



Minnesota State University, Mankato
Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly
and Creative Works for Minnesota
State University, Mankato

All Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other
Capstone Projects

Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other
Capstone Projects

2023

Neither Fully Queer Nor Somali?: What Queer Somalis' Narratives Reveal About Space, Identity, and Community in Western Diaspora

Dominik Drabent

Minnesota State University, Mankato, dominik.drabent@mnsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds>



Part of the [Islamic Studies Commons](#), and the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Drabent, D. (2023). Neither fully queer nor Somali?: What queer Somalis' narratives reveal about space, identity, and community in western diaspora [Master's thesis, Minnesota State University, Mankato]. Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/1317/>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects at Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Neither Fully Queer nor Somali?: What Queer Somalis' Narratives Reveal About
Space, Identity, and Community in Western Diaspora

By

Dominik Drabent

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Gender & Women's Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

April 2023

April 28, 2023

Neither Fully Queer nor Somali?: What Queer Somalis' Narratives Reveal About Space, Identity, and Community in Western Diaspora

Dominik Drabent

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

Dr. Maria R. Bevacqua (Advisor)

Dr. Yalda N. Hamidi (Committee Member)

Dr. Jameel N. Haque (Committee Member)

Acknowledgments

As this research would not have been possible without all of the queer Somalis who had the courage and strength to share their personal stories with this world, I want to thank them for being role models for all of us. Despite all the challenges and dangers they encounter within their communities and the societies they live in, they claim their spaces and lives while advocating for their peers and communities. Thank you for inspiring me and giving me hope for a world where we all live in peace with each other.

First, I must thank my family for their ongoing support. Without their love and belief in me, I would not be where I am today. My parents have always supported my plans. I am so thankful for having you and your unconditional love. I also want to thank my grandmother, who is such an amazing person and inspiration. You have shaped me in so many ways I am deeply grateful for. I also want to thank my brother for never questioning me and my life choices. You are the best brother I could have asked for, and your silent cheering means a lot to me. A special thanks go to my aunt, who has been one of my biggest influences in life and who I can always count on. Without your help, I would have never studied abroad and realized my dreams. You have truly changed my life in a very positive direction. Thank you. I love my whole family a lot, and I am incredibly blessed to have such luck with all of you.

I also want to thank my thesis committee. My thesis committee chair, Dr. Maria Bevacqua, navigated many changes and hurdles with me. I appreciate you a lot for working with me on obtaining IRB approval for the initial project idea, then pivoting my project into new directions and changing my methods, and providing valuable feedback on my thesis drafts. You have been excellent guidance and support

of my research. Thank you! I also want to thank Dr. Yalda Hamidi. You have been of such great help with aiding in writing this thesis, especially for your training in gender and sexuality in relation to Islam. And then there is Dr. Jameel Haque, whom I am very grateful for agreeing to be part of this committee and providing valuable insights on the historical and communal aspects of Somalia and the background of Islam.

Furthermore, I want to thank the Department of Gender & Women's Studies for their support throughout my educational journey. In addition to my thesis committee members, Dr. Laura Harrison and Dr. Ana Perez have been great professors to learn and engage with. My thanks also go to all the administrative assistants who have been there to support my endeavors.

I also could not have done this without my outstanding cohort members, Maya Wenzel, Zahra Fariha, MeMe Cronin, and TL Jordan. You have been an inspiration, and I had a fantastic time with you.

This thesis project was only possible with our lovely librarians' dedicated support and hard work. I want to thank Kellian Clink, Jess Schomberg, Evan Rusch, and Barb Bergman, along with all the other staff at the library on campus, for being there for me and searching the depths of materials available to enrich my research.

A special thanks go to Dr. Cawo Abdi from the University of Minnesota for encouraging me to continue pursuing this critical research and developing my project. You have been very supportive of my research, and I appreciate that very much.

Another thanks go to the Director of the Women's Center, Liz Steinborn-Gourley, who has been there for me and listened to my daily struggles while also providing a safe space to reenergize whenever needed. You have been a great listener.

I also do not want to forget to thank my dear friends Sophia Kern, Jean-marc Lubiba, Theresa Khan, and Lisa Weiß, who have supported my journey to become an aspiring scholar in feminist studies. Thank you for being there for me and cheering me on.

I also could not have done this without all the people that I have shared my life path with, including but not limited to my current and some former roommates, professors, exchange students, fellow international students, scholarship donors, and community members in the Mankato area, who have encouraged, supported, and empowered me to pursue this master's degree.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	1
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2	6
Literature Review	6
Anti-Black Islamophobia	6
Islamic Views on Queerness	12
Western Notions of Sexuality and Homonationalism	18
Reflections on Literature	27
Chapter 3	28
Methods & Methodology.....	28
The Methodologies	29
The Methods	32
Limitations	35
Reflexivity.....	36
Chapter 4	38
Results	38
Migration Stories	40
The Somali Struggle	42
Violence & Tradition.....	45
Islam & Queerness.....	48
Coming Out(s) & Western Imperialism in Sexuality	57
The Daily Physical & Mental Survival	62
Racism, Islamophobia, & Their Intersections.....	67
Questions of Belonging, Assimilation, & Erasure.....	70
Community Empowerment.....	76
Concluding Thoughts	79
Chapter 5	80
Conclusion	80
The Embodiment of This Research: What Does It Mean to Be a Queer Somali?.....	80
Explaining the Results.....	82
The Significance	88
For Future Research.....	89
Hopes for the Future	89
Appendix	91
A	91
References	93

Neither Fully Queer nor Somali?: What Queer Somalis' Narratives Reveal About
Space, Identity, and Community in Western Diaspora

Dominik Drabent

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Gender & Women's Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Mankato, Minnesota
April 2023

Abstract

The field of Muslim sexuality studies has grown over the past two decades because of the aftermath of 9/11. This master's thesis is a textual content analysis of the personal narratives of queer Somalis in Western diaspora. It addresses the intersections of their identities that create unique forms of oppression. Not much research has been conducted on queer Somali communities. This analysis of queer Somalis' personal narratives aims to illuminate parts of the invisibility of queer Somalis, their experienced accusations of inauthenticity, and the erasure of their existences. I utilize an intersectional, transnational feminist, queer, and Black feminist lens. By conducting this research project, the findings of this master's thesis indicate that queer Somalis are subject to various forms of oppression, such as anti-Black Islamophobia and queerphobia, which often directly result in violence. Queer Somalis in Western diaspora actively resist these oppressive systems and actions through different forms of activism. The following themes emerged from the analysis: Migration stories; the "Somali struggle"; violence and tradition; Islam and queerness; coming out(s) and western imperialism in sexuality; the daily physical and mental survival; racism, Islamophobia, and their intersections; questions of belonging, assimilation, and erasure; and community empowerment. As this master's thesis intends to shed some light into the field of Muslim sexuality studies and provide some valuable insights into the identity construction of queer Somalis in Western diaspora, this knowledge potentially can inform decisions that will empower queer Somalis and deconstruct those oppressive systems that negatively affect their lives.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the 1980s, the African nation of Somalia has been embroiled in a civil war that has resulted in a tragic Somali diaspora. The Somali diaspora has large communities in the Western hemisphere, especially in areas such as the state of Minnesota in the United States, where refugee resettlement programs created large populations of Somali immigrants (Ibrahim, 2017).

Queer communities have been under constant attack by conservative politicians in the West, especially queer communities of color (Drabent & Phelps, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). Jasbir Puar's term "homonationalism," which is the merger of queer sexualities with nationalist and imperialist agendas, highlights the impact that Western politics has on communities abroad (Puar, 2007, 2013; Savcı, 2021). However, some queer Somalis have concerns about their belonging to the imagined community of Somalis in the U.S. and their visibility in the larger queer community (Abdi, 2019; Armila & Kontkanen, 2019). Queer Somalis often have been denied their existence by the mainstream queer community as well as their Somali communities (M. A. Ali, 2019; Jama, 2008a, 2013b, 2015, 2018; Peterson, 2020; Schuessler, 2017). This thesis project aims to highlight the lives of queer Somalis in Western diaspora by analyzing their personal narratives.

Somalia's history plays a vital role in the shaping of queer Somalis in Western diaspora. After the assassination of Somalia's second president, Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, on October 15, 1969, a power vacuum developed, which led to a terrible civil war starting in the 1980s and 90s, and the outflux of Somalis to other countries, including the United States (Ibrahim, 2017; Yusuf, 2012). The following generations of Somali immigrants then would also move from Somalia to these countries because

of their already-settled family members there, creating the comfort of having kin close to someone while being in a foreign land (Ibrahim, 2017). In many communities, such as in Finland, this led to actively engaged citizens of Somali background who would shape their communities and have a positive impact (Armila & Kontkanen, 2019). Moreover, colonial histories directly impacted the divisions in the country and shaped the different legislations present. Somalia, prior to its independence, was divided into five regions: British Somaliland (north), Italian Somaliland (south), French Somaliland (northwest), Ethiopian Somaliland (the Ogaden), and Kenyan Somaliland (Northern Frontier District) (Ibrahim, 2017). As Jama (2015) points out, the laws adopted by each distinct region intersect with today's punishment of queerness in Somalia. While the former British part in the North had legal codes against homosexuality under the British rule, the former Italian part had no legal codes against homosexuality, since Italy had already decriminalized homosexuality in the nineteenth century (Jama, 2015). Such differences have fueled the conflicts in the region.

While diasporic citizenship in the context of Somalis has already been studied, their sexualities have rarely been discussed, even though studies of Muslim sexualities have gained importance during the past two decades. Despite the widespread belief that being Muslim and being queer are mutually exclusive, many scholars have shown that queer Muslims do exist within and outside the Western hemisphere (Alvi & Zaidi, 2021; Golriz, 2021; Kehl, 2020; Khan & Mulé, 2021; Najmabadi, 2014). Nonetheless, not much research has been conducted on Somali immigrant communities and very little is known about queer Somalis in the Western world (Hunt et al., 2018).

In the context of this thesis, I understand a “Western” identity to be shaped by discourses in the Global North that on the one hand are marked by progressiveness and secularism and on the other hand by nationalism and Christian conservatism. I am not trying to imply that all “Westerners” are liberal, secular, Christian or conservative, but rather that dominant discourses in Western societies are different from those outside of the West, while not unique by any means. In addition to that, the term “Western diaspora” used throughout this thesis refers to a group of countries in the Global North—in Europe and North America—that shares similar discourses on progressiveness and conservatism to those described in relation to a “Western identity.” Therefore, I am not attempting to create a nebulous reference, which can have many meanings to different people. Rather I use the term “Western diaspora” as a summarizing reference for a shared understanding and implementation of political discourses that are different from those areas and countries not included in my definition of the term.

I argue that queer Somalis’ personal narratives in Western diaspora reveal how they resist the claims of invisibility, the accusations of inauthenticity, and the erasure of existence shaped by discourses on queerphobia, anti-Black Islamophobia, and homonationalism.

When investigating the lives of queer Somalis through a textual content analysis, three main areas of knowledge must be kept in mind: Anti-Black Islamophobia, Islamic views on queerness, and Western notions of sexuality and homonationalism.

An intersectional lens reveals how the identities of queer, Muslim, Somali, Black, and immigrant intersect with each other creating specific forms of oppression

but also influence the identity formation of queer Somalis. Anti-Black Islamophobia is one specific example where race and religion intersect in various ways and Black Muslims experience unique oppressions (Chowdhury, 2018; Ghabrial, 2017; Mugabo, 2016). Thus, queer Somalis are also impacted by anti-Black Islamophobia.

To better understand what the actual perspectives of Islamic scholars on queerness are and how religion interferes with the lives of queer Somalis, this thesis explores the various Islamic views on queerness. Many queer Muslims have described their own identity formation as well as the reconciliation with their faith (Alvi & Zaidi, 2021; Eidhamar, 2015; El-Tayeb, 2013; Khan & Mulé, 2021; Shah, 2016; Siraj, 2012), while there also has been research on the views that Islamic communities hold on queer Muslims (Golriz, 2021; Rayside, 2011; Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2012; Savcı, 2021). Both aspects are crucial for understanding the spaces that queer Somalis navigate.

Current sexual identities are usually constructed based on Western notions of sexuality and often ignore, deny, or erase other queer identities and terms that are present in other cultures and languages (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Najmabadi, 2005, 2014; Puar, 2007, 2013). Under homonationalism, queer Somalis are erased as their identities are constructed as mutually exclusive and backward (Çalışkan et al., 2020; El-Tayeb, 2012; Kehl, 2020; Kosnick, 2015; Mosurinjohn, 2014; Puar, 2007, 2013). Homonationalism is also a catalyst for Islamophobia and racism (Çalışkan et al., 2020; El-Tayeb, 2012; Puar, 2007, 2013; Savcı, 2021). Thus, in the context of queer Somalis, it must be explained how power dynamics are in place when utilizing Western notions of sexuality.

This textual content analysis of personal narratives of queer Somalis in Western diaspora will utilize a transnational feminist, intersectional, queer, and Black feminist theoretical lens to analyze the statements made by them. By utilizing the direct voices of queer Somalis in this research project, their assumed acts of resistance are highlighted with an emphasis on empowering the community.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter will provide an overview of the existing literature in the areas of anti-Black Islamophobia, Islamic views on queerness, and Western notions of sexuality and homonationalism. In the third chapter the method of textual content analysis is explained more. The methodology of a transnational feminist, intersectional, Black feminist, and queer theoretical lens is outlined. Possible limitations are discussed, and I consider my reflexivity in this thesis project. The fourth chapter outlines and discusses the results of analyzing the selected personal narratives of queer Somalis in Western diaspora. In the conclusion, I summarize the findings, connect them back to the existing scholarship, and highlight the relevance of this research.

Through this project, I demonstrate that queer Somalis are fully queer and fully Somali as their identities are not mutually exclusive. This thesis research cannot be representational of all queer Somalis. This master's thesis will contribute to the discussion of Muslim sexuality studies and fill in some of the gaps in understanding the social constructions of queer Somalis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This thesis analyzes queer Somalis' narratives in Western diaspora and their lived experiences by utilizing an intersectional, Black feminist, transnational feminist, and queer theoretical lens. As such, the existing literature must be consulted to inform my thesis project. The existence of queer Somalis is often described as impossible because of the perception that their identities as queer and Muslim are mutually exclusive (Hunt et al., 2018). By looking at the social construction of queer Somalis from different angles, such as intersectionality and transnational feminism, a more complete picture than the dominant white, Western male perspective can be achieved. The literature used in this chapter will discuss Islamic views on queerness, Western notions of sexuality, the concept of homonationalism and its significance for this thesis, and the role anti-Black Islamophobia plays for this project. All these perspectives must inform the analysis of queer Somalis' identity formations in the West.

Anti-Black Islamophobia

Intersectionality is crucial for any analysis informed by feminist theoretical work as it explains the symbiosis of various identities and how they create an individual's unique experience of oppression and privilege. According to Bartlett and Kennedy (1991), "discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them" (p. 63). This analogy supports the original coining by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), who suggested that "because of their intersectional identity as women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other,

women of color are marginalized with both” (p. 1244). Even though the concept was rooted in the experiences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), it has become a useful tool of feminist theory to address the intersections of identities and their related influences (Bartlett & Kennedy, 1991). An analysis of queer Somalis in Western diaspora consequently must utilize not only a transnational feminist lens for decolonizing knowledge production but also an intersectional lens to investigate how the identities of being queer, being Muslim, being Somali, and being Black intersect with each other creating unique forms of oppression but also identity formation. Anti-Black Islamophobia, also referred to as anti-Muslim racism or the racialization of Muslims, is one specific example where Blackness and Muslimness intersect in unique ways, and Black Muslims experience unique oppressions. Thus, queer Somali immigrants will be impacted by anti-Black Islamophobia. In this section, I am going to look at how being Black and Muslim intersect, how the embodiment can be a form of resistance, how Somalis struggle specifically, and how anti-Black Islamophobia is acting in conjunction with queerness and anti-terrorism efforts.

While anti-Black and anti-Muslim attitudes were often seen as separate phenomena, some scholars have shown that anti-Blackness and Islamophobia often intersect and that the concept of anti-Black Islamophobia as a unique form of oppression does exist (Baker, 2022; Chowdhury, 2018; Meier, 2022; Mugabo, 2016). As Chowdhury (2018) points out, the intersections of religion and racism create a new form of anti-Muslim racism. Similarly, Mugabo (2016) explains how anti-Black Islamophobia serves the purpose of “othering,” excluding, and dehumanizing. Beydoun (2018) argues that today’s Islamophobia in the United States is an extension of Said’s orientalism, where the “oriental Other” is constructed as a racialized,

political, and national identity in contrast to the “West.” Beydoun (2018) also explains how this orientalist caricature creates an essentialized view of who is Muslim, thereby allowing anti-Black racism and Islamophobia to merge and further ostracize Black Muslims within the Muslim community. According to Korkman and Razack (2021), “utilizing the idea of the Muslim as global ‘terrorist’ and premodern Other to evict Muslims from political community, nations of the Global North and the Global South traffic in anti-Muslim racism” (p. 263). Through anti-Muslim racism, the status of white superiority can be kept, which further oppresses Black Muslims. In the case of teaching about Islam, Razack (2022) explains that bans that aim at prohibiting teaching about Islam in American schools are built on the foundation that Muslims are a theological and racial threat to American society. Razack (2022) further argues that the reason for the rise of anti-Muslim racism/anti-Black Islamophobia lies in the anxieties of the Global North about losing the old power structures that privileged them as the “Muslim terrorist” has become the enemy since 9/11. Moreover, Beydoun (2018) describes how the incorrect categorization of Muslims as a racial category in the United States works to uphold white supremacy by creating new “racial others.” According to Puar (2014), the racialization of Islam is directly tied to the idea of Islam being a fundamentalist religion partly because of the aftermath of 9/11.

As Somalis are perceived as Black in American society (Abdi, 2019), anti-Black Islamophobia also applies to them, even though many Somali immigrants would not identify as African American, and conflict between these groups regularly occurs (Abdi, 2015). According to Abdi (2015, 2019), many Somalis deal with poverty while also dealing with racism and Islamophobia, which burdens their integration into American society and, thereby, perpetuates the low socio-economic

status they find themselves in. Similarly, it was found by Armila and Kontkanen (2019) while studying Somali immigrants in Finland that Somalis were seen as welfare recipients who did not contribute to the Finnish society, even though Somalis who were integrated well became active and engaged citizens who advocated for change. Nonetheless, Mohamed (2017) reminds us of the importance of intersectionality in the context of Somalis by stating that

The Somali women activists I interviewed have indicated that, yes, they are Black, but they are also Somali and Muslim; and being Somali, Muslim and Black in Canada has a different trajectory than being Caribbean and Black or Black that fled the United State [sic] to come to Canada 250 years ago, which is completely a different kind of Blackness. (p.9)

This quote reemphasizes that the realities of Black Muslims facing anti-Black Islamophobia are also influenced by discourses that are shaped by the intersections of the identities they hold. As Abdi (2015) explains, the hierarchies a migrant find themselves in are often “situational and strategically managed.” Therefore, Somali migrants in the United States find their “Arab identity” and their Islamic faith instead as a drawback rather as an advantage due to the societal structures in the U.S. being highly racialized and polarized (Abdi, 2015).

This polarization can also be observed in queer spaces. According to Ghabrial (2017), the exploration of the intersections of race and queerness found that there are not enough spaces for queers of color, and thus, queer racialized spaces are needed. Therefore, in the case of queer Somalis, it will be interesting to see if specific spaces for queer Somalis, due to their intersections of faith, race, and sexuality, are utilized in the activism queer Somalis potentially engage in. The discourse on terrorism also

influences the lack of spaces for queers of color. For instance, Meier (2022) highlights how racialization can underpin counterterrorism efforts, targeting Muslim communities specifically. As anti-Black Islamophobia directly affects Somalis, these counterterrorism efforts are experienced by them (Dahir, 2017). Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), which is an initiative seeking to prevent violent and terroristic acts, plays a vital role in perpetuating anti-Black Islamophobia. According to Beydoun (2018), CVE is developed and directly tied to ideas of Islam and how Muslim identity is expressed. This connection is very harmful as CVE also relies on the “unfounded assumption that disaffected youth, disconnect between youth and religious leaders, internal identity crisis, community isolation, and lack of opportunity constitute ‘root causes’ of radicalization” (Mirza, 2015, para. 15). According to Mirza (2015), “the very real need many local organizations have for resources and funding is subsumed under the rubric of national security and tied to the prevention of violent extremism. In the process, it stigmatizes these communities as uniquely prone to ‘radicalization’” (para. 15). As Baker (2022) explains, anti-Black racism serves white supremacy and feeds into neoliberalism, while anti-Muslim racism also serves neoliberalism. They go on to explain in the case of the war in Iraq in the early 2000s that “the war, then, was at all times a racial project, with anti-Muslim racism operating within and through the conditions created by anti-Black racism” (Baker, 2022, p. 380). This underpins what Korkman and Razack (2021) mean by anti-Muslim racism serving white supremacy. Chan-Malik (2018) explains that the “racial-religious” aspects of the Islamic histories in the United States must be recognized when discussing being Black and Muslim, as American ideas of Islam and policies

directed at it are intertwined with state surveillance militarism that further attacks Black Muslims in the U.S.

While being Black and Muslim indeed entails some degrees of oppression in the context of the "West," embodying these identities can also lead to some forms of resistance (Armila et al., 2019; Chan-Malik, 2018; Dahir, 2017; Mugabo, 2016). According to Chan-Malik (2018), being Muslim in America is directly tied to Black liberation efforts as the lived realities of oppression and discrimination make the Islamic religious expression less theological and shift the focus on resisting racial and gender inequities. Furthermore, Chan-Malik (2018) argues that Islam in America was significantly shaped by Blackness and the cultural aspects of being African American. One example Rouse (2004) mentions in her book *Engaged surrender* is the veiling of African American women and the associated nuances of a "Black struggle," where veiling means building community and resisting racism in the context of African American Muslim women. Rouse (2004) describes the process of veiling as a sense of group belonging that signifies an act of resistance as African American Muslim women partly seclude themselves from society to protect themselves from racism and Islamophobia through their community, the *ummah*. According to Rouse (2004), "generally, . . . , in the African American community, the symbol of *hijab* connects with identity struggles that exist beyond the borders of faith" (p. 65). This statement underlines the veil's significance as a practice of resisting racism. Nonetheless, the main focus of those women was not solely on the *ummah*, as many Islamic movements in North America committed themselves to the idea of nation-building, *asabiya*, which includes the *ummah* as a critical part (Rouse, 2004, p. 86). Therefore, in a figurative meaning, veiling also denotes the formation of a

movement for the liberation of African Americans. Here, being Black and Muslim is not perceived as a disadvantage due to anti-Black Islamophobia integrated into American society but as a powerful combination of identities to advocate for Black liberation activism (Chan-Malik, 2018; Rouse, 2004). Rouse (2004) also describes how veiling is a decolonizing practice as “for African American women, *hijab* authors a new female aesthetic in an environment of negative representations of black female beauty” (p. 63). Black Muslim women and their veiling practice are not the only form of Black Muslimhood as a form of resistance. Malcolm X might be one of the most prominent examples. As Gomez (2005) elaborates about him,

Malcolm’s commitment to the black struggle was certainly not less important than his personal beliefs. McCloud has borrowed concepts from the Islamic world to characterize Malcolm’s creation of two organizations as an attempt to reconcile two warring principles: *asabiyah* (‘cohesiveness’) an idea introduced by Ibn Khaldun and recontextualized to represent African American Muslim efforts at nation-building across a wide spectrum of the African-derived community; and the *ummah*, the specifically Muslim community that spanned ethnic, racial, and national differences. (p. 353)

Here, similar to Rouse (2004), Gomez (2005) mentions the ideas of *asabiyah* and *ummah*, the connection of Islam to the Black struggle, and the process of nation- and community-building. While the Black struggle is a unifying theme for many Black Muslims, queerness is a dividing factor, and views on queerness vary widely among diverse Muslim communities and individuals. The following section will further look into Islamic views on queerness.

Islamic Views on Queerness

Western notions of Islam have been influenced by orientalism, colonialism, and imperialism, which created a narrative that Islam is entrenched in patriarchal structures, inferior to Christian standards, and full of violence. These wrong perceptions and harmful stereotypes have created a stigma against Islam that also influences views on sexuality.

Here, I will discuss the various views of Islam and queerness. Islam itself is divided into various sects, and diverse views exist. Islamic scholars may have different views than Muslims who do not have a queer identity, while Muslims identifying as part of the queer community also have various views of themselves (Alvi & Zaidi, 2021; Eidhamar, 2015; Golriz, 2021; Kehl, 2020; Khan & Mulé, 2021; Rayside, 2011; Shah, 2016; Siraj, 2012). While some progressive Islamic views come to a negotiated understanding of tolerance, the dominant perception of society remains that being Muslim and queer are mutually exclusive identities (Alvi & Zaidi, 2021; Golriz, 2021; Kehl, 2020; Siraj, 2012). As Kugle (2014) states: “Many Western observers and allies assume that transgender, lesbian, and gay Muslims must leave Islam in order to live with dignity and pursue social reform” (p. 53). To better understand what the actual perspectives of Islamic scholars on queerness are and how religion intersects with the lives of queer Somalis, the various Islamic views must be explored. While I will lay out Islamic views in a more general sense due to the lack of research within the various sects of Islam, it is important to note that over 90 percent of all Somali Muslims are Sunnis (Hunt et al., 2018). I will discuss the literature about the views on queerness from the Islamic scriptures, the Muslim communities, and queer Muslims themselves.

In this section, I will discuss some of the scholarship on the interpretations of the Islamic scriptures on queerness. According to Siraj (2016), “the subject of homosexuality in the Qur’an is essentially non-existent. It is in the hadith that homosexuality is raised more frequently” (p. 90). As Habib (2010) and Kugle (2010) explain, Islam is said to be a “homophobic religion” by some conservative members of society, and being queer is against the faith. Various scholars have shown that there are overall negative perceptions and thoughts on queerness from a Muslim view (Alvi & Zaidi, 2021; Eidhamar, 2015; Kugle, 2010; Rayside, 2011). The degrees to which these interpretations show negative perspectives vary. For instance, Kugle (2010), as well as Rehman and Polymenopoulou (2012), suggest that the views against Muslim queerness stem from erroneous or incomplete interpretations of difference in Islam. Here, they argue that Islam is an inclusive religion concerning gender equality and sexual identities, as Islam's foundations are rooted in an egalitarian approach (Kugle, 2010; Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2012). According to Golriz (2021), it is also essential to acknowledge that religion alone does not account solely for negative interpretations and attitudes toward queerness. Kugle (2010) further argues that classical Islamic jurists have predominantly approached homosexuality through a viewpoint of sexual acts rather than utilizing diverse opinions that include and focus on sexual orientation; instead, they remain in a narrow, patriarchal lens in their legal rulings. Habib (2010) further argues that Islam as a religion is not an authoritative voice that dictates clear lines regarding queerness but instead that Muslims are the agents of being queer-friendly or homophobic, not the faith.

However, there also has been research on the views that Muslim communities hold on queer Muslims (Alvi & Zaidi, 2021; Eidhamar, 2015; Golriz, 2021; Rayside,

2011; Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2012; Savcı, 2021; Shah, 2016; Siraj, 2012, 2018). The positions and attitudes of Muslims provide varying insights into the relationship between Islam and queerness. Many scholars in the field have elaborated that Muslim communities often hold negative attitudes towards queerness and queer Muslims (Alvi & Zaidi, 2021; Eidhamar, 2015; Rayside, 2011; Shah, 2016; Siraj, 2009, 2012, 2018). In their research, Siraj (2009) found that the dominant traditional religious doctrine shaped most participants' views on homosexuality by frequently referring to the Qur'an and *Hadith*. In some cases, Muslims acknowledged the problem in acceptance and tolerance towards queerness while holding varying degrees of what was problematic about it. As Eidhamar (2015) argues, some Muslims state that the Qur'an and *hadith*, which are the collected traditions based on the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammed, do see queerness as a problem in the current life and for the afterlife and that it is entirely unacceptable, while some other Muslims believe that there is only an issue with the afterlife but not for the current life of a queer Muslim. Peumans (2014) found that all their study participants believed that queerness was *haram*, while the roots for such beliefs remained unclear. Additionally, many Muslims believe that there are no queer Muslims. According to Habib (2010), there have been unique homosexual practices in gender-segregated Muslim societies, where a culture of homosexuality is common. These homosexual acts are not necessarily understood to correlate with queer sexual identity and, thus, decrease the visibility of queer Muslims (Habib, 2010). As Hunt et al. (2018) find in their research of some female Somali refugee perspectives on queerness in Minnesota, queer Muslims exist but are unknown. In addition to that, Rayside (2011) shows that queerness is seen as a product of the "West," and thus, queer Muslims were not "real"

and "authentic" Muslims. According to Nasirzadeh (2010), "most Muslims in North America remain almost entirely shielded from queer Muslim visibility and would see it as 'western' and not authentically a part of their community" (as cited in Rayside, 2011, p. 114). This construction as "un-Islamic" and something coming from the "West" concerning queerness is further shaped by other factors. According to Rayside (2011),

Prominent among the factors is a defensive reaffirmation of Muslim identity in the face of increased Islamophobia, domestically and internationally. Another important explanation is the power of social, cultural, and religious family values in the countries of origin for the majority of diasporic American Muslims, then reinforced by the need for support and connection within immigrant communities. A third influential source of familial traditionalism is the prominence of conservative religious and political leadership of the American Muslim community itself, in part as a product of international developments. (p. 111)

These factors also inform the ostracization of queer Muslims from the *ummah*, the community of Muslims, and how queer Muslims view themselves.

Thus, it is not surprising that queer Muslims' self-description of their identity formation is as diverse as the interpretations of the Islamic scripts and the Muslim community's perceptions. Many queer Muslims have described their identity formation as well as the reconciliation with their faith (Alvi & Zaidi, 2021; Eidhamar, 2015; El-Tayeb, 2013; Khan & Mulé, 2021; Shah, 2016; Siraj, 2012, 2016, 2018). Scholars such as Eidhamar (2015) and Shah (2016) have found that queer Muslims reinterpret texts positively and create alternative interpretations of the Islamic

understandings of queerness. Siraj (2016) argues that queer Muslims do not only create these alternative understandings but that these interpretations provide queer Muslims with "the power to engineer constructive change in their lives" (p. 98). Jaspal (2018) found that gay Iranian migrants to the United Kingdom started even embracing their gay identity after moving there by disclosing socio-sexual experiences to queer and heterosexual friends. Similarly, Kugle (2010), as well as Rehman and Polymenopoulou (2012), have advocated for revisiting Islamic scriptures to go back to the egalitarian roots and the importance of difference in Islam. Siraj (2012) found indications that queer Muslims can reconcile their faith and sexuality while remaining dissatisfied with the outcomes and never fully accepting themselves. Siraj (2018) also states that queer Muslims "are influenced by traditional ideologies concerning sexuality and gender; . . . and the conviction that homosexuality is prohibited and sinful" (p. 207). According to Alvi and Zaidi (2021), sometimes queer Muslims have negative perceptions about themselves, and they are unable to find solutions for them that work in living out both identities—being queer and Muslim—rather than feeling the need to pick either one of these two identities. On the contrary, Fidolini (2018) argues that "they overcome the norm and develop other models of living their sexuality, not necessarily from a queer sexual identity perspective, but rather making religion in itself the space to apply a queering interpretative sensibility in dealing with sexual individualization strategies" (p. 190). As Peumans (2014) states in the case of queer Muslim immigrants, many queer Muslims' religious experience changed in relation to the migration process. Lara (2022) argues that "some women do not seek to reconfigure their identities and choose to embody one identity over the other (Queer or Muslim), while others embody both at the same time" (p. 35).

According to Kugle (2014), many queer Muslims attempt to “heal” themselves through Islamic ritual practices or visit traditional healers, but ultimately come to terms with their identities by challenging religious traditions and normative theological propositions as some of these queer Muslims participate in an Islamic liberation theology and understand the Qur’an as source of empowerment. Thus, this research project investigates these issues of reconciliation further.

Western Notions of Sexuality and Homonationalism

In this section, I will discuss the meaning of queerness as an umbrella term and how sexuality can have different meanings depending on the cultural context. It is crucial to utilize a transnational feminist perspective, given that much discourse in queer studies seems to be influenced by Western perspectives, forming a dominant narrative of who is considered to be queer and what queerness means. In addition, this section will address the importance of the concept of homonationalism, how the social construction of the nation-state works as an exclusionary tool, and the absence of scholarship on queer Somalis. Regardless of the origins of the queer Somalis and their current immigrant status, discussing how sexuality is socially constructed is unavoidable.

“Queer” is an umbrella term, and the acronym LGBTQIA+ is used to refer to the various sexual and gender identities within this category. In this thesis, I am using “queer” as an umbrella term to describe LGBTQIA+ identities. While there still are limitations in fully accounting for all the sexual identities in the world, I believe the term “queer” is more inclusive than the acronym “LGBTQIA+,” and it is the best term to question the stability of identity categories. Additionally, by using “queer,” I am queering those sexual and gender identities that are usually constructed based on

Western notions of sexuality and often ignore, deny, or erase other queer identities and terms that are present in other cultures and languages (Corey-Boulet, 2019; Darakchi, 2017; Gaudio, 2014; Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Najmabadi, 2005, 2014; Puar, 2007, 2013; Savcı, 2021). As Ioannides (2018) argues, the history of queerness for Muslims in the Arab world and the Middle East has been denied for the longest as Muslim history has been built by essentialist and social constructionist perspectives influenced by the Western sphere.

Moreover, I will discuss the significance English holds in the field. Terms used by foreign governments, such as the Iranian government, are often heavily influenced by their English counterparts, which is a depiction of how language dominance can shape the understanding of queerness globally. According to Savcı (2021),

[Her own] aim is not only to point out the specificity of English as a language that dominates queer studies' epistemological unconscious over and against other languages but also to underline the homolingual address that queer theory and queer studies inevitably engage in as a result and to invite a rethinking of the particular theories of language that animate the field. (p. 12)

An example of this can be found in the work of Najmabadi. In the original understanding of sexuality in Iran under the Qajar dynasty (1785–1925), nonheteronormative maleness, where men can be homosocially in public and feminine men would be an object of desire, would have been the norm (Najmabadi, 2005). Thus, Iranian society and authorities that rejected this nonheteronormative maleness based on the idea of westernization seem to ignore that their understandings are based on a Western perspective of gender and sexuality (Najmabadi, 2014). In

their argumentation men must be masculine and physically distance themselves from each other (Najmabadi, 2014). Moreover, being *kuni*, which refers to the act of being anally penetrated, was a shameful word and insult, which was part of why gay individuals in Iran rejected the term “gay” at first. Therefore, they rejected a Western notion of their identity, while Iranian authorities who claimed to fight the westernization of their country argued against the Iranian queer community based on Western identity categories. This highlights what Savcı (2021) argued about the dominance of the English language in queer theory and queer studies. While members of the queer community had their own terms for describing themselves, the Iranian government’s terms were heavily influenced by its Western and English counterparts.

Here, I explain how various other examples of queer sexualities that do not necessarily follow the Western understandings of queerness can be found in historical and contemporary contexts. One historic example is the case of Qajar Iran from the eighteen to the twentieth century. In Qajar Iran, the term *amrad*, which depicts a beardless, gorgeous young man, did not denote a derivative of a female form but was a standalone form and, thus, did not signify *amrad* as a same-sex desiring man in contrast to a heterosexual man, but rather as part of a culture of homoeroticism present in Iran up until the beginning of the twentieth century (Najmabadi, 2005). In contemporary Bulgarian Pomak communities, as one result of the encouragement of sexual activity within the community, men in their 40s to 50s shared within the studies by Darakchi on Muslim sexualities that they had sex with other boys during their teenage years as they state because “in every community there are boys who would like to be passive in the sexual act and act like a ‘woman’ so other guys normally ‘take advantage’ of this” (Darakchi, 2017, p. 1203). Such a statement

indicates that even men now encouraging their youth to be sexually active within the frame of heterosexuality have engaged in nonheteronormative acts of sexuality, supporting an understanding of sexuality being a spectrum rather than a binary. Gaudio (2014) had similar findings, where they described how the Hausa tribe in Nigeria has male homosexual prostitutes and their own word *dan daudu*, which means "man who acts like a woman" for it (p. 322). Other instances can also be found in enslaved males in Egypt, who came there with the sub-Saharan slave trade, which served other male clients sexually (Gaudio, 2014). Various aspects of queerness on the African continent have also been investigated by other scholars (Corey-Boulet, 2019; Epprecht, 2008; S. O. Murray & Roscoe, 2001). All these scholars (Corey-Boulet, 2019; Darakchi, 2017; Epprecht, 2008; Gaudio, 2014; S. O. Murray & Roscoe, 2001; Najmabadi, 2005, 2014) have shown successfully that queerness can be defined differently depending on the cultural context and thereby, support Savcı's (2021) argument that the language used in queer theory and queer studies matter, and that the default should not always be English.

Furthermore, Valentine (2007) also argues that questions of gender identity and gender performance are often tied to questions of whiteness, as many trans people of color might not understand their trans experiences in the same ways as white trans people do but rather as nonidentity, a variation of gayness or a mixture of their gayness and transness. Thus, in the context of queer Somalis, it must be explained how power dynamics are in place when utilizing Western notions of sexuality. Using terms such as LGBTQIA+ and even queerness must be carefully done.

In this section, I will describe the role of homonationalism. Homonationalism, which is the political union of queer sexualities with nationalist and imperialist

agendas (Puar, 2007), as a tool for theorizing the intersections of homophobia and Islamophobia, provides a crucial lens when analyzing queer Somali activists' lives. As Puar (2007) describes, homonationalism is constituted by racism that is sexualized, nationalism that is racialized, and gendered practices that work together, affected by the political surroundings at a given time. By being queer, Black, Muslim, and immigrant, queer Somalis in America are fully experiencing the oppressions that are perpetuated by homonationalism. Under homonationalism, queer Somalis are erased as their identities are constructed as mutually exclusive and backward (Çalışkan et al., 2020; El-Tayeb, 2012; Kehl, 2020; Kosnick, 2015; Mosurinjohn, 2014; Puar, 2007, 2013; Savcı, 2021). Homonationalism serves two major purposes. On the one side, it serves the purpose of depicting a country as a "haven" for queer people and that everyone is safe there (Çalışkan et al., 2020; Puar, 2007, 2013; Savcı, 2021).

Puar (2007) suggests that the roots in this "progressiveness" of the state that feeds into exceptionalism are based on the nation's secularism in the Global North, which is perceived as an ethical standard on that state violence against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities within and outside the nation becomes justified. The idea of pinkwashing is directly linked to the concept of homonationalism. Pinkwashing states portray themselves as open-minded and diverse, allowing sexual minorities to be their authentic selves (Puar, 2013; Savcı, 2021). Examples often include India and Israel, but pinkwashing can also be found in the United States and other countries. For instance, Trevenen and Degagne (2015) highlight that in the case of Canada, "incorporating some sexually exceptionalized citizens into the category of 'protected' encourages some LGBTQ people to advocate for 'tough on crime' approaches that reinforce the marginalization and criminalization of Indigenous people, poor people,

activists, and sex workers, among others” (p. 113). In their work Zubillaga-Pow (2016) make the case of homonationalism being present in Singapore affecting the Malay-Muslim lesbian subject. El-Tayeb (2012, 2013) has shown how homonationalism plays out in Europe, where the queer Muslim immigrant challenges the heteronormative European. According to El-Tayeb (2011), a queering of ethnicity is practiced that refers to “embodying an identity that is declared impossible even though lived by millions” (p. 167). They argue that being a queer Muslim immigrant is not considered possible in Western opinion, and thus, by embodying such characteristics, they resist this public understanding of exclusiveness.

On the other side, homonationalism also is a catalyst for Islamophobia and racism (Çalışkan et al., 2020; El-Tayeb, 2012; Puar, 2007, 2013; Savcı, 2021). By creating the Muslim world as the enemy that must be fought in order to protect the queer communities in the countries, which often participate in pinkwashing, Muslims are portrayed as the source of all evil, including homophobia (Çalışkan et al., 2020; Puar, 2007, 2013; Savcı, 2021). This reasoning has two concrete consequences for queer Muslims. First, identities such as being queer and being Muslim are pivoted against each other, creating an artificial opposition, which then fuels the public perception that queer Muslims do not exist or cannot exist (Çalışkan et al., 2020; El-Tayeb, 2011, 2012, 2013; Kehl, 2020). As El-Tayeb (2016) explains,

The dominant dichotomy to which homonationalist and progressive white queers subscribe to sees the European Muslim/PoC community as a whole as embodying the wrong, that is, misogynist and homophobic, type of heterosexuality. This dichotomy puts racialized queers in an even more

impossible position however: communities of colour appear as by default heterosexual, the queer community as by default white. (pp. 160-161)

Therefore, this kind of reasoning supports more conservative and negative Islamic interpretations of queerness, as discussed earlier. Second, homonationalism allows governments to construct who are authentic queers and who is worth living. As Çalışkan et al. (2020) explain, homonationalism supports notions of queer necropolitics, where queer communities of color are seen as having no value, and thus, they potentially can experience social, political, or literal death because bodies of queer people who do not fit the construction of queer bodies by certain governments are then deemed to be disposable. Shakhsari (2020) adds another dimension to this notion by arguing that some queer of color communities, like the Iranian queer community, have some worth when their cases are appropriated to create monetary value off of those communities through the marketing of their struggles. Queer Somalis, as one community of queers of color, fit into this category. Puar (2006) argues that discourses of terrorism are related to questions of race and sexuality and its surveillance within and outside the U.S. as a nation. Nonetheless, scholars such as Savcı (2021) have argued that colonial frameworks of Islamophobia and homonationalism do not always work as theorized but that nation-states such as Türkiye have complicated the discourse even more by merging nationalism, religion, capitalism, and neoliberalism, thereby, creating complex spaces for queer individuals to navigate. Savcı (2021) also argues that queer subjects are not mere victims but that they create queer epistemologies that are of high value for the survival of queer individuals in nation-states attacking the queer subject.

Here, I explain the various aspects surrounding the idea of “nation.” The nation-state as a social construction plays a crucial role in how queer immigrants are treated in the Global North. While one can be a permanent resident, even a full citizen of the host country one immigrated to, the question of home will always be asked by those in power, and racism, such as anti-Black Islamophobia against Somali immigrants, for instance, will remain prevalent (Mohanty, 2003). As Mohanty (2003) points out: "Questions of 'home,' 'belonging,' 'nation,' and 'community' thus become profoundly complicated" (p. 124). The social construction of queer immigrants creates various issues. As Hodge (2019) and D.A. Murray (2013) have shown, one major issue is the precarity of queer lives that results from this construction. By objectifying queer immigrants as bodies that can be disposed of (Çalışkan et al., 2020), bodies that must adhere to the host country’s standards of living (Çalışkan et al., 2020; Hodge, 2019; Mohanty, 2003; D. A. Murray, 2013), and constructing those bodies as inauthentic to “natives” queer bodies (Hodge, 2019; Kehl, 2020; D. A. Murray, 2013; Puar, 2007; Savcı, 2021), queer immigrants are under constant pressure to become authentic queers. As Western notions of sexuality dominate the discourse on queer identities, many queer immigrants have a different understanding of their sexuality than the government of the country they are seeking to immigrate to, and queer immigrants often struggle with reconciling their own identity formation with the dominant discourse that is pushed on them and consequently oppresses them (Hodge, 2019; D. A. Murray, 2013). Additionally, as homonationalism also serves as a tool of oppression for governments that perpetuate violence through queer necropolitics, national security measures are now justified to protect the queer community of the nation and thereby ignoring and violating queer immigrants not

fitting into those categories (Çalışkan et al., 2020; Hodge, 2019; D. A. Murray, 2013). These tragedies directly result from queer sex being "normalized" based on white, queer bodies so that queerness becomes part of the state's apparatus to regulate (Puar, 2007).

In this part, I discuss the gap in the literature on queer Somalis. As Hunt et al. (2018) have pointed out in their research on perceptions on queerness of female Somali refugees in Minnesota, queer communities in Somalia have rarely been researched, and academic scholarship is minimal. In New Zealand, Somali immigrants were researched about their queer identities concerning mental health, showing that queer Somalis, like other queer Muslims, struggle to reconcile their identities (Guerin et al., 2004). While academic scholarship is widely lacking on queerness in Somalia and the Somali diaspora, queer Somali authors, such as Afdhere Jama and Mohamed Abdulkarim Ali, have shown that queer Somalis exist through books containing interviews and memoirs (M. A. Ali, 2019; Jama, 2008a, 2013b, 2015). Academic scholarship on African queerness only slightly touches on queerness in the Somali context (Epprecht, 2008; S. O. Murray & Roscoe, 2001; Osman, 2016a, 2016c). Osman (2016a, 2016c) explains that Somalia, alongside many other East African countries, has much change ahead of them regarding queer rights and that hypermasculinity is a trait valued highly in Somali manhood, which hurts queer Somali men. Thus, while queer Somalis undoubtedly exist, a lack of research on queer Somalis can be identified, and no research on queer Somali in Western diaspora has been conducted. Nor has any research on queer Somalis been conducted on their resistance towards the mutual exclusiveness and visibility of their queer identities. The research was limited to the perceptions of female Somali refugees in Minnesota

on queerness (Hunt et al., 2018) or the relation of their queerness to mental health in New Zealand (Guerin et al., 2004). I will address this gap in the literature by showing some of the ways queer Somalis in the Western diaspora might exist by analyzing published personal narratives.

Reflection on Literature

This literature review discussed three main areas of knowledge production: Islamic views on queerness, Western notions of sexuality and homonationalism, and anti-Black Islamophobia. The literature in these areas is specifically vital in understanding the intersections of being queer, Muslim, and Somali in the context of the Western diaspora. By reviewing this literature, the risks of essentializing and exceptionalizing are reduced. By emphasizing the role of transnational feminism, intersectionality, and queer theory in this research, I was able to counteract the dominant systems of knowledge production proactively. Furthermore, I identified a gap in the literature, which my research aims at illuminating more. The significance of conducting this research was shown, and in the next section, the methodology of a textual content analysis of materials containing queer Somalis' personal narratives in Western diaspora will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Methods & Methodology

In this section, I will discuss essential methodologies I use for this thesis project and the methods utilized to achieve the project goals. As this thesis aims to analyze queer Somalis' personal narratives in Western diaspora and their lived experiences, it is vital to choose the proper method for data collection. The methodologies should also align with the overall goal to account for the various perspectives that inform the analysis of queer Somalis' identity formations in the Western diaspora.

Studying the community of queer Somalis in Western diaspora is very important, as not much research on queer Somalis has been conducted (Hunt et al., 2018). As queer Somalis are at the intersections of queer, Black, Muslim, immigrant, and Somali identities, they are prone to experience oppressive forces such as homophobia, racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia that are informed by each other. Sexism potentially plays another role depending on the gender of the person. Thus, as this project utilizes feminist research, it is meant to have an empowering effect. While not all feminist research is empowering, it is a feminist praxis to take action with one's research (Gurr & Kelly, 2019; Hesse-Biber, 2014b). Queer Somalis are not just some abstract group in Western diaspora; they are our neighbors who directly suffer from various forms of discrimination. Therefore, by utilizing feminist ethics of care, this research does not see the participants as pure data sources but as valid knowledge holders who have to inform the research process and hopefully benefit from it but never further suffer from this research (Bell, 2014). This research is vital to improve the lives of queer Somalis in Western diaspora by filling some of the research gaps and addressing some of the community needs.

The Methodologies

Various feminist methodologies and epistemologies will guide this thesis project. In this section, I explain why I choose to engage and conduct this research by utilizing intersectionality, Black feminist theory, transnational feminist theory, and queer theory.

The unique intersections of the lived experiences of queer Somalis in Western diaspora require an intersectional lens. Intersectionality is crucial for any analysis informed by feminist theoretical work as it explains the symbiosis of various identities and how they create an individual's unique experience of oppression and privilege. The theory of intersectionality explains that a person's multiple identities and their intersections shape their lived experiences and positionality in this world (Bartlett & Kennedy, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Thus, investigating a community that embodies the intersections of multiple identities makes an intersectional analysis imperative, as these identities potentially lead to their discrimination.

Black feminist theory is also crucial for this analysis. According to Hill Collins (2000), "Black feminist theory's identity as a 'critical' social theory lies in its commitment to justice, both for U.S. Black women, as a collectivity and for that of other similarly oppressed groups" (p. 9). Thus, Black feminist theory can illuminate some social dynamics that queer Somalis in Western diaspora experience. Many members of American society perceive Somalis as Black or as Abdi (2019) questions: "Are Somalis the newest African-American?" The racialization of African immigrants as Black is something that scholars such as Chan-Malik (2018) and Rouse (2004) have already discussed in the context of Black Muslim women. Black Muslims in America have experiences shaped by the public discourse of anti-Black Islamophobia

(Chowdhury, 2018; Meier, 2022; Mugabo, 2016). According to Chowdhury (2018), anti-Black Islamophobia is the unique intersection of anti-Blackness and anti-Muslimness, which compounds and shapes a form of Islamophobia that differs from Muslims who are perceived as light-skinned as the racist component is not as foregrounded in them. Some of those experiences have already been highlighted in the works of Chan-Malik (2018) and Rouse (2004), which discuss the daily lives of Black Muslim women in the United States. Because of the racialization of African immigrants as Black in the United States, the daily struggles to navigate the oppressive forces ingrained in systemic racism are very similar to Black Americans. Black feminist theory offers insights and answers on resisting these forces and dealing with the blatant racism in American society. This is important when considering queer Somalis since they are perceived as Black and sometimes fall into this category.

Nonetheless, intersectionality must be no substitute for theories of decolonization. Hence, transnational feminist theory takes a central role in this project. Scholars such as Chandra Mohanty (1984) have warned us of the construction of a monolithic “other.” According to Mohanty (1984), many Western feminists have often explained how “third-world” women were constructed as one group with the same experiences, which recreated power dynamics that harmed women in the Global South. Transnational feminism attempts to counteract these single stories and create a solidarity that acknowledges our differences (Moghadam, 2015). The question of home is also a crucial one in diasporic communities (Abdi, 2015, 2019; Armila et al., 2019; Armila & Kontkanen, 2019; Mohanty, 2003). Many Somalis do not feel they belong to the country they live in, and thus, their integration is also jeopardized (Abdi, 2015, 2019; Armila et al., 2019; Armila & Kontkanen, 2019). In return, many

societies hosting diasporic Somali communities assume that Somalis as an ethnic group do not want to integrate themselves, even though the structural barriers in place are the main reason for the lack of integration (Abdi, 2015, 2019; Armila et al., 2019; Armila & Kontkanen, 2019). As a result, Somali communities must not be lumped together into a monolithic group such as “immigrants” and deserve a detailed and nuanced analysis of their life situations. This also remains true for subgroups within the Somali diaspora. Mohanty (1984) and Kaplan (1994) argue for a deconstruction of the present power structures, which are harmful to people in the Global South, and call for a critical reflection on one's positionality in the global context in order to do justice to such project as this thesis undertakes with queer Somalis in Western diaspora.

Queer Somalis in Western diaspora do not only question their belonging from a perspective of ethnic and racial identity but also their queer identities. To understand nuances and identities within the queer spectrum, queer theories in explaining the identity formation of queer Somalis are essential. Being queer, Black, and Muslim already pivots queer Somalis as the “other” in society and deems them as deviant, non-normative, and as a threat to society's hegemony. Therefore, scholars such as Anzaldúa (2009), Ferguson (2004), Hames-García (2011), Johnson (2001), Puar (2007, 2013; 2002), Savcı (2021), and Somerville (2000) have influenced the queer lens used in this thesis. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that queer theory in this thesis must always be accompanied by transnational feminist thought since there are multiple potential dangers if this is not done. First, many queer identities are constructed from a Western perspective and do not account for other queer identities not falling into the dominant descriptors of sexuality (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001;

Najmabadi, 2006; Savcı, 2021). Scholars such as Najmabadi (2005, 2014) for Iran, Darakchi (2017) for Bulgaria, Gaudio (2014), Epprecht (2008), Murray and Roscoe (2001), and Corey-Boulet (2019) for sub-Saharan Africa, and Savcı (2021) for Türkiye, have shown that queer identities are far more complex globally than the dominant categories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and even queer amongst others. Second, English reinforces this dominance of Western notions of sexuality because of the universal use of the English language in communication, which harms queer communities in the Global South (Savcı, 2021). Therefore, queer theory cannot be used alone, and a transnational feminist and queer of color critique lens must be used for queer theory.

The Methods

When conducting research with marginalized communities, the chosen method is fundamental to ensure the best possible treatment of the people engaged with the research. Initially, this thesis project was supposed to be based on qualitative interviews as it would have allowed for subjugated knowledge to be revealed directly by queer Somalis, in their own words. Nonetheless, due to the time constraints of a thesis project brings with itself, I was unable to recruit interviewees. One possible reason was the time was not enough to build the needed rapport for trustful interactions that address the power relations between interviewer and interviewees. This history of feminist research praxis led me to utilize qualitative textual content analysis as my method for this thesis project. This method came naturally to fill in the void as it still addresses hidden and subjugated knowledge. As Leavy (2007) states, “Feminist researchers also use textual analysis to explore issues that are central to women’s lives—issues that have historically been made to appear invisible within

academic literature” (p. 234). As feminist research is not only concerned with women but also other marginalized communities, a qualitative textual content analysis allows us to address the absence of queer Somalis in academic scholarship by analyzing published popular literature. The method of content analysis “developed out of the assumption that we can learn about our society by interrogating the material items produced within the culture,” and highlights that “we can learn about social life, such as norms, values, socialization, or social stratification” (Leavy, 2007, p. 229).

Thus, choosing the kind of textual materials to be analyzed has to be done carefully. By conducting search engine as well as database searches with terms such as “queer Somalis” and “LGBTQ+ Somalis,” I created an extensive list of existing textual materials about queer Somalis. Nonetheless, it must be remarked that such an overview can and will never be complete due to all kinds of barriers, including epistemic violence and privilege. After combing through this list, I decided to utilize nine primary textual materials, which represented a diverse range of materials from academic books and memoirs to oral history projects and an online interview project, hoping also to sample a wide range of queer Somali voices. The nine textual materials were Mohamed Abdulkarim Ali’s *Angry Queer Somali Boy: A Complicated Memoir*, chapters in Afdhere Jama’s *Being Queer and Somali: LGBT Somalis at Home and Abroad*, the interview with Hadiyo Jim’ale in Afdhere Jama’s *Queer Jihad: LGBT Muslims on Coming Out, Activism, and the Faith*, the chapters authored by Diriye Osman in the anthology *Decolonizing Sexualities: Transnational Perspectives; Critical Interventions* edited by Sandeep Bakshi et al., the essay written by Amna Ali in the anthology *This Arab Is Queer: An Anthology by LGBTQ+ Arab Qriters* edited by Elias Jahshan, the foreword written by Afdhere Jama in Michael T. Luongo’s *Gay*

Travels in the Muslim World, the chapter “The Gabdho of Somalia” in Afdhere Jama’s book *Illegal Citizens: Queer Lives in the Muslim World*, Mustafa Jumale’s entry in the Minneapolis Interview Project titled “Mustafa Jumale: Accessing Power for Black Immigrants,” and the transcript of the oral history project at Augsburg University with Ash Farah and Mustafa Jumale named “Oral History Interview with Ash Farah, 2019” (see Appendix A for a detailed overview). One criterion employed for selection was the fact that the queer Somalis in the materials had to reside at some point in their lives in the Western diaspora. Moreover, the pieces needed to entirely, or largely, reflect the direct voice of the queer Somali in question. This way, the textual content analysis engages directly with the voices of queer Somalis in Western diaspora without any interference from outsiders. The selected textual materials were inductively coded for this thesis project. According to Leavy (2007), “the data are then coded, which means they are categorized into preconceived or inductively generated code categories, which may be very literal/specific or larger metacodes that are more conceptual in nature” (p. 231). In this thesis, I retrieved inductive, specific codes from the texts, which I categorized into larger metacodes that reflected an overarching theme, where multiple codes related to each other and intersected with each other. That also led to the cross-listing of specific codes in multiple metacodes.

Through this method of textual content analysis, discovering emerging themes is only one beneficial aspect of better understanding the queer Somali community in Western diaspora. Furthermore, the research results aim to help empower the queer Somali communities in Western diaspora. As Leavy (2007) explains,

Feminist textual analysis is important because when looking through a feminist lens, researchers are likely to ask different research questions,

approach the data differently, and use their resulting knowledge to effect intellectual, social, and political change. Furthermore, this kind of research often looks at text from the viewpoint of women who may not otherwise be considered. (p. 236)

Thus, by using this method, I intend to empower the queer Somali communities in Western diaspora and counteract some of the epistemic violence this community experiences in academia.

Limitations

While nine textual materials are not a small number for a literary analysis, the danger of overgeneralization must be considered when conducting this research. The reasoning for focusing on queer Somalis in Western diaspora also suggests a limitation, as the outcomes might vary between the various regions considered to be in Western diaspora. Thus, further research on the overall identity formation of queer Somalis in other subgroups must be conducted. For instance, research on queerness within Somalia is still needed. This will then also allow for the validation of the patterns that emerge.

Moreover, I have an outsider status in the queer Somali community. As Hesser-Biber (2014a) points out: “If the interviewer is perceived as an *outsider*, it is generally thought that his or her differences might make it more difficult to gain access to and understand the situation of ‘the other’” (p. 210). This outsider status also applies to me as the researcher who engages with the voices of queer Somalis in Western diaspora through textual content analysis. For this particular reason, my upcoming results chapter is heavily driven by quotes, even block quotes, to ensure

that their voices are central to this thesis project and their language remains unaltered in an attempt to decolonize research and counteract epistemic violence.

Reflexivity

My identities shape my preconceptions and who I am. Being an outsider to the communities I research affects my positionality. While I have been engaged in studying Muslim sexualities for multiple years, my knowledge is only partial, and for research participants, I remain a potential threat due to my own identities. I am a cisgender, Caucasian, German, queer man who conducts research with queer Somalis. Not only do I not have the lived experience of being queer and Somali, but I am also not a Muslim. This creates a power dynamic, which must be addressed carefully. Hesse-Biber (2014a) notes that “sometimes differences that occur between the interviewer and interviewee may seem particularly challenging, especially with regard to interviewing across gender lines and/or dealing with interview topics that may be extremely sensitive to deal with” (p. 214). This quote still holds true in my research with textual materials. Both cases apply to me, as not all queer Somalis whose pieces are analyzed in this thesis might share the same gender or sexuality as me.

The topic of queerness within a Muslim community is very sensitive. Additionally, I hold some epistemic privilege in my position as a graduate student studying a highly underrepresented community in academic research. Thus, I “become privileged to speak further” (Naples & Gurr, 2014, p. 21). Consequently, my research must be guided by feminist ethics of care to ensure that I am always guided by what is best for the community and the participants and not further exploit or harm them. As a feminist researcher, I must practice reflexivity. Before each step of my research, I must evaluate how my own identities shape the conversations,

interpretations, and interactions that inform my research. Keeping the systems of power and whom they privilege and how in mind, provides valuable insights on how I am located in this research. According to Hesse-Biber (2014a), “*doing reflexivity* in fact empowered both the researcher and the researched within the interview situation” (p. 216). This shows that acknowledging my positionality and practicing reflexivity can minimize my potential dangers when engaging with the stories of people who are different from me and holds chances to improve their lives.

By utilizing the concept of intersectionality in conjunction with Black feminist theory, transnational feminist theory, and queer theory, the analysis of personal narratives of queer Somalis in Western diaspora will reduce the risk of essentializing, colonizing, and perpetuating violence. Instead, this research seeks to empower queer Somali communities in Western diaspora by decolonizing the analysis and counteract the oppressive forces that alienate them within Western societies.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter discusses the findings from analyzing queer Somalis' personal narratives in Western diaspora. These personal narratives stem from written pieces such as memoirs, book chapters, websites, and oral history projects and are readily available to the public. In the following sections, the collected data is discussed based on thematic blocks, which are grounded in codes that developed from the analysis of queer Somalis' personal narratives. Those blocks reflect the most common emerging themes as well as surprising results. In this chapter, I will discuss the themes of migration stories; the “Somali struggle”; violence and tradition; Islam and queerness; coming out(s) and western imperialism in sexuality; the daily physical and mental survival; racism, Islamophobia, and their intersections; questions of belonging, assimilation, and erasure; and community empowerment.

As this thesis project would not even come to life without the powerful and strong voices of queer Somalis in Western diaspora, it is crucial to introduce the people whose voices will be heard in this chapter. They are at the center of this analysis and deserve the space to be introduced briefly. **Amna** is a Somali-Yemeni-Emirati who is a queer rights activist and founder of the Black Arabs Collective. She resides in Toronto. Another Canadian-based person is **Mohamed**, who has also lived in the Netherlands prior to moving to Canada. He is a queer author and his first book, one of the materials of this project, is an impressive memoir of his life. **Ash**, who lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is a trans Somali activist, who fiercely fights for the Somali community within Minnesota through efforts such as opposing CVE legislation and conversion therapy abolition. Minnesota is also home to **Mustafa**, who works as a Black immigration activist and was very engaged in policy work that aims

at empowering East African immigrant communities. **Afdhere**, is a renowned author of multiple books covering the topics of Islam, queerness, and Somali culture. He also is a filmmaker and founder of platforms such as *Huriyah Magazine* and *Queer Somalis*. **Hamdi** is a Somali transsexual, who transitioned from male to female, and currently lives with her Somali husband in the U.S. **Hadiyo** is a Somali lesbian, who was married and has two children. She has lived in the U.S. and pursues queer rights activism back in Somalia by engaging with local authorities and communities. She also is co-founder of *Queer Somalis*. **Ahmed** was an assumed bisexual Somali man, who was killed in his sleep. He lived in Atlanta, Georgia. **Rahma** is a Somali lesbian who resides in Geneva, Switzerland. There, she attended medical school to become a gynecologist as she is a strong anti-FGM activist. **Mo** came to the United Kingdom as an undocumented refugee, where he met his current boyfriend, Dylan, at the London airport. By sticking together in tough times, they have been dating for over seven years. **Dadirow**, who also lives in Minneapolis, works as a teller supervisor in a local bank. He tries to live life to the fullest while he battles his HIV infection. In Oslo, Norway you can find **Amal**, who is an open lesbian Somali activist who fights the daily homophobia through her activism. Oslo is also home to **Rashid**, who advocates for a reconciliation with Islam as his past relationship ended due to his ex-boyfriend's reconciliation struggles. **Jamal** is a vibrant gay man, who lives a very Parisian life in Paris, France. There, he can count on a strong community of Muslim friends, who would do everything for him. The whole group can regularly be found with their children at the Paris Pride. **Ali** and **Ismail** are a gay couple from Somalia, who have been with each other since they were 11 years old. Falling deeply in love during their teenage years, they fled their families and applied for asylum to the U.S., where they

live now. **Dahir** is a Somali gay man, who has a long history of migration due to his experiences of homophobia. After being granted asylum, he now lives in Toronto, Canada. **Diriye** is a queer Somali author who aims at empowering African queer people through his writing. He is living in the United Kingdom. Last but not least, there is also another **Diriye** who resides in Washington, DC and regularly wrote pieces for *Queer Somalis*.¹

In the following thematic blocks, their lived experiences will provide valuable insights into what it means to be queer and Somali. The first theme to look at, are queer Somalis' migration stories.

Migration Stories

One prominent theme in the analysis of queer Somalis' personal narratives was the experience of fleeing Somalia. Some stories started with an initial fleeing from one region in Somalia to another before leaving the country altogether. Moreover, many of the people shared in their stories that after fleeing Somalia, they would have a long migration journey attached to their lives. Often this journey led through neighboring countries like Kenya and then the Middle East, such as Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, before moving to a country in the West such as the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, or the Netherlands. With the civil war in Somalia being the dominant reason for these migration histories, some individuals indicated that they had fled Somalia because of their sexuality and sometimes the imminent danger that potentially resulted from that.

¹ It was not clear if both persons were the same person in different life stages or if they are, indeed, two different people.

Many individuals shared the trauma that such leaving of the home brought with it. For instance, Mohamed had to leave his mother behind as a very small child (M. A. Ali, 2019, pp. 6–7). Mohamed describes his last time with his mother before leaving Somalia as follows: “It was my final dip in the oasis before the whole country was swept up in the violence of clan warfare” (M. A. Ali, 2019, p. 6). In the case of Ali and Ismail, they had to flee because their gay relationship had become known to their families (Jama, 2015, pp. 84–85). As Ali states: “I was extremely in love with him, . . . , there was no way I was going to watch them kill him” (Jama, 2015, pp. 84–85). Dahir fled first to Yemen, followed by Saudi Arabia, Kenya, South Africa, and then Canada after being ostracized, harassed, and threatened in Somalia as well his host nations along his migration journey (Jama, 2015, pp. 135–137). In Dahir’s case, his immigration status resulted in years of unemployment throughout his journey (Jama, 2015, p. 136). Nonetheless, Dahir perceives his arrival in Canada as a relief, where he finally can be free and himself (Jama, 2015, p. 139). As Dahir explains: “I’m so happy to be in Canada, . . . , life has completely changed for me. I’m in the best country in the world” (Jama, 2015, p. 139). The question of home is always significant to immigrants and migrants (Mohanty, 2003) and, thus, is also a question that can be found in the personal narratives of queer Somalis.

While refugees such as Dahir might be thankful for escaping longstanding histories of violence based on their sexual and gender identities, the Western exceptionalism expressed does not hold true for most queer refugees. According to Hodge (2019),

Being a refugee is precarious enough, but it can be compounded by the double-threat of having one’s status as a precarious person itself rendered

precarious due to possible “discrepancies” between an [border] agent’s expectations about a refugee’s identity and the facts of their lived experiences. (pp. 86–87)

Therefore, many migration stories of queer Somalis directly intersected with notions of nationalism, white supremacy, imperialism, colonialism, immigration status, and Western exceptionalism, regardless of whether they fled due to the civil war or to escape violent threats for their queerness. Each individual had a unique migration story that led them to the West, but shared experiences of queer Somalis in the Western diaspora were visible.

The Somali Struggle

Another common theme, which was surprisingly coherent among those queer Somali narratives analyzed, was the articulation of what I call a “Somali Struggle.” Throughout the statements of queer Somalis, it becomes apparent that they believe that there is a struggle that pertains to Somalis specifically. Mohamed (M. A. Ali, 2019), concerning his stepmother's family and their deterioration of well-being, described the following:

Now they were rootless beggars calling on the white folks they had denounced back home. The bitterness was strong and a sense of defeat crept into their lives. Their exile marked a return to Islam. The belief was that we had turned away from Allah and exile and beggary was our reward. (p. 27)

The experience of being in exile as a form of Islamic penalty that Mohamed describes is very similar to other descriptions by queer Somalis. Afdhere mentions how “despite our common connections, and there are many connections Somalis have, not all Somalis see the world through the same lenses” (Jama, 2015, p. i). Such a statement

indicates that Somalis are not a homogeneous group and that different views will contribute to the “Somali Struggle.” Hadiyo (Jama, 2013a) also expresses this struggle:

I think I would change being Somali. I’m not sure if it’s difficult to be anything else. I’m proud to be Somali, but I also know it takes so much energy out of me. It’s such a fight, on a daily basis, to continue being Somali. (p. 116)

Thus, it becomes apparent that being Somali in the Western diaspora carries some burden with it. Mustafa narrates about his experience in working in politics with Somali communities as follows: “I experienced traumatic struggles within the Somali community. I didn’t know much about Somali clans. There were some toxic Somali men that were using clan identity politics to push their own agenda and play ‘kingmakers’ in the Somali community” (Jumale, 2019, para. 36). Here, Mustafa explains the importance of tribes in Somali culture and how this also leads to diverse Somali views on issues. As discussed in the introduction the colonial histories of Somalia intertwine with the civil war, which directly affect Somali diasporic communities. Conflicts between tribes in the North, what is considered Somaliland, with tribes in the South, also play out in the Western diaspora. Mustafa’s “kingmakers” are only one such example.

Ash (Gadow, 2019), discussing the experiences of Somalis in exile, also refers back to the meaning of Islam:

And it makes sense for people especially here in Minneapolis to cling on to their faith even more so than they would back home because they literally had to give up so much of themselves and Minneapolis is vastly different than where they’re growing up. I like had this conversation with my mom and she

was explaining how much she missed sugar canes and how much she missed like the masjid that she would go to and like just how vastly different growing up in Somalia versus living here in this tundra! With no sun, like, just off. Even the food's off! All this, so it's very understandable, they would cling to their faith even harder, like even more strict because that's one of the only things they got to keep. (5:30–7:50)

Thus, an alienation from Somali culture and homelands results in an intensification of engagement with the faith. This return to Islam with increased engagement also fuels conservative forces and viewpoints that perceive queerness as a threat to Somali empowerment, as the Somali community already struggles enough with other issues (Osman, 2016c). Diriye (Osman, 2016c) describes this as follows: “In order to fully belong you must live up to absurd standards of virtue, honour, and piety” (pp. 100–101). All of these aspects highlight the diversity of Somalis with regard to faith, tribe, culture, inclusivity, and many more factors. For instance, Diriye also states that femininity is inferior in Somali culture and that bending gender is not Somali, very similar to how non-heteronormative sexuality is perceived as a threat against Somali empowerment (Osman, 2016a, pp. 105–106).

These perceptions are also directly tied to a fear of westernization. Diriye tells the story where their father called them to say that “being gay was not only an amoral form of psychic and sexual corruption but also an act of perverse, Western mimicry” (Osman, 2016c, p. 100). Similarly, Mohamed (M. A. Ali, 2019) retells an encounter with his stepsister:

What she meant was that homosexuality in white bodies was acceptable. As a Somali, I disgraced our heritage. Queerness was a fine complement to Western

degeneracy we inhabited, yet in our Islamic culture, it was a symptom of sickness. Why on Earth would she want sickness for her brother! (p. 135)

Through these narratives, the “Somali Struggle” is described as directly intertwining with questions of religion, sexuality, gender, and westernization.

Violence & Tradition

When discussing a specific group of people, such as Somalis, it is unsurprising that some themes surrounding tradition and culture develop. In many cases, experiences of violence were directly tied to notions of tradition and justified by cultural norms. Mohamed (M. A. Ali, 2019) provides some insights into the roots of this kind of violence by stating,

Violence was commonplace. We were wounded people. It was assumed we had the wherewithal to pick up where we left off. The rage of becoming dependents and the obscuring of our pain taxed our collective sanity. Violence was the expression of our frustrations. We were a proud people brought low by historical circumstance. No one had the time to figure out what went wrong because life had to go on. We had to thrive in this alien land and jealousy guard whatever we had left of our culture. (p. 44)

The “Somali Struggle” of being in exile—in Western diaspora—resulted in a protectiveness of remaining customs and values in conjunction with increased religiosity, as mentioned before. Hence, as part of this protectiveness violence became one possible strategy to protect the remains of Somali culture in the Western diaspora.

Much of the violence experienced or witnessed by queer Somalis is related to non-conforming gender performance, nonnormative sexuality, and rejection of Somali

customs and traditions. For instance, Ismail's father had tried to kill him as Ismail (Jama, 2015) reiterates,

'Oh, they were so angry. My father was in a full rage and was running around with a knife, . . ., it was far more than I thought it would be. It was crazy. I can't even begin to tell you how they all seemed like they were about to explode.' (p. 84)

His relationship with another man, Ali, caused such rage that both men had to flee their homes. In the case of Diriye (Osman, 2016c), they share,

The fact that I wanted to write about my experiences as a young gay Somali did more than grate on my family's nerves. They were incensed enough to threaten me with violence, but I was smart enough to know that as a citizen of the UK there are always laws that protect my rights as a gay man. (p. 101)

The violence that is rooted in any queerphobia, such as homophobia and transphobia, is a shared experience amongst many queer Somalis due to being a potential threat to the "Somali Struggle." Amna (A. Ali, 2022) narrates a time when her brother had beat her the worst:

He had punched me repeatedly in the head and the face until I blacked out. I had pools of blood inside both my eyes caused by haemorrhages, and broken teeth. He did it in the name of honour, obviously. . . . My thirty-one-year-old brother beat me with an inch of my life, because he unfairly, unethically and unlawfully pried through my private belongings and outed me. (p. 136)

Violence from the Somali community could also be received through threats. Ash had gotten such threats after being shown on TV in a documentary they had been screened in (Gadow, 2019). They describe, "And I got a flood of like, threats and

death threats and people being obviously righteously mad” (Gadow, 2019, 27:13–27:44). In times of social media, experiencing threats and harassment can easily occur in online spheres and not only in person. For instance, Amal explains in the context of Norway, “I’m lesbian, Muslim, and Somali – it is not a simple combination, . . ., it can be difficult for ethnic Norwegians to understand how difficult and painful it can be to be both Muslim and for gay rights” (Jama, 2015, p. 113). Amal hints at the mutual exclusiveness of sexuality and faith that often comes to mind to Western people, even though Muslims can be queer, and queers can be Muslim. After attending pride in Norway, she had experienced threatening text messages and voicemails (Jama, 2015).

Violence and tradition do not only intertwine in the lived experiences of queer Somalis, but queer Somalis often also witness violence that is based on traditions and relates back to the “Somali Struggle.” For example, the topic of female genital mutilation (FGM) came up in some of the narratives. Mohamed speaks about the time when he witnessed his stepsisters undergoing FGM. He says, “For the next few hours, I heard the screaming of two young girls. They cried while their mother, along with their new father, held them down as a stranger cut off parts of their bodies” (M. A. Ali, 2019, pp. 13–14). FGM, a common practice amongst East Africans, was only one example. Ash also mentions how their friend miski was taken back home to undergo conversion therapy due to being a trans woman (Gadow, 2019, 58:47–1:02:45).

Besides conversion therapies, forced and arranged marriages also proved to be an important factor. Mo’s family had arranged a marriage for him, but he admitted his homosexuality to them and fled as he states that ““They were not joking. . . . They were serious”” (Jama, 2015, p. 125). Rahma did not experience forced marriage

herself, but she learned from a friend that her ex-girlfriend was married off to a man by their family (Jama, 2015). Rahma explains, “‘It was a horrible news because my ex-girlfriend and I did not break up because the relationship died but because of the civil war. We got separated and then her family married her off to some guy’” (Jama, 2015, p. 130).

While the fear of westernization also plays a significant role in the relationship between violence and tradition, it is apparent that non-conforming gender performances and expressions also relate to this construct. For instance, Diriye describes, “‘To my friends, though the notion of a man wearing a dress meant having an extra pair of balls, it seemed essentially perverse’” (Osman, 2016a, p. 105). Thus, the “Somali Struggle” not only influences violent actions towards queer Somalis, but genderqueerness is as essential as queer sexualities are in understanding these acts of violence that are based on traditions. Both forms of queerness are understood as a threat to the Somali empowerment.

Islam & Queerness

While queer Somalis had different relationships to Islam, and their religious lives varied widely from not being a believing Muslim to a firm believer, many queer Somalis articulated how Muslims were not one homogeneous group and that different interpretations of the faith led to some of the issues they were facing regarding their queerness. Afdhere (Jama, 2015) concluded about the question of whether sexual relationships of the same sex were seen as negative by Islam or if it was a cultural question that, “‘Ultimately, I came to the understanding that it was indeed cultural, and that different Muslim cultures approached this differently. The cultural approach was,

in my newfound understanding, the same way different schools of thought approached this issue differently” (p. iv).

Hadiyo goes further and also explains how there have been prominent queer Muslims in the history of Islam, and that a deconstruction of the heterocentric history of the faith is needed (Jama, 2013a). They elaborate (Jama, 2013a):

Many queer Muslims, for example, are shocked to learn that a gay man lived in the home of the prophet. It blows their minds away because they never stop think [sic] something like that is possible. Something else I tell every young Somali person is that for four years, Muslims in the Islamic Golden Age had an openly gay Caliph or Pope, Caliph al-Amin, the son of Harun al-Rashid. It shocks them in a deep way because they have been taught since a young age that this is not a faith for people like them. (p. 115)

In Hadiyo’s opinion, Islam is a faith that “has room for everyone” (Jama, 2013a, p. 116). By the same token, Afdhere complains about the audacities heterosexual religious scholars showcase by stating, “It amazes me that to no end that heterosexual scholars have the audacity to pass judgement in their (ever-condemning) fatwa about our sexualities” (Jama, 2007, p. x). Thus, heteronormativity crept into the faith in ways that harm queer Muslims, including queer Somalis. Ash (Gadow, 2019) suggests,

There’s a lot of issues like that, but in particular, like queer Muslims have existed and will continue to exist. It’s just we choose not to talk about that because it’s much easier to tell your family that the cousin or that sibling left or disappeared or got sick, then [sic] deal with the fact that this is a problem that needs the like reformation that we need change the way we view the way,

the way we accept treatment of LGBT Muslims in our community. Because that is not a reflection on the deen [faith] but a reflection of us. (39:20–40:10)

Therefore, many queer Somalis understand their faith as inclusive for them, but the people engaged with the religion are not inclusive, posing an external threat to queer Somalis.

Consequently, it is not surprising that many queer Somalis, at some point throughout their lifetime, had hidden sexual desires or have hidden their sexual desires actively. Often the hiding of those desires was connected to the idea that those sexual desires were not normal or natural and were against the faith, meaning the person was sinning. For instance, Amna (A. Ali, 2022) narrates about her first school crush:

Although compulsory heterosexuality was all around me and was nestled in my subconscious, I have vivid memories of the crush I had on my sixth-grade English teacher when I was twelve. I also remember knowing it wasn't right. I felt sick, I felt dirty, I felt sinful. (p. 138)

They (A. Ali, 2022) continue to explain about their school experiences,

We were handed flyers, pamphlets, cassette tapes and given talks about the 'dangers' of our immorality. We were told we were going to be smote by God and rejected by society for simply acting on our innate natural attractions.

Many internalized their queer attractions as a 'phase' for them. Not me. (p. 138)

In both examples by Amna, it became clear that non-heterosexual desires were deemed immoral and sinful, as an act against the Islamic faith, that was condemned by society and God. Consequently, some queer Somalis deemed themselves bad

Muslims, who brought shame to their faith and communities. Like Amna, Hadiyo had married a man, even though she knew that she was lesbian, also because of the freedom marriage would provide to her by being free from the daily surveillance of her family (Jama, 2013a). Hadiyo perceived marriage as an outlet to become “normal.” She (Jama, 2013a) states,

I convinced myself that he was going to be the one to help change me. I thought I was horny and that if I got married it would all go away. . . .

Thinking back I knew very well I was a lesbian, but I was really in denial. (p. 114)

Thus, the associated shame with being queer and Somali is so deeply ingrained that people are willing to enter marriage as a cover-up for their hidden sexual desires. Some queer Somalis, such as Afdhere, also witnessed this kind of self-shaming and consciousness in their partners. Afdhere shares, “This second man who grew up in a semi-religious household, had issues with it [same-sex sexual relationships]. He would feel bad after we had sex, and one time even commented how he had hoped we would change” (Jama, 2015, p. iv).

On the contrary, not all queer Somali non-heterosexual relationships were shaped by notions of shame and sin, but some queer Somalis embraced the queer sex they had with their partners. Ismail and Ali regularly had sex with each other since they accidentally had sex at age twelve while playing together (Jama, 2015). Ismail recounts, “We were just playing and it just happened” (Jama, 2015, p. 83), while Ali adds, “After a certain time, I couldn’t imagine living without him” (Jama, 2015, p. 84). The two men had fallen deeply in love and saw nothing wrong with it. While unlucky to find his love, Mohamed retells numerous sexual encounters without

feeling guilty. While being critical about his engagement with porn in general, Mohamed openly admits that he indulged in much porn. He (M. A. Ali, 2019) writes,

I sought out porn involving black booties doing battle with black dicks.

During these searches I was introduced to the realm of interracial gay sex. Its pervasiveness astounded me. It was a mission to find men like the ones in my environment without the porn involving a white body. (pp. 93–94)

In his engagement with porn, Mohamed critically reflected on the role of race and how whiteness still dominated what kind of narratives were told about Black men. In his writing, he did not reflect much on the Islamic perspectives on gay porn and did not indicate that he felt guilty about consuming gay porn from this view. Later in his narrative, Mohamed retells stories about his sexual encounters with much explicitness. He (M. A. Ali, 2019) reflects on some of his non-mainstream sexual acts and encounters,

I wondered why the words excited me. Is this the sort of thing my stepmother warned me about? Was she right about these faggots leading me down a road of depravity? Was she right about me losing my soul in this world of dissolution? . . . He had opened up a world from which I couldn't return. (p. 171)

Although Mohamed reflects on what his stepmother had meant with her warnings, which were directly tied to Islamic views on queerness, he seemed more confused, curious, and excited than actually in deep remorse about his actions, indicating an enjoyment of gay sexual encounters.

Despite the question of whether queer sexual behavior was un-Islamic or not and whether queer Somalis were fine to engage in queer sex, many of them had

several sexual experiences. The cases of Mohamed, Ismail, and Ali are not the only instances of queer Somalis having sex. Mo, who is in a relationship with Dylan, a white English man, had found his partner at the airport, where the two had had spontaneous sex (Jama, 2015). Dylan recounts about their experience, “‘I didn’t dare to go there, . . ., but I was also madly attracted’” (Jama, 2015, p. 122). Dadirow, another queer Somali, who lives in Minneapolis, was a very sexually active man who ended up contracting HIV because of trusting his partners too much. He recalls, “‘It was stupid, . . ., I thought ‘Well, I’m only having sex with people I know are negative.’ But that wasn’t true because people never tell you everything you need to know’” (Jama, 2015, p. 148). Hamdi, who now lives in Seattle, remembers her times in Somalia, where she actively sought out relationships with men who dressed like men and not drag queens (Jama, 2015). This was a revolutionary act due to the trans district’s strict rules to only allow gender nonconforming people to live in the district to protect the trans community (Jama, 2015). She explains, “‘I had to sneak around, . . ., but I definitely broke all the rules. I was a rebel!’” (Jama, 2015, p. 143). Still, Hamdi, like many other queer Somalis, engaged in queer sex in Somalia as well as in their new homes in the Western diaspora.

Even though not every queer Somali felt remorse about engaging in queer sex and what it meant for them concerning their faith, the question of the Islamic views on queerness came up multiple times, either through struggling with the meaning for oneself, a total abandonment of the faith, or a reconciliation with the faith to integrate one’s queer sexuality or genderqueerness. Afdhere explains that in the Somali context, most Somalis are Sunnis that follow the Shafi’i branch (Jama, 2015). Afdhere goes on to explain that “‘Sha’ifism requires self-confession or the testimony of four

male witnesses, who swear on the Qur'an that they have indeed witnessed the act” (Jama, 2015, p. 36). This kind of witness practice makes the actual execution of a case very difficult. Moreover, Afdhere also shows that the diversity of Muslims makes the views on queerness very diverse and that variations are also dependent on branches, countries, cultures, and histories, especially colonial histories (Jama, 2015).

One example of struggling with one’s sexuality in relation to faith can be observed in Dahir. After his journey of fleeing through multiple countries, Dahir was so fed up with the daily homophobia he faced while being in South Africa before his departure to Canada that he (Jama, 2015) recounts,

‘I was tired of running, . . . , I was just tired. I wanted to change my life. I decided to become what people wanted me to become. I cut my long hair, I took off my earrings, and I put on a white *qamiis* to be a good Muslim.’ (p. 137)

Here, the societal pressure of the Muslim community surrounding Dahir became so unbearable for him, that he tried to solve the situation by becoming a good Muslim to compensate for his queer sexuality. For Diriye, the experiences of religion and sexuality at their intersections were different and directly interwoven with his activism. Diriye describes his role as *muazzin* and states, “‘I belonged to the original Muslim Brotherhood contingent of the anti-dictatorship movement of the early 1970s”” (Jama, 2015, p. 157). He further says, “‘Today, I'm spiritual and don't belong to any organized religious movement”” (Jama, 2015, p. 157). It became apparent that many queer Somalis are in constant dialogue with themselves and their relationships to faith and sexuality, and how they perceive themselves changes over time.

Regarding the societal pressure Dahir had felt in South Africa, Ash suggests, in

connection to the Somali community in Minneapolis, that the phenomenon of groupthink also fosters more conservative views on queerness (Gadow, 2019). Ash reconciled their faith and sexuality by deciding that God had created them the way they are (Gadow, 2019). Ash (Gadow, 2019) explains,

Okay, well, if the Quran doesn't obviously have anything against being like trans and the only Hadith I found was for it. I figured out right then that there was nothing and that Allah didn't hate me, but that my people did. . . . And I decided right then and I wasn't going to be ashamed of anything I had.

Because I knew that if there was an Allah, that Allah was merciful. . . . Do you know the Most Merciful so I'm like if that is really true, then I am going to be fine. And those who wish violence upon me, will have to account for it on the Day of Judgment. I found that was very faithful in that sense. And I decided not to hide anything because Allah made me the way I was. And I decided to be visible. And in the sense of I decided not to lie, which was a sin anyway.

(41:41–47:30)

Here, Ash serves as one example of queer Somalis who made peace with their identities and live out their lives in a way that allows them to be queer and Muslim simultaneously without being in conflict with each other.

On the contrary, some queer Somalis opted to abandon or exclude Islam from their lives. This is especially true for many Muslims in Western diaspora who experienced a dramatic increase in Islamophobia after the events of 9/11. For example, Mohamed (M. A. Ali, 2019) explains his transformation to Mo after the events of 9/11:

I decided to try another track and instead of being noticeably Muslim, I avoided all talk of Islam. I went from Mohamed to Mo. During the month of Ramadan I ate hamburgers with my friends. September 11, 2001, gave birth to ‘ex-Muslims.’ (p. 82)

Mohamed also explains how the dynamics in his family regarding religion upset him.

He (M. A. Ali, 2019) states,

I began to rebel, quietly and passively, against the Islamizing nature of my family. It was a middle finger to their hypocritical faces. I was sick of knowing that my family was on good terms with my aunt’s husband, a known child molester. (pp. 90-91)

Mohamed not only describes the impact 9/11 had on Muslim communities in the Western diaspora, but he also explains how religious interpretations intersect with family dynamics creating hypocrisies where it is okay to be a child molester but not to be gay. The intersectionalities of queer Somalis often did not only result in secularism but often in self-hate throughout the process of struggling. Amna (A. Ali, 2022) narrates after her violent encounter with her brother,

This incident was the first time I truly understood that my queerness – as well as my non-religiousness – were making it difficult for me to exist in the part of the world I happened to be born and raised in. It was also the first time I realized that my intersectionality was my biggest bully. (p. 136)

Amna understood her existence as queer Muslim as a reason for experiencing physical violence. She (A. Ali, 2022) also shares,

I spent my whole life thinking I deserved everything I experienced because I was too different. I thought that I belonged on the outskirts. I thought my

constant state of anxiety and hypervigilance was just ‘who I was’. I thought I was made broken. I had allowed my biggest bully, my intersectionality, to win. (p. 140)

Amna understood her identities of being queer and Muslim as mutually exclusive. She decided not to be religious, which did not prevent her from becoming the subject of violence through her brother’s hand.

Queer Somalis’ relationships between faith and sexuality are often complicated and as diverse as possible as they range from mutual exclusiveness over reconciliation efforts to full inclusiveness.

Coming Out(s) & Western Imperialism in Sexuality

The theme of coming out(s) was one of the recurring themes throughout this study, which is very surprising, given that queer Somalis are being at high risk for experiencing violence. Nonetheless, the coming out stories of queer Somalis are very diverse, and the reasons for coming out or being outed vary widely. Furthermore, discussing the idea of coming out cannot be done without discussing the role of the West in shaping the understanding of sexuality in the Somali community.

A typical pattern detected was the adherence to heterosexuality due to heteronormativity in their childhood. For instance, Mohamed recalls a time when he was involved with a white girl in the Netherlands: “Unsure of how to explain my disinterest in girls, I asked for a week to consider. After a week she duly returned” (M. A. Ali, 2019, p. 42). Although disinterested, he entered into this heterosexual relationship. Hadiyo further explains the role of gender segregation within Somali communities and how it fosters homosociality: “Somali people don’t mix the genders. I spent most of my childhood life with women. I didn’t think there was anything

wrong when I felt those early attractions” (Jama, 2013a, p. 112). Nevertheless, most queer Somalis realized that their desires were more than homosocial encounters and found the language to describe their desires and articulate them. For Mohamed, coming out was an act of resistance; thus, he had particular imaginations of how his first coming out should go and what reactions it should cause. He (M. A. Ali, 2019) states,

I was determined not to let anything stop my transformation into a visible homosexual. I went so far as to utter that truth to one of my classmates. . . . I craved reassurance, and her indifference, albeit very tolerant, was intolerable to me. (pp. 115–116)

Here, Mohamed tried to resist the oppressive forces of his family, community, and host society by being openly queer, which was the driver for coming out. For Jamal coming out happened early in life to his friends, whom he is very close to, and later his family (Jama, 2015). He (Jama, 2015) recalls,

‘They were disappointed, . . . , They loved me, but they asked me to try and change. I told them I was not going to do that, and they were really offended, thinking I was taking the matter easily. We had some fights, and we didn’t speak for years. . . . Eventually, they started to understand I was not doing this to belittle them or our culture.’ (p. 118)

For Jamal, the acceptance of being himself by his Muslim friends provided some confidence and comfort to come out to his parents and later reconcile the relationship with them. Hadiyo tied their coming out directly to their butch identity in order to resist notions of being in a ‘phase’ (Jama, 2013a). They state, “I think I was probably repressing that part of myself, or perhaps I was using butch to throw it in front of

friends and family who believed it was a passing phase” (Jama, 2013a, p. 112). Very similar to the reaction of Jamal’s parents and the visibility notions of Hadiyo, Diriye’s coming out was signified by pride and confidence. Diriye (Osman, 2016c) narrates,

When I came out to my family I did not flinch. I spoke my truth and stood my ground knowing that I would be punished in some way for having the audacity to assert my identity. What upset my family the most was the fact that I was proud of being gay. (p. 100)

While Mohamed, Jamal, Hadiyo, and Diriye are just some of the queer Somalis who were proud of their identities, some queer Somalis were forcibly outed or experienced direct violence after. Amna was outed by her brother’s unauthorized phone search and paid by being beaten terribly (A. Ali, 2022), while Hamdi told their boyfriend about their transsexual/transgender feelings, and he freaked out (Jama, 2008b). Some queer Somalis also did not feel the need or were not ready to have a coming out. Mustafa (Jumale, 2019) explains,

Some in the Somali Student Association were anti-gay. I wasn’t out then. My process of coming out is ongoing. People want to know. To me it’s an open secret. Getting on Facebook and saying “I’m here, I’m queer” is a very White coming out story. (para. 19)

Some queer Somalis also rejected their sexuality. Amna shares: “I didn’t feel at home, not even inside my own body. I rejected my sexuality. I became terrified of intimacy. Everything triggered me” (A. Ali, 2022, p. 137). Sometimes this rejection touched only on gendered aspects connected to questions of masculinity. For example, Diriye explains how “if a Somali man is considered feminine he is deemed weak, helpless, pitiful: the underlying message being that femininity is inherently inferior to

masculinity” (Osman, 2016a, pp. 105–106). Thus, many queer Somalis, especially cisgender and transgender men, try to be perceived as masculine to make their queerness more acceptable.

Nonetheless, not all queer Somalis are ostracized by their families. An interesting finding was the presence of support from a family member. In one of Diriye’s essays, they highlight a mother who reconciles with their trans daughter before their passing (Osman, 2016b). Their narration ends with the words: “I will transition with the knowledge that my daughter has made the terrifying journey before me and is now reborn, a miracle child, strong and steady, painting this complex world with her own astonishing splashes of colour” (Osman, 2016b, p. 104). In Dahir’s case, his mother provided money out of safety concerns for him before his father returned so that he could flee (Jama, 2015). Hamdi even found a husband, who knows of her gender history and keeps a happy marriage with her (Jama, 2015). Sometimes these varying degrees of visibility and reconciliation affect the relationships of queer Somalis. Rashid’s relationship ended because his ex-boyfriend could not reconcile Somali culture with his sexuality (Jama, 2015).

Despite these coming-out narratives being deeply interwoven with queer Somalis’ personal lives, the role of the West and the various notions of sexuality cannot be ignored. For some queer Somalis in Western diaspora, the West presented an opportunity where they would be truly free, could be themselves, and could flee any potential violence. Dahir, as mentioned earlier, perceived Canada as his savior nation, where he can live a liberated and peaceful life (Jama, 2015). Amna, who also resides in Canada, shares a similar sentiment: “I no longer live in a country with homophobic laws. I’m able to fight for what I believe to be right without fearing for

my safety. . . . I am free” (A. Ali, 2022, pp. 141–142). Both people are happy with their “new” lives and feel free. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that many forms of queerphobia, such as homophobia and transphobia, exist in the Western world, and especially queers of color experience violence due to their intersections of gender, sexuality, and race. Moreover, queer Somalis are also not an abnormality that were created by the West and, thus, can only survive in the West.

Somalis portraying non-heterosexual behavior have always existed, and the histories of queer Somalis up to the present day are directly connected with the colonial rulers of the past. Afdhere explains how the lover of Caliph Al-Amin, Kauthar, is assumed to have been Somali, and he states: "If indeed it is true that Kauthar was Somali, it would mean he was the first gay personality that we are aware of in the history of the Somali community” (Jama, 2015, p. 41). Moreover, Afdhere also describes the mythical Somali queen, Araweelo, who was deemed to be lesbian, as well as the case described by anthropologist Friedrich Julius Bieber, where Somali men and women of all ages commonly practiced mutual masturbation (Jama, 2015). Furthermore, Afdhere recalls from his own memories that “In the mid 1980s, when I was a small boy growing up in Mogadishu, I remember people talking about neighborhoods in the old town in which gays lived openly” (Jama, 2015, p. 42). He also explains from his conversations with Diriye, that their experiences resemble similar impressions in the 1960s, describing Mogadishu as a place with a thriving queer community (Jama, 2015). Therefore, they make the case that, historically, queer Somalis have existed, and their sexual behavior and identities do not necessarily mirror what Western understandings of queerness and sexuality are. This also can be observed in having a similar word to “queer” in Somali culture. Afdhere narrates

about the word *qajac*: “I definitely knew what the *qajac* part [of Qajac, qajac Khadiijo Warsame] meant. It meant weird, strange, and it was also a word used against feminine men or masculine women, men and women outside of heteronormative sexuality or gender identity” (Jama, 2015, p. 17).

These findings align with questions about the visibility of queer Muslims discussed by other scholars (Darakchi, 2017; Gaudio, 2014; Jaspal, 2018; Najmabadi, 2005, 2008, 2014).

The Daily Physical & Mental Survival

Queer Somalis are in constant danger of exposure to violence, abuse, economic insecurity, and other adverse life-impacting circumstances. Thus, it is not surprising that many queer Somalis shared experiences that touched on these issues and their implications on their lives. Some queer Somalis underwent violence at the hands of their stepparents, siblings, cousins, and other relatives, which was tied to them being perceived as “weak” in the eyes of their kin. One such example is Mohamed's stepmother, Samira, who physically and mentally abused Mohamed since he moved in with her in Kuwait and during his time in the Netherlands and Canada with her. Mohamed (M. A. Ali, 2019) recalls,

I was at the mercy of people unmoored from their usual roles back home. My stepmother played both father and mother. When her madness put her out of commission, her daughters became deputy tyrants. I rued the day I disobeyed.
(p. 26)

He later mentions how she insisted on supporting her financially. He (M. A. Ali, 2019) states,

Things at home weren't improving for me. I worked nearly forty hours a week and had a full course load. My stepmother's greed wore me down. She insisted I apply to any grant or bursary and hand over half of my paycheques. (p. 123)

Thus, not only was Mohamed's hard work abused by his stepmother, but even his financial independence was undermined by the requirement to support her. Dadirow also experienced physical abuse as his father was an alcoholic and used to beat his mother and him (Jama, 2015). Mohamed was also abused by other relatives, such as his sisters. He recalls, "She ran over to the drawer and pulled out a knife. . . . She, her fucking mother, this fucking country, haunted me. I wasn't safe from violence and intimidation anywhere" (M. A. Ali, 2019, p. 51). In addition to physical abuse by his direct kin, his cousin sexually abused him once. "Playing" with him in his cousin's family car, Mohamed narrates, "He undid his pants and pulled my hand onto his dick. I watched myself being grabbed. My body went limp and he handed me the truck" (M. A. Ali, 2019, p. 39).

Besides the physical and mental abuse by family members, many queer Somalis felt abandoned or left alone. Mohamed's father, for instance, was always absent and rarely came to see him, and when he did, the two were very distant from each other as no intimate relationship had developed (M. A. Ali, 2019). The physical absence of his father and the abusive stepmother led Mohamed to engage in harmful behavior: "To satisfy my hunger on the weekends, when Samira [his stepmother] slept in well past noon, I ate more newspaper than usual" (M. A. Ali, 2019, pp. 18–19). Thus, Mohamed indicates that he regularly ate newspapers instead of nutritious and "real" food a young boy would have needed. Such behavior could be an indicator for

the eating disorder pica. The absent father figure is also something Ash experienced. Ash mentions, “My dad left two years after we like relocated” (Gadow, 2019, 2:00–3:00). In their case, their mother compensated a lot for this absence, but she was only able to because of the Somali community support she had received (Gadow, 2019). In Amna's case, she and her mother were never close, especially since her mother favored taking actions against Amna's behavior and, thus, would not disapprove of her brother's violence towards Amna (A. Ali, 2022).

This violence and abuse often led some queer Somalis to the need to generate income to gain some independence. Mohamed had various jobs and still relied on Revenue Canada for support checks (M. A. Ali, 2019). Dahir also describes the struggles he had regarding income. His sexuality made him subject to discrimination in South Africa and finding employment very difficult (Jama, 2015). While he was waiting on a case decision for immigrating to Canada, he worked as a dishwasher in a restaurant, where he recalls,

‘It wasn’t much, the money, . . . , but I was able to live my life. I was able to rent my own room, and I became happy again. It was so nice to finally be able to be myself. To be whole again. To be able to do the things I wanted to do.’

(pp. 138–139)

Similar to Mohamed, generating income also meant independence and freedom for Dahir, while it also symbolized the struggle of being economically unstable due to one’s sexuality in intersection with other identities within oppressive systems of power. Sadly, this economic instability and the common threat of danger put some queer Somalis at risk for homelessness. Mohamed is one queer Somali who experienced homelessness. After losing his apartment through a decreased income

and a rent increase, he found himself living in a men's shelter (M. A. Ali, 2019). He shares, "The thing about homelessness was that it skewed everything that seemed normal and mundane about my life" (M. A. Ali, 2019, p. 177). Here, he points to the disruptiveness homelessness poses on an individual's life. Dahir also became homeless after losing his income (Jama, 2015). Mo was also close to being homeless after he had housed at the London airport to remain warm and dry before moving in with his boyfriend Dylan, whom he met at the airport (Jama, 2015).

Being economically and mentally vulnerable often made some queer Somalis more vulnerable to other violence. For instance, Mohamed (M. A. Ali, 2019) describes his exposure to sexual violence,

Slowly, I noticed a few of them trying to penetrate me while I slept or was passed out from drinking. I had to fight one guy after I found him on top of me in the morning. I don't know who the fuck he thought I was, but I'm not that bitch. No ma'am. (p. 127)

Wanting to make sexual experiences, as an act of liberation, Mohamed's unstable life also made him vulnerable to this kind of sexual abuse and violence. Moreover, other violence, all the way to attempted murder, became part of his life. One of the drug-addicted men in the men's shelter tried to burn him alive (M. A. Ali, 2019). Afdhere also recalls the case of Ahmed from Atlanta, who was murdered, most likely for his bisexuality (Jama, 2015).

These and many more factors, as outlined earlier, led to many queer Somalis experiencing some mental health issues. Depression was a pervasive theme arising. Dahir experienced depression, and so did Dadirow, who tried to cure it with unsafe sex and drugs, as well as Mustafa, whose depression was tied to his work, too (Jama,

2015; Jumale, 2019). Amna explains the factor that affects her current life the most: “What hurts me the most, when I look back, isn’t the pain from the physical and mental abuse, but the long-term psychological torment, the years of my life lost to feeling sad and adrift” (A. Ali, 2022, p. 137). Amna also felt helpless in relation to her queerness and the violence she experienced from her brother (A. Ali, 2022). In Ash's case, their mother and the Somali community surrounding them tried to utilize Islam to cure them as they describe, “That my entire community was trying to help me because I was flawed and broken and a burden onto my mom (Gadow, 2019, 10:56–12:00). For Mohamed, many physical and mental issues were part of his life. Mohamed not only developed an eating disorder, but he also abused drugs by popping pills such as valium pills and became an alcoholic as he felt hostage to Somali culture and wanted to escape his family’s abuse (M. A. Ali, 2019). Mohamed also inflicted self-harm on himself during his childhood and put himself in danger of being raped, kidnapped, and murdered, as he (M. A. Ali, 2019) shares,

I also took to squatting by the highway and pushing thick branches in my ass. I kept going until I bled. The drivers shot me disapproving glances as they whizzed past. I had no way of releasing the constant tension except by damaging my body. I felt alive only when in pain. The branches got thicker with each visit to the roadside. . . . I rode away, praying that any of the men walking their dogs or jogging would attack me. I’d pray that they’d rape me in the middle of the bushes. I fused my nascent sexuality with the violence I faced inside and outside the home. (pp. 55–56)

As he grew older, he developed other coping mechanisms, such as his drug abuse, but eventually, Mohamed tried to commit suicide after his stepmother had abused him

again (M. A. Ali, 2019). Thus, the mental and physical abuse experienced by many queer Somalis, in combination with other factors, created a feeling of helplessness, which also caused depression and sometimes went as far as self-harm and suicide.

Racism, Islamophobia, & Their Intersections

While sexuality is a very prominent and crucial aspect when discussing the lives of queer Somalis, other facets, such as their race, nationality, faith, and many more, cannot be ignored. As utilized throughout this chapter, an intersectional lens reveals unique intersections that otherwise would be easily overlooked. Experiences of racism were one prevalent aspect in the lives of queer Somalis. In Mohamed's life, racism was experienced in schools in the Middle East and the Western diaspora in the Netherlands and Canada (M. A. Ali, 2019). Similarly to Mohamed, Amna also experienced racism in her school in the Middle East (A. Ali, 2022). Mustafa's school experiences in the U.S. and the university's alerts of potential threats triggered him due to their racist nature (Jumale, 2019). Of course, all of these people also experienced racism in other life instances.

Racism was not the only discrimination queer Somalis experienced in their daily lives, though. It often intersected with Islamophobia and xenophobia. For example, Jamal got yelled at by a woman during the Parisian Pride to "go home," where he encountered: "'I'm from Paris, bitch'" (Jama, 2015, p. 119). His appearance automatically triggered this French woman to assume that he was foreign and did not belong there. Given the surrounding of a Pride event also makes the space for queer Somalis not more welcoming. Afdhere shares, "I have faced racism and Islamophobia from some queers, especially after 9/11" (Jama, 2015, p. 21). Ash also recounts occasions, where they would find themselves in spaces that showed racist and

Islamophobic behavior toward them (Gadow, 2019). Somalis are often perceived as Black people in the mainstream societies in the Western diaspora. Nonetheless, the question of Blackness came up in some instances. In the same explanation about their racist experiences, Ash states that they are “too Black to be African” (Gadow, 2019, 15:17–19:27). The classification as Black and identification with Blackness is a finding that is inconsistent within queer Somalis and the Somali community at large. For instance, Mohamed writes, “In the disavowing I forgot who I was in the white frame of reference. The truth was that *the Somali of 2003 was black*” (M. A. Ali, 2019, p. 117). Therefore, while Ash felt somewhat Black but found their Africanness excluding them from being Black, Mohamed realized that he was indeed Black now. Continuing this point, Mustafa confidently identified as Black, when introducing themselves as a “Black Immigrant organizer” (Gadow, 2019, 0:00–0:48). Thus, a unified identification of Somalis being Black was absent. However, a shared understanding of being somewhat Black in the Western diaspora was present, and all queer Somalis had experienced daily racism in their lives.

This process of defining the belonging of Somalis to the category of Blackness also stemmed from an internalized racism of some Somalis. For Mohamed, his stepmother had warned him multiple times to stay away from other Blacks, while Ash's mother disapproved of Black friends as they might have a bad influence (M. A. Ali, 2019; Gadow, 2019). Amna also discusses her own self-value in her relation to Blackness: “I developed an inferiority complex and internalized everything I was told about being queer and Black: my gross, ugly hair, my home-cooked food smelling bad, and the weird other language (Somali) I spoke at home” (A. Ali, 2022, p. 139).

This idea of inferiority is also directly tied to white supremacy. Mohamed (M. A. Ali, 2019) narrates about his time on a Dutch soccer team:

I nodded in agreement. The Dutchman was always right. Not all ignorance was that subtle. My teammates sang songs about Ali Baba and called me Cacaface or Zulu lips. They saw no conflict between emulating American rappers and degrading my blackness. (p. 37)

This blatant unworthiness of Black people, in the eyes of white-dominated societies, deeply affected queer Somalis such as Mohamed.

On top of that, the presence of police, police violence, and state surveillance also negatively impacted the lives of queer Somalis and their communities. Mohamed (M. A. Ali, 2019) described the police presence in his community in Toronto as follows:

We knew better than to hang out at a particular corner for too long lest the boys in blue came through. I was more concerned about the police than the criminals or gun violence. They rode up and down the neighbourhood and made their presence felt. (p. 79)

This worthlessness of Black bodies was also reflected in how Mohamed's high school dealt with losing his classmates. Mohamed (M. A. Ali, 2019) explains,

But at that time, our wonderful educators never mentioned it. They figured death was a normal part of our dark lives. Years later, a student named Jordan Manners was shot on the steps, where I hung out. His mother was photographed, wailing on a patch of grass near a bus stop. Our grief mattered only if the white gaze consumed it. (p. 99)

Despite the disinterest in protecting Black lives by Western governments, many governments perceived the Somali community as a direct threat to national security. As such, the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program poses one such example of how the Somali community is experiencing state surveillance. Mustafa saw this as a pressing issue as it created paranoia amongst the Somali youth (Jumale, 2019). Ash (Gadow, 2019) confirms this “paranoia” by explaining,

It was at a time where the community was facing a lot more police surveillance and CVE and a lot of friends working on it and, you know, countering CVE in that process and it was just, I found it very, very, very difficult to hold my intersections and push for intersectionality in activism in all these different ways, . . . , and honestly, I learned at a young age really gets people like hurt and killed and I worried for my family because my brothers and sisters were being chased from school. (29:16–30:45)

Thus, increased surveillance of Somali communities puts the Somali youth at risk of further violence. In some cases, white people overdo their kindness and showcase a kind of savior complex, which Mustafa had experienced in school by being pampered as one of the few students of color (Jumale, 2019). While the lived experiences of queer Somalis showed much more variety than in other emerging themes, the common underlying message was their overall experience of being perceived as Black or African American in Western societies and how that translated to racism and xenophobia at the intersections of their faith and Islamophobia, which created room for anti-Black Islamophobia.

Questions of Belonging, Assimilation, & Erasure

For many queer Somalis, the question of belonging was essential. While living in the Netherlands, Mohamed rejected his cultural identity and states (M. A. Ali, 2019) about his Somali friend, Yusuf, and himself,

Yusuf was like me when it came to our faith. We had no interest in being observant or being constrained by *halal* or *haram*, what is lawful and what is forbidden. We watched porn and listened to explicit music from America. We wanted zero parts of the culture we were born into. (p. 33)

Both wanted to belong to the Dutch society they lived in. A culture shock often accompanies this disconnect to the Somali culture. Mustafa is one of the queer Somalis who experienced a culture shock when moving to rural Minnesota. He states, “That was a huge cultural shock. We were one of the first few Black immigrant families in Mankato. The first week our house got TPed. My brother caught the kids who did it and made them take it down” (Jumale, 2019, para. 6). Nonetheless, rather than developing a hate for the white people surrounding him and becoming closer to Somali culture he, similar to Mohamed and Yusuf, desired to be closer to his white peers (Jumale, 2019). He recalls how he also wanted to have a birthday party and play a band instrument, things uncommon in his familial surroundings (Jumale, 2019).

Besides, being Somali as ethnicity, religion and nationality also seemed to have an alienating effect on some queer Somalis. Hadiyo (Jama, 2013a) narrates,

I would never change my sexuality or the color of my skin or what type of hair I have. These are my deep identities. Nationality, religion, where I live, et cetera, on the other hand, some days I could do without these things. (p. 116)

Thus, it appears that sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity (as well as faith) have different impacts on the belonging of queer Somalis to communities in the Western diaspora. Afdhere (Jama, 2015) explains,

Being queer and Somali is being part of two ‘different’ groups. In the queer American community I’m different because I’m Somali; and in the Somali community I’m different because I’m queer. I consider myself to be many things, I especially consider myself to be a global person. I have said to many people; that being global is the only way I know to juggle my many identities.

(p. i)

Ash experiences a similar struggle of juggling their identities and they believe that being queer, Muslim, and Somali are *not* mutually exclusive identities (Gadow, 2019). Furthermore, Mustafa also points out how generation 1.5 consists of people, who were born in Somalia but raised in the U.S., and who were “constantly negotiating, you know the space between Somali culture and the US” (Gadow, 2019, 7:13–7:50). Therefore, dealing with their identities and their intersections posed a big task to many queer Somalis, especially with regard to belonging.

Despite that, queer Somalis would also experience a certain exoticization.

Dadirow receives many glances for having a desirable body that is touched by its Somaliness and the curiosity of people about him being Muslim (Jama, 2015).

Afdhere (Jama, 2007), who observed this exoticization of Dadirow, also states about the history of it:

It has been the practice of Western travel writers to somehow always make exotic whatever other people they wrote about, and certainly very few would

argue that any other people have been more victimized by this practice than Muslims, for so long. (p. ix)

Thus, often queer Somalis did not truly belong to their host societies and the queer communities within, but they were part of those communities as an object of desire based on their “otherness.” Consequently, the question of friendship was also a concern for some queer Somalis. For Mohamed, making friends was difficult, but the friends he had were usually people of color or people with an immigrant history (M. A. Ali, 2019). If not Somali, most of his friends were Black girls as they provided the comfort and safety he needed, as his effeminate behavior often excluded him from his peers (M. A. Ali, 2019). Similarly, Jamal's circle of friends was composed mainly of Muslims and other Africans (Jama, 2015). In contrast to Mohamed, though, Jamal's friends are very supportive of his queerness, and they even join him with their families at the Parisian Pride (Jama, 2015). As Jamal shares, “I’m with these guys forever, . . . , they are closer to me than any boyfriend. All of their girlfriends know they will leave them if I say so” (Jama, 2015, p. 118). When discussing belonging, not only interpersonal relationships matter but also the feeling of belonging to a social group.

Thus, as mentioned earlier, the question of Blackness also matters, but it also depends on the context. Some queer Somalis felt they were Black, such as Mustafa, some were categorized as Black, such as Mohamed, or some did not identify as Black, such as Ash (M. A. Ali, 2019; Gadow, 2019; Jumale, 2019). The disidentification with Black people in the West, the constant struggle to navigate their identities, and the question of belonging led to some queer Somalis developing a “want to be unique.”

Some of these queer Somalis tried to achieve this uniqueness by developing a sense of queenhood. For example, Mohamed bought new, more feminine clothes to resemble a gay appearance visible to the outside world (M. A. Ali, 2019). For Diriye, dressing up as queen was a powerful act. They share, “I struck confident pose after pose, proud of the fact that there was a hard-won sense of power in my femininity” (Osman, 2016a, p. 107). On the other side of this queenhood were queer Somalis who had internalized queerphobia, as Diriye describes it in relation to an effeminate appearance and how many people opposed it, while Amna openly rejected her queerness (A. Ali, 2022; Osman, 2016a). In the same sense, a lot of the non-conforming gender performance had to do with rejecting specific communities and visibly showing the longing to belong to other communities. One such example is Hadiyo’s “butchlike” behavior, to clearly show their queerness to family and friends (Jama, 2013a).

Another critical aspect was the histories and intersections of colonialism, imperialism, white supremacy, and nationalism and how they shaped queer Somalis’ lives. Looking at colonialism, it is important to acknowledge that the criminalization of homosexuality in Somalia was a direct result of the British colonial rule. Afdhere states, “In 1888, the people of northern Somali regions ended up with the British colonial laws as subjects of the British Empire. British Somaliland was the first time we ever had a law against homosexuality in any Somali region” (Jama, 2015, p. 37). Even though many queer Somalis are not even aware of those colonial histories, many of them flee due to the ongoing civil war as well as safety concerns about their sexual identities, then to face modern imperialism in the form of gatekeeping. The whole immigration apparatus in Western nations often makes it a monstrous process to claim

asylum based on sexual identity. Mo, for instance, entered the United Kingdom as undocumented refugee and then applied for asylum, which was a lengthy process (Jama, 2015). Additionally, many white people, including queers, do not understand the complexities around being queer and Somali as Amal explained in the case of Norway (Jama, 2015). Ideas of nationalism are further harmful to queer Somalis as they aim to assimilate queer Somalis at the cost of erasing their cultural heritages. Mohamed vividly describes his experience after moving from the Dutch school system to the Canadian one: “Canada, on the other hand, seemed gung-ho about pushing its vision of the Great White North on the *buitenlanders* entering its urban landscape from Victoria to Halifax” (M. A. Ali, 2019, p. 84). Mohamed referred to the differences compared to the Netherlands, and it is important to remember that degrees of nationalism vary within the Western diaspora due to historical occurrences. Mustafa (Jumale, 2019), who works as a Black Immigration activist, even goes so far as to demand,

People are not disposable. Green cards for everyone. We need Amnesty. No borders. Decriminalize people. . . . Don’t deport people. We need health care and voting rights at the municipal level, for undocumented people who are paying taxes to support those institutions. (para. 78)

Mustafa directly ties nationalism and white supremacy on one side to the necropolitics of immigrant communities, which through forms of homonationalism and queer necropolitics, also affect queer Somalis and their lives in the Western diaspora.

Nonetheless, the West is not always deemed a negative location as people such as Amna and Dahir mention how they feel free now and are no longer afraid (A. Ali, 2022; Jama, 2015). The antidote to all of this lies in the complexities of the

experiences of queer Somalis. While some embraced the West, others were highly critical of it because of the state's violence perpetuated through homonationalist and necropolitical tactics, and some queer Somalis experienced violence from their Somali communities because of the fear of westernization, which perceived queerness as a product of the West.

Community Empowerment

Although many experiences described here by queer Somalis are profoundly depressing and concerning, and violence, trauma, and mental health issues are present amongst queer Somalis, there is hope. Queer Somalis are a resilient group of people who have found multiple ways to empower their communities and themselves. By no means can there be any indications that queer Somalis are mere victims of anti-Black Islamophobia, queerphobia, and xenophobia. Through their various outlets of activism, they change the narrative of being queer, Muslim, and Somali, and they resist the notions of invisibility and erasure that dominate the discourse on them.

One route some queer Somalis choose to empower their communities is the founding of support groups online and in person. In late 2001, Afdhere and Hadiyo founded "Queer Somalis," which initially was a support group. Afdhere states, "The creation of 'Queer Somalis,' which was both online and offline simultaneously, had been very beneficial to many of us. It encouraged many of us to take the leap and do work in our communities" (Jama, 2015, p. 47). Hadiyo even is so convinced by this support group that she went back to Somalia to found local chapters on the ground. Through fieldwork there, she gets the chance to improve queer Somalis' situation back home by talking with people and politicians (Jama, 2013a). She shares, "Other times we have the opportunity to meet with politicians like the late president of Puntland,

who assured us a fairer inclusion in the constitution” (Jama, 2013a, p. 115). For Amna, community activism also has helped her personally. As the founder of The Black Arabs Collective, she (A. Ali, 2022) recognizes,

My silver lining has been my community – and the work I see us all doing towards shifting the narrative and creating a world that doesn’t demonise queerness but celebrates it. A world where intersectionality is no one’s bully, where instead our intersectionality can empower us, and enrich our lives and those of the people around us. (p. 144)

Ash, who is involved in many activist efforts that ranged from local initiatives such as banning conversion therapy in the state of Minnesota to fighting CVE legislation federally, also provides valuable insight into the relationship of what it means to advocate for social justice in your community if the same community ostracizes you (Gadow, 2019). They (Gadow, 2019) state,

Because that’s the thing about justice you. You either want justice for everyone regardless of how they are to you or you? You’re not . . . You know, like, I made peace with the fact that I wasn’t going to be liked by my community early on. But that doesn’t mean people should be surveilled [surveilled]. It doesn’t mean people should be, you know, having Muslim bans and it doesn’t mean that, you know, like, our community should be pushed out through housing issues and initiatives without their voice, you know, and all those things like, doesn’t matter they don’t like me, or if they want me dead, because that’s more reflection on them that it is on me. (33:00–32:57)

Thus, the collective struggle as a Somali community, a marginalized community in Western diaspora, sometimes overrides the individual struggle of a queer Somali, as Ash suggests.

Besides efforts of in-person activism, some queer Somalis utilized writing as an outlet for activism. For instance, Afdhere tries to provide a voice to queer Muslims. He shares, “In 2000, I founded *Huriyah*, the world’s first magazine for queer Muslims. . . . In less than three years, the magazine gained over 253 people in 72 countries” (Jama, 2007, p. xi). Diriye uses writing as a healing process for queer Africans and explains what his stories are about: “These characters experience a wide spectrum of dilemmas whether it is mental illness, civil war, immigration, or complicated family histories. But they still hold on to their sense of humanity and optimism without the need for apology or victimhood” (Osman, 2016c, p. 101). Thus, some queer Somalis tried to reach their peers and empower them through written pieces for their souls.

Lastly, some people sought direct political engagement. Mustafa, for instance, worked as a congressional staffer. He shares, “I discovered I enjoyed and was good at working on public policy. I focused on East African community issues, immigration, foreign affairs, public safety, arts, civil rights, civil liberties, and juridical matters” (Jumale, 2019, para. 38). Thus, while some queer Somalis worked with communities directly, some engaged with writing, and some participated in public policy, queer Somalis were resisting the oppressive forces in their lives and found working solutions for themselves and their communities. Of course, that does not mean that queer Somalis were not facing severe backlash and discrimination up to the murders of queer Somalis, but they are no victims in need of saving.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter discussed the results of a textual content analysis of nine selected materials (see Appendix A) covering the personal narratives of queer Somalis in Western diaspora. Nine themes, which were discussed in this chapter, emerged out of inductive coding: Migration stories; the “Somali struggle”; violence and tradition; Islam and queerness; coming out(s) and western imperialism in sexuality; the daily physical and mental survival; racism, Islamophobia, and their intersections; questions of belonging, assimilation, and erasure; and community empowerment. For a better understanding of the finding’s meaning in the current context of academic scholarship and directions future research might want to consider, I will further contextualize the results in the following concluding chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The results chapter of this thesis has highlighted some of the intersectional lives of queer Somalis in Western diaspora. They are not a homogeneous group that can be generalized without context. While specific patterns became apparent throughout the analysis of their personal narratives (migration stories; the “Somali struggle”; violence and tradition; Islam and queerness; coming out(s) and western imperialism in sexuality; the daily physical and mental survival; racism, Islamophobia, and their intersections; questions of belonging, assimilation, and erasure; and community empowerment), it is important to keep in mind that those must be carefully evaluated and always be contextualized and historicized. Many aspects must be considered, and they cannot be evaluated solely isolated or without a transnational feminist lens. Intersectionality and transnational feminism are the heart of shaping an understanding of the results outlined in the previous chapter.

The Embodiment of This Research: What Does It Mean to Be a Queer Somali?

The methodology used in this thesis allows us to analyze lived experiences through intersectional lenses in combination with transnational feminist theories. In the case of an immigrant community in the Western diaspora that experiences multiple oppressions simultaneously, both lenses become imperative. For instance, Ash (Gadow, 2019) states,

The struggle of black African Americans and stuff like and found that I was within that, but also separate and had to unpack that. I also had to unpack that in LGBT spaces I went to Minneapolis, were very white centric, very had various ideas of what it meant to be Muslim. And I encountered a lot of Islamophobia. And a lot of racism too. So I felt great. So I'm too, I'm too

black, and too African and too Muslim, to be an LGBT spaces consistently, I'm to LGBT to be in Islamic spaces, I'm too, you know like, African and queer to be in black spaces. So I decided, fuck it, I'm going to find and forge, and make community and make a chosen family and, like make spaces for us to be, you know, for people like me to seek them out. Even though it's very much, people say it's very much for our best interest to not claim all three of those identities because even one of them. Islamophobia alone kills, homophobia alone kills, transphobia alone kills, and anti blackness kills. But to claim all three and to be looking for other people like you, is to literally, literally, paint a target on your head and say that's better. Maybe if I find two other people like me, it'll be worth being consistently shot at. (15:17–17:29)

Here, Ash's comment embodies what this research is about. The complexities of one's intersectionality in the context of queer Somalis in Western diaspora become clear by listening to them. Ash's intersecting identities make them too Black to be queer, too Muslim to be queer, and too African to be queer. They are also too Muslim and too African to be Black. Thus, they constantly struggle with the question of where they belong. On top of that, they experience society's oppressive forces, such as racism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and queerphobia, even though they do not feel like they belong to any of these groups. The violence and death at the end of their comment directly point to homonationalism and queer necropolitics. The exclusion from the queer community based on their race and faith is a direct indicator for homonationalist forces at play that pivot the “homophobic Muslim” against the white-led queer community in the Western nation. Nonetheless, as the results of the chapter

before having shown, Ash's described experience is no singular and isolated case.

Some recurring themes became clear throughout this analysis.

Explaining the Results

A widely shared experience was the significance of queer Somalis' migration stories. Those stories, while sometimes related to sexuality, were mainly tied to the ongoing civil war and safety concerns for themselves and their families. The emergence of these themes is also not surprising considering that Mohanty (2003) explains the importance for immigrants and migrants of the question of home. In cases where queer Somalis fled Somalia and/or their families because of their queerness, the migration stories became somewhat more complicated. Hodge (2019) highlights how queer immigrants live very precarious lives. Often, they are not considered authentically queer, and their asylum cases are considered invalid by immigration officers who do not believe their queerness (Hodge, 2019). Murray (2013) further explains how many queer immigrants are surprised about the queerphobia they still experience and witness in their new "homes." This often is tied to internalized exceptionalism. The queer Somali narratives in this thesis have displayed both despair and hope. These competing views of the host nation being hostile and a haven is tied to homonationalist practices, such as pinkwashing, that aim to portray the nation as queer-friendly, while the policies made apply only to middle-class, white queers (Puar, 2007, 2013).

Another overwhelmingly recurring theme was the experience of the "Somali Struggle," as some Somalis have described it, which I find neatly fitting what they discuss. The queerness of many queer Somalis is perceived as a threat to Somali empowerment due to the connection of being queer as nonnormative and deviant. In

addition, many queer Somalis described their community and people as "broken." They explained the violence experienced as an attempt by the Somali community to make them honorable members of their community. Some queer Somalis even perceived the struggle of being in exile as an Islamic penalty. Mohanty (2003) explains that questions of home, identity, history, and geography for immigrant communities are complicated in the twenty-first century. Belonging and nationhood are constitutive to the Indian diaspora (Mohanty, 2003), and similar notions hold true for the Somali diaspora. In their roundtable, Naber et al. (2018) highlight how the queer Palestinian question poses a threat to the Palestinian community, as it feeds into the understanding of Palestinians as deviant and nonnormative. This then fuels queerphobia against queer Palestinians and, thereby, feeds into the stigma of Palestinians being homophobic, transphobic, and backward (Naber et al., 2018). A similar dynamic informs the "Somali Struggle," where queer Somalis experience queerphobia in order to prevent the Somali empowerment efforts from failing.

Such divisiveness is not only found in the Palestinian case but within the Black liberation movement. Black Muslims have advocated for the *ummah* (Muslim community) and *asabiyah* (nation-building in the American context) being vital guiding principles for a united community, while queerness is often perceived as anti-Black (Gomez, 2005; Rouse, 2004). Due to the "Somali Struggle" and the sentiment that queer Somalis jeopardize the liberation of Somalis in the Western diaspora, many families utilized violence that they justified with references to tradition. Some queer Somalis also had witnessed violence against other family members, who imposed a threat to Somali customs and the union of the community.

Queer Somalis' descriptions of their relationships between faith and sexuality are similar to those some scholars have described. For instance, Siraj (2012) found in their studies that Muslim lesbians struggled to reconcile faith and sexuality, similar to what Dahir had described. Kugle (2010, 2014) argues that being queer and Muslim is possible and that the Islamic scriptures can be understood from other viewpoints, which aligns with a positive reinterpretation such as Ash has done. The need to pick one side, as described by Mohamed and Amna, is very similar to what Alvi and Zaidi (2021) describe with feeling the need to choose between being Muslim and being queer. Moreover, research that described the intersections of faith and sexuality as interwoven with other factors, such as culture, and the idea of queerness as a product and threat of the West, is also similar to what Afdhere and Mohamed have described (Golriz, 2021; Rayside, 2011). Therefore, queer Somalis not only were questioned about their authenticity as Muslims, but they often questioned themselves and had doubts about being able to live out both identities related to religion and sexuality. In cases where reconciliation was achieved, the path to reach it was often long and painful.

These struggles to be both Muslim and queer are often intertwined with questions of visibility and how to understand one's sexual identity. For instance, Iranian gay men who had reached confidence about their sexualities and sometimes abandoned Islam shared their queerness with friends with an attitude of pride after moving to the United Kingdom (Jaspal, 2018). Moreover, the Western notions of sexuality that have shaped the Somali understanding of queerness in contemporary Somalia and the Western Somali diaspora have also influenced other queer Muslim communities. In Bulgaria, queer sexual acts that happened within the community's

youth were often forgotten due to the impact Western influences had on the community and the shame that got attached to same-sex sexual relations (Darakchi, 2017), while Africans showing queer behavior also have always existed prior to colonization (Gaudio, 2014). This strengthens the cases of Kauthar and Araweelo in Somalia (Jama, 2015). Furthermore, terms that are rooted in Somali culture slowly are replaced by Western identity categories similar as it has happened in Iran (Najmabadi, 2005, 2008, 2014). Most queer Somalis who discussed their sexual identities in their personal narratives either used no label or were using the Western identity categories present in their host nations, while being unaware of the histories of Somalis presenting nonnormative sexual behavior and the terms for them used in the Somali languages. This loss of terms and knowledge can also be observed in other communities (Gaudio, 2014; Najmabadi, 2005, 2014).

Scholars such as Eidhamar (2015) and Rayside (2011) have explained how Muslim communities often hold negative perceptions about queerness. Siraj (2012) argues that some Muslim lesbians did not want to taint their faith. Hunt et al. (2018) state that female Somali refugees' perspectives on queerness were diverse but overall not very supportive. All of these perceptions influence the mental and physical well-being of queer Somalis and their socioeconomic status. Many queer Somalis described the physical and mental abuses they had experienced from family members. Some of them mentioned that they became sick and depressed. Some lived in homelessness, while others tried to escape self-destructive behavior to cope with abuse, such as drug usage and alcoholism. In the case of Mohamed, the burden of living a life not filled solely by darkness resulted in his suicide attempt.

Sadly, some of the abuse and violence was not only happening at the hand of their kin and communities, but social practices also harmed queer Somalis further through racism and Islamophobia. While these experiences sometimes were very distinct, in some cases, racism and Islamophobia intersected. The theorization of Somalis as Black and their integration into Western societies have been discussed before (Abdi, 2015, 2019; Armila et al., 2019). The explanation of anti-Black Islamophobia has been in constant discourse as well, and more about the racialization of Muslims has been theorized (Beydoun, 2018; Chowdhury, 2018; Razack, 2022). Additionally, the subtheme of surveillance and CVE has been discussed in connection to the Somali community due to its significant impact on the community's well-being (Dahir, 2017). The disposability of queer Somalis and Somalis in general also aligns with the idea of necropolitics (Mbembé & Meintjes, 2003). Thus, many findings of racism, Islamophobia, and anti-Black Islamophobia also were found in this analysis of queer Somalis.

A big concern for queer Somalis was the question of belonging. This becomes extremely visible when reading Ash's quote at the beginning of this chapter. Ash's struggle to make space for themselves within the Somali, Black, African, Muslim, and queer communities always is unsuccessful due to at least one of them being an alienating factor in belonging. The complexities of belonging and the need for differentiated views have been discussed extensively by transnational feminist scholars (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Mohanty, 1984, 2003). Furthermore, the struggles of immigration that many queer Somalis have experienced are also common to other queer refugee communities (Hodge, 2019; D. A. Murray, 2013). The gatekeeping that Western states achieve through state violence and surveillance strategies has widely

been discussed in the context of queer Muslim communities (El-Tayeb, 2011, 2012; Puar, 2007, 2013; Trevenen & Degagne, 2015). The consequences that can lead to some queer Somalis' deaths and the deaths of their whole communities through the state's violence are another common pattern detected in queer communities of color (Çalışkan et al., 2020; Mbembé & Meintjes, 2003). Ash delivers another example of that at the end of their quote when they refer to the policing of the various communities. Somali, Black, African, Muslim, and queer are all identifiers that trigger Western states to investigate and surveil individuals based on group assumptions that categorize them as deviant and, therefore, as threats. After 9/11, the queer Muslim has become the prototype for the imaginary of the terrorist (Puar & Rai, 2002). Queer Somalis face not only police brutality because of their Blackness due to systemic racism in Western nations, but they are also prone to state surveillance through measures, such as CVE and asylum-seeking processes (Dahir, 2017; Hodge, 2019; D. A. Murray, 2013). In both cases, Western states often deem queer Somalis as disposable. This kind of necropolitics is articulated by Mohamed, who brings up the death of another student and claims that society only cared for their deaths if they were entertaining the white gaze (M. A. Ali, 2019).

Despite the existence of queer necropolitics and the killings of Somalis, queer or not, queer Somalis were not just mere victims of their fate. Many, if not all, queer Somalis whose narratives were analyzed engaged in various forms of activism, including telling and sharing their stories with other Somalis and beyond. Their activism sometimes focused on queer Somalis or queer issues. However, many queer Somalis, such as Ash and Mustafa, also engaged in activism to benefit the Somali community. Research has suggested that diasporic and marginalized communities

often engage in civic life and find ways to empower their communities (Armila et al., 2019; Chan-Malik, 2018; Gomez, 2005; Rouse, 2004). Such findings can also be supported by the activism of queer Somalis in Western diaspora and the community empowerment activities they engaged in. Mustafa's political engagement, for example, aimed at tackling issues such as the Obama Administration's CVE legislation that harmed the whole Somali community, not just queer Somalis. In another case, Rahma was fighting FGM, which is widespread among Somali communities, including in the Western diaspora. Of course, creating one's own space, such as Ash indicates in their quote at the beginning of this chapter, is a form of activism in itself. Ash's presence is unwanted and oppressive forces aim at erasing Ash's existence under the premise that queer Muslims, queer Somalis, queer Africans, or even queer Blacks do not exist or cannot exist. They are mutually exclusive. Ash's presence challenges those preconceptions, as do many other queer Somalis highlighted in this thesis project.

The Significance

This thesis project is a small attempt to illuminate some of the ways queer Somalis navigate the different spaces they find themselves in within the context of the Western diaspora. Hunt et al. (2018) have shown that some Somalis are aware that queer Somalis are present within their communities, but they are often unknown and live in hidden spaces. While part of that reason is the danger of violence that they might face, as many queer Somalis have experienced violence based on their queerness in these personal narratives analyzed, the lack of research and enforced invisibility by mainstream queer and Muslim communities both perpetuate the issue. Injustices can be found anywhere, and many have roots in systemic issues.

Nonetheless, solutions that aim to work like a watering can (the watering can principle) cannot work as well and productively as specific solutions that target the roots of an issue within a community by contextualizing and historicizing. This thesis, while providing only a little background on queer Somali communities in Western diaspora, is a starting point from where more research is needed to achieve the liberation of queer Somalis. Generalizations fuel the single stories that feminist researchers aim to deconstruct. Therefore, a categorization such as the Western diaspora needs further breakdown and further research within sub-diasporic communities.

For Future Research

In order to achieve such a breakdown and research within sub-diasporic communities, more qualitative research is needed. How does it influence where queer Somalis are located? How is their situation in the United States different from Canada or the Netherlands? To answer these and many more questions, qualitative interviews with queer Somalis in those countries could provide some additional insights. Additionally, qualitative interviews might want to investigate what resistance strategies queer Somalis use and what the community needs are. This research then can have a crucial impact on how queer Somalis can be supported. The nuances between different queer Muslim communities will also be worth illuminating. How do queer Somalis' lived experiences align with those of queer Iraqis or Iranians? What similarities exist, and how do their histories and cultures shape their specific lived experiences? A comparative analysis of two or more queer Muslim communities might reveal some interesting findings on the roles that colonialism, imperialism,

feminism, culture, and religious perspectives might have in forming queer Muslims' lives.

Hopes for the Future

Many of these stories shared and analyzed are heartbreaking and triggering as they depict profoundly traumatic experiences for those queer Somalis who decided to share them with the public. Nonetheless, I want to end this thesis with the knowledge that queer Somalis actively resist oppressive forces and do not give up. Spivak (1988) once coined the phrase “white men saving brown women from brown men.” Queer Somalis do not need anyone to be saved. They know best for themselves what solutions are needed and what might clash with their cultures and communities. Our responsibility lies in building sustainable and trustful allyships that support their initiatives under their guidance and leadership. Knowing the strength and perseverance these queer Somalis, such as Mohamed, Mustafa, Ash, Amna, Hadiyo, and many more, have shown in their personal narratives of their lives gives me hope for them, me, and the world.

Appendix A

Number	Title	Publication Place	Medium	Author	Person covered	Parts used
1	Angry queer Somali boy: a complicated memoir	University of Regina Press	Book	Mohamed Abdulkarim Ali	Mohamed	Whole book
2	Being queer and Somali: LGBT Somalis at home and abroad	Oracle Releasing	Book	Afdhere Jama		
	Introduction				Afdhere	pp. i–vi
	Queer				Afdhere	pp. 17–21
	Muslim				Afdhere	pp. 35–39
	History				Afdhere	pp. 41–43
	Today				Afdhere	pp. 45–48
	Refugees				Ali, Ismail	pp. 83–89
	Oslo				Amal, Rashid	pp. 113–116
	Paris				Jamal	pp. 117–119
	London				Mo	pp. 121–128
	Geneva				Rahma	pp. 129–133
	Toronto				Dahir	pp. 135–140
	Seattle				Hamdi	pp. 141–145
	Minneapolis				Dadirow	pp. 147–153
	Washington				Diriye	pp. 155–157
	Atlanta				Ahmed	pp. 159–161
3	Queer Jihad: LGBT Muslims on coming out, activism, and the faith	Oracle Releasing	Book	Afdhere Jama	Hadiyo	Ch. “Hadiyo Jim'ale,” pp. 111–116

4	Decolonizing sexualities: Transnational perspectives; critical interventions	Counterpress	Book	Sandeep Bakshi & et al.		
	Diriye Osman, Ch. "To Be Young, Gay, and African"				Diriye	pp. 100–102
	Diriye Osman, Ch. "This Is How We Soften Our Hearts"				Diriye	pp. 103–104
	Diriye Osman, Ch. "Femininity in Men Is a Source of Power"				Diriye	pp. 105–107
5	This Arab is queer: An anthology by LGBTQ+ Arab writers	Saqi books	Book	Elias Jahshan	Amna	Ch. "Amna Ali," pp. 135–144
6	Gay Travels in the Muslim World	Harrington Park Press	Book	Michael T. Luongo	Afdhere	Ch. "Foreword," pp. ix–xi by Afdhere Jama
7	Illegal citizens: Queer lives in the Muslim world	Salaam Press	Book	Afdhere Jama	Hamdi	Ch. "The gabdho of Somalia," pp. 5–7
8	Mustafa Jumale: Accessing power for Black immigrants.	Minneapolis Interview Project	Interview Project	Mustafa Jumale	Mustafa	
9	Oral history interview with Ash Farah, 2019	Augsburg University	Oral History Project	Sabrin Gadow	Ash, Mustafa	Ash Farah, Mustafa Jumale

References

- Abdi, C. M. (2015). *Elusive Jannah: The Somali diaspora and a borderless Muslim identity*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Abdi, C. M. (2019). The newest African-Americans?: Somali struggles for belonging. In P. Armila, M. Kananen, & Y. Kontkanen (Eds.), *The contexts of diaspora citizenship: Somali communities in Finland and the United States* (pp. 19–32). Springer.
- Ali, A. (2022). My intersectionality was my biggest bully. In E. Jahshan (Ed.), *This Arab is queer: An anthology by LGBTQ+ Arab writers* (pp. 135–144). Saqi.
- Ali, M. A. (2019). *Angry queer Somali boy: A complicated memoir*. University of Regina Press.
- Alvi, S., & Zaidi, A. (2021). “My existence is not haram”: Intersectional lives in LGBTQ Muslims living in Canada. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 68(6), 993–1014. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1695422>
- Anzaldúa, G. (2009). To(o) queer the writer—Loca, escritora y chicana. In A. Keating (Ed.), *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (pp. 163–175). Duke University Press.
- Armila, P., Kananen, M., & Kontkanen, Y. (Eds.). (2019). *The contexts of diaspora citizenship: Somali communities in Finland and the United States*. Springer.
- Armila, P., & Kontkanen, Y. (2019). Diaspora citizenship: Silenced, stigmatized, outlying—And campaigning. In P. Armila, M. Kananen, & Y. Kontkanen (Eds.), *The contexts of diaspora citizenship: Somali communities in Finland and the United States* (pp. 151–165). Springer.

- Baker, Y. K. (2022). Provincializing America: Race, neoliberalism, and sovereignty in the war on Iraq. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 54(2), 376–381. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743822000381>
- Bartlett, K. T., & Kennedy, R. T. (Eds.). (1991). *Feminist legal theory: Readings in law and gender*. Westview Press.
- Bell, L. (2014). Ethics and feminist research. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Feminist research practice: A primer* (Second Edition). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Beydoun, K. A. (2018). *American Islamophobia: Understanding the roots and rise of fear*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520970007>
- Çalışkan, G., Preston, K., Kinsman, G., Moussa, G., & Wahab, A. (2020). Decolonial interventions to queer necropolitics and homonationalisms. In G. Çalışkan (Ed.), *Gendering globalization, globalizing gender: Postcolonial perspectives* (First edition, pp. 40–60). Oxford University Press.
- Chan-Malik, S. (2018). *Being Muslim: A cultural history of women of color in American Islam*. University Press.
- Chowdhury, E. H. (2018). Reading Hamid, reading Coates: Juxtaposing anti-Muslim and anti-Black racism in current times. *Feminist Formations*, 30(3), 63–78. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2018.0038>
- Corey-Boulet, R. (2019). *Love falls on us: A story of American ideas and African LGBT lives*. Zed Books, Ltd.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.

- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Dahir, Z. A. (2017). Blurred intersections: The anti-Black, Islamophobic dimensions of CVE surveillance [M.S., Minnesota State University, Mankato]. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1989761165/abstract/CC21CB87E463420CPQ/1>
- Darakchi, S. (2017). Dynamics in the notions of sexuality among three generations of Bulgarian Muslims. *Sexuality & Culture*, 21(4), 1197–1214.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-017-9446-6>
- Drabent, D., & Phelps, H. (2022a, June 22). Ms. Global: Feminists Create Transnational Abortion Network; Syrian NGO Supports LGBTQ Rights; The World’s First Openly Gay Head of State. *Ms. Magazine*.
<https://msmagazine.com/2022/06/22/global-transnational-abortion-network-lgbtq-rights-abortion-san-marino-syria-thailand/>
- Drabent, D., & Phelps, H. (2022b, July 21). Ms. Global: Iranian Women Unveil in Protest; Hungary Sued Over Anti-LGBTQ Law; Sierra Leone Overturns Abortion Ban. *Ms. Magazine*. <https://msmagazine.com/2022/07/21/ms-global-afghanistan-iran-vatican-france-hungary-sudan-sierra-leone/>
- Drabent, D., & Phelps, H. (2022c, August 10). Ms. Global: Historic Kenyan Elections; Malaysia Passes Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill; Germany Introduces Self-Determination Act. *Ms. Magazine*.
<https://msmagazine.com/2022/08/10/ms-global-kenyan-elections-malaysia-china-germany-self-determination-iran/>

- Eidhamar, L. G. (2015). Divine revelation and human reasoning. *Sociology of Islam*, 3(3–4), 170–189. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-00303002>
- El-Tayeb, F. (2011). *European others: Queering ethnicity in postnational Europe*. University of Minnesota Press.
- El-Tayeb, F. (2012). ‘Gays who cannot properly be gay’: Queer Muslims in the neoliberal European city. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 19(1), 79–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506811426388>
- El-Tayeb, F. (2013). Time travelers and queer heterotopias: Narratives from the Muslim underground. *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 88(3), 305–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00168890.2013.820637>
- El-Tayeb, F. (2016). Lesbian of colour activism and racist violence in contemporary Europe. In S. Bakshi, S. Jivraj, & S. Posocco (Eds.), *Decolonizing sexualities* (pp. 154–169). Counterpress.
- Epprecht, M. (2008). *Heterosexual Africa? The history of an idea from the age of exploration to the age of AIDS*. Univ. of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Ferguson, R. A. (2004). *Aberrations in Black: Toward a queer of color critique*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Fidolini, V. (2018). When religion reshapes identities: Young Moroccan adults, sexual behaviours and Islamic modernities. In Y. Taylor & R. Snowdon (Eds.), *Queering religion, religious queers* (pp. 178–193). Routledge.
- Gadow, S. (2019, December 16). *Oral History Interview with Ash Farah, 2019* / *Augsburg University Archives*.
<https://archives.augsburg.edu/islandora/object/AUGrepository%3AMIMFarah2019?display=list>

- Gaudio, R. P. (2014). Trans-Saharan trade: The routes of 'African sexuality.' *The Journal of African History*, 55(3), 317–330.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853714000619>
- Ghabrial, M. A. (2017). "Trying to figure out where we belong": Narratives of racialized sexual minorities on community, identity, discrimination, and health. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 14(1), 42–55.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-016-0229-x>
- Golriz, G. (2021). Does religion prevent LGBTQ acceptance? A case study with queer and trans Muslims in Toronto, Canada. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 68(14), 2451–2475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2020.1809888>
- Gomez, M. A. (2005). *Black crescent: The experience and legacy of African Muslims in the Americas*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grewal, I., & Kaplan, C. (2001). Global identities: Theorizing transnational studies of sexuality. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 7(4), 663–679.
- Guerin, B., Guerin, P., Diiriye, R. O., & Yates, S. (2004). Somali conceptions and expectations concerning mental health: Some guidelines for mental health professionals. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 33, 59–67.
- Gurr, B., & Kelly, M. (Eds.). (2019). *Feminist research in practice*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Habib, S. (Ed.). (2010). *Islam and homosexuality*. Praeger.
- Hames-García, M. (2011). Queer theory revisited. In M. Hames-García & E. J. Martínez (Eds.), *Gay Latino studies: A critical reader* (pp. 19–45). Duke University Press.

- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2014a). Feminist approaches to in-depth interviewing. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Feminist research practice: A primer* (Second Edition). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2014b). *Feminist research practice: A primer* (Second Edition). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Hill Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (Rev. 10th anniversary ed). Routledge.
- Hodge, E. (2019). Making precarious: The construction of precarity in refugee and migrant discourse. *Borders in Globalization Review*, 1(1), 83–90.
<https://doi.org/10.18357/bigr11201919265>
- Hunt, S. L., Connor, J. J., Ciesinski, A., Abdi, C., & Robinson, B. “Bean” E. (2018). Somali American female refugees discuss their attitudes toward homosexuality and the gay and lesbian community. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 20(5), 591–605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2017.1367036>
- Ibrahim, H. (2017). *From Somalia to snow: How central Minnesota became home to Somalis*. Beaver’s Pond Press.
- Ioannides, G. (2018). Queer travels: Intersections for the study of Islam, sexuality, and queer theory. In Y. Taylor & R. Snowdon (Eds.), *Queering religion, religious queers* (pp. 117–136). Routledge.
- Jama, A. (2007). Foreword. In M. Luongo (Ed.), *Gay travels in the Muslim world* (pp. ix–xi). Harrington Park Press.
- Jama, A. (2008a). *Illegal citizens: Queer lives in the Muslim world* (2nd edition). Salaam Press.

- Jama, A. (2008b). The gabdho of Somalia. In *Illegal citizens: Queer lives in the Muslim world* (2nd edition, pp. 5–7). Salaam Press.
- Jama, A. (2013a). Hadiyo Jim'ale. In A. Jama, *Queer Jihad: LGBT Muslims on coming out, activism, and the faith* (pp. 111–116). Oracle Releasing.
- Jama, A. (2013b). *Queer Jihad: LGBT Muslims on coming out, activism, and the faith*. Oracle Releasing.
- Jama, A. (2015). *Being queer and Somali: LGBT Somalis at home and abroad*. Oracle Releasing.
- Jama, A. (2018, March 20). The Huriyah blog: Nothing wrong with being queer, Somali, and Muslim! *The Huriyah Blog*.
<http://huriyahmag.blogspot.com/2018/03/nothing-wrong-with-being-queer-somali.html>
- Jaspal, R. (2018). Sexuality, migration and identity among gay Iranian migrants to the UK. In Y. Taylor & R. Snowdon (Eds.), *Queering religion, religious queers* (pp. 44–60). Routledge.
- Johnson, E. P. (2001). “Quare” studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 21(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930128119>
- Jumale, M. (2019, November 16). Mustafa Jumale: Accessing power for Black immigrants. *Minneapolis Interview Project*.
<https://turtleroad.org/2019/11/16/mustafa-jumale/>
- Kaplan, C. (1994). The politics of location as transnational feminist critical practice. In I. Grewal & C. Kaplan (Eds.), *Scattered hegemonies: Postmodernity and transnational feminist practices* (pp. 137–152). University of Minnesota Press.

- Kehl, K. (2020). 'Did queer Muslims even exist?' – racialised grids of intelligibility in Swedish LGBTQ contexts. *Social Identities*, 26(2), 150–165.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2019.1671183>
- Khan, M., & Mulé, N. J. (2021). Voices of resistance and agency: LGBTQ Muslim women living out intersectional lives in North America. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 68(7), 1144–1168.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.1888583>
- Korkman, Z. K., & Razack, S. H. (2021). Transnational feminist approaches to anti-Muslim racism. *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 20(2), 261–270.
- Kosnick, K. (2015). A clash of subcultures? Questioning queer–Muslim antagonisms in the neoliberal city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 39(4), 687–703. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12261>
- Kugle, S. S. al-Haqq. (2010). *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical reflection on gay, lesbian, and transgender Muslims*. Oneworld.
- Kugle, S. S. al-Haqq. (2014). *Living out Islam: Voices of gay, lesbian, and transgender Muslims*. NYU Press.
- Lara, T. (2022). Queer, Muslim, and Maghrebi: An intersectional analysis of immigrant identities in contemporary France. *Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography*, 12(1), 33–53. <https://doi.org/10.15273/jue.v12i1.11312>
- Leavy, P. (2007). The feminist practice of content analysis. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Feminist research practice: A primer* (pp. 223–248). SAGE Publications.
- Mbembé, J.-A., & Meintjes, L. (2003). Necropolitics. *Public Culture*, 15(1), 11–40.

- Meier, A. A. (2022). Terror as justice, justice as terror: Counterterrorism and anti-Black racism in the United States. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15(1), 83–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2022.2031132>
- Mirza, W. (2015). Fighting anti-blackness and Islamophobia. *The Muslim Internationalist*.
- Moghadam, V. M. (2015). *Transnational feminist activism and movement building* (R. Baksh & W. Harcourt, Eds.). Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199943494.013.003>
- Mohamed, H. (2017). The triple consciousness of Black Muslim women: The experiences of first generation Somali-Canadian women activists. *Journal of Somali Studies, Volume 4*(1 & 2), 9–42. https://doi.org/10.31920/2056-5682/2017/v4n1_2a1
- Mohanty, C. T. (1984). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Boundary 2*, 12(3), 333–358. <https://doi.org/10.2307/302821>
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). Genealogies of community, home, and nation. In *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity* (pp. 124–136). Duke University Press.
- Mosurinjohn, S. (2014). Popular journalism, religious morality, and the Canadian imaginary: Queers and immigrants as threats to the public sphere. *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 26(2), 244–258.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/jrpc.26.2.244>
- Mugabo, D. (2016). On rocks and hard places: A reflection on antiblackness in organizing against Islamophobia. *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 2(2), 159–183.
<https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.2.2.0159>

- Murray, D. A. (2013). Becoming queer here: Integration and adaptation experiences of sexual minority refugees in Toronto. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 127–135. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.36504>
- Murray, S. O., & Roscoe, W. (Eds.). (2001). *Boy-wives and female husbands: Studies of African homosexualities* (1. ed. (paperback)). Palgrave.
- Naber, N., Atshan, S., Awad, N., Mikdashi, M., Merabet, S., Abusalim, D., & Elia, N. (2018). On Palestinian studies and queer theory. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 47(3 (187)), 62–71.
- Najmabadi, A. (2005). Part I: Beauty, love, and sexuality. In *Women with mustaches and men without beards: Gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity* (pp. 11–60). University of California Press.
- Najmabadi, A. (2006). Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Analysis? *Journal of Women's History*, 18(1), 11–21. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2006.0022>
- Najmabadi, A. (2008). Transing and Transpassing across Sex-Gender Walls in Iran. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 36(3/4), 23–42.
- Najmabadi, A. (2014). *Professing selves: Transsexuality and same-sex desire in contemporary Iran*. Duke University Press.
- Naples, N. A., & Gurr, B. (2014). Feminist empiricism and standpoint theory. In S. N. Hesse-Biber (Ed.), *Feminist research practice: A primer* (Second Edition). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Osman, D. (2016a). Femininity in men is a source of power. In S. Bakshi, S. Jivraj, & S. Posocco (Eds.), *Decolonizing sexualities: Transnational perspectives; critical interventions* (pp. 105–107). Counterpress.

- Osman, D. (2016b). This is how we soften our hearts. In S. Bakshi, S. Jivraj, & S. Posocco (Eds.), *Decolonizing sexualities: Transnational perspectives; critical interventions* (pp. 103–104). Counterpress.
- Osman, D. (2016c). To be young, gay, and African. In S. Bakshi, S. Jivraj, & S. Posocco (Eds.), *Decolonizing sexualities: Transnational perspectives; critical interventions* (pp. 100–102). Counterpress.
- Peterson, H. (2020, July 30). *Queer Somalis | Lavender Magazine*.
<https://lavendermagazine.com/our-lives/queer-somalis/>
- Peumans, W. (2014). Queer Muslim migrants in Belgium: A research note on same-sex sexualities and lived religion. *Sexualities*, 17(5–6), 618–631.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460714526327>
- Puar, J. K. (2006). Mapping US homonormativities. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 13(1), 67–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690500531014>
- Puar, J. K. (2007). *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*. Duke University Press.
- Puar, J. K. (2013). Rethinking homonationalism. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 45(2), 336–339. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074381300007X>
- Puar, J. K. (2014). Reading religion back into Terrorist Assemblages: Author's response. *Culture and Religion*, 15(2), 198–210.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2014.911045>
- Puar, J. K., & Rai, A. S. (2002). Monster, terrorist, fag: The war on terrorism and the production of docile patriots. *Social Text*, 20(3 (72)), 117–148.
https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-20-3_72-117

- Rayside, D. (2011). Muslim American communities' response to queer visibility. *Contemporary Islam*, 5(2), 109–134. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-011-0157-8>
- Razack, S. (2022). *Nothing has to make sense: Upholding white supremacy through anti-Muslim racism*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Rehman, J., & Polymenopoulou, E. (2012). Is green a part of the rainbow? Sharia, homosexuality and LGBT rights in the Muslim world. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2180807>
- Rouse, C. M. (2004). *Engaged surrender: African American women and Islam*. University of California Press.
- Savcı, E. (2021). *Queer in translation: Sexual politics under neoliberal Islam*. Duke University Press.
- Schuessler, R. (2017, August 3). “White queers are really good at erasing us”: The lives of LGBTQ Somali-Americans. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/03/lgbtq-somali-americans-minnesota-homophobia-trump>
- Shah, S. (2016). Constructing an alternative pedagogy of Islam: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Muslims. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 37(3), 308–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2016.1212179>
- Shakhsari, S. (2020). *Politics of rightful killing: Civil society, gender, and sexuality in Weblogistan*. Duke University Press.
- Siraj, A. (2009). The construction of the homosexual ‘other’ by British Muslim heterosexuals. *Contemporary Islam*, 3(1), 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-008-0076-5>

- Siraj, A. (2012). "I don't want to taint the name of Islam": The influence of religion on the lives of Muslim lesbians. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 16(4), 449–467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2012.681268>
- Siraj, A. (2016). Alternative realities: Queer Muslims and the Qur'an. *Theology & Sexuality*, 22(1–2), 89–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13558358.2017.1296690>
- Siraj, A. (2018). Islam, homosexuality and gay Muslims. In Y. Taylor & R. Snowdon (Eds.), *Queering religion, religious queers* (pp. 194–210). Routledge.
- Somerville, S. B. (2000). Introduction. In *Queering the color line: Race and the invention of homosexuality in American culture* (pp. 1–14). Duke University Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
- Trevenen, K., & Degagne, A. (2015). Homonationalism at the border and in the streets: Organizing against exclusion and incorporation. In O. H. Dryden & S. Lenon (Eds.), *Disrupting queer inclusion: Canadian homonationalisms and the politics of belonging* (pp. 100–115). UBC Press.
- Valentine, D. (2007). *Imagining transgender: An ethnography of a category*. Duke University Press.
- Yusuf, A. I. (2012). *Somalis in Minnesota*. Minnesota Historical Society Press.
- Zubillaga-Pow, J. (2016). "Guarding against terrorism": Testimony of a Singaporean Muslim lesbian. In S. Bakshi, S. Jivraj, & S. Posocco (Eds.), *Decolonizing sexualities* (pp. 170–177). Counterpress.