

A Minority within a Minority

Identity Perceptions of Dutch Homosexual Muslims



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Foreword

Since the first year of my study of Islam and Arabic, I have been interested in the subject of homosexuality in Islam. I found it fascinating how so many Muslims seem to have an almost fearful hatred of gays, yet at the same time denying they exist. In Dutch politics, Geert Wilders's party the PVV (Party for Freedom) often takes sides against Islam and pro homosexuality. What he, and many with him, seem to forget, is that these two things do not have to be mutually exclusive. This dissertation is a way of giving homosexual Muslims a way to explain their side of the story.

This study would not have been possible without the help of so many friends. First of all a very good friend of mine, who showed me a part of his life normally hidden from others. Through him and others, I got to know the respondents for this study. I want to thank all of them for telling me their stories so honestly and trusting me with their secrets. Without them, this thesis of course would not exist.

I want to thank Marloes, a dear friend, for thinking along with me in the very early stages of this study. Last but not least I want to thank prof. dr. Christian Lange, my thesis supervisor. I want to thank you for not just trying to put your own ideas in this dissertation, but making it better by thinking along with me and giving me new insights.

Introduction

“We gays are seen as garlic: everybody knows we’re there and we’re part of life, but it smells” (Azar in *I am Gay and Muslim*)

This past year two movies on Islam and homosexuality have been produced and premiered. The first is *Mixed Kebab*, a Flemish film about the homosexual love affair between the Turkish Ibrahim and the Flemish Kevin. In the film is a homoerotic scene between the two young men, recorded in a hamam. Director Guy Lee Thys describes how this caused a problem: “Taping the homo-erotic scene in a hamam in Antwerp turned out to be impossible. As soon as the Moroccan owners of the hamam found out what kind of scene we were recording, we were kicked out of the building. We decided to film the scene in Turkey. The hamam-owners must have known what we were filming, but we were allowed to do so anyway.” (De Ruyck 2012).

The second film that came out is *I am Gay and Muslim*. This documentary offers five portraits of young gays in Morocco. The filmmaker, Chris Belloni, states that he actually wanted to portray Dutch Muslim gays, but they would not appear on camera: “These men are very, very afraid their family finds out they’re gay. They cannot be open about their homosexuality, because that means they choose the Western lifestyle. That way they would distance themselves from their family and they do not want that.” (in Kooijman 2012).

The situations described show how migrant minorities can be more conservative and more strict when it comes to ‘traditional’ values than the people in their country of origin. This makes sense: the migrants left their country maybe decades ago. For them, when they think of their cultural and religious heritage, they think of the way it was when they left. Of course things have changed, but they missed these developments. Besides this, migrants attach more to traditions because situations they face in their new country. Research by Haddad (2007) shows that after 9/11 Muslim women in the United States became to veil more often because they saw the veil as a symbol of their American muslim identity. This behaviour is called reactive ethnicity and is often the result of discrimination in the new country. Reactive ethnicity emerges ‘in reaction to the situation, views, and discrimination faced (by immigrants) [...] that turn the circumstances of national origin into the primary basis of group solidarity, overwhelming other competing identifications such as those based on class.’ (Portes & Rumbaut in Popkin 1999: 269). Even though Dutch homosexual Muslims can live a gay lifestyle in the Netherlands, the prejudice and rejection they might face within their ethnic community may be even more harsh than it would be if they lived in their country of origin.

Since the 1970s acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands has increased rapidly. However, before the sexual revolution, during which sex outside of marriage, pornography and homosexuality became more and more tolerated, the Netherlands were as conservative as countries like Turkey and Morocco (Keuzenkamp 2010). Since then a lot has changed: the Netherlands are now the most tolerant country when it comes to homosexuality. Not only the legal system, but also the tolerance of Dutch inhabitants towards homosexuality is the highest in Europe (Keuzenkamp 2011: 10-7).

More has changed in the Netherlands than just attitudes towards homosexuality. Even though Holland has historically been an immigration country, the last few decades the inhabitants

have become more and more ethnically diverse. Largely, there are three groups that came to the Netherlands: the migrant workers that came to Holland on invitation during the 1950s and 60s, inhabitants of the previous Dutch colonies Surinam and Indonesia and refugees fleeing their countries for various reasons. Many people from all three groups are Muslim (Trappenburg 2003: 1-3).

When looking at the different ethnic groups in the Netherlands, one sees that whereas people with a Dutch origin on average have a positive attitude towards gays and equal rights for homosexuals, ethnic minorities do not always share this opinion. Especially people with a Moroccan or Turkish background seem intolerant. The researchers argue that both the religious background and the on average lower education levels of migrants are related to this. Things are improving though: studies show that the first generation of migrants from Moroccan and Turkish descent have a more negative attitude than their children and grand-children (SCP 2011: 29-31). The Collaboration for Dutch Moroccans (Samenwerkingsverband Marokkaanse Nederlanders) recently published their vision on Islam and homosexuality. In the publication they state that even though they understand the difficulty the Dutch-Moroccan community has with the subject, it is important that they become more accepting (SMN 2012). The way in which SMN is really representing the Moroccan community in the Netherlands is questionable though (see f.e. blogs by Hassan Bahara (2012) and Ewoud Butter (2010)).

More and more research has been done on how people with a non-Dutch ethnic background view homosexuality and how this can be explained. Something not often researched is how people who are both gay and from non-Dutch background reconcile their sexual, religious and ethnic identities and how they deal with problems concerning this. Large research institutes like the Social Cultural Plan Bureau (SCP) find it difficult to find gays from non-Dutch descent to cooperate in their studies because this is the group that is most uncomfortable talking about their sexuality. For a smaller study like this one, Muslim gays were willing to open up, even though sometimes it took some effort to convince someone to be interviewed. This thesis will give an answer to the following question: How do Dutch Homosexual Muslims (DHM) perceive and shape their Muslim-gay identity? To answer this question, eight Dutch Islamic gays have been interviewed about their religious and sexual identity perceptions. Before the analysis of these interviews in Part II, I offer a theoretical framework for reflection in Part I, which will consist of a chapter on homosexuality in the Qur'an and in Islam and a chapter on a discussion of the concepts of identity and gender.

Part I:

Theoretical

Explorations

Homosexuality in Qur'an and Islam

Homosexuality is highly controversial in Islam. The question is whether this is merely caused by religious factors or by other cultural traditions. Often Islam is used as a reason to condemn homosexuals, but what does the Qur'an really say about homosexuality? Scott Kugle (2010) emphasises that, when studying homosexuality in Islam, it is very important to separate what he calls religion from other cultural traditions. Islamic cultures are almost always patriarchal, and therefore less accepting of equal rights for women and gays. Among many others, Asma Barlas has pleaded for a completely new, feminist tafsir (interpretation) of the Qur'an. She considers the Qur'an to be holy and righteous, but the interpretations written from a solely male and patriarchal perspective disadvantaging women and gays (see f.e. Barlas (2006)). In this chapter we will look at both classical tafsirs, by Ibn Kathir, and modern interpretations, by Scott al-Hiraj Kugle and Omar Nahas, of the parts of the Qur'an that bear, or seem to bear on homosexuality¹. After the exegetical part gay identity in Islam will be discussed as well as the problems this can cause for people.

When studying homosexuality in the Qur'an the story of the prophet Lut (also known as Loth in the Bible) is the one most talked about. This story tells how God sent the prophet Lut and his family to the people of Sodom. The people are having miscellaneous sexual encounters: men have sex with other men, with children, and with animals. Lut is sent there to tell them this behaviour is not accepted in God's eyes. Even when Lut offers his own daughters to the men to protect his guests, they refuse. Instead, they rape Lut's guests, which are God's angels. Lut warns the people again that this behaviour can not be tolerated, but they would not listen. God keeps his promise and destroys the city. Only Lut and his family, except for his wife, can escape. The story of Lut is spread out over different suras: sura 7: 80-4, 11: 69-83, 15: 51-77, 26: 159-75, 27: 54-58, 29: 28-35 and 54: 32-40.

There are many different visions on this story in the Qur'an. The most traditional explanation is the one by the classical and celebrated exegete Ibn Kathir (1301-1373). Ibn Kathir states that the men in the story desire other men instead of their women. Q11:79: "Surely, you know that we have no need of your daughters, and indeed you know well what we want!". Ibn Kathir adds glossae to fill what he perceives to be the 'gaps' in the Qur'anic narrative. He writes: "{Surely ... daughters} This means: Verily, you know that we do not want our women, nor do we desire them. {and ... want} We only want males and you know that. So what need is there for you to continue speaking to us about this!". The original Qur'anic text says that the men do not want the daughters of Lut. Ibn Kathir extends this to their own women, making the problem bigger than it is in the Qur'an. He also sees sex between men in the story of Lut as something voluntarily, something both partners desire. Ibn Kathir does, however, write in a more nuanced way about the so-called atrocities the people of Sodom practice: he states that these are not just homosexual acts, but also robbery, murder and rape (Ibn Kathir 2012, his exegesis on Q7, 15, 21, 26, 27, 29 and 29).

Omar Nahas, a Dutch-Syrian author, says that it is not clear if the Qur'an actually means voluntary sexual encounters between men. The word used in various ayaat and usually translated with 'men', is adh-dhukran. This word actually means 'males', and could therefore also apply for

¹ Since all respondents say they do not value what is said about homosexuality in hadith and sunna, these will not be discussed in this chapter.

other males, like young children or animals. This means that the story is not about voluntary sex between men, but about rape. He states further that the people of Sodom do not take the warnings of the prophet seriously. In fact, they challenge him, as is seen in Q29:29: "(...) But his people gave no answer except that they said: 'Bring Allah's torment upon us if you are one of the truthful'." Nahas (2001) therefore concludes that even though the men of Sodom were having sex with other men, this was first of all not a voluntary act, but there were also many other reasons for God to punish them, including challenging His prophet and committing other crimes.

Kugle (2010) likewise argues that the story of Lut does not have to be referred to homosexuality at all, but about the usage of sex as a weapon. He even argues that Lut's guests are male by coincidence: they could have been female as well. He further writes that often when there are verses about the story of Lut, right before or after that the story of another prophet, Salih, is told. In this story Salih is sent by God to the people to ask them to take care of his she-camel. The people fail and the camel dies, for which they are punished. No classical or modern exegete interprets the hate for camels as the reason for the punishment: the story is traditionally explained in a way where the she-camel symbolises the poor. God punishes people if they do not take care of the poor. Kugle argues that the interpretation of Lut story and the Salih story should be guided by the same interpretative principles. Why, Kugle (2010) asks himself, could the interpreters not look past the obvious factors in the story of Lut and see the metaphor in it? The story of Lut is about not taking care of your guests and about dishonouring God.

Apart from the story of Lut, there is no notion of homosexuality in the Qur'an. And even in the story of Lut homosexuality is not called by name, so the exegetes came up with their own word: *liwat*, meaning: 'Lut-related behaviour', but more often interpreted as 'the sin of the people of Lut' (see f.e. Kugle 2010, Halstead & Lewicka 1998). Halstead & Lewicka argue that language define one's way of thinking. Since *liwat* is an action, not a way of being or an identity, they say, this is how Muslim people think of homosexuality: "From an Islamic point of view it makes no more sense to say that one has been 'created homosexual' than it does to say that one has been 'created adulterous'; both involve intentional actions which contravene God's law." (1998: 58). Yip (2004) writes how increasingly sexual morality is seen as a boundary indicator between the so-called pure morality of Islam and the demoralised Western societies. Family honour (*izzat*) and sexual purity in the form of marriage is what separates Islam from the rest in the West. Yip (2004) describes how this makes life difficult for Islamic gays: they cannot come out of the closet because first of all, in Islam there is no such thing as a homosexual identity and second of all, *izzat* is what separates them from the rest. Yip's respondent Azin gives the following explanation: "And being in a white society where you are not the majority, where you are the minority, it's really important to have that community support and if they reject you, where are you going to have the support against the racism that you might face. That was my fear." (Yip 2004: 345-6).

Gender, sexuality and 'identity-management'

"The psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterised - Westphal's famous article of 1870 [*Archive für Neurologie*] on "contrary sexual sensations" can stand as its date of birth - less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species." (Foucault in Nagel 2003: 50)

As the quote cited above makes clear, the very concept of homosexuality is something relatively new. Until the end of the 19th century, there was no such thing as homosexuality; there were mere homosexual acts (Nagel 2003: 50-1). After the publication of Westphal's article in 1870, the concept of homosexual identity slowly started to develop in the West resulting in the legalisation of gay marriage in the Netherlands in 2001, and later in many other countries. Acknowledging gay identity is, however, still something Western: many people from non-Western countries such as Iran's president Ahmadinejad, deny the existence of gays in Iran (see for example Whitaker 2007), even though in that same year around five men received that death penalty for homosexual acts (Human Right Watch 2010). In this paragraph the notion of identity in general, and Muslim and gay identities more specific, will be explained. Attention will be given to the Social Identity theory, the theory of intersectional identities and the existence of ethnosexual frontiers.

The last decades, the concept of 'identity' has become more and more important in Social science and the Humanities. Theories about how identities are formed and about how people look at people from other social or cultural groups. One important theory is the Social Identity Theory (SIT) by Tajfel (in Taylor & Moghaddam 1987). SIT states that people categorise the outside world into groups instead of individuals. The main distinction is made between the ingroup (one's own group) and the outgroup. Since people strive for a positive self-image, the outgroup is always appreciated less than the ingroup. According to Jansen (1987) the first distinction people make is between men and women. This leads to a difference in 'power balance': men usually have more power than women. Aalten (1990) agrees with Jansen that the distinction between men and women seems important, but she asks herself why this is. The similarities between the groups are much more evident than the differences. Others, such as Di Leonardo (1991) have suggested that gender is not the only factor one should look at. Nationality, socio-economic status and ethnicity are also important. Building on this, the theory on intersectionality was formed.

Intersectionality is based on the thought that gender is not the only factor that counts when categorising people. Wekker & Lutz (2001), two scholars in Women's studies, describe how other axes of identity also matter. The revolutionary idea about intersectionality is that at the crossroads of the different axes of identity, such as nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic status, the individual identity of a person is shaped. This is symbolised in the picture below. Captain & Ghorashi (2001) describe how a person may not show all his or her axes of identity all the time: at some time it may be wiser to, for example, hide one's religious ax or one's sexual one. In the case of Dutch

homosexual Muslims this is very applicable: when going out DHM show their gay identity but when at home, they could play the role of 'good Muslim boy'.

Joane Nagel describes how ethnicity and sexuality can also cause inequality. She describes sexuality as a social construct: something that changes over time and is not the same in every society (2003: 7-9). Sexual boundaries are those boundaries that tell us what is and is not allowed when it comes to sexuality. These can be very physical, like red light districts in which prostitution is allowed, but also more symbolic: in many cultures women and men should stay virgins before they marry. Homosexuality is also in many cultures a crossing of a sexual boundary: homosexual relations do not produce children and are therefore not healthy for the ethnic group (2003: 47-8). It could be said that homosexual Muslims occupy a place in a rough ethnosexual frontier since these identities seem to be mutually exclusive.

Sociologist Momin Rahman says that since Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* Muslim identity is increasingly seen as antithetical to Western identity, and as gay identity is seen as something Western it is therefore incompatible with Islam. He emphasises the importance of looking at intersectionality when studying homosexual Muslims: "(...) Gay Muslims occupy an intersectional social location *between* political and social cultures, and (...) they suffer oppression through this position" (2010: 945).

Ganzevoort et. al. (2011) conducted a study on how Dutch Christian gays cope with the struggle between identities. They came up with four strategies: choosing the Christian identity and letting go of the gay one, choosing the gay identity and therefore losing religion, seeking a 'commuter identity': living in two worlds and using two identities at the same time, or trying to combine the two identities. The last one seems the most desirable option, but could require great sacrifices: the family of the person trying to combine the identities might choose to outcast him or her. Yip conducted research among both Christian and Muslim gays. He developed four strategies that one could use when trying to combine the religious and gay identity (Yip 2005): 1) Stating that the interpretation of the Qur'an has been wrong over time and saying that a new interpretation needs to be made. This strategy is very possible in Islam. Like the previous chapter showed, different interpretations of the Qur'an are being made and followed, though not by 'mainstream-Muslims'. 2) Stating that religious books are products of their time so they are not one on one applicable to current times and should, by and large, be abandoned. This strategy is more problematic: the Qur'an has a completely different status among Muslims than the Bible has among Christians: where the Bible is seen as a book written by people 'inspired by God', the Qur'an is seen as holy and completely written by God himself. Muslims see the Qur'an as perfect and wanting to change something or indeed deny its trans-historical relevance is considered a sin (Gilliot 2010: 41-4). 3) Question the authority of religious leaders and fundamentalism. This is possible, even though religious leaders, or 'ulama, have historically had a high status in Islam, their authority is declining because more and more people have access to information and can now make their own religious decisions 4) 'Dissident identity management': looking at religion from an individual perspective. This last strategy is a trend seen in the entire Western world: religion becomes less communal and more personal. It could be a possibility that this counts even more for people not completely fitting into the community. Some say that the privatisation is due to the secularist approach of Western governments: Kilian (2007) argues that governments want religion to be privatised, so that is what citizens do. They start seeing religion as something between them and God, and not something that should be public. They stop going to communal activities, such

as church or mosque and instead pray in their own homes. With Islam this can cause trouble though: Islam is, more than Christianity, a lifestyle. It effects all aspects of life: work, personal life, politics etc. (see f.e. Eickelman & Piscatori: 2004).

Kubicek et. al (2009: 602) describe how, in general, religious adolescents lead a more responsible and better life than non-religious adolescents. However, if they find out they are gay, they face higher levels of stress when trying to combine these identities. This effect is even higher if the adolescent in question is him or herself very religious instead of just going to church or mosque for their family. No matter what strategy they choose to follow, the chances are high that this causes problems for them. In the next chapters we will see how the respondents in this study handle their 'identity-management'.

Part II

Dutch Homosexual

Muslims tell their stories

A methodological note

As mentioned before, I interviewed eight Dutch homosexual Muslims to find out how they try to reconcile their Muslim and gay identities. Five of them were born in the Netherlands or came here at a young age, three moved here when they were adults. They moved here for studies or for their partner. Together, they belong to a variety of ethnic groups: they are Egyptian, Turkish, Iraqi, Pakistani and Indonesian. I found them using the snowball-method: I found a few on my own and asked them after the interview if they knew anyone else that I could interview. All respondents are highly educated. Some are still students, but most of them are professionals. Their ages are between 25 and 40 and they all live in middle to big cities in the Netherlands. I interviewed all respondents for approximately one hour at a location of their preference. I did not record the interviews. Instead I emailed them a copy of my elaborated notes. If they disagreed on anything, I changed it.

The interviews were structured into three different parts. First I would ask the respondents about their Muslim identity: do they consider themselves Muslim, if so, how do they practice their religion and what was this like when they grew up? After this I asked about their gay identity. I asked them how they shape their sexual identity and how this changed during their lives. Then the part about the combining identities came up: I would ask the respondents if and how they combine their religious and sexual identities. During the analysis of the interviews it became clear that even though this structure seemed logical, it really was not. The religious and sexual identities of DHM are so intertwined that it does not make sense to separate them for this study. Instead, I chose a different route: I chose to structure the information more chronologically. Even though the life courses of my respondents were completely different, they all went through the same phases. First, there was the moment they found out they were gay. This led to confusion because most of them were raised in a family where homosexuality was never discussed. After that comes the phase of denial, leading to very religious or in some cases 'straight' behaviour to mask their feelings. Some respondents had a relationship with a girl at this time, others became very orthodox in their religion. After this comes the phase of acceptance: they find out that they cannot hide their homosexual feelings forever and need some way of dealing with this. In this phase they often start to think differently about religion and being Muslim. Most of them do remain Muslim, but some do not. In this chapter I will describe the different phases respondents go through and link them with the literature discussed in the previous chapters.

When reading the stories below one thing has to be kept in mind: these are the stories of the men who do, at least at this moment in their lives, choose for their gay lifestyle. The people who decided to suppress their sexual identity could not be included in this study: they would never be interviewed about their gay identity if they do not admit to being gay. I do believe these stories reflect more people than just the ones I interviewed. Imad el-Kaka and Hatice Kurşun interviewed 24 homosexual men and women with an Islamic background. When reading the book they wrote with the life stories of these people, there are many similarities. The same counts for the movie *I am Gay and Muslim*, mentioned in the introduction. The stories of the men in the movie sound very similar to the stories of the men I interviewed.

Phase 1 and 2: Noticing you are different and denying it

Most respondents describe how, in some way, they always knew they were different. There is always that one moment that they realise they are gay. Omeed (26) describes how it happened to him:

I always knew I was gay, but when I was 13 I knew for sure. I fell in love with a boy in my class. I thought: what is wrong with me? (...) Guys are supposed to like girls, not other guys. It was very confusing for me.

Sometimes there is not one moment when someone realises they are gay. These feelings could of course also come more gradually. All respondents say it starts of with fantasies of boys instead of girls. Then they start noticing the men around them, like in their sports team or at school. Sometimes they even fall in love, like Omeed described.

The respondents are often confused about their feelings towards men because they are raised in families that do not talk about sexuality, let alone homosexuality. They do not know what being straight, gay or bisexual means until they learn about sexuality at school. Hussein (25) tells how he only really realised he was gay when he was in his early twenties, even though he had these feelings all his life:

At a very young age I thought I liked boys and I played sexual games with boys. I did not know anything about the concept of homosexuality at that time. When I became a teenager hormones were rushing through my body. I felt attracted to guys, not to girls. I didn't do anything with those feelings at that time, I pushed them away instead.

Because it confuses them so much, most respondents decide to push their feelings away and not talk to anyone about them. They all think their homosexuality is against their religion and they do not know how to handle the situation. Omeed describes how he had the feeling that homosexuality was not allowed in his family. They never actually talked about it, and he did not dare to bring it up. Other respondents felt that their homosexual feelings stood in the way between them and God. Some DHM say that they tried to deny their feelings completely, but that after a few months of not fantasising and looking at other men, this did not work out. Amin (29) said that if he did think of men again, or had sex with a man, he had the feeling he failed in the eyes of God. Some tried to make deals with God. Mehmet (38) for example really liked dancing in a female way. He prayed to God: "I won't dance again, and then You will change me into a straight person." He kept up with this promise, but during his exams he was so stressed out that he could not do it anymore. He had sex with a man. He said "I have to do my best, God was so merciful. He forgives me, but he also says that I shouldn't do it again."

All respondents see Islam as a solution for their problem. They try to 'loose' themselves in it. Most respondents go into very conservative Islam: Mehmet joined the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hussein is Shi'ite, but describes how he, in behaviour, almost turned into a Salafi-Muslim. He prayed more than five times a day, fasted at least two days every week and never listened to music or went out. Yunus (25) went to a Sufi boarding school in the Netherlands. In the beginning he only went there because his parents made him go, but he felt really inspired by it. At the same time it helped him forget about his homosexuality: he would go to school during the day, and in the evenings he would pray and read the Qur'an. This gave him almost no time to fantasise or think about men. Others would develop a more than average interest by going to the mosque more often and reading many books about Islam.

This 'denial' or religious phase corresponds closely to what Ganzevoort et. al. (2011) call the denial of gay identity. However, in their research this was seen as a permanent state, not as a phase someone goes through. Possibly there are many DHM who never accept their gay identity, meaning that the phase just described does not become permanent. Kubicek et. al. (2009: 602) write how adolescents who are gay and religious face higher levels of stress, especially if he or she is very religious by choice. My respondents all agreed that this was the case for them: they were very stressed out, felt guilty whenever they would 'make a mistake' and most of them were depressed. Not all respondents completely chose their religious identity over their sexual desires. Most of them kept a gay lifestyle on the side. This can be seen as the 'commuting identity': at home and with their friends they are often very orthodox Muslims and when going out they are gay. Amin describes his double life:

It was like I had schizophrenia. At work and with family members I was somebody else then when I was with my gay friends. I still believe that it's my own business what I do in bed. I tried to keep them [my family] out of it, that they didn't know. Of course I could be myself at gay parties. In gay bars it's part of my character to show that I'm gay.

Yunus tells how he has to watch out all the time because he does not want his family to find out he is gay: "I have the feeling I'm leading two lives at the same time. I have to watch who I'm friends with on social media like Facebook and Twitter. I am restricted in my life, I can not be myself this way." The respondents use their different axes of identity Wekker and Lutz (2001) described to cope: at home they are Muslims, while going out they are gays.

All respondents do not dare to tell their family they are gay at this point: they are too afraid this would cause a scandal in the community. They all feel like their culture (no matter if their Turkish, Pakistani, Indonesian, Egyptian or Iraqi) is more communal than the Dutch culture. The fear of not only their parents and family but the entire community condemning them is there. This corresponds with the findings of Yip (2004) in his study of British Muslim gays. He argues here that family honour, *izzat*, and sexual purity is often seen as something separating the Muslims from the British people.

Phase 3: Acceptance and coming out

For all the people I talked to there was a moment in their lives when their parents found out their sexual preference. Most respondents told this voluntarily, but for Coşkun and Yunus this choice was made for them. Coşkun had told all his friends he was gay, but his family did not know yet. One of his friends was Turkish and via her family his family found out about him being gay. He asked his sister to tell the rest of the family. He describes how this created complete chaos: when his sister came home the entire family was there, including all his uncles, aunts and cousins. His sister told them all that he was gay. Everyone was screaming. His mother called him to make him come home, which he did:

"I was a bit stupid at the time, because when I came home I also became angry. I told my family that they had to accept me the way I am. I didn't understand their point of view. Now I understand: they don't accept me, because they can't. This is mainly because of culture and religion. Our religion says it's not allowed and our culture says: never tell the community."

For Yunus the decision was also taken out of his hands. He was spotted by a friend of his father with another man in the city centre. When his father came home he locked the door of the room Yunus was in and beat him up. Yunus fled the house and only came back a few months later.

Other respondents fortunately did get the chance to tell their parents about their sexual preference on their own time. Some parents actually responded well to this. Abdel (26) describes how he had been very depressed for a long time. He was not eating much and did not look happy at all. His parents were very worried about them and kept on asking him what was wrong. Finally he decided to tell them. They showed themselves to be relieved: they thought there was something much worse with their son. Amin decided to tell his mother after he had a breakup from a serious relationship she never knew about. She responded well to it, even though she was disappointed in him. He found it very nice he could finally talk to her about his real feelings. However, a few months after he told her everything, she was setting him up with girls he might like, like she had done before. To handle the situation, she ignored what her son had told her. This is a situation that is very likely to occur: Yunus' mother also still ignores her son's sexuality the same way Amin's mother does this. They both decided not to bother them with it again, meaning they continue to live in commuting identities in some way.

For Abdel telling his parents also was not the end of his problems: even though they responded very well, he is still afraid about the reaction of his brothers and cousins. He is so scared they find out that he does not talk about his gay identity when he is in public, too afraid they might find out some way or another. When he is in a gay bar and people are taking pictures, he hides behind something so he can never be in one and end up on the internet.

In the introduction the influence of both religion and education on tolerance towards homosexuality came up. Even though in my opinion this study is too small to make generalisations about this point, something can be said about the influence of education as well. It turns out that parents with a higher education, like Abdel's, Amin's and Mehmet's parents, respond better to their son's sexual preference than the parents who have a lower education level. This could be a coincidence, but it could mean that the SCP researchers were right in their hypothesis about the influence of education.

Most DHM came out to their parents after they had accepted the fact that they are gay. This means that they either found a way to combine their sexuality with their religion or that they left their religion almost entirely. The first group is the largest: only one respondent does not call himself a Muslim anymore. Most respondents do however have doubts about their religion. In the theoretical framework Yip's theories on successfully combining religious and homosexual identities have been discussed. As it turns out, most respondents use both the first and the fourth strategy. This means that they make their own interpretations of religious books and that they look at their religion from a more individual perspective. Most respondents know a lot about Islam: because they have been struggling so much they read a lot of books on their own religion, studied the Qur'an and read works discussing homosexuality in Islam. This way, they can make their own interpretation of the story of Lut and other parts that are relevant to them. Often, this interpretation is in a very fundamentalistic way, which could have something to do about the very religious phase most respondents went through. They use two arguments when saying why for them homosexuality and Islam are not mutually exclusive. The first one is that God created them this way. They all feel that homosexuality is not a choice for them: they fought it so hard that it has to be just the way they were created. And, if God created someone gay then he cannot be against homosexuality. Coşkun argues that most 'mainstream' Muslims, if they even believe homosexuality exists, will see this as a challenge homosexuals have to face in life:

“You have to suppress your feelings to pass the challenge. I’m not going to do that. I think lots of Muslims do it though: I know lots of guys who did marry a woman and later get a divorce or have sex with men on the side”.

The second argument is about homosexuality in the Qur’an. All respondents except for one immediately mention the story of Lut when I asked them about homosexuality in the Qur’an. They all say though, in line with the arguments by Omar Nahas (2001) and Scott Kugle (2010), that this story has been misunderstood: it is not about homosexuality, but about rape, adult men having sex with animals and children and rejecting God and His prophet Lut. Most respondents came up with this idea on their own, but some read the book by Nahas and quoted from it. Nourdin (39) says the story is just about homosexual acts, not about homosexuality in general:

Of course , there’s this part of the Qur’an about the story of Lut, that God punished his people because they chose men over women. But I have my own version of that. For me, it is not a choice to be gay, but in the Qur’an it is said that it’s their own choice. I think it’s not a choice, God created me like this. It can’t be that he created me like this and then makes me suffer.

The most important strategy respondents choose when combining their religion and their sexuality, however, is making their religion less communal and more personal. Abdel, Hussein and Nourdin all say that they do not believe in certain islamic rules. By this they mainly refer to the practical rules, the ban on alcohol and pork or the rules during Ramadan. They say that Islam came to the world to make the life of people easier, not harder. Nourdin:

“I don’t really pray five times a day or practice Ramadan. I’m Sunni but I’m more ‘greedy’ when it comes to religion. I make my own religion. I understand or find my way to understand Islam to fit me. [...] In Islam it is said you shouldn’t drink alcohol but it’s nice to drink, so why not? It’s these kind of things. I don’t believe in these kinds of rules, that you cannot drink or eat pork. But of course there are other facets to religion, like the relationship with God, that he can forgive you for anything.”

Hussein also makes his own rules when it comes to religion, but he first researches what scholars and religious books and websites say about this:

I’m a Muslim but I don’t practice like most Muslim practice Islam. I made up my own rules for praying five times a day and for fasting. I did not do this entirely on my own, but I based them on fatwas, opinions and theories I read online. I do not pray five times a day and when I pray I don’t do it the way other Muslims do it. [...]. The same goes for the Ramadan: I’m not going to fast from 4 o’clock in the morning till 10 in the evening. [...] I fast from 6 in the morning until 6 in the evening. I read this on the internet, at all different kinds of religious websites.[...] In the Qur’an it only says you should pray. Nowhere it says exactly how you should do this. The sunna does talk about praying, but which sunna should you believe? They all say something different [...]. When I pray, I think about God. Isn’t that praying already? Or, I read the Qur’an. That is the only book I completely acknowledge as a Muslim. Other books, like the sunna and hadith, are relative for me.

Most respondents consider a personal relationship with God very important, but do not practice all the traditional customs like described above. They rather focus on this relationship instead of on the rituals around it. Some ground rules do exist: most do not drink alcohol and do not eat pork, for example.

Not all respondents succeeded in staying a Muslim. Mehmet describes how Islam helped him be the person he is now, it shaped his character. Right now he is not a Muslim anymore, because he just does not believe God would not give signs to people about His existence. This has nothing to do with his sexual preference, he emphasises, but just with his personality. Yunus is in great doubt about his faith: he used to believe strongly but because of his homosexuality he does

not know anymore. If God indeed created him this way, then why would he suffer this much? For him this means God probably does not exist.

Looking at the future

For most DHM, the future is full of insecurities: will their families accept their gay identities so they can fully live a gay life? Or will they have to continue commuting between identities? At the end of every interview I asked the respondents what they think the future will bring them, both in a realistic way but also what they would wish in life if everything was possible. Two respondents already settled down: they married their husband and live together. They are almost completely 'out of the closet'. Even though they both wanted children very much, they gave up on that dream.

The others are all single, but most are looking for a serious relationship with a man. They are very pessimistic about the gay scene: they despise the fact that everyone seems to be looking for casual contacts only instead of seeking real love. In their perfect future they quietly settle down with a partner, maybe with children. Coming out to everyone is for most not necessary: they rather restore the often damaged relationship with their families than come out of the closet. Abdel really wants to settle down with the love of his life, but does not think this is very likely because he thinks the gay scene is so superficial when it comes to love. If he can not find love, he has another plan:

"If it all doesn't work out, I will go back to my own country. There I can marry a woman and get children. [...] I wouldn't want to get married here, here there's too much seduction with the gay scene and everything. It's just not safe, your family will find out then. [...] It would be one big show if I would marry a woman of course. Actually I don't approve of it, but maybe ... I don't know if I would do it."

Other respondents also mention the idea of going back to their country of origin: Yunus is thinking of moving to Istanbul because he believes he can live a happier life there, in more freedom. His family in the Netherlands is too negative about his homosexuality.

Apart from Abdel, all other respondents say that marrying a woman because it is easier is the last thing they want. They know lots of men who did this because they meet them when going out at gay bars. They do not want to follow in their footsteps, not even for their own happiness but because they do not want to betray or hurt anybody. Yunus:

"You often hear about Moroccan and Turkish men who are gay and still marry a woman. They then meet men somewhere at a parking spot or in the pub to have sex. I do not want to lead such a life! I am who I am. I think that's the real acceptance. My mother often ask me: 'When are you getting married?' I don't respond when she asks me, but it does hurt me. My mother has accepted me as her son, but not the way I am. When she asks me about marriage, she is actually saying she doesn't accept me."

Conclusions

When asking my respondents “Do you think it’s possible, being both Muslim and gay?” they all immediately answered with a yes. Some however do think this is a possibility in general, but not for them personally. Most did succeed in combining the two even though the way there was often hard and painful.

In the introduction it was made clear that the group of Dutch homosexual Muslims is in a very difficult position: even though they live in the most tolerant society when it comes to equal rights for gays, their own ethnic group thinks it is a sin. Most often the attitude towards gays is more negative among ethnic minorities in a Western country than it is among people in their country of origin because of reactive ethnicity and because migrants develop their culture differently than than the people staying behind. DHM are in a very difficult position because of this. Some respondents even say they are thinking of moving to their country of origin because they cannot face prejudice from their families anymore.

The second chapter gave room to a more exegetical discussion: both the interpretations of the classical exegete Ibn Kathir and the modern interpreters Scott Kugle (2010) and Omar Nahas (2001, 2005) were laid out. While Ibn Kathir argues that the story of the prophet Lut in the Qur’an is a story of how God disapproves of homosexuality, Kugle and Nahas point out that this story does not have to be about homosexuality at all. Nahas states that the word usually translated with ‘men’, *adh-dhukran*, actually means ‘males’ and could therefore apply to both adults as children and even animals. He then argues that the people of Lut were destroyed for rape, not for homosexuality. Kugle writes how whenever there are verses about the story of Lut, the story of the prophet Salih is right before or behind it. This means that the interpretation of the story of Lut should be guided by the same principles as the story of Salih: this story is not about homosexuality, but about dishonouring your guests and God. Because the story of Lut is the only notion of homosexuality in the Qur’an, most Muslims see homosexuality merely as an act, not as an identity (Halstead & Lewicka 1998). It turns out most DHM follow the interpretations by Nahas and Kugle even though not all have read these books.

In chapter three different theories on identity and sexuality were discussed. The theory of intersectional identities, where a person has different axes of identity that he or she does not show all at all times, turned out to be important for this study, as well as the different strategies one can use when being gay and religious formulated by Ganzevoort (2011) and Yip (2005). Ganzevoort (2011) described how there are four possibilities when being Muslim and gay: leave religion, leave sexuality, commuting identities and combining identities. Yip argued that, when trying to combine the identities, there are four possibilities: giving a new interpretation of the Qur’an, stating that holy books a a product of their time, question the authority of religious leaders and ‘dissident identity management’: looking at religion from a more individual perspective. As it turns out, all of these strategies have been used by the respondents in this study.

The interviewed DHM all had similar patterns in their lives. When they find out they are gay, they try to hide it from everyone around them. They think there is something wrong with them and want it to change. Most became very religious to forget about their feeling towards other men. During

this phase, the 'denial'-phase, they play with their axes of identity: when they are in the mosque or with their families, they are Muslim, when going out they are gay. This corresponds with two strategies of Ganzevoort (2011): denying gay identity and commuting identities. The respondents are trying to deny their feelings completely but they never succeed: after a few months of resisting temptation they have to admit to their feelings.

All respondents' parents know they are gay, as well as some friends and sometimes siblings. The 'coming-out' was not always voluntarily and definitely never easy: some DHM were too depressed to hide their gay identity any longer, others were caught with another men. The reactions of the parents differed: most mothers still accepted their son, even though after they found out their son's sexual identity they chose to ignore it. The mothers continue asking when their son wants to get married and set him up with girls they think are good for him. For most DHM the relationship with their father completely cools down after they find out their son is gay, though not for everyone: Abdel described how his parents, especially his father, were so happy that he only told them he was gay. They thought something much worse was going on with their deeply depressed son. Respondents almost never talk to their parents about their sexual identity after their coming out. This works best for all parties because by not bringing it up, the family honour, *izzat*, stays the same. It seems the education level of the parents could be of influence on the way in which they accept the sexual identity of their son: parents with a higher education level tend to be more accepting.

After the respondents succeed in accepting their own identity, they start to think of their religion in a different way. This largely corresponds with the four strategies by Yip (2005): they make up a new interpretation of the Qur'an where the story of Lut is not about homosexuality, they do not take religious leaders and fatwas seriously, and they make their own religion more personal and less communal. Another important way in which they handle their 'identity-management' is stating that if God created them this way, he cannot be against them. They do not believe homosexuality is a choice for them. When looking at the future, most DHM want a quiet, happy live. They want to find a partner, live together, maybe even get married and have children. They almost all say that coming out of the closet completely is not necessary for them. They do not want to hurt their family's honour even more.

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