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Doing, being and verbalizing: Narratives of queer migrants from Muslim backgrounds in Spain

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Abstract
The hegemonic narrative in the West establishes that having same-sex relationships constitutes an identity that must be public. This article analyses how this narrative is reproduced and/or subverted in the discourses of queer migrant people from Muslim backgrounds in Catalonia (Spain). The analysis of 10 interviews reveals a more fluid notion of sexual orientation, an uncomfortableness with the identity categories regarding sexuality, and a stronger distinction between the public and the private boundaries. The informants found themselves in a complex situation that made it impossible for them to completely reproduce or subvert the overlapping normativities of both the origin and host society, compelling them to devise hybrid strategies to live their sexuality. The article closes with a reflection on the implications of the different ways of living sexuality in relation to the theorization of sexual/intimate citizenship and LGBT equality policies, which also reproduce the western hegemonic understanding of sexuality.

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Introduction[1]

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978: 43) explains the creation process of the homosexual figure as a 'personage'. Following this approach, other authors have analysed the logic of the hegemonic gay/lesbian narrative in the West, according to which homosexual desire constitutes an identity that must be revealed (Binnie and Simmons, 2006; Weeks, 1985). From a minoritizing perspective (Sedgwick, 1990), this identity is based on a clear distinction between homo and heterosexual people, while at the same time establishing homosexuality as something that goes beyond sexual acts and 'involves desire, lifestyle, culture, gender, politics and identity' (Jaspal and Siraj, 2011: 184).

This version of the hegemonic gay/lesbian identity in the West has been problematized for excluding other ways of constructing sexual diversity: 'dominant identity categories are, in actuality, ontologically incomplete and achieve their (incomplete) coherence only through the exclusion of "others"' (Rahman, 2010: 953). In this vein, the hegemonic gay/lesbian identity comes about through the exclusion of the specific experiences of other cultures: 'the coming out becomes a decontextualized fetish around which the familiar superiority of western individuality is built, while queers of colour are expected to catch up, to overcome their inherent cultural disadvantage' (El-Tayeb, 2012: 89). This logic has consequences both on an exterior and interior political level. On an exterior level, it affects the neo-colonial and assimilationist policies of the so-called 'Gay International' (Massad, 2002) to foster the western way of managing homosexuality in the Global South (especially in countries with a Muslim majority). On an interior political level, migrant Muslims have taken on 'a central role in the debates about national identity, cultural belonging, and alterity', presenting them as inherently homophobic, intolerant and fundamentalist (Mepschen, 2009: 12). As such, Muslims are constructed as the otherness through which the modern western identity is reinforced (Mepschen et al., 2010; Puar, 2007; Sinfield, 1996).

Pursuant to this problem, the general objective of the article is to analyse how the narratives of queer migrants from Islamic backgrounds reproduce and/or subvert the hegemonic gay/lesbian narrative in the western context. The specific aims are to analyse two aspects that are central in Foucauldian analysis of sexuality: the relation between sexual practices and identities, and the pressure to verbalize (to confess, in the author's terms) and make public sexual identities. These objectives are part of a wider research project which sought to analyse how LGBT equality policies are facing the challenge of taking into account cultural and religious diversity. This issue will be briefly tackled in the Conclusions, where we will contrast the article findings with the theorization of sexual/intimate citizenship

and LGBT equality policies, which reproduce the western hegemonic understanding of sexuality.

The article focuses on how queer migrants from Morocco living in Catalonia (Spain) make sense of their sexualities, understanding that they find themselves in 'the space of the "in-between"', which positions them 'at the interstice between the home and the 'host' country, the culture of origin and the destination culture, national rootedness and transnational routes' (Berghahn, 2012: 133). Thus, the article draws on queer migration scholarship, which explores 'how overlapping regimes of power and knowledge generate and transform identity categories' (Luibhéid, 2008: 169); and queer diasporic studies. The latter focus on how 'the presence and experiences of diasporic subjects puts any normative notion of culture, identity, and citizenship in question' (Fortier, 2002: 184), distancing from identity politics (Patton and Sánchez-Eppler, 2000; Sinfield, 1996). Being aware of the risk, set out by Ahmed (2000), of understanding the position of queer migrants 'as a necessarily transgressive mode of existence' (Wesling, 2008: 34), the purpose of the article is to analyse how the informants make sense of their sexuality in the context of two cultures which are not neatly bound and separate but actually overlap (Fortier, 2002: 190). The article is contextualized in Catalonia (Spain), where religious and cultural diversity has increased greatly in recent decades (Martínez-Ariño, 2018). This growth is in part explained by the rising foreign-born population: from 2.9% of the population in 2000 to 15% of the population in 2019 (Idescat, 2019). The population from Morocco make up almost 20% of this figure, being the largest foreign population group in Catalonia (Idescat, 2019). Central issues that have become prominent in social debates are mostly related to religious identity, such as conflicts over mosque constructions (Astor, 2012) or debates about the regulation of female Islamic face veiling (Burchardt, et al., 2015). In contrast to the rest of Spain, today the presence of extreme right xenophobic parties in the political institutions is residual. However, Catalonia is the region with most Islamophobic incidents reported, especially since the terrorist attacks in Barcelona in 2017 (PCCI, 2018).

In the Catalan or Spanish context, no research has been conducted about the experiences of non-normative sexuality of migrants from countries with a Muslim majority. However, it is a subject of study tackled in other European countries, mainly in the UK (e.g. Jaspal, 2012; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011; Jivraj et al., 2003; Shah, 2016; Siraj, 2016; Yip, 2004, 2005; Yip and Khalid, 2010) but also in The Netherlands (El Karka and Kursun, 2002; El-Tayeb, 2012; Jivraj and de Jong, 2011), France (Provencher, 2011, 2013, 2016), and Belgium (Peumans, 2014, 2016, 2017).

The terminological aspects are crucial in a study that precisely seeks to question the limits of western logic in the construction of homosexuality. However, it is impossible to find a terminology that enables us to fully escape the ethnocentric perspective. Revising the different options used in the studies examining this subject, we find three options. The first is to use the word 'gay' or 'homosexual' (*Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 2016; Jaspal, 2012; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010;

Jaspal and Siraj, 2011; Minwalla et al., 2005; Rahman, 2010; Yip, 2004, 2005, 2009), an option which we rule out because the narratives of the individuals interviewed often break precisely with the identity logic of these categories. The other two options are 'non-heterosexual' (Yip, 2004, 2005) and 'queer' (Abraham, 2008, 2009; El-Tayeb, 2012 and Rahman, 2010). We have chosen the latter because we agree with Abraham (2009: 80) that 'queer' 'avoids the inevitable heteronormativity of a label like "non-heterosexual"'. Moreover, the category 'queer', despite also originating in the West, allows us to approach forms of sexuality that are beyond normativity and cannot be categorized (Charania, 2017; Sáez, 2004), and to 'acknowledge that all identity categories are burdened by legacies that must be interrogated, do not map neatly across time and space, and become transformed through circulation within specific, unequally situated local, regional, national, and transnational circuits' (Luibhéid, 2008: 169).

In the following sections, the theoretical aspects guiding the article are presented and the methodology behind the fieldwork is outlined. Subsequently, the analysis is presented, based on two specific objectives (the liaison between practices/identities and the public/private boundary). The article closes with a reflection on the political implications of this research.

Theoretical approach

The initial quotation by Michel Foucault (1978) indicates that the article adopts a perspective that moves away from essentialism. Upon reviewing previous research on the subject, contributions can be found that follow this essentialist approach, resulting in an assimilationist and ethnocentric logic. The paradigmatic example is an article published in the journal *Culture, Health & Sexuality* (2016), which homogenizes 'Islamic cultures' (even discussing their 'essence'), labels them as intolerant towards homosexuality, explains that the experiences of queer people are always negative ('characterized by anger and shame', p. 284) and assumes a supposed gay identity:

> As religious identity is strong and unquestioned, the only thing that will enable a coherent identity and a sense of self-worth is to not be gay. Therefore the early strategies employed to maintain self-esteem and protect against this threat centre around resisting emerging sexuality. (*Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 2016: 285).

Thus, gay identity is not presented as a cultural product rooted in a specific context, but as something universal that must be accepted as such. Beyond the field of research, in the cultural representation of queer migrants from Muslim-majority countries we can also find examples of films that follow an essentialist and assimilationist logic (Coll-Planas, 2020).

The constructionist perspective adopted in this article, in contrast, considers that 'the direction of sexual desire is not intrinsic, and that culture provides widely different categories and labels for framing sexual and affective experiences'

(Obermeyer, 2000: 240). Applied to homosexuality, the constructionist perspective leads to a questioning of the hegemonic form in the West of defining homosexuality, on account of it having a universalist, ethnocentric and evolutionist logic: 'a path of development from folk, indigenous or "traditional" configurations of same sex practices to a modern, politicised gay marked by visibility and greater publicity' (Binnie and Simmons, 2006: 3). This evolutionist interpretation is particularly clear in the case of the social construction of queer Muslim individuals:

> they are perceived as being too oppressed and alienated from their own needs to speak up as long as they still identify with Islam. It is only when they can make the step into western modernity – a step that necessarily requires the break with, the coming out of the Muslim community – that they can claim an individualized identity as feminist or queer, usually by expressing gratitude for being saved by their 'host society'. (El-Tayeb, 2012: 80)

The constructionist perspective, thus, helps to understand the hegemonic way of defining homosexuality in the West as a specific historical construction and tells western people that 'our own existence is ontologically and politically tenuous rather than somehow inevitable' (Rahman, 2010: 954).

Methodological aspects

The corpus of analysis of the article is made of 10 interviews with queer migrants living in Catalonia and coming from countries with a Muslim majority. The number of interviewees is considered to be sufficient bearing in mind that the subject is being analysed from a qualitative perspective, that it is an invisible social group (Abraham, 2009), and that the research is of an exploratory nature.

The people interviewed were recruited through the personal networks of the research team (5 interviews) and through LGTB associations (5 interviews). In the latter, they are individuals who are close to said associations but are not actively involved in them. Moreover, as they are entities that do not specifically discuss cultural or religious diversity, the individuals interviewed do not have a very politicized or theoretical discourse in this respect, something that does occur in research carried out with activists from the LGTB associations of Muslim people (as is the case of Jivraj et al., 2003; Minwalla et al., 2005; Siraj, 2016).

As regards the informants, eight were born in the Maghreb and emigrated between the ages of 6 and 23. In the case of the other two, Omar[2] was born in Saudi Arabia and Ibrahim in France, and had parents or grandparents of Moroccan origin. It is important to acknowledge that there is a gender bias, since we recruited eight men and only two women. While in general it was difficult to contact men, in the case of women it was even more complicated. This may be related to the greater family and social control to which women are subjected in order to follow gender norms (Jivraj et al., 2003), making them profiles that are more difficult to make visible.

It is also important to note the heterogeneity of the interviewees, as regards: age (between 21 and 49 years of age); place of residence (six towns of different sizes and from the provinces of Barcelona, Tarragona and Girona); and socio-economic position, avoiding the over-representation of professional people and individuals with university studies whom we find in studies such as those by Abraham (2009), Minwalla et al. (2005) and Siraj (2016).

As a research technique, a semi-structured interview format was chosen. The interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes, were transcribed, entered into an Excel matrix and codified according to the analytical categories that emerged from the theoretical framework (Meyer and Avery, 2009). The interviews were analysed using the content analysis methodology, which is based on a systematic, reproducible and valid reading of the data. The aim was to interpret the data according to their context and to give an account of their manifest and latent meaning (Andréu, 2002).

Analysis of queer migrant individuals' narratives

This analysis section is structured around the two specific aims of the article, which revolve around two key elements of the hegemonic gay/lesbian narrative set out earlier: the presumption that sexual practices with people of the same sex constitute an identity (under the title 'Doing and being'); and that this identity must be made public through a ritual commonly known as 'coming out of the closet' ('Verbalizing').

Doing and being: 'The problem with homosexuality is pride'

The phrase quoted in this heading was uttered by Karim in his interview to demonstrate that what is penalized in his environment is not so much the fact of having sexual relationships with people of the same sex, but the fact that these are lived openly and constitute an identity. In this regard, the use of the word 'pride' is key, as it is one of the emblematic words used in the normative experience of the western gay/lesbian identity.

In this subsection, we will focus on two aspects: how the informants' experiences show the western way of managing sexual orientation as a culturally specific product; and how they reveal the link between sexual practices and identity labels.

As regards the first aspect, Med, Abdul and Mohamed agree that in their country of origin: 'you don't have to be homosexual to have homosexual relations and in Morocco it is very, very natural' (Karim). According to all the interviewees, this way of experiencing sexuality without it being tied to an identity or a subculture, changed radically after their arrival in Spain: in all cases their attraction towards people of the same sex took shape in the new cultural context. The informants highlight that this change is related to four issues: visibility, cultural recognition, collective dimension of the experience (both in terms of leisure and activism), and

connection between sex and affection. Karim, who arrived when he was 14 years old and is now 22, expresses this change as follows:

> I come from a culture where this was just having a good time, you know? When I came here I saw that it really exists, it is real, it's not my imagination, it's not something only I feel, but a lot of other people do too. It's something shared, something collective, there are other people who also feel like that. It changes your mentality completely. (Karim)

In this same vein, Abdul, aged 28 and living in a small rural town, considers that the main change is the union between sex and affection: 'I discovered good sex here [...] when I was in Morocco everything was very cold, very fast, in and out, there was none of that sexual enjoyment that you feel with a man, hugging each other, kissing ...'. In addition, Abdul has a group of autochthonous gay friends and takes part in the demonstration for LGTB rights on 28 June, so he participates in the collective dimension of sexuality.

Second, in relation to the link between practices and identities, the few studies carried out in countries with a Muslim majority or with people who have emigrated to the West from these countries, show that sexual practices with people of the same sex in many cases do not constitute identities (Minwalla et al., 2005; Obermeyer, 2000). In fact, Jivraj et al. (2003) and Minwalla et al. (2005) reveal the difficulty queer people from Muslim backgrounds living in the West have in identifying with the identity labels.

In the case of our informants, three of them identify with identity labels in relation to sexual orientation. Such is the case of Mehdi and Abdul, who identify as 'gay', something they relate to the fact that they have never felt desire for or had sexual relations with women. Despite this identification with the identity category, their experience of sexuality breaks with the expectations of the western gay narrative (see the next subsection). In turn, Aima feels defined by the word 'bisexual'.

The rest of the interviewed individuals are reluctant to use identity categories. Among the arguments given, Ibrahim, Karim and Imad point out that they do not like the labels because they do not allow for an account of the complexity of people. Despite being critical of identity labels, regarding the 'gay' category, Karim states:

> It's not that I don't use it, I use it but I'm very different to others. Because I think that everyone is different. But I label myself as gay to demand gay rights. (Karim)

Actually, despite questioning identity labels on account of not acknowledging diversity, Karim is involved in activism for LGBT rights in Morocco and he finds that these labels are useful in this context.

In the case of Imad, aged 49 and living in a medium-sized city, he is married to a woman with whom he has three children. When asked about his identification in relation to sexuality, he answered 'bisexual'. When asked if he liked this category

he replied: 'I say it because you use this label when someone likes both genders [...] I don't need labels at all'.

Ibrahim, aged 44 and living in a medium-sized seaside village, compares his understanding of sexuality with that of nationality, rooted in the fact that his grandparents were born in Morocco, his parents were born in France, he was born in the Netherlands, and he is currently living in Catalonia while keeping a strong emotional and cultural bond with Morocco:

> Like with my nationality, I feel like I am from everywhere; I don't define myself with this either, because for me it is just the person. I don't really like the words homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, transsexual, or whatever. For me it's the person and that's it. (Ibrahim)

Despite having taken part in LGTB public activist events and being exclusively attracted to women, Laila is reluctant to use the label 'lesbian': 'I like girls, but I think the label is ... you're giving away very private personal information'.

In this regard, the uncomfortableness regarding identity labels of the majority of interviewees conceals a more fluid experience of sexuality and a rejection of the idea of encapsulating desire, reducing it to a category that they experience as limiting. However, this point of view coexists, usually during the same interview, with the use of identity categories. This apparent contradiction is linked with a feeling the interviewers had during the fieldwork: that the informants were incoherent in their responses. These alleged contradictions revolved around the two specific aims of the article: the visibility of sexual orientation and the use of identity categories. In the analysis process we realized that the alleged incoherence was not in the informants' words but in the researchers' eyes and in their cultural expectations.

Regarding visibility, as we develop in the following subsection, the alleged contradiction is the result of the balance between being able to live their non-normative sexuality and not putting the family and community bond at risk. In relation to identity categories, the alleged contradiction had two forms: the informants who intended to follow identity categories were not doing so according to the hegemonic way of doing it in the 'host' society; but the informants who were critical of identity categories were not completely alien to them. Ultimately, due to their location in a diasporic space (Berghahn, 2012), the informants found themselves in a complex position that made it impossible for them to completely reproduce or subvert the overlapping normativities of both the origin and the 'host' society.

Analysing the position of the informants through the lens of hybridity helped the authors to disentangle the alleged contradictions. Following Berghahn (2012: 133), hybrid identities 'are complex and heterogeneous, characterized by crossovers and mixes between different cultural traditions that are invoked and drawn upon simultaneously'. In the case of our informants, they were in a complex position that compelled them to embark on a creative process in which they had to create their own ways to live their sexuality far from predefined solutions, a strategy that we found in another part of the research in which we analysed the

cinematic representation of queer migrants (Coll-Planas, 2020). The most explicit example of this hybridization is Karim, who enjoys writing, and the most inspiring authors for him are the Moroccan Mohamed Choukri, the Spanish Federico García Lorca and Abdellah Taïa, of Moroccan origin living in France.

Verbalizing: 'Here you talk about sex a lot and have it little, we don't talk as much and we have more'

The sentence quoted in this heading was Omar's reply when the interviewer asked him if he considered sex to be a taboo subject in his community of origin. This quotation is completely in line with the Foucauldian approaches about how (homo)sexuality was constructed in the West through discourse and the mechanism of confession (Foucault, 1978) and it is ideal to introduce the analysis of the verbalization of sexual orientation and the public/private management of it.

Previous research shows that 'don't ask don't tell' is the main strategy followed by queer migrants from Muslim backgrounds (Jivraj et al., 2003: 13). This enables them to develop their emotions and sexuality without generating a shock that renders relationships with the family and the community unsustainable:

> Silence is sometimes a strategy employed by the participants and their parents in order to maintain space and boundary. Some participants reported that they suspected their parents or even siblings had some inkling about their sexuality. However, the issue was never discussed, so they did not have to face the consequences. The participants rationalized that their sexuality is a private matter, thus using the private and public divide as a management strategy. (Yip, 2004: 343)

Following that considered by Jivraj et al. (2003) and Yip (2004), the strategy most used by the interviewed men as regards their families is to transfer the information without explicitly verbalizing it. The narratives concerning this aspect are ambivalent. For example, Mehdi, who is 21 years old and lives in a big city, mentions that he has a very close relationship with his mother, who lives in Morocco ('we are great friends') and they speak on the phone every day. When he is asked whether his mother knows his sexuality or not, on the one hand, he says that his mother observes that he is a 'feminine' person ('my mother calls me "my girl"') and knows that he has gay friends; on the other hand, he states that 'I don't want to tell her because she won't understand and she won't accept it', because she thinks homosexuality is a 'bad habit' and, in fact, she tells him to 'find yourself a girlfriend'.

Nabil, aged 27 and living in a big city, highlights this tension between knowing but not verbalizing in relation to his mother, who is living in another region of Spain:

> I think she knows, but my mother will never talk about it and neither will I. It is something she knows, I know she knows but I don't know... it's not spoken about. [...] I don't want to even think about the day that... that... she talks to me about that because I won't be able to cope, because I don't... well, let time pass, you know?

[...] because my mother, she, she accepts ... well, she accepts it, she doesn't accept it because she doesn't know for sure either. (Nabil)

This strategy, which an interviewee of Provencher (2011: 817) calls 'coming out oriental style', consists of transmitting the information without explicitly verbalizing it, thereby avoiding open conflict and preserving family and community ties. Furthermore, it is based on a different definition of the line between what is public and private: while in western societies there is an increasing effort to make public, and even exhibit, aspects that were previously considered to be private (Remondino, 2012), in the milieu of Muslim migrants there is a clear division between what is public and what is private, which leaves a space to transgress the norms without questioning the sense of belonging.

Along these lines, some of the men interviewed have an implicit pact with their family according to which the information about their sexuality is known but the fact that it is not verbalized means that no conflict arises. This is the case of Abdul, who lives with his uncle and aunt, cousins and brother. As regards whether the latter is aware of his homosexuality, he answers 'maybe, but it's not mentioned'. In response to the question of how he might know, he answers that he 'leaves hints on purpose' so that he works it out, for example, 'on the computer you leave the name of a sex webpage, porn videos ...'. He says that he 'would love' him to know but at the same time he does not want to verbalize it. This same logic applies to the relationship with two gay friends from his town. When asked do they talk about the subject, Abdul explains: 'they don't know anything about me, I think ... or maybe they do'. In fact, after a couple of moments he says 'they do know but we don't talk about it'. He presumes they know because Abdul displays his face on gay contact pages without hiding the name of the town in which he lives, and as such, it is easy to recognize him.

This strategy breaks with the logic of coming out of the closet in the West, in the sense that it is based on a specific link between what is known and what is said, aimed at preserving meaningful relationships and avoiding any potential conflict due to unfulfilled expectations.

The majority of interviewees agree that sexuality is a taboo subject in their families, but unlike the logic of the repressive hypothesis that Foucault (1978) sets out, there is no criticism in this regard; rather, they defend this sphere of life as a private matter, far from public scrutiny. In the words of Ibrahim:

I never talk about that, about my sexuality, with others because it is personal. I'm not going to say who I was with last night, I won't talk about it afterwards, because it's my business. (Ibrahim)

In fact, he mentions that he has a cousin with whom he shares a close relationship. She knows that he feels attracted to both men and women 'but because she respects me a lot, she never talks to me about it'. He doesn't mind her knowing but he

believes that the fact that she never talks about the subject is a sign that she respects his privacy.

This strategy of managing non-normative sexuality must be understood in relation to the role played by the family and the community of origin. In comparison to the values of independence and individualism that predominate in current western societies, in many Islamic communities and settings interdependence and interconnection predominate, manifesting in: the importance of looking after and respecting parents and elderly people, strong family ties, and the notion of loyalty towards one's own community (Yip, 2004). In the first generation of migrant individuals, which is the case of most of the interviewees, Yip (2004) points out that the community acts as a support network and as a space to reinforce the sociocultural practices of their countries of origin, contributing towards weaving a network of commitments and obligations.

In this context, the verbalization of homosexuality tends to be interpreted 'as posing threats to a crucial dimension of their ethno-religious identity' (Jaspal and Siraj, 2011: 189) and as a process of 'westoxication', that is to say, an intoxication of western immorality and permissiveness (Yip, 2004: 340). From this perspective, the non-heterosexual person can be understood as a traitor to their own culture and religion (Yip, 2008). Precisely for this reason, the non-verbalizing strategy is an option to avoid conflict.

Regarding family and community pressure about the way they live their sexuality, three types of situations can be observed in the interviews. First, there are informants who report that they do not feel pressurized by the people around them to marry someone of the opposite sex. Such is the case of Nabil, Mehdi and Abdul, whose parents all live in Morocco, something that may influence the lesser degree of pressure that they feel.

Second, Ibrahim, Mohamed, Imad and Omar do not report feeling any direct pressure, but they do say that they hear comments from their relatives and feel cultural expectations that they have interiorized and that influence their life decisions as regards emotional–sexual relationships. Ibrahim, who married a woman due to pressure from his siblings and divorced years later, explains:

> I had to get married because I had reached marrying age. It's true that my parents never said anything to me, especially my mother, but in my family whenever there was a reunion or a celebration I'd hear 'why are you single', 'it's your turn now'...The pressure...(Ibrahim)

He got divorced when he fell in love with a man and decided that he did not want to have a sexual and emotional relationship with someone else while being married.

Mohamed, aged 23 and living in a big city, says that in his house the subject of marriage is not broached, but that, for example, when he goes to a wedding he feels pressure to get married. In this regard, although he considers that '70% of me likes men', he states that 'one day I'll marry a Maghreb woman, because my Mum would like that'. His strategy can be understood as a hybrid one, since he is seeking

a balance between fulfilling his parents' expectations in the public domain while having sexual relations with men as part of his private sphere.

Lastly, there are three cases in which the individuals interviewed say that they have received direct pressure. Such is the case of Karim and of the two women interviewed; this supports the idea that women tend to be more subjected to family supervision: the control of their sexuality and the pressure to marry tend to be more accentuated for women both in societies of origin and in migrant communities in the West (Jivraj et al., 2003; Obermeyer, 2000; Siraj, 2016).

Karim had a relationship with a boy when he was in secondary school. He was affectionate in public and told the people around him but not his parents:

> The idea was that I wouldn't tell my parents that I was homosexual, that they'd discover it with time. I felt that they knew I was homosexual but . . . (Karim)

This pact was broken when, on his boyfriend's insistence, he took him to his parents' house introducing him as a friend. After that visit, his parents managed to get him to open up and tell them that he was not a friend but a boyfriend. After some time, Karim and his parents travelled to Morocco, where they took him to several 'healers' who tried to change his sexual orientation. After resisting, the long journey came to an end when he changed his strategy and decided to tell them that he would not have relationships with boys again. When he went home, Karim had a short relationship with a girl (which he defines as a way of 'covering' himself) and he managed to regain a certain level of peace with his parents. He explains that since then they have not discussed the subject again, and as such have returned to the previous pact of silence.

It is interesting to mention how Karim defines the line between what is public and what is private. On the one hand, he believes that he should not have to discuss his sexuality with his parents because 'it is private', and does not concern them. On the other hand, when he has had relationships with boys he has been affectionate in public; for example, he explains that they used to kiss at the door of the secondary school, even though it provoked insults. Moreover, he considers that sexuality is a political aspect, which he tackles through activism in a human rights association and an association for the rights of LGBT people in Morocco. This alleged contradiction in the definition of the private/public nature of sexuality can be understood in the light of his hybrid position, which combines a strong boundary between the public and the private in relation to his family and community of origin, while considering sexuality a public matter in relation to other spheres such as secondary school and activism.

As regards the women interviewed, Aima, aged 34 and living in a medium-sized city, explains that she felt pressurized to marry, and actually, she has married twice. The first time was a marriage arranged by her family when she was very young and living in Morocco. The second marriage was to a man of Moroccan origin when she arrived in Catalonia in her 20s. At the time of the interview she is divorced and living with her daughter from a previous marriage and a female

partner. In response to the question as to whether this pressure was related to the 'suspicion' that she was not heterosexual, she says:

> Maybe, because my older sister has always called me Mohamed [laughs]. I used to always wear trousers and play football. Maybe, I don't know. I have a friend in Morocco and last year my sister asked me 'is that friend of yours lesbian'? I said, 'huh? no, not lesbian', and she said 'well she looks it, I don't like you hanging around with her'. (Aima)

Aima lives in fear that her bisexuality will be revealed, and is very tense during the interview. She speaks in a quiet voice and refuses to discuss certain aspects that could identify her despite the guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity.

The clearest case of pressure is that of Laila, who was born in Algeria, and fostered when she was a young child by a Catalan family living in a small rural town. She is now 26 years old and living on her own in a big city. While in the case of Nabil, Mehdi and Abdul, the fact that their parents are far away has given them greater autonomy, the same cannot be said about Laila. The informant explains that she has always lived in 'fear' of her biological family because she has not complied with the mandate of marrying a man and because she has breached the rules of her family, among others, by having relationships with girls. This fear manifests in her believing that she will be pursued (in fact she suspects that for a while she was followed by someone on behalf of her family), that she will have acid thrown on her face to disfigure her, or that she will be killed.

This feeling of fear has made her decide not to return to visit her family. She feels that there is an increasing danger that, once there, they might not let her leave on account of being of marrying age. The pressure she feels to return to live in Algeria and to marry a Muslim man makes her put off communication. At the time of the interview she has been blocking communication with her family for four months:

> They've written to me, but I don't open WhatsApp because it's too... [...] when they ring me or when I ring... I tremble. I get really anxious before ringing... [...] It's a fear, it's... it's a fear... because instead of asking 'how are you?' 'are you working, are you not working?'... my mother starts to verbally attack me... [...] [My mother says] 'you're my daughter, my daughter was stolen from me', and of course... She starts with that whole thing, and I don't know, I don't want to feel guilty, I've already felt guilty too many times. (Laila)

In fact, her attitude oscillates, depending on the season, between drifting apart and a certain closeness that is based on 'fuelling the lie' that she will return to Algeria and marry a man: 'I think about it a lot, and I cry after talking to them, because in reality it's a lie, it's a lie that will never come true'. Laila reports that often she finds it very difficult to manage this tension between distancing herself and the need to preserve the bond: she doesn't want to live

according to her family's expectations but nor can she live her life (in the emotional-sexual, artistic, professional spheres) fully.

Conclusions

As stated in the Introduction, this article is part of a wider project aimed at analysing how equality policies are facing the intersection between sexual and cultural diversity. This is why we would like to finish by reflecting on the political implications of the main findings of the study, a research line that will be further explored in future articles.

Although the informants do not constitute a homogeneous social group, there are elements that show that they do not completely follow the hegemonic gay/lesbian narrative in the West, but deploy hybrid strategies to deal with the impossibility of following the normativities of both the origin and the 'host' communities. In short, the informants distance themselves from western normativity in the following aspects: same-sex sexual practices do not necessarily manifest in identities; sexual orientation is more fluid; there is a more notable distinction between the public and private spheres; and the management of information does not reproduce the logic of coming out of the closet.

What are the implications of these findings for the theorization of sexual/intimate citizenship? Are these questions relevant for rethinking LGBT equality policies? The first theorizations of both sexual and intimate citizenship revealed the hegemonic theorization of citizenship as a 'contextualized concept' and criticized its biases (Lister, 2002: 192). However, not enough attention was afforded to the possible biases of the concepts of sexual and intimate citizenship themselves (e.g. Plummer, 1996). This approach is part of a wider movement, because 'the rearticulation of the public–private divide is central to both feminist and queer citizenship politics', which considered a success 'the public recognition of "private" issues [. . .] as concerns of public policy' (Lister, 2002: 195).

The findings of our project and other previous research show that the positive consideration of making public aspects such as sexuality may not be taking into account the needs and realities of people from different cultural backgrounds. In this line, Richardson (2018: 2–3) claims that 'it is time for a critical evaluation' which analyses 'the normative assumptions underpinning notions of sexual citizenship'. One of the normative assumptions is the 'European–North American historical configuration' of the concept, which can be observed in 'the centrality of the individual (sexual) citizen who chooses', and which 'marginalizes and obscures sites of struggles over sexuality where constructions of selfhood are experienced differently' (Richardson, 2018: 3).

How does this theoretical debate about the place of sexuality in the construction of citizenship translate into public policies? We will briefly reflect on the implications for public policies in relation to the context where the research has been carried out, but the reflections may be relevant to other western countries.

In Catalonia, since the implementation of law 11/2014 for the rights of LGBT people in 2014, it is compulsory for municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants to develop an LGBT policy programme and to create a service to look after victims of LGTBphobia. Although this has meant an enormous boost for LGTB equality policies, there are some limitations that are relevant for the issues tackled in this article: they have not been designed from an intersectional perspective and, more specifically, they have been carried out without any connection with policies dealing with cultural diversity.

Regarding public policies on cultural diversity, they do not have much history, partially due to the fairly recent arrival of migrants from the Global South to Catalonia. Actually, the recent boost of both areas of public policies and the fact that they are not fully institutionalized may constitute an opportunity to question their single-issue approach and to embrace intersectionality (Cruells and Coll-Planas, 2013).

The question that remains is how LGBT equality policies can acknowledge cultural diversity when designing policy plans, programmes to fight homophobia or support services for victims of homophobia. Taking into account the results of the research, we consider that LGTB equality policies face a double challenge. The first is the need to rethink the frameworks from which these policies have been designed. In this vein, we could ask: How do LGTB equality policies construct the target of their interventions? Who is excluded from the target? Do these policies contribute towards reinforcing or counteracting the ethnocentric, assimilationist and evolutionist perspective that fuels the essentializing and stigmatizing image of Muslims as an inherently homophobic social group? Do LGBT practitioners take into account cultural diversity when looking after a queer migrant who has been a victim of LGBTphobia or who is in conflict with their family? Do these policies acknowledge queer migrants at all? And if they do, do they construct them as a deprived group who needs help to be able to follow western logic, or as a creative agent dealing with two overlapping normativities?

Finally, the second challenge is, following Jacqueline Bhabha's concern, to avoid 'relativist conceptions of human rights', which 'while anti-imperialist in intent and rhetoric and sensitive to the need to contextualise social and cultural norms [...] easily become vehicles for a discriminatory hierarchisation of human rights protection and an uncritical reinforcement of exclusionary state practices' (1999: 189). In short, the challenge lies in the fact that the process of critically reviewing the normative assumptions of LGTB equality policies does not lead to relativism, thus rendering impossible any intervention to avoid the discriminations and inequalities that people with non-normative sexualities experience, regardless of their origin and religion.

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Notes

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2. To guarantee the anonymity of interviewees, pseudonyms have been used in this article.

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