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The above Quranic verse echoes the pursuit to embrace unity within the diversity that exists within Muslim communities, and we learn through our differences that reconciliation of sexual and spiritual/religious identity is achievable. This chapter is another significant example of the increasing awareness in Australia and indeed internationally in relation to diversity within Muslim communities, which includes a ‘faith-centered anti-homophobic reading of the Qur’an … at the whens and wheres of how divine love has historically been interpreted as only present along straight lines, families, bodies and love(r)s’ (Shannahan, 2010:680). Multiple marginalities and intersectionalities need to be negotiated and navigated when ‘living the rainbow’: interweaving religious diversity, cultural diversity, gender diversity and sexual diversity (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995; Shannahan, 2010). The establishment of the Australian GLBTIQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer) Multicultural Council Inc (AGMC) and the many multicultural and multifaith GLBTIQ social and support groups are a testimony to the need to engage with people’s lived experiences of negotiating and interweaving multiple identities, multiple group allegiances, multiple community belongings and the subsequent border dwelling (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005a; 2008).
In this chapter, we have endeavoured to interweave a theoretical framework and discussion of the issues with a personal biography in order to present an overview of how the queering of Muslim identities is being lived, discussed, researched and theorized. The personal narrative can be found within the excerpts from a transcribed interview that screened on ABC *Big Ideas*, as part of the 2012 Sydney Mardi Gras events. Interviewed for the program was Paki­stani, Muslim, Australian lawyer, Alyena Mohummadally. She conversed with Sekneh Beckett, a Muslim psychologist, about reconciling the ‘two identities’ of being gay and being Muslim. The full video as well as an audio recording was published on the ABC *Big Ideas* website on 12 March 2012 (ABC, 2012).

‘I am a queer Muslim’

Being GLBTIQ and raised within an ethnic/religious group requires the negotiation and interweaving of varying and multiple regulations, expectations and social codes in relation to gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Identity and belonging, with their consequent regulations, expectations and codes, come from a person’s predominantly hetero-normative and gender-normative ethnic/religious families and communities; predominantly Western/white middle class GLBTIQ communities; and predominantly hetero-normative and gender-normative wider social, political, educational, media and health institutions and systems. This negotiation of identities is highlighted by an initial question posed to Alyena by Sekneh in the ABC *Big Ideas* interview:

SB: I'm interested in asking how you’ve reconciled your relationship with your queer Muslim identity, particularly when I know there is an invitation for us to relinquish our faith in order to express our diverse genders and sexualities.

AM: I pause because there is no quick answer and I think it’s ... a part of a journey which you can still be challenged on, or you can still rethink or revisit. But I firmly say I am a queer Muslim because, to me, I cannot be queer and not Muslim and I cannot be Muslim and not queer: they are two halves to my whole.

Savin-Williams (1998) presents three main developmental tasks of GLBTIQ young people from diverse ethnic/religious backgrounds that are not necessarily experienced by GLBTIQ young people from dominant Anglo-white backgrounds when undertaking the journey that Alyena has un-
dertaken to arrive at her sense of being whole: 'I am a queer Muslim.' First, the young person needs to cultivate both a sexual identity and an ethnic/spiritual identity. Second, the young person must resolve or manage any conflicts that may arise in claiming allegiance to an ethnic/religious reference group and to a gay community. Third, the young person needs to negotiate any stigma and discrimination encountered because of the interconnections of homophobia, racism, sexism, anti-religious mind-sets and classism.

**Negotiating the phobia factors**

In the following, the conversation between Sekneh and Alyena exemplifies Savin-Williams' third point above: the need for multicultural, multifaith and sexually diverse young people to negotiate various 'phobia factors'. As Alyena illustrates in her discussion of her faith and her family, for many GLBTIQ young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, their ethnic/religious community and family can nurture a cultural identification, offer a deep sense of ethnic heritage and spiritual values, and provide a sense of self within the context of a family that shares a youth's struggles and oppressions from the wider society such as racism, Islamophobia and classism (Greene, 1997; Jackson & Sullivan, 1999; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998). Simultaneously, as Hooghe et al found in their research, being GLBTIQ within a Muslim family 'has strong repercussion for the family and community ... The family honour might be compromised ... [and] given the strong emphasis on family obligations, almost all respondents considered openly expressing one's homosexual identity to be an act of selfishness' (2010:67).

SB: I've learnt, Alyena, that homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia — it doesn't have a colour or a religion — and I think if we take up that line of argument that it's based on our religion, it's a reductionist, it's a simplistic argument. So how do you respond to homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia?

AM: Can I chuck another one in? — I'm going to add ethno-phobia.

SB: Can you explain that to me?

AM: Well the fact that again, many years ago, at a social space in Sydney, talking to another woman, she responded to me saying, 'Nuh, sorry, don't do Leb [Lebanese] chicks.' And I was offended and angry.
One, I'm not Leb – how dare you call me Leb. And then, two, poor Lebs! Why are they getting such a bad rap!

But I think this was a really telling moment for me, because it actually said that just by what I looked like, because I must be Leb because I look Leb, that someone's going to decide already what or who or how I am and so that is, like Islamophobia, that ridiculous ignorance ...

It's sad, because I still get the whole, 'Oh, you're not like what I expected or know about Muslims' [and I would say] 'What do you mean, I'm not like your expectation of a Muslim?', because my mum and dad would say well I'm exactly like that – a Muslim who has faith. In fact, my sister would say I'm more religious than she is, because when I'm angry I go and pray, and when I'm happy, I go and pray.

Those are the two extremes for me, whereas she'd be like, 'Can't be bothered with that.' And that's fair enough. But she would also argue, 'Your faith is so much stronger than mine and yet you'll be the one who, because you're open about having a faith, you're going to be the one being treated differently.' So I think that, yeah, we're living in an interesting time ... people have always, throughout the ages, always boxed people in, decided who they are on the basis of how they look. I worked in the blindness sector for many years and it was a very interesting world to be in because you're not making assumptions purely on how someone looks, you're doing it on the basis of how they communicate with you, how accessible they are, all the other senses apart from sight, and I found that it still could have the same prejudices that were imported over from the sighted world but at the same time, you had people going, 'Well hold on a minute, I'm not going to just accept things just because I've been told that.'

Upon further reflection, Alyena provides more examples of how even within the mainstream Western world, such as in the workplace, there are levels of heteronormativity that require negotiation and assertion of one's sexuality:

AM: Little things: I start at a new job, I have to out myself on day one because I hate that hetero assumption when I mention my child – of course I must be straight, instantly. So I mention Catherine's name right away. When I walk into the tea room, I have to do that again. When I meet someone new, I am the person who has to ram it down everyone's throat at work because I don't want that awkward moment because we work in this hetero-privileged world, you know, which unfortunately does think that we're all straight. And so I go, well it does make your life harder because heteros don't have to think about – 'Oh well, every day I need to now announce about my straight kid, and my straight life' – they
don’t have to experience that. So my mother was right [about my life being harder] but I’m not going to say that that would’ve changed who I am or where I am today.

As the above discussion illustrates, there is a need to provide a diversity of mental, emotional, physical and spiritual spaces and places where the multiple selves and multiple life-worlds (Cope & Kalantzis, 1995) can come together to share similar and differing joys, negotiate the multiple and interwoven phobias, and share understandings with others from one’s own groups and other groups in regard to living and loving in diversity.

Reconciling Western constructs of coming out with Muslim communities

As the transcribed interview unfolds, an added complexity is expressed within these places of belonging, particularly in relation to negotiating the diversity within one’s cultural/religious community and the positioning of one’s cultural and religious constructs of family, gender and sexuality in relation to Western constructs, as specifically evident when homosexuality is viewed as a symptom of ‘Westernization’, representing the moral decadence of Western society (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Shannahan, 2010). This becomes particularly pertinent and poignant in a queer Muslim’s decisions regarding coming out, a prevalent Western construction of publicly declaring and openly living one’s sexuality within one’s family of origin, rather than closeting or concealing it (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005b):

SB: It’s important to note that in our Muslim communities, we’re not a homogeneous group, that there’s diversity within diversity, and admittedly, in the context that I work as a psychologist, I’m meeting with quite extreme circumstances. What would you say to the voices that might argue that your journey is reflective of Western constructs of negotiating sexuality and what I mean is, for example, someone might have been able to leave home, meet a girlfriend, but when the parents come home, all the remnants of the girlfriend have to disappear, the photos come down and the girlfriend waits in the park or we hear things like marriages of convenience?

AM: My partner’s not Muslim and it was interesting when we met because straight up, I was very open about [my faith], I wear a
prayer(necklace) every single day, I only take it off at certain times..., my spirituality's important to me, and we had the conversations about ‘Well, what if we have kids’, and I said, ‘Well, I want to raise her or him Muslim’, and she went and explored Islam because she doesn’t have any religion and she was worried, what is that going to actually mean for the child and for her, and she liked it when she realized my family functions and how we live.

But before we even got to that point of having a child and we had moved in together, by then I was well and truly out. I told my parents that we were together and they were like, ‘All right, fine, but we don’t want to talk about it’ so it doesn’t actually exist if we don’t talk about it, and when my uncle, who lives overseas, came for a yearly family holiday and she wasn’t invited to that family holiday I realized, okay we’ve got a problem here because we’ve been together for three years now, and I’ve told my parents we’re together but I’m not going to force it down your throats so if you’re not comfortable with her and me in the same room, that’s okay, we’ll sleep in separate bedrooms.

I tried to do everything to please my family because I love my family but I don’t know if I would’ve done that today. No, I can’t do that today because I have a son and I must raise him to be proud of his mums but at that time, I thought this is what you do, because a good Muslim girl very much puts her family first and never mind if she’s planning to build a family with someone else, she’s still a daughter and a sister. And so for me, I did exactly that. I didn’t send her off to the park, she would’ve killed me for that, but I kept the bedroom door closed or I made things sort of awkward so that I’d say, ‘We’re together but we’re not actually together’, and then when my uncle came for the usual family holiday in the country, and she wasn’t invited, I realized, well you know what, I’m creating issues in my relationship, I actually have to do something, that, yes, in many ways is that Western construct, the Western notion of ‘you must come out, you must go out and scream it down the street’ which I never wanted to do to my parents. I’d already done it by being queer officer and doing lots of uni things and all that in the activist world but I didn’t want to do that with my parents. I wanted to have the best of both worlds ... [but] living that dual life was very difficult so I think that the walls came tumbling down and it all crashed and I had to have tears from mother and tears from partner and tears from myself and tears from everybody before everybody said, ‘All right, we have to do something public while being respectful of the private.’

Catherine and I went one step further and we had a wedding. A few years ago we had a big [wedding], she was pregnant at the time so it was a dry wedding [no alcohol] which my father was very happy about. I wasn’t, but he was and she was, and it was high tea and it was a day event, and
it was respectfully done. I will say, kissing her in front of my father was the most awkward moment I've ever had, to this day. The photo shows me going ... tiny little pecks, the one that your grandmother gives you, it was horrible, horrible. So I think there is that issue of the Western belief that you've got to be out but, unfortunately in my case, until I actually did come out my parents weren't able to accept it and this is the irony because I was trying to be the good Pakistani girl and not ram it down their throats, for want of a better word, like not scream about being queer, but they actually needed the wedding, they needed to see ... 

SB: What did it make possible?

AM: The fact that well, it's not a phase any more, let's get over that one. But more than that, this is a life that Alyena has chosen. One of the saddest moments when I came out, I came out a million times to my mother, then denied it, went back in, came out again, denied it, went back in, and I did this again and again and again and one of those moments when we were sitting and crying about it, my mother said something to me that I've never forgotten and I take with me every day because I do and I don't believe it. She said, 'I'm crying because your life now will be so much harder than it could have been.' Now I look at my life and I go, I have a wonderful partner, wonderful son, wonderful house in Melbourne, all that - my life is not hard.

In the above, Alyena provides her own personal example of how she considered coming out as important in being able to effectively and respectfully interweave traditional family values such as weddings (and without alcohol) and raising a Muslim child, with her lesbian relationship with a non-Muslim who was pregnant with their child and with whom she had established a home and family. This exemplifies Hooghe et al's finding that queer Muslims and their families must connect and collaborate in 'demonstrating upholding family values can be fully compatible with a respect for LGBT rights' (2010: 68).

'We need more people like me to be visible'

In the following, Alyena is invited to speak about significant factors she believes would successfully support the negotiation and advocacy of people's various identities within Muslim communities, thereby making it much more possible for queer Muslims to be visible in personal, public and popular cultural settings. This, in turn, would challenge simplistic and damaging stereotypes coming from all sectors of Australian society:
AM: I think it's two-fold ... One, it's definitely [Muslim] religious leaders who are willing to actually go, 'Well, hold on a minute, what exactly is the issue with a same-sex relationship?' Enough of this "[it's not] natural" nonsense, because we've moved on from that, we've got IVF and all of that medical science and Islam actually embraces medical science and says, "This is very important, you need to try and find a cure for every ailment", so you can tick that box. The second thing I think we need, and this one I really want to tread lightly on because of the respect issue, is we need more people like me to be visible. I mean, jokes aside, this is exhausting. Every time I do this, every time I write something, every time I speak to someone, I am exhausted after, for multiple reasons. When I first started running the Queer Muslims in Australia Yahoo Group, in late 2004, I was terrified that either I would be killed or my mother or my father or my sister would be killed or someone from the community would kill themselves. I was terrified. I was thinking worst case scenario. So I went under a pseudonym; for years I was Aly M. I refused to use my name, and thankfully, and this shows you that we do live in a reasonably laidback nation — no one cared, nothing happened. And I think that's given me the courage to be more visible and by being more visible I do two things. One, I tell people yes, you can be queer and Muslim, and that's important for people in the Muslim community but it's also important for people in the non-Muslim community, to not just make that assumption: 'You live in this religion where you've got crazy Taliban people who are going around chopping each others' heads off — why would you want to identify [with that]?' Well, I can say, 'No, I identify as Muslim but I am very much queer as well', so I think it's two-fold.

There are seven significant factors in the successful negotiation of people's various identities and communities, and the extent to which they feel safe, comfortable and confident in being visible. First, strong support networks and friendships with other GLBTIQ people of same and/or similar cultural and religious backgrounds are considered of great significance (Jackson & Sullivan, 1999). Likewise, having access to and participation in both the GLBTIQ and ethnic communities while transcending both to live with a code of their own is important (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995). Third, GLBTIQ people want control over how, when and if to come out, or invite people to come in (Hammoud-Beckett, 2007; Shannahan, 2010) to their ethnic families as well as receiving acceptance and support for those decisions from their GLBTIQ friends, ethnic friends and school/workplace friends (Greene, 1997). Fourth,
media coverage of GLBTIQ individuals and role models from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and historical facts about sexual diversity within their own home cultures needs to be made available in queer, ethnic community and mainstream papers, queer, ethnic and mainstream television, film and music such as the documentary *A Jihad for Love* (2007) (Drucker, 2000; Murray & Roscoe, 1997; Shannahan, 2010). Fifth, educational, workplace and health systems can address racism, sexism and homophobia equally, consistently and in interconnected ways via policy development, professional development programmes and pastoral care of clients, students and staff (Savin-Williams, 1998). Sixth, GLBTIQ people from diverse ethnic/religious backgrounds want queer community organizations and services, gay venues, papers and other media avenues to promote and implement policies and practices that cater for their diverse cultural backgrounds (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998). Finally, schools, GLBTIQ community services, ethnic community services and mainstream health services need to undertake research into their multicultural, multisexual populations (Fish, 2008; Yip, 2008), and make available more personal accounts of growing up queer Muslim (see for example Khan, 1997; Manji, TI 2003; Siraf, 2006); and incorporate multisexuality into multicultural school, health promotion, workplace and community events.

**Concluding thoughts: Re-storying and queerying identities.**

The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story (Adidiche).

This chapter ventures to inhabit the border zones of multiple marginalities via interweaving some relevant theoretical and research literature and a transcribed interview between two Muslim women. ‘Queeryed’ were the stereotypes by making visible the diverse stories that exist within Muslim communities. This was apparent in the way one woman’s story illustrates the ongoing journey of negotiations and navigations between and within her multiple life-worlds (Cope & Kalantzis, 1995). In instituting such explorations we have endeavoured to not make one story become the only story, and germinated a sense of miscellany, acceptance and inclusion of queer Muslim identities.

We hope this chapter inspires people and becomes one of many stories of
Living the Rainbow

queer Muslims that need to be told in Australia. Hearing the stories that exist within Muslim communities encourages people to hold an informed position in relation to deconstructing and reconstructing their discourses around genders, sexualities and Muslim culture/religion. In their research with British queer Muslims, Jaspa and Cinnirella found that:

A clear distinction was made between spirituality, associated with a (perfect) God, and religion, which was perceived as being prescribed by generations of human beings who had misinterpreted, and thus misrepresented, God’s word (2010: 866).

Thus, an Allah that endorses a sense of respect, freedom and benevolence is reclaimed, in contrast to the dominant mainstream Muslim and non-Muslim narratives of an Allah that seeks retribution and persecution for the perceived abomination of diverse sexualities and genders. As some of these complexities are embedded within Muslim communities, so too are the complimentary solutions, such as weighing ‘the strength of homophobic arguments against the weight of Allah’s intimate closeness, which is, according to the Qur’an, ‘with you wheresoever ye may be’ (Qur’an 57:4’ (Shanahan, 2010: 680. When ‘living the rainbow’, there is anticipation that the splendour of our colourful humanity is treated with dignity and respect by their appointed creator and communities. In our daily queerying and navigating, and diverse strategies of border dwelling, we conclude with the relevant Qur’anic quote:

Every creature in the heavens and on earth:
Every day in new splendour.
The Holy Qur’an, Surah 55, Al-Rahman, verse, 29

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The Holy Quran.