the male and female sexes are romantically and/or sexually drawn to each other (Binnie, 2007), while naturalising gendered identities and performance. Though this authoritative heterosexuality has become socialised as natural at face value, it is produced by norms and morals of sexualities that have a powerful and abundant history, shaped muscularly and unevenly by political, religious and cultural elements. Hubbard (2008) argues that the presentation and performance of heterosexuality as the hegemonic sexuality continues to be produced through politics, institutions, media and cultures. Discernible through this system is how everyday spaces are generally unremarked as heterosexual, with those performing 'different' gender and sexual identities within these spaces seemingly contesting socio-spatial norms (Browne and Brown, 2016). This heteronormative regulation has therefore had profound implications for how minority identities and practices relative to heterosexuality and its attendant privileged masculinities and femininities have been negotiated, in/excluded, and understood.

The commanding concept for cataloguing the regulation of LGBT+ sexualities is the spatial metaphor of 'the closet' (Seidman, Meeks and Traschen 1999), 'a term used to describe the denial, concealment, erasure, or ignorance of lesbians and gay men' (Brown, 2000: 1). Sedgwick argues that the closet is 'the defining structure of gay oppression' (1990; 71). It is also used to describe other LGBT+ groups, such as bisexuals, pansexuals, polysexuals, as well as gender non-conforming groups too such as transgender and genderqueer populations. Historically, LGBT+ identities and practices have been wedded to the closet; implicitly, the metaphor silhouettes these against institutionalised heterosexuality, though it is important to also acknowledge that there are varying styles of the latter with some arrangements of heterosexuality, such as the monogamous married couple and nuclear family, more valorised or fetishised than others (Jackson, 2006). Being in the closet suggests a metaphorical space of secrecy, rejection and shame that organises LGBT+ identities and practices

through simplistic binary models of gender (male and female) and sexuality (heterosexual and homosexual) that shape the suppression of non-heterosexuality, whilst simultaneously reproducing heterosexuality as the hegemonic model of sexuality (Sedgwick, 1990; Weeks, 2007). On the other hand, being out of the closet or disclosing LGBT+ identities is seemingly a liberating step towards the most accepted or 'canonical expression of being gay' (Perez, 2005:177) and generally seen to be a fundamental practice for hastening and achieving positive LGBT+ experiences (Plummer, 1995). Coming out as gay, lesbian, transgender etc. might therefore seem to be a politically subversive tool that resists the ubiquitous social order of heteronormativity.

However, the extent to which this act is politically subversive is ambiguous given it can maintain and reinforce the unequal exercise of power and the problematics of dichotomous models, and their associated contradictions. It is crucial to outline that coming out of the closet is not a linear process that might otherwise be assumed, but one that depends on 'continuous acts of declaration' (Urbach, 1996: 69) because of the naturalness of heterosexuality in everyday life and the shifting individual and social contexts of regulation, sexual morality and acceptance. The processual and relational nature of disclosure of LGBT+ identities and coming out of the closet means silence and articulation of sexualities vary depending upon context and this blurs understandings of disclosure as healthyand non-disclosure as unhealthy and internalised homophobia (Rasmussen, 2004; Mclean, 2007). There are other nuances to the model of the closet; it has often been predicated on gay male experiences (Brown, 2000; Halberstam, 2005) and based on white bodies (Fung, 1996; Lee, 2003; McCune, 2008), whilst it has also been subject to criticism because of the Eurocentric nature of its conceptualisations and models of sexuality and gender (Jolly, 2001; Phellas, 2005).

According to Tucker (2009: 10), the closet is too rigidly based on the biographies of 'Western European and North American' sexual minorities, with the attendant issue of being placed inflexibly within a binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality that has historically formed the primary framework for understanding sexual identities in the West (Sedgwick, 1990). Problematically, this may limit the application of such a conceptualisation of sexuality in locations outside of the West, with many of these having long histories of sexual and gender diversity (Ilkkaracan, 2008; Habib, 2010;

Hossain, 2012) that may relate to, but are not entirely consonant with, Western sexual identities. Relatedly, Massad (2002; 2007) has been critical of the Eurocentric labels and notions that underpin the coming out process and broader social and political subscriptions to sexual citizenship as based upon a Western sexual epistemology. This tends to universalise experiences of sexual minorities through transplanting teleological narratives of development and modernisation related to coming out.

As such, applying Western labels for understanding sexuality and the processes and practices that relate to this and that shape understandings of the closet may therefore be tantamount to a culturally caustic 'form of colonization: yet another export in the diffusion of queer culture from the West' (Brown, 2000: 137). As Tucker (2009) argues, therefore, the closet can be difficult to analyse in settings where there is limited inclination for valorising a sexual self based upon Western labels. Furthermore, even in Western settings, sexual minorities from minority ethnic and diasporic backgrounds may challenge the primary understandings and constructions of the closet and coming out processes that are implicit in the celebration of the assimilation of sexual minorities into European citizenship (Haritaworn et al., 2008). The Eurocentricity and whiteness of the closet with regards to representing disclosure as a constituent of the model of a sexually progressive citizen that it promulgates may be limited in scope and application therefore where there is little inclusivity and understanding of how sexual minorities from minority ethnic and racial backgrounds in the west claim sexual identity labels and the structural and interpersonal factors that shape belonging to these and their associated communities.

Cohen (1997) observes that celebrations of progressive sexual identities and politics in the West are based upon generally white, gay cisgender men. As a result, the experiences of others that engage in same-sex relations or non-normative sexual practices may be misunderstood if solely understood via the closet as a schema for analysing their experiences. Bui (2014) highlights that Asian American gay male experiences do not fit precisely with the coming out process and the insider/outsider binary because of family ties and gendered relations and understandings, while Ross (2005) explores how African-American men that engage in same-sex practices and sexual relationships likewise may not share claims to an authentic sexual self that

coming out processes allude to, in spite of understanding their experiences around a comparable binary of homosexual/heterosexuality. Therefore, the predominant portrayals of coming out and the closet through Eurocentric standards and whiteness at the expense of other sexual minorities can work to conceal diverse experiences of the regulation of minority sexualities, navigations of disclosure, sexual practices and relationships, and heteronormativity, and how these draw meaning in relation to not only Western contexts and models of heterosexuality/homosexuality but also the other communities and social contexts that shape lived experiences. In order to advance more inclusive analyses of understandings of the closet and complicate it beyond a Eurocentric frame, or the validity of it as a way to understand the experiences of diverse individuals, it is worth further probing how both different identities and geographies shape the subjectivities of sexual minorities, the latter of which I turn to now.

4.3 The closet: From metaphors to spatialities

Noting the importance of the spatial metaphor of the closet as a central aspect of gay men's lives, Brown (2000) suggests it is also taken for granted and seldom discussed in relation to its materiality of power, knowledge and space. Building on nascent work that explored the role of space and place in shaping sexual relations, practices and politics (Bell and Valentine, 1995), Brown sought to understand how the metaphor of the closet works as both a material and discursive spatial practice and tactic of power and knowledge, and reflected the growing importance and sophistication of the sub-field of geographies of sexualities. Brown's (2000) shift from the textual geographies of the closet implicit in Sedgwick's (1990) reading moves away from the dualism of metaphor/materiality. This reflected a growing tendency to de-masculinise the discipline of geography, particularly with feminist geographies raising compelling questions about epistemologies and methodologies in human geography, and presumed ideas about the relationships between subjectivity, power, representation and knowledge that geographers of sexualities increasingly drew upon and developed in relation to their sub-field (Rose, 1993; Valentine, 1993a; Longhurst, 1997; Brown and Knopp, 2003). Understanding the closet as not merely a metaphor but a spatial structure and set of spatial practices, Brown (2000) highlighted the production and resistance of power related to sexual identity, seeing these as fluid and relational, but also profoundly rooted in places and at different geographic scales.

At the scale of the body, Brown (2000) uses Butler's theory of performativity (1990) to understand the multiple stages of closet gay identities. Understanding experiences of being in the closet as linguistic performatives through both speaking of and about the closet, and the silence of *doing the closet*, furthers understandings of the non-essentialism of categories of sexuality and gender and the usefulness of the role of space and place in shaping these. Further, the spatialities of the closet are central to performances of sexualities given Brown's (2000) description of gay men's resistance entailing embodied experiences and migration. This shift away from the elsewhereness of performativity (Nelson, 1999; Gregson and Rose, 2000) highlights the closet as simultaneously a linguistic performative and a material space, and coming out migration as a material process/expression of these ideas. The 'series of spatial scales: the body, the city, the nation, and the global' (Brown, 2000: 20) considered are drawn from several different geographic locations and are useful for uncovering the universalising tendencies implicit in textual, metaphorical geographies of the closet. However, despite this, the space of the closet itself seems rather too easily static and somewhat a reflection of Brown's organisation of his book. Despite working at several scales, the closet is seldom reflected as something that can be considered through the interrelatedness of numerous geographic scales.

Furthermore, despite Brown's analysis of the spatialities of gay men's closets, there are limited accounts of other LGBT+ groups. By not considering other sexual closets-'too problematic and exhausting a task to speak much beyond gay men's closet's' (Brown, 2000: 22/23) – this work is empirically constrained, a point Brown evidently concedes. A task I take on is to supplement this work by enabling questions about the intersections of identities and oppressions that problematise the spatial materialities of the closet, as well how discourses and spatial metaphors constitute such experiences. How is unequal access to LGBT+ privilege shaped by different identities and their locations? Thus, the interrelatedness of space and sexuality as it concerns the closet needs to be complicated further by understanding how these relationships are moderated by, and negotiated through, the interactions of different social, political and geographical contexts of other minority identities.

4.4 Further geographies of sexual exclusion

Though the closet is understood as a spatial metaphor for the concealment and denial of lesbian and gay men (Sedgwick, 1990), it is simultaneously a lived, material

phenomenon that has certain spatialities to it and requires negotiations in space (Brown, 2000). Understanding the closet as both material and metaphor builds upon some of the earlier geographies of sexualities work (Knopp, 1992; Valentine, 1993a, 1993b; Bell and Valentine, 1995) that demonstrated that 'sexuality- its regulations, norms, institutions, pleasures and desires- cannot be understood without understanding the spaces through which it is constituted, practiced and lived (Brown, Browne and Lim, 2007:4). Geographic research on how LGBT+ people mediate heteronormative contexts developed through the sub-field of geographies of sexualities, demonstrating how socio-spatial relations are sexualised in specific ways that exclude and can oppress non-heterosexuality while commonly supporting the unmarked pedestal of heterosexuality (Browne and Brown, 2016). Though earlier work by geographers concerned the mapping and discussion of visibly distinct gay spaces in Western cities (Castells, 1983; Lauria and Knopp, 1985; Knopp, 1990; 1992; 1995), research into lesbian identities helped mark everyday spaces and banal sites as central to the uneven structuring of sexuality and the negotiations that lesbians, as well as others that come under the umbrella LGBT+ term, therefore have to take (Valentine, 1993a; 1993b).Thus, the closet is shaped by how everyday spaces are regulated by sexual norms, whilst simultaneously producing such spaces and the social relations within them.

One way in which geographers highlighted the importance of space and location as significant to gender and sexual identities and practices was through analysing the spatial contexts of the performativity of gender and sexuality and the recursivity of discourse and materiality in shaping heteronormativity and patriarchy (Bell et al., 1994; McDowell, 1995). Peformativity theorises gender not as an originary and fixed signifier, but as fluid and malleable in relation to discursive and cultural contexts (Butler, 1993). It is highlighted that gender is a specific process of 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame', however, this process of organising gender is simultaneously an exercise of power, in which the subject is itself complicit. Thus, these performatives that Butler sees as iterative, repetitive and an act of 'doing' take place in normative contexts that have no real foundations themselves, but instead stem from these very acts of repetition and iterations. Butler (1990, 1993) draws upon Focauldian (1984) assumptions of power and knowledge in theorising performatives in the context of gender and sexuality; referencing such performatives as acts of power that are prediscursive and that come to outline the normal and socially-appropriate

means Butler's assumptions of performativity highlight the recursivity and fluidity of agency and structure. However, Butler's theory of the performativity of gender has been critiqued for its denial or lack of reference to context, particularly through its referencing to the 'elsewhereness' of structure and oversight of the immediacy of context (Bell et al., 1994; Nelson, 1999; Rose, 1996; Gregson and Rose, 2000). Responding to these meant highlighting that such acts and identities cannot be fully understood without acknowledgement of the situatedness and power relations of the spatialities of these contexts (Bell and Valentine, 1995a; Pile, 1996).

Bell et al.'s (1994) study on the subversive embodied performatives of gay skinheads and lipstick lesbians explored the performativity and cultural context of sexual and gender identities in spatial terms in ways that parodied and transgressed gender roles. They found that non-conforming sexual and gender identities unsettle heterosexuality in implicit ways that concurrently undermine the assumptions and unwritten social codes of heterosexual space; thus, the examples of the sexual performatives of gay skinheads and lipstick lesbians highlight their potential in relation to heterosexist expectations and conventions, as well as in producing new spaces that are creatively queer. In relation to two skinhead gay men sharing a kiss, Bell et al. state that 'by behaving in this way the gay skinhead can disrupt or destabilise not only a masculine identity but heterosexual space' (1994: 36). Thus, rather than assuming an essential spatiality- or space as simply a pre-existing container in which social relations and processes play out- multiple identities and spatialities are mutually constituted and performed, and as such, social processes, spaces and identities cannot be divorced from one another.

Brown (2000) also examined sexual relations at the scale of the body and the way this site could be read. In many cases with the men he spoke to, acts of disciplining the body through clothing for instance seemed a necessary evil for the practices and performatives of 'passing' as straight. Such acts of self-disciplinary embodied heteronormativity were demonstrated to intensify marginalisation and a sense of exclusion, thus highlighting how these materialised the body as a closet space. Re-evaluating Butler's theory of performativity with a decidedly geographic perspective, Brown highlighted both the contextuality of closeted sexual performatives and their materiality of power and knowledge. Overall, the body is a key site of gender and sexuality; gender is sexed, sexuality is gendered, and the body is the preeminent

material site of these. Whilst discussions of Butler's notion of performativity have highlighted the elsewhereness of what Butler explores, geographers' understanding of the importance of space in shaping these, and vice-versa, help show how 'dissident' sexualities might be deemed to be out of place and marginalised. Certainly, in the context of the embodied closet, the non-disclosure of sexuality reflects and reifies the disciplinary regimes of heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality to potentially mark sexual minorities as out of place, but these are also evidently customised to make sense in particular circumstances as with the examples of gay skinheads and lipstick lesbians (Bell et al., 1994).

A different space that has been explored by geographers of sexualities has been the site of the home which reflects this as an important area of research within geography (Johnston and Valentine, 1995), particularly amongst those working from a feminist perspective (Blunt and Varley, 2004; Blunt, 2005; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). According to Blunt and Dowling (2006), homes can empower people, as well as making them conform to ways of being in the world in relation to idealised discourses of gender (McDowell, 1999) and sexuality (Johnston and Valentine, 1995). Heterosexuality is often normalised within domestic space, linked to heteronormative ideals which generally highlight 'belonging and intimacy amongst members of a heterosexual, nuclear family, living in a detached, owner-occupied dwelling in a suburban location' (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 100-101). As such, according to McNamee et al. (2003: 125), the 'taken for granted heterosexuality of the family home can be experienced as oppressive and alienating' for LGBT+ people.

Some of the earliest work within geographies of sexualities on the home demonstrated this idea of the home as a conflicting site of oppression and comfort. Using data from lesbian experiences in both England and New Zealand, Johnston and Valentine (1995) found that homes were bound up in dominant ideologies of heterosexuality that mostly symbolised that what they could not or did not want to be. Thus, homes as key sites for heterosexuality and heteronormative socialisation mean that for those identifying as lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual, amongst a host of other non-conforming gender and sexual identities, domestic space can be negative, burdensome, and alienating (Valentine, 1993a, 1993b; Johnston and Valentine, 1995; McNamee et al., 2003; Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003). Such experiences complicate how identities and the space of the home are produced in mutually constitutive ways and

the expectations that ultimately surround these. Closeted LGBT+ identities therefore materialise in the home, but amongst those that 'come out', they may be subject to verbal and physical abuse, intimidation, outright rejection and eviction (Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003). In relation to normative expectations of the home, sexual minorities may therefore have to strategically negotiate home in specific ways that are contextualised through time-space relations, such as using two different rooms or hiding objects that reveal their sexualities (Valentine, 1993a; 1993b; Johnston and Valentine, 1995) to avoid discrimination from family members.

Other work has also explored LGBT+ experiences of home in relation to the use of domestic space for the materiality of LGBT+ identities and the building of supportive networks. For instance, Elwood (2000) and Gorman-Murray (2007a; 2007b; 2008) both demonstrate how the space of the home and objects such as posters, flags, ornaments and photos can be used to establish a sense of self and home. Thus, according to Gorman-Murray (2007a; 2007b; 2008), the perceptions and makings of home as private, identity-making and comforting are simultaneously congruent and conflictual with normative meanings of home that present heteronormative ideas of such spaces. Furthermore, as Skelton and Valetine (2004) demonstrate, disclosure of LGBT+ identities within the site of the home is mediated by the complex relationships with family members and the appropriateness of disclosure in relation to how such identities are perceived and practiced in the space of the home. Having explored some of the key literature in studies on the closet and everyday regulations of sexualities and their spatialities, I now move on to explore some of the interview material as it pertains to the regulation of LGBT+ British Muslim sexualities and the experiences of the closet.

4.5 Interpreting LGBT+ identities through Islamic theology and Allah
4.5.1 Sinful LGBT+ identities and relations
This first section of analysis explores how my participants understood religious barriers to living openly as LGBT+ Muslims, i.e. how they understood their sexual identities and practices within the context of Islamic teaching on sexuality, as well as their interpretations, adoptions and discussions by Muslims. As mentioned in chapter one (pp.5-13), Islam is a largely heteronormative religion and closeting discourses are generally upheld by mainstream conservative rhetoric that simultaneously feeds into and reproduces a lack of visibility of LGBT+ Muslims. That LGBT+ practices and politics are often viewed as morally wrong and sinful is unsurprising bearing in mind

the entrenched public Muslim discourse that lucidly marks heterosexual marriage as the solely permissible form of sexual relations. According to Bouhdiba (1998), forms of sexual practice and realisations of sexual identities that are not consistent with the complementarity and unity of the male and female sexes are viewed as deviant and violations of the strict principles and proscription of zawj. Importantly, it is how doctrine and discourses are *interpreted* that mark how LGBT+ Muslims negotiate condemnation of their sexualities, as well as silences around the perceived incompatibility of Islam and LGBT+ identities, desires and practices. I explore this by focusing on how participants interpreted their sexualities as sinful or not in the context of Islamic thought and interpretation. Initially, I highlight participant narratives that situated their sexualities as sinful within Islam, before focusing on those who felt it was not sinful to be an LGBT+ Muslim.

Many participants cited the parable of Lot in the Qur'an as informing their interpretation and feelings of being LGBT+ within Islam as sinful, with some describing their feelings as anomalous to both the ways of life seemingly proscribed by Allah and defilements against the 'true' order of sexuality. According to Amir (37), a pansexual man yet to disclose his sexuality to his wife and family and whose interview we completed in a neighbouring city and secluded riverside bench to seek privacy:

> *I just felt it was wrong, I felt it was wrong…the whole saying 'God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve', it was that whole thing. I felt it was unnatural and wasn't part of God's plan, and you'd read about the people of Lot in the Qur'an and what happened to them, and that would terrify me… People would openly say about what would be the fate of homosexuals: 'it's the most disgusting thing in the eyes of God', so I felt, I felt guilty*

Similar stories of Lot and seeing their sexual identities as prohibited were expressed by Mo and Raif. The latter is bisexual and regularly enjoys casual sex, though has not told many people other than sexual partners of his sexuality. However, Raif has researched extensively into the Qur'an's stance on non-heterosexuality and was a Facebook follower of support groups aimed at LGBT Muslims and LGBT people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds. Mo, like Amir above, is married to a heterosexual woman and revealed over the course of our encounter that it was through the interview that he had first talked openly to somebody in a face-to-face setting about being gay and Muslim, and mentioned his nerves before meeting up. For both Mo and

Raif, the Qur'an was central to interpreting their sexual identities at a younger age and thus informing the internalisation of their sexualities:

> *I came to actually read and understand a translated version of the Qur'an in English that I understood Lot and then it becomes clearer that it's a sin to be gay according to Islam, and if the Qur'an is the true spoken word of God, of Allah, then who am I to go against that* (Mo, 31, gay)

> *The Qur'an is clear in that it's a way of life, it's supposed to be the way of life for all Muslims and so, so I used to feel you can't therefore be both gay and Muslim for that reason… there's the sodomising in the story of Lot and why the city of Sodom was basically annihilated. This is what people say about what the Qur'an says about being gay, bi or lesbian* (Raif, 28, bisexual)

According to Duran (1993), the Qur'an is clear in its condemnation of homosexuality and all three subscribe to this view; these are indicative of the centrality of Islamic sexual ethics in determining how participants perceived their sexual identities and Islam as incompatible. By seeing their sexualities as wrong within Islam they emphasise the heteronormalisation and heterosexual domination through which the closet is made sense of. Thus, the closet here is informed by the moralities shaped by normative Islamic sexual ethics and responsibilities, and their sexualities are demonstrably marginalised by the orthodoxies of these. However, to be in the closet, so to speak, is to not only simply make the tactical choice to not pronounce one's sexuality but to consider how it encroaches all aspects of an individual's life (Seidman, 2004). While on the outside passing as straight might characterise the closet because of guilt, anxiety and prejudice, the internal effects of not disclosing one's sexuality may be more severe (Seidman, 2004). Feeling ashamed of their sexualities and fearing the rejection of these by Allah seemed to characterise the lives of those who interpreted religious doctrine in an orthodox manner; the excerpts below demonstrate not only these but also ideas about impurity:

> *I'd feel huge guilt and I'd say 'I'm not doing, I'm not exploring it any further at all, I don't want to do this'…I didn't want to have those feelings, I didn't want to be thinking that way or feeling that way and I'd beg Allah through supplication, dua'a, after prayers to get rid of those feelings, 'I don't want these feelings'* (Amir, 37, pansexual)

> *At the time he knew that as quickly as a flash I'd have only been too pleased to change… I used to pray and ask why I was the way I was, hoping things would change because I felt shame, that these thoughts were soiling my soul in the eyes of God* (Noreen, 29, lesbian)

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I don't think it's true that Allah creates your sexuality but I think it's awfully difficult to be gay and to be Muslim, I think you can change through Salah and subordination…he is challenging you to get rid of these thoughts and desires (Mo, 31, gay)

These paint a morose picture of the reality of interpreting their LGBT+ identities and desires within rigid, conservative interpretations of Islamic doctrine as it concerns sexual morals and ethics. By referring to their sexualities in a negative light through wishing these away and as dirtying the sanctity of the soul we see why there may be a pressure on the behalf of those supplicating to rid themselves of the 'polluting 'Other' (Yip and Khalid, 2010: 82). They see their sexualities are imbued with guilt and shame, as well as being thought of as unnatural and able to be altered. Douglas (2002) proposes that individuals relate the notion of dirt to contexts that they are not properly capable of organising or categorising into a fully intelligible system or situation, suggesting that sexual identities have a weightier latency than other forms of identification for being perceived as moral contagions against the notion of purity. While a metaphoric term rather than a material concern, for the participants these accompanying thoughts of guilt are reproduced in the form of prayer and serve to internalise their sexualities within themselves and through prayer and submission to Allah. Exploring the intertwining of religion and sexuality within strict interpretations of Islam explicitly marks the closet as a heteronormative regime in which it works simultaneously at the level of both religious dogma and internalised suppression; the closet works ideologically in this sense through theological condemnation and performatively through the repetitive act of, as of yet, hopeless prayer.

4.5.2 Validating LGBT+ sexualities through Allah and Islam

Mo reflected on the notion that being gay emerges as a litmus test from Allah, the objective being to exhibit restraint or, at the very least, curb longings that are contrary to Allah's plans. In contrast to this view, some participants spoke richly and positively about interpreting their sexual identities within the doctrinal and spiritual milieu of Islam. At the time of interviews, many did not assume their LGBT+ identities as worthy of labelling as sin nor did they see these as unforgivable. Often, this perspective was narrated by assumptions that they were 'made' or born gay, as made clear by Faisal and Sofia:

Allah created me gay, if Allah made me in this way I don't see it as a sin to be gay. If it was my kismet [fate] to struggle against that than I have but it's also then my kismet altogether. It's not something I can change within me, I don't know whether in a biological way or psychological sense, but it's planted deep in me and I didn't choose to be gay (Faisal, 29, gay)

I was anguished for years because of it, I'd felt suicidal and had little confidence…but I came to the realisation that I reject the idea that God'll punish or correct me for being something that I had no choice over (Sofia, 28, lesbian)

Understanding their sexual identities as part of God's plan or will empowers both to come to terms with their sexual identities and this rather essentialist conceptualisation of sexuality provides an allaying force against the assumed incongruity of religious and sexual identities. Though Siraj (2006) suggests seeing themselves as being made LGBT+ by Allah may help LGBT+ Muslims assimilate their religious and sexual identities, it is vital to note that such experiences are not characterised by something akin to a linear trajectory in which LGBT+ Muslims are originally deeply conflicted and then suddenly liberated once arriving at this belief. Rather, to assume Allah has made them this way was typified by a turbulent self-development that often left participants to question Islam itself:

When I was younger I felt that I'd had it with Islam… too many bad experiences with it…began to understand that it's not Allah that's punishing me and the LGBT+ community (Ali, 27, gay)

I started searching for answers about Islam itself you know, how do I fit into the Islamic worldview and while initially you only hear negative things, homosexuality is connoted with negativity, it hurt me and I was mad at God for making me this way but then I came more aware of actually there isn't anything black and white on the issue and it's how Muslims interpret texts and hadiths…so it wasn't Allah I was angry at, it was the people who told me in not so many words that I should be mad at (Adeel, 23, gay)

In defiance of a twisted perspective on Islam's relationship with LGBT+ sexualities and bigoted interpretations by lay heterosexist Muslim audiences, both are brought back to religious ideas and relationships with Allah that they see as comforting and beyond the legitimacy or lack thereof afforded by other Muslims. Though both Ali and Adeel suggest the journey to such a stage forged difficult negotiations and states of mind, infused dishearteningly with discomfort and ambiguity, they also indicate that religious values for LGBT+ people of faith persist as crucial contexts for 'belonging and

meaning-making life practices' (Pellegrini, 2005: 94; see also Wilcox, 2002). Cognisant and accommodating of the conflicts that have marked their religious and sexual identities, these narratives are suggestive of the complexity of their lived experiences. Distinguishing between Allah and Muslims is a strategy for coming to terms with their sexuality and its conflicts with Islam; understanding that Allah and his love, and Muslims, are intersecting entities across the whole spectrum of Islam means they fashion a space of 'oneness not only within oneself but also between the individual and Allah, since Allah was believed to be the creator of everything and who accepted every aspect of their being' (Yip and Khalid, 2010: 90). These personal journeys of faith and a synthesis of their sexual and religious identities in the belief of Allah's omnipresent acceptance and understanding means endorsing these for some LGBT+ Muslims.

Interestingly, the story of Lot and the Qur'an were also acknowledged as legitimising LGBT+ Muslim identities through a critique of their popular misunderstanding and the centrality of their appropriation in censorious rhetoric. Though earlier I established how some interpreted the story of Lot in literal terms that surrendered them to a negative promotion of LGBT+ sexualities within Islam, it is evident that participants also consumed this and other passages in the Qur'an in more affirmative fashion through non-literal analysis and comprehension:

> [On the story of Lot] *It doesn't say much about homosexuality actually, if you read it, it's actually, the story is about heterosexual male anal rape* (Daniyaal, 21, bisexual)
>
> *The story of Lot doesn't actually denounce homosexuality, it's there as a guide for moral behaviour…to not lie and steal. It could easily just be referenced to adulterous behaviour* (Riyadh, 24, gay transgender man)

Both Daniyaal, a young medical student in London, and Riyadh, a white British convert to Islam, affirm that a non-literal reading of the story of Lot best corresponds with what they see as a truer form of its meaning, while Daniyaal's practice of reading the Qur'an contests the assumption that the Qur'an is condemnatory of his bisexuality. Riyadh converted to Islam after coming out as a transgender man to his white British family who were not initially supportive of his adopted religion and transition. He resorted to couch-surfing because of his family's cold tolerance, though they did not kick him out of the family home. For both Daniyaal and Riyadh, the Qur'an was a resource for approaching a conciliatory understanding, consistent with Kugle's (2010) theological

deconstruction and Yip's (2005: 53) work with LGBT+ Muslims that highlighted how they problematised the popular Muslim understanding of Lot by directing their analysis of the story towards the immorality and sinfulness of sexual violence and theft, rather than same-sex practices. Others followed a similar pattern of differentiating the Qur'an from literal reading by asserting the importance of historicising the Qur'an in what they suggested was its appropriate temporal context:

> *I'd take solace from the Quran, so I read the Qur'an and I was tryna' look for the answers and I did kinda find the answers in terms of my sexuality which boiled down to several paragraphs or verses. And, it shocked me really because I just thought: 'Is this what it comes down to, you know, a few paragraphs? So I read it and studied it and I just thought 'No, let me put it into context'…so I read it again and to me, the story of Lut or Lot is about, you know, there's rape, brutality, incest, offering the daughters…when it came to the issue of being gay there wasn't really anything there to be said and he's not saying that to be homosexual is forbidden because what did people know about sexuality then?! It was ok to marry off children at the time, is that ok now? No, so why can't the same be said for being gay* (Jahangir, 47, gay)

> *If I was to go back over history, over time, and see how the Qur'an is seen to be the work of Allah and how it should be taken at face value… well how is it possible that everything can be taken exactly from it when the interpretation of it in terms of Sharia law was at a period where they obviously weren't as advanced as us now…most Muslims won't even follow everything in it now* (Sofia, 28, lesbian)

As well as placing texts in historical context and being critical of normative historical understandings of these, participants also alluded to the gendered nature of Islamic law. Jahangir, who lives with his partner of over 25 years and volunteers as an LGBT+ activitst, critiqued what he felt was a *"men's perspective"*, while Sofia and Zara asserted the absence of discussion of lesbian sexual relations and practices within the Qur'an:

> *I just thought ok, knowing that Islam came after Christianity, so I read the Bible as well and they again highlighted the same story and I just thought 'what is it about this story that says that it's haram? So I had to kind of reference the two books and what it was that he's not saying that to be homosexual is forbidden because if you're the creator of a universe, why would you?...again, it was like putting it into context, if you look at how it's written, the two holy scriptures [Bible and Qur'an] it's written from a men's perspective, and I should imagine from a heterosexual perspective as well, so men being men they're quite, kind of, they talk about things like power don't they? Power and ego, and*

masculinities, so it, from that perspective I just thought that, that's just one-sided (Jahangir, 47, gay)

There isn't actually anything mentioned in the Qur'an about lesbian women… there's no confirmation anywhere in scripture that it's halal or haram (Sofia, 28, lesbian)

If being a lesbian in Islam was wrong where is the proof…it would be in the Qur'an. The actual condemnation, you know, it doesn't, where does it come from, it doesn't come from the words of God himself…people seem to take it how they want (Zara, 22, lesbian)

The views of Sofia and Zara are consistent with Kugle's (2007) contention that there is no explicit referral to lesbian relationships or sexual relations within the Qur'an. The silence around lesbian relationships in the Qur'an therefore is symptomatic of a closeting debate on non-heterosexuality within Islam more generally. This censoring is steeped in, and is part and parcel of, the multiple silences and ambiguities more generally around LGBT+ issues within Islam and serves to motivate and pervade the censorious sexual discourses of non-heterosexuality in Islam. Evaluating the absence of clear condemnation of their sexualities allows Sofia and Zara to develop a source of resistance and this theological silence here is constitutive of envisioning a lesbian Muslim subjectivity. By decentring thought and power that seeks to tame lesbian sexualities, they implicitly interrogate the sexual morals that fail to speak to the ambiguity around these and the heterosexist privileges that are incumbent upon such silences.

Jahangir's syncretic account of reading both the Bible and Qur'an, and his understanding of the underlying gendered associations, also highlights a sustained contemplation of the moralities surrounding the position of same-sex relationships in Islam. His commitment to appreciating the story from its historical and gendered contexts, and in reference to an interfaith dialogic engagement, fosters a critical evaluation by establishing his own understanding of his religious self and therefore, 'adopting a hermeneutic lends based on the authority of self' (Yip, 2005: 56), and relationally through comparison with the *"men's perspective"* he critiques. Just as Foucault (1997: 32, cited in Cadman, 2010: 546) proposes we 'question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth', Jahangir's interrogation of what he assumes is a masculinsed and heterosexist standpoint displaces the power and burden of interpretation onto a more autonomous LGBT+ self then and wrestles with the authority of pervasive and imposing Islamic sexual discourse. Placing the

Qur'an it in its temporal context allows Jahangir to reflect on the masculinism of it (Barlas, 2002) and offers an understanding of his epistemological footing that helps him construct his gay identity as perfectly permissible. For Sofia and Zara, however, the absence of communication of lesbianism in the Qur'an helps them to affirm that perhaps there is space for them to be Muslim lesbians, and this informed silence is as compellingly persuasive as the effectiveness of supposedly definitive knowledges surrounding sexuality within Islam. While Sofia is 'out and proud' and was a fellow PhD researcher (in the sciences) at the time of the interview, Zara still lives with her parents and has told friends and some cousins about her lesbian identity but not her parents as of yet. Having explored some of the ways in which LGBT+ Muslims understood their sexualities in relation to scripture, the next section moves on to explore how their sexualities were shaped by family and ethno-religious communities that raised several interesting concerns.

4.6 Home, izzat and gendered expectations

4.6.1 Complications of family relations

The participants expressed a range of opinions and statements regarding their place within the family and the complexities of love, respect and gender that manifested across familial and kinship relations. Most grew up in supportive families that encouraged respect, education and togetherness, but ones in which religious and ethnic ties were upheld and influenced gender and sexual identification and understandings. While these family relations were expressed positively there was a general theme of religious values dominating the shaping of values and ways of life of LGBT+ Muslims; for some, these were rather conservative and rigid, while others seemed to express the religious values they were brought up with in rather more positive terms:

> *We grew up with 'you can't do this, you can't do that' and a huge emphasis on following the sunnah and it was quite dogmatic in the way that you can't do this…when you enter a bathroom you've got to enter it this way…kind of an exact science if you like, we never really questioned it* (Amir, 37, pansexual)

> *In some ways it was being brought up to reason your deeds against what Islam says, would I have been a good/bad Muslim depending on what I'd done. It wasn't forced on to us, people may think that, but it was never, it was never like that, my parents were laid-back in that sense…for them it was about guiding us on the right path and that was through Islam* (Raif, 28, bisexual)

Such accounts were consistent across the interviews carried out, with the participants conveying the importance of Islam in the context of everyday family relations. It was through these taught values that participants came to understand and express the dynamics of family relations. However, these values and feelings also intersected with their British identity and upbringing, as well as their ethnic background. Diya is from a Black Arabian family, though he was born and brought up in a very diverse city where he still lives with his parents, while Jahangir's parents came to England from India:

> *Being Muslim has influenced my whole life and particularly the way I see things as right or wrong...being British, I wouldn't have had the chances to go where I've been, to do what I've done if I wasn't born and bred here…course, that's not always a positive if my parents see me as being too British* (Diya, 22, gay)

> *My dad would have liked to have thought we were* [religious]*…but we were quite rebellious 'cause the way I look at it now, so many years later, is where my parents wanted to integrate into the communities and culturally, and they fought along the way to make things happen. We, my generation, we changed it and we wanted to assert out Britishness rather than our Asian culture, we fought against it, my brothers started clubbing, my two, my two other siblings they'd dye their hair blonde and what have you, and they'd wear clothes that, wear jeans that were not allowed* (Jahangir, 47, gay)

We see some conflict between different generations here, with the participants wanting to identify with a British identity, as well as with their religious and ethnic identities, similar to contestations and intergenerational relations of home in the context of the everyday lives of young Scottish men that Hopkins (2006) explored. However, it is too simplistic to suggest that participants were caught between different cultures and identities, instead it is vital to note the slippages and contestations around these simplifying discourses (Brah, 1996) in the sense that participants were able to and maintained attachments to different aspects of their identities in diverse ways. Thus, they make their 'multiple subjectivities' and attachments visible to demonstrate multiplicity and complexity beyond a binary commitment to either/or (Mollett and Faria, 2018).

Moreover, though some of these practices, e.g. wearing jeans or going clubbing, may ordinarily have been seen to diverge from the cultures of home, participants upheld these in other ways because of respect and love for their parents. Participants often

described it was through these relationships, love, and the values transmitted and flowing between them that their sexualities were closeted:

> *Allah knows my intentions are pure and that I want nothing but to love and be loved. However, he placed me in a situation where I can possibly be disowned from my parents, I can't sabotage that relationship…not a day goes by where I don't think about the devastation my parents would feel if they knew about me. I am leading a double life because of them* (Faisal, 29, gay)

> *Not only did I sort of find it highly embarrassing when I had to go to the pub for the first time in London…I'd carried all this guilt of 'I shouldn't be here or what would my parents think. This is all haram, this is forbidden. This goes completely against what I've been taught'. Although I wasn't practicing, the religious side kicked in…I got on with my daily routines and being at college but inside I was grieving, not only for myself, but for all my aspirations and ambitions that I shared with my parents, so that's how it was* (Daniyaal, 21, bisexual)

The narratives above evince the importance of love, fear of disclosure, and grievance over the suspected loss of those family ties should they have exposed their sexual identities and desires to their parents. Here, love and family ties become oppressive, informing the non-disclosure of their sexualities. Jackson's (1993; 1995) work on love highlights that love is produced through social relations rather than simply being an internalised emotion; love for parents and family comes to paradoxically suffocate the sexual identities and subjectivities of LGBT+ Muslims because their understanding of their parents' love seems to be that which is predicated on the basis of heterosexuality. Thus, the power around the distribution of love is internalised in order to protect these relationships, informing their closeted sexual identities.

The non-disclosure of their sexualities here is not only brought about through wider heterosexism in society but entangled with love that excludes and deploys a somewhat menacing omnipresent tone. Daniyaal's poignant reflections on moving away and carrying his guilt points to the different spatialities and temporalities of his closet. Being bisexual and Muslim is not simply concerned with negotiating these identities, but the individual and social contexts that surround them that generate a deep-seated restraint and challenge. Despite Daniyaal moving to London for higher education the lack of physical proximity to his parents still engenders complexity because the emotions he feels here transgress different scales and expectations, emphasising the need to seriously consider emotions as part of the migration course for same-sex minorities

(Gorman-Murray, 2009). Though migration has the potential to aid LGBT+ individuals by allowing them to comparmentalise aspects of their lives if need be (Lewis, 2012; 2014), Daniyaal's helplessness here highlights that the individualism linked to coming out is incompatible with his situation. The relationality of power and sexual morals that Daniyaal describes interrogates these coming out models and highlights the repudiations of LGBT+ migration as always consonant with freedom (Lewis, 2014). His closet bridges sites of the body, home, the pub and college where it manifests daily and indicates how interconnections of different identities across spatial and social contexts (Hopkins, 2019) can complicate exclusion, as well as folding different temporalities. Faisal earlier (p.79) described how he felt he was placed in this situation and his fate in grappling this. The double life he describes reveals this struggle, but, as with Daniyaal's account, his account of love for parents and ties reverberate beyond simply a linear pattern of coming out and culminating in an 'out and proud' sexual citizen. Burdening themselves with parental love here and imagining futures of risk and loss are problematic but reflective of how the closeting of their sexuality comes into being consistently.

4.6.2 Cultural taboos and coping with 'corrupt' sexualities

While I have demonstrated the importance of family ties and emotions of love as informing the closeting of the sexualities of LGBT+ Muslims, these following sections shift to explore how the parents of my participants also formed their own closets in many respects, inadvertently or otherwise, which in turn concealed the sexualities of the participants. This is highlighted by firstly exploring what was articulated as a cultural taboo of talking about sexuality across ethno-religious communities and societies. Nearly all the participants communicated there was little discussion of sex and sexuality within these. This was concerned with notions of respectability and a sense that it was taboo to talk of such issues. In this vein, a closet was formed not only around their own but all sexual identities. However, this was not solely identified as a religious issue but something steeped in cultural norms and pressures of their ethnic heritage that simultaneously concealed sexuality within the domestic sphere, as well as public recognition and discussion within those communities. According to Taimoor, a 22-year-old gay man from the West Midlands who has disclosed his sexuality to his parents and was once on a popular television programme where his gay identity was key to the premise of the programme:

Taimoor*: Being Asian, being Muslim, talking about heterosexuality, talking about a girlfriend or even mentioning a kiss between a heterosexual couple is the most awkward thing in the world. You couldn't even watch heterosexuality being expressed on TV…there was a kiss on a film you'd have to forward it, it's just awkward right. So when you see that happening your parents aren't comfortable with girlfriends and boyfriends the last thing you want to talk about is homosexuality.*

NI: *Why do you think there's such a taboo around it in Asian families?*

Taimoor: *It's just a cultural thing isn't it if you think about it? I would say to my family 'You don't really know where this, this opinion that you have comes from, this opinion isn't your opinion. It's an opinion that's been passed down to you from generation to generation, of everybody behaving in this particular why but nobody really understands why. If you think about it, sexuality and talking about humans expressing love, it's a good thing, it's not a negative thing*

Jahangir and Zara also expressed similar views of a cultural reticence to discuss these issues:

I think we're kind of, with my parents being, coming over from India/Pakistan I think it's kind of entrenched that you don't talk about certain issues in your life. Even when I was at school I'd want to talk to people, my sister at home she'd say 'We don't talk about those things'… even when it came to sex and sexuality, or orientation, that was nothing that was discussed really and I thought it was just me and my family but as you grow older you find out it's lots of people go through similar and for some reason we've got in our minds that it's quite a taboo subject matter but the reality is that's it's just part of life isn't it? (Jahangir, 47, gay)

In Arab culture it's very rare to speak about stuff concerned with sexuality…it's both religion and your cultural society kind of not talking about those issues (Diya, 22, gay)

Taboos of talking about sex and sexuality at home somewhat stigmatise these unsaid topics, but according to the participants there is little understanding of why these are unspoken of and hidden in conversation; instead, these are seen to be intrinsic and transmitted from generation to generation with little recourse to their reasoning. These, however, emphasise how intergenerational relations can be understood as 'both within the context of kinship systems and wider generational orderings' (Vanderbeck, 2007: 205). As topics that failed to come up in conversation or were evaded, the values and morals around sex and sexuality become clearer and emplaced within the home, as from the perspective of parents they are patently signified as things to be pushed away from discussion with their offspring and so they reproduce generational identities and

positionings. Such contexts for understanding sexuality disclose the multiple relations of power (Mollett and Faria, 2018) and how these are contingent upon imagining homes as anti-sex. For some of the participants thus, a hierarchical intergenerational relationship within the family unit may have deterred them from asking questions as they may contest moral principles informed by the intersections of religion, ethnicity and age. The lack of spoken engagement with sex and sexuality within these contexts and communities becomes therefore, an open secret, as with Sedgwick's (1991) understanding of the epistemology of the closet: a knowing-by-not-knowing.

Understanding sexualities in a limited format through a lack of communication means there is potential for LGBT+ Muslims' sexual identities to become stunted. Within Asian diasporic communities, Islam (1998) suggests there is a lack of identities understood through the intersections of sexuality due to the arrangement and unspoken taboo of sexualities. Thus, incorporating this everyday absence into their sexual knowledge and identity highlights the density of relations and codes LGBT+ Muslims must live with or transcend in order to affirm their sexual identities. But even so, though there is a general understanding of the pervasive silence around sex and sexuality within their communities, both Jahangir and Taimoor show how they understand notions of love and sexuality as *"just part of life"* or *"a good thing"*. While their parents and older generations may have enabled a passive engendering of unspoken sexualities- accepting prevailing cultural norms and structures- both Jahangir and Taimoor speak of endeavouring to assert the naturalness of love and sex in order to recast potentially docile sexualities (both LGBT+ and others). Thus, they did not simply and impassively follow cultural forces but sought to tentatively and slowly influence and articulate these to their family members to encourage education and critique, intimating towards negotiating, challenging and (re)constructing intergenerational relations and orderings (Vanderbeck, 2007), and thereby highlighting embryonic practices that complicate the flow of intergenerational values beyond downward diffusions (Hopkins et al., 2011).

While a cultural widespread absence of taking about sexuality in all its guises seemed to limit how sexuality was understood, LGBT+ sexualities were often speculated as a Western import from the perspectives of the family members and communities of the participants. These were frequently represented as potentially jeopardising the socio-cultural moral regime of ethno-religious communities that these families lived their lives through. Massad (2007) argues that though terms such as gay and lesbian have a long

and convoluted history, they may be hindered in their applicability and relevance outside of specific regions of the West because they emerge from a 'Western sexual epistemology'. Thus, these terms may not be universal and applicable to LGBT+ identities and practices outside of the West and instead may be said to be 'a product of globalisation' (Altman, 2002: 426). For some of the participants, such sentiments carried weight, according to Siddique, a 26-year-old gay man from North London:

> *There aren't any terms like lesbian, gay, bisexual in Islam, these are Westerns terms, Islam doesn't classify us based on our sexual feelings and preferences*

Across the range of data, while there was a seeming silence around sexualities from the parents of the participants, it was also narrated that many parents saw LGBT+ identities and practices as what Yip (2008: 105) states 'a Western disease, a reflection of the secularity of the Western culture, and its resulting moral relativism, sexual permissiveness and cultural degeneracy'. According to some participants:

> *Being gay was like going in full opposition to all that I'd been taught Islamically, culturally…they thought that I'd become too Western and started blaming it on themselves for not bringing me up proper* (Junaid, 27, gay man)

> *Coming out to my family…my dad flipped and told me to fuck off out the house and never come back…he said to go to my goray* [white] *friends if I wanted to be one* (Ali, 27, gay man)

> *My mum cried for about like two weeks…she had no understanding of it, so she genuinely thought I wanted to be a woman, she again thought I wanted to have incest with any male member that I saw. She also thought that I wanted to go out and just be a whore basically 'cause everyone had this whole sexualised idea of the gay community* (Taimoor, 22, gay)

These excerpts show how some parents were guilty of casting LGBT+ identities as a chief example of Western immorality and sexual promiscuity, misunderstanding and representing British or Western culture as corrupting. Cultural representations or understandings of LGBT+ sexualities within Muslim communities often depict these as morally lacking (Yip, 2004; 2008) and reflect historically over-sexualised representations of LGBT+ practices (Taylor, 2016). Despite there being a rich history of sexual relations and practices within historical societies of Muslim communities and countries (Massad, 2002; Ilkkaracan, 2008), exerting control over the moral ethos of sexuality, and concomitantly fuelling it, through submitting the 'impurity' of LGBT+

sexualities to the space of the West allows the sustenance of sexuality as a contested ideological sphere across a range of geographical and temporal scales. Determining LGBT+ sexualities as 'Western' inventions, however, constitutes a rather acute example of cultural amnesia and limits understandings of the histories of the regulation of sexualities. During the age of Empire, a tripartite of gender, race and sexuality was frequently manipulated in order to substantiate arguments for control and expansion whilst simultaneously fashioning moral sexual regulation (Phillips, R., 2006). A fundamental tactic for producing geographical imaginations of the 'Other' was representing the sexual abnormalities of the colonised through which civilising attempts sought to curb the supposed decadence of native sexual practices and reconstruct understandings of sexuality that mirrored the moral ethos and regulations of European colonisers.

However, the remnants of colonial politics related to sexuality maintain a shaping of postcolonial Western societies and the lived experiences of sexual and ethnic minorities. While Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens (2010) warn against the representations of a European West as a space of sexual enlightenment and tolerance that extends a particular conception of European identities and citizenship, and not condoning the instrumentalisation of sexuality as an exercise in perpetuating Western exceptionalism (Puar, 2007), it is important to consider how liberal coming-out narratives coincide with religiously and culturally inflected heteronormativity in the context of my participants' lives. Though Massad (2007) criticises LGBT+ labels for being universalist and Puar (2007) suggests heterosexist and patriarchal norms within diasporic societies are related to the heteronormativity of Western migration regimes, to discount the reinforcement and policing of heteronormative values, informed by religion and diasporic/community bonds, does a disservice to the experiences of LGBT+ Muslims here.

According to Luibheid (2005), diasporic communities are founts of cultural and religious traditions and this can harden attitudes towards minority sexualities. By constructing the fallacy of a straight Muslim community, the taboos of talking about sexuality and portraying LGBT+ identities as Western inflections invoke heteronormative projects that were once the preserve of the colonial elite and work to highlight that solely through heterosexuality is cultural and/or religious continuity made possible. Sangari and Vaid (1989) highlight how respectable gendered and sexual ideologies were vital

in constructing anticolonial, newly independent nations. Representing homosexuality as colonial imports through colonial represssions and distinguishing from pre-colonial sexualities (Rao, 2014) helped develop opprobrium and engender sexual morals that condemned the assumed sexual licentiousness of homosexuals. These accounts from my participants highlight how cultural heterosexism is related to the slow development of the homosexual figure as an initial target for European colonising powers to its increasing acceptance in terms of decriminalisation and support in terms of its claims within and to the public realm within the West, and how this came to be seized upon to as a way to ideologically position the West as morally abject in nation-building projects and their diasporic communities. Such a stance, however, both in discourse and in shaping interpersonal relations, rejects the historic tolerance of same-sex relations and practices within Muslim lands and societies in favour of an expedient Occidental narrative that culturally expels Muslim communities of LGBT+ individuals.

In the contemporary context thus, normalising a sense of minority LGBT+ sexualities as a product of Westernisation is problematic. However, it is also complicit with agendas that recycle narratives of coming out as rejections of regressive religious and ethnic customs, so that sexual freedom is depicted as part of a modern West, allowing the instrumentalisation of sexual politics to become appropriated and harmfully deployed (Pilkington, 2017). Consuming these in a relational manner, as described by accounts from the parents of my participants, conjectures not only LGBT+ sexualities as other, but reinforces (mis)understandings of perceived British culture as necessarily incompatible with religious and ethnic cultures, and their associated values. Distinguishing different cultures in this crude style limits LGBT+ identity, as well as implicitly delineating the margins of morality, belonging and loyalty to the ethno-religious community. According to Yip (2004), out LGBT+ Muslims may be viewed as defectors against religious and ethnic ties and communities and such sentiments are tangible in the accounts of Junaid, Ali and Taimoor. For the participants, coming out as gay and lesbian in these instances reinforced the prudish moralities that they were supposed to uphold by not submitting to the lures presented by their 'goray friends'. Such binary thinking, as epitomised by the parents, problematises how disclosure was mediated further and curbed by social constraints to which I turn to now.

4.6.3 Honour and community: restraints on coming out

A crucial social context through which the closet for LGBT+ Muslims is constructed and experienced is through the ethno-religious community and the social representations of, and restraints on, sexuality that are generally upheld. These communities are a source of social capital for Muslims in Britain; strong relationship networks, cultural traditions and solidarity are developed through these (Platt, 2012). However, within these there is an expectation and prioritisation of izzat. Gill and Brah (2014: 73) state that this 'refers to a wide spectrum of sociocultural relationships and ties that bind family and community groups together'. According to the participants the principle of izzat was something that necessitated careful negotiation because of the extent to which it is seen as an essential tenet of being part of the Asian community:

> *Mostly about having honour, respect and standing, we don't air our dirty laundry in public. That's very much taught in you* (Yassar, 28, gay)

> *Honour and shame are very important in the Asian community…you have to think about the consequences of what you do and how that's gonna impact on your family's standing* (Amir, 37, pansexual)

Izzat is recognised as a key feature of South Asian societies and their diasporic communities (Werbner, 2005), the value of it being established from a young age. Instrumental is the understanding that those within the community do not publicly display behaviours that transgress these unspoken codes because of the fear of losing honour in the face of wider family and the community. Though participants expressed ambivalence towards belonging within the ethno-religious community in some contexts (as I later explore in 5.4.3), they also stressed their experiences of protecting parents from the gaze of socially sanctioned heterosexuality that policed their sexualities:

> *It's my parents that would feel the brunt of any decision I make to come out* (Yassar, 28, gay man)

> *There'd be stories of them [parents] not having brought me up properly, we'd be the gossip of the town* (Noreen, 29, lesbian)

> *I don't want anyone finding out…I'd prefer to sacrifice coming out than have me or my family shunned from the community* (Mo, 31, gay)

These accounts underscore the emotionalities of non-disclosure and adhering to cultural customs of izzat and saving face among parents. Importantly, such concerns highlight the intersection of both familial and extrafamilial intergenerational relations (Vanderbeck, 2007), as respect for elders stretches across immediate and non-

immediate family networks in these ethno-religious communities and there are concerns with how these could work to jeopardise standing. Hence, they order relations between different generations and the socio-spatial dynamics of these regulating their sexualities is made tangible. This is especially poignant because the burden of cultural structures and expectations of unspoken sexualities continually interpellate the closet and materialise the power relations of compulsory heterosexuality; the individualisation of coming out is disturbed and weighed against what participants see as a social responsibility. Many Asian Muslims in the UK tend to live in close-knit communities (Peach, 2006: Phillips, 2006) and, as such, there may be a tendency to see the proximity and spectral qualities of others as restrictive to a LGBT+ identity. The social relations cemented within these communities thus disciplines my participants and considerations to not disclose their identities reflect Yip's (2004: 347) claim that their 'strategies and experiences are culturally-embedded'. Despite potentially being out to their parents and immediate family, and therefore seemingly breaking down the closet through disclosing their identities, it is evident that the social context of coming out is not exactly on their own terms, rather there is a complex interplay of compulsory heterosexuality, love and obligation deep-seated in the cultural convention of izzat.

I was interested to know how the interviewees understood the ways in which LGBT+ identities or practices were viewed or discussed within their ethno-religious communities. The limited work on how heterosexual Muslims perceive and construct discourses around LGBT+ identities within their communities points towards an othering perception of them, either through outright homophobia or a limited tolerance of these (Siraj, 2009; Hooghe et al., 2010; Rayside, 2011). For the participants, it was seen that antipathy toward their sexualities was a constituent part of maintaining honour for their families because of the pervasive socially prescribed context that deems LGBT+ sexualities as tantamount to breaking such moral codes:

> *Homophobia is a big thing, as is honour, honour is still there, respectability. It's a huge thing across Muslim communities, across Asian communities. When people say 'you can't do that, what would people think, what would people say', it's still huge* (Amir, 37, pansexual)

> *I broke all the taboos really… within certain communities or cultures that your parents want the best for you and she wanted me to do well but she warned me that you know what it's like in Asian communities, I'm thinking of your safety…maybe there was a bit of insecurity or*

paranoia that people were going to talk about me, or worse, had I stayed there 'there's the gay [refers to his surname]*'* (Rehman, 30, gay)

As we saw earlier, some understandings of LGBT+ sexualities within their communities posit these as Western and alien to their own, or are condemned through literal scriptural reading (Yip, 2004; Siraj, 2009). The consistent presence of deeply damaging representations and understandings of LGBT+ sexualities within these communities is generally negative for Amir's and Rehman's own expressions and experiences of their sexualities, and they are pressurised with the prospect of carrying the guilt of parents too. These discourses saturate the communities of the participants and they would seem to lose izzat for themselves and their families should they disclose their sexualities to the wider community. There was an awareness of the distinctiveness of Asian communities compared to white British ones, where the collectivity of the former was stressed and the multi-scalar nature of the closet materialising is made clear where it exists in spaces of the home and community, as well as religious spaces as seen in interpreting Muslim discourses of LGBT+ sexualities across 4.5 (pp.80-88). Though referring to homosexuality debates in the Anglican Communion, Valentine et al. (2013b:61) importantly highlight 'the complex webs of connections and relations across multiple sites' related to sexual moralities and this is alluded to in the accounts of my participants in this section, as they frequently focused on the different factors that contextualised their understandings of disclosure in different everyday spatial contexts. Thus, in these accounts, displaying counter-normative behaviour through coming out and breaking the code of izzat demonstrates how LGBT+ Muslims 'inhabit a social, cultural, and religious context that is deeply homophobic (Siraj, 2012: 450). To be LGBT+, or at least avow one's sexual identity loudly, is considered as diverging frmom socio-cultural values. Hence, squaring their religious, ethnic, cultural and sexual identities is muddled with social responsibilities developed through the interdependency and collectivity of Muslim communities (El-Hadi, 2000), which are contingent on spatial relations of proximity and spatial metaphors of perceptions of the 'gaze' or airing "*dirty laundry in public"* (Yassar, p. 92).

4.6.4 Gendered expectations and heterosexual marriage

Another way to understand how the sexual identities of the participants were regulated is through exploring the linearity of gendered expectations. For Muslims, the

discourses surrounding sexuality state heterosexual marriage as the only permissible form of practicing or performing sexuality; a key expectation and milestone in the lifecourse of Muslims means that for LGBT+ Muslims there is a need to carefully negotiate gendered relations and the prospect of marriage, heteronormative interpretations dictating it as religiously and culturally imperative. Though the rigid nature of the overall discourse of heterosexual marriage within Islamic teaching is important, I focus more on how these were understood and negotiated from the perspective of lived experiences- how LGBT+ Muslims recognised their sexual identities within gendered roles and expectations, as well as how these intersected with ethnic identities, cultural norms and practices, and social contexts.

Marriage was often seen to be an unspoken ritual expected of the participants, the taken-for-granted nature of it symptomatic of the cultural silence on sexuality:

> *You know, as well as I do, that you're supposed to get married, have kids* (Jahangir, 47, gay)

> *If anything that made it worse for me growing up, I remember sometimes when my sort of depression was at its worst was when I realised that I might eventually have to marry a woman. I genuinely accepted at that time before I came out of the closet, there was a point where I accepted to myself that I'm going to have to hide my sexuality my entire life, I'm going to have to be married to a woman, I'm going to have to have kids, I don't know if I'll ever be able to love her but then I'm going to have to fulfill, for want of a better term, my sexuality in a secret life* (Taimoor, 22, gay)

> *Marriage and creating a family is seen as a duty in both Islam and your Asian community…that's how you achieve your responsibilities as a man* (Ali, 28, gay)

As aforementioned, heterosexual marriage and procreation are seen not only as religious obligations but cultural ones too, the latter quote asserting the importance of these for fulfilling religious-cultural norms of gender and sexuality (Siraj, 2009; Al-Sayyad, 2010). The expectation of heterosexual marriage, as an institution, aids in the maintenance of religious and cultural identities within British Muslim communities (Shaw, 2000; Shaw and Charsley, 2006). The narratives from the participants reflect upon how gendered norms operate within these communities; marriage equates to a ritual that supports the maintenance and affirmation of ethno-religious gendered identities and social ties.

The space of the home, questions of marriage and gendered expectations all featured consistently in the interviews with participants. As mentioned when touching on the literature on the relationships between home and LGBT+ identities, notions of home for LGBT+ people may be linked to different and conflicting identities, as well as with positivity and love. Home and family ties are important spatial and social contexts for LGBT+ people because homes are central to the reproduction of normative identities (Blunt and Dowling, 2006) and profoundly shape practices of compulsory heterosexuality that can cause experiences of home to be oppressive and uncomfortable for people who identify as LGBT+ (Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003). The spaces of home are significant for understanding and negotiating LGBT+ identities, as well as Muslim ones (Mohammad, 2005; Hopkins, 2006). Considering experiences of home, participants provided interesting insights into its relations that shaped the lack of disclosure of their sexuality when growing up:

> *There was hardly any talk about sex or anything, never mind being gay…home life was just quite backwards and traditional* (Sofia, 28, lesbian)

> *We were brought up in a strict household where sometimes you felt you couldn't say boo to a goose in front of my dad…home life was very much dominated by my dad and brothers and I was quite quiet and reserved, and would get picked on* (Omar, 28, gay)

Relaying the strictness or backwardness of home describes how coming out as LGBT+ was rendered difficult owing to the sense of restriction. Recalling these spaces as strict and traditional caused Sofia and Omar to closet their sexualities because of both the silences around sexuality, as well as the intergenerational masculinised relations between father and son, and ties between siblings. Reproducing the hegemony of heterosexuality through a general silence as well as the dominance of ethnic and religious ties highlights how sexual moralities are influenced by spaces such as homes that reflect the conservatism of their family units. These relations conform to materialise the unequal power relations, closeting their LGBT+ identities within home and wider relations with family members, and thus producing spaces that were marked by the inconspicuousness of mundane heterosexualities.

The gendered nature of the family home was often remarked as significant for the participants' understandings of why and how their sexualities were regulated; importantly, however, the complex gender dynamics of their homes were often

informed by the interconnections of these with other identities such as religion and ethnic backgrounds. These necessitated carefully negotiating disclosure in order to persevere with a sense of protecting the family at the expense of outing oneself:

> *Us men we're supposed to carry on the family name and be the head of the family…it was difficult to merge those expectations your family have while being gay* (Rehman, 30, gay)

> *Well, my parents are quite religious and for them, for a woman to talk about even having sexual feelings would be taboo and not 'proper'…my relationships with my parents is very good, both are religious, trying to teach us and lead us on the right Islamic path, one part of that is for a Muslim woman to have kids and to teach the next generation the values and principles of being a Muslim. Knowing that made things quite difficult hearing that I could never fit into what they would have wanted* (Noreen, 29, lesbian)

The inscription of gender, generation, religion and sexuality within these narratives demonstrates how the intersections of different identities induce complexity that serves to problematise hopes of disclosing one's sexual identity; however, this is not simply concerned with identity alone. Relations here are shaped by interpersonal and cultural domains of power- relating to one another and idealised representations or ideas (Collins and Bilge, 2016) - that work to reproduce the lived differences and exclusion that Rehman and Noreen experience. For Noreen, the space of the home is represented as a crucial space for the downwards-generational transmission of religious values and is a crucial context for religious capital. However, she alludes to the difficulties in adhering to the gendered expectations of home and how these serve to closet her sexual identity. Rehman, in a similar vein, highlights the gendered expectations of preserving the duality of gender organisation in Islam (Dahl, 1997) and achieving a head role in the family setting (Siraj, 2010). In this regard, the gay and lesbian identities for Rehman and Noreen, respectively, are at odds with the ideal Muslim masculinities and femininities; their LGBT+ identities co-constructed in relation to gendered and generational attitudes that inform the expectant backdrop of family and home. Thus, sexuality is but one aspect of the closet at home and these interconnections demonstrate the intensity of the closet in all its material and discursive guises.

> *You've got to get married haven't you…it's expected of you to have a husband or a wife* (Rehman, 30, gay)

There are very clear stages of your life that I'm supposed to go through if I was a typical Asian man- uni, job, marriage, kids and inheritance. Like, if I did those and I did those fairly well I'd be successful, well maybe not successful but I've ticked the right boxes there. Clearly, me being gay changes the dynamics doesn't it, I don't do two of those at least, I don't get married, I don't have children maybe (Yassar, 28, gay)

Conforming to gendered expectations of marriage and procreation tie into narratives of linearity and the uncritical social reproduction of identities and cultures. From the persepectives of Rehman and Yassar, it seems the invocation of marriage disturbs the expectation of this gendered path; there is little appetite for understanding how LGBT+ Muslims could still marry and have children with their same-sex partners. For Muslim men, it seems the discourses around their gender identities are characterised by patriarchal gender roles and the perceptions of respectability that surround these. Implicitly acknowledging their setbacks in achieving these goals, the participants highlight the assumed fixity of these roles and hierarchical relations to the specificity of cultural and religious expectations. Clearly, the heterosexist discourses in British Muslim communities (Siraj, 2009; Yip, 2004; 2008) means marriage is a gendered rite of passage to navigate, with heteronormative representations dictating it as religiously and culturally imperative.

4.6.5 A will not to know

Despite some of the participants having disclosed their sexual identities to their parents and members of the family, and though these were accepting of them in some cases, it was felt imperative to keep these within the immediate family for some parents in order to minimise the perceived risks of shame and dishonour among the wider family and community. This meant another closet materialised, despite disclosing their sexual identities to parents:

She said 'Whatever makes you happy makes me happy and what kind of mum will I be if I don't share your happiness?' which made it even more difficult than it was. But she did say: 'don't tell anybody we don't want anyone else knowing' (Jahangir, 47, gay)

From my dad's perspective when I came out, from my dad's perspective, it was more about because he was like this self-proclaimed community leader, he did think for a long time and did argue with me about what would the community think, what would his peers think, what would the extended family think (Omar, 28, gay)

They were ok with it as long as I kept it secret from cousins, aunts and the like…they were scared of others finding out (Adeel, 23, gay)

The intersections of religious and ethnic identities and their social contexts serve to place restrictions on not only LGBT+ British Muslims, but the parents of these as well, even if the latter are liberal and accepting; the compulsoriness of heterosexuality therefore not only polices and limits LGBT+ people but heterosexuals, and heterosexuality itself (Rich, 1980). Such experiences challenge normative understandings and interpretations of Eurocentric models of both sexuality and coming out as LGBT+ (Abraham, 2010), because the social costs of shame and embarrassment are determined as important in the face of the community which are not simply rejected by LGBT+ Muslims because of issues of racism in wider society (Minwalla et al., 2005). Thus, as well as theological condemnation determined from both scripture and the ethno-religious group, there are closets formed around parental expectations, izzat and the ethno-religious community.

Such cultural and ethnic dimensions to understanding and disclosing their sexualities breed further levels of complexity for LGBT+ Muslims. The silences around their sexuality vis-à-vis their parents and their communities conceal their identities, practices and relationships, driven by an obligation to protect personal and family reputations. Upholding this façade of heterosexuality to spare the feelings of family members is an acute materialisation of power construed and reproduced through the density of familial love and expectations mediated by ethnic heritage, and implicitly acknowledges the typical silences around sexuality and collective denials of LGBT+ sexualities. This conscious closeting of sexuality in the face of the ethno-religious community serves the purpose of protecting family and individual reputation; of preserving harmony and standing. The latter is consistent with Murray's (1997) contention that intentionally ignoring discreet instances of moral and especially sexual transgression forms part of a common Muslim community ethos; not only does this protect transgressors and their families, but it also upholds religious sexual norms by refuting evidence of violations. Thus, this willful policing of sexuality through a mode of a will not-to-know is characterised by silence rather than not knowing.

Though the reactions to coming out to their parents varied across the interview data for those that had, for both Sofia and Rehman, parental reactions to these were to

insist on heterosexual marriage as a way of keeping face and maintaining the public expectation to get married to the opposite sex:

> *Their idea was for me to get married to a girl and it'd be swept under the carpet as it were* (Rehman, 30, gay)

> *My parents weren't happy with it and pressurised me to get married so that I might have been changed…but deep down I think they knew that me being a lesbian wasn't going to change just because I was married, I think it was a strategy to avoid questions because of my age and the offers I was getting* (Sofia, 28, lesbian)

Seeing heterosexual marriage as inauthentic and constraining their sexual subjectivities, Rehman and Sofia somewhat individualise the process of coming out to negotiate the standards of marriage. Yet, a continued insistence to meet the cultural and religious standards of heterosexual marriage persevere in the eyes of their parents and problematises the development of a sexual subjectivity, where the responses to such a critical moment not only suppress but reproduce domination and further complicates the intersection of private and public contexts (Seidman, Meeks and Traschen, 1999). Ceasing the pressure to get married through coming out entails a disruption of the publically understood requirement to perform heterosexual marriage but only to the extent that another closet is duplicitously produced to extinguish a public gay son or lesbian daughter. These reflections demonstrate the deep-seated nature of family, cultural and social obligations that have been the focus of this section. Having explored how LGBT+ Muslims sexualities were interpreted through Islamic sexual discourse and how this informed how LGBT+ Muslims understood their position within Islam, as well as focusing, in this section, on how the complex relations of family, honour and community obligations came to closet their sexualities, I move on in the next section to focus on embodied experiences of the closet.

4.7 Understanding and negotiating embodied closets

4.7.1 Material closeted LGBT+ Muslim bodies

As highlighted earlier, the closet is not simply a metaphor of LGBT+ repression but also a materiality of power and knowledge that can serve to regulate the disclosure of one's sexual identity within, and across the intersections of, different geographic scales. Thus far, I have highlighted how the closet manifests as a heteronormative regime through theological discourses and interpretations, homes and family settings, and through community expectations and relations for my participants, demonstrating

its different metaphoric and material spaces and scales (Brown, 2000). Now I present some accounts from my participants that highlight the embodied materialities of the closet and how these link to other scales of sexual regulation and non-disclosure. Thus, how did embodied practices or real and assumed identities materialise onto the body the relations and secrecy of compulsory heterosexuality, as mediated by religion, ethnicity and personal relationships? Interestingly, one of the ways in which this came to the fore was through clothing, where participants noted the intrusive nature of embodied disciplining:

> *…Carefully choosing what to wear for example, not to wear anything too boyish maybe that would have given people something to latch onto the possibility that I was a lesbian* (Noreen, 29, lesbian)

> *The fashion was, you know that hippy/Urban Outfitters look, a bit different and I like that but…I'd have been too daring, too out there, I would have got looks and comments, no doubt* (Daniyaal, 21, bisexual)

Here, the body becomes a contested space of conflicting identities where the desire to present a clothed body of their own choosing became a struggle to comply with demands settled out by the policing nature of the heterosexual gaze. Limiting the embodied traces of sexuality through the body means yielding to the different discourses that structure their sexual identities and the perceived display of these. For Noreen, this meant acquiescing to supposedly 'correct' versions of femininity assigned to her biological body (Crossley, 2001) by not wearing *"anything too boyish"*. The disciplining of Noreen's body, as well as in the account of Daniyaal, highlight how their 'docile' bodies here are constructed through relations of discourse and materiality (Little and Leyshon, 2003), by which the social norms around presenting the body are influenced through techniques of power. Foucault's (1977) assertions of how docile bodies are fashioned through techniques produced by technologies and discourses of power are not necessarily concerned with sexual and gender identities but work by feminists using his ideas has highlighted how bodies become controlled and regulated by societal norms around sexuality, with women's bodies in particular expected to be controlled and conform to these disciplinary regimes (McNay, 1992; Bartky, 2003). A focus on embodied experiences of the closet points to the materiality of discourses and social relations of identity and difference that highlight the regulatory relations of gendered presentations of the body.

For Noreen and Daniyaal, the body had the potential to become stigmatised should they not have gone along with the expectations surrounding their clothing choices and demonstrates how bodies are styled are 'one of the techniques through which we peform, enact and 'do' gender (Nayak and Kehily, 2006: 467). These material submissions to the authoritative relations of sexuality, gender, ethnicity and religion, at the expense of threatening to transgress codes of gender expectation, reflect how the closet is an everyday, embodied experience. Work on Muslim women's bodies and clothing (Dwyer, 1999) reveals how these are sites in which different identities and their attendant normative expectations fold onto and are observed or snubbed in order to customise own truths of identities and belonging to these. In these situations, carefully monitoring what they wear highlights how the sexualities of my participants were closeted through the material site of the body in which their sexualities, as well as Muslim, gender and ethnic identities, are co-constituted in distinct ways, following theological suppression and community discourses too. Complying with an apparent requirement to not clothe oneself in anything "*too daring, too out there*" is recognition of an entrenched hegemonic heterosexual gaze; the reduction or absorption of the closet at the scale of the body emphasises and inducts the self-discipline that seems a pre-requisite of recognising oneself as within the closet.

Problematically, however, the embodied gendered standards that participants faced not only stifled the creativity of fashion for them but also relied on and reified a stereotypical and dangerously misleading understanding of gay men or lesbian women contravening gender codes. Longstanding assessments that bracket gay male sexualities with effeminacy (Clarkson, 2006) or lesbian sexualities with butchness (Walker et al., 2012) are erroneous and stereotypical, but such stereotypes were acknowledged as everyday realities by those who participated. Indeed, carefully considering how their gender identities were expressed through the body was a strategy for attempting to ensure the closet door remained to some extent shut and, thus, difficult for others to realise and objectify their sexualities. One of the ways in which this was achieved for some of the men was through policing a perceived effeminate embodied demeanour:

> *I was conscious not to be camp, to try and act straight* (Faisal, 29, gay)

I was brought up in quite a masculine environment…hide it by making sure I wasn't giving anything away, so crossing my legs for example just to avoid that basic caricature (Junaid, 27, gay)

Thinking intersectionally as to how different identities are read, contested and negotiated through the body, and how this links to and perpetuates oppression and domination, has an appeal for this most intimate of scales can be a contested site of wider cultural, political and social discourses (Simonsen, 2009) that are lived out across various everyday scales (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014). Here, lived realities of mediating the relations between their gender and sexual identities demonstrate how discourses can aggregate at the body (Mirza, 2013). Policing how they embody gendered expectations or norms in this manner alludes to the rigidity of gender roles within oppressive heteronormative systems; a body that acts gay, camp or effeminate is rendered the object of visual inspection and heterosexist expectations or ways of doing gender and sexuality. Conscious of their policing practices and turning down their campness to fit into heteronormative expectations of doing gender and sexual subjectivity means that the interpretation of bodies is a key concern in daily life for the participants and demonstrates how embodied identities and processes are relational and constructed in dialogue with opposing standards or expectations (Hopkins, 2012). LGBT+ Muslim bodies that do not conform to normative embodied expressions of gender and sexual identities may therefore be at risk of outing their inhabitants; affecting a more 'straight' persona lays open the relational dynamics of the closet and the underpinning structures of non-disclosure of sexuality, while reproducing the materialities of the discourses that are invoked. Evidently, the body, as 'the geography closest in' (Simonsen, 2009: 51), is an intense scale of the closet (Brown, 2000), given it is through the body that our identities are often read or assumed, and policing one's body clarifies the complexity of unequal relations of sexual identity.

4.7.2 The desiring closeted body

Though above there are accounts of monitoring clothing choices and effeminacy, I now move on to explore how the conflicts of sexual desire imbricate themselves onto and through the body via accounts of unease after masturbation or sex, and romantic desire itself. While participants identified themselves as sexual minorities at the point of interviews, Junaid and Yassar described examples of unease and disaffiliation, despite masturbating over gay porn or having sexual encounters with other men, while Diya recounted the intensity of unrequited love:

I'd feel dirty after [masturbation] and ask Allah to rid me of these feelings…didn't think of myself as gay just because I was watching male porn, I just thought it was a phase, 'I'm straight because I'm still attracted to women'…denying it really, looking back I was suppressing it (Junaid, 27, gay man)

If I fuck a guy I confess it as a sin and that makes me a faasiq [sinner] *and I'd pray for forgiveness…but, for me, for me, I didn't think I had to come out about being gay because of that, I didn't think that. My absolution was God's will (*Yassar, 28, gay man)

It's boys I want, I can't help it. But you know when you look at a boy, I mean when your eyes linger, what is that? Is that sin? Because I'm hard and I'm in love and I can't stop the feeling of wanting him. I can't stop thinking about him; his little idiosyncrasies; his smile; the way his face lights up when he starts talking about something he cares so much about; the fact that he never gives a shit about what anyone thinks; his bed-ruffled hair; I've fallen for him and I hate that no-one can know; I've cried over him (Diya, 22, gay man)

Junaid and Yassar's accounts follow similar patterns of turning to Allah after accommodating and concluding their sexual desires through masturbation or sex with men. Junaid's attempts to pray these feelings away and not recognising himself as gay are indicative of shame and denial as a formative aspect and challenge of being non-heterosexual and in the closet (Sedgwick, 1990). While he now lives openly as a gay man in the north of England, having migrated from the south, and attends LGBT+ Muslim group events, his earlier recollections show how shame and unease were seemingly essential to the conflicted enactment and reiteration of his LGBT+ Muslim self. Yassar, on the other hand, has only revealed his sexual identity to work colleagues and friends in his current city of residence and has not told his parents out of respect and fear. According to him, having sex with other men and praying to Allah after considering this as sin did not necessitate disclosure of his sexual preferences or identity, instead believing any form of forgiveness was according to the will of Allah.

Interestingly, the embodied experiences described convey the complex paradoxes and ambiguity that characterise experiences of the closet; despite attending to their sexual desires, their sexual identities remain undisclosed or retreated away from, to some degree a source of shame for Junaid and sinning for Yassar. 'This shame is the body saying that it cannot fit in although it desperately wants to' (Probyn, 2004: 345) and seeking forgiveness or praying their sexual feelings away are practices that may be understood as both an intimate embodied/spiritual intimacy with Allah and a form of

self-rejection that simultaneously provides protection and unease. The intensity of these feelings demonstrates the sharp relationships between emotions, the visceral and the body (Probyn, 2004), as the crude emotions of guilt and sin that result out of embodied practices of masturbation and/or sex intensify are made tangible. Thus, there is some form of embodied dissonance as feelings of shame manifest in piety to paradoxically highlight a supposed absence of piety within themselves; the sense that acting upon their gay identities are not quite right reverberate across such prayers and seemingly have more introspective import than would simply harbouring those sexual desires. Here thus, the recitation of prayer in the aftermath becomes a practice of reciting shame and sinning and so recitation becomes a performance of a closeted gay identity.

The captivating eagerness by which Diya, who has only disclosed his sexuality to one friend, narrates his unrequited love for a close friend of his likewise highlights the relationship of embodied shame and the closet. Here, the disjointedness between curiosity over whether his love is sinful, where it may be condemned, and the emotionality of the 'impossibility' of being able to disclose his love and realise it in all its glory and travails is clear. The force of the prohibition of his sexuality and love means it is not just through acting on these that we feel the emotive force of his experiences; rather, the exclusion he feels reveals itself through the body, both his and the friend's he desires, intensifying itself around sites of arousal; the gaze, the eyes and his genitalia. Though the iterative nature of these feelings and longings caused alienation and conflict, making him feel his sexual 'otherness', it also compelled him to recognise his own romantic desires and this closeting operates vis-à-vis the performativity of shame and uneasy love which is scary and exciting, alienating but bewitching. Such reflections prompt identification and reformulation; the shame and ambiguity of the closeted gay self continues to surface through across a plethora of felt emotions, reinforcing both his sexual and religious identities. Thus, the shame and nature of the closet do not necessarily pass away into closure or disclosure, but rather, closure might immobilise while simultaneously and paradoxically inciting. Shame, then, is a characteristic of non-heterosexuality for the participants, typified by a set of embodied experiences that hide sexuality away but continually rescript it through reiteration.

4.7.3 Bodies on/offline

I now want to focus on how some of the participants attempted to negotiate experiences of their closet through the medium of the internet and speculate on how these practices of using online spaces often blur the lines between digital and material spaces. Digital spaces have been recognised as increasingly fertile contexts for geographic research: according to Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski (2018: 25), 'Geography…is in the midst of a digital turn…a demonstrably marked turn *to* the digital as both object and subject of geographical inquiry'. It was commonly expressed that the use of the internet allowed participants to engage in discussions about the conflicts between their religious, ethnic and sexual identities, while these also enabled them to communicate and connect with other LGBT+ Muslims and BME people and support groups, keep up an online covert sexual identity, and meet up with other people for sex and dating. According to Ali:

> *Finding other people like yourself on the internet when I was younger was like a godsend, it was so restricted and to be able to have that community and talk to people online. Perhaps I should have expected it, I think people who are oppressed always find a niche way to connect*

For Ali, a space online in which to communicate the tensions between being LGBT+ and Muslim allowed him to come to terms with his sexual identity, finding some form of solace in speaking to others like him. A desire to be comfortable in the face of restriction is a force of magnetisation and solidarity for oppressed groups according to Ali. Similar narratives were articulated by Raif and Riyadh who remarked that online spaces were the nascent efforts through which to facilitate identity and community-building. For them:

> *It was through the forum that I first started to talk about whether it was acceptable to be a bisexual Muslim and that helped me through talking to other people who had been in the same situation as me, or were still in that same situation…I could start to explore that part of me more and maybe see that, with the help of others, I wasn't necessarily a sinner or going to burn in hellfire* (Raif, 28, bisexual)

> *It was so important to me to be able to find that community…whether through just mutual support or finding out about medication…that helped me to get to where I am now. Yeah, it was all well and good meeting peer groups in physical settings and to see them but I wouldn't have been able to build up that courage in the first place to have gone and done that* (Riyadh, 24, transgender man)

Both Raif and Riyadh point to the significance of online spaces and interactions made within them to help them approach the possibilities of unity and group solidarity, and these narratives are consistent with Gross' (2007) contention that the spaces of online interactions have enabled new forms of visibility and communication for LGBT+ people. These forums and chatting to peers in similarly complex predicaments in ostensibly 'safe spaces' allows them to fracture their seemingly docile sexualities and re(interpret) them rather more positively, allowing them to recreate virtual space as comforting and somewhat resistant towards discourses that manufacture the materiality of regulating power relations as they pertain to their sexualities. The value of safe spaces lies in their capacity to facilitate dialogue, sharing and a sense of freedom to speak of issues of concern without fear of marginalisation, misunderstanding or violence. Coming out as LGBT+ in online spaces may be risky given the possibilities of the wrong people finding out but it is clear that the space of the internet is a 'newer' way of coming out and could be said to be rather transformative if one is able to determine the balancing act of who knows what and on which sites and spaces- whether these be 'real', material spaces or through online dialogue.

However, it is no big jump to suggest that these practices of using the internet to affirm one's sexuality also are packed with diverse hegemonies of identities and the troublesome paradox of the closet coming to the fore once more. As explored, the closet in both its material and metaphoric forms, and their intersections, is ambiguous, ambivalent and precarious, and being out in one setting does not rest upon disclosing sexual identity in others. The complicated interactions between material spaces and cyberspace became apparent in discussions with those who had used the internet as a site of coming to terms with their sexual identity or to explore this further in discussion. Touching on this is Amir's account:

> **NI:** *You said that a lot of this exploring of your sexuality has been through digital means- social media, forums, things like that. Have there been any kind of, any spaces, everyday spaces, perhaps the LGBT+ clubs or support groups, you've used?*
>
> **Amir:** *No, I've tried to use things online, but not in real life as in going to places. I think the closest places…I'd be interested in finding, but again, I don't wanna start opening up new things where I've got to, I don't want to destroy my whole life, I'm very mindful of that*
>
> **NI:** *Can I ask, have you told any friends, colleagues perhaps?*

Amir: *No, nobody that knows me, [laughs] you're actually the first person that I've told face to face, I've, I've told people online but not in real life*

Similar accounts of only informing people online and not in offline spaces were provided by Faisal:

> *I found it difficult really to tell people in real life, even though you're making sure you're covering your tracks for example by not using your real or full name, being careful not to give your specific location away, there's that fear of being found out by someone you know in real life*
> (Faisal, 29, gay)

Online spaces, despite providing a productive foundation for engaging with one's sexual identity, are demonstrated as precarious and risky in these narratives despite the careful disclosure of their sexual identities in "*real life*". To some degree there may be a ghettoisation of LGBT+ communities online; Alexander and Banks (2004: 281) suggest 'the power that LGBTQ voices carry is diminished as they are relegated to a corner of the cyberworld- you know, the gay part of the virtual town'. However, they also suggest that LGBT+ people can explore their identities online further. Though the above accounts seem to demonstrate a binary way of thinking in which 'real life' is separated from online spaces, clear in them is the understanding that explorations of sexuality and this form of negotiating the power of the closet is also complicit in its materialisation; relegating the closet to offline spaces is a strategic configuration of one's sexuality (Orne, 2011), but also continually rescripts the materiality of the power relations of the LGBT+ closet. However, using social media or the internet more generally is a productive basis for enabling participants to anticipate their concerns and the 'imperative' to come out, challenging the latter in different ways.

Implicitly questioning the imperative to disclose one's sexuality while engaging with it in its various forms and through different practices helps us make sense of how the digital and the material bleed into one another. Though there are references to these above, I now focus on the example of the use of the digital and the maintenance of the closet while negotiating these through sex. The use of location-based apps such as Grindr, Tinder and Hornet are now a common feature of gay male life, particularly flourishing in large urban spaces where users can meet and engage in dating or sex across a larger pool. Plenty of the gay men who took part in the research interviews highlighted a knowledge and use of some of these in order to facilitate both sex and

dating. While these apps are based on location and proximity their actual use distort some of the binary conceptualisations of material and digital worlds outlined above. Miles suggests 'studying the processual stages from online communication to embodied experience is key to understanding the impact of technological hybridisation' (2017: 1597) in the context of locative media apps. Adeel (23-year-old gay man) had not disclosed his sexuality to parents at the time he was using Grindr and revealed he had not used it for several years, while Diya (22-year-old gay man), lives with his parents and does not live openly as a gay man. For both, at different times of their lives, the use of Grindr enabled them to meet up with other people:

> *I was hesitant about it initially because people barely responded without me sending a face pic first but once I started to become more familiar with it it was fine even if I did have a compulsion to constantly check it* (Adeel)

> *It was through Grindr that I started having sex and lost my virginity actually…I think if you're meeting up with discreet people it's totally fine, I know it may seem risky on the outside to meet up with someone you don't know or have only ever spoken to online…don't think I could actually be without it to be completely honest with you* (Diya)

The use of dating apps is significant for sexual encounters for both Adeel and Diya, reflecting the popularity of technological apps as an increasing cultural signifier and repertoire of gay male life (Miles, 2017). Being able to attend to their sexual desires despite having not disclosed their sexual identities to family and friends evidences and embodies the complexities of the closet itself and its significance in everyday life. The connections made via the use of Grindr oblige the two of them to continually check and meet people in the hope of engaging with their sexual identities and their preferred practices that accompany these. Additionally, as a means to an end of sexual encounter or dating, the use of Grindr starkly highlights the hybridity of online and offline spaces and the effects that these interrelationships have on the negotiating their sexual identities.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the narratives of LGBT+ British Muslims as they concern the closeting and regulation of their sexual identities, and how they understood these experiences. I have demonstrated how they engage with and negotiate different identities and their social and spatial contexts, and how these reify unequal relations that constitute a necessity to manage the disclosure and concealment of their

sexualities carefully. Thus, the examples and discussion provided not only reflect the issues and factors that cause the closeting of their sexuality, but also the structural and spatial discursive and everyday frameworks that set the parameters of acceptable sexualities. Such experiences demand an understanding of the dense intersectional network of relations that exclude and cause the specific experiences of suppression and negotiation that have been discussed.

Understanding how LGBT+ British Muslims understand Islamic sexual ethics and their interpretations of these was the focus of the first analysis section and this highlighted the different readings of these led to distinct challenges or affirmations. Some, such as Amir and Mo, saw their sexual identities as sinful and immoral because of negative interpretations of the story of Lot and understanding that these forms of sexuality were not permissible within the heteronormative discourse and milieu of Islam. These therefore textually condemned their sexualities into the confines of the closet and these emotional accounts demonstrated the complex entwining of sexuality and religious moralities that seemingly propogated a sense of such challenges being 'tests' laid down by Allah. The section then moved on to explore more positive and affirming interpretations which relied on a mixture of essentialist thinking and non-literal reading; the former when participants contended they were born or made LGBT+ by Allah and the latter in interpretations of the story of Lot and absences of condemnation within the Qur'an. Such findings are consistent with Yip's (2004; 2008) work with LGBT+ Muslims in Britain and so highlight the conflicting challenges and interpretations with regards to understanding Islamic sexual ethics.

The chapter then moved on to focus on how LGBT+ British Muslims sexual subjectivities were shaped by family and community networks that influenced constructions of a closeted sexual identity. This section was rich with understanding the intersectional and intergenerational relations that complicate coming out for LGBT+ British Muslims and the social restraints of these (Yip, 2008; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011). However, by considering space and scales in this section, I developed more socio-spatial understandings than the current literatures afford. My participants highlighted issues of love and respect for parents inhibiting their sexualities because disclosing these were seen to go against religious and cultural values. I sought to contextualise understandings of these experiences through an intersectional analysis sensitive to how the power relations across different identities and domains (Hopkins, 2019a)

shaped their understandings of their sexual identities. The emphasis of honour and cultural taboos of talking about sex highlight the intergenerational and intersectional complexities of everyday life for LGBT+ British Muslims. Understanding these relations that constitute sexual difference and otherness across different scales such as the home and community demonstrate the spatialities of intersectional (Mollett and Faria, 2018) and intergenerational (Vanderbeck, 2007) orderings that signify disclosure of the sexualities of the participants as tantamount to breaking izzat (Siraj, 2012).

Geographical imaginations and metaphors were also implicit in these discussions given how parents constructed LGBT+ identities as examples of Western immorality, while spatial metaphors were discussed in relation to honour and community. A historical context of postcolonial sexualities demonstrated the relational ways in which the former issue can be understood, but also demonstrates that LGBT+ British Muslims not rejecting their ethnic communities (Minwalla et al., 2005; Jaspal and Siraj 2011) is entwined with legacies and histories of colonialism that structure contemporary experiences. Regarding expectations and disclosure, the linearity and rigidity of gendered roles were also reflected upon and these buttressed discursive regulations of the sexualities of my participants. Such accounts help signify how LGBT+ Muslims simultaneously contend with harsh theological doctrine, or at least their interpretations, as well as social contexts that signify complexity. Understanding how these different identities and their wider relations and contexts of power and representation are irreducible demonstrates the complexity of their lived experiences (McCall, 2005).

Finally, there were examples of the embodied closet that showed the materiality of the discourses, interpretations and expectations that bounded LGBT+ Muslim sexualities. Embodied performatives that reproduced the materiality of the closet were highlighted and demonstrate the value of embodied intersectionality (Mirza, 2013: Johnston and Longhurst, 2014) for understanding how the closet, as a power/knowledge matrix, materialises at this intimate scale (Brown, 2000). By showing examples of adapting clothing and posture, linkages of sexual practices, shame and prayer, and online/offline hybridities of spaces and the closet, I demonstrated the complex embodied relationalities (Hopkins, 2012) and spatialities of power and knowledge that shape the closeted regimes of the sexualities of my participants.

Overall, these lived experiences of the closets of LGBT+ British Muslims- how they are shaped and understood through religious understandings and social relations, as well as space and scale- reflect the complexity of their different and intersecting positionings as they pertain to religious, sexual, ethnic, generational and gendered identities. How these mediate the disclosure of their sexualities has been highlighted to show how the individualisation and teleology of the closet (Tucker, 2009) is somewhat constrained for understanding their experiences, as this rarely accounts for social complexities with regards to the intersections of race, ethnicity or religion in its formation and model. This would seem to highlight that critiques of the Eurocentric nature of the closet as perhaps a white, Western framework for understanding sexuality (Brown, 2000; Phellas, 2005) are helpful, but this also needs to be considered with some care and not wholly applicable, given how my participants identified with labels that come under the LGBT+ umbrella and primarily understood their sexualities through a heterosexual/homosexual binary. Practices of querying representations of Lot and understanding their sexualities in essentialist terms, as well as for instance, the performativity of negotiating embodied closets are overt acknowledgements of having to negotiate heteronormative standards within their ethno-religious communities that are analogous to normative Western understandings and binary divisions of gender and sexuality. Both the actions of having to navigate domestic heterosexist cultures in silence and identifying with the words, labels and models of Western LBGT+ sexualities demonstrate the intersectional negotiations and predicaments of my participants. Such issues mean that LGBT+ Muslim experiences do not correspond neatly with the distinction of in/out and private/public that the closet framework is complicit with, but such binaries are acknowledged, understood and a prime way for configuring understandings of the experiences of their sexualities, and so, understanding the regulations of their sexualities vis-à-vis the closet is useful, but only fit where there are efforts to understand how these are mediated by other identities.

Further, the multi-scalar closets of these are made tangible where their relations and processes materialise or are imagined across different scales, demonstrating that these are spatially contingent (Mollett and Faria, 2018). This intersectional and intergenerational understanding of the closet and sexual regulations in the lived experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims highlights the challenges they face in light of multiple positionings of power and inequality. To further understand the lives of LGBT+

British Muslims in contemporary British society, in the next chapter I explore how their experiences of urban encounters shaped belonging and the importance of relations of time, space and politics for influencing these.

Chapter 5: Urban encounters and belonging

5.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on narratives from LGBT+ Muslims as they recounted encounters in the urban. The study of urban encounters has now become a well-established area of research within human geography, highlighting the significance of these for shaping exclusions and relations/exchanges of social difference (Wilson and Darling, 2016). The field of geographies of encounters has developed and helps understandings of the significance of, and connections between, the micro-politics of encounters, ostensibly banal practices of everyday life in the urban, the presence of the 'stranger', ordinary cosmopolitanism, and the implications of these for different forms of citizenship (Amin, 2002; Laurier and Philo, 2006; Valentine, 2008; Clayton, 2009; Noble, 2009; Andersson et al., 2011; Askins and Pain, 2011; Koefoed and Simonsen, 2012; Hopkins, 2014; Wilson, 2017). In a British context, much of this work has gained currency within debates about multiculturalism (and the assumed failures of this discourse), segregation and discourses of parallel lives and securitization (Nayak, 2012). Further, the importance of shared and different spaces in which encounters take place and the negotiations of their unequal power relations that cut across and connect with several discourses at different geographic scales means encounters find a welcome home in human geography.

Much work on the everyday geographies of Muslims in the West explores encounters, particularly in relation to Islamophobia and others forms of racism (McGinty, 2018). This focus demonstrates the multi-scalar nature of geopolitical fear (Pain and Smith, 2008), as well as how they shape how difference is mediated and understood, and the meaning of these in relation to everyday spaces and different communities (Hopkins, 2008). This chapter builds on these by exploring encounters in the contexts of LGBT+ British Muslim lives. Before exploring these experiences, I lay out the development of geographic scholarship on encounters in the urban, focusing on issues such as 'meaningful' encounters, difference, prejudice and attitude, and, the presence of the 'stranger' in the city.

In the section that follows a review of encounters, I introduce narratives from my participants regarding encounters in their local areas and how these shaped belonging in respect of their everyday relations with those of the same religious and ethnic

background in the first instance. I highlight how encounters with people from similar backgrounds structured conceptions of belonging that were emplaced in the local and through community relations, but also determined othering understandings of white populations and groups. Though these were evidently a source of social and cultural capital for the participants- particularly when growing up as young adolescents and adults- I highlight how limiting encounters with 'white others' placed boundaries of belonging and precipitated wariness of non-brown bodies. Further, their lives within the ethno-religious community also regulated how their sexualities were expressed and accepted, working to make them closet their sexualities in these spaces in order to ensure not being the subject of gossip. I present these notions as well as encounters of heterosexism that conditioned familiar discomforts. I then move on to explore urban encounters that my participants expressed and how these related to and made real the embodied differences of race, religion and nationhood- considering how these were contextualised through space, time and geopolitics, and processes of exclusion that shaped belonging to the nation. Though LGBT+ British Muslims retained a strong sense of affiliation to Britain, as I evidence in this chapter, I show how these senses are relational in that they are constructed through different bodies, identities and their representations. Further, the social and political contexts of these encounters demonstrate the importance of taking these into account and help show why their sexualities were rarely expressed in relation to the nation and the encounters that could challenge claims to this.

5.2. Negotiating encounters in the urban

There is now a rich body of research that can be placed under the umbrella of 'geographies of encounter' (Wilson, 2017). This work explores, understands and encourages understandings of the intimate negotiations of social and cultural encounters of difference in everyday contexts (Wilson, 2011). Early feminist work on encounters in the urban focused particularly on perceptions of fear, crime and danger that demonstrated the connections of the specificities of spaces with the social and political discourses of marginalised groups (Smith, 1987; Pain, 1991; 2000). These highlighted key relationships between marginality, inequality and fear, given 'the contours of anxiety within cities tend to follow topographies of inequality' (Pain and Smith, 2008: 4). This early feminist work on the relationalities of social inequality, themselves spatially and temporally contingent, laid the foundations for this increasing

engagement with urban encounters and raised interesting questions about the spatial characteristics of encounters and the imaginaries that were concomitantly provoked.

Moving on from the early encounters work, urban spaces have been characterised and imagined as sites of connection, the celebration of difference and potential contexts for the mediation of socio-spatial ills of inequalities (Massey, 2005; Laurier and Philo, 2006). While encounters might be casually assumed to be regulated by difference that crystallise around debates about the supposed absence of commonalities and symbolic binaries of 'us and them' (Rovisco, 2010), geographic work on difference and encounters has argued for explorations of encounters and the city in a positive light that conceptualises these through mutuality and understandings of the 'throwntogetherness' (Massey, 2005: 181) of the city, and how such encounters of difference and sociality are productive of the distinctiveness of cities and urban spaces (Stevens, 2007). In laying out the potential for encounters of the city to mediate difference and transform debates about inequality, difference and prejudice, this body of work has centred around the significance of contact and proximity in the urban for destabilising and dissolving hostilities and opening communities up for grasping and engaging with others (Wilson, 2011).

Laurier and Philo (2006) suggest focusing on the conviviality and friendliness of the micro-scales of the city entails a commitment to a practical 'doing' of civility that reflects the 'throwntogetherness' of the city. Their explorations of sociability occuring through practices of holding doors for strangers and talking to others in queues etc. might be indicative of what Thrift (2005) suggests is the banal friendliness of the urban, indicating a base-line democracy of new forms of urban citizenship that call for intercultural conversations and exchange (Staeheli, 2003). However, Amin (2002) warns against too easily equating presence and proximity in shared spaces as significant in itself for mediating conflict and prejudice. Though such encounters might signify small-scale achievements in the good city and the evolution of urban cultures of civility, Amin, (2006) suggests a need to be wary of translating serendipitous, frequent and casual encounters as symptomatic of respect for difference and an attunement to, or adoption of, a truly cosmopolitan culture (see also Sennett, 2001 and Valentine, 2008). This, therefore, entails thinking carefully about what is meant when tolerance is invoked in relation to civil encounters, for this term is highly dubious and reflects a relationship steeped in inequality (Brown, 2008). Though nominally

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suggesting a form of positivity, tolerance can hark back to recognition, however implicit, of hierarchical forms of seeing others that thus sustain the subjugation of certain groups whilst concomitantly re-producing those very power relations (Andersson et al., 2011).

According to Noble (2011), encounters with cultural 'others' can heighten assumptions of difference with their attendant stereotypes and prejudices. Valentine's (2008) sentiments tally with this position, imploring the need to challenge the troubling romanticism of urban encounters as shared co-existence itself cannot breed a sense of inclusivity and harmony. For instance, issues of self-segregation in the UK, often problematically portrayed as willingly done so by migrant and ethnic minority communities, also suggests a bounding of territory and identity that might limit encounters with others or lead to scapegoating. Though work by geographers has been important in disrupting popular stereotypes of self-segregation (Phillips, D. 2006; Gale, 2013), other work has also highlighted that the enduring nature of divided communities and proximities and encounters between these can often intensify difference, scapegoating and indifference towards cosmopolitanism in the city, with many of Valentine's participants telling:

> Community-based narratives of injustice and victimhood, for example that migrants are stealing jobs, that minority groups such as Muslims, lesbian and gay men and disabled people are receiving unfair cultural support or legal protection and so on…Indeed, being prejudiced can actually serve positive ends for some people, for example, by providing them with a scapegoat for their own personal, social or economic failures (2008: 327-328)

The problems demonstrated here suggest encounters in the urban might be rooted in opposition, conflict, prejudice and insurmountable cultural differences, highlighting how social and political discourses of social categories of difference permeate everyday life in quotidian spaces and moments of encounter, and demonstrate how cultural exchanges might be constrained by those aforementioned topographies of inequalities (Pain and Smith, 2008) Fundamentally, these urge enquiries about the ultimate outcome of encounters of difference and whether these bring about notions of solidarity, friendship and understanding.

Uneasiness with the way in which encounters in urban spaces are altogether too-easily

celebrated has also raised a set of interesting debates about notions of meaningfulness and transformation and the durative qualities and intertwining temporalities of encounters (Matejskova and Leitner, 2011; Valentine and Sadgrove, 2012; Wilson, 2017). Valentine has been particularly prominent in advancing a critique of the idealised accounts of the serendipity of the urban within the field of 'geographies of encounter'. Her request (2008) for critical attention to meaningful encounters proceed from the argument that proximity and contact do not necessarily translate to positive changes in attitudes and she documents a worrying opening in, firstly, accounts of how encounters have the potential for transformation and how this potential might be realised, and secondly, with the relationship between encounters and practices in public and those values and beliefs that are personal or projected to a close few (Valentine, 2008; Valentine and Waite, 2012). Thus Valentine (2008) calls for more intersectional frameworks that account for the contingencies of unequal power relations and social categories of difference that conform to materialise power and shape personal and everyday geographies of encounters.

Wilson (2017: 460) notes the need for accounting for this 'paradoxical gap between practice and belief' but also reminds us not to set these out as fixed and discrete for this might limit how we understand encounters over time and their potential for incremental changes in beliefs and prejudice. Further, Wilson's (2017) argument for stressing who encounters are meaningful for and in what circumstances and to what effects are important to consider. Wilson (2017) and Wilson and Darling (2016) raise important questions about the different forms in which encounters matter and whether encounters are only ever meaningful if they have positive impacts. This relates to questions about meaning and the importance of scale mentioned earlier. How do encounters at certain scales cause changes in social and cultural relations at others, if at all? The participants from white-majority social backgrounds in Valentine's study (2008) had numerous daily positive and friendly encounters with those from other minority groups including asylum-seekers, disabled groups, Muslims and British minority ethnic groups. Yet, in many cases, these tolerances and encounters with individuals did little to impact on their opinions about such groups and wider transnational and political discourses of these, as was the case with how German nationals interacted and regarded Russian immigrants (Matejskova and Leitner, 2011).

These issues reverberate deeply in uncertain geopolitical and socio-economic times; they raise implicit questions about the importance of scale and show how the local, national and global interact. While the global scale has often seemed to be the starting point of analysis for geopolitics (Dowler and Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2001), grounding geopolitics in the everyday demonstrates the folly of this scalism (Pain, 2009). Regarding perceptions of global and national discourses, local scales and urban sites seemingly have most currency for minority ethnic groups (Hopkins, 2008; Noble and Poynting, 2008) and as such, there is much worth in accounting for sustained characteristics of encounters, as well as qualifying how encounters are situated within specific temporalities and discourses (and their own histories) that shape how these play out in the present (Ahmed, 2000; Haldrup, Koefoed and Simonsen, 2006; Valentine and Sadgrove, 2012).

Urban life invariably necessitates encounters with those whom we know little about or have had little exchanges with before. According to Hopkins (2014: 1572), much of the work by social scientists on strangers in the urban 'show attentiveness to the spatialities and temporalities of 'the stranger', with issues of acceptance, surveillance, distance, proximity, closeness and remoteness being important themes'. While some of this work might be disembodied and missing empirical accounts of how those who are cast as strangers respond to and contest such assumptions and encounters, Hopkins (2014) sets out an exigent agenda for work on geographies of encounter and everyday multiculturalism (see Fortier, 2008) that takes seriously the complicated and interconnected issues of relationality, emotions and embodiment in his work with young Scottish Sikh men. These accounts demonstrated the complex everyday strategies of co-existence, shared understandings, education and mobilities that were important to contest these young men's experiences of racialisation and Islamophobia, and ignorance of their Sikh religion. Other accounts of strangers in national settings have been provided by Noble (2005) in an Australian context, and Haldrup, Koefoed and Simonsen (2006), and Koefoed and Simonsen (2012) from a Danish perspective. The latter two examples focus on how Danish citizens engage with transnational political semiotics about the 'Other' (in this case, Muslims and immigrants) to create and mould Orientalist boundaries of us and them in quotidian and banal ways that rely on processes of embodiment, relationality and the senses. Thus, they understand the relationality of the body and embodiment as precise forms of enacting, responding to and contesting the labeling and figure of the stranger in the urban.

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5.3 Encountering Muslims

I now want to sketch out how some of the limitations of work on encounters lend themselves to the pressing questions and aims of my own project. Overall, this thesis is situated within the fields of everyday geographies of religion (Dwyer, 1999; Mohammad, 2005; Hopkins, 2006, 2007; Phillips, 2015) and sexuality (Valentine, 1993; Brown, 2000; Gorman-Murray, 2007a; Hubbard, 2008), and their intersections (Rouhani, 2007; Andersson et al, 2011; Valentine and Waite, 2012; Valentine et al., 2013), but also engages with work on the urban geographies of race and ethnicity (Hopkins, 2014; Phillips, 2015; Nayak, 2017), and encounter (Valentine, 2008; Wilson, 2017). In this section, I explore key issues of Islamophobia and racialisation in terms of encounter, while moving on to pointing out the need for more analysis of LGBT+ Muslims' encounters in the urban with both fellow Muslims and other groups, as well as those from LGBT+ backgrounds and those belonging to other sexualities. In doing so, overall, I highlight the need for attention to LGBT+ Muslim everyday encounters with others as points of misunderstanding, education, embodied intersectionality and relationality.

Since the turn of the century a broad set of discourses has increasingly shaped Muslims as the West's other through the representation of insurmountable cultures, although this ties into repetitive Orientalist thinking (Said, 1997). These Oriental rhetorics of the Muslim world and Muslims have a long background that helps us understand the situated nature of anti-Muslim racism and racialisation today (Meer, 2014), though it is not vital to pursue an outline of the genealogy of anti-Muslim/Islam prejudice here. Much of the contemporary reporting on Muslims serve to portray them as political and social problems that have contributed to the failures of multiculturalism and the engendering of parallel lives and self-segregation within urban spaces (Phillips, D. 2006; Kundani, 2007). This is problematic for it gives rise to everyday socio-spatial ills of racism, racialisation and Islamophobia; the potential for disaffection amongst young Muslims and alienation in terms of belonging and citizenship; and broader questions about the use of culture and religion to recast geopolitical imaginaries and orders. Since the events of the 2001 11th September attacks in the US, and others that followed in Bali, Madrid and London, the racialisation of Islam has increased, presenting brown bodies as dangerous and 'other', to be feared, and stripped of uniqueness and diversity (Bhattacharyya, 2008; Koefoed and Simonsen, 2012).

The preceding discussion demonstrates some of the key issues of being a Muslim in the West today and some of the tensions that surround this. Geographic work on Muslims in the West has been plentiful since the beginning of the 21st century (see Falah and Nagel, 2005; Aitchison, Hopkins and Kwan, 2007; Hopkins and Gale, 2009; Hopkins, 2017), but where this work is somewhat limited is in its engagement with encounters that help critically identify the intersectionality of identities as they are played out and expressed through the body and how the body as the most intimate scale of relationality (Simonsen, 2009) is exposed (though see Dwyer, 1999a; 199b). Listerborn (2015) and Hopkins (2016) suggest that Islamophobic violence takes a particularly gendered form because of the hypervisibility and racialisation of the different veils and dress some Muslim women choose to wear. Indeed, reports and accounts of Islamophobic violence demonstrate that Muslim or Muslim-looking women are often the victims and men often the perpetrators (Lambert and Githens-Mazer, 2010). Thus, embodied intersectionality (Mirza, 2013) is a key issue here and policy and media commentary on Islamophobic encounters certainly needs to specify the forms of relationality and intimacy that occur and the specific geographies that shape and are shaped by these.

With regards to LGBT+ groups, there is a long history of their experiences in urban spaces. While the city has a rich tapestry of stories that recount safety and inclusivity in gay neigbourhoods or cities more generally (Castells, 1983; Knopp, 1992; Chauncey, 1995; Brown, 2000; Binnie, 2004; Nash, 2006), there is also very much a contested history to these spaces too, with encounters across class (Taylor, 2008), age (Casey, 2007), gender (Skeggs, 1999; Casey, 2004; Doan, 2010), and ethnic (Han, 2007; Teunis, 2007; Bassi, 2008; Tucker, 2009) identities all impacting upon the specific experiences of inclusivity and belonging as they pertain to LGBT+ experiences. Less work however has focused on the intersections of sexual identity and religion in the urban (though see Andersson et al., 2011, Valentine and Waite, 2012), and their intersections with other identities, such as race and ethnicity, in moments of encounters.

Overall, I have sought to outline the development of a field of 'geographies of encounter', demonstrating how this has reflected and reinforced the everyday as a prism through which to explore wider social power relations and inequalities. This work has been challenging and suspicious of the romanticisation of polite and convivial

encounters as necessarily translating to transformations in attitudes and beliefs (Amin, 2002; Valentine, 2008). Indeed, there is a concern for teasing out the meaningful aspects of encounters and demonstrating the need to account for intersecting identities, connectivity, the temporal qualities of these, and the specific scalar and spatial characteristics of these encounters and their implications for belonging and the use and negotiations of shared spaces of the city. Hopkin's call (2014) for 'relational, emotional and embodied' accounts of strangers thus resonates for a broader set of enquiries about interpersonal encounters in the urban and one which necessitates an empirical focus in the contexts of the lives of LGBT+ British Muslims.

5.4 Constructions of white 'others', comfort and discomfort
5.4.1 Limiting friendships, retaining space

The neighbourhoods that my participants resided in were expressed as crucial to building socio-cultural capital, while simultaneously limiting encounters with others because some parts of the towns and cities participants were from were seen to be white spaces:

> *It was just normal…there was no sense that you were segregating because that was all you knew and white people had their own areas…it was just apne* [own people] *in our area mainly and some white people (*Raif, 28, bisexual man)

> *There was Old Side where all my white friends would have grown up but that would have, my parents would have been very wary of going over there because it wasn't just white people…it was I suppose what you'd call quite a chavvy area, very dirty, lots of litter…there was nothing for us there, whereas in New Side we had everything we would have needed, the shops, mosques, people* (Noreen, 29, lesbian woman)

Raif and Noreen express urban neighbourhoods through ethnic, class and religious identities, and symbolise territorialised identities through which vocabularies of belonging, identity and home are rooted in particular spaces (Phillips, 2015). Expressions of comfort that link to certain areas of their localities mean that racialised inequalities could be somewhat mediated by encounters of similarity and perceived sameness in which they were able to perform their ethnic and religious identities with little recourse to thinking about marginality. Thus, encounters of a multicultural flavour were constrained by the limits of place and space, and the relational geographies of material sites through which their own were indicated as "*everything we would have*

needed"'. Perceptions of comfort are tied up in local knowledge and a calculated awareness of the value of living with 'similarity'. However, this place-belonging and meaning also funds an attitude of banal everyday urban citizenship in which participants considered their community spaces as normalising their visibility and not therefore standing out as non-white. Rooting themselves to the local as a way of identification is a salute to how LGBT+ Muslims expressed symbolic and emotional capital to other British Muslims as a form of cohesion and solidarity in opposition to the potential for discriminatory acts of racialised or religious oppression or feelings of marginality.

Nevertheless, limited encounters with white others in homes and neighbourhoods reinforced seemingly fixed spaces and relations of ethnic and religious identities. This division of multicultural encounters in school spaces and seemingly homogenous encounters of similarity in neighbourhood spaces takes in practices of everyday in/exclusions that lead to certain familiarities and disjunctures, and thus problematised how LGBT+ Muslims understood themselves and their places within different communities. Noreen's classed description of a white area as "*quite a chavvy area, very dirty*" corresponds with how Amir's and Rehman's parents constructed white populations as different, fashioning acute anxieties that multiplied through proximity and similarity (Yeoh and Huang, 2010). Seeing white others as different therefore had the relational potential to perpetuate inaccurate assumptions of sameness amongst the British Asian Muslim community, or at least position these as a coherent bloc of 'us'. This is problematic because it reanimates the fictivity of race and traditionally essentialist discourses and dynamics of this into certain spaces and bodies, indicating wariness of the proximities of white bodies and cultures as incompatible with those of the communities to which participants belonged.

5.4.2 Localised comfort and familiarities

The comfort in marking local neighbourhoods as safe spaces of the urban shows the need to configure emotions into discussions of encounters (Hopkins, 2014; Nayak, 2017). Habitual practices of my interviewees claiming spaces as their own reflected the emotional work engaged in that highlights the processual and spatial factors that shape belonging but also the co-constitutive dynamics of reproducing the tensions between attaching oneself to local or national registers of place belonging and their divides. As mentioned, seeing and being in local neighbourhoods provided a sense of

security and evoked familiarity which breeded local formations of urban citizenship that were discordant with what participants sometimes saw as exclusionary forms of the politics of national belonging; these were seemingly rooted in negative discourses of Britishness and multiculturalism, race and migration, cohesion, and Islam. My participants highlighted that:

> *It was easier to feel that you had more in common with the people living around you than what you saw in town* (Jahangir, 47, gay man)

> *Home wouldn't have been home as much…alienated without that cultural support* (Sofia, 28, lesbian woman)

Urban forms of citizenship and belonging that Jahangir and Sofia emphasised reflect the safety and comfort of the local that also enabled them to reinforce claims of belonging to Britain without recourse to mentioning the nation itself, demonstrating the contextuality of difference and the multiplicities of national and local belonging. Phillips, Davis and Ratcliffe (2007: 224) previously reported the 'continuing importance of 'community spaces, which were seen to engender feelings of familiarity, security and support' for British Asians from Bradfod and Leed, and both Jahangir and Sofia reported similar narratives that evince the value in accruing social capital within such spaces that Noreen alluded to earlier too.

The local becomes a space of familiarity and comfort that works at strengthening their ties and belonging to their ethnic groups. However, to suggest that multicultural claims to belonging are solely rooted at the local here is a false portrayal of these narratives because of how participants identified with the nation-state through, for example, the use of hyphenated signifiers of being British-Asian, British-Pakistani or British-Indian etc. Hence, claiming the local and hyphenated labels indicate a symbolic connection to the nation too and the value of the rootedness of their lives as being in Britain. This self-identification is unsurprising- my participants rarely questioned their own perceptions of being and feeling British, rather considering how to be part of the wider British nation inclusive and accepting of their different backgrounds. This points to a redrawing of the geographies and perceptions of diaspora. According to Brah (1996: 47), British Asians 'lay claim to the localities in which they live as their 'home'…Even when they describe themselves as 'Asian', this is not a reaching back to some 'primordial Asian' identity. What they are speaking of is a modality of 'British Asian-

ness'. Asserting their right to the urban and the nation is symptomatic of the emotional dimensions and everyday spatialities of belonging across different scales.

Local spaces and neighbourhoods hence engendered a sense of community because of the appeal of interaction and contact with similarity too which represent a point of social and cultural capital that is fundamental to belonging and identity. Belonging and identity are not the same here, but are constituted through intersectional dialogue of identities, spaces and emotions (Antonsich, 2010). Belonging is fundamentally geographical (Mee and Wright, 2009: Antonsich, 2010), as cultural practices of identity and the emotions that these establish symbolise and relate to how places 'can reinforce the personal feelings of belongings of inhabitants' (Isakjee, 2016: 1350). Considering how belonging and such evocations help to root my participants to particular places in the urban demonstrates the spatial relations of familiarity, home and security. Thus, everyday urban citizenship is shaped by positive feelings of belonging and visibility, as well as perhaps safety in numbers. Claiming parts of their towns and cities as their own highlights how discrimination and stigmatisation in certain local places can complicate attachment to these, whilst strengthening upbeat accounts and personal emotions of others (Hopkins, 2007a; 2008a). They can become significant sites and spaces of interaction and encounters that focalise place-belonging and reassertions of different identities without having to justify these, or their, at times, contradictory or complicated relationships and syntheses.

5.4.3 Familiar spatial discomforts: surveillance, intergenerational conflicts and heterosexuality

Though these spaces enabled access to different forms of social, cultural and religious capital, they were concurrently characterised by ambivalence and contradictions too that complicated belonging and different identities. A grounded sense of urban citizenship and everyday belonging is rooted in practices and processes of acceptance and inclusion. However, my participants also narrated the contradictions and emotional (re)structuring of urban civility and locality, as they concerned interactions and exchanges of similarity and their ability to reify unequal social relations, as well as expressing some of the positives of the local/urban space. Some of these concerns were characterised by a sense of surveillance and a lack of privacy:

Pakis are nosy, that's what I don't like…everyone wants to know everyone's business (Zara, 22, lesbian woman)

It's that village mentality…that rural mindset that once something is out there it's as if everyone knows (Jahangir, 47, gay man)

Fractured accounts of living within communities of ethnic heritage are suggested as tinged with hesitancy and a sense of a lack of freedom or mobililty because of the gaze of others. Both Zara and Jahangir spoke of a sense of surveillance and gossip. According to Bhatti (1999), gossip within Asian communities can be a source of social control and notions of gossip and nosiness were prevalent across the interviews. Gossip is closely linked to izzat within these communities, as ensuring members of the community are not party to potentially embarrassing information is one of the ways in which is izzat is operationalised and performed. Thus, the social barrier of izzat is brought to the fore once more and criticisms of surveilling tendencies reveal the intricacies of place, belonging and social relations that are constituted within them and work to re-inscribe their orderings. Despite a nod to the value of living with those from similar ethnic and religious backgrounds, these accounts are also reflective of intermittent senses of discomfort. These echo work by Phillips, Davis and Ratcliffe (2007) whose participants also regarded a sense of the Asian community to be occasionally inhibiting for freedom and spatial mobility within local spaces.

As I explained in the previous chapter (4.6.3, pp.97-99), many of the participants told accounts of the heterosexist South Asian Muslim communities. This was problematic for it materialised into the urban areas of the local through perceptions of a heterosexist gaze informed by the intersections of ethnic, gender and religious identities. That the participants felt the values held were regressive to their sexualities was enlivened in prosaic encounters with other Muslims that were supposedly marked by humorous encounters of questioning when the participants would be getting married or engaged, or by working to navigate the aforementioned restrictions on spatial freedom. Such encounters, or lack thereof, were marked reproductions of heteronormative values and assumptions:

At Eid, birthdays or dawats, once I reached a certain age you'd get your aunties and uncles asking you about if your parents had found you a girl yet (Amir, 37, pansexual man)

People constantly ask 'when are you getting married?' or…at weddings, they tell you 'it's your turn next'…you just learn to nod and smile (Omar, 28, gay man)

For LGBT+ Muslims, forms of ambivalent perceptions of belonging to community spaces were particularly sensitive given their minoritised sexual identities. In this sense, what is evidenced is limited accounts of engaging their sexual identities in the local spaces of the neighbourhood. The encounters described above share the common cultural assumption of heterosexuality and marriage based on this sexual identity, cautioning them against invoking their sexualities; the spectre of the heterosexist community worked to hint at the lack of inclusivity of sexual and gender minorities within these. That the interviewees seldom came to resist the heterosexist overtones of elder members of their ethno-religious community heeds back to a recognition, however implicit, of the risk of resisting the structures of heterosexuality, lest they become subjects of gossip. Here, bringing in the assumed futurity of gossip and loss of networks is clear. The intensity of anxiety that the participants described with regards to coming out as LGBT+ Muslims is such that it was demonstrated that they would prefer to only be visibly Muslim rather than outing themselves as sexual minorities too in such areas. This is unfortunate; it implies a spatialised hierarchy of identities for LGBT+ Muslims where it seems that publically acknowledging their sexual identities would lead to further marginalisation and outcasting in these spaces.

Discourses of the sinfulness of LGBT+ relations within Muslim communities and its interpretations suggest that heterosexual Muslims may willingly withdraw from contact with sexual minorities (see Valentine and Waite, 2012: 480). In this case, the latter become strangers, emphasised by the experiences of LGBT+ Muslims who were evidently and consistently wary of remarking upon these and questioned their inclusion and acceptance into the ethno-religious communities if they were to disclose their sexualities and if this was to become public-local knowledge around their residences. This socio-spatial control is evident across encounters with those from their ethno-religious communities and came to peak in banal conversations, which reflected how the issues and signposting of their communites as heterosexist materialised through the spectre of gossip and the future; such communities are demonstrably power-laden with respect to how the constructions of silent sexualities and heterosexism order relations. Such narratives reflected the tensions and constructions of belonging and identity as contextualised through encounters and urban spaces within their ethnic

communities. Outlining these has shown the complex everyday formations that LGBT+ British Muslims negotiate. Contradictory senses of comfort and discomfort revealed through relational structurings of others and spaces highlight the role of encounters in shaping difference and the value of attuning to the power relations within them (and being (re)produced by them) and that might be resisted. I now work to develop this theme in this next section by revealing LGBT+ British Muslims experiences of encounters of racism and their assertions of belonging to Britain.

5.5 Encountering racism

5.5.1 'Fleeting' racist encounters?

I turn now to look at encounters of difference in respect of racism that LGBT+ British Muslims experienced. In this first section I explore how they experienced fleeting racist encounters in urban spaces and highlight that though fleeting in nature, different temporalities are invoked and brought to life, and how spaces are implicated and made through these. I then move on to account for the racialisation of religion and consider explicit Islamophobic attacks and link these experiences (and their exploitation of religion for hollowing out and perpetuating the myth of bounded racial identities) to political and social contexts that are important to understand encounters beyond meetings of different identities and bodies. I explore how these problematise perceptions of belonging to the UK and the postcolonial discourses of citizenship, Britishness and whiteness that can be understood through these.

Experiencing racist encounters in the urban was a common issue narrated by the participants, across different ages and socio-economic backgrounds. In respect of these, I acknowledge and work with Nayak's (2017: 291) understandings of 'the 'everyday racism' that pulls at the fabric of conviviality and works to whiten the nation'. By focusing on these experiences, I show how difference is constantly resuscitated, mediated and negotiated in and through racist encounters. I start with neighbourhood streets and encounters of racism experienced in these. Neighbourhood streets can be laden with significant relations of power that seemingly betray their micro-scale status (Matejskova and Leitner, 2011); these can shape encounters that make, rework and sustain social difference that scaffold experiences of the urban and their consequent subjectivities. When speaking about racist encounters it was clear that my participants had experienced a number of these in a 'fleeting' fashion:

I remember being called a black bastard by a guy when I was walking back home…I'm not even black (Raif, 28, bisexual)

There were a bunch of guys who'd said something…I didn't hear because I had my headphones in and they stopped me and asked me "Are you fucking deaf, you daft Paki?" I pretty much legged it and they chased me for a while until I managed to run on to a busy road (Daniyaal, 21, bisexual)

All I did was chuck a can on the street and an old guy, white, told me told me to pick it up and said it was typical of my "sort" (Adeel, 23, gay)

Negative accounts of 'fleeting' racist encounters destabilise notions of conviviality within the city (Thrift, 2005). Instead, being victims of racism highlights how spatial proximity can elicit the habituation and reinforcement of negative encounters of difference. Raif discloses being labelled a 'black bastard' despite not being black, rendering clear how 'racist activity…regards the racial characteristics of both 'Pakis' and 'niggers' as being equally worthy of hatred' (Gilroy, 1992: 36-37). The *"old guy"* in Adeel's account racialises his behaviour to his *"sort"* and hints at an assumed insurmountability of cultural differences, invoking littering as natural to whatever race Adeel embodied, racialising both bodies and spaces here. Both accounts signify shallow interpretations of embodied racial difference, sharing with Daniyaal's experience, the view of these bodies as not belonging. All invoke a sense of bodies on the move and the racist incidents heighten this mobility where they do not quite fit; Raif is ignorantly called as black where his race and/or ethnicity is misunderstood, Daniyaal is moved to run away and Adeel's uncivil littering implies a cultural conditioning that he and his wider group are yet to undergo. Those verbalising these racist comments differentiate my participants from themselves and signify how these strange/out of place bodies are central to developing their own versions of racialised nationhood, requiring such exchanges in order to substantiate a coherent offering of it (Cohen, 1994; Ahmed, 2000). Here, race and nation are in the process of becoming (Nayak, 2006), where these come to shape the subjectification of Raif, Daniyaal and Adeel.

Relationally defining boundaries against different bodies and cultural backgrounds seemed to be a way to enact a hierarchy of race and belonging through which the non-white bodies of my participants were typically relegated as out of place. Indeed, this theme highlighted the trajectories of past experiences of racism and the negative emotions they had the potential to breed, as they concerned belonging and forms of urban multicultural citizenship:

Like, what are they actually thinking of you? I walked into a fairly middle-class café and felt as if they were looking at me…was that me being paranoid or was that just a consequence of feeling like that before, I don't know (Ali, 27, gay)

We went to Bella Italia and weren't seated for ages…this is [home city] remember, and you're thinking why is that? (Faisal, 29, gay)

Though these examples are not explicitly racist, per se, that does not mean doubts should be senselessly raised as to whether these are racialised encounters. Instead, I privilege the interpretations of these as evoking racialised ideas and differences from the perspectives of Ali and Faisal. That these encounters engender feelings of difference demonstrates the necessity to consider not only the embodied relationalities (Hopkins, 2012) of encounters but also their temporalities (Wilson and Darling, 2016). They emphasise the folding of past experiences and emotions into present situations and indicate the significance of the complex time-space relationalities of the urban to shape how these are conceived and understood. The highlighting of these experiences indicates how Ali and Faisal felt uncomfortable within their everyday spaces where these were thought to feature forms, enactments and silences of racial difference marked onto and by the body. The less tangible forms of racialised difference as they emerge through the encounters that Ali and Faisal describe calcify whiteness as central to an evaluation of who can belong and the routinised regulations of belonging; these relatively 'small' issues accumulate to discomfort (Noble, 2005). Both read their bodies in these spaces against the taken-for-granted canvas and comfort of whiteness in Britain to the extent that their 'paranoia' seeps out of past experiences. Though they may be fairly banal experiences that 'does not mean they cause no-one to suffer' (Hopkins and Smith, 2008: 104) and, more than simply being about different embodied identities, these experiences make tangible the symbolic and embodied postcolonial relations of power where they are so common-place that they go unobserved. Such power generates 'modes of reflexivity' (Butler, 1997) where the confusion and questioning that is constructed in relation to white bodies is characterised by ambivalence over whether these are particularly racist or merely something playing on the minds of the participants. Thus, race and space are relationally entwined in emotional, embodied encounters that invoke past experiences to deem these non-white bodies as not quite belonging.

It is important to consider personal histories of race, belonging and the urban because 'over a long period of time individual experiences build up to a narrative of a resident's life' (Isakjee, 2016: 1345), and frequent experiences of racism intimates towards its normalisation. Assumptions of 'risky' bodies out of place are not merely symptoms of institutionalised forms of racism or the contemporary resistance against multiculturalism that is dependent upon and reifies ethnic and national difference (Pilkington, 2016). Instead, notions of bodies out of place symbolise a long-standing racial prejudice that has been part of the history of the British nation (Gilroy, 2004). These everyday racisms cannot be simply reduced to local urban encounters, as they are contextualised through genealogies of racial conditioning and violence that have been part and parcel of building up nationhood and who can claim to belong. Relations of power that position the non-white bodies of my participants as problematic are thus contextualised through postcolonial contexts of Britain that highlight the historic uneasiness of its accommodation of non-whites (Bhambra, 2017). In an everyday context, such histories and processes of place-making that mark out the UK as white rehearse and revise the scripts of exclusion and existing racial discourses, as is clear in the excerpts below:

> *Walking home and it was in broad daylight, both of the guys were drunk…one of 'em said 'Paki bastard' I just carried on walking* (Mo, 31, gay)

> *Some guy told me that we were all taking over, I was like 'who's we?' because I was sick of feeling responsible you know and he was like 'you dirty Pakis'…how can we call ourselves a tolerant country when that kind of shit goes down constantly* (Sofia, 28, lesbian)

> *One guy shouted… 'go back to your own country', those kind of things have happened a few times. One guy thrown a bottle of wine at me* (Raif, 28, bisexual)

Here, Mo, Sofia and Raif discuss some of their experiences of racism in city street spaces. The racial dimensions of these urban encounters are made unambiguously clear; to be non-white is to be thought of as part of an invasion, a target of physical threat, worthy of prejudiced verbal abuse, and condensed and marginalised to the point of having empty bottles thrown within these tense experiences. Race is made tangible and functions to subjugate and reproduce asymmetries of power that are contextualised through a multiplicity of scales but made clearer at the most initimate. Proximity to the non-white bodies of my participants is contested by seeking to distance

those defending white privilege and solidify social and spatial markers of difference (Dwyer and Jones, 2000). However, they do not exist out of a temporal and geographical vacuum. According to Ahmed (2004a: 31), 'The "moment of contact" is shaped by past histories of contact, which allows the proximity of a racial other to be perceived as threatening, at the same time as it reshapes the bodies in the contact zone of the encounter'. The 'futurity of whiteness' is also made tangible in Sofia's account where her protagonist's *"taking over"* claim is predicated upon the 'absent present' and speaks to the uncertainty of socio-spatial imaginaries (Baldwin, 2012). The power dynamics of race and whiteness embodied here weave together histories, futures and politics of whiteness, where acting on compulsions to perform racism work to defend space and imagine this as in the process of becoming white or returning to it.

Encounters of the kind described above and throughout this section show the memories and experiences of racist incidents that transform the (im)possibilities of belonging and speak to a disordering of being included. These different but related encounters of racism accentuate a wider, 'white socio-spatial epistemology' (Dwyer and Jones, 2000: 210) that is predicated upon essentialist imaginations and understandings of space and British identity, and which simultaneously 'produce and encompass multiple temporal registers' (Wilson and Darling, 2016: 2). Such dynamics and their manifestations in racist acts normalise and privilege whiteness across a range of various spatial scales (the body, the street, the nation), and work, in chorus, to agitate and corrupt the subjectivities of belonging and fitting into the nation from the perspective of LGBT+ British Muslims. Thus, whiteness and white identities are spatially and historically contingent and fashioned through discourse and their interactions with the materialities of non-white identities (Bonnett, 2000). Through such incidents of racism and intolerance, the scope for seemingly fleeting encounters of embodied difference to maintain and make precarious relations and belonging is made perceptible. These are practices in nourishing white privilege and grooving the subjugation and otherness of non-white, brown bodies. A powerful urban tapestry of personal and collective encounters of racial violence and harassment calls attention to what bodies are permissible and included and such problematics of in/exclusion and fear/violence can be further clarified when related to geopolitical events and relations (Pain, 2010) to which I now turn to.

5.5.2 Islamophobic encounters

Islamophobic violence has increased since the turn of the 21st century (Allen, 2010; Dunn and Hopkins, 2016). Everyday patterns of embodied forms of Islamophobia demonstrate how race and religion are simultaneously constituted within these encounters and shape feelings of belonging (McGinty, 2018), constructing and framing Muslim subjectivities as well as those of perpetrators. The rise in these forms of prejudiced attacks bring into question the multicultural urban formations of citizenship and relationships between inequalities related to religion, ethnicity and race; perspectives on national belonging and legitimisations of claiming 'ethnic' or cultural British identity; ethnic and religious misrecognition; and, the racialisation of nationhood and whiteness. Muslims have become arguably the most racialised group in British society and their presence is amplified when considering moral panics, terrorism, and immigration, amongst other areas of concern. In this section, I draw on interview data that revealed Islamophobic encounters that participants had experienced.

Islamist attacks across the West emerged time and time again in interviews as considerable markers for shaping the contexts and experiences of negative racialised encounters. The temporal-geopolitical dimensions, contextualised in the space of the city and its geographies and geometries of power, are accounted for in attempting to establish how the multi-scalar aspects of these events shaped such encounters:

> *It wasn't exactly fine before but it was if things changed from being a Paki and go back home to a terrorist* (Noreen, 29, lesbian)

> *I remember being on a train with some kids back to* [hometown] *and I could make out, well the whole carriage probably could, one of them saying 'he's got a bomb in his bag'* (Faisal, 29, gay)

Noreen's account is demonstrative of how changing geopolitical and global events and situations structure experiences of racism to particular times, as is Faisal's who spoke of his train experience in the days following the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing. Such accounts are consistent with reports of rising hate crime in the aftermath of Islamist violence in the UK (Travis, 2017; Dearden, 2019), while Faisal's experience highlights how public transport is a site of Islamophobic encounters for many Muslims who have reported such instances (Tell MAMA, 2016). Public spaces and their encounters can often be fertile contexts for religiously prejudiced violence and vilification and show how quotidian forms of negative encounters of difference permeate everyday lives of

ethnic and religious minorities (Noble and Poynting, 2008). These exemplify everyday forms of racism where marginalisation is routinised, verbal racial abuse is disguised through joking, and differences in terms of culture and race are inflated (Essed, 1991). Banal racial incivilities and victimisation are inherently problematic, working to frame Muslims as evil, other and a threat, pathologising a whole religious population, while constricting and ignoring the diversity of Muslims in both Britain and across the world (Morgan and Poynting, 2012). Such attitudes feed into and reproduce how certain bodies are represented, what they transmit and how these are read by others (Haldrup, Koefoed and Simonsen, 2006), entrenching suspicion and the embodied and visceral perceptions of living with and encountering Muslim 'Others' from the perspective of Islamophobes. Everyday encounters of Islamophobic violence seek to press ideals of hierarchies and exclusions based on racial, religious, cultural and national identities that substantiate stereotypes; these necessitate general principles of asserting that racialised groups have distinct cores that cannot be met or generate the possibilities of hybrid forms of cultures and identities.

These agonistic encounters stir the (re)emergence of racial and ethnic formations, and adjust to and with the aggregations and modalities of power relations in the aftermath of geopolitical events. The religious identities of my participants gel on to their bodies and radiate all that is assumed; suspicion, prejudices and stereotypes are solidified within and through these encounters with strangers, providing a fillip to the embodied relationalities through which the erroneous cementation of race is made perceptible. These negative encounters and their discords speak of essentialised rootings of race and religion and underline how bodies have the potential to be seen as fixed signifiers of cultural and ethnic difference (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2012). For the executors of these encounters, Muslim bodies seal up the opportunities for positive multicultural encounters of difference and sharpen the racial knives of suspicion that limt the possibilities of challenging the corruption and representation of Muslim bodies in Britain, which may be 'viewed as a threat by politicians, the media and many non-Muslims' (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012: 715). The everyday relationalities and dynamics of difference evidenced at play here are symptomatic of how such encounters are both contextualised within wider structures and contexts of power and oppression, while serving to reproduce them at the same time.

According to Hopkins:

Young Muslims who visibly display markers of 'Muslimness', whether this be through dress, through having a beard or simply through skin colour, are more likely to be marginalised through everyday racism' (2004: 269)

Similar experiences were echoed across the interviews and these incidents evidently differentiated and constructed relations of difference. These experiences of brazen hostility are complicit in initiating and propogating a sense of otherness and alienness; rigid mindsets of self, the ethnic/religious other and the seeming insurmountability of these are reinforced through their embodied intersections in moments of encounters of difference. Consider the two excerpts below, both taking place at night and where alcohol had been consumed by the perpetrators:

> *I was having a smoke and a drunk guy walked past my house asking me for a cigarette 'Mohammed'. This was just a month or so after that soldier* [Lee Rigby] *was killed…I thought what makes him think that I'm Muslim, just because I'm brown…I kept asking him because at this point I'd got annoyed but he walked off muttering fuck knows what about 'Mussies'* (Ali, 27, gay)

> *We were in the smoking seating area of the bar and an old guy started asking me what I was hiding behind that beard, I told him that I'm barely a Muslim, I'm drinking out here with you…the woman he was with kept telling him that I'm alright but he was having none of it 'What are you hiding? What are you doing here?'* (Taimoor, 22, gay)

Ali and Taimoor indicate the significance of phenotypical features or facial hair for discharging inaccurate ideas from the perspectives of the offenders who project racialised assumptions. For both Ali and Taimoor, these experiences highlight the racist, anxious and suspicious (Hopkins, 2014) readings of their bodies that are inflected with exclusionary forms of drawing boundaries and circulate dominating forms of racial logic and hierarchy; here, the brown male Muslim other is viewed as alien and able to be questioned and implicitly managed through having to explain and outline the validity and peacefulness of his religion. The participants' responses to the encounters above highlight a wish to challenge stereotypes in terms of seeking to educate out ignorance in the face of racial and religious prejudice. However, that they respond to becoming the objects of a gaze radiating wariness and distrust does not equate to an effective counterbalance to the power relationships embedded within these confrontations of the racialisation of religion. Rather, to be interrogated or called out, and responding to these, is tantamount to embodying those hierarchies of power and

racialised intolerance, even though they can be somewhat challenged by seeking to develop more dialogic encounters.

There were also other narratives that concerned the visibility and appearance of being Muslim within the UK. The assumed probability of racist incidents guarded Adeel to internalise assumptions and embarrassment about his mother's shalwaar kameez and veil, while for Faisal, who was born in Pakistan but now has citizenship here having lived in England since the age of two, his parents' inability to speak English caused awkwardness when out in public spaces with them:

> *I was…conscious of the fact that my mum wore traditional Pakistani clothes and a scarf…I didn't want her to…I was almost embarrassed that people would know that I'm a Muslim* (Adeel, 23, gay)

> *When I was younger I started hating going out with my parents when I became a teenager…they couldn't speak English and it was awkward, I felt you could sense people just turning to you, like 'what are they saying?'* (Faisal, 29, gay)

Once more, we see assumptions about ethnic and religious identities, but in this context, Adeel and Faisal stew on perceptions and apprehensions of their own backgrounds that assume encounters of hate. It has been recognised that Islamophobia is often gendered in its act (Listerborn, 2015; Najib and Hopkins, 2019), but Adeel's embarrassment at being seen with his mum embodying Muslimness or Pakistani identity and therefore seemingly being seen as less progressive suggests seeing himself as part of a set of racialised discourses that infantilise Muslim women and see them as being needed to be saved by 'Western' liberal discourses (Brown, 2011). Faisal's quote similarly relates to a theme of introspection marked by ethnic and racial identities and customs, and conditions his sense of belonging and wariness of the dominant white British gaze. Both demonsrate that though Muslim bodies are frequently represented as dangerous and to be feared, and therefore, sources of fear, (Hopkins abd Smith, 2008; Pain, 2010), such representations are disproportionate to the anxious emotions that characterise groups from ethnic and religious minorities, in respect of visible markers of race, ethnicity and religion and fears of confrontations (Pain, 2010). Adeel and Faisal also intimate towards an assimilationist commitment that echoes governmental policies in order to access comfort with regards to their place within Britain. This 'nausea' of 'negation' (Ahmed, 2006: 139) is shaped by angling to discourses of Asian dress or lack of English proficiency, where they may be material

representations of not assimilating. By Adeel and Faisal entertaining such thoughts, we see the 'haunting' (Eng and Han, 2000) of racial melancholia in the implicit attempts of pursuing the confidence of whiteness which is demonstrably not 'fixed, ahistorical, aspatial' (Bonnett, 1996: 98) but grounded through the positionings and power that configure it to dominate beyond a simple category of race.

Exploring different experiences of Islamophobic encounters or wariness of these in this section has highlighted the potential for these to limit inclusion and draw boundaries amongst the perpetrators of these and their Muslim subjects. The power relationships linked to different ethnic, racial and religious identities demonstrate the contingency of public encounters to unsettle, denigrate and deepen stereotypes and prejudices where they concern Islam and other identities. Patently, Islam is racialised as a brown religion and markers of it can serve to subject Muslims and other brown bodies (Hopkins, 2014; Hopkins et al., 2017) to racist vilification that structure and damage perceptions of belonging and being. To this end, I now follow on in the next section to explore encounters of difference where these concerned questions about belonging to Britain, assertions of these and the racialisation of national identity in the context of Brexit,

5.5.3 Denials, assertions and Brexit

The scope of urban encounters to regulate the participants' claims to being and feeling British is made further tangible in this section, and demonstrates that those denying their belonging in Britain are guilty of equating the national imaginary with white identities, while simultaneously failing to understand the intersectionalities and pluralities of British national, ethnic and religious identities. I present accounts of refutations in the sense that participants asserted a British national identity which subjugated participants to a space of otherness and as antithetical to it. Like Nayak's (2017) findings, there is an implicit expelling of non-whites; attempts which seek to whiten the nation and act as everyday, practical projects for righting the wrongs of trajectories of non-white or wrong 'shades' of white migration (Botterill and Burrell, 2019), and policies of multiculturalism and diversity, while anticipations of expulsion by racists inherenty fold in future visions of what Britain should look like (Baldwin, 2012). In the first instance, I explore narratives of encounters that were regarded as questioning their national identities and where they were born:

There's always someone who'll ask you where you from and you'll tell them, and then it's like 'where are you really from? Where are your parents from?' (Adeel, 23, gay)

Someone told me I couldn't be British and Muslim when I told him I was born here, he was having none of it (Daniyaal, 21, bisexual)

I remember being in Dublin and these drunk Irish kids asking me if I was from England and I thought 'if these guys can tell that I'm English, that I'm British, why can't others realise that when I'm back at home…it's always the older or EDL ones that don't believe you when you tell them (Mo, 31, gay)

These demonstrate how in a severely racialised context, being identified as Muslim or non-white means being thought of as culturally foreign and configures Britishness as contained and unbridgeable with Islam or non-white identities. These everyday forms of racism (Essed, 1991) reproduce the whitewashing of the nation and the symbolic capital of belonging is assumed here as something citizens accrue through being white (Hage, 1998) and not Muslim; minority ethnic and religious identities are portrayed as negative forms of symbolic capital in the project of whiteness that seeks to legitimise claims of belonging to the nation (Noble and Poynting, 2010). The forms of nationalism espoused or upheld by the participants' questioners work to exclude and perform ethnic forms of nationalism that synonimise Britishness with whiteness. Here, 'it is homogeneity rather than diversity that provides the new rule' (Gilroy, 2004: 2) and framework for an embodied practical response to various gestures and policies that have sought to provide a new politics of multi-ethnic belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006b), but, at the same time, have alienated some inidividuals already politically and economically disenfranchised (Sales, 2012; Pilkington, 2016). Recounting these experiences confirms the everyday muscularity of perceptions of race and nationhood where they conduct, territorialise and subject the reinflation of white Britannia across different scales and through a combination of uncomfortable feelings, sites, bodies and encounters. Following Sibley's work on geographies of exclusion (1995), the questioning of my participants' claims to British national identity may be viewed as practices of purification that draw clear racial boundaries and homogenise a sense of ethnic white Britishness.

Such examples illustrate a refutation of British Muslims as British citizens or nationals and foster a sense of exclusionary nationhood- recitals and recollections of which outwardly situate the politics of belonging in deterministic encounters of difference.

Because of these encounters, what can be interpreted are feelings of discomfort with regards to acceptance of being British for some of the participants. According to Noble, (2009: 888) encounters 'entail circuits of recognition, and concomitant questions of legitimacy and competence'. Moments of vilification, mistrust and incivility assert the importance of situating the political contexts through which some citizens feel the impulses or ethnic 'obligations' to administer the management of who can belong to Britain (Pilkington, 2016). The damaging rhetoric on British Muslims (Kundani, 2007) has been led, side by side, with an increased pattern of racial discrimination, religious prejudice and harassment (Karlsen and Nazroo, 2015). This everyday practice and questioning of ethnic and racial marginalisation foregrounds both visibility and recognition as reductionist markers of difference within these moments of encounter and, thus, the unwarranted attention paid to in negative encounters of difference and their place in Britain can serve to chip away at a sense of belonging.

In Britain, the Islamophobic violences that have increased post-September 11 are legitimised not only by perceptions of cultural differences, but implicitly by national policies across the years that have been ideologically racist in their expression and signal how the cultural and structural embeddedness of messages which may have once been the preserve of the far-right nourish inequalities of race and ethnicity in interpersonal encounters. This questioning of one's place in the nation that is experienced by Adeel, Daniyaal and Mo also exposes the incompetencies of governmental projects of rebranded British values as well as securitisation and immigration policies that evidence the amnesia that structures contemporary British understandings of race, ethnicity and nationhood (Gilroy, 2004; 2005). Those questioning and doubtful reflect the postcolonial British context where colonial history, according to Gilroy (2005: 2) 'remains marginal and largely unacknowledged, surfacing only in the the service of nostalgia and melancholia' but which 'continues to shape political life in the overdeveloped-but-no-longer-imperial countries'. Political debates surrounding British Muslims and immigrant groups, as well as policies like the Terrorism Act (2006), The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015), and the Home Office 'hostile environment' under Theresa May's time as Home Secretary and the associated Windrush scandal (Cole, 2019) not only structurally slur and marginalise entire groups but also inspire (mis)acknowledgements of insurmountable differences from the perspective of those wanting to whiten or purge the nation (Nayak, 2017),

while further fashioning an atmosphere of fear and social exclusion among British Muslims (McGhee, 2008).

That these may vitalise everyday forms of racism is alarming and they have a menacing tone in that the cumulative normalisation of racism, xenophobia and religious prejudice across interconnected domains of power may contribute to increasing alienation and marginalisation from claims to being British and belonging for British Muslims (Spalek and McDonald, 2009). What does not help is what Britishness means is vague, but politically loaded and, as Sardar and Ahmad (2012: 4) state is 'frequently invoked in excluding Muslims from the national equation'. Celebrating and promoting notions of liberty, tolerance, equality and democracy etc. are 'merely ideas to which anyone might aspire' (Winder, 2007:32, see also Sales, 2012) rather than being the preserve of us British. In spite of negative encounters of racialised difference, Islamophobia and othering policies and rhetoric, claims to being British and belonging-though occasionally tinged with uncertainty - were clear and asserted throughout the interviews, despite the depth of feelings that negative media, political and public rhetoric could arouse:

> *We were born here, we're British… we celebrated the Diamond Jubilee, the Olympics, Will and Kate getting married…How are we not British? How can you be so ignorant not to know that there are people who were born here that aren't white* (Noreen, 29, lesbian)
>
> *I don't know anywhere else, I don't want to…of course I'm British, I don't identify with being Indian other than through my parents* (Taimoor, 22, gay)
>
> *The country has to get used to us as well, we are here to stay…our roots are here and the vast majority of us are happy and want to and will live in peace* (Mo, 31, gay)

Though the racialisation of their religious identities and British national identities in moments of encounters could serve to limit perceptions of being British, these quotes highlight a stout sense of Britishness and attachment to the nation. These multi-ethnic British identities that are proclaimed contest imaginaries of an exclusive, stable, white British identity and though all the participants were English, they largely defined themselves as British when speaking of attachment and belonging to the nation. This complies with McCrone's (2002) and Jivraj's (2013) arguments that English people from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to describe themselves as British

than English, as opposed to their white British counterparts. The excerpts above highlight the strong assertions and the rightfulness of the participants to belong in Britain through birthright, ties and place-belonging (Antonsich, 2010). Although the politics of belonging may seek to counter or limit claims to Britishness for those who enact them, the participants are assertive in portraying belonging and do not conform to a whitewashing of the imagined nation that occurs through racialised encounters of difference that call these into question.

The religious aspects of their subjectivities similarly did not work to question or majorly influence or conflict with claims to rightful and emotional belonging in modern Britain:

> *I don't find any conflict with being British and Muslim, they're not mutually exclusive identities* (Jahangir, 47, gay)

> *Both are big parts of me…I don't need one or the other to affirm me, but equally I don't see how you can't be British and Muslim…it says more about the people that suggest you can't be Muslim in modern Britain* (Sofia, 28, lesbian)

There was seen to be little conflict with regards to being British and Muslim, with their British identity being asserted and complemented with their ethnic, religious and racial identities. The excerpts onwards from Noreen on the previous page relay my participants celebrating key cultural events and asserting the intersectionalities of belonging and emotional attachments that are reflective of a sense of being home (Yuval-Davis, 2011). For some of the older participants, however, there were suggestions that the younger generations of British Muslims were effectively retreating to their Muslim or Asian identities:

> **Jahangir:** *We, my generation… we wanted to assert our Britishness but what I find now is that the new generation, as it were, they, they're kind of going back two steps, they're wanting to assert their religiosity more than what they can offer as a cultural community or individuals*
>
> **NI:** *Why do you think that's the case?*
>
> **Jahangir:** *I think, partly, I think it's due to 9/11. You know, because people are coming through now and they're talking about 9/11 as if it happened to them, or they're of that era but some people aren't, some of them people are just like aged about 20-25 and, you know, you have to think to yourself, 'do they understand what happened back then in 9/11?'*

According to Amir (37):

> *From my parents' generation I think they made more of an effort to kind of integrate and get on with things, not with everything, there's obviously that whole dietary thing, halal, and you know, they didn't go out to pubs and have the same lifestyle but there was a bit more kind of cohesion and I think as there's been more people, 2nd generation, 3rd generation, 4th generation, however many people there are build these communities themselves so they don't want or need people from outside because they've grown up with Muslims or Asians. There's more a sense of claiming to be Muslim now rather than being British which has kind of backfired, I think, so I think it's created more segregation*

I do not agree with Jahangir's assertion that the generation of young British Muslims between 20-25 does not understand what happened during 9/11 or its aftermath (not least because he somewhat contradicts his statement included in the previous page). Frankly, negative representations that homogenise Islam and Muslims have abounded since the new millennium and provided the backdrop for how Muslim identities have been understood in the West since the new millennium (Gale and Hopkins, 2009). Both quotes also highlight similarities with the parallel lives discourse and its assimilationist agendas with Muslims being expected to be conform to British norms, with less attention paid to more hybrid forms of national identities and multiculturalism that extends past the 'celebration of steel bangles, saris and samosas (Nayak, 2012: 456), and that might challenge prejudice (Valentine, 2008). Sensing a loss of British identity when legal norms and securitisation agendas other Muslims in Britain may indeed cause young British Muslims to question their place in the nation, However, as the quotes from the participants above highlight, their feelings of Britishness are strong if touched with ambivalence at times and they belong from a personal perspective. However, when these are questioned, the refutations of their claims to Britan are inherently concerned with race, as we saw earlier, and this was particularly the case around the EU referendum and its messy aftermath, which I explore now as a further context of the intersections of structural, historical and political conditionings of the contemporary postcolonial British mood.

52% of the British electorate who participated in the referendum for Britain to either leave or remain in the European Union (EU) opted for the former on 23rd June 2016 (BBC, 2016a). Surrounding this referendum were intense public debates on the democratic processes of the EU, the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice,

economic trade and policy, as well as questions, more pertinently for this section, around immigration and national identity. Regardless of where one stands on the decision of the electorate and no matter how Brexit proceeds from here on in, what followed was an unfortunate and disconcerting spike in racist violence and the statistics around hate crimes in the aftermath are demoralising: more than 2300 racist incidents were reported to the police in the 38 days after the referendum (Weaver, 2016); over 3000 hate crimes were reported to the police nationwide between the 16th of June and the 30th of June, a 42% increase on the same period in 2015 (BBC, 2016b); and, 599 racist incidents were reported to just Scotland Yard between the day after the referendum (24th June) and 2nd July 2016 (Smith and Hayhurst, 2016).

Debates prior to the referendum and its fall-out were typified by anti-migrant rhetoric which served to unsettle some of the participants, in terms of considering their perceptions and understandings of the national attitude- or at least what they thought this was:

> *I have never known a political, social climate in my lifetime that has been so divisive against anyone that isn't part of the majority group…clearly it wasn't just Muslims but anyone that seemed to be non-white and non-British* (Noreen, 29, lesbian)

> *The hateful rhetoric actually shocked me…I didn't think that I'd feel so out of touch with the national mood…I recognise a lot of people care about that and feel a deep cultural sense of being British, but I can feel you're not actually hindered in any way by being part of the EU* (Omar, 28, gay)

> *I don't like it when people say they're proud to be British or they're proud to be wherever they're from, pride's a vice not a virtue… that came through from the referendum for me* (Raif, 28, bisexual)

These quotes reflect the complexities of their national and ethnic positionalities. Consistent with earlier reflections, there is a sense of ambivalence to a degree about where they stand in modern British society, with regards to how they are perceived and the difficult atmospheres that have been given sustenance by ideological positionings of 'us' and 'them'. While many leave voters will have had genuine concerns about lawmaking, control over economy and trade, and where money was being spent etc., it is obvious that for others, a case of controlling borders against what they saw as mass migration, Islam and the reassertion of cultural norms directed their choice to vote to leave. A sense that they could be unfairly treated or victimised as

outsiders underpinned the narratives here, despite being born and living in Britain. Thus, these highlight how different sets and interplays of emotions are contextutalised through geopolitical events and demonstrate how closely woven notions of geopolitics and citizenship are in respect of the collapsing and aggregation of different scales and invocations of belonging (Staeheli, Marshall and Maynard, 2016).

Fears of migration from countries with majority Muslim populations, representations of the mooted inclusion of Turkey into the EU, as well as long-standing forms of Islamophobia that work to (re)produce Muslims as global folk devils (Morgan and Poynting, 2012) were key aspects of the anti-immigration rhetoric. As Botterill and Burrell (2019: 27) state, the Brexit referendum 'held a mirror to, and amplified, wider and deeply entrenched, and often thinly disguised Islamophobic and racist, concerns about the EU's ability to keep these more othered others out'. Regardless of my participants consistently affiliating with Britain, how others imagine, encounter and exclude them inevitably mediates affiliations and belonging- as has been evident across 5.5. Agreeing with McGinty (2018: 3-4, original emphasis), this reflects 'the *simultaneous experiences and processes of belonging and alienation in everyday lives'*. Further, Yuval-Davis (2011) considers both emotional qualities and relations of belonging and how these intersect with political issues and rights that structure these. How Noreen, Omar and Raif sense the divisions," haterful rhetoric" and the "vice" of national pride evidently relates to the dimensions and experiences of belonging reflected by McGinty (2018) and Yuval-Davis (2011), where the discursive atmospheres of Britain and their concomitant social and political conditionings of inclusion intersect with and shape personal moods and perspectives.

For Amir and Diya, experiences of hate crimes and prejudice were linked to the referendum's immediate aftermath:

> *After Brexit, think it was like the day, two days after there was a homeless guy who'd asked me for some change and I didn't have any change, I didn't have anything to give him, I said 'sorry' and he kind of said 'We've voted leave, go back to where you came from'. I found that really disgusting and he obviously had no idea what Brexit meant and I think that that's quite, that attitude is, harbours in a lot of people's minds, they don't actually understand. They think anyone that's not white is going to have to leave or, I think it's definitely brought up more of a racist kind of attitude, whether it was just suppressed before or*

whether it's just brought it out, but it's definitely, I've definitely felt that (Amir, 37, pansexual)

Waiting at a taxi rank after a night out and someone told me to 'fuck off back home…voted for you to leave'…like is that what the referendum was exclusively about (Diya, 22, gay)

The racist encounters here are rooted in affirmations by the perpetrators that the country is 'their own' once again and is sustained by older forms of racism and more recent backlashes against diversity and multicultural formations of national identities, discourses and belonging (Sales, 2012; Pilkington, 2016). These are the materialisations of the 'take back control' mantra spread by the leave campaign which has evidently been indulged upon given the aforementioned statistics and the racist encounters experienced by Amir and Diya that configure yearnings and expectations of white Britannia. Relations of power that are (re)produced in these encounters fix identities onto the body and in time and space (Wilson and Darling, 2016). Amir and Diya are relegated to leave, where those conducting these performances claim back the space of the nation from its undesirables. In 'taking back control', there is a sense of rectifying the wrongs of British history, where the nation dared to invite or host what were once its colonial 'subjects' and their descendants, as well as immigrants from outside of its former colonies. In the case of the former, their arrivals as citizens and then their civic and discursive evolutions as immigrants and the internal 'Other' signifies the racialised imaginaries of white Britain (Bhambra, 2017) and reflects the plague of Britain's colonial past problematising its contemporary context (Gilroy, 2005). The discursive invocations of Brexit migration debates energise encounters that are characterised by performances of displacement, exclusion and regulation, spatialising whiteness and endeavouring to limit proximity, by very virtue of the proximity of the non-white (Nayak, 2017). Telling Amir and Diya to "*fuck off back home*" or "*go back to where you come from*" operate, palpably, as signifiers of the historical continuities of racism and reflect the racialised landscape of Britain which contextualises their lives and the encounters that produce difference. Abstracting racial violence from the interconnected legacies and contexts of British race relations is therefore symptomatic of the refusal to take race and Britain's colonial histories seriously (Gilroy, 1987).

Enacting racist ideologies in the lively moments of urban encounters entails not just claiming back the country, but working to whiten it (Nayak, 2017) and causing those of non-white British backgrounds within my study to acknowledge the relationalities of

their identities and the intersectional dialogues of these with the representational and political contexts that have characterised the Brexit fallout (Burrell and Hopkins, 2019), and that speak to restricting or increasing perceptions of belonging to the nation. According to Tomlinson and Darling, the belief of the:

> 'economic, political, social and racial superiority to the rest of the subjects of empire…is still present in the 21st century and goes some way to explaining the xenophobia, racism and hostility that is still such an obvious part of the British heritage (2016: online)

Performing the management of the exclusive white nation (Hage, 1998) demonstrates 'how white proprietorship of the nation becomes a prerequisite for belonging' (Nayak, 2017: 298). These encounters implicitly challenge how to develop more civil and shared futures of difference and 'Britishness' where the relations of racialised difference are seemingly in the process of being solidified in the current political climate of the UK. The experiences of my participants with regards to the aftermath of Brexit and identifying the mood and rhetoric around this, as well as the social and political conditions that have worked to shape belonging across 5.5, demonstrate that though civic foundations sculpt political citizenship, belonging is shaped by encounters that are relational, emotional and embodied (Hopkins, 2015) too and must be situated within their respective and interlocking historical, spatial and political contexts.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored LGBT+ British Muslims' experiences of public encounters in the urban and the shaping of belonging that is contextualised through these. I illustrated the complexities of belonging to different communities, the multi-scalar formations that shape and problematise these dynamics, and the temporal, social and political contexts that must be understood in order to develop how encounters make difference in the contexts of urban negotiations in their everyday lives. The (re)productions of identities and relations in encounters that my participants have experienced illustrate their numerous positionalities that are experienced in relational moments of body, space, time and politics and which structure a sense of a series of links to various categories of belonging. The first section demonstrated local spaces and ethno-religious communities as limiting the possibilities of urban multicultural encounters with white peers, while, at the same time, allowing for the construction of social, cultural and religious capital related to their Asian heritages and Muslim identities. Encounters of similarity and difference were shown to be emplaced

in particular settings. It was firstly demonstrated that some participants' families regulated access to family homes for white others, positioning these as dirty or different, and antithetical to Asian and Muslim values. Constructing difference through an absence of encounters with white others served to distance relations and racialise neighbourhood spaces which was also problematic in relation to their sexual identities. These were closeted through the power of the spectre of gossip as a social control (Bhatti, 1999) and the heterosexist assumptions of their communities. The surveillance and power-laden nature of these communities and the encounters that they expressed speaks to the impeding of their sexualities in the urban contexts of their homes and neighbourhoods.

However, it was only through these encounters or anticipations of them that the sexualities of my participants were mentioned, and this speaks to the context-specific nature of understanding the relations of encounters that are made, reworked and produced (Wilson and Darling, 2016). That interviews for the project took place between September 2016 and October 2017 meant issues of racism and Islamophobia were prevalent because of Brexit, terrorist attacks in Manchester (May 2017) and London (June 2017), questions about immigration, British homegrown terrorists and British identities, more generally. These structured media and political debate and were clearly experienced in my participants' lives. This speaks to section 5.5 where I sought to reflect on how encounters of difference were anything but momentary, being contextualised by the folding of the past, present and future, and the geopolitical backgrounds and issues of the day. This section highlighted the importance of power being shaped by more than just the identities of my participants or ones that they embodied; rather the encounters of racism, whiteness and Islamophobia they experienced structured and made difference, questioning their belonging in some respects.

By exploring these encounters and how they modulated belonging, aspects of being misrecognised as not British and encounters with racist white others that diluted claims to Britishness and the nation were shown. Racial prejudice and the whitewashing of the nation (Nayak, 2017) demonstrated the racialisation of British national identities and confirms the perceived legitimacy of white identities equating to Britishness, simultaneously disregarding how legacies of colonial British histories shape contemporary British society and understandings of categories and lived experiences

of race, ethnicity and nationhood. For the participants, thus, these had the effects of questioning whether they could belong, but I also presented how they were assertive in claiming and wanting to be British. The issues surrounding the EU referendum in 2016 and its aftermaths were also demonstrative of the complex intersections of political contexts and social locations of LGBT+ British Muslims and the differences they supposedly embodied from the views of racists in their encouners. This referendum has highlighted and invigorated long-standing forms of racism and anxieties of white Britain (Gilroy, 2004; 2005), related to a fetishised and nostalgic longing and anticipation for a white nation (Finlay et al., 2019), equating whiteness with British identity in the past and into the future (Baldwin, 2012). I demonstrated how encounters in the aftermath of not only the vote but the 'anxieties' over Muslim bodies in the context of Islamist terrorism in the West had the potential to complicate how participants were seen or perceived as British, and the problematics of this label where it is historically amnestic and hollowed out from its politicisation. Thus, I demonstrated the complex temporal-spatial-political contexts and relationalities of belonging and difference.

Overall, this chapter has highlighted the urban encounters that LGBT+ Muslims contended with and ones that acutely shaped difference and modulated belonging. The spaces and nature of these encounters were seemingly banal but demonstrated their capacity to prompt clear, composite and contradictory senses of belonging. These then enacted lines of in/exclusion that problematised how LGBT+ British Muslims were perceived in relation to the nation, as well as how they understood the local spaces of their communities. Markedly, however, the sexualities of LGBT+ British Muslims were seldom mentioned in relation to urban encounters nor as mediators for influencing a feeling of belonging to Britain; implicitly, this demonstrates not a hierarchy of identities but that interpersonal encounters of difference are reflective of how systems of oppression and processes of social inequalities matter in different contexts, and attending to these is vital for examining and understanding the specifics of encounters. In the chapter that follows, I present findings from my interviews that express how LGBT+ British Muslims practice and negotiate religion and religious discourses within Muslim communities that relate to their sexualities. I show how important online communications and spaces are for doing this and building networks that work to affirm belonging and their identities, however nascent such efforts are in respect of

challenging institutionalised rhetoric of the impermissibility of Islam and LGBT+ sexualities.

Chapter 6. Lived Islam: negotiating exclusions and faith

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore how LGBT+ British Muslims practiced religious identities in their everyday lives, highlighting the value of moving away from solely institutionalised forms of considering and capturing religiosity. The concept of 'lived religion' has lent itself to a shift in the way that religion in contemporary times is understood, refocusing attention on the individual as an agent in defining beliefs and spirituality through material, emotional and embodied practices not necessarily theologically ordained within institutional forms of religion (McGuire, 2008). My participants, as highlighted in chapter four, struggled with the condemnation of their sexual identities, both from theological authorities and wider religious and cultural communities and traditions. This often led to metaphorically and materially closeting their sexualities and negotiating these in the specific ways discussed. While some participants felt Islam and Allah affirmed their sexualities through being 'born this way' or considered careful interpretations of passages within the Qur'an, many grappled with the moral instabilities caused by the connection of religious discourses with ethnic identities and values, particularly in the form of feeling comfortable conforming to institutionalised beliefs and morals of organised Islam, and such relations with familial and community forms of cultural regulations of their sexualities. Such perceptions and rhetoric of exclusion led to LGBT+ Muslims reflecting on their own religious beliefs, practices and the spaces and communities in which these were constrained and negotiated. To understand these experiences, this chapter highlights that practices of religion are reflected not as primarily contextualised through institutionalised beliefs within the mosque, for instance, or a reliance on traditional forms of interpreting scripture, but rather through diverse forms of internet interactions, the development of community groups and inclusive online/offline spaces, as well as informing and educating others against the perceived incompatibility of their identities.

The chapter first reviews the literature on lived religion, a key paradigm shift in considering how religion plays out and is practiced in the everyday lives of individuals. This approach is attentive to critiques of a binary approach to religion that may suppose practitioners as either wedded to institutional beliefs or not. Thus, lived religion is explored within and at the intersections of both official/insitutionalised spheres of religion and what people do in their everyday lives. I then move on to discuss

participant narratives of lived religion. Firstly, I highlight how participants negotiated perceptions of exclusion from institutionalised Islam within the space of the mosque or through Islamic groups that upheld censorious discourses on sexuality, before moving on to highlight how interactions with (presumably) heterosexual Muslims were themselves lived in ordinary contexts and developed a lived intolerance of non-heterosexuality but also how these shaped how LGBT+ British Muslims responded to such exclusions. The following section then highlights the importance of online spaces for LGBT+ Muslims questioning their religious and sexual identities and shows how these helped develop communities both online and in the 'material' world.

6.2 Institutional biases and lived religion

Locating religious life primarily through the principles as stipulated by official institutions can reduce understandings of the subjectivities of individuals who identify with a religion and practice to these contexts and polarise religious institutions and what may be represented as the margins of religious life or secularity, eliding their mutuality (Ammerman, 2014; Tse, 2014). Religious institutions may also be slow to react to ever-changing social contexts- the varying politics of LGBT+ inclusion and tolerance within the Anglican Communion as an example (Andersson et al., 2012; Vanderbeck et al., 2011; Valentine et al., 2010; 2013a, 2013b). According to Ammerman (2005), social changes influence how people choose to adapt to religion; privileged perspectives focusing on belief within official spaces may contest the actualities of religion as lived by different individuals. Adhering to an analysis of religion that principally affords attention to traditional institutions and their permitted forms of belief can exclude many of the religious intentions of ordinary people (Neitz, 2011). The Protestant custom of essentialising religion with primacy to belief (Bender et al., 2011) is symptomatic of declension accounts that are empirically thin where they concern the hollowing out of religious life and practice (Ammerman, 2007). Thus, while institutional forms of religion can foster engagement with religious identities in different contexts and scales, a primary focus on these can temper the richness and complexities of religious aspects of individuals' lives as they live these through quotidian practices.

According to Jeldtoft (2011), non-institutionalised or unsanctioned styles of religiosity have traditionally been difficult to incorporate within studies of religious lives of ordinary people because they are often less visible. However, nuancing explorations of

religiosity is necessary for broadening the empirical anchoring of religion in modern contexts. Considering religion as dependent upon the institutional site not only highlights hierarchical power relations as they pertain to religious identities, but also those surrounding gender and sexuality identities (Jordan, 2000; Wilcox, 2002, 2006). The limitations created within such institutions, shaped by religious discourses that reinforce unequal power relations, can legitimate attitudes towards those individuals seen to be not conforming to a range of identities and orient understandings of these to be outside of the religious groups under consideration. An institutional perspective, therefore, wears down the intersectional subjectivities of various individuals, their agencies and their expressions of religion that may take on meaning in different spatial and temporal contexts. A corollary of focusing on everyday religious practices that move away from solely considering these through institutional contexts is a demonstrably more progressive reflection on the hybridised and complex religious realities of lay members across different religious backgrounds.

Expanding the analysis of religious belief and practice to include everyday forms of faith has proven useful for developing greater understandings of the richness of religious identities and practices (Ammerman, 2007). Empirically foregrounding lived experiences of religion offers more sensitive acknowledgements of the boundaries and contestations of religion, as well as pluralising understandings of the negotiations, sensibilities and meanings enriched through diverse attachments and practices (McGuire, 2008). A lived religion perspective underlines a focus on everyday, embodied and emotional experiences (Neitz et al., 2010) and reshapes and broadens the boundaries of what can be understood as having religious dimensions (Orsi, 2005). This focus seeks to uncover and underline the embeddedness of religion in everyday life and is useful for exploring diverse religious expressions outside of traditional sacred spaces and broadening the dominant indices for measuring religiosity. Exploring religious endeavour and motivation through focusing on how lay individuals interpret and practice religion in everyday contexts expands the traditionally limited (institutionally biased) scope of understanding religion through an either/or commitment and visibilises the multiplicities of religious subjectivities, practices and spaces. McGuire (2008: 16) suggests that 'By emphasizing individuals' practices in everyday life…by examining lived religion, we may get closer to understanding individual religion in all its complexity and diversity'. She notes the interactions between traditional religious institutions and everyday, individualised forms of religion as useful

for honouring the range of contemporary (re)configurations and patchworks of religiosity.

Though McGuire (2008) is credited with accelerating the lived religion paradigm, attention to how religious laity thought of and practiced religion in everyday contexts can be attributed to a collection edited by David Hall (1997). This sought to explore the practices of ordinary people to extend the scope of understandings of religiosity within the disciplines of contemporary history and sociology. An implicit response to challenging how religion had traditionally been explored (Bender et al., 2011), this perspective moves beyond the misconception of a clear frontier between official and popular beliefs (Hall, 1997). Thus, lived religion is concerned with how people interpret their religious lives through traditions, cultures and power relations influenced by official institutions and lay people; sacred texts and rituals/habits; theological and seemingly secular practices. By providing a dynamic framework for understanding contemporary religiosities a more holistic interpretation of how religious practices interact with cultural forms and recognitions is emphasised, as well as a de-emphasis on previous binary perspectives.

A focus on how people sacralise everyday contexts, intentionally or inadvertently, stresses the significance on individuals, reduces the invocation of doctrinal perspectives/sanctionings, and pays attention to sites not noticeably religious or sacred (McGuire, 2008). By moving beyond what may be the 'officially sacred' (Kong, 2001), a lived religion perspective parallels demands to attend to quotidian formations of religious subjectivities that infer agency (Tse, 2014; Avishai, Jafar and Rinaldo, 2015). Analyses of these vary in terms of whether a focus is retained on religious people and institutions as settings for lived religion (Nelson, 2005) or individual religious expressions and rituals in irreligious contexts (Cadge and Daglian, 2008; McGuire, 2008; Jeldtoft, 2011). However, what these share is a committed reference to dismantling oft-held binary conceptualisations of religiosity and considerations of the diverse and specific forms of interactions between the institutional and the non-official, the theological and the practical, the religious and the secular. Further, these studies demonstrate the practice-oriented nature of developing religious subjectivities regardless of whether these may be thought of as having high levels of religiosity or not (Ammerman, 2014). Evaluating how religion is lived and practiced in everyday life demonstrates that although these practices 'may not be necessarily theologically

sanctioned' (Ammerman, 2006: 6), they enable us to explore how religion can be used to (re)create narratives of the self through shifting scales of religious experience crisscrossing different contexts.

Rather than an explicit focus on essentially a definition by contrast- by the inclusion of what has been occluded- a lived religion framework is importantly sceptical of clearly distinguishing people that may 'live' religion in everyday contexts from established institutions and teachings (Hall, 1997). The variations in practices concerned with religious expression, the interactions with religious establishments that enable these, and the specific constructions of experience generated are profiled to analyse how lived religion matters beyond the inclusion of what has been traditionally excluded. Focusing on religious practice through various expressions nuances the agenda for research on religion by highlighting more forcefully the pragmatism, individuality and autonomy, and culturalisation of religious subjectivities and the work that goes into helping people make sense of their lives (McGuire, 2006). By highlighting interactions between institutional and non-official contexts of religion, the stress on the substance of lived religion as practice is made more tenable and the gains of understanding religious expression by focusing on the individual and the social embeddedness of these expressions in particular contexts can be drawn out to (re)orient the repertoires of religious expression through pluralistic understandings.

Studies applying a lived religion approach are concerned with everyday practices (McGuire, 2008) and ground the material, embodied and discursive aspects of these as they pertain to religious life within mundane contexts (Ammerman, 2014). This highlights lived religion approaches as situated in the midst of people, spaces, social relations and representations, and how these are co-produced, negotiated and resisted where fit. The value of using a lived religion approach is enhanced where it concerns the diversity of lay religious identities and the salience of their intersections with other axes of difference that particularise religious practice within a broader and multilayered schema. Such an approach demonstrates how religious identities and religiosity are rooted in both positive and negative relational networks, and practice is fundamental to how these feelings are determined (Aune, 2015). In order to further make the case for using a grounded approach to everyday embodied, and material religious practices more persuasive, it is useful to explore some of the geographic

literature that engages with different domains of religious practice, but without necessarily all labelling these foci as set within a lived religion approach.

6.3 Broadening spatial and scalar contexts of faith

Parallel to the development of cognate sub-disciplines, geographies of religion have broadened out from a limited focus on religious life as charged by official religious authorities and spaces (Kong, 2001; Gokariksel, 2009). Here I highlight how the significance of everyday contexts has enabled geographers to broaden the scope of disciplinary understandings of religiosities and religious identities. Subliminal echoes are found in religious studies where a 'spatial turn' (Knott, 2005, 2008) has enabled a richer understanding of the spatialities of religious life. Prioritising a shift to explorations that knot the everyday banalities of religion has the cumulative effect of accommodating diverse indices of religious life and practice, across different spatial and scalar sites. Kong's (2001) call for geographers to move beyond the officially sacred acts as a useful rejoinder to considerations of the aspatiality of religion or the institutional bias of its historic analysis and exploration. Geographic research succeeding and meeting Kong's invitation has been plentiful over the two decades since (Andersson et al., 2012; Vincett et al., 2012; Hopkins, Kong and Olson, 2013; Dwyer, 2016a; Finlayson, 2017; Gokariksel and Secor, 2017; Gilbert et al., 2019). By considering how lay individuals engage, experience and (re)produce multiple religiosities and affiliations through ordinary contexts and practices, this body of research has demonstrated the intertwining of spaces and scales with religious subjectivities.

A key scalar focus has been the embodied practices and experiences of religion, as both a social identity and politicised site, and the body itself as a scale of transcendence. Gokariksel (2009; 2012; see also Gokariksel and Secor, 2015; Gokariksel and Secor, 2017) has been particularly prominent in advancing an embodied perspective on everyday forms and enactments of religion and piety that contest the spatial and conceptual inflexibility of secular/religious politics and citizenship, focusing this analysis on a Turkish context. By exploring Islam within the spaces and sites of everyday life that the bodies of Turks negotiate and produce, her work highlights the contestations of religious identities and moralities, while underlining the transformations of different scales of religiosity and understandings. Demonstrating how spaces and bodies that may be presumed to be religious or secular are produced

and contested as such is achieved through developing attentiveness to the embodied practices and modalities that work to demonstrate the overlapping contours of formal and informal/everyday acts of faith. Further, McGuire (2008) suggests that a focus on embodied practices that are not necessarily translated as religious and may, ostensibly, be seen as not religious, is useful for accounting for the sacralisation of mundane contexts and practices. Other geographers attentive to the embodied practices and relationalities of religious subjectivities also echo this work by highlighting the embodied forms of religiosity that function across different ordinary, everyday spaces and practices (Holloway, 2003; Olson et al., 2013; della Dora, 2018; Klingorova and Vojtisek, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2019). These developments engage with non-institutionalised practices of faith that overlap both 'official' and 'secular' spaces and scales, working to sacralise the mundane, while fitting the religious into everyday settings that accommodate the ordinariess of negotiating everyday life (Ammerman, 2014).

Stressing how religiosity can be grounded through embodied acts in everyday spaces helps inform arguments over the mutuality of sacred/secular spaces, as well as the everyday/spectacular (Dwyer, 2016b). By problematising a division between these, empirical accounts of the kinds cited above progress the boundaries of what can be deemed religious and sacred. Turning attention to how bodies experience, feel and encounter religion is profitable for complicating the contingencies of religious practices, or everyday practices that invoke religious and spiritual experience (Holloway, 2006; Finlayson, 2012; Dwyer, 2016b). Posing questions and issues over how lay bodies practice, express and feel religious and spiritual connections contextualises these as mediums for religious formation, expression, meaning and experience. Embodied acts of faith that may be explicitly religious or accommodate a religious identity or cultural ritual help ordinary people make sense of everyday life, as well as the transcendent, and provide a consciousness of belonging, however liminal it may be.

Interventions into the study of religion by feminist geographers have led the charge of considering embodiment as it concerns religious identities and religiosity (Falah and Nagel, 2005; Secor, 2007; Hopkins, 2009). These have tended to not only subvert hierarchical forms of conceptualising religion at particular scales, but also taken into account issues of power relations and how minoritised followers recast religious ideals,

cultural and institutional perspectives of religious codes of morality, and institutional spaces of marginality (Vincett, 2012; Aune, 2015). As Olson et al (2013: 7) remind us:

> Lived religion, public piety, and religious embodiment complicate our analyses, for they request a disassemblage of meta-religious categories and their assumptions. Through this, new spatial understandings of religion as producing places, networks, and spaces are revealed that would otherwise be obscured

Opening up religious identities to analyses that explore their spatialities and scalar contexts and interactions, and focusing on how piety is subjectively conceptualised and refreshed in different spaces, is important in rendering the body as a site of experience that can be constitutive of, and/or interact, with sacralising practices and sacred spaces.

Consideration of other everyday practices that incite religious formations and discourses of faith and religious life, or where specific identities conflict with normative religious teachings and consummations of these, are rather less forthcoming within the sub-field. This is particularly the case for the use of the internet (Shelton, Zook and Graham, 2012), despite its ubiquity in everyday life, as well as the increasingly discernable role of technology in religious life (Kong, 2010). Forays into how religion and the internet intersect are rather scarce within geography, despite the diversifying scope and trajectory of geographies of religion (Kong, 2010). Increasing insights into digital sexual geographies, helped by a somewhat digital turn (Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski, 2018), have explored issues such as how LGBT+ people use internet spaces to form networks (Downing, 2013), queer urban life and online sociality (Miles, 2017), and the influence of social media for sex workers (Ryan, 2016), among other themes. Simultaneously, work in communication studies has highlighted the increasing growth of religious representation, networking and configurations of religious subjectivities through the use of the internet (Campbell, 2004; 2006; 2007). Yet, there is little discernible dialogue between these and geographies of religion, and the use of the internet to negotiate religious identities, challenge religious authority and (re)interpret prevailing discourses of religion. Further, the potentialities of their portability remain curiously sparse across the intersections of geographies of religion and geographies of the internet (see Graham, 2013 for a useful overview of the latter). The power of representations of ideal pious subjects patently has the scope to be

challenged in online spaces, and how internet interactions can mediate religious and social experiences is a productive approach for understanding the spatial imaginations of both the internet and the closet, as it pertains to LGBT+ Muslims here.

Though not a great jump to see the obvious approach for experiences of lived religion through an empirical exploration, it is important that individual religiosities and socio-cultural contexts are accounted for when analysing the narratives and different dimensions and practices of belief. A feminist geographic approach attentive to the inherent intersectionality of diverse religious subjectivities is more observant of the exercising of agency in the face of constraints and the canonic, uncritical trope of religion as the predominant or totalising identity of any religious follower. Instead, merging an intersectional perspective with a lived religion approach is a useful, but necessary intervention in order to expand the scope of analysis of the empirical ordinariness and innovations of religious practices of lay people. In respect of this, I now turn attention to explorations of LGBT+ British Muslims' negotiations of religion; I first explore narratives of exclusions in mosque spaces and Islamic societies/groups before exploring how they used online spaces to develop communications and nascent networks with other LGBT+ Muslims.

6.4 In/exclusions in institutionalised Islam: mosques and homophobic groups
6.4.1 Questioning the mosque and institutionalised belief

LGBT+ British Muslims contend with heteronormative discourses on sexual ethics that are largely intolerant of their minority sexual identities (Ali, 2016). For some of my participants, such intolerance generated a yearning for a closer relationship with Allah, sacralising this relationship within repetitive acts of prayer, reading and exploring the site of the mosque as a way in which to maintain a degree of religiosity in order to comfort conflicts between their sexual and religious identities. According to Sofie and Adeel who still maintained links to the mosque despite the conflicts with institutionalised and lay Muslim discourses of non-heterosexualities:

> *It wasn't up to the congregation to decide what I could be and whether it was permissible, that was my choice…obviously I hadn't told anyone at the time but I felt… that I can go to mosque and be a good Muslim* (Sofia, 28, lesbian)

> *I still go to the mosque. It's just like a ritual, it doesn't affect me, I feel more kind of at peace now that I've accepted that that's not the truth*

that I can't be gay and Muslim. I just go with the flow of going to the mosque when the family are going, Eid or Jummah, or whatever there's no problem, I don't feel guilty (Adeel, 23, gay)

Sofia and Adeel are assertive in claiming the space of the mosque as somewhere they can maintain religiosity; while Sofia remarks upon disregarding any unaccepting views from the 'the congregation', Adeel speaks more to the ritualised aspect of attending the mosque with family members. Regardless of whether these are inclusive or not, their accounts highlight how spaces of institutionalised belief that might nominally espouse heteronormative discourses can be just as important for LGBT+ people as more LGBT+ 'inclusive' religious settings (Cuthbert and Taylore, 2019), as tradition and personal belief are valued and upheld. That these may be characterised by a sense of religious individualism, where there is limited reliance on others including or affirming them (O'Brien, 2004; Rodriguez, 2009), is unimportant because they demonstrate a sense of seeing the mosque as a way of transcending the perceived incompatibility of their religious and sexual identities; at least to themselves seeing these as viable and one identity not necessarily compromising the other. Thus, such reflections highlight that religious and minority sexual identities are not mutually exclusive ones (Siraj, 2016). The space of the mosque provides a background for facilitating their engagement with Islam. Moreover, an additive approach to the intersections of Islam and non-heterosexuality may present LGBT+ British Muslims as walking away from their religion or stumbling through a repressed sexuality because of the assumed secularity of LGBT+ identities and movements (Taylor, Falconer and Snowdon, 2014), or because of the assumed homophobia of Islamic scripture and Muslim communities (Rouhani, 2007). However, by highlighting experiences of attendance at the mosque as a way to develop a form of a religiously-informed consciousness that is not necessarily contradictory and dark in relation to their sexualities, Sofia and Adeel highlight nuanced subjectivities that reject one-dimensional thinking that pursues an oppositional stance. Their affiliation to Islam and the mosque represents a grounding in Islamic membership and a desire for stability in a chaotic social order that throws up constant questions about their identities and experiences, as evidenced by the LGBT+ education schools row (BBC, 2019a)

For some of the other participants, however, their experiences caused them to retreat from the mosque because of religious clergy and their interpretations of their sexualities within Islam, and a perceived pervasive homophobic attitude among

Muslims. As their sexual identities came into their thinking on a more persistent basis through adolescence and early adulthood, and initial conflicts of these, they became increasingly critical of the mosque and institutionalised belief itself, demonstrating the moral geographies of sexuality within Islam. For Rehman and Yassar, the space of organised religion became unwelcoming:

> *I remember them, an imam saying it was sinful to be gay, that this wasn't an Islamic thing, it was the devil and you had to choose…I must have been in my late teens because I was at university at the time, and I just thought if this is the type of discussion I don't think I want to be in such an unforgiving, unwelcoming* place (Rehman, 30, gay)

> *It became somewhere I didn't want to go, I felt that it wasn't necessary to have to go to mosque to be religious, I didn't, I didn't want to really live in that trapping of having to be there knowing what people thought of this other part of me, this other tribe of mine if you like. Nobody says anything about it, but I would just feel uncomfortable* (Yassar, 28, gay)

Discomfort and being the unwanted 'other' led to Rehman and Yassar withdrawing from the physical space of the mosque, though Yassar highlights that the ostracisation from Muslim communities that he felt did not equate to rejecting Islam and expressions of religious practice. The condemnation of their sexualities caused them to distance themselves from institutionalised practices and they are differently positioned to Sofia and Adeel in that theological and social barriers implanted a bordering of exclusion that meant discomfort and intolerance limited the spatial freedom of religious expression for them. Disassociating with mosque spaces and congregations became a way of coping with what were presented by clergy and the congregation as incongruous sexual and religious identities. Messages from religious clergy in the case of Rehman and the unspoken homophobia in Yassar's account clearly highlight how mosques can take on multiple meanings dependent on the identities and experiences of followers. Thus, religious identities and practices are not the only contexts through which to identify and understand mosque engagement and Islamic belief, and the participants are not just Muslims in the mosque; rather, their religious and sexual identities intersect and demonstrate how people's experiences of inclusion and belonging are shaped through the intesections between different social categories, as well as social and cultural relations that mediate these and contextualise such interactions (Yuval-Davis, 2007).

Problematically, these experiences highlight the normative regime of heterosexuality within Islamic sexual discourse and communities (Yip, 2004), potentially turning LGBT+ Muslims away from the mosque as it could be a symbolic, spatial bastion of a presumed homophobic religion. The religious space of the mosque is felt as a particular site of exclusion that marks Muslims that identify as LGBT+ as different and sinful, owing to negative experiences of engaging with religious leaders and congregations, as well as the overall silence on sexuality within Muslim communities, as aforementioned. Conventional approaches to religious observance may mark these participants as irreligious in these contexts, however, as we see later, attendance at the mosque is but one, and perhaps shallow, form of gauging the religiosity of my participants. Disaffiliation from organised Islam does not necessarily translate into, or constitute, religious decay or a break, but may be a way of negotiating and grounding the experiences of exclusion into competent action and practice.

The sexual moralities that may become institutionalised within the mosque instruct standards of heterosexuality that are oft appropriated within the context of being a pious Muslim. Heteronormativity within these contexts may constrain the participants' abilities to navigate the heterosexist mosque, but they do not essentially prevent their efforts at engaging with Islam in different shapes and forms. One way in which participants emphasised what they saw as truer forms of Islamic morals was through their discussions of gender segregation and the lack of women's influence within mosque spaces, seeing these as normatively embedded but not religiously ordained:

> *There is this very kind of male, obviously, dominated clique in a mosque where there is provision for women, but it's not much, it's very much, mosque is for men. That's one thing that doesn't really sit well with me* (Ali, 27, gay)

> *We have to be in the basement floor of the mosque and we're all cramped together like sardines…reflects this idea that women are inferior to men in Islam, when actually that's not the case* (Sofia, 28, lesbian)

> *From my experience of my mosque back home, and where I still go now and again when it's Eid, it's not very welcoming. It's very, almost selective you know, maybe selective isn't the right word, maybe more restrictive…the women are shunned into essentially a side-room… if anyone's not from an apna background, they tend to get funny looks as if what are they doing here. You know, and where does it say that you should be doing this in scripture, if anyone cared to have a proper*

look they'd realise that to pray together shouldn't be this all boys club,
(Taimoor, 22, gay)

These descriptions of the mosques my participants attended reveal gendered inequalities, as well as presumed exclusions based upon ethnic backgrounds according to Taimoor. Experiencing these as spatially restricted for women- *"cramped together"* and *"shunned"* into the basements and side-rooms- they highlight what they see as the incorrect orderings of the space of the mosque and that which come to represent a false portrayal of Islam. These critiques of gender segregation and male dominance are attempts that seek to make sense of prevailing patriarchal norms and regulations; by framing their critiques through highlighting erroneous understandings of Islam, they highlight what Avishai (2008) demonstrates as agency by 'religious doing'. According to Maqsood (2005), mosques are often viewed as primarily male spaces and the organisation of space and provisions for Muslim women materially signal this, and both Sofia and Taimoor imply that the patriarchal organisation of mosque spaces is engendered through cultural norms. Relations of power here are evidently contingent on space but they make a distinction between Islam and cultural orderings and practices that shift towards gender segregation (Karim, 2009). Thus, the three of them practice Islam and construct religiosity not simply through practices of prayer and the assumed primacy of ritualistic worship but submitting to Islam in less conventional ways through contesting patriarchal norms and spatial dominance.

Gendered spatial inequalities and organisational cultures in mosques come to represent such spaces as patriarchal- and heteronormative, by extension- but the criticisms of Ali, Sofia and Taimoor show how though such practices may not be assumed or recognised as Islamic, they make sense for them and situate 'agency' by 'doing' religious morals of gender equality and, implicitly, imagining more progressive senses of mosque spaces. Such questioning has continuities with how some participants sought to reflect upon the ambiguity of the Qur'an and the lack of explicit condemnation in interpretations of scripture that I highlighted across 4.5.2 (pp. 83-88). In highlighting these experiences and other readings of mosques, this section has explored the different meanings of, and attachments to, mosque spaces in the case of LGBT+ British Muslims. The next section follows by exploring how they engaged with a lack of tolerance of their sexualities and how these experiences led to further disaffiliation from spaces and forms of institutionalised thought and dogma.

6.4.2 Negotiating intolerance

Before demonstrating how those involved in the study sought to resolve difficulties they had related to their sexual and religious identities through the use of the internet and finding people and groups going through similar challenges, I explore some of the interactions LGBT+ Muslims had with other Muslims that were intolerant of their sexualities. This was the case for some of the participants that had encounters with other Muslims who reflected the importance of the Qur'an in justifying their intoletarance of non-heterosexuality, though without recourse to dissecting the epistemological foundations that generate sexual intolerance. However, rather than relying upon uncritical interpretations and rehearsals of it, several participants questioned how it was invoked and used against them in order to support homophobic and heterosexist opinion and belief. In the case of Yassar and Jahangir:

> *The one woman who I got on really well with at that time, she made some quite blasé comments…it was quite crude and I didn't like that and I said 'don't talk like that', I said 'I'm very open but there's certain dialogues and things' and she said, well, you know used that old cliché 'Oh, God created Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve', and I just said 'You claim that you're reading the Qur'an and you study it, but what comes out of your mouth on a daily basis is very crude'…I don't understand where that's coming from because if the Qur'an and Islam is supposed to be about love and peace and tolerance and compassion, and all the rest of it, at what point does it tell you that you've got the right to talk* (Yassar, 28, gay)

> *I talk to people and I say 'Have you read the Qur'an?' and then they'll go 'Yeah, kind of'. That, to me, it's not good enough to say kind of. I mean I read it once…now this is just simplifying it, but unless you're a fan of Shakespeare and you read it and you thoroughly enjoy it, you're not going to understand the Qur'an. Likewise with the Bible, you know, it's written in such a way that, you have to really understand it. So I began to question how can people quote the Qur'an and religion, and say this is what it does or doesn't say when, if you're telling me you hated that kind of language, 'how're you going to understand that?'* (Jahangir, 47, gay)

Yassar and Jahangir reject normative lay interpretations of the Qur'an, questioning the understanding of it by those upholding rejectionist views on their sexualities and how they came to develop this knowledge. This is due to both the difficult, dense traditional language of scripture, which is compared to the Bible too, and the apparent belief that the encounter in the first excerpt goes against Qur'anic teachings of compassion and tolerance. While neither may have been particularly acquainted with the Qur'an at a

theologically-advanced level, Yassar and Jahangir highlight how conceptualising religiosity away from solely formal beliefs is a productive way of evaluating it, given they challenge the primacy afforded to Qur'anic knowledge that is interpreted without perceptive insight, yet reverberates across Muslim communities. I already outlined how Jahangir interpreted the Qur'an through a syncretic account with the Bible and his interpretation of their inherent masculinism (pp.86-88). Here, this evaluation, along with Yassar's, is seized to 'unsettle and decentre' (Mollett and Faria, 2018) the interlocking relations of power at the interpersonal domain that shape everyday interactions. Considerations of Islamic discourses that are seemingly universal are confronted and the assertions by the participants reflect and infer agency in the face of appropriating scripture to uphold injunctions against LGBT+ Muslims. Instead, the Qur'an is indexed and opened up to create a more dialogic environment for religious affirmation of non-heterosexuality. While the widespread belief of the inerrancy of the Qur'an (Kugle, 2007; 2010) as the word of Allah can have negative implications for creating a theological barrier for LGBT+ Muslims coming to terms with their sexual identities in respect of its normative interpretation by most Muslim communities (Siraj, 2009), both Yassar and Jahangir ground their differences through more considered readings of the Qur'an and presenting these rather than rehearsing simplistic rhetoric of it as explicitly condemnatory of LGBT+ Muslims.

These acts seek to undermine normative theological teachings of the impermissibility of non-heterosexualities. Acknowledging the different shapes of interpreting scripture and doctrine, the participants seek to revise the homophobia they encounter through an individualised commitment and approach to Islam. Just as we saw across the previous chapter, encounters are 'events of relation' (Wilson and Darling, 2016: 2) that make difference; for Yassar and Jahangir, such encounters (re)produce homophobic spaces and relations that they work to resist. As Yip (2005) highlights, a lack of theological capital and support means LGBT+ Muslims often develop individual pursuits for affirming their sexualities. In these instances, Yassar and Jahangir interpret scripture and tradition that helps them make sense of their own lives and signal a more nuanced negotiation of religious and sexual identities than are nominally presented where they concern Muslims and sexual minorities in the West (Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens, 2010). Creatively using religion in this way demonstrates how these nominal acts of representation highlight the importance of considering religiosity where it may sit outside of the realm of the institutional but is nevertheless informed by and

intersects with it (Sheringham, 2010). The predominant approach of seeing LGBT+ Muslims as embodying the paradox of religion and sexuality interacting without one compromising the other (Dahl, 1997) is negated here. Significantly, they attempt to influence how others must regulate their own restrictions within a more holistic revision and one that transcends a negative attitude to non-normative Muslim sexualities. Contemplating such thoughts enable Yassar and Jahangir to exhibit an active part in the interaction between social and institutional processes of obtaining and exploring religious knowledge. They do not simply submit to the assumed piety of other members and the dominant narratives of the pathologisation of LGBT+ Muslims but seek out unquestioned religious knowledge to form a more applied understanding of Islam that is demonstrably more suited to satisfying meaning within their lives.

However, though some participants sought to be assertive in claiming religious identities and challenged oppressive beliefs concerning their sexual identities, problematically, there were instances of some of the participants relaying stories of having their faith being questioned because of sexualities. These intrusions fermented through widespread Muslim moralities that prohibit sexual conduct and identities outside of the norm of heterosexuality:

> *As soon as they see…you identify as an LGBT+ or anything like that, it's, they don't want to talk about it, or they'll attack with 'You were never a Muslim anyway' and that's really, really kind of, it just destroys everything because you don't know what I was before, I was probably more Muslim than you are now* (Jahangir, 47, gay)

> *I've been, you know, I've never fully fitted in to their worldview of sexuality… their less crude, traditional way of talking about sexuality, which is to mainly not talk about it. I found it difficult to open up conversations about being a LGBT+ Muslim and this is, you know, a university society for god's sake…where you should be able to engage with different ideas and discuss them constructively, not shut down debate because you think I'm a kuffar* [non-believer] *for being gay and Muslim* (Diya, 22, gay)

Also consider this exchange that Zara expressed:

> **Zara**: *I sat in on one of them discussing outside of the group setting that they couldn't think to be friends with somebody that was gay, that they wouldn't want their children to be introduced to them in case they corrupt the minds of them. I just found it so devastating to hear that*

> **NI:** *How did you respond to that? Did you say something?*

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> **Zara:** *I asked her if it was somebody else's sin who was she to judge and that there were plenty of Muslims who are homosexual or bisexual and that that's according to God's will. I couldn't tolerate that language of bigotry…Her response was to say that you couldn't possibly be a homosexual and Muslim, you're entertaining haram thoughts to even think that…I just didn't feel safe enough to jump in and say that I'm also gay*

The sexual identities of my participants are not ordinarily consented within the somewhat tense and dogmatic encounters that are alluded to. Others dissect their bodies and identities with recourse to knowledge of their sexual identities, as well as unawareness of these, and demonstrate the encounters of prejudice (Valentine, 2010) that must be negotiated. They become regulated on the foundation of an assumed universal Islamic moral code. Implicated within these supposed moral perturbations are perceptions from the participants of feeling in/excluded (Gokariksel and Secor, 2017) and questions of the safety in disclosing their sexual identities. In line with Cresswell (1996), these bodies, whether others are aware or not of their minority sexualities, are stained with rigid and harsh readings of acceptability and permissibility and are deemed out of place within the normative religious mileu of Islam. Thus, religiosity and piety become situated within specific versions of group-oriented restrictions that rely upon restrictive readings of Islam, as opposed to seeing religious Muslim positionalities as more open-ended; effectively paupering the range and multiplicities of sexual subjectivities afforded to those identifying as Muslims.

The experiences of Jahangir and Zara reveal the hostile approaches towards LGBT+ Muslims that see them as embodying impermissible sexual identities; the participants are subject to statements that they cannot be proper Muslims if gay. However, these exchanges help develop a response in which they reason themselves as '*more Muslim*' and question the doubting of *"God's will"*. They demonstrate that religious moralities and subscribing to belief and faith are not merely about simply consuming pre-set dictations and obligations, like those they contend with, but also the reasoning behind choosing to do so (Lambek, 2000: 315). In this sense, the contestations over who can be a Muslim in these spaces empower them to question religious authority and dogmas of institutionalised Muslim moralities in the process and practice of constructing a subjectivity that may be simultaneously conflicting and rewarding. Within a religious community that oft utilises censorious rhetoric and social opprobrium, the participants

effectuate a challenge to those upholding heterosexist viewpoints and demonstrate the requisite encounters of education and affirmation needed to slowly evolve how Islamic sexual ethics are interpreted, understood and experienced. While the response to Zara's intervention meant she she "*didn't feel safe enough to jump in*", her intrusion does emerge as having disruptive potential by way of using some of the essentialist perspectives signalled across 4.5.2 (pp. 79-80) to contest the homophobic lady's narrative. In highlighting this, I do not seek to romanticise this argument, but suggest that such practices and interactions are a form of agency that is neither 'complicit' nor 'resistant' (Avishai, 2008). Instead, Zara's intervention contests fetishised and teleological assumptions about agency and resistance to highlight how, according to Mahmood (2005: 15, original emphasis), 'agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms'. Rules around sexuality within Islam are predicated upon heterosexuality, and by dwelling to problematise this, Zara demonstrates a slow tendering of recognition if not visibility.

Diya's difficulty to speak about his sexual identity at a university Islamic society similarly reflects the hesitancy in which sexuality is often discussed within Islam, but also the hierarchical forms of control that are developed in what should be a critically dialogic space. While previous work with Muslim students that belong to Islamic societies on university campuses has highlighted their experiences of structural discrimination and exclusion (Hopkins, 2011), Diya's exclusions within such societies highlights the necessity to contest monistic constructions and instead seek to highlight how different identities intersect to shape exclusion (McCall, 2005). The effects of limiting speech over certain topics for Diya points to the marginalisation of LGBT+ Muslims that fashions not only a yearning to negotiate the complexity of the intersectionality of faith and sexuality but is simultaneously demonstrative of a need to not over-privilege individual acts of resistance, where these are divorced from institutional and social networks. Rather, individualised and everyday practices of religiosity occur on both the margins of, and within, religious institutions and normative belief doctrines that manifest in the minds of lay believers. We see, then, how for the three participants, their interpretations of Islam and their contempt for homophobic Muslim groups that see non-heterosexuality within Islam through uncritical eyes (presupposing the divinity of shari'a without a fair critique and without opening themselves up to divergent opinions) is fraught with power relations, to the extent that

their faith is being questioned or would be questioned. A compulsion to sidestep these is demonstrated in order to adapt to and negotiate the cultural schema that is religion here.

Questioning the normative cultural and religious continuities that impinge upon their sexualities within different spaces and contexts meant the participants were not simply passive recipients, enduring unyielding 'truths' of sexuality within Islam. Rather their questioning that was evidenced earlier is at play once more within oppressive spaces of mosques in the previous section and the lived intolerance of their sexualities. Either through questioning the orderings of space or the use of the Qur'an as a device through which to normalise intolerance or challenging homophobic discussion, without themselves coming out, the participants point to the desire to work on a mentality that engages in critical work of querying religious authority and moralities engendered within institutional Islam and the spaces in which organised Islam shapes lived intolerance. This focus on the negotiation of organised religious expression, ambivalent and precarious as it may be, indicates the need to consider the contradictions and periodic conflicts of LGBT+ British Muslims and how they live and attempt to make sense of them. Thus, this first section of empirical analysis sets the scene for the rest of the chapter which demonstrates how participants often sought to create understandings and spaces that affirmed their identities and experiences, and ones that altered conventional religious practices and discourses. The following section of this chapter explores this in relation to using the internet to find alternative interpretations and forms of community, as well as their issues.

6.5 Seeking inclusive spaces and understandings

6.5.1 Challenging religious authority online and finding affirmation

In this part of the chapter I discuss how LGBT+ Muslims used the Internet as a key site for negotiating their religious and sexual identities. The Internet affects several spheres of life and has also influenced how religious relationships, communications, practices and ideas develop (Campbell, 2005). As I already demonstrated in 4.7.3 (pp.111-114), the use of online spaces was a productive way for some LGBT+ Muslims to negotiate and resist, in some respects, the closet and that these practices blurred the divides between online and offline spaces. I extend such thinking in this section to highlight how the Internet was used as an everyday tool to connect to LGBT+ Muslims and find alternative Islamic interpretations of their sexualities and to challenge both

conventional discourses and homophobic espousers of these. I then also highlight how these helped develop networks of LGBT+ Muslims who developed offline spaces of visibility, representation and activism. However, despite the value of online spaces, I also highlight the need to be careful not to over-romanticise internet/online communications, as these also had digital divides that intersected with socio-economic class, as well as tensions with internet trolls.

Using online spaces enabled LGBT+ British Muslims to search for discourses that were not necessarily at odds with their sexual identities, thus going against the common grain of understanding sexuality within most Muslim communities (Siraj, 2009; Rayside, 2011). While the regulation of their sexualities is often justified through readings of the story of Lot and presumed intolerant codes of Sharia and Hadiths, which are used as catalysts for championing heterosexist discourses, LGBT+ Muslims sought to examine theological interpretation in order to question contestations over sexuality, religion, gender, and themes of belonging, community, and marginalisation. These efforts are practiced because of the aforementioned normalisation of heterosexuality within organised Islam and its common spaces; such practices are therefore suffused with hope and anxiety, and seek to point to an opening up of conversations around sexuality beyond the framework of heterosexual marriage within Islam. The narratives I speak of now are ones that shared an effort to participate in a care of the self that grew out of concern for being LGBT+ and initially seeing this as haram (unlawful) within Islam and the curiosity that abounded when unpacking the intersections of faith and sexuality, as practices in enduring and revalorising marginalised identities. In the previous section, I highlighted the concerning exclusions that those who participated in the project felt in mosque spaces, as well as the intolerance that bred in interpersonal encounters with homophobic Muslims. One effort to contest a widespread paucity of inclusion was to search for and instrumentalise a change in how their sexuality, contextualised within religious belief, was viewed by themselves:

> *I'd wanted to actually understand what Islam said about homosexuality and not just conform to this assumed heterosexuality…finding different ideas online helped…because you weren't just show this black and white impression* (Omar, 28, gay)
>
> *I was looking constantly for answers, you didn't get...even though you were looking for recognition and acceptance…But finding people and*

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more accepting stances online emboldened me to not just reject my religion (Adeel, 23, gay)

Seeking sites and answers to questions of the permissibility of their sexuality in Islam, what became increasingly clear was the capacity of the Internet here to foreground practices of reconciling Islam and their gay sexualities for Omar and Adeel, with it being an easily-accessible resource for research (O'Riordan and White, 2010). Seeing these as debates that were closeted in formal spaces of organised religion, the capacity of the online to make spaces for nascent experiments in altering the heterosexist dogma of the inviolability of same-sex relations within Islam is referred to. As Friedman (2005: 5) suggests, the internet 'may be of particular importance to small or marginal groups with limited…expectation of mainstream support for their views'. The spaces of the internet can proffer the initial power to challenge pervasive religious, social and cultural constraints that intersect to cause my participants to adhere to normative regulations of their sexualities. The mainstream spaces of Islam may be seen as invoking a challenge to how LGBT+ Muslims frame their sexualities in ambivalent contexts and practices, but the internet space obliges us to consider how it can help to participate in influencing identities and the constructions of these, as well as how to negotiate and challenge their wider contexts of power relations.

Despite religiously-inflected homophobia seemingly being a formidable challenge to coming out as a LGBT+ British Muslim, religious motivation is applied and sculpts the tactics and practices that are employed by Omar and Adeel to shift away from oppressive thought. The specific intersections of power in formal religious spaces, or in ones informed by the orthodoxies of these, may limit attendance or disclosure, as shown earlier, but that does not stop their quest or impulse to engage with Islam in this context. Their reactions to representations of their sexualities as impermissible consist of a search for Islamic knowledge and uncovers how minoritised followers may 'do Islam' through maneouvering the interactions of exclusionary offline spaces with online spaces. Kort (2005) terms such developments as 'Dar al-cyber Islam', where Muslims can consume and produce new forms of understanding beyond literalist interpretations of holy texts in order to reform orthodox discourses. These experiences are symptomatic of an embryonic hybridisation of space and practice that quells participants to determine what their faith is on their own grounding. Using the internet to negotiate the presumed incompatibility of LGBT+ and Muslim identities unsettles the hegemony of institutionalised sexual ethics and moralities. The transmission of

religious heterosexism through which Omar and Adeel initially framed their understanding, negotiation and participation is not merely entertained unsuspectingly. Rather, opening themselves up for resources that allow for a more flexible code of sexual fulfillment and identity forms a potential way of constructing and performing both Islam and their sexual identities. Thus, instead of religion fading away into the background, which may be popularly assumed where it intersects with LGBT+ identities in western contexts (Gross and Yip, 2010), it is revived and revitalised online to ingress a space for pragmatic negotiations of understanding and performing LGBT+ and Muslim identities.

One of the online strategies through which participants sought to question faith and interpretation regarding their LGBT+ identities was to find affirming discussions that were comparatively progressive to those organised forms of religion that they were accustomed to. When speaking about the value of online spaces, Sofia and Adeel stated efforts were made to contest prevailing texts and their assumptions by lay Muslims:

> *Lot is always used to justify the sidelining of LGBT+ Muslims, but no-one ever interprets it outside of the context in which it was written, time moves on. Why is it that only Muslims who are lesbian,gay, have to unpack their religion, others need to do it too and become part of those discussions (*Sofia, 28, lesbian)

> *We're all children of Allah, only he can distinguish between us- that's what I began to understand. Homophobia within Islam is quite contemporary, the sexual diversity less so* (Daniyaal, 21, bisexual)

Devoting labour to rework 'scripts of inclusion and exclusion' (Taylor and Snowdon, 2014: 397), these online practices and discussions indicate the agency in reacting to personal, social and ethno-religious circumstances that entrench the suppression of their sexualities, and the spaces and structures through which these are shaped and are shaped by. Invoking stories of Lot again, seeing their sexual identities as natural, embodied and part of Allah's creation, and historicising Islamic interpretations have substance beyond the participants plunging themselves into a whirlpool of theological questions. By scoring propitious opportunities to perspectives and understandings that experiment with Islamic sensibilities as they concern LGBT+ sexualities, the participants remind themselves that accessing Allah and Islam is an opportunity that presents itself regardless of seemingly inefficacious efforts to engage with homophobic

clergy and believers. Everyday activities of going on the internet platform religious-sexual subjectivities that go beyond textual, conformist and ritualised forms of religious practice and observance, and their inhospitabilities. A detour of Islamic thought is thus constitutive of facilitating agency that contests hegemonic rigid readings and demonstrates an entwining of everyday practices and religiosity. The tool of online spaces and searches offer LGBT+ British Muslims preliminary material to refashion a moral sexual self that resists the mediation and compromisation of their sexualities and is achieved through a framing of religion that celebrates flexible Islamic hermeneutics that resist the discourses and theological doctrines often unquestioningly institutionalised, produced and lived.

Thus, the promising crumbling of unequal relations of religious power means LGBT+ Muslims' commitments to Islam and their regaining of a sense of religiosity in disdain of the heteronormative discourses and their materialities is crafted through accounting for diverse meanings of scripture that are found online. These are evidently also energetic efforts to contest religious exclusion and the secularist biases of LGBT+ representations and communities (Yip, 2018). While somewhat individualist pursuits, given the lack of visible LGBT+ Muslim support, these practices offer more democratic understandings of religious comprehension (Loimeier, 1999) and demonstrate how LGBT+ British Muslims negotiate and extract from different aspects of their identities in order to carve out more positive religious-sexual imaginations than are initially conceived by themselves, or nominally represented within wider society (Rahman, 2010). Comprising of relational contributions that condition interaction, citation, discussion, and personal critical reflection, these afford LGBT+ British Muslims provisions for identities and ways of living, and meaning, that may motivate positive processes and practices through which negotiating contemptible discourses and interpretations are made sense of and lived. By refuting the conventional theological sanctity of regulating discourses towards their sexualities, internet searches and their interpretations offer a sense of personal piety and observance as transcending the confines and spatialities of rigid rules of worship and the institutionalised spaces in which these are expected to be adopted.

I now want to demonstrate how my participants communicated with people in similar predicaments online and how these inspired forms of community-building. While the knowledge/power nexus that characterises different materialities and metaphors of the

closet can often cause sexual minorities to feel rejected and lonely, they can shape practices that respond to different modes and spatialities of exclusion and intolerance (Brown, 2000). Though LGBT+ British Muslims ostensibly face structural and social controls that recede the development of sexual fulfillment, online interaction with other LGBT+ Muslims helped to episodically challenge the religious and moral citational practices and interpretations of seemingly authoritative foundations while also helping to form social networks. Embracing critical and/or affirming interpretations of text and religious dogmas of sexuality online, as described earlier, my participants also acknowledged the wish for engaging with other LGBT+ Muslims:

> *I wanted to find other gay Pakistani Muslims, somebody who would understand and where I could find a place between Muslims and gay men* (Siddique, 26, gay)

> *It was helpful to connect to people like you and realise you weren't the only one- you know that in your heart but talking to people through those discussions and emails gave you a sense of the possibility of being a gay Muslim* (Adeel, 23, gay)

> *It's hard to find supportive Muslims outside of those who I found through the forums and discuss these ideas and feelings with them* (Junaid, 27, gay)

Aspirations for experiencing social and community bonding with other sexual minorities from Muslim backgrounds refract the schism between religious commitment and secular LGBT+ identities and forms of community (Gross and Yip, 2010), consistent with other everyday practices and experiences of the participants. The acts are productive for they help build on imaginaries of LGBT+ Muslim communities that actually materialise through dialogic interactions and discussions online. Though the use of the internet may seem rather ordinary given such media is central to everyday life (Livingstone, 2008), in this context, it reveals the obscuring of conceptual partitions between the online and the offline, the quotidian and the unusual, and ultimately, the empirical separations of the repressed LGBT+ Muslim and the liberated 'out' one. Rather, these desires for engaging with other LGBT+ Muslims to share commonalities of experiences reveal a specific set of moments of negotiation and agency. The fostering of community networks reflects that online spaces and communities are not abstract from offline contexts and sites (Graham, 2013), given the social relations that are worked online and how these helped to develop and contest religious narratives (Shelton, Zook and Graham, 2012). Such spaces are therefore relational (Massey,

2005), being produced through intersections of the materiality of power relations in offline spaces where visibility is seemingly closeted, and so, shaping the sexual-religious landscapes that are in the process of being constructed in hybrid online spaces.

A sense of not quite 'fitting in' may characterise LGBT+ British Muslims within both religious and LGBT+ groups and spaces yet embracing these new-found contexts and relationships for defining their experiences opens up the possibilities for alternative understandings of the moral boundedness of the relationships between their sexualities and Islam. The erasures of LGBT+ Muslims cultivate a desire for support that exists at the intersection of networks of religious and LGBT+ communities and online contexts provide a useful conduit for doing so, given the relative anonymity of the Internet that can be productively engaged with (Magee et al., 2012) and further performed to enhance understanding. The importance of visibility and representation is patently clear from the narratives from my participants and reveal how accounting for seemingly banal practices of religion or the construction of a community informed by these is reflective of the agency of individiuals within religious communities to develop intersectional subjectivities (Tse, 2014). To this end, a lived religion approach that presents such practices helps problematise how religious power is outworked to make sense in everyday life; a collage of different practices (Ammerman, 2014), such as re-reading texts and working to establish connections with others in similar quandaries, helping to negotiate and construct a broader understanding of religious practice and affiliation. This wish to engage with similar people through online interactions highlights that it may be through an online space that participants felt social experiences of their LGBT+ identities and communities could be initially realised and experienced and the possibilities for engaging and connecting with similar people online enabled powerful congregational relationships for those still exploring their sexual identities within the context of their intersections with religious and ethnic identities. Such buildings of community are demonstrative of the range of practices oriented towards religious expressions and practices, and the consequential experiences and modified moral guidelines that facilitate a development of the sexually permissible (Yip and Page, 2013).

By demonstrating these communal forms of increasingly questioning seemingly fixed religious power and discourse, it is clear the social and spatial contexts of internet

spaces are significant for LGBT+ people of a religious persuasion (O'Riordan and White, 2010). Throughout interviews, online contexts were deemed to better protect the isolation of LGBT+ Muslims and worked as essential resources for both personal development and interactions with others. The relations of similarity that were nurtured within online engagements with others enabled the distribution of shared experiences of grief and injustices, and the complex steps of questioning the boundaries of religion:

> *I was so grateful to find other people that I could connect with and who would know what I was going through without getting questions where I'd be having to explain things constantly* (Noreen, 29, lesbian)

> *Having interactions with other LGBT+ Muslims was helpful for me to question what I was taught and to feel like I could share my story* (Siddique, 26, gay)

> *It was great to know that I could talk to others who were like me, that I could still be seen as a Muslim* (Adeel, 23, gay)

Embracing the helpful anonymity that online spaces can nominally provide (Friedman, 2007) enabled a fertile relationship characterised by the importance of taking into account social contexts and relations in influencing religiosity and affiliation. The presences of others going through similar issues generated feelings of belonging and affirms that others struggling with Muslim, LGBT+ and ethnic minority identities are out there too and creates, at the very least, tangential networks. Such experiments in affecting belonging and attachment are practices that helped to encourage my participants to assent to renewed religious understandings that gather experiences of marginalisation and invisibility, and helps them to use these to mobilise a recalibration of religious community. The stirring of resonating experiences underlines the importance of emotional practices that can help people understand their religious expressions and activities (Neitz 2011), while the composite relations of similarity manifesting in the thoughts and actions of the participants generated a sense of shared safety in numbers, however ephemeral such perceptions may be online.

Via networking to develop virtual communities of LGBT+ Muslims angling towards challenging the authorities of Islamic knowledge, Noreen, Siddique and Adeel sought to consider and redistribute relations of power within religious expression and inclusion. These experiences demonstrate the more lateral politics of religious community that are formed where these practitioners have felt excluded from normative Islam and though I do not want to suggest that these online pursuits

necessarily translate into wholly positive endeavours and expressions of conflicting identities, they do help mediate religious and increasingly social experiences (Graham, 2013) and it is a truth for these participants that these efforts revealed the first steps needed to invest in orienting towards more critical and transformative shared experiences of attachment to Islam and other Muslims that identify as sexual minorities. Within these spaces different ways of approaching Islam and the relationships created are mobilised as both a reference for identity and a resource (Sharma and Guest, 2013). Thus, religion becomes a more affirming communal experience. The connections between individual forms of religiosity and social and cultural contexts is traceable here; contestations and exclusions of Islam in the public eye and the contexts of institutionalised Islam, and the personal experiences and networks developed at the micro-level are demonstrated as contouring the lines of personal religiosity. For the participants, their faith is expressed through banal practices that animate embedded unequal relations of power through the contestations of these and attempts to debate these with others.

6.5.2. The quest for LGBT+ Muslim groups

The previous section demonstrated the online efforts my participants practiced to find affirmation of their faith and sexualities online and the importance of connecting with other LGBT+ Muslims. In this section I develop the latter point further by highlighting membership of LGBT+ Muslim groups or progressive alternative Muslim organisations that my participants engaged with both online and in offline spaces. As highlighted in the methodology (p.52), the number of groups that cater for LGBT+ Muslims is limited within Britain. While mainstream LGBT+ groups may be able to provide some support for LGBT+ Muslims, they may be less able to accommodate for and understand that 'religious and cultural conservatism significantly buttresses homonegativity and heterosexism' (Yip, 2009: 3) within the communities to which they belong and how this intersects with their general invisibility in mainstream LGBT+ spaces and organisations (Rouhani, 2007; Rahman, 2014) to construct the specific issues and needs that result from this often unfavourable milieu. This is reflective of what Crenshaw (1991) terms 'political intersectionality' where differently positioned individuals may be invisibilised within nominally justice-oriented groups due to singular approaches to fighting for this. It is important to acknowledge however, that though practically all my participants searched for theological answers online and perhaps wanted some form of connection, others were hesitant to join visible LGBT+ Muslim groups beyond online spaces. In the

first instance however, I present some quotes from participants regarding the usefulness of finding LGBT+ Muslim groups online:

> *When I go there* [gay scene], *I do…feel a bit of a, just slightly a bit of an outsider in the sense there are no other Muslim people there, there are hardly any Asians there…I'm conscious of it…I think it's helpful to have those Muslim groups for that support and going against that homophobia, but also that representation within the mainstream LGBT+ places* (Ali, 28, gay)

> *For me to think that other Muslims were there, activist gay Muslims, when I was younger was not plausible…you had so much bigotry then…but being able to find those answers on the FAQ pages* [on Islam and sexuality], *connecting to people online was so valuable…it's hard to have to go from one world of homophobia and then to another* (Junaid, 27, gay)

> *I found those discussions and relationships rewarding for my fulfillment, I was being more critical of Islam and more religious at the same time. It was good to explore that part of me* (Zara, 22, lesbian)

These highlight how the internet can be a rewarding space for finding LGBT+ Muslims, so as to pursue a reworking of the perceived secular forms of LGBT+ communities. Further, these searches provide a nuanced form of moving away from puritanical Islamic customs, and the religious and cultural silencing of their sexual identities. Finding spaces and the social capital to initiate expressions of religious sexual subjectivities and agency emphasises how these are constituent of belonging and problematises assumptions that LGBT+ people 'negotiate an increasingly individualised range of socio-sexual trajectories' (Downing, 2013: 44). Further, these experiences highlight the positive role of some religious-based groups. The ability to engage with LGBT+ Muslim groups through their forums, engaging with their interpretations on theological material surrounding their sexualities, and simply seeing their identities represented in some form or another is a precursor to an emerging shielding from curbing expectations and discriminations, and that works to contest religious and cultural homophobia, the whiteness of LGBT+ spaces and organisations, and general homophobia. By affiliating with such groups or searching out for them, these LGBT+ British Muslims highlight their negotiations of intersecting modalities of power that work to 'achieve their own empowerment' (Pande, 2015: 183). This is not to neatly begin to dichotomise a sense of seeing these LGBT+ Muslims as liberated and walking linear paths 'from the darkness of sexual repression into sexual freedom' (Weeks, 2007: 4), but rather see these as intentional, but complex, yet repetitive

practices that begin to embolden them and respond to the religious, cultural and sexual landscapes of struggle that can oppress through the interlocking of different axes of inequality.

The result of these searches for LGBT+ Muslim groups and engaging with them contributes to eschewing perceptions of affiliating with one or the other identity. Here, the LGBT+ British Muslims in my study make room for these through the specificities of online spaces, searches and alliances that unsettle the tendencies to ascribe oppositional representations of their identities without consideration of their lived experiences. These practices allowed my participants to engage with productions of multiple social representations and visibilities of LGBT+ Muslims and to seek out identifiable experiences and people which integrate the prosaic with the seemingly exceptional. Such practices weave together different notions of the routine with infusions of meaning that relate to broader processes and relations of power and community development in the sense that they invoke renewed awareness of the concept of 'ummah' and the importance of engaging with other Muslims in the context of Islam, while concurrently disrupting the regulations that normative conceptualisations of the ummah can produce. Their sense of 'ummah' might be emplaced within particular sites and groups but is evidently informed by wider relations of homophobia within different Muslim societies, and how this intersects and operates with other systems demonstrates the 'relatedness' (Valentine et al., 2013b) of how power works across different scales where religion and homosexuality are concerned. The accounts above show an everyday response to these multi-scalar discourses and invisibilities that can be slowly pushed back against within online and group spaces.

Aligning themselves with other LGBT+ Muslims is clearly vital for planting the seeds that act as more therapeutic retorts to the injurious religious, community and secular LGBT+ discourses and the concomitant self-scrutiny that can characterise the experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims. Visibility online can create and act as a catalyst for changes in the representation and experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims. These descriptions refocus attention to how such groups and spaces online generate complex associations that may be ordinarily seen as remote from urban political sites and struggles that have historically shaped LGBT+ activism. However, we are reminded that 'there are no spaces that sit outside of sexual politics' (Johnston and Longhurst, 2010: 3) and such online contexts have become increasingly normalised and engaged

with as political spaces (Usher and Morrison, 2010). Ali, Junaid and Zara demonstrate how these practices are ones that are defined by a sense of limited representation, recognition and understanding; plainly political and intersectional struggles thus, given they are attempts that depart from the perceptions of the impossible LGBT+ British Muslim.

I now want to include experiences that demonstrate how some online connections extended to offline spaces and groups, thus embedding the former within the latter and vice-versa, demonstrating the hybridity and relationality of such contexts (Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2016). While using the internet for alternative forms of finding and expressing their identities was shaped by both weakening senses of belonging to institutional religious spaces and curious motivations surrounding the possibilities of affirming their religious and sexual identities, these also influenced how some LGBT+ Muslims engaged with their identities in the form of attending LGBT+ Muslim groups in offline spaces:

> *Meeting up with people through* [Muslim LGBT+ group] *was fab. It was great to put a face to a name and to the people you're talking to, obviously you add each other on Facebook, but that's not the same as meeting up with what become friends face-to-face* (Noreen, 29, lesbian)

> *It sounds ridiculous and I don't know what my expectations were, but it was just so normal. There were discussions of Islam, but you didn't have to listen or engage if you didn't want to, I've always been in and out of those* (Junaid, 27, gay)

> *When I said that maybe for white gay people they wouldn't be able to understand that you can't just reject Islam, that it's this whole part of you…you get that when you go to these meet-ups, there's the understanding and support* (Diya, 22, gay)

Noreen, Junaid and Diya speak of the ability of online and offline networks to co-constitutively build connections and the importance of the visibility and representations of previously ignored groups (Dhaenens, 2012). Such engagements resist perceptions of the conformity and ritualistic nature of religious communities, instead demonstrating their active role in mobilising distinct practices of gaining religious and social capital. The significance of sociability is noticeable and enables the communication of progressive values and inclusivity. It is not that these are inherently more cosmopolitan spaces of Islamic religiosity and expression, for this would create a division between

the institutionalised and the personal here, rather than considering their intersections and relationalities (Ammerman, 2014), but more that such spaces demonstrate the need to attend to diverse spaces and indices of religious engagement, rather than simply seeing these as solely characterised by worship/belief in formal religious contexts and practices (McGuire, 2008). The presence of other LGBT+ Muslims allows for the emergence of friendship and activism (however loose this may be) that challenges the rhetoric of the incompatibility of intersecting LGBT+, Muslim, Asian and British identities (Yip, 2008; Siraj, 2016). Positive exchanges inculcated in these spaces, motivated by prior online communications, indicate the evolution- if not quite the transformation- of LGBT+ Muslim visibility, representation and community. Relating to Islam and other LGBT+ Muslims thus becomes a way to develop multiplicities of being Muslim in the face of regulation, discrimination and condemnation. These practices of attending LGBT+ Muslim group events are vital for LGBT+ British Muslims here to connect and belong, while consciously recognising and attempting to transform the social conditions that have caused the attritional atmospheres conducive to the regulation of their sexualities.

Such moments and interactions of sociality verge towards the conditioning of deessentialising religion as a totalising identity (Ammerman, 2014). This is because they demonstrate an approach to religious subjectivities that demystify the abnormality of the religiously-engaged LGBT+ person (Yip and Page, 2013) and show how they make themselves and their distinct religiosities visible (Tse, 2014), as they intersect with institutionalised Islam but also individualised and democratised forms of developing an understanding of Islam and their sexualities. Contrary to representations of LGBT+ Muslims that might position them as being caught betwixt and between the crossfires of religion and sexuality (Sabsay, 2012), those above and other group members progress towards more inclusive and relieving spaces and dialogues in concert with one another. Shared histories of dogmatic suffering are re-energised to lead to a convergence of religious critique and reattachments (of friendships and religious affiliations) that produce the legitimacies of their subjectivities and expressions of these, becoming recursive repertoires that legitimate the articulation and performance of their identities. Efforts to participate in collective examinations of their identities in respect of Islam, ethnic minority cultures, and the whiteness and secularity of mainstream LGBT+ cultures and sites, these spaces of commonality are a locus for offering members stages and encounters to attune themselves with

resources and dialogues that broaden the understandings of the forms of cultural and religious power that have tended to constrain their flourishing.

Dislocating religious heteronormativity and secular forms of being LGBT+ as pillars of vested sexual truths that serve to exclude, commitments to their religious and sexual identities attend to the virtues of both collective and personal responsibility and action. Individual online pursuits to question their exclusions within Islam can help galvanise the challenge towards reworking their inclusion within specific sites and more lateral relations of power and religious citizenship than are normally constituted and composed of within official spaces of Islam. Regardless of whether they are 'out and proud', these relations and critiques infer agency that should be recognised as contesting the parochialism of liberal coming out models and question 'what desires, other than freedom, do people live by' (Mahmood cited in Shaikh, 2007: 151). The traditional theological weight entrusted within Islamic clergy can remain rather static but interfacing the myopic lens of heteronormativity is the transformative potential of affirming dialogic interactions and groups that anticipate multiple questions, both positive and negative, and transition members through a labyrinth of religious questions and moral statuses, not necessarily resulting in 'outing' themselves, but demonstrating the situatedness of their responses to intersectional vulnerabilities. These online and offline quests and encounters for alternative truths and affirmations are rooted in everyday activities that attend to diversifying definitions and understandings of religiosity and practices.

However, despite highlighting the value of the relational practices and questions that my participants expressed here, their actualities in shaping more traditional spheres of belief and practice are still yet to be realised in some respects; theological evolution with regards to Islam and LGBT+ communities is rather ponderous even 14 years from Yip's (2005) contention of the lack of theologically affirming LGBT+ support within Islam (c.f Kugle, 2010; Ali, 2016). Thus, I am wary of over-romanticising inclusive LGBT+ Muslim spaces (online and offline) for accentuating positive exchanges and transformations of religious doctrine and discourse in normative spheres of Islam. Even though this effectuates meaningful change in the lives of LGBT+ British Muslims, the orthodoxies of heterosexism still present consistent challenges as do the intersections of other inequalities and contexts. In this respect, relations between online-offline spaces can be troublesome and testing territories too and it is to this end

that the next section seeks to uncover and understand some of these complex relationships.

6.5.3 Exclusions of online and offline communications and spaces

I have presented narratives and understandings of how the internet can act as a resource for LGBT+ British Muslims to form understandings of faith and social and religious environments, with its relative anonymity (Friedman, 2007; Magee et al., 2012) and everyday accessibility (Livingston, 2008; Graham, 2013) proving convenient for reseach and developing relationships. Yet, brokering interchange and affirmation with others also had drawbacks related to the extent to which this perception of a digital LGBT+ Muslim citizenship could materialise in the form of physically attending events for some of the participants. This was related to whether they had disclosed their sexualities or not for some, while others who had an appetite for meeting up with these groups in physical spaces were unable to do so for reasons related to socio-economic background, as well as the pertinence of coming from cities with large ethnic minority populations:

> *I find it hard to have the money to go out and actually meet-up sometimes; I don't pay rent, but my job pays shit and it's difficult when you know it's a fancy lunch that you're meeting up for, or a dinner…Transport for London* (TfL) *is a constant spend, I feel as if that's what half my wages go on* (Siddique, 26, gay)

> *As much as I want to meet up, I can't always afford to go travel and there's no resources for them to pay for you either* (Diya, 22, gay)

> *I don't want to be seen with other Asian men, some of whom are clearly gay and camp… I'd like to join up with people I've spoken to but it's always in central* [home city]…*there are, well I know too many apne* [own people] *there to go…I would go if they didn't always meet up in* [home city] (Raif, 28, bisexual)

The surfacing of the cost of travel in the accounts of Siddique and Diya is indicative of exclusions that LGBT+ people from working-class backgrounds contend with and that can act as barriers to inclusion and feeling part of LGBT+ communities (Taylor, 2008). Complicating the intersections of faith, sexuality and the opportunities for coalitional politics of LGBT+ Muslim activism are the financial requirements to attend group events that limit mobility here and make the possibilities of journeys towards community more difficult. The suggestion that TfL is a constant expenditure on his bank statement indicates Siddique is limited in his capacity to travel to where some of

these group meet-ups have taken place. Similarly, Diya's status as a university student from a working-class socio-economic background (something he self-identified as on the demographic questionnaire form) means train travel is not readily accessible to him and he has to question where these events are held. So, in these instances, mobility and attendance are constrained by financial concerns for Siddique and Diya but are not divorced from their online engagements. This is because the relationalities of these online-offline geographies modulate power vis-à-vis the hopeful imaginaries of offline network and their occasional lack of materialisation in urban space, demonstrating the spatial stretchings of these relations that are contingent on mobility.

Furthermore, Raif's wariness of other Asian bodies in his home city means he feels it is difficult for him to interact with other LGBT+ Muslim group members. Here, encounters with other "*other Asian men*" are limited because of their effeminate bodies, as well as the events being organised where he knows "*too many apne*". The disciplining heterosexual gaze of the Asian community is invoked again- as seen across 4.6.3 (pp.97-99), 4.6.5 (pp.103-105) and 5.4.3 (pp.132-134) - and means he feels unable to attend, constraining the accessibility of these spaces where they are determined as unsafe and potentially suspicious. Thus, fear of 'similar' bodies because of their close proximities is expressed and affects the particular experiences of attending LGBT+ Muslim events, while producing norms of space simultaneously. As Valentine et al. (2010) highlight, events that may be characterised by 'risk' are informative material contexts for exploring how the intersectionality of power relations work and are mediated. Notions of risk have been prevalent across the thesis, as referenced above, but also where my participants have been engaged with as risky bodies subject to racism or anticipations of these (5.5.2, pp. 139-143) and through the questionings of whiteness and space, and their bodies out of place (5.5.1, pp.135-137). Here, it is the potential, expressed in different contexts, in these events that brings to life the relations of difference and inequality. For Siddique and Diya, precarious finances materialise immobility while, in Raif's account, the risky bodies of those he does not want to be seen with lay bare the future potential for outing those identities and communications he develops in online contexts. The urban materialisation of these relations and inequalities demonstrate how LGBT+ mobility is shaped by place and identities, and vice-versa (Gorman-Murray and Nash, 2016), and offer understandings as to the limits of online-offline spatial relations, where the power/knowledge nexus becomes materialised according to spatial contexts (Brown, 2000).

Interactions between online-offline sites of LGBT+ Muslim group connections and encounters were also evidenced through exploring who had access to the knowledge of the physical locations of meet-ups. It was remarked that many group events did not publically advertise the locations of these for what was seen as a method of protecting members:

> *Nobody knows unless you sign up to the event, which makes it a bit safer…I wouldn't want other Asians to know that these groups exist* (Yassar, 28, gay)

> *You only find out where the meet is taking place if you're confirmed as going…* (Junaid, 27, gay)

Deploying a strategic measure to attempt to secure privacy and protection, this method of only revealing location meet-ups to those who signed up may also potentially have drawbacks if other LGBT+ Muslims are reluctant to sign up to mailing lists etc., thus limiting their accessibility to these spaces. The liminal closet that is formed is an example of how discourses and power connect in different spatial and social contexts to characterise the experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims, as shown across the thesis. The evident precarity for some group members necessitated concealing the location of physical events and the hybrid, multi-scalar space of the closet- somewhat in limbo- folded in the futurity of risk and the mediation of the 'anonymity' of online contexts, while destabilising the partitionings of offline and offline sites. The itinerant negotiations of closeting discourses and the careful management of revealing locations to limit potentially negative interactions show how online interactions are not disembodied but rather that such technologies involve a mesh of bodies, discourses, materials and values (Kinsley, 2014), as well as time and space that relationally produce those different spatial contexts and the mediation of, or extensions and retractions, of power.

As seen, the hybrid geographies of online-offline communications within LGBT+ Muslim groups and experiences can spur affirmation while simultaneously closeting, in terms of their materialisation and habits. The relational interactions between online- offline, private-public, and digital-material are drawn out and conditioned according to what may be felt as compelled, or co-opted, ethno-religious structures limiting their sexualities. Taking in these complex geometries of power (Massey, 2005) necessitates adapting the production of space befitting the cultural requirements across different

contexts and seeing both group organisers and my participants as competent actors in the face of precipitating risky encounters. These developments, however cognisant of the dangers of outing members, do demonstrate the agentic negotiations and mediations of the ills of theological appropriations and the censorious dimensions of communities that reject public affirmations or displays of LGBT+ British Muslim identities and such practices of protecting members, while simultaneously platforming their interactions, highlight the creative potential of closet spaces that are in the process of being negotiated according to their different contexts (Brown, 2000). These politics and tensions demonstrate the controversial interconnected moral geographies of sexuality and its debates that transcend geographic scales (Sadgrove et al., 2012; Valentine et al., 2013)- in these stances, of the internet, the body and the urban- and that must be accounted for in order to shape the empowering of LGBT+ British Muslims.

As mentioned in 3.3.1 (pp.53-54), Twitter accounts were useful as a method of accessing LGBT+ British Muslims for the purposes of research recruitment. Though some participants were happy to include their sexual identities within their profile biographies, others restricted who could see their biographies to only their followers. This hypothetical anonymity (Friedman, 2007; Magee et al., 2012) helped shelter LGBT+ British Muslims and allowed them to explore different interpretations and dialogues of Islamic sexual ethics, for instance in the form of restricting Twitter followers, seeking different theological interpretations or building online networks. However, anonymity in online spaces also had shortcomings for LGBT+ Muslims in respect of engaging with homophobic Muslims online. For Yassar, Junaid and Sofia, attempts to engage in online discussions with other Muslims sometimes had the effects of contestations and outright homophobia, informed by supposedly institutionalised beliefs over the inerrancy of homosexuality and Islam:

> *I'll try and show them what they're saying is so dogmatic and homophobic 'Do you think that God, is your God that small that he nitpicks about these things?' They only come back with 'This is what God says', there are people that are firm believers in nothing else other than 'This is what God says'. They don't want to think about it, they don't want to use their minds, they attack you for who you are* (Yassar, 28, gay)

They'll try and show you evidence for what they're saying but they're not receptive to the alternative. They tell you you're a sinner, it's not natural, you can't be a proper Muslim if you're gay (Junaid, 27, gay)

I've often been told we don't want your sort in Islam, we don't want you, you're not a proper Muslim, they see that you're gay and they tell you stubbornly 'you never were a proper Muslim' (Sofia, 28, lesbian)

Rebuke of the permissibility of their sexualities within Islam rehearses familiar scripts of heterosexist Islamic networks, particularly where the presumptions of the mutual exclusivities of Islam and LGBT+ identities that Junaid and Sofia describe in online arguments complement the experiences of Jahangir and Zara in face-to-face encounters (pp.171-172) Patently, their disclosures and projections of liberal Islamic hermeneutics of sexuality are portrayed as dubious and 'going against the established rules laid down by religion' (Hooghe et al., 2010: 62). These performances implicitly monitor an outwardly coherent framework of Islamic sexual ethics and discourses, through which people identifying as LGBT+ Muslims are positioned as 'others' (Siraj, 2009). Qualifying them as going against Islam paints the participants as outsiders, offering an essentalised sense of Islam that demonstrates one-dimensional thinking in respect of considering the multiplicities of how people can be Muslim. Simultaneously, the accounts highlight the potential dangers of online spaces and communications where online practices of bullying and harassment may amplify existing stereotypes and prejudices, and work as 'disciplinary rhetorics' (Cole, 2015). While Muslims online can experience harsh instances of online Islamophobia (Awan, 2014; Ekman, 2015), my participants outline how their individualised pursuits are subject to authoritative online Muslim voices that seek to control, so the context of online communications problematise their practices of affirmation and highlight the interconnected geographies of 'wounding' (Philo, 2005) that make precarious the heterogeneity of religious understandings and practices (McGuire, 2008).

The agency in speaking out and attempting to impart more inclusive interpretations of Islam's stances on non-heteroexuality is mediated by the online encounters of suspicion and rebuke, supposedly supported by "*evidence*". Competing stances demonstrate online spaces as crucial performative sites where the negotiations and contestations over Muslim identities are contextualised through 'networks of control' (Campbell, 2004: 94-95) that signify complexity and the different social and spatial contexts in which the rhetoric of the impermissible LGBT+ Muslim is produced and

experienced. However, the aims of Yassar and Junaid to offer their own interpretations highlight that despite what online Muslim homophobes might truculently propose 'there is also no ideal or authentic way of living an identity' (Dhamoon, 2011: 233) and that the (re)productions of power evidenced in these online encounters are emblematic of how relations of oppression are both ordered and contested. Though the assertions by Yassar and Junaid take place in online contexts, their attempts to resists the erasures of their identities and practices foster the possibilities for disruptive critiques of their exclusions.

Sustaining the online encounters of intolerance are the repetitious rhetorics and binaries- morality and immorality, the good and the bad Muslim- that not only constitute regulations of sexualities, but constantly reproduce hierarchies as to how different Muslims are viewed by others through the normative, established values of sexuality. That those who participated in the research may be ordered as undoing these through their questioning of the supposed word of God means they are cast as outsiders and such attitudes that question the integrity of LGBT+ Muslims seek to limit their representation and visible performances of Islam, while, at the same time, demobilising heterosexual Muslim support for their LGBT+ counterparts. The binary presentations are expedient for the purposes of upholding heterosexist and homophobic networks and pejoratively and unjustly, in the eyes of the participants, demarcating the entrenched ways of living and being Muslims that can be amplified and distorted online (Bunt, 2009). However, my participants offering their interpretations are not simply acts of nothing more than cathartic melodies for the predestined, doomed LGBT+ Muslim. Rather, these practices of affirmation and hope, however fractured their interactions, can be interpreted as subliminally questioning the institutionalised perspectives on absolution and regulation because they contest the control mechanism of silence of sexuality within formal spaces of Islam, which work to suffuse heterosexist attitudes. Accordingly, these commitments reflect their agency as constructing religiosity (Avishai, 2008), without necessarily seeking a corrective resolution of these interactions with regards to affecting change across formal spaces of Islam.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to highlight the different ways in which LGBT+ British Muslims have maintained links with Islam or turned to it in such ways that highlight how religion can persevere in the lives of LGBT+ people, despite the typecasting of sexual

minorities as decidedly secular (Wilcox, 2002; Yip, 2018). Demonstrating the value of empirical attention to the grounding of Islamic discourses, negotiations of institutional spaces, and mediations of both lived intolerance and practices of lived religion in online contexts, the chapter has highlighted the conditional and complicated convergences of diverse relations of Muslims subjectivities that are utilised to fashion meaning-making and inclusive spaces and dialogues for LGBT+ British Muslims.

I first explored how they negotiated the institutional space of the mosque and the different interpretations and experiences of these, before highlighting how they faced exclusions in less official spaces of religion, but ones that were informed by normative, institutional discourses on Islamic sexual ethics. Cognisant of increasing awareness of their sexual minority statuses as participants reached adolescent stages, the space of the mosque began to problematise religious belonging for some because of the gendered and sexual expectancies and silences of institutional discourses and spaces. Others, however, saw attendance at the mosque as a personal endeavour that contested the theological and ethno-religious barriers of exclusion. Both groups essentially grappled with heteronormative discourses and its spatialities, but for those moving away from the mosque, these were shaped by, and embedded, within regimented practices and expectations transmitted by clergy. Other contexts such as Islamic classes and Islamic societies also had the potential to mark LGBT+ British Muslims as out of place through the propagation of naïve understandings of sexuality within Islam and a lack of dialogue- due to what participants saw as a lack of comprehension of the Qur'an, as well as the unfiltered and unquestioned socialisation of popular sexual discourses within Islam. However, LGBT+ British Muslims do not simply consume these spaces and discourses of intolerance; they demonstrated assertiveness and in many respects by questioning the gendered inequalities, highlighting personal relationships with Islam, questioning the teachings and understandings of the Qur'an and encouraging the questioning of the sexual moralities espoused through normative teachings by urging more sophisticated discussions. Thus, though a lived religion approach has been taken that demonstrates religion as lived out in everyday contexts through practices that may not seem religious, it is imperative to highlight that lay religiosities are shaped by institutional spaces, and their practices demonstrate a sense of agency by religious doing (Avishai, 2008).

The section on seeking and developing online and offline spaces and affirmations demonstrated the contingent nature of in/exclusions of religious discourse and difference, contextualised through rather banal practices of using the internet to question and form alliances. The value of online contexts for religious practice was stressed as central to shaping more dialogic and affirming hermeunetics of Islamic theology, highlighting how technology (Kong, 2010) and the internet in particular (Campbell, 2004; Shelton, Zook and Graham, 2012) has been increasingly used for religious expression and developing religiosity. Though such practices may not be institutionally sanctioned (Ammerman, 2014), they demonstrate how everyday practices are helpful to frame more nuanced understandings of religion (McGuire, 2008) Many of the participants sought to explore affirming interpretations of their sexualities within Islam that contested normative lay understandings and emboldened renewed affiliations and attachments to Islam that went against popular representations of irreligious LGBT+ individuals (Yip, 2018). Such searches and discoveries of more progressive understandings also enabled participants to engage in debates with other Muslims in a similar boat. This empowered them to build networks of community online; for others, these also materialised in offline networks and spaces, though there were also exclusions around these, based upon class and geography, as well as participants who had to deal with homophobic discourses online from heterosexual Muslims. The use of the internet to challenge religious authorities, enact new discourses, and build social networks that engaged religious identities is an example of how an everyday practice sustains religiosities and can be used in a positive way for non-heterosexual Muslims to consider their sexuality. Though useful, I also demonstrated the relational geographies of such practices in order to show that such practices demonstrated strategic agency in order to negotiate the intersections of different relations of power that manifested in both online and offline spaces, and their hybrid contexts.

Altogether, this chapter has highlighted the positive values of exploring the grounding of Islam in an everyday, banal context for LGBT+ British Muslims. Though the preeminent sexual discourses and lived relations of Muslim communities are largely condemnatory of their sexual identities and practices, LGBT+ British Muslims develop interpretations and spaces through which they can negotiate their seemingly conflicting identities and the social and religious contexts that complicate belonging. Offering these findings forward, they demonstrate the multiplicities of being Muslim and LGBT+

but without adhering to the norms or linearities of 'coming out'. A lived religion undertaking that pays attention to their everyday practices of religion demonstrates the value of these for developing meaning and resisting the processes, practices and structures that work to subjugate LGBT+ British Muslims to spaces of otherness.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

My thesis set out to provide an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims. I explored the interconnected spatial and social contexts of their lives in order to grasp the complexities of LGBT+ British Muslim subjectivities, while simultaneously seeking to address the invisibilities and misrepresentations that pervade within discourses of Muslim cultures and sexual diversity. By offering grounded openings into the lived realities of LGBT+ British Muslims through an analysis of the intersections of their minority and marginalised sexual, religious and ethnic identities, I have highlighted the complexities and relationalities of negotiating exclusion and affirming different interpretations and registers of belonging. I have reflected upon how discourses and narratives of Islam and sexuality influence the closeting and disclosure of their sexual identities, as well as how cultural values and expectations mediate such experiences, and how these experiences shape, and are shaped by, different spaces and scales. Furthermore, I presented examples as to how urban encounters regulate perceptions of belonging at different scales for LGBT+ British Muslims with respect to their communities of ethnic heritage and the contemporary British nation. Finally, I sought to highlight that despite harsh theological doctrine-as well as the general uptake of it by mainstream British Muslim communities-and stereotypical representations of contemporary LGBT+ identities as fundamentally secular, LGBT+ British Muslims develop everyday and educational practices for reconciling their minority religious and sexual identities that dispute beliefs about the mutual exclusivities of sexual diversity and Muslim cultures.

The thesis is theoretically informed by and positioned within a postcolonial feminist framework of intersectionality that helps situate my participants' lived experiences with respect to the social, cultural and political contexts of their identities and biographies, and attends to how they work to modulate relations across different domains of power. Throughout the thesis I have sought to explore how different aspects of their lives as sexual, ethnic and religious minorities in contemporary Britain emerge to influence and shape their experiences. My research therefore is firmly located within ongoing British postcolonial legacies, difficulties of national, religious, sexual and ethnic belonging for LGBT+ Muslims. I have offered understandings of the interconnected different social, political, spatial and historical contexts and how they influence the shaping of the lived

experiences of my participants. By doing so, I have responded to conspicuous gaps within the sub-fields of geographies of religion and geographies of sexualities and built upon the extant work on LGBT+ Muslims. In my final chapter, I provide some closing considerations and summarise the key arguments developed throughout my three empirical chapters. Firstly, I present chapter summaries for the first three chapters and then respond to the research questions noted in chapter one, through which I effectively weave together summaries of the empirical chapters. I then discuss my contributions to geographic literature before considering some limitations of my work and point towards directions for future related research.

7.2 Chapter summaries and responding to the research questions

The first chapter of the thesis reflected on the LGBT+ education in primary schools row through which we have seen how heterosexual Muslims have positioned LGBT+ sexualities as immoral for Muslims and the missing accounts of LGBT+ Muslims within many of the initial media accounts and opinions (BBC, 2019a; 2019b). I reflected on such absences as a more general invisibility of LGBT+ Muslims within the national picture. I then introduced the research questions which can also be seen below before providing a review of key strands of literature. Much of the existing research on LGBT+ Muslims in the West has provided reflections on how LGBT+ Muslims experience conflicting identities, manage relationships with family members and come to terms with their identities (Minwalla et al., 2005; Yip, 2008; Yip and Khalid, 2010; Jaspal, 2012; Siraj, 2016). I suggested geographic interpretations of their lives and an awareness of the intersectionality of these issues beyond a cursory nod would add to this developing literature. Geographic work on Muslims was then explored and I reviewed the flow of this literature as primarily focused on gendered Muslim identities (Dwyer, 2000; Hopkins, 2008a; Phillips, 2009; Mohammad, 2015), but with little recourse to sexualities, as well as work on encounters and Islamophobia to demonstrate how these shape belonging and inclusion (Listerborn, 2015; McGinty, 2018; Hopkins, 2019b; Najib and Hopkins, 2019). This helped to draw attention to the empirical absence of LGBT+ Muslims in geographic work on Muslims within the sub-field of geographies of religion. As a result, and developing on work at the intersections of geographies of religion and geographies of sexualities on homosexuality debates in Anglicanism (Valentine et al., 2010; Vanderbeck et al., 2011; Andersson et al., 2012), I tied up these literatures in respect of how they opened up the thesis and where the thesis sits.

In chapter two, I provided a review of the value of a theoretical framework of postcolonial intersectionality to attend to the lives of LGBT+ British Muslims (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins and Bilge, 2016; Mollett and Faria, 2018). A brief history of black feminist thought as a precursor to intersectionality was offered to highlight the relationality inherent in early black feminist thinking and thinking through the genealogy of intersectional thinking long before its coining. I initially highlighted how Black American slaves sought to highlight the need to destabilise concepts of 'womanhood' to mark how the simultaneity of different oppressive systems complicated their lives before looking at how early black feminist thinking, advocating standpoint theory and inclusivity, developed the groundwork for Crenshaw (1989; 1991) to coin intersectionality. Key principles of intersectionality were then highlighted (Collins and Bilge, 2016) and I sought to consider how postcolonial feminist understandings could complement these to be applied to my analysis and understandings of contemporary LGBT+ British Muslim lives.

Before presenting the three empirical chapters, I reflected on the methodology of the project considering key practical and ethical issues across the whole research process. I reflected on the process of research design and the sampling techniques and correspondence that led to the collection of data. I justified the use of my 19 semi-structured interviews as I felt these allowed for flexibility while maintaining a conversational tone that would allow me to ask key questions gleaned from literature reviews and themes, as well as allowing participants the freedom to expand upon answers. I demonstrated how I found it difficult to recruit interviewees and the usefulness of Twitter to help communicate with potential and actual interviewees. I then discussed some of the ethical issues pertaining to anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent. Thinking about positionalities within the research process and encounter is also a key ethical issue and one which I sought to consider critically through considering some of my own motivations, identities, aims and biases, and some of the power relations around these that were negotiated both prior to interviews and within them. By highlighting these issues and the methodological process, I was able to provide the settings for the empirical chapters which I now summarise in relation to the research questions.

1) *How do LGBT+ British Muslims experience the upholding of heteronormative Islamic sexual discourses?*

My first research question sought to reflect on the lived experiences of Islamic sexual discourses and the spread and re-productions of these within my participants' religious and ethnic communities. My participants overwhelmingly reflected on these negatively, situating these influences as key to the regulation of their sexual identities. In order to grasp these experiences, I asked LGBT+ British Muslims key questions about what they felt were the preeminent sexual discourses or expectations within Islam, how their parents and family members perceived these and expected them to align with them, and the prospects of negotiating these. These posing questions were concerned with how their sexual identities might problematise normative Islamic sexual discourse and moralities, and with respect to how these widespread feelings within the religious and ethnic communities were established and consequently lived for my participants.

I found that LGBT+ British Muslims experience the heteronormativity of Islamic sexual discourse and expectations in ways that both iterate the impermissibility of their sexualities, as per the parameters of rejectionist stances towards non-heterosexuality, but also allow them to contest these given what they see as a lack of explicit condemnation as I suggest later. Concerning the former, Siraj (2009) argues that heterosexual Muslims and communities establish sexual identities, practices and relations outside of heterosexual marriage as deviant and unacceptable in Islam. According to my participants (pp.81-82), the story of Lot in the Qur'an is often understood to support the position that LGBT+ sexualities are impermissible within Islam and so LGBT+ identities and Muslim identities are proposed as mutually exclusive ones which LGBT+ Muslims must carefully navigate. Positioning LGBT+ sexualities as impermissible develops restrictive environments for LGBT+ British Muslims. The story of Lot was highlighted as a source that some of my participants felt denounced their sexualities because they interpreted the story in a similar fashion to normative readings and propagations of it which suggest that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah were punished because they engaged in homosexual activity and penetrative anal sex (El-Rouayheb, 2005; Habib, 2010). What this often led to was a sense of guilt and shame that meant some of my participants went through stages of seeing their religion and sexuality as incompatible. Such feelings were further intensified when participants sought to respond to these by invoking their sexualities in prayer because they saw their sexualities as sinful within the eyes of Allah. Strengthening this discourse of Islam as incompatible with LGBT+ sexualities were experiences within mosques. As seen across 6.3.4, encounters of intolerance towards

their sexualities also occurred within Islamic classes, Islamic societies and encounters with other Muslims.

These experiences revealed that LGBT+ British Muslims contend with harsh religious discourses that generally construe them as going against the teachings of Islam. Yet, how LGBT+ British Muslims respond to these are reflective of the ambiguity of Islam's stance on non-heterosexuality. My participants' experiences highlight that the consistent religious censuring they face are not Islamically preordained but continuously sustained by heterosexual Muslims- both lay and clergy. The expectations of heterosexual marriage loomed large in the regulation and closeting of their sexualities as highlighted across 4.6.4 (pp.99-103). Some of my participants who had engaged with heterosexual Muslim people online in order to relay different interpretations of their sexualities were met with rather cold and exclusionary messages that tended to reinforce LGBT+ Muslims as outside of the accepted Islamic canon, as seen in the case of Yassar, Junaid and Sofia (pp.191-192). In this respect, LGBT+ British Muslims experience heteronormative Islamic discourses in various different settings, situations and spaces. They deal with these in personal settings, with religious leaders and family, and with other Muslims who may rebuke their interpretations and so reiterate a heterosexist morality with regards to Islamic sexual ethics. These widely held notions of LGBT+ sexualities as not sanctioned within Islam demonstrates the harsh regulation of the sexualities of my participants. Though they responded to these in different ways and sought to reconcile them in order to renegotiate their identities and to 'hold on' to their faith, as I summarise later on, it seems LGBT+ British Muslims have to navigate repetitive concerns as to the impermissibility of their sexualities within Islam.

2) *How do LGBT+, Muslim and ethnic identities form experiences of being in 'the closet' for Muslims, and how does this shape, and is shaped by, spaces and processes of in/exclusion?*

This question overlaps with the first one and the arguments around the experiences of the heteronormativity of Islamic sexual discourse are of salience with regards to how LGBT+ British Muslims experienced being in the closet. This term is used to identify the concealment of sexuality for sexual minorities and highlights their oppressions (Sedgwick, 1990). LGBT+ British Muslims expressed several conflicting identities, ties and relations of power that structure their experiences of being sexual minorities.

These experiences highlight the lived intersectional contexts of their everyday lives and means disclosure of their sexualities are influenced by a range of intersecting oppressions. Power relations shaping homophobia within their religious and ethnic communities, racism and Islamophobia, expectations of gender conformity, and community cultural norms materialised in different settings and spaces and illustrate the complexities of their everyday lives. I showed this in the first instance across section 4.5 (pp.80-88) in respect of how LGBT+ British Muslims experienced a closeting of their sexualities with regards to how they interpreted Islamic sexual discourses. This caused some to feel that their sexualities were not commensurate with Islam, but others still validated their sexualities within Islamic discourse or scripture because the relative ambiguity and different interpretations meant they rejected simplistic exclusionary rhetoric. Though being in the closet is often seen to be a negative issue and 'the act of not coming out may be read as an abdication of responsibility' (Rasmussen, 2004: 146), being closeted can also shape rich practices and tactics that work to slowly contest the neat binaries imposed by representations of the closet and evolve the power relations inherent in the intersectional regulation of sexualities. My participants developed different interpretations of their sexualities that helped them to come to terms with these: seeing themselves as being made gay by Allah or part of Allah's will for Faisal and Sofia (pp.83-84); highlighting that it was interpretations by Muslim communities that were homophobic rather than it being an inherent component of Islam or Muslim subjectivity (p.169); questioning the context and interpretations of Lot for Daniyaal, Riyadh, Jahangir and Sofia (pp.85-86). These helped them to overcome the homophobia or intolerance espoused by various figures within their religious communities.

As section 4.6 (pp.88-105) highlighted, the closeting of their sexualities was informed by their ethnic identities and communities too. Cultural norms and practices within these intersected with religious censure. Expectations of marriage, cultural taboos of talking about sexuality, notions of izzat and the representations of LGBT+ identities as Western phenomena all complicate the sexual subjectivities of LGBT+ British Muslims. These demonstrated that LGBT+ Muslims do not only experience closeted sexualities because of a general heteronormative society, but ones marked by the intersections and relationalities of religious and intergenerational cultural forces. Preserving honour and good standing were earmarked as crucial even in the face of disclosing their sexualities- for some participants, this meant marriage was still recommended in order

to keep up a façade of heterosexuality. This performative notion of honour is deeply embedded within the views of British LGBT+ Muslims it seems, and the ties of family can work to entrench difficulties for them. Disclosure is, of course, one way of managing the closet but when this develops into a closet transplanted into the lives of family members it challenges the individualisation of coming out narratives which are predicated on Western models of LGBT+ sexualities and coming out. These are evidently the ones that matter for LGBT+ British Muslims, or are understood, because of the context of their lives in Britain. Yet, their experiences demonstrate a need to be more cognisant of the dense intersectional and intergenerational relations of power and love that weave across different cultural settings. It is not that LGBT+ Muslims are having to navigate between choosing to come out and leave their religious and ethnic communities, or not disclose their sexualities and live as repressed sexual beings, but these contexts intertwine in and out of their lives in different contexts and must be more carefully attended to. The heteronormativity of their ethnic cultures means disclosure can be limited but points to a requirement to consider how these intersect with broader processes that inhibit their sexualities.

The relations of power and knowledge that constitute the closet as a social phenomenon are also materialised in spaces and influenced by these- in this way, the closet can be conceptualised as socio-spatial (Brown, 2000). In different ways, the closets of LGBT+ British Muslims are contested relations of power that linked to different scales and spaces. One way of considering the closet is as an embodied form (Brown, 2000) and this was consistently brought up in the narratives of LGBT+ British Muslims with regards to policing the body and passing as straight through gendered performances of what they assumed signified heterosexuality (pp.105-108), as well as the conflicted desiring body for Diya, Junaid and Yassar (pp.108-110). The space of the family home was represented as a closeted space too in which sexualities, even heterosexualities, were not spoken of. Negotiating their closets digitally and the intersections of these in material spaces was a constructive way forward for LGBT+ British Muslims I spoke to (pp.111-114 and section 6.5, pp.174-193). Searching for different theological interpretations online, connecting with other LGBT+ Muslims both online and organising/attending subsequent offline meet-ups, debating their positions with heterosexual Muslims, and dating/finding sex through apps all helped LGBT+ Muslims negotiate the confines of the closet. These point to the increasing relevance of digital technology to negotiate sexual identities and demonstrate the mutually

constitutive, fluid relations of online/offline spaces. The endeavours of LGBT+ British Muslims to negotiate the inequalities and complexities of intersecting power relations highlight that despite the closet materialising in distinct spaces and forms and the intricate relationships of these, they are able to exercise power that warrants stricter analysis of 'spectacular expressions of resistance' (Pande, 2015: 182) as 'coming out' might commonly be characterised. LGBT+ British Muslims are not simply passive recipients of intersectional inequalities but work to reshape them where and how fit to suit their individual circumstances.

3) *In what ways do encounters shape perceptions of belonging to different communities for LGBT+ British Muslims?*

The work on encounters is now rather rich and a key strand of this literature has explored how difference and prejudice shape encounters and can emphasise, harden and rework power relations (Wilson, 2016). While some of this work is celebratory, or at the very least hopeful of the capacity of encounters to negotiate difference, Valentine (2008) reminds us to be wary of the romanticisation of these. LGBT+ British Muslims narrated rich experiences that highlight the value of everyday encounters for influencing belonging to different communities and thinking intersectionally about these. I have already highlighted in 4.6 (pp.88-105) the importance of family ties and protecting these with regards to maintaining izzat amongst the communities of ethnic heritage for the participants. Across section 5.4.1 (pp.127-130) my participants reflected on encounters with white British people while growing up and highlighted a lack of these outside of school spaces. While this was unfortunate for limiting understanding of other groups outside of institutionalised spaces, many participants also reflected that local spaces were beneficial for building social support and capital, and that familiarity and comfort was therefore fostered. This helped them feel attached towards their communities of ethnic heritage, but there were also issues with these that complicated belonging. Being wary of what they deemed to be a snooping community was also highlighted as limiting inclusivity with regards to having to pass as straight within the neighbourhood spaces of the local ethnic community of participants. Much of the literature on urban multicultural encounters is based on encounters of ethnic or racial difference; here, however, encounters with those ostensibly of the same ethnic background are also concerned with relationality in a different sense and the interlocking of different processes of inclusion and exclusion.

According to many of my participants, encounters with white others had the most effect for shaping belonging to the nation and claiming a sense of Britishness (pp.134-152). These narratives highlighted the racialisation of space, embodiment and British identity and the mutually constitutive relationships of these. Casual racialised transactions were often experienced in institutional spaces for many of my participants rather than explicitly racist incidents. Fleeting encounters of racialised difference were also remarked as rather common across the data; this everyday form of racism that Nayak (2017) argues is important to understand because of its tendency to implicitly whiten the nation was consistently reinforced as the most common type of racist incident. Islamophobic incidents were also fairly common and all of these experiences or types are rather disconcerting. They may only occur in a fleeting context, but the effects are clearly manifold for my participants. They question the claims of LGBT+ British Muslims to belong to Britain, racialise British identity as white, and demonstrate the multi-scalar relationships between the body, street, city and nation. However, these do not only have spatial dimensions, but temporal ones too for such encounters can yearn for a nostalgic Britishness synonymous with whiteness, while past experiences can shape perceptions and belonging and can problematise future visions or hopes.

However, despite such experiences which exclude LGBT+ British Muslims from claiming Britishness according to the perpetrators of these racist encounters, my participants assert their British identity, and largely want to and do belong. Emotional narratives from Noreen and Taimoor (p.146-147) highlight such assertions. A tense political context in which Islam, racialised others, and Brexit may complicate belonging. However, the contemporary cultural politics of exclusion do not fashion a desire to retreat away from claims to belonging to Britain. The country is at a tense point where Britishness is concerned and the racialisation of this can be seen to be a part of a treadmill of otherness, misidentifying non-whites from claiming to be British. This is part of a contested political legacy of colonialism, immigration and race (Gilroy, 2004; 2005), intersections of which are still relevant in postcolonial Britain and somewhat resuscitated in the current climate of Islamophobia and racialised debates about immigration and Brexit. The whiteness of Britishness is an issue here, where it is claimed that this is an integral feature of it. Claims to Britishness and Muslim identities contest the stances upheld by the racists in these encounters. Educating these in respect of asserting their identities is one small practice of engaging in a somewhat

convoluted cultural transaction but can help to develop belonging and reiterate different aspects of this.

4) *How do LGBT+ British Muslims practice religion to reconcile marginalised identities and the discriminations they face?*

My final research question sought to unpack and understand if and how LGBT+ British Muslims practiced Islam in the face of other Muslims upholding heteronormative sexual discourses. Despite the exclusions and marginalisation that LGBT+ British Muslims face, many were steadfast in 'holding on' to a religious identity and maintained practices of faith in the face of intersectional oppression and subjugation. This is consistent with the literature on LGBT+ Muslims (Rouhani, 2007 Yip, 2008; Yip and Khalid, 2010; Siraj, 2016) and highlights that despite popular belief, many LGBT+ Muslims do not necessarily see their faith and sexuality as discordant. My findings in relation to question one overlap with my response here given that the normative sexual framework for Muslims is that of heterosexual marriage (Bouhdiba, 1998). LGBT+ British Muslims negotiate the strict regulations of their sexualities by using Islamic scripture and grounding religiosity in everyday practices rather than strict adherence to the rules or norms laid out, or by consistent attendance in the mosque. They often sought to carve out niche spaces and beliefs that worked to affirm and maintain their identities.

Of course, the regulation and closeting of their sexualities was informed by strict discourses of Islamic sexual morals and the lived realities of the power relations they shaped in respect of space and interpersonal encounters. As we have seen, the story of Lot is used to rebuke homosexuality; imams and religious figures are not particularly accepting of sexualities deviating from heterosexuality given participants were told to supplicate and fast; other lay Muslims consistently sought to undermine LGBT+ Muslims' claims to being Muslim; family members upheld heteronormative worldviews. This points to a harsh theological and institutionalised terrain that worked to make LGBT+ British Muslims consider their places within Islam and for many these were initially considered as sinful and not permissible. However, over time, efforts to scrutinise the Qur'an and the doctrines established by other Muslims meant my participants were able to recast their identities away from the heteronormative and often homophobic discourses and positioning espoused.

This is important because it gave my participants important spaces to reflect upon their sexualities in more positive lights. Seeing their sexualities as products of Allah was helpful for them and allowed them to develop more spiritual forms of religiosity that distinguished themselves from the institutionalised efforts and thoughts laid bare within mainstream Islam. This is not to say that organised Islam suddenly became unimportant but that it helped inform their grounded practices and intersected with these in different contexts. The religious space of the mosque could be interpreted in new lights (pp.164-168)- for some this meant moving away from it because they were uncomfortable with what they perceived to be a homophobic congregation, but for others, the mosque, despite being a public religious space, was altogether shaped either differently by rebuking homophobic interpretations of their sexualities or simply through repetitive actions that helped them to maintain faith there.

Overwhelmingly, my participants spoke of the importance of online spaces that helped them to develop new interpretations of their sexualities and Islam's stance on them, as well as for communicating with other LGBT+ Muslims (pp. 174-188). Whether through searching for affirmative or alternative literature on Islam's stance on LGBT+ sexualities or engaging with LGBT+ Muslims or LGBT+ Muslim support groups, the blend of the digital, the spiritual and the material is important in the context of their lives and how they seek to reconcile what are marginalised identities. For LGBT+ Muslims like Noreen, Siddique and Adeel (p. 181), speaking to others in similar predicaments helped them to negotiate the institutionalised and widespread homophobic Islamic discourse while comforting them, whether 'in' or 'out' of the closet. It is clear therefore that LGBT+ British Muslims are rather dependent on digital spaces to help them across different aspects of their lives. However, despite the importance of finding spaces online in which to reinterpret literature and discourse, and communicate with other LGBT+ Muslims, there are limits to these. Siddique and Diya (p.188) spoke of being unable to afford travel to meet others on a consistent basis, while online communications can be rife with insensitive and bullying trolls across different platforms and media; LGBT+ Muslims faced some trolls for instance that scolded their newly found interpretations and attempts to engage in religious conversations (pp. 191-192). As well as these, for some LGBT+ Muslims the anonymity of the internet helped them to maintain privacy even in these endevaours for instance by locking their social media accounts as private or when plans to meet in offline spaces were only revealed within seemingly safe mailing lists.

Faith is sustained not necessarily by attendance to the mosque and public or institutionalised acts of piety, but by simple practices of everyday life. In this vein, while my participants may not, say, be part of organised Islam and adhere to the five pillars of Islam, they associate with being Muslim in diverse ways that mean they do not simply dismiss religion for it brings both meaning and support for them. Here though, it seems being a Muslim, or at least an LGBT+ British Muslim, means going beyond 'official' religion and conserving and strengthening different elements of faith, culture and sexuality. Altogether, these efforts to maintain a religious affiliation, however distinct from Islam, however distinct from institutionalised rhetoric, demonstrates how my participants contest power relations, and their moralities and materialities in incrementally gratifying ways that are at odds with normative representations of LGBT+ and religious identities (Yip, 2018), and this demonstrably helps them develop a sense of belonging.

7.3 Contributions

Having summarised the arguments of my thesis, I now emphasise its contributions to knowledge. As stated in the introduction (1.5, pp. 22-26), my thesis is situated at the intersections of geographies of religion and geographies of sexualities, and considerations of how the voices of individuals who identify as LGBT+ and are from a religious background- in this case, LGBT+ British Muslims- are often overlooked within both this academic context and more broadly within society. In terms of empirical contributions therefore, my thesis subtly sets about bridging this gap. Furthermore, while the work on LGBT+ Muslims within neighbouring disciplines (see 1.3, pp.8-13) has proved important for developing understandings of the lived experiences of LGBT+ Muslims, my thesis contributes to the limitations of this extant literature in relation to developing arguments based upon geographical understandings and a theoretical framework of postcolonial intersectionality in order to situate the contemporaneity of experiences of British LGBT+ Muslims within intersecting social, political, spatial, cultural and historical contexts.

My thesis adds to the developing work on LGBT+ Muslims in the west in disciplines such as psychology and sociology. It does this by incorporating geographical analyses and framing these through a postcolonial intersectional analysis. This is important because the extant work on LGBT+ Muslims largely focuses on individuals and identity processes. My thesis has sought to develop broader understandings of the social and

political contexts too and where fit, consider the histories of these as linked to the contemporary postcolonial situation where the racialisation of religion, otherness of Islam and the views of homosexuality as Western culture seep into the lives of LGBT+ British Muslims. An intersectional approach is important because it highlights the mutuality of relations, inequality, complexity and context and demonstrates how these work in everyday life for minoritised people (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins and Bilge, 2016). Both black and postcolonial feminists have highlighted the importance of seemingly ordinary contexts and reworkings of power in order to do away with a fetishisation of grand narratives of contestation that are not always applicable to the lives of people engaged in intersectional struggles (Mahmood, 2005; Avishai, 2008; Pande, 2015; Mollet and Faria, 2018). By applying such a framework to the existing literature on LGBT+ Muslims, and through geographic perspectives, I have demonstrated the importance of socio-spatial relationships and realities of these to show how relations of power shift and are negotiated. Revealing the closet, encounters and living religion online through a multiplicity of scales and their wider social, political and historical contexts can help reframe common-sense representations and understandings in order to reveal complexity and relationality that reflect the complicated lives people lead.

7.3.1 Geographies of religion and geographies of sexualities

My thesis develops understandings of the lived experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims by analysing these from a geographic angle. This is important because it offers alternatives to discourses about LGBT+ Muslims that see them as incompatible with the Islam and the attendant cultures and moralities around sex and minority sexualities (Siraj, 2009). The thesis argues that geographic research on LGBT+ Muslims is largely absent (cf. Rouhani, 2007) which reflects the lack of work on the intersections of religion and sexuality (Brown, 2012). It contributes to filling this empirical gap by paying close attention to how the sexualities of LGBT+ British Muslims are regulated and closeted and the spatial dynamics of these, as well as exploring the socio-spatial relationships of practices of lived religion, particularly in online contexts which raise questions about the relationships between online-offline worlds, bodies and regulations (Graham, 2013; Kinsley, 2014). The importance of encounters for regulating belonging at different scales and to different communities also contributes to geographic work. Interestingly, the sexual identities of my participants was rarely spoken of as important within these encounters of difference, highlighting the

importance of embodied intersectionality, where the embodied closet, as one important scale of it, may be able to conceal sexuality in fleeting encounters, but because of racialised assumptions of Islam and the race or ethnicity of participants that are not so 'hidden', questions and assertions over their belonging can be practiced by perpetrators.

The focus on relationships between society and space and the scalar dimensions or aspects of these reveal the importance of thinking geographically about the lives of LGBT+ British Muslims. Across the thesis, the different spaces that LGBT+ Muslims negotiate everyday life reveal different experiences of regulation, encounter, belonging and resistance to the power relations that are co-constitutively knitted together in these relationships. Yet, perhaps as an important issue about the value of thinking geographically is that sometimes perhaps space and place do not matter. Of course, these shape particular relations and circumstances, but as revealed in the three empirical chapters, often some of the key issues of LGBT+ British Muslim lives and the ties that bind transcend space and place, and speak more to a multi-scalar analysis. For instance, the closet shows itself intensely in different circumstances even when not naming as such, while accounts of encounters reveal the networks of scales that regulate belonging. This thesis therefore helps build upon the geographic work on Muslims at the intersections of geographies of sexualities and religion. In some respects, aspects of the lives of LGBT+ British Muslims have much in common with their heterosexual British Muslim counterparts as seen across much of the encounters chapter, yet the geographies of the closet and emplacements of homophobic discourse in official spaces of Islam that helped inform the particular geographies of online Islam reveal differences and tensions with these.

7.3.2 The closet and LGBT+ British Muslims

I also contribute to developing an inherently intersectional understanding of the closet and the problems with the teleology that this model can sometimes assume (Tucker, 2009). My participants used the term 'the closet' to understand the regulation and concealment of their sexualities (as well as gender identity in the case of Riyadh, the transgender gay man who converted to Islam) across various stages of their lives, so while criticisms of the closet are apt in respects of its foundations as a way to understand sexualities in the west and the need to not universalise experiences of sexuality, all my participants are British and have understood their sexual lives

primarily through such a model. Yet, where my thesis departs from this is going beyond white, middle-class, gay men's experiences of the closet (Brown, 2000) and thinking through the intersectional predicaments of it and its effects on belonging to different communities and its contingent intergenerationalities in line with its particular spatial characteristics and relationships.

The intersectional/relational characteristics of the closets of my participants complicate any linear understandings of sexual identity because different identities and belonging to different communities problematise static ideas about sexuality and religion, and imperatives to 'come out' that are often highlighted in narratives of the 'healthiness' of coming out (McLean, 2007). As others have highlighted, being out as LGBT+ often relies on numerous iterations (Sedgwick, 1990; Urbach, 1996) because of the compulsoriness of heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), so coming out is a more processual practice than is otherwise assumed. Different identities and dimensions of life can shape such experiences and do so as revealed through the intersections of faith, family, age, community, ethnicity and gender in the experiences of my participants. The importance of Islam for my participants continues to be of significance and value where their experiences of racism and Islamophobia may problematise their everyday lives, where it helps them to negotiate or overcome homophobic discourses from Muslim communities, but also where it is simply a religion that they are deeply connected with and want to be a part of. The dynamics of these ties and affiliations highlight that the imperative to come out (Rasmussen, 2004) is not always so relevant in the context of LGBT+ British Muslim lives, and perhaps others. Across 4.4 I highlighted how taboos of talking about sexualities in most forms, constructing LGBT+ sexualities as Western issues, izzat and disclosure all construct a multi-layered closet that intersects with the issues raised in 4.3. These religious, ethnic and intergenerational ties all problematise sexuality and coming out, sometimes building new closets through being advised to marry for instance.

Furthermore, the spatial characteristics of different closets are interesting features to explore and help contribute to the literature on the closet. Using Brown's (2000) initial work on the geographies of the closet and broader literature on everyday geographies of sexuality and sexual regulation shows the closet as having different spatialities and connections with others scales that shape both disclosure and the negotiation of this in relation to different identities. While the discourses and constructions of a closet

have different spatialities, negotiating these also brings alive the closet in different formats, for instance in the contexts of neighbourhood spaces as seen in 5.4.3 (pp. 126-128) or even in the context of LGBT+ British Muslims seeking different spaces of religion that could also conceal sexuality through the use of private social media accounts, not revealing the locations of meet-ups, homophobic encounters in the mosque, Islamic groups and online. Thus, the closet in the lives of LGBT+ British Muslims is of salience in everyday contexts but needs to be understood in a more intersectional and relational manner as developed through this thesis. Consequently, this develops understandings of the closet which are largely based on a model of sexuality that does not consider intersectional identities and lived experiences of these. Brown (2000) himself stated that his work on the closet focuses on the experiences of white, gay men and so my thesis contributes to this literature further by incorporating the voices of LGBT+ British Muslims and by demonstrating the multi-scalar and interactive nature of the closet.

7.3.4 Lived religion and digital spaces

The lived religion paradigm has helpfully offered new insights into religious practice, often contextualised through embodied and everyday features (McGuire, 2008). I have sought to use this concept for understanding how LGBT+ British Muslims practice religion and it was seen that many of their efforts to redraw homophobic interpretations of their sexuality within an Islamic milieu, engage in dialogue with heterosexual Muslims and develop networks and communities of LGBT+ Muslims were predicated on everyday engagements with online spaces. The practice of Islam online as demonstrated across 6.5 (pp.174-193) demonstrates the ever-increasing digitisation of contemporary life (Graham, 2013), as does the use of online spaces to platform the disclosure of sexuality (Downing, 2013) or engage in sex and romance (Miles, 2017). Despite being separated by physical geography, those who participated in the study were able to develop connections, dialogues and debates with other LGBT+ Muslims, as it were, and other Muslims.

These practices reflect relational online/offline geographies and highlight the multi-scalar relations that are (re)produced through these. As Zook and Graham (2007) highlight, these are mutually constitutive geographies and increasingly bleed into each other, as digital technology is now integrated into everyday life (Ash, Kitchin and Leszczynski, 2018). While online spaces have been explored as useful for LGBT+

populations to build community networks and explore facets of their sexual identities (Gross, 2007; Downing, 2013), where these have been relevant to LGBT+ groups who identify as religious or have a religious background that intersects with their sexualities have been much less to the fore in these debates, despite the potential for online spaces to educate. Exploring these online/offline relationships in the context of Islam in this thesis advances a critical gap within the lived religion paradigm and helps highlight the embryonic steps undertaken by LGBT+ British Muslims to negotiate the confines of the religious regulation of their sexuality by both Islamic clergy and lay Muslims. Online technologies and spaces shape how LGBT+ British Muslims have come to interpret Islam through more positive lenses and sought to cultivate further grounds for doing so with other Muslims in order to progress the 'theological capital' that Yip (2005) suggests is less forthcoming in the context of LGBT+ Muslims, as compared to their Christian counterparts. By highlighting these practices, I have specified particular acts of lived religion that are shaped by contemporary technologies and reflected on their contingencies by being careful not to entirely romanticise these as they were also laced with careful negotiation and dangers.

7.4 Future work

My thesis has offered a valuable exploration of the lived experiences of LGBT+ British Muslims but could no doubt be better and built upon further. In the first instance, the thesis is somewhat limited in making grand interventions into policy debates because of the limited number of LGBT+ British Muslims that participated in the study. The number of participants reflects the limited visibility of LGBT+ Muslims and perhaps the researcher fatigue for LGBT+ Muslim support groups I outlined in my methodology chapter. While a small sample of participants is not necessarily an issue with respect to providing a critical opening into LGBT+ Muslim lives and it is important to highlight that my thesis was never an endeavour which sought to generalise LGBT+ Muslims lives, it does perhaps limit the transferability of the findings beyond an academic context. In this respect, speaking to more LGBT+ Muslims and a more diverse sample group would be helpful. The voices of more lesbians and transgender people who identify as Muslim would no doubt have enriched the study further, as would a greater number of people from different ethnic backgrounds. So, while I sought to highlight, interpret and analyse the common experiences across the interview data through a thematic analysis that revealed similar issues for all participants, my thesis is skewed

somewhat towards an analysis of gay British Muslim lives, rather than a more comprehensive understanding of LGBT+ British Muslim experiences.

Furthermore, the study could provide an opening into further research on the intersections of religion and minority sexualities from the perspective of heterosexual Muslims. Siraj (2009) has explored how heterosexual Muslims construct homosexuality as the 'Other', while Valentine and Waite (2012) highlight how heterosexual Muslims separate a belief of the impermissibility of homosexuality- seen as a Western disease- in Islam from civil and professional conduct. These projections of homosexuality as a Western other and the limits of tolerance have the potential to be researched further. This is important and relevant to highlight given the opening ambit of the thesis and the virulent episodes occurring in Birmingham and other cities at the time of writing. Such work may help develop understandings as to what discourses are travelling and in what contexts and how. Of course, any work on the intersections of LGBT+ sexualities and Islam should be placing emphasis on LGBT+ Muslims who may feel 'caught' but being receptive to different audiences and problematising any incidents of homophobia and intolerance could provide important routes into enacting change.

Clearly, LGBT+ British Muslims contest the discourses of Muslims as illiberal others in Britain and the constructions of LGBT+ individuals as shaped by secular norms. They challenge normative beliefs within Islam and their perspectives complicate assumed trajectories of coming out and being LGBT+ in Britain. Deeper insights could also be developed through analyses of LGBT+ Muslim converts or reverts. Considerations of why LGBT+ Muslims choose to convert to Islam, as in the case of Riyadh in this project, or why they may have decided to go 'back' to Islam could highlight some rich perspectives on exclusion and the processes of change.

Geographically speaking, the importance of online contexts is clear in the lives of LGBT+ British Muslims. Extending work into why and how could contribute further to deepening understandings here of the online-offline intersections of space and the digital, and their scalar relationships (Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2016). Research into LGBT+ Muslims in different national contexts may also be interesting here to see how they communicate with others and to identify the relationships and interpretations of sexuality, practices and Islam in diverse national settings. There are just a few ways in

which the thesis could be expanded to gain more complete pictures of the complexities and richness of LGBT+ Muslim lives and it would no doubt be interesting to see how research develops in this respect.

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Appendix A: Information sheet

RESEARCH ON LGBT+ MUSLIMS IN THE UK

Can you help?

....

THE STUDY

There is little research about the experiences of LGBT+ Muslims in the UK. To fill this gap, I have been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council to conduct a research project to explore what it means to be LGBT+ and Muslim in the UK. How is the closet experienced by LGBT+ Muslims? How do religious and ethnic identities influence sexuality? How might social and political contexts shape experiences? And, what do these experiences mean for perceptions of belonging?

Please get in touch if you are interested in taking part: I would like to speak to anyone who identifies as LGBT+ and Muslim. Please note that though you may not have disclosed your sexuality, I would still welcome and value your participation. Additionally, your religiosity is not a factor in participating either

....

Participating– What would be involved?

You will be invited to participate in an individual interview that will last about an hour. I can arrange to meet you wherever is most convenient and comfortable for you, I am able to travel across the UK. This interview will be a discussion about who you are and your experiences of being LGBT+ and Muslim in the UK. This discussion will be entirely confidential and sensitive to your particular experiences.

I will use a digital tape recorder in these interviews to make sure I am able to correctly detail your stories. This interview will be confidential and I will use a pseudonym in order to protect your confidentiality. You will be able to check that what has been recorded is correct and anything you want to be taken out of interview transcripts will be. All interview data will be stored securely and files will be numbered and password protected. You are able to withdraw from the project at any time and any data you do not want to be included will be destroyed.

If you are interested in taking part, please either email or write to me using the contact details below. Thank you!

Nathar Iqbal– Doctoral Researcher

5th Floor, Daysh Building, Newcastle University, NE1 7RU

Email: n.iqbal@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix B: Checklist of organisations contacted

Organisation	Date of contact	Reply (Yes/no)	Follow-up date and response (1)	Follow-up date and response (2)	Outcome
Imaan	04/10/16	Automated- 'Currently undergoing a revamp and unable to respond until next spring Renew forum membership in new year Have joined mailing list	26/04/17 Email reply received 06/05/17- Don't have capacity to assist with academic requests	N/A	1 interview from Imaan forum
Inclusive Mosque Initiative (IMI)	03/10/16	No- unable to help because they get too many research requests Have joined mailing list	11/10/16- unwilling/unable to publicise research across social media/mailing lists	N/A	2 interviews from attending IMI event

Naz-	04/10/16	No	13/10/16- no answer to phonecall Focus on London in new year	06/02/17- no reply 09/02/17- phonecall (not entertaining academic research requests)	No interviews
Mesmac Leeds	03/10/16	No	17/10/16- replied but unable to help	N/A	No interviews
Mesmac Bradford- Jonathan Cookson	03/10/16	No	17/10/16- no answer to email	31/10/16- no reply to letter	No interviews
Mesmac Wakefield- Mark Tyson	03/10/16	No	18/10/16- no answer to email	31/10/16- no reply to letter	No interviews
Mesmac NE	03/10/16	Letter sent- no reply	17/10/16- no reply to email		No interviews
Equity Partnership	03/10/16	No	11/10/16- no reply	17/10/16- no reply	No interview

Huddersfield Gay Group	03/10/16	Yes- have no relevant members but would share on facebook	28/10/16- no leads	N/A	No interview
Unity LGBT Glasgow	11/10/16	No	17/10/16- no reply	24/10/16- no reply	No interview
Spice Bradford	10/10/16	No	31/10/16- no reply	15/11/16- no reply	No interviews
Lesbian Immigration Support Group	11/10/16	Yes- 06/11/16 confirmed would forward email to Muslim LISG members	10/11/16- no leads so far	N/A	No interviews
Rainbow Noir	12/10/16	Yes- shared request via email and twitter 19/10/16	24/10/16- will share again		No interviews
Unmuted Brum	12/10/16	No	20/10/16- no response	06/02/17- no response	No intterviews

Centred	03/10/16	No Refocus on London in new year	No reply 06/02/17	N/A	No interviews
University of Leeds LGBT society	18/10/16 2nd attempt	Yes- no members	N/A	N/A	No interviews
Leeds Trinity LGBT society	18/10/16 2nd attempt	No	No reply to email 09/11/16	N/A	No interviews
University of Manchester LGBT society	19/10/16 2nd attempt	No	10/11/16 no reply to email	N/A	No interviews
Manchester Met LGBT society	19/10/16 2nd attempt	Yes- No members	10/11/16- no reply	N/A	No interviews
University of Liverpool LGBT society	19/10/16	No	25/11/16- no reply	N/A	No interviews
Liverpool Hope LGBT society	19/10/16	No	25/11/16- no reply	N/A	No interviews

University of Huddersfield LGBT society	9/11/16 2nd attempt	Yes- no members	N/A	N/A	No interviews
University of Bradford LGBT society	9/11/16	No	18/11/16- no reply to email	06/02/17- no reply	No interviews
University of Sheffield LGBT society	9/11/16	No	18/11/16- no reply	06/02/17- no reply	No interviews
Sheffield Hallam LGBT society	9/11/16	No	18/11/16- no reply	06/02/17- no reply	No interviews
University of York LGBT society	10/11/16	No	18/11/16- no reply	06/02/17- no reply	
University of Glasgow LGBT society	10/11/16	No	18/11/16- no reply	06/02/17-no reply	
University of Strathclyde LGBT society	10/11/16	Yes- no members	N/A	N/A	No interviews

University of Edinburgh LGBT society	10/11/16	Yes- no members	N/A	N/A	No interviews
Edinburgh Napier LGBT society	10/11/16	No	18/11/16- no reply	N/A	No interviews
University of Nottingham LGBT society	10/11/16	No	18/11/16- no reply	N/A	No interviews
Nottingham Trent LGBT society	10/11/16	No	18/11/16- no reply	N/A	No interviews
LGBT Foundation	27/04/17	Yes- confirmed forwarded on to comms team to publish in bulletin	08/05/17- Confirmed place in bulletin- no reponses thus far	N/A	No interviews
Hidayah LGBT	26/04/17	No reply- messaged via Twitter too	Replied 21/08 if participants required. Affirmative (sent 22/08)	29/09 sent email again Reply received 17/10 Confirmed shared via facebook (26/10)	

Rainbow Home	27.04/17	04/05/17- confirming project would be advertised in next group meeting	11/05/17- Resent information sheet as per request	17/05/17- no leads	No interviews
		Forwarded on to colleague and contact details provided of LGBT Muslim volunteer (NE)			
Club Kali	27/04/17	No reply	N/A	N/A	No interviews
Catch 22	29/06/17	Forwarded information on	No reply 05/06/19	No reply to phonecalls/twitteer messages or emails 15/05/17	No interviews

Appendix C: Demographic survey

BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION- INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT

Age _____

Sexual identity _____

Gender _____

Ethnicity _____

Appendix D: Demographic table of participants

Pseudonym	Age	Sexual identity	Gender	Ethnicity
Daniyaal	21	Bisexual	Male	British Asian-Pakistani
Diya	22	Gay	Man	British Asian-Arab
Taimoor	22	Gay	Man	Indian
Zara	22	Lesbian	Woman	British Pakistani
Adeel	23	Gay	Man	British Pakistani
Riyadh	24	Gay	Transgender man	White British
Siddique	26	Gay	Man	British Pakistani
Ali	27	Gay	Man	British Pakistani
Junaid	27	Gay	Man	British Pakistani
Omar	28	Gay	Male	British Pakistani
Raif	28	Bisexual	Man	British Pakistani
Sofia	28	Lesbian	Woman	British Pakistani
Yassar	28	Gay	Man	British Bangladeshi
Faisal	29	Gay	Man	British Pakistani
Noreen	29	Lesbian	Female	British Pakistani
Rehman	30	Gay	Man	British Bangladeshi
Mo	31	Gay	Man	British Pakistani
Amir	37	Pansexual	Man	British Indian
Jahangir	47	Gay	Man	British Indian

Appendix E: Interview schedule

1. Background information

-Culture/ethnicity/religious upbringing?

-Relationship status

-Hobbies

2. Sexual identity

- Label/term you use to describe your sexual identity

- How do you engage with your sexual identity, if at all?

- Experience of growing up as… in family home?

-Family relations? Ask about different generations and relationships with these?

- How did you negotiate disclosure or non-disclosure of this? Perhaps ask about specific spaces?

- Influences growing up and now? Family (wider family/ethnic community), friends, work colleagues

- How has your sexual identity influenced family relations?

-Links to gender identity?

3. Sexual identity and religion/ethnicity

-View and understanding of Islam and non-heterosexuality

-Understandings and views on Muslim discourses of sexuality and gender in Britain

-Homophobia in British Muslim communities?

-What are your understandings about the expectations of Muslims in terms of sexuality and gender? How are these reinforced and by who?

-How do you negotiate these expectations?

-Ask if they have heard about marriages of convenience and what they think about these?

-To what extent do you feel your religiosity now is influenced by your sexual identity, if at all?

-How would you describe the relationship between your religious and sexual identity?

-How have you used Islam as a resource, if at all?

-In what way?
-To what extent do fears about your ethnic community finding out about your sexual identity inform your decision to disclose/not disclose it?

-What is your understanding about how (participant's ethnic community) views non-heterosexuality?

4. Sexual exclusions

-Have you disclosed your sexuality to many people? Who and why/why not?

- Understanding and experience of being in the closet. A term they use themselves?

-What do they think about this term?

-How might Islam and Muslims have influenced this experience?

-How do you think ethnic and gender identity might have informed experiences of closet?

-Explore notions of respectability and honour. What does this mean for you being…?

- To what extent does this 'code' of honour translate across different contexts/scales/generations?

-Are there places and spaces where being LGBT+and Muslim might be easier for you? Or being non-heterosexual and…?

-Are there resources that you have used that have enabled you to disclose your sexual identity or 'reconcile' Islam and your sexuality?

If applicable to participants:

-To what extent was internal migration influenced by identities? And why?

- How has this movement shaped your sexual identity do you feel?

5. LGBT spaces and activism

-How do you feel about the LGBT community in Britain?

-Representations of LGBT people in the UK/West?

-Ask about relationships and dating on the 'scene' and apps/sites?

-What does being LGBT mean to you?

-How do you feel about Pride events?

6. Being a LGBT+ Muslim in the UK

- How do you feel about being LGBT+ and Muslim in the UK? Perceptions of fitting in?

- How do you explain your religious and sexual identity to people (if you're comfortable telling them)?

- How do you educate people about being a non-heterosexual Muslim from a (ethnic) background? If applicable

-Are there particular communities and groups you identify and affiliate yourself with? Why?

- Do you use 'LGBT' spaces? If so, why? What do these allow you to do/feel etc?

- What about racist or Islamophobic experiences? Specifically in LGBT spaces, if relevant as well

-How do you feel your experiences have been shaped by context of war on terror etc. over the past decade or so?

-What do you think of the use and discourse of LGBT rights?

- Do you think the LGBT rights movement or spaces is Islamophobic or racist? Why?

-Have you had any particular experiences of these?

Appendix F: Email confirmation of project ethical approval

Ethical Approval

WD Wendy Davison Wed 03/08, 09:38   ! # Reply |"

Nathar Iqbal (PGR); Peter Hopkins

Inbox

> Flag for follow up. Start by 10 November 2016. Due by 10 November 2016.
> You replied on 04/08/2016 14:23.

Dear Nathar

Thank you for your application for ethical approval of your project "Exploring Everyday social and Political Geographies and Encounters of Non-heterosexual Muslims in the UK". I confirm that Prof Daniel Zizzo has approved it on behalf of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

Please note that this approval applies to the project protocol as stated in your application - if any amendments are made to this during the course of the project, please submit the revisions to the Ethics Committee in order for them to be reviewed and approved.

Kind regards,

Wendy

Wendy Davison

PA to Lorna Taylor (Faculty Research Manager)

and Sue Mitchell (Research Funding Development Manager)

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

5th floor, Daysh Building

Newcastle University

Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU

Telephone: 0191 208 6349

Fax: 0191 208 7001

Appendix G: Consent form

Title of Project: Exploring everyday experiences of non-heterosexual Muslims in the UK

Name of Researcher: Nathar Iqbal

Contact Details:

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason ☐

3. I confirm that I am happy for the interview to be recorded on a voice recorder and laptop, with the understanding that once transcribed, these sound recordings will be deleted ☐

3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future written work by the researcher ☐

4. I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or thesis ☐

5. I agree to take part in the above study ☐

_____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature