Introduction: Queering Islam and micropolitical disorientation

> To say that male homosexuality flourished in Islamic societies would be an overstatement typical of orientalist discourse, but it would be no exaggeration to say that, before the twentieth century, the region of the world with the most visible and diverse homosexualities was not northwestern Europe but northern Africa and southwestern Asia. Indeed, the contrast between 'Western' and 'Islamic' homosexualities is not so much one of visibility versus invisibility or modern freedom versus traditional repression, but of containment versus elaboration, of a single pattern of homosexuality defined and delimited by institutions and discourses closely linked to the modern nation-state versus the variety, distribution, and longevity of same-sex patterns in Islamic societies. (Murray and Roscoe, 1997, p. 6)

HOMOSEXUALITY IS, arguably, one of the thorniest contemporary topics surrounding Islam and its relationship with civil rights. To this day, same-sex acts are still a significant taboo even among Muslim communities in the West, and they remain a contentious issue in many Muslim-majority countries, where levels of tolerance can vary between clandestine social acceptance and exemplary state punishment. Whereas homosexuality has been decriminalised in places such as Turkey and Indonesia – while in India it has been decriminalised, recriminalised, and decriminalised once again – stepping out of line with normative sexualities can lead many Muslims to face imprisonment or even the death penalty, in countries such as Malaysia, Nigeria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia (Habib, 2010). Whether these Muslims are the victims of systemic homophobia or of state retribution, such harsh living conditions, often intersecting with issues of war or financial scarcity, sometimes entail migration to countries where homosexual acts

are not punished by the state: notably in Europe and North America, where, in turn, perceptions of their incompatible sexual orientations and religious identities can result in internal conflict. This study argues that the fight against homophobia and Islamophobia ought to be a joint one: it is only through a double critique that we can start challenging mutual suspicion and begin to forge some form of transnational understanding of overlapping identitarian and cultural identifications.

One of my aims in this initial chapter is briefly to chart the history of homosexuality in Islam, a living reality often elided in contemporary Islamist discourses that vilify or simply negate sexual non-normativity, against the richness and longevity cited by Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe in this chapter's epigraph, taken from their seminal book *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*. As we will see shortly, Islamic homophobia is imbricated in a complex and long history of European colonialism, anti-colonial insurgency, and postcolonial Islamic revivalism, which links it, in varying and often overlapping degrees, to Western homophobic discourses. I also interrogate current debates surrounding Western approaches to Muslim homosexuality and suggest an assembled essentialist and constructionist queer approach as the most appropriate critical method to avoid identitarian prescription and the aggressive homonationalist discourse of what Joseph Massad (2007) calls the 'Gay International'.

This chapter also explores the relatively recent concept of 'queer diaspora', and the promises and pitfalls of comparative queer criticism, in interaction with prominent critics such as Gayatri Gopinath and William Spurlin, while also examining current debates on queer Muslim intersectionality by the likes of Momin Rahman. While admitting to the intersectional positioning of queer diasporic Muslims, I also argue that they should not be constructed merely as paradigmatic of intersectionality, but rather as agents of micropolitical disorientation in societies where different forms of macropolitical segmentalisation constantly intersect. As will become apparent in dialogue with Sara Ahmed, it is often too easy to romanticise queer diasporic subjects as inhabiting alternative semiotic spaces, when in fact their routine lines of flight from normativity, which I formulate via Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, reveal their mundane micropolitical disorientation of normative social categories. As such, I present queer diasporic Muslims neither as exceptional figures nor as inhabitants of a different semiotic dimension; instead, like most of their other coreligionist and diasporic comrades, queer or otherwise, they should be seen as contributing to the disorganisation of solidified ethnic and sexual categories in our allegedly liberal West. I also discuss the work of Timothy Fitzgerald in order to reveal how, despite their constant pitting in Western discourses, 'secularism' and 'religion' are interdependent concepts only

conceptually separated during the European Enlightenment, demonstrating that the supposedly secular West is still highly steeped in Christian aesthetics. Lastly, I briefly propose an antithetical interpretive methodology in dialogue with Bruce Lawrence and Edward Said, whose interrogation of tendentious discourses on Islam and Muslims propagated by Western media helps me complicate the often simplified relationship between 'Islam' and 'the West'. By explicitly pitting my analysis against such ongoing polarisation, I am answering back to power and its networks of desire, challenging the persistent stereotyping of Muslims. In so doing, I offer queer Muslims as negotiatory figures whose disorganisation of normative ideologies can challenge, on the one hand, Muslim and non-Muslim homophobia and, on the other, monolithic Western views on Islam and Muslims.

Islam and homosexuality

Islamicate[1] cultures – that is, cultures whose evolvement have been significantly influenced by their contact with Islam – have a long and complex history of same-sex acts and desire, if not always of *homosexuality* as we have come to understand it in the West since the nineteenth century. Oliver Leaman observes that homosexuality is often constructed by Islamist commentators as a 'feature of Western decadence and something that does not and should not exist in Muslim communities, and if it does, then it is merely as a reflection of the unwelcome spread of corrupt ideas from without' (2014, p. 86). This statement summarises the thrust of contemporary Islamic homophobic discourses, whereby *homosexuality*, understood as a deviant lifestyle, is regarded as an extraneous influence with no real place in 'proper' Islamic societies. Leaman recounts the visit of the former President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to Columbia University in 2007, when Ahmadinejad confidently asserted that there were no homosexuals in Iran. Leaman recalls that this statement met with raucous laughter from the audience. Although Ahmadinejad himself must have known that his tendentious statement was, even from the most technical point of view, a fallacy, it constitutes, nonetheless, a clear message of defiance: the state of Iran will not tolerate a Westernised envisioning of sexuality, and *homosexuality* has therefore been wiped out from the national plain – if not fully physically just yet, at least discursively. What can be gleaned from Iran's unrelenting official position regarding homosexuality is that sexual non-normativity has become for many Muslim countries and communities an issue of political strategy: it helps them situate themselves in complete opposition to the alleged moral laxity of the aggressively modern but also highly simplified West.

To the chagrin of contemporary Islamists keen to deny the existence of homosexuality in Muslim-majority contexts, it is undeniable that Muslim societies have a tradition of homoeroticism, and that such tradition has not been part of a hushed-up clandestine subculture, but has belonged in the cultural mainstream. The work of Khaled El-Rouayheb, particularly his book *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800*, has been of utmost importance to the reclamation of the history of Islamicate same-sex desire. El-Rouayheb (2005) observes that Islamicate literature from the early Ottoman period was brimming with homoeroticism, bluntly articulated in such disparate genres as dictionaries of biography, poetry anthologies, and collections of erotic essays. According to him, '[t]he biographical entries on Sufis of the period confirm that the practice of contemplating handsome beardless boys was still thought a living tradition' in the mid-eighteenth-century Islamicate world. Although now regarded by some Islamic commentators as the 'decadent' poetry of the Ottoman Empire, the *ghazal*, one of the main poetic genres in the Islamic world between the thirteenth century and nineteenth century, featured constant pledges of love from the male poetic persona to an adolescent male. Jocelyn Sharlet explores the case of Abu Nuwas, the famous Baghdadi poet who knew he would never be able to enter into socially accepted partnerships with his younger lovers, yet devoted much of his poetry to the expression of this particular homoerotics. Sharlet argues that '[c]oncealment of homoerotic desire gives way to occasions to put love on display in the sociable circulation of poetry and anecdotes, both orally and in writing' (2010, p. 44). This dynamic of self-effacement and public dissemination creates a primal paradox in Islamicate cultures: they may not allow socially sanctified homosexual unions, but such lack of social ratification found a projection onto public culture through the expression of the poet's frustrated homoerotic affections. Hence, while exclusive homosexuality might not have been deemed societally tenable, the tragic expression of unfulfilled homoeroticism was certainly to the taste of Islamicate readerships and audiences, and thus a platonic and ill-fated form of homoeroticism found a niche in mainstream Islamicate cultures.

Homoeroticism did not belong exclusively to the allegedly decadent Ottoman period, however, and it certainly did not involve only platonic relationships. Nonetheless, the terms *homosexuality* and *homosexual* do not automatically equate with what takes place in Muslim-majority countries. As El-Rouayheb also reminds us, the terms *homosexualität* was coined in the late 1860s by Austro-Hungarian writer Karl Maria Kertbeny, but it is not necessarily synonymous with the much older concept of *sodomy*. He cites Michel Foucault's idea that the term *sodomite* could only apply 'to the perpetrator of an act' (El-Rouayheb, 2005, p. 5).

Thus configured, someone who has an inclination towards the same sex but does not engage in same-sex acts cannot be considered a sodomite. As El-Rouayheb states: 'On this account, homosexuality is no more synonym for sodomy that heterosexuality is equivalent to fornication' (2005, p. 5). We can glean from this discussion that 'homosexuality' is more in keeping with an essentialist conception of sexual identity, with a focus on feelings and immanence, as opposed to a constructionist approach to sexuality, which regards sexual acts as a form of performativity. This difference between essential identity and constructionist social performance is important when dealing with the configuration of same-sex acts in the so-called 'Muslim world', which seems attuned to inherited Hellenistic and Roman models focused on sexual roles. This homoerotic genealogy is an episteme that retains currency to this day: Max Kramer's (2010) study of contemporary internet chatrooms reveal many Muslims still categorise people according to whether they are sexually 'active' or 'passive' penetrators, not according to the gender of their chosen sexual partners, and certainly not in terms of exclusive desire towards any particular gender. Kramer observes that a man who penetrates another man is perceived as 'masculine', and thus would never be labelled as 'homosexual', a tag reserved for the penetrated party, especially if that person is an adult male. Indeed, as a Turkish correspondent emphatically put to Kramer: 'no no – am not homosexsüel – aktif aktif' (2010, p. 139).

Kramer also explores cases of middle-aged men from the Middle East and the Maghreb, of different social classes and occupations, who are married and have children, but who also find an outlet in homosexual relations with other men. These married men perform their societal and moral duty according to Islamic principles: they court women, they marry women, they have children. Having fulfilled their God-given and societally constructed roles, they can then comfortably lead a double life as husbands and fathers while giving vent to their homoerotic desires privately, sometimes in full knowledge of their immediate family, whose social and financial dependence on heteropatriarchy may encourage them to remain silent about these matters. In Kramer's account, as long as men marry, have children, and carry out their sexual dealings discreetly, they can feasibly enjoy relations with other men '*without being socially discredited*' (2010, p. 144, emphasis in original). Male same-sex acts are alive and well in Islamicate societies, albeit to the detriment of women and their elided desires and emotional needs. Moreover, what is repressed or punished in Muslim communities is not attraction between men per se, but, as Jayesh Needham (2013) suggests, the men's public definition as homosexual, i.e., having a sexual identity of exclusive sexual involvement with men. This social discouragement of same-sex relationships

leads many men to marry women, while reserving their same-sex desire for clandestine extramarital affairs. Are these men primarily attracted to men but societally forced into marriage, or is this an endemic case of what the West would call rampant Arab bisexuality? Both cases seem feasible, yet the work of Joseph Massad (2007) leans towards the latter option, by arguing that a Western-style conception of sexuality as essential and gender-exclusive is not vernacular to Muslim cultures.

A self-confessed disciple of Edward Said, Massad argues in his book *Desiring Arabs* that the construction of essential sexual identities, such as *homosexuality*, is a Western invention, and that Muslim men engaging in same-sex acts or infatuated with younger men would not necessarily consider themselves to be exclusively *homosexual* in the way we have come to understand in the West. In his view, applying a Western conception of sexual identity to Islamicate countries is an extension of imperialist taxonomies attempting to define the 'Other' according to prescriptive Western notions. Massad argues in an impassioned syllogism that '[t]here is nothing liberatory about Western human subjectivity including gays and lesbians when it does so by forcibly including those non-European who are not gays or lesbians while excluding them as unfit to defend themselves' (2007, p. 42). At heart, it would seem this is a problem of self-definition: there are many people in Muslim-majority countries that would not describe themselves as *gay* or *lesbian*, let alone *homosexual*, not just because such terminologies do not translate easily to their vernacular Islamicate cultures, but also because the Western exploitation of binaries – i.e., masculine/feminine, homosexual/heterosexual – forecloses behavioural complexities in Islamicate societies. In trying to reclaim homosexual Muslims, Massad argues some Western LGBTIQ activists, which he calls the 'Gay International', project onto a different cultural landscape their own Western ideologies, just like the Orientalists of yore. Kramer also points to the irony in the situation: the Muslim world, so often constructed as an 'Eden for same-sex practices' (2010, p. 134) – as evidenced in the manifold works of Gustave Flaubert, André Gide, Paul Bowles, William Burroughs, Jean Genet, and Joe Orton – is now portrayed as acerbically homophobic and in need of sexual liberation, which the West will gladly procure. To Kramer, forcing down on Muslims a Western formulation of 'sexual Orientation' amounts to almost a 'second colonization' (2010, p. 153). He also observes that a model of exclusive orientation creates undue polarisation even in the West, where people are pressurised into belonging to one particular sexual group, potentially forcing heterosexuality – and homosexuality – onto subjects who might express and define their sexualities more fluidly.

There are some downsides to the form of cultural protectionism that Massad propounds. While it is important to remain sensitive to cultural nuances and to be wary of epistemic violence, the influence of global flows of communication, embodied in the widespread availability of Western models of homosexuality through the media and the internet, means that conceptions of sexuality in Islamicate societies, including diasporic Muslim communities in direct contact with Western ideologies, are gradually changing, whether this change is welcome or not, or whether it is seen as a form of cultural contamination or as the inexorable symptom of globalisation. As such, the way social and cultural critics account for the existence of these transnational forms of homosexuality ought to be commensurate with their burgeoning expression. Scholars such as Samar Habib (2010) see Massad's position as too reductive, for it consigns Muslim men and women who have a near-exclusive sexual preference to non-existence, or to a state of mere complicity with Western imperialism. If we are really to account for the complexities of the globalised contemporary world, we should be ready to acknowledge epistemic overlaps in the formulation of sexual identification. Rather than selectively embracing one model of sexuality according to a single school of thought, as either essentialist or constructionist, we need to remain attuned to nuances in the cultural articulation of such matters, and willing to concede to inconsistency, which, in the case of diasporic subjects, is a matter of everyday existence. Moreover, critiquing the colonial and neocolonial networks of desire that have given way to such cultural overlaps in the wake of rampant globalisation is one thing; attempting to downplay or erase the effects of such exchanges on actual human experience is another. As we will see through the course of this book, representations of queer diasporic Muslims are capable of making reference to a plethora of cultural and ideological influences, both local and global. In many cases, the latter are not perceived as an imperialist imposition or as destroying cultural authenticity, but, instead, they are accepted as the inevitable result of living in the diaspora. Like any other human phenomenon, sexuality is not exempt of cultural confluences and ideological intersections. Admitting to such interconnection and analysing its effects on the expression of non-normative desires should be key to understanding queer diasporic positions, while also contributing to blurring the boundaries between 'East' and 'West' stubbornly drawn by both Euro-American ethnocentrism and Islamism.

Even the continued aversion of Islamist commentators to homosexuality cannot be considered in isolation and should be framed more explicitly within the historical context of European colonialism and postcolonial Islamic revivalism, which, despite their power contestations, share some of their homophobic

ideologies and discourses. If, as we have seen, homoeroticism was a part of mainstream Islamicate cultures well into the eighteenth century, the global onset of homophobia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be traced back to the West's accession to global power, a time when homosexuality, formulated as an innate moral deviation, became the object of intense scrutiny both 'at home' and in the colonies. El-Rouayheb (2005) sees the expurgation of homo-eroticism in literature as part of this colonial legacy. He cites the case of Richard Burton and his translation of the *Thousand Nights and a Night*, first published in 1885. Burton's highly eroticised version of the *Arabian Nights* is testament to his exaggerated fascination with Oriental homoeroticism[2] and is far from being the collection of children's stories later published by Andrew Lang in 1898. El-Rouayheb observes that the edition of Burton's *Arabian Nights* published in Cairo in 1930 elided all the homoerotic stories, including those concerning the real poet Abu Nuwas already mentioned. This sanitised edition was followed two years later in Cairo by an equally expurgated publication of Abu Nuwas' poems, which, unlike previous editions, did not include the homoerotic poems for which Nuwas is famous. The postcolonial expurgation of any references to homoeroticism, whether exaggerated by Orientalists such as Burton or vernacu-larly articulated by Islamicate poets like Abu Nuwas, reveals that colonial and postcolonial Muslims have inherited the distaste towards homosexuality of the European colonial elites.

Whereas at first this homophobia was symptomatic of colonial mimicry, the postcolonial aversion towards homosexuality would become a feature of Islamic revivalist ideologies trying to define themselves in direct opposition to the West. Roy (2004) convincingly argues that the onset of Islamic neo-orthodoxy in the second half of the twentieth century was due to a postcolonial impetus to define Muslim-majority societies in direct contrast to Western ideologies. He also suggests that the contemporary construction of homosexuality by contro-versial Muslim *mullahs* replicates the medical rhetoric of right-wing Christian conservatives. He chooses the prominent example of Muzammil Siddiqi, the former president of the Islamic Society of North America, who describes homo-sexuality as 'a moral disorder, a sin and corruption. […] Homosexuality is dan-gerous for the health of the individuals and for society. It is a main cause of one of the most harmful and fatal diseases' (Roy, 004, p. 215). According to Roy, this contemporary rejection of homosexuality on medical grounds is not formulated in relation to Islamicate traditions, but follows, instead, the allegedly scientific model prevalent in the West. Although there is historical evidence that classical Muslims already discussed homosexuality in medical terms (Habib, 2009), it is

reasonable to infer that contemporary Islamists seem to be taking their cue from Christian homophobia. In addition, Siddiqi's leaning towards medical terminologies and away from religious and moral imperatives seems to betray a desire to be perceived as 'up to date' with modernity. It would appear, then, that it is not homosexual acts but rather the homophobic discourses medicalising it that constitute a foreign imposition on Islamicate cultures, articulated via colonial Western ideologies and dressed up as Islamist self-affirmation.

As we have just seen, Western imperialism and postcolonial Islamic revivalism are complicit in the condemnation of homosexuality. However, the tendentious Western view that Islam is intrinsically homophobic should also take into consideration not only the influence of European colonial history, but also the complex trajectory of Islamic debates on same-sex acts, which have not been as unanimous as contemporary Islamic commentators would have us believe. Barbara Zollner suggests that neo-orthodox Islamic scholars are too quick to condemn homosexuality 'with stern conviction and without a grain of doubt. Nevertheless, those familiar with the intricacies of Islamic law should immediately be suspicious of this affirmation' (2010, p. 197). Such suspicion is warranted by the lack of consensus in Islamic juridical debates – the *fiqh* – about the nature of same-sex transgression and its suitable punishment. Zollner takes on those liberal commentators who seek to reclaim the perspectives of queer Muslims by essentialising Islamic law, which she does not deem universally homophobic. This is something that can be extended to some feminist debates[3] on Islamic doctrine, which also refute the view that *tafasir* – the various scholarly commentaries on the Qur'an – and the ensuing *fiqh* are unanimously patriarchal. Although, as Zollner observes, Muslim jurists regard divine will as the gauge for their laws, Islam's sacred scriptures need interpretation in order to derive such rulings, and as such the primary instinct behind jurists' decisions is *ijtihad* – independent reasoning.

If the rulings on homosexuality have not been consensual in the first instance, it is because the primary source of Islamic belief, the Qur'an, is not unambiguous about same-sex relations, and thus subsequent commentaries and rulings have had to grapple with this nebulousness. The matter of most contention when debating Islam's condemnation of same-sex acts involves recurring references in the Qur'an to Lot's people, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, as described also in the Bible, and some alleged references to female-on-female sexuality. The work of Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle (2010) has been instrumental in 'queering' the Qur'an, the *ahadith* – sayings by and about Prophet Muhammad – and the various interpretations of these texts, as well as the *fiqh*. He makes particular reference to the contending schools of thought debating the issue. It is clear from

Kugle's commentary that Lot's people rejected his prophethood, and that they were grossly inhospitable to his guests by using rape and theft as methods of dissuasion. According to Kugle, although anal intercourse is at stake in the episode, which makes references to lust, it cannot be divorced from the context of sexual coercion, including adultery, since Lot's people were married men; in addition, it is important to remember that the transgressions of these men also included theft and the negation of God and his prophet, which played a major role in their being annihilated by a divine storm, together with Lot's wife, who also rejected his message but was not a man who performed anal penetration. Persistent textual references to the men's 'abomination' in waylaying other men and abandoning their wives made it necessary for some Muslim jurists to coin terms that could describe them and their actions: *liwat* and *luti*, which can be roughly equated to the biblical terms *sodomy* and *sodomites*, respectively.

Whereas these jurists interpreted this episode as being, on the most part, a condemnation of anal penetration, Kugle cites the example of classical Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazm, who placed emphasis on the men's rejection of Lot's prophethood and their adultery. According to Ibn Hazm's commentary quoted by Kugle:

> The [divine] stoning which punished them was not for one type of immorality [*fahisha*] in specific, but was rather for their infidelity and rejection [*kufr*]. Those who claim that stoning is the punishment for this immorality [anal sex between men] are not following the command of God unless the one guilty of it is a rejecter of God's Prophet [*kafir*]. (Kugle, 2010, p. 51)

Whereas neo-orthodox Islamic scholars such as Siddiqi would argue that the case of Lot's people involves a categorical, God-ordained rejection of homosexuality, this instance of *tafsir* proves there is complexity to the matter. Kugle argues, via Ibn Hazm, that '[t]he role of male-to-male sex acts is marginal to the essence of the story and its moral lesson' (2010, p. 53). I would add that the contextual details involving Lot's tribe do not correspond strictly with either our contemporary conception of homosexuality as a consensual act between same-sex adults or with any other cultural configuration of human relationships as based on egalitarian intimacy. It should not be obviated that Lot's people were married men and that they were being unfaithful to their wives when forcing their lust on Lot's guests. They were also using sex coercively, as a weapon, not as a form of sensual connection with another human being, which is, together with reproduction, one of its main purposes in Islamic doctrine. Kugle argues that sexual desire (*shahwa*) is one of several human desires, including the enjoyment of 'food, wealth, and

power', and that these desires 'might be good or bad depending on the intent, intensity, and ethical comportment of the desiring than on the specific object or experience desired' (2010, p. 50). In light of this, sexual desire is not considered bad per se, but rather its good or evil is incumbent on its motivations. It is arguable, then, that Lot's people were therefore illicitly using their sexual desire with the wrong intent.[4]

The Qur'an mentions another form of immorality – or *fahisha* – that can take place between several women, although it is not given a concrete name. Subsequent *tafasir* have argued this transgression entails *sihaq* – the act of rubbing – a neologism associated with female-to-female sex acts.[5] Kugle (2010) cites a tenth-century interpreter, al-Isfahani, as the first to suggest this *sura* is concerned with female same-sex acts, an interpretive position embraced centuries later by al-Zamakhshari and al-Baydawi, and more recently by Rashid Rida. Kugle concludes that patriarchal interpretation has found it easy to scapegoat sexual morality in order to avoid the more urgent topics of economic and social justice, especially surrounding women. I would suggest that, if Kugle fails to provide an example of *tafsir*, apart from his own, challenging this bias against sex between women, it is because the Islamic focus on sexual transgression has been far more generally directed towards penetration than towards any other forms of sexual contact (Habib, 2007). Some jurists grappling with rulings on female sexuality did not equate *sihaq* with *liwat*, and saw the former as a minor transgression not requiring equal punishment. In fact, Junaid bin Jahangir cites Salafi scholar Yusuf Qaradawi's statement that '[l]esbianism is not as bad as homosexuality, in practical terms' (2010, p. 299). This is not so much a case of benevolence towards women as proof of the general Muslim obsession with masculine sexuality, and with anal intercourse as being metonymic of homosexuality.[6] Female homosexuality, which Qaradawi's statement does not even count as homosexuality, is putatively erased from the map.

The *ahadith* add further complications to the *fiqh*, or the tradition of Islamic juridical rulings. In essence, the *ahadith* are sayings or anecdotes attributed to the Prophet Muhammad or his followers which were observed by his disciples and passed down orally, until they were textually transcribed. A plethora of *ahadith* have been compiled in disparate collections, and a whole Islamic scholarly tradition was once devoted to their study and to the verification of their authenticity.[7] Because of their reliance on the words of a series of followers, who may have wanted to advance their own sociopolitical standpoints, the *ahadith* can be instruments of elucidation, but also, as Kugle warns, of coercion. Zollner (2010) cites the case of twentieth-century Iraqi scholar Taha Jaber al-'Alwani,

who, typically, mentions the story of Lot's people as proof of God's condemnation of homosexuality in the Qur'an, and who then justifies the use of the capital punishment by strategically referring to a *hadith* stipulating that, if caught, both active and passive partners ought to be killed by burning or stoning. On closer inspection, Zollner (2010) observes, in concurrence with previous work by Kugle and Habib, the *hadith* singled out by al-'Alwani and anthologised by Abu Da'ud, is not found in the al-Bukhari and the al-Muslim collections, two of the most respected compilations of *sahih* – truthful – *ahadith*, which suggests classical Islamic scholars doubted its authenticity. This is a useful example of how any individual *hadith* may be strategically used to condition the punishment of homosexuality, even when such *hadith* goes against interpretive consensus. Moreover, Kugle (2010) goes as far as suggesting that no single *hadith* reporting on homosexual or transgender behaviour is *mutawatir* – i.e., containing multiple credible links back to the Prophet – a qualification classical Islamic scholars decided was vital in asserting the decisiveness of the narrative when attempting to dispense justice.

The fact that disputed *ahadith* can, and have been, used to recommend the killing of those involved in same-sex acts suggests that they have contributed to the gradual cumulation of homophobic ideologies, which, as I have mentioned, became particularly important when defining the moral and legal character of the Islamic postcolonial nation in opposition to the 'permissive' West. In asserting their homophobic stances, Islamic neo-orthodox commentators have been building on, on the one hand, the internalised but seldom acknowledged influence of colonial homophobia, best illustrated in belatedly embraced colonial laws regarding homosexuality, and, on the other, on an Islamist rejection of homosexuality that relies on the ambiguities of the Qur'an and on the tendentious evidence provided by *ahadith*, while ignoring discordant voices within the *tafsir* and *fiqh* traditions, all of which have allowed for orthodox attitudes towards sexual roles to become calcified in contemporary mainstream Muslim ideologies.

I would suggest that, ultimately, it is doubtful whether a productive vindication of queer Muslims can be staged strictly on the grounds of theology or scriptural interpretation, not merely because scriptural ambiguities and complexities can easily be exploited by intolerant interpreters of the Qur'an and its attendant traditions, but also because Islamic orthodox commentators are unlikely to concede validity to arguments they automatically class as flawed, unscholarly, or simply blasphemous, merely because they threaten their moral certainties. Their dogmatic position denies Islam its due complexity, and it tries to silence centuries of Islamic interpretive and juridical debate, to the point of making the

Islamic condemnation of homosexuality seem wrongly objective and static. This authoritative – or authoritarian – appearance of consensus, Zollner (2010) and Christopher Grant Kelly (2010) compare with the more modest position of the Hanafi juridical branch of Islam, which does not believe same-sex acts should be punished, due to the lack of clear evidence of their punishment in the Qur'an. This is the kind of religious debate with which Islamic neo-orthodoxy refuses to engage by condemning homosexuality categorically. Despite such internal differences within a faith that is often constructed as monolithic, and at the risk of becoming complicit with such essentialism, it is beyond the possibilities of this study to stage an intervention into Islam that can reclaim queer Muslims merely from the field of what we have come to define as 'religion' in the West, and which scholars such as Kugle and Habib have staged so productively elsewhere. I also suspect a purely theological debate to be too narrow a framework for such a complex sociological topic and for such heterogeneous global citizens. I would suggest, instead, that the key to vindicate the positions of queer diasporic Muslims is to interrogate the crucial disjoints and overlaps in cultural expressions of homosexuality, especially by exploiting those paradoxes that can help us see through the cracks of intersecting homophobic ideologies in nationalist and diasporic discourses.

Queer diasporas, homonationalism, and micropolitical disorientation

A reclaiming of queer diasporic Muslims' perspectives should draw attention and exploit these epistemic overlaps, in order to offer a nuanced understanding of the contending sexual models informing discussions of queer desires: hence, my preference for an assembled approach to sexual orientation which attends both to constructionist and essentialist formulations of sexuality. *Queer* is also the term that can most productively bring together the various examples of non-normative desires included in this study. As we have seen, applying the term *homosexual* to all Muslims engaging in same-sex acts is problematic, especially when considering those cases where the subject in question is not sexually and emotionally orientated towards members of their own sex in an exclusive manner. I would even argue that the term *homosexuality* is too tainted by the history of Western homophobia and European colonialism, and its negative reception in many Muslim-majority countries is a symptom of discontent with such histories of colonial imposition. In turn, bisexuality has long been associated in dominant gay and lesbian discourses with fickleness, sexual indecision, and closetedness; moreover, a consideration of

all Muslims as inherently bisexual merely reproduces old Orientalist tropes. The term *queer*, on the other hand, although still Western, is associated with a more polymorphous and less essentialising liberation from sexual normativity, as well as with epistemic resistance. *Homosexual*, like *gay* and *lesbian*, is formulated as an essential identity and exclusive desire, whereas *queer*, first reclaimed in the age of poststructuralism, became a tool for sexual liberation based on social and individual performance rather than on an essentialist identitarian configuration, yet, when used as an umbrella term, it has enough suppleness to include essentialist envisionings of sexuality which are not heteronormative. Seen in this light, queer can account for Islamic models of sexuality based on sexual acts and roles rather than on immanence, and to any other liminal configurations of desire.

In his Introduction to *Post-Colonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, John C. Hawley quotes Annamarie Jagose on the possibilities of the term *queer*:

> queer may be used to describe an open-ended constituency, whose shared characteristic is not identity itself but an anti-normative positioning with regard to sexuality. In this way, queer may exclude lesbians and gay men whose identification with community and identity marks a relatively recent legitimacy, but include all those whose sexual identifications are not considered normal or sanctioned. (Hawley, 2001, pp. 3–4)

Jagose states that *queer* should not be understood as a fixed identity label, but as an 'anti-normative positioning', which means it can be used in a constructionist manner. As such, apart from being hospitable to the various performances of sexuality that may escape stiff categorisation, the term also strategically circumvents sensitive issues of burgeoning or non-exclusive sexual orientation. By focusing on the 'practice' of queer sexualities rather than on their configuration as an 'identity', we can avoid epistemic violence to vernacular Islamicate model of sex acts. In addition, Jagose's point avoids prescribing to those societies – such as Muslim-majority states – where the late post-imperial vindication of queer rights may be a recent phenomenon, and where individual subjects may still be tuning themselves to the cultural workings of global queer communities. In addition, the term *queer* is suitably 'open-ended'; it does not delimit a particular segment of any community or membership of any single club, but rather points to the collective social interweaving of a myriad individual cases of sexual non-normativity.

In deploying *queer* as a tool of sexual liberation applying to many global and local contexts, we need to be wary of colluding with normativity. William

J. Spurlin highlights the self-reflexivity needed in comparative queer scholarship, arguing that a transnational queer lens should 'examine its own imperialist and homogenizing impulses made possible through globalization' (2001, p. 200). Indeed, the context of globalisation can make it too easy for those critics with a foothold in the West to glamorise queer migration and to paint it with the bright yet blinding colours of Massad's 'Gay International'. Comparative queer scholarship must divest itself of the cloak of objectivity and rationality, particularly when examining sensitive issues of faith, ethnicity, and sexual identity. We ought to see ourselves as inalienable parts of networks of desire, whose positions of knowledge invest us with authority. When dealing with the plights of queer diasporic Muslims, we must be ready to admit partial defeat when dealing with complexities outside the bounds of our linguistic or cultural competence. *Queer* constitutes a useful heuristic tool insofar as it helps us account for a multiplicity of global perspectives, but only as long as we do not relinquish the nuances of transnational human experience. In order not to collude with Western privilege and power, we must always be on the lookout for inequalities in terms of representation, visibility, or legitimisation, our eyes keen on recognising those power dynamics that are the product of (neo)colonial oppression.

Critical humility when dealing with such disparate cases of queer desire is highly necessary due to the pervading influence of Western models of sexual liberation, which can risk constructing cultures with fraught relationships with queer citizens as inferior or backward. Jasbir K. Puar (2007) has famously drawn attention to the ways in which Western LGBTIQ activism has been complicit with ongoing neocolonial attitudes, leading to the exclusion of 'Other' citizens from national and global discourses. She suggests that the accession of LGBTIQ subjects to civil rights in many European and North American countries has led to what she calls 'homonationalism': that is, a conglomeration of homosexual ideologies that dictate normative homosexual lifestyles at the expense of cultural and contextual complexities. Puar argues that Western LGBTIQ discourses are predominantly white and often intolerant towards cultures that do not unanimously accept homosexuality, a position that ignores the fact that homosexuality is not unanimously accepted or respected in all Western contexts. Puar also feels that, far from contributing towards true liberalisation, homonationalist queer ideologies exclude complex cases from normative discourses on homosexual rights, to the detriment of those queer subjects whose identification both with their non-normative sexualities *and* their ethnic identities is being wittingly or unwittingly dismissed. Exploring international representations of queer diasporic Muslims must entail an extrapolation from those forms of queer criticism that

posit the West as the paragon of modernity. I reject this form of exceptionalist ideology in the knowledge that it does not foster understanding about the complex sexual and ethnic positions of queer diasporic Muslims and that, in fact, it risks strengthening Western Islamophobia.[8] This is not just a matter of liberal political correctness: affirming, against the evidence of existing debates, that Islam is inherently homophobic and that the West is exceptional because it is the best place to be homosexual is politically dangerous, for this rhetoric can easily play into the hands of Western military interventionists and their apologists, whose continued interests in Muslim-majority countries is always on the lookout for moral justification. Nonetheless, we must also ward off the most astringent claims of both Islamic conservatives and well-meaning cultural protectionists, in the hope of gauging a more flexible position that can respect the complexities of transnational queer positions.

Placing queer Muslim migrant subjects within broader discourses of diaspora should also allow us to acknowledge the ways in which sexual difference can be a crucial factor in the articulation of individual and collective migration. In *Comparing Postcolonial Diasporas*, Michelle Keown, David Murphy, and James Procter point to the belated extension of the concept's remit. Although, as they point out, the term initially referred to the 'dispersal of the Jews' (Keown *et al.*, 2009, p. 1), contemporary cultural and literary analysis has come to refer to a myriad of global migrations: Romanian, African, Asian, black, Sikh, Irish, Lebanese, Palestinian and 'Atlantic', to name but a few. The term has been globally deployed in terms of ethnicity, race, nationality, and even religion, within the various contexts of slavery, indentured labour, war, religious persecution, and poverty. However, as they suggest, '[a] corresponding expansion of diaspora's conceptual horizons has also taken place in recent years, since it has evolved to operate as a travelling metaphor associated with tropes of mobility, displacement, borders and crossings' (Keown *et al.*, 2009, p. 1). Thus configured, the term can include a plethora of individual and collective journeys in search for a place of settlement away from economic hardship or persecution. Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin concede that Muslim migration is 'now often seen as a diaspora' (2011, p. 4) because of the organisation of such migrant communities around ethnic and religious commonalities. Nonetheless, as we can easily appreciate, sexuality does not automatically figure in discussions of diaspora, and sexual non-normativity has been a generally underrated factor in the discussion of contemporary forms of migration.

A seminal examination of the concept of queer diaspora is that of Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler (2000), who agree with the anti-essentialist and

constructionist branch of queer studies when examining the conjoining of sexuality and translocation. Rather than essential, diasporic sexual identity is deemed by them as strategic and contingent, set against a backdrop of shifting material and discursive conditions. They argue that '[s]exuality is intimately and immediately felt, but publicly and internationally described and mediated. Sexuality is not only not essence, not timeless, it is also not fixed in place; sexuality is on the move' (2000, p. 2). Queer diasporic subjects must contest national and cultural borders; their sexuality is subject to ongoing negotiation within a complex framework of transcultural exchange. Patton and Eppler further observe that '[w]hen a practitioner of "homosexual acts," or a body that carries any of many queering marks moves between officially designated spaces – nation, region, metropol, neighborhood, or even culture, gender, religion, disease – intricate realignments of identity, politics, and desire take place' (2000, p. 3). These crucial realignments involve mundane challenges to those normative structures imposed by the heteronormative social majority or the state. In the instance of queer diasporic Muslims, segmentary constructions of ethnic and sexual identities which are predicated as separate in the normative public discourses of the Western 'secular' state, and of normative Islamic heteropatriarchy, suddenly become blurred, giving way to new identitarian configurations previously deemed impossible.

In constructing this argument, I am inspired by the work of Gayatri Gopinath, who lucidly argues that '[s]uturing "queer" to "diaspora" then recuperates those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional diasporic and nationalist imaginaries' (2005, p. 11). By reclaiming unheeded tensions surrounding sexuality, the study of queer diasporas can uncover previously uncharted differences with established discourses of nation, diaspora, and globalisation. These new affective maps also pose a challenge to Eurocentric LGBTIQ discourses, with a configuration of queer identities that is a combination of non-normative ethnic and sexual allegiances. Queer diasporas dissolve the linear narratives linking notions of origin and destination, home and migration, even ethnicity and sexuality. Gopinath argues that

> queer diasporic cultural forms suggests alternative forms of collectivity and communal belonging that redefine home outside of a logic of blood, purity, authenticity, and patrilineal descent. Queerness names a mode of reading, of rendering intelligible that which is unintelligible and indeed impossible within dominant diasporic and nationalist logic. (Gopinath, 2005, p. 187)

Home, then, is no longer exclusively linked to family, community, ethnic group, patriarchal lineages, or even orthopraxy; home is redefined in representations of queer diasporas as networks of affect and desire at a remove from the heteronormative structures of the national and the diasporic communities.

Like Muhammad and his most immediate followers, queer diasporic Muslims seem empowered by the Islamic concept of *hijra*, of pilgrimage. Queer Muslim diasporas are thus crucially conditioned by an affective and physical departure from the beliefs of the social mainstream. According to Peter Mandaville (2007), this model of migration broke through ethnic barriers and united Muslims who dissented with dominant Arabian polytheism at the time of the Prophet. Although many Muslims regard their queer coreligionists and their defenders as heretics, the plight of those queer Muslims who leave their societies behind due to persecution is curiously parallel to the trajectory of Muhammad and his friends: they are searching for a place where they can live with what they perceive as their 'God-given' role. In so doing, they are severing, or at the least questioning, heteronormative familial and communitarian ties, while, in some cases, remaining loyal to their identity as Muslims. Such queer flights from the norm also result in an affective reconfiguration of Islam. In the light of such complex affiliations, the position of queer Muslims in the West is highly contingent, even equivocal, for while they may be grateful for the greater respect of their civil rights in some Western societies, they do not wish to see their ethnic or religious backgrounds abused on the grounds of their problematic treatment of homosexuals. Momin Rahman has reflected on the 'difficulties of negotiating a social world where racism, Islamophobia, and homophobia intersect' (2014, p. 27). He persuasively suggests that Islamophobia and anti-Western homophobia are engaged in a process of triangulation, whereby the more Western commentators denounce Islamic homophobia, the more Muslims respond angrily to the political and moral impositions of Western politics; these shows of animosity in turn exacerbate Western views of Islamic conservatism, and like this ad infinitum.

The very notion that queer Muslims can identify as both queer *and* Muslim must also mean that there is no inherent contradiction between sexual and ethno-religious identities; if there is tension, it is not because of their immanent conflict, but rather because of the normative social workings of Islamic heteropatriarchy and of Western homonormativity, both of which are dominant but not fully representative of 'Islam' or the 'West'. Because of the complexities added to queer Muslim identifications by the ongoing process of triangulation, Rahman proposes a model of 'intersectionality' whereby identity categories are neither

'solid' nor 'definite' (2014, p. 13), and where different social movements can join and fight together. This relativist view of identity and its creation of inclusive social movements is inspiring. However, we must resist the temptation of singling out queer Muslims as paradigmatic of intersectionality, for this in itself is a form of exceptionalism. Due to the globalised nature of our contemporary societies and to the intersection of issues of gender, class, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity, many contemporary citizens' predicaments are already intersectional. What queer diasporic Muslims bring to debates about nation and diaspora is not an exceptionally intersectional configuration of sexual and ethnic identities, but rather a disorganisation of normative categories at the heart of these discourses. As such, they are not the pre-eminent examples of intersectionality in otherwise normative networks of desire; rather, they constitute ideological destabilisers in societies where flights from normativity occur on a regular basis across the various social categories.

In my choice of vocabulary, I have already betrayed my indebtedness to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1996), particularly to their notion of micropolitics.[9] They suggest that the whole of Western thought is organised around the idea of the root and the tree: 'The West has a special relation to the forest and deforestation', and it favours lineages that centre around arborescent imageries; by contrast, they argue, '[t]he East presents a different figure: a relation to the steppe and the garden (or in some cases, the desert and the oasis), […] cultivation of tubers by fragmentation of the individual' (1996, p. 18). Against the Western root, the Eastern rhizome: a complex network of subterraneous tube-like connections that works horizontally, as opposed to the vertical tree-like structure of Western thought. Although too neatly cut out, and ignoring existing religious and social hierarchies in the Islamicate world, such mapping preliminarily fits the differentiation between Christian-infused secularism and political Islam: Western religious and secular authorities work through hierarchies or clan-like lineages, whereas the lack of an overarching tree-like structure in Islamic ideologies entails a myriad connections within a tribe-like rhizomic network. Nonetheless, as Deleuze and Guattari also suggest, roots and rhizomes can intersect, and there are despotic hierarchies within the rhizome – which in the case of Islam we can assign to the punctual authority of some religious figures and to pockets of extremist activity. Moreover, they argue that '[w]hat is at question at the rhizome is a relation to sexuality – but also to the animal, the vegetal, the world, politics, the book, things natural and artificial – that is totally different from the arborescent relation: all manner of "becomings"' (1996, p. 21). Queer Muslims embody such horizontal 'becomings', in a rhizome that creates

dialogue between sexuality and ideology, politics, and culture. The resulting state fits the chosen image of the plateau: a space that is always in the middle, 'whose development avoids any *orientation* toward a culmination point' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1996, p. 22, emphasis added). By avoiding a final orientation in their negotiation of ethnic or sexual segments, queer diasporic Muslims inhabit a space that disorientates mainstream cultures, stopping their identities from having the chance to calcify into exceptionalist singularity.

The work of prominent current scholars, such as Puar (2007), has already benefited from Deleuze and Guattari's work, especially when she argues that 'queerness [is] not an identity nor an anti-identity, but an *assemblage* that is spatially and temporally contingent'; moreover,

> [w]hile dismantling the representational mandates of visibility identity politics that feed narratives of sexual exceptionalism, affective analyses can approach queernesses that are unknown or not cogently knowable, that are in the midst of *becoming*, that do not immediately and visibly signal themselves as insurgent, oppositional, or transcendent. (Puar, 2007, p. 204, emphasis added)

In Puar's thinking, with my emphasis on the echoes of Deleuze and Guattari, queerness is a combination of constructed categories, not, of necessity, an essence; although, as I have shown, a combination of essence and performance may be best suited to diasporic models of queer desire because of their assembled nature. In the various cases of the queer diasporic Muslims chosen for study, their assembled affective experiences should also be envisaged as different from those of visible homonormative Western queerness: their burgeoning sense of becoming can help us oppose normative views of Western sexual exceptionalism. Moreover, queer Muslims should not be positioned in a different, alternative space, at a remove from the world of macropolitics, or as paradigms of intersectional exceptionality. On the contrary, a model enabled by Deleuze and Guattari's notion of micropolitics and by the work of critics such as Puar should allow us to see queer diasporic Muslims as contributing micropolitically to the redefinition of the segmentary identity categories of heteronormative patriarchy, both Western and non-Western, without the need for a constant taking up of arms. Their challenges work at the level of mundane action and affect, leading to common views being constantly renegotiated.

Such a vision of queer diasporic Muslims as disorientating the mainstream, rather than occupying an exceptional or alternative space, is inspired by the work

of Sara Ahmed (2006), whose notion of queer disorientation is highly instrumental to my study. In her work on queer phenomenology, Ahmed contends with the well-established but contentious notion of sexual orientation, which, she argues, constructs heterosexuality as the neutral sexual state and homosexuality as being a particular 'deviant' orientation. She suggests that the notion of sexual orientation is born at the same time as the figure of the homosexual, and hence homosexuals are the only subjects considered to have an orientation as such. However, instead of flatly rejecting the concept, she interrogates it and appropriates it in relation to migration and to queerness, pondering the ways in which experiences of diaspora entail a process of disorientation and reorientation in relation to the subject's shifting surroundings. Her phenomenological approach 'reminds us that spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 9). In this mapping, queer subjects and their surroundings merge and create queer spaces that are transient yet politically insurgent.

Ahmed also intimates how queer disorientation does not merely take place in the macropolitical sphere, by asking us to consider

> how queer politics might *involve* disorientation, without legislating disorientation as a politics. It is not that disorientation is always radical. Bodies that experience disorientation can be defensive, as they reach out for support or as they search for a place to reground and reorientate their relation to the world. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 158, emphasis in original)

In Ahmed's view, disorientation does not need to be constructed in public discourse as a form of radicalism, but happens at the micropolitical level of everyday action and affect. In addition, she offers that what is important is not disorientation in and of itself, but its effect: 'The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do – whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope' (2006, p. 158). I would respond to Ahmed that the new lines drawn by queer disorientations from the micropolitical dimension are, indeed, hopeful. Queer diasporic Muslims' continued disorientation has a revulsive effect that disorganises both Western views on ethnicity and sexuality and the conservative ideologies of Islam which refuse to legitimise the various identitarian confluences. Micropolitical dynamics reminds us there is no Islam *and* the West; no secularism *and* religion; no Muslim *and* queer identities: in the realm of worldly experience, the disorientated boundaries between categories create new

forms of becoming. There is hope in the fact that each micropolitical flight from normativity leaves a trace in each nation's tapestry that challenges established official discourses, and that these challenges can connect molecularly with other forms of anti-normativity within and across national borders, eventually feeding back to the macropolitical, and thus gradually contributing to the redefinition of those categories that segmentalise our contemporary world.

As cultural critics of queer diasporas, we must remain wary of those macropolitical models that construct cultures, ethnicities, or religions as hermetic, for, as the dynamics of micropolitics remind us, for every norm there is a flight from normativity that challenges the discreteness of its contours. Moreover, the work of Timothy Fitzgerald (2007) draws attention to the contradictions in Western secularism, with its claims to rationality, democracy, and free speech, and its 'authorisation' of forms of private religiosity, while opposing, also, the 'dangerous' public nature of political Islam. Fitzgerald is particularly provocative when drawing attention to the strategic but fallacious line drawn between the categories of 'religion' and 'politics'. As he suggests, 'religion is a modern invention which authorises and naturalises a form of Euro-American secular rationality. In turn, this supposed position of secular rationality constructs and authorises *its* "other", religion and religions' (2007, p. 6, emphasis in original). In other words, 'religion' has not always been a discrete category routinely extrapolated from the world of politics and law-making, but has been the object of a history of Euro-American secularisation. Before the birth of secularism, which, as Fitzgerald reminds us, was born out of religion, not the other way around, politics and religion belonged in the same public realm; there was nothing to suggest that politics could not be underpinned by theological worldviews, which were not deemed irrational or backward. In addition, religious texts, such as the Qur'an, make reference to pragmatic phenomena we would now not automatically classify as religious in the theological sense, such as inheritance laws, biology, and medicine.

Interestingly, Fitzgerald's work also helps us recognise how, despite secularism's claims to objectivity and rationality, our so-called secular Western world is still shrouded in Christian aesthetics. A cursory look at Western law easily demonstrates that Christianity is still deeply embedded in our political consciousness. Even many of the secular institutions related to the democratic state – i.e., freedom of speech, democratic elections, the pledge to a nation and its flag – are imbued with a sacrality and ritualism that Fitzgerald suggests is not dissimilar to religiosity. When considering the 'dangers' of allowing 'Islam' to enter the political realm, Western thinkers ought to realise that there is no preternatural division between 'religion' and 'politics'; that there is no incompatibility

between religious belief and politics. The secularist obsession to create separate categories seems more driven by the fear of the religious 'Other' – a fear that seems to belie ethnicity rather than mere religion – and with the perception that secularism is the apogee of human development. So, in queering Islam, we should unmask Western secularism and interrogate the strategic gap it places between public politics and private religion, and ultimately between the 'secular' West and the 'religious' East.

Talad Asad argues there is a tendency in the West to see Islamic traditions as local, linked to the remote, exotic spaces of the Orient, while 'Western writers who invoke the authority of modern secular literature claim they are universal' (1993, p. 8). The view of Islamic tradition as rooted to a locality – invariably the Orient – while modern secularism is seen as universal – ignoring, in the meantime, that its global reach has more to do with Euro-American colonialism than with an 'organic' growth of secularist ideologies – further widens the gap between 'Western' and 'Muslim' perspectives, which even in my own phrasing here are mapped in two discrete localities. Morey and Yaqin suggest that the ancient presence of Muslim citizens in the West expose the lie to the familiar rhetoric of the 'clash of civilisations',[10] and expose it as a 'political strategist's daydream' (2011, p. 4). They argue that the constant framing of Muslims as extremist and retrogressive creates persistent stereotypes that only exacerbate anti-Western sentiments in Muslim communities, which in turn stereotype the West as decadent and imperialist. This model of reciprocate stereotyping 'drives a wedge between worlds that are intertwined, indeed interdependent' (Morey and Yaqin, 2011, p. 4). In other words, when approaching a contentious topic such as Islam and the West, or even Islam *in* the West, we need to remind ourselves that such discrete essentialist categories paint a false picture: the relationship between Islam and the West has for centuries been one of interrelationality despite the ontological differences still conjured in political and scholarly rhetoric. The depictions of queer diasporic Muslims that I examine in this book paint a more sympathetic picture of Muslim diasporas, which can help Western audiences begin to question the partisan pictures often painted by the Western media, and its creation of monolithic versions of the 'average' Muslim as being patriarchal, traditionalist, and violent.

In attempting to outgrow the political thrust of Western aversion towards Muslims, I take my cue from Bruce Lawrence, a respected scholar of Islam and world religions, who offers the following response when asked about how we can teach Islam after 9/11:

Unlearn all the slogans about the red menace (communism) succeeded by the green menace (Islam), the axis of evil (mostly Muslims) overshadowing participatory democracy (almost never Muslim). Unlearn the words *shari'a* and *jihad* as catch-all categories for universal Islamic aspirations. Unlearn Islamic politics as the major reflex for Muslim social activists across the globe, whether Arab or Asian, Iranian or Turkish, African or American. In short, tell your listeners, as I have not ceased to tell my students: stop reading the headlines and the bylines that invoke Islam as the nemesis of all that is modern, Western and hopeful about the twenty-first century. (Lawrence, 2014, p. 212)

Any scholar seriously approaching Islam or Muslims should bear in mind Lawrence's powerful dictum, which addresses some of the most commonplace Western assumptions about Islam, such as the idea that it is the successor of Russia's communism as the archenemy of the democratic and liberal West. As Sadia Abbas (2014) pithily argues, such twisted political logic tends to ignore the fact that many of the West's accomplices during the Cold War were the very Muslims who are now constructed as the 'Axis of Evil' in the rhetoric of the 'War on Terror'. In addition, participatory democracy is not something often associated with Muslim-majority countries, their religiously infused autocracies being perceived as the norm, and so Western military interventionists often construct themselves as the bringers of democracy, except for those countries – such as fiercely monarchic and conservative Saudi Arabia – which are already the West's allies or oil suppliers, for which exceptions can be made. Lawrence also draws attention to a variety of Arabic terms that have become common parlance in Western media, but which are seldom understood, such as *jihad*, *Shari'a*, or *fatwa*,[11] whose frequent occurrence has turned them into almost meaningless slogans.

Perhaps most importantly, Lawrence asks us to demystify Islam as a monolithic political consciousness controlling each and every move of a heterogeneous faith community – now numbering a fast-growing 1.5 billion worldwide – which cuts through national borders, ethnicities, religious practices, and cultural traditions. By attempting to unlearn the conglomerate of negative images daily mixed by the English-speaking media, I position my work at a defiant angle from the truisms assailing Islam and Muslims in Western discourses. In so doing, I adopt a methodology that is antithetical to power, inspired by the seminal work on Islam by Edward Said. In his oft-forgotten book *Covering Islam*, Said suggests that antithetical scholars

reject the notion that knowledge of Islam ought to be subservient to the government's immediate policy interests, or that it should simply feed into the media's image of Islam as supplying the world with terrifying militancy and violence, they highlight the complicity between knowledge and power. (Said, 1997, p. 168)

In so doing, Said argues, antithetical critics are trying to forge relationships with Islam that are not dictated by power, looking, putatively, for 'alternative relationships' and 'interpretative situations', which entail a 'scrupulous methodological sense' (1997, p. 168). My study is inspired by Said's postcolonial envisioning of antithetical scholars as challenging the connection between 'official' dominant knowledges and power; between the ability to represent and the power to misrepresent the political 'Other' in the eyes of the general public. The upcoming exploration of international literary and cinematic representations of queer diasporic Muslims reveals 'other interpretative situations', positions of postcolonial critical analysis that encourage Western audiences and readers to begin questioning their own assumptions about Muslims. By examining how some of these narratives challenge the tendentious images pictured in the global media, I search for 'alternative relationships' that can start breaching ontological exclusivism between 'the West' and 'the rest'. I do so by fostering the multiple and nuanced deployment of Muslim identities in the West through depictions of intersectional sexual and ethnic disorientation, often simultaneously connected to issues of gender and class, in order to gauge an understanding of the highly textured ideological assemblages at work in queer Muslim diasporas.

Notes

1 Marshall G. S. Hodgson offers a seminal definition of the 'Islamicate' which is related to yet distinctive from the term 'Islamic':

> We will require a different term for the cultural traditions of the civilization at large, when we are not restricting our reference to religion. The various peoples among whom Islam has been predominant and which have shared in the cultural traditions distinctively associated with it may be called collectively 'Islamdom' […]. The distinctive civilization of Islamdom, then, may be called 'Islamicate' (1974, p. 95).

2 The original edition of Burton's *Thousand Nights and a Night* is now freely available through the University of Adelaide's website (Burton, 2006). Its 'Terminal Essay' contains a section entitled 'Pederasty' in which this controversial issue is explicitly discussed. Burton assigns pederasty to a particular geographical location, what he calls the 'Sotadic Zone', which is 'bounded westwards by the northern shores of the Mediterranean (N. Lat. 43) and by the southern (N. Lat. 30). Thus the depth would be 780 to 800 miles including meridional France,

the Iberian Peninsula, Italy and Greece, with the coast-regions of Africa from Marocco to Egypt' (Burton, 2006). This is a capacious yet highly specific geographical location in which pederasty allegedly occurs de facto, whereas outside of it, it is regarded as immoral: 'Within the Sotadic Zone the Vice is popular and endemic, held at the worst to be a mere peccadillo, whilst the races to the North and South of the limits here defined practice it only sporadically amid the opprobrium of their fellows who, as a rule, are physically incapable of performing the operation and look upon it with the liveliest disgust' (Burton, 2006). Although to our contemporary sensibilities such facile geographical demarcation may seem scientifically naïve, Burton also admits that tolerance of such controversial sexual practices had been gradually built into the cultures of those places within the Sotadic Zone, through the model of sexual initiation inherited from classical Greece. According to Burton, there is, further-more, a combination of 'masculine and feminine temperaments' which makes alternative sexual arrangements more feasible. While Burton believed the Qur'an to be condemning of such acts, recounting the case of Lot's people and their attempted rape of disguised angels Gabriel, Michael and Raphael in front of their Prophet, he nonetheless recognised that the expression of homoeroticism had become commonplace in many Muslim societies, and a work such as his sexually frank version of the *Arabian Nights* simultaneously demonstrates a vernacular Muslim focus on homosexual acts and also a European exaggeration of such desires, both flying in the face of normative ideologies that forbade their expression.

3 Despite familiar Western constructs of all Muslim women as repressed victims of Islamic patriarchy, there are well-established lines of Muslim and Islamic feminist enquiry that qualify the often universalising views of Western second-wave feminism, while contesting also the masculinist thrust of mainstream Islam. Fatima Seedat (2013) mentions the seminal work in the 1990s of thinkers such as Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, and Amina Wadud, which Seedat terms 'Islamic feminism', a denomination that scholars such as Wadud have resisted because of the Western inception of the feminist movement. Seedat also points out the work of activists who apply feminist analysis to human rights frameworks, such as Ayesha Imam, Farida Shaheed, Zainah Anwar, Lily Munir, and Riffat Hassan. It is also important to mention the work of female scholars who contribute to the *tafsir* tradition, such as Shuruq Naguib, whose commentaries set out to qualify views of Islam as invariably patriarchal and query historical religious interpretation for evidence of the importance of women to Muslim societies. For instance, on feminist interpretations of menstruation in the Qur'an, see Naguib (2010). It goes without saying that a study of queer Muslim diasporas needs to engage with the specificities of female experiences of queerness, particularly given the ongoing erasure of Muslim female homosexuality from the dialogic plain (Habib, 2007).

4 Aleardo Zanghellini (2010) suggests that the Qur'an is ambiguous about same-sex practices because it was implied that its contemporaneous audience would have instantly understood the sexual references and their moral implications, without need for elucidation. This implied contextual knowledge has not travelled well down history, and therefore, through the cen-turies, jurists have had to grapple with the text's lack of clear explanation. Zanghellini's main argument goes against one of the main queer interventions into the Qur'an; he argues that the story of Lot's people does not merely condemn rape, and that, instead, it is explicitly meant to censure male-to-male sexual penetration. However, he ascribes this not simply to a

condemnation of same-sex attraction, but rather to a critical view of non-egalitarian sexual practices. His persuasive historical research shows that pre-Islamic Arabic customs, in particular those of the Bedouin, imbued anal sex with issues of mastery and subordination, and the repeated references to the actions of Lot's people, particularly the misdeeds they are said to have performed among themselves in their gatherings, suggest that they do not only try to engage in sexual acts with Lot's visitors. Zhangellini's reading recruits the perspective of Kecia Ali, who also refuses the rape thesis, in favour of a narrative of sexual mastery that entailed an emasculation of the penetrated party. This view of sexual roles as being masculine/powerful and feminine/powerless depending on who does the penetrating is one that subsequently became mainstream in Islamicate cultures, and, indeed, a conflation of gender and sexual orientation still pervades the so-called 'Muslim world'.

5   Apart from the creation of a new term to designate a transgression not readily named in the original text, there are also linguistic and contextual ambiguities here. Kugle, who is a translator of classical Arabic, argues that the Arabic pronoun used to point at these women is *hunna*, but that this 'refers to a group of three or more women […] in contrast to a pair of people (represented by the pronoun *huma*)' (2010, p. 64). This linguistic construction rules out one-on-one sexual acts between women and it is arguable that it may be pointing to a different form of immorality.

6   Barbara Zollner (2010) usefully points out that classical scholar Abu Ja'afar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, while highly concerned with denouncing anal penetration, without paying attention to rape, in the story of Lot's people, he altogether ignores same-sex acts between women, which suggests female-to-female sexuality was not considered *zina* (fornication).

7   Kugle (2010) carefully explains the structures of the *ahadith* and the process of their authentication. Each *hadith* contains two parts: information about the Prophet's speech or action (*matn*) and a narrative chain (*isnad*) that relays how this information has been passed down, which respectively gave way to *matn* and *isnad* criticism. Classical ahadith scholars tried to ascertain the reliability of each *isnad* in four ways: first, by checking that the narrative chain went all the way back to the Prophet and was not merely a claim made by one of his followers – the stronger the links, the more reliable the pronouncement; second, by testing the plausibility of the chain of narration (i.e., checking that the narrators indeed could have lived at the same time and known each other); third, by reassuring themselves about the moral status of the narrators and their lack of any suspicious agendas; fourth, by ensuring the narrators were of sound memory and intellectual ability. If a narrative passed all these tests satisfactorily, then it was considered to be a legitimate *hadith*. *Matn* criticism was somewhat overshadowed by *isnad* criticism in the classical period of Islam, mostly, according to Kugle, due to the fact scholars were unwilling to over-rationalise the purport of the Prophet's sayings. Nonetheless, classical Islamic scholarship, as well as modern interpretation, tends to suspect *matn* that 'contains information that goes against common experience, scientific observation, medical knowledge, or historical and geographical facts' (Kugle, 2010, p. 81). *Matn* scholars also assessed linguistic plausibility: if the sayings contained expressions that postdated Arabic usage of the Prophet's period, they would not be considered legitimate *ahadith*.

8 Hana Sadik el-Gallal defines the term 'Islamophobia' as the 'unexamined and deeply
   ingrained anxiety many Westerners experience when considering Islam and Muslim coun-
   tries', pointing out that 'the term became common parlance in defining the discrimination
   faced by Muslims in the West' (2014, p. 105) from the 1990s onwards. Whether partly based
   on concrete available evidence or on internalised stereotypes handed down through history,
   Islamophobia constitutes an often illogical and affective aversion to all things Islamic that is
   not always well-founded on empirical evidence.

9 Deleuze and Guattari's concept of micropolitics (1996) is useful when envisaging the ways
   in which mundane flights from normativity, which they call micropolitical, routinely dis-
   organise the solid segments imposed by societal and statist ideologies, which are labelled
   macropolitical. The everyday micropolitical dimension of affect, perception, and dialogue
   operates 'differently' from the dimension of segmentary macropolitics and destabilises its
   categories. Such challenges to macropolitical normative structures do not only happen in the
   realm or radicalism or conscious anti-systemic political action, but at the level of lived experi-
   ence. According to Deleuze and Guattari, there is a cyclical and reciprocate relationship
   between the molar segments of macropolitics, which draw barriers between categories and
   highly polarise individuals, and the molecular lines of flight of micropolitics, which escape
   the prescribed segments, redefine them, and then feed them back to macropolitics, causing
   macropolitical lines to be redrawn. In this sense, queer diasporic Muslims micropolitically
   disorganise the macropolitical segments that define ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and dias-
   pora. The textual and visual representations of such challenges to normativity enter the
   realm of macropolitics and gradually start changing public opinion, redefining sexual and
   ethnic categories, allowing the lines that separate identitarian allegiances to be redefined.

10 The idea of the 'clash of civilisations' has been most infamously exploited by American
   scholar Samuel P. Huntington in his eponymous book *The Clash of Civilizations and the
   Remaking of World Order* (2002), originally published in 1996. Huntington puts emphasis
   on a globally needed model of democracy that is persistently resisted by Muslims, which
   suggests, in an ethnocentric manner, that Western democracy is the only viable political
   model for our planet. He also asserts that '[a] civilization is thus the cultural grouping
   of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which
   distinguishes humans from other species' (2002, p. 43). Huntington concedes that the global
   media is 'one of the most important contemporary manifestations of Western power' (2002,
   p. 59), only to add that such hegemony encourages 'populist politicians in non-Western
   societies to denounce Western cultural imperialism' and that Western domination of global
   communications is 'a major source of resentment and hostility of non-Western peoples
   against the West' (2002, p. 59). This argument strategically absolves the 'West' of any part
   in encouraging such anti-Western animosity by other means, such as undertaking military
   interventions in 'non-Western' countries and the coercion of their governments, which is
   the foremost gripe of these peoples, far and above media control and misrepresentation.
   Moreover, Huntington denounces the violence inherent to Islam, the 'religion of the sword'
   by reminding us that Muhammad was celebrated from the start as a fighter, stating '[n]o one
   would say this about Christ or Buddha' (2002, p. 263). Although Christ and Buddha may not
   have been fighting figures, Christians and Buddhists alike have become agents of violence.

Huntington is willing to ignore historical nuance for the sake of bolstering his ethnocentric political argument.

11　The term *jihad* is often translated in Western media as 'holy war', an idiom that harkens back to the time of the Crusades and that is used in our contemporary context to account for all kinds of acts against local governments and foreign interventionists; translated literally from Arabic, it simply means 'struggle', and Peter Mandaville (2007) lists a number of different struggles, not all of which are necessarily violent: *jihad al-qalb* means 'struggle of the heart'; *jihad bil-lisan*, 'struggle by the tongue'; *jihad bil-qalam*, 'struggle by the pen' and *jihad bil-sayf*, 'struggle by the sword' (Mandaville, 2007, p. 250). To these nuances of meaning regarding the origin or nature of each particular struggle, he adds some nuances of praxis: for instance, the term *jihad bil-yad* means 'struggle by the hand', which can be interpreted either as non-violent political activism or the necessary disposal of financial resources. In addition, the term *fatwa*, long associated with the polemical death warrant issued to Salman Rushdie in 1989, does not merely mean 'death sentence', but it is a form of legally binding opinion issued by an Islamic authority; *fatwas* typically involve all kinds of rulings, and not just the dispensation of death sentences, and, arguably, they may not apply to all Muslims, let alone all humans, but to the religious followers of the particular Islamic spokesperson that has uttered them.