

Sexuality and integration: a case of gay Iranian refugees’ collective memories and integration practices in Canada

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ABSTRACT

During the past two decades, Canada has accepted hundreds of LGBT asylum seekers, including gay Iranian men. Sociologists of sexualities and migration have yet to study this group as immigrants whose sexualities play a central role in their social interactions, immigration, and integration practices. Taking integration as a category of practice and relying on Halbwachs’s theory of collective memory, I provide an empirical study of integration practices of gay Iranian refugees in Canada. I draw on 32 interviews with gay Iranian refugees to analyse their interactions with Canadian society at large, the Canadian gay community, and Iranian Diaspora. My findings indicate that memories play the role of proxies that inform gay Iranian refugees’ interactions in Canada at the intersection of race-ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and nationality.

KEYWORDS: Integration; sexuality; collective memory; refugees; LGBT; Canada

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Introduction

During the past two decades, Canada has welcomed hundreds of LGBT asylum seekers. Gay Iranian men make up a noticeable proportion of this category of refugees in Canada. While the number of LGBT asylum claimants in the West is increasing each year, sociologists of sexualities and migration studies have yet to study this group not solely as refugees, but also as immigrants whose sexualities play a central role in their social interactions, immigration, and integration practices (Kahn and Alessi 2017; Akin 2017). In this paper, I focus on this latter theme. My goal is to deploy sexuality as an analytical lens to shed light on diversities in integration practices, underline the role of power relations around sexuality in regulating integration, and, thus, highlight the insufficiency of the ethnic lens in studying migration and integration.

In writing this article I join scholars who have called for re-conceptualization of integration, not as a category of analysis but as a category of practice, by paying attention to the ways immigrants and non-immigrants reconstruct their everyday lives in the urban spatiotemporal registers of North American and European cities (Korteweg 2017; Dahinden 2016; Oosterlynck et al. 2016; Wieviorka 2014; Brubaker 2013; Lentin 2008). This emergent body of literature invites “a return to studying old-fashioned discrimination” through historicized and rigorous analysis of integration practices within a diverse political, economic, and social matrix rooted in memories and histories of colonialism, capitalism, and oppression in the host and home countries and “based on the intersections between race, ethnicity, class, gender, and religion” (Korteweg 2017, 13).

I argue that integration as a category of practice is, in a way, a turn towards the classic understandings of integration in sociology. Durkheim (2014 [1984]), in the wake of mass social changes at the turn of the twentieth century, argued that integration, a means towards social

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3 cohesion, is not merely an issue of objective division of labour but also a matter of moral
4 convictions, shared symbols, and ideas. This emphasis highlights the importance of individuals'
5 social encounters in shaping different forms of national solidarity (Oosterlynck et al. 2016; Loch
6 2014). Thus, examining pre-migration experiences and memories that refugees and immigrants
7 bring with them (Fokkema and Haas 2015) provides a better understanding of integration
8 practices as these memories and experiences function as proxies for establishing mutual senses
9 of belonging (Harold and Fong 2018; Karimi and Bucerius 2017). I will analyse the integration
10 practices of gay Iranian men at the nexus of asylum-migrants not to eliminate experiences of
11 "refugeeness" (Lacroix 2004), but to emphasize that it is not possible to draw a definitive
12 boundary between refugee and immigrant categories (Castles 2003).

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14 To underline the diversities in integration practices, I bring sexuality – an often overlooked
15 factor – to the centre of analysis. I provide an empirical study of integration practices of gay
16 Iranian refugees in Canada and, consequently, contribute to the limited literature on sexuality
17 and migration which to date has mainly focused on Asian and Latino immigrants (Cantú 2009;
18 Luibheid 2008; Manalansan 2006; Carrillo 2004). At a theoretical level, in line with the
19 Durkheimian understanding of integration, I operationalize Maurice Halbwachs's (1992)
20 "collective memory", the shared social frameworks of individual recollections, to analyse
21 individuals' and collectives' reconstruction of their past experiences that inform their daily lives
22 in Canada. To bridge the methodological challenge of choosing between individual or collective
23 units of analysis, I rely on ethnography and interviews to capture refugees' narratives to explore
24 the dialectic and interconnectedness between the two individual and collective levels (Olick
25 1999).

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3 In what follows, I will first review the literature on integration and sexuality in migration
4 studies. Second, I will outline the concept of collective memory and its relevance to migration
5 studies. Third, I will discuss my six-month fieldwork consisting of 32 semi-structured interviews
6 with 19 gay Iranian men in Canada. Fourth, I will discuss gay Iranian men's pre-migration
7 experiences and collective memories, which are profoundly shaped by stigmatization, Iranian
8 family values and gender norms, and misinformed views of the West. I will then thematically
9 present and discuss my findings on gay Iranian men's interactions with Canadian society at
10 large, Canadian gay communities, and Iranian Diaspora.
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24 **Integration, Canadian context, and sexuality**

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26 Early assimilation theories approached immigration as a challenge to the imagined social
27 cohesion of the host country (Nagel 2002; Alba and Nee 1997) and focused on the ways that
28 migrants practised assimilation, i.e., the unquestioning adoption of the host country's cultural
29 norms (Portes 1969; Gordon 1964). By the end of the twentieth century, however, migration
30 scholars had demonstrated the unrealistic underpinnings of assimilation theory and argued that
31 integration, i.e., the adoption of host cultural norms while retaining home cultural norms, is the
32 more common strategy among immigrants and, thus, a more practical immigration policy. Portes
33 and Rumbaut (2001), for instance, suggested that immigrants' lived experiences as members of
34 ethnic communities and host society inform their integration strategies. Similarly, segmented
35 assimilation theories underline various individual and contextual factors such as education, race,
36 and economic background which inform interactions and inter-group solidarities (Zhou 2014).
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51 Thus, migration researchers emphasize that integration in host societies is neither
52 unidirectional nor objective, nor is it independent of individuals' and groups' experiences
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(Karimi and Bucerius 2017; Anthias 1998). More recently, scholars have further questioned the traditional assimilation and integration theories which, influenced by rational-choice theory and economics, presumed linearity in social processes and measured integration based on national or ethnic groups' performances, often "regardless of national context(s)" of home and host countries (Crul 2016, 63). Accordingly, Wieviorka (2014) argues that commonplace models of integration are not able to account for the growing diversity in intra-group integration practices since former linearities are being replaced by more diversity. We now need more intricate analyses to account for intra-group as well as inter-group integration practices, since a well-integrated society is ultimately a society of individuals *and* groups (Crul 2016; Faist 2009). This is a burgeoning task that should not overlook the role of the state as the most salient route for claim-making.

In this paper I take integration as a matter of collective action and active participation of individuals, immigrant and non-immigrant, in mutual reproduction of social life (Ager and Strager 2008), since "each one of the functions that the members exercise is constantly dependent upon others and constitutes with them a solidly linked system" (Durkheim 2014 [1984], 173). It is in these diversified interactions that senses of belonging and group solidarities are constructed as firmly as those solidarities built on political and economic ties (Schneider and Crul 2010).

Integration in Canadian contexts is a component of Canadian multiculturalism, which, as a model of policy and practice, emphasizes finding ways to integrate differences with the goal of social inclusion and cohesion (Abu-Laban 1998). However, scholars have noted that racial and gender biases are inherent to the Canadian nation-state and that the official multicultural policies are symbolic strategies of embracing neoliberal economies for the mainstream white, patriarchal,

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3 and heterosexual citizens (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002). The wave of re-ethnicization in
4 Canada (Winter 2014), similar to the culturalization of citizenship or civic integration in some
5 Western European countries, places sexuality and gay rights at the forefront of drawing legal,
6 political, and cultural boundaries between non-Western immigrants and native populations
7 (Kahn and Alessi 2017; Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010).

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10 To refrain from a linear and homogenized understanding of social groups and to address the
11 insufficiency of examining integration through the ethnic lens, I suggest complicating data
12 collection and analysis by accounting for inter- and intra-group differences and commonalities.
13 To this end, I incorporate the recent feminist sociological literature on sexuality, migration, and
14 integration – known as queer migration scholarship – which explores “how sexuality constitutes
15 a ‘dense transfer point for relations of power’ that structure all aspects of international
16 migration” (Luibheid 2008, 169). In other words, this line of research underlines the intra-group
17 diversities around sexual and gender identities and explores the ways that (attitudes and
18 experiences of) sexuality may also drive immigration, inform group membership, and affect
19 integration in host societies (Epstein and Carrillo 2014; Mai and King 2009; Cantu 2009;
20 Manalansan 2006; Ahmadi 2003; Cruz and Manalansan 2002).

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22 The incorporation of the queer migration literature into the integration-as-practice argument
23 enables me to account for the ways that (homo)sexuality as well as gender, race, and other
24 relevant factors intersect in creating social hierarchies and informing integration practices
25 (Dhoest 2018; Röder and Lubbers 2015; Lewis and Naple 2014). This body of literature, in line
26 with criticisms of traditional integration theories and policies, has questioned the presumption
27 that sexual minority immigrants experience smooth transition and integration in western host
28 societies. Several scholars have shown that the current social acceptance of homosexuality in the

West mainly targets the social inclusion of white, middle-class citizens and marginalizes the voices of queers of colour (Duggan 2012 [2003]; Murray 2014) who strive to “address the complex intersections of sexuality with race, class and gender” (Grundy and Smith 2005, 390) in selecting integration strategies and constructing senses of belonging.

Collective memory and integration

To analyse the individual and intra-group diversities as well as memories and experiences that inform integration practices, I use the sociological theory of collective memory (Halbwachs 1992) since it allows asking who remembers and how remembering happens, and therefore why certain individuals and groups choose certain integration practices in the host countries (Harold and Fong 2018). Also, collective memory theory is effectively applicable to qualitative data and participants’ narratives because it is a mid-level theory that theorizes the “limited ranges of data-theories [collected through qualitative interviews] for example of class dynamics, of conflicting group pressures, of the flow of power and *the exercise of interpersonal influence*” (Merton 1968 [1957] cited in Castles 2017, 12, *italics added*).

Following a Durkheimian tradition that emphasizes the role of the past and historical continuities in creating social solidarities, Halbwachs (1992) conceptualized collective memory as shared social frameworks of individual recollections. Halbwachs places his analysis in contrast with individual psychology by underlining that minds work along with each other and are influenced by social structures (Olick and Robinson 1998): “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories ... the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them” (Halbwachs 1992, 38).

Halbwachs's sociological but individualistic understanding of memory applies the theory of collective representation to the question of group memory to account for the interplay between individual and group memories (Olik 2008), as individual memories are socially mediated because individuals are in constant communication with others "who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past" (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995, 127). According to Halbwachs, all remembering occurs through group dynamics, and an individual's interactions with other group members shape how and what the individual remembers from past experiences, indicating that "even though an individual does have a particular perspective on this group reconstruction of the past, he or she does not have an independent memory of the past" (Russell 2006, 796). Collective memory also emphasizes the particular nature of the group and the ways it creates shared memories, such that any individual can be part of several different social groups and can rely on these groups' different collective memories (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995).

Thus, if we take collective memory as informing individuals' actions while being reshaped through the same actions and interactions, we "need to unpack which sources of meaning are mobilized in processes" (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2009, 220) of integration at individual and group levels. This is because "social processes of integration are (mostly indirect) consequences of situationally reasonable reactions of the involved actors to the respectively given societal conditions" (Esser 2004, 1127). By using qualitative data and narrative analysis, it is possible to understand the ways any particular social group may draw on shared meanings to make or break social ties with other groups.

Bikmen (2013) has used collective memory to understand group identification and out-group attitudes among Bosnian Serbs and Croats in the United States. Highlighting the similarities in

the two ethnic groups’ narratives of shared origin, Bikmen analyses the strategies of ethnic co-existence after immigration. A few other studies, including the literature on Iranian Diaspora, have used the concept of collective memory to analyse immigrants’ sociocultural organizations, but these studies homogenize ethnic groups and focus on their reconstruction of ethnic and national identities in host countries (see for example Majumdar 2017; Sorek 2011; Moghadam 2007; Salaita 2005). These studies fail to account for the role of sexuality in their analyses of refugees’ intra-group differences and ethnic minorities’ experiences. In contrast to this previous work, I will explore the ways that past experiences and histories of socialization inform integration in Canada beyond the limits of ethnicity and at the intersections of sexuality, gender, race, and religion (Harold and Fong 2018; Maghbouleh 2017).

Methodology

Ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in Canada throughout the fall of 2016 and the winter of 2017 with 19 gay Iranian men who had come to Canada as refugees. Since Iranian citizens do not need a visa to enter Turkey, gay Iranian men often make asylum cases to the closest United Nations offices, located in various cities in Turkey, and are then resettled in Canada. I had already worked with the Iranian gay community in several research projects and established close ties with them. I contacted a participant from my earlier fieldwork and relied on his contacts and snowball sampling to find participants in Canada. I forwarded my contact information and a brief project description to potential participants, and with their consent we communicated via Facebook Messenger and telephone. In 2016 I interviewed eight participants in Vancouver. I then interviewed 11 more participants in Toronto and Ottawa in 2017. Interviews lasted for about two hours each and were complemented by detailed field notes taken during and

after interviews. Next, and following data analysis, I conducted 13 follow-up one-hour interviews via telephone and Skype ($N = 32$ interviews in total). All interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the informant. I conducted observations and interviews in participants' homes as well as public spaces such as cafes, parks, malls, and workplaces. I attended a gathering at the home of one participant in celebration of Persian New Year but did not conduct any interviews at this gathering.

In each interview I explored participants' daily lives in Iran, the development of their sexual identities, their experiences of seeking asylum and resettlement in Canada, and their feelings about their current situations, among other topics. Interviews were semi-structured to secure narratives that are based on the personal experiences of the subject, because individuals' understandings of their social interactions are essential for interpreting and analysing their choices. Narratives and personal stories that draw on collective memories reveal how each participant experiences and makes sense of his world (Gemignani 2011).

I used an inductive approach to analyse my findings. I started with open coding and attached comments to quotes and excerpts from the data. Once the thematic categorization of data was established (as presented in the following sections), I undertook a more rigorous analysis to explain the emergence of these typologies by a deductively derived theoretical argument (Esser 2004). The collective memory theory proved most capable of making sense of this set of data.

All participants were born and raised in Iran. With one exception, they all had a university education. All self-identified as gay. They ranged in age from 22 to 37, and their length of stay in Canada at the time of the interview ranged from 2 to 7 years. They identified themselves as middle class in Iran but working class in Canada. None expressed strong religious beliefs. The

interviews were conducted in Persian, except for one which was conducted in English. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and all quotations in this paper were translated by the author.

Pre-migration experiences and expectations

Sexuality in Iran is regulated through religious and governmental heterosexist discourses where femininity is depreciated against masculinity and men and women are expected to follow strict codes of masculinity and femininity. These patriarchal discourses inform and shape a variety of micro-level and macro-level events such as daily experiences of rejection due to the perceived violation of gender identities, denial of the existence of homosexuals by the state’s leaders, and implementation of the death penalty for same-sex acts. These events shape intense feelings of shame, fear, and guilt among gay Iranian men – emotions that have an essential role in any recollection (Durkheim 2014 [1984]). One respondent said:

There is so much hatred and ignorance about homosexuality in Iran. Every day I was reminded to act like a man, and I was expected to get married of course ... moreover, on top of all of this, there is government aggression, you know that they can easily hang you if you're caught having sex with a man!

I asked participants about their imaginations of life in the West while still struggling with social and legal vulnerabilities in Iran; one participant said, “I thought people are more accepting of gay people! I read tons of news and blogs ... and of course movies, there are so many romance gay movies, so I used to think it is not a big deal for them”. Indeed, one important factor impacting gay Iranian men’s integration practices in Canada is family values. While in Iran family is the central point of negotiating memberships and identities, the new discourse of

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3 equal rights to marriage for LGBTs in the West, disseminated through Hollywood movies and
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5 the Internet, has gained increasing popularity among gay Iranian men (Karimi 2018). This is
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7 particularly tangible in online spaces where many gay Iranian men's Facebook profiles are
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9 marked with statuses such as 'engaged' and 'married' to another male. One participant said, "I
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11 am a human and have rights. Why in other countries can gay and straight people get married and
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13 have children, but we cannot in Iran?"
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17 It was evident throughout the interviews that gay Iranian men's pre-migration memories
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19 entailed contradictory experiences of precarious life in Iran versus expectations of access to
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21 security and equality in the West. Gay Iranian men's collective memories depicted the West "as
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23 modern, rich, high quality, and power and Iran as traditional, backward, and powerless"
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25 (Khosravi 2009, 607). Above all, and as emphasized by all participants, pre-migration
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27 expectations and imageries of life in the West lacked insights on integration barriers such as
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29 marginalization from Iranian diaspora, broader social inequalities, and racism.
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35 **Interactions with Canadian society**

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37 An initial analysis of gay Iranian men's collective memories, which divide Iran and the West into
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39 two opposites of oppression and freedom, would indicate gay Iranian men's willingness to build
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41 social ties and participate in various community activities once they live in Canada. However,
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43 more in-depth analyses of participants' daily experiences in Canada revealed a sharp alteration in
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45 gay Iranian men's views on ethnicity and belonging. For example:
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49 We all thought of Canada as a place to have freedom and happiness ... I am free to wear
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51 what I want, but I know that I am stereotyped right away, anywhere I go, and I do not
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53 know what to do with it.
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Another participant said: “It does not make a difference to try because you like it or not they look at you and you are an Arab or East Indian to them, now go figure how to explain it otherwise!” In the post-9/11 era the contrast between the Orient and the Occident has further solidified and has led to ethnicity, nationality, culture, and skin colour being negatively associated with Islam, forced marriages, honour killings, etc., through the homogenizing lens of Islamophobia (Korteweg and Yurdakul 2009). More in-depth scrutiny revealed that sexuality, as an invisible marker of identity, has been replaced by a more visible marker: gay Iranian men have come to understand themselves as racialized men mainly defined through their skin colour which is taken as a sign of religiosity. Most of the participants were not *out* with their friends and colleagues, not because they feared homophobia, but because they no longer saw sexuality as an important factor in shaping their interactions:

Sexual orientation does not have any role in me feeling included here. We thought it would be important, but no one can see that I am gay! I mean it is not written on my forehead! People see me and my colour ...

Although the participants’ imaginations were not informed by first-hand memories and experiences of daily life in Canada before their arrival in their host country, they have been able to reshape their perceptions of life in Canada and develop strategies that promote their integration and belonging. For instance, three participants expressed their unwillingness to share their stories of asylum and experiences of discrimination with others, as they had learned that sharing their stories results not in common understanding but in expressions of pity and superiority, with the white Canadians as ‘heroes’ who have saved the Oriental (Posniak 2009; Ahmed 2000). All participants preferred not to talk about their country of origin. Some, however, mentioned that they would identify as *Persian*, not Iranian, in negotiating racial boundaries and

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3 seeking proximity with white citizens (Maghbouleh 2017). Regarding this latter strategy, which
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5 is a common integration strategy among Iranian Diasporas, one participant said:
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7 I learned about being ‘Persian’ when I arrived here ... even in Turkey, we were Iranian.
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10 In our history books and media [in Iran] we already learn that Iranians are different,
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12 better, from Arabs or most of our neighbouring countries, but it was here [that] ... I saw
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14 that Iranians, gay and straight, talk about themselves as Persian because it is not as
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16 negative as Iranian to Canadians.
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19 The development of these new strategies through individual initiatives and their later
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21 adoption by group members attest to the flexibility of collective memories, individuals’ agency
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23 in responding to new conditions, and the importance of social interactions in informing groups’
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25 integration strategies. Accordingly, and despite the experiences of exclusion along racial lines,
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27 more than half of the participants stated they felt they belong in Canada, and described
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29 Canadians as “accepting of gay people” and Canada as “truly multicultural”. They mentioned
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31 that in their experience “open-minded Canadians” were more likely to join gay Iranian men in
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33 social gatherings and friendship groups. Open-mindedness was associated with upper-class, well-
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35 travelled, educated, and, at times, liberal identities. Therefore, in addition to ethnicity and
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37 nationality, upper-class identity and education are factors impacting the attainment of social
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39 belonging. Further, these findings show that integration is not a mere responsibility of
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41 newcomers or a social problem (Dahinden 2016), but a multidimensional process of (re)building
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43 universal ties, shared meanings and memories, and trust between members of social groups
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45 (Durkheim 2014 [1984]; Olick and Robinson 1998).
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54 **Interactions with Canadian gay communities**

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Gay Iranian men’s pre-emigration perceptions of similarities between their own experiences and desires and those of sexual minorities in Canada had set up expectations of building strong social ties with Canadian LGBT communities. However, data collected in Canada show that the reality is quite the opposite: gay Iranian men are generally sexualized, racialized, and marginalized in Canadian gay communities. One participant said: “I feel like they [Canadians] want me, sorry, but only for a one-night stand because I’m darker, I know they say I’m exotic”. He continued, “I feel wanted, for sex, but not for anything more. They have their own friends and communities, and I do not think I have any place there”. Another participant who had worked at gay clubs recounted several stories about how he was “hit on” by white Canadian gay men only to be later insulted by them through racial slurs such as “camel rider” and “terrorist”. This was echoed in the narratives of several other participants. One stated:

I was on Grindr for a while, and you do not know how many times they told me to go back and bomb your own country as soon as they realized I am Iranian! During the day no one says these things, but on Grindr or in clubs they think they can say whatever!

It seemed that defining insider status through sexuality and membership in the imagined gay community has come to facilitate social exclusion: sexuality overrides the political correctness that is witnessed in interactions with wider Canadian society and allows white Canadian gay men (assuming that their online profiles are authentic) to express racist slurs. Participants’ narratives revealed that their collective memories, which were heavily formed by “movies like *A Single Man* or *Queer as Folk* and many other YouTube videos of gay prides in Canada”, did not contain signs of “exclusion if a gay person is not from Canada and is not well-off white”.

The above quotes resonate with Said’s (2004 [1979], 1) argument that the Orient has become “one [of the West’s] deepest and most recurring images of the Other”, replete with

excessive sexuality available for exploitation and manipulation by the rational and superior West. In the current globalized world, the Oriental male is depicted through the axiom of fear-desire. On the one hand, Oriental man is “stateless, dark, perverse, pedophilic, disowned by family” (Puar 2006, 71). On the other hand, the Oriental man – in this case, the Oriental gay man – embodies the white man’s colonial desire (Cantú 2002); he “becomes an allegory of the white men’s repressed fantasies, the mainstay of his preoccupations and his desires” (Khosravi 2009, 599; see also Fanon 2008 [1952]).

As mentioned above, the current dominant political rhetoric on equal rights is assimilationist and is founded on a new and precarious homonormativity, i.e., a white middle-class neoliberal sexual politics that “does not contest the dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency” (Duggan 2012 [2003], 179). One participant said, “during all these years, I have been to a few LGBT community meetings ... I went there to make friends, but it seems their connections are already built, and there is no place for others”. Later he clarified that he could not remember seeing any other immigrant gay men in those meetings, and continued:

You know they talk about things that seem so trivial to me like book clubs or stuff when some [immigrant] gay men have a hard time making ends meet! ... Maybe there are some more active groups out there, but I do not know about them.

Homonormative sexual politics require adherence to normativity for sociopolitical belonging to safeguard the national and moral national boundaries (Murray 2014; Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010). Therefore, similar to the situation where most established immigrant groups show low support for increasing immigration in Canada in fear of losing their status (Reitz

2012), the newly accepted mainstream LGBT groups show unwillingness towards the incorporation of queers of colour (El-Tayeb 2012).

Although currently there are a few queer Muslim groups in major Canadian cities who embrace sexual minorities from Middle-Eastern backgrounds, none of the participants had experience of or desire for membership in such communities. Several participants tied religion, Islam in particular, to their experiences of rejection and fear. For instance, one participant commented on how the news of the alleged homosexuality of two teenagers and their execution in Iran in 2005 had become a traumatic component of gay Iranian men’s collective memories:

I was a teenager when they killed them. You can still find the photos of their public execution on the Internet Every single gay guy in Iran has seen the photos. We have all experienced the fear. The government killed them, and many other gays, because they say being gay is against the religion.

Further, four participants drew on generalized cultural norms to hold up Persian identity, irreligiosity, and proximity with the Caucasian race against Muslim and Arab identities. One participant in Vancouver specifically mentioned:

I know a few Middle-Eastern gay guys, Syrian I guess ... I have added them on Facebook; I see they post things about Islam in Arabic ... but I do not get them! They have run away from their Muslim people, but still follow [religion] ...

Another factor in regulating gay Iranian men’s daily interactions is holding family values that, according to the participants, are different from the popular trends in Canada. One participant contrasted the Iranian and Canadian cultures in general and specified that:

I am confused with [gay] people here. What are all the LGBT movies that they produce about? You would think relationship and family are important for them too, but I feel like

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3 it is all a bubble. I have dated a few Canadians, and I am baffled by how individualistic
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5 and selfish they are! I am not sure if they understand what a family is!

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8 Participants' narratives reveal that their memories, and therefore their social expectations, are
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10 based on images spread by the Internet and media and different from the reality of the post-
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12 migration context. One immediate consequence of this mismatch between pre-migration
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14 memories and post-migration daily life was gay Iranian refugees' apathy towards inter-racial
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16 dating, i.e. the "intermarriage" which is celebrated as an important facilitator of integration by
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18 migration scholars (Alba and Nee 1997; Gordon 1964). My findings underline their inclinations
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20 to only date other gay Iranian men; as one participant said: "It seems that only we [Iranians]
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22 understand and want that family-type lifestyle". I also discuss, however, the intra-group
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24 heterogeneities that were revealed.
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29 Three participants, who either were in or had had long-term partnerships with white
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31 Canadian gay men, mentioned that they share the common viewpoint of the Iranian gay
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33 community in Canada. However, they emphasized that their experiences and memories that were
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35 shaped in Iran were not merely bound to their media-based imageries or memories of fear; rather,
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37 they highlighted that other experiences such as their particular family norms from Iran had
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39 enabled them to build better, albeit limited, ties with Canadian-born gay men. One participant
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41 said:
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44 I was raised to be independent ... I was seen as an individualist, maybe aloof, in Iran!
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47 Who knew it, now it has helped me a lot ... to survive here. There are many things
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49 involved though; my partner is also from an educated family and willing to accept our
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51 cultural differences ...
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Further, five participants mentioned that their interactions with the older generation of Canadian gay men and those with immigration backgrounds were less conflictual. After coming to Canada, participants came to believe that what they had seen in movies and romanticized images of LGBT movements and families was closer to what the older Canadian-born gay men had experienced and aspired to in their youth than the indifference and individualist tendencies of younger Canadian gay men. Also, participants talked about the stories of social and economic marginalization that they had heard from other racial minorities, of Asian and Latino backgrounds. In both cases, perceived similarities with older Canadian gay men's and immigrant gay men's experiences had resulted in a sense of proximity with these groups: "Maybe because they have similar experiences, the older guys were also marginalized, they did not have everything easy".

The quotations in this section testify to intra- and inter-group diversities and to Halbwachs's theory that collective memory reflects the particular nature of group experiences such that any individual can be part of several groups and draw on disparate but overlapping memories and ideas in social encounters to shape social solidarities (Oosterlynck et al. 2016).

Interactions with Iranian Diaspora

Gay Iranian men's experiences of exclusion, fear, and guilt from Iran directly inform their interactions with Iranian communities in Canada. This is mostly in the form of avoidance of other, non-homosexual Iranians or in the form of selective interactions conducted without revealing their sexual orientation. Reproduction of home-culture attitudes towards homosexuality among heterosexual Iranians, as perceived by the research participants, has become a barrier in creating feelings of belonging to Iranian diaspora, a source that could otherwise facilitate

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3 feelings of belonging in Canada. When I asked whether participants had had any negative
4 experiences in interacting with the Iranian diaspora, I realized that, except for a few cases, they
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6 had no willingness to build social ties with Iranian communities and that this out-group attitude
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8 also informed interactions with other visible minorities, Middle-Easterners in particular. In
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10 addition to the traumatic memories of executions, participants' memories were replete with fears
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12 of being "forced into heterosexual marriage" or being "physically punished after being caught
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14 having sex" with another man. One participant had lost his left ring finger when his older
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16 brother, who had learned about his sexual relations with another boy, had broken his fingers by
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18 jamming his hand in a heavy door to punish him. The combination of such memories led to a
19
20 disconnection from the Iranian Diasporas and from participation in diasporic exilic lives. One
21
22 participant described his interactions with heterosexual Iranians as intrusive: "they ask so many
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24 questions ... why are you single, or, where is your girlfriend ... I guess finally they will put it
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26 together ... I am gay and then I am sure the harm is more than the benefit".
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33 Only two participants had taken up jobs within the Iranian community (in Toronto); one of
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35 them said: "I have to hide so much from my co-workers and customers, who are mostly rich
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37 Iranians or the Lebanese ... sometimes I think about leaving. But I do not know how". Another
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39 participant said: "they [Iranians] reproduce their life here with the same culture. I know so many
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41 straight couples who live as if they are in Iran, man is the boss, and the girl powerless no matter
42
43 how educated". Although the literature on Iranian communities shows that there have been
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45 progressive changes in gender relations among heterosexual Iranian immigrants in the West
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47 (Farahani 2012; Dallalfar 1994), I argue that researchers have failed to explicate that these
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49 changes are only accepted as long as they prioritize patriarchy and men's hegemonic
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51 masculinities, both of which bolster heterosexism and preclude inclusive intra-community
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3 interactions and mutual alteration of collective memories replete with homophobia, exclusion,
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5 and fear.
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8 Research on the reproduction of home cultures and changes in immigrants’ attitudes
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10 indicates that any alteration in attitudes towards gender and sexuality in post-migration contexts
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12 is not a straightforward process since immigrants negotiate gender and sexuality based on the
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14 available resources (Karimi, Bucerius and Thompson 2018; Röder 2014). A variety of factors
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16 including racialization and marginalization specifically in the post 9/11 era (Sadeghi 2016),
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18 connection with home cultures (Soehl 2017), and fear of losing class and social status among
19
20 sexually conservative families in Iran and in exile have resulted in fixation of origin-culture
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22 attitudes towards homosexuality among heterosexual Iranian immigrants, contrary to Iranian
23
24 Diasporas’ successful structural assimilation (Gordon 1964). One participant said:
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28 Yes, Iranians are well educated, and most of them are financially successful, well-off
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30 people. But when you talk to them about this stuff [gender and sexuality], they don’t even
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32 want to hear it. It is like you question their whole identity! Just have a look at Iranians’
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34 Facebook page. There are a couple of psychologists who leave some random but
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36 educational posts about sexuality but no one comments on those posts, it is like they do
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38 not want to see it!
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43 For years, “self-identified homosexual Iranians [have been] compelled to distance
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45 themselves from the community to avoid being ostracized. They, therefore, find themselves in a
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47 double migrancy/exile – once with respect to the homeland, the second with respect to the
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49 Iranian community in Canada” (Shahidian 1999, 195; see also Abdi 2014). Some exceptions can
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51 be highlighted, however, to this long-standing marginalization of the Iranian sexual minorities.
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53 First, some participants noted that they find Iranians who have participated in the educational
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3 system in Canada more tolerant and accepting of homosexuality: “My neighbour is a retired
4 professor. After a while, I felt I could trust him and his family and I came out to them ... they
5 were quite accepting. I think it was because they are very well-educated”.

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10 Second, two respondents mentioned that their best friends are Baha’i and that they find most
11 Baha’i community members to be “tolerant people because I think their religion is more pro-
12 equality ... I have learned there is more emphasis on gender and family equality ... but I know
13 that they are still hesitant because their mentality is part of Iranian culture”. Third, participants
14 mentioned that younger Iranians in Canada, particularly those born in Canada, were less biased
15 and more accepting of sexual minorities. However, further inquiries showed that this latter claim
16 was not based on first-hand experience, as none of the participants knew any second-generation
17 Iranians in Canada. Indeed, participants’ collective memories from Iran, where they had built
18 limited friendships with non-gay individuals of their age and younger generations, had resulted
19 in perceptions and expectations of building social ties with younger Iranians in Canada. One
20 participant said: “[second-generation Iranians in Canada] should be similar to young people in
21 Iran, or even more open-minded about gays and lesbians because they grow up here, no? I do not
22 know anyone in person, but I expect it to be so”. These intra-group disparities of membership in
23 Iranian Diasporic groups indicate the growing diversity in intra-group integration practices and
24 the inadequacy of integration models that assume immigrants automatically form diasporas
25 (Wieviorka 2014).

26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 **Concluding remarks**

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51 There is a gap in research on integration practices of racialized sexual minority refugees who
52 simultaneously resemble and differ from the native-born sexual minorities with regards to social
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3 belonging and social inequalities. Faced with this paucity of knowledge about racialized sexual
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5 minority refugees' lives after resettlement, one is left to wonder about their experiences, needs,
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7 and agencies with regards to their social relations and identity transformations. Luckily, more
8
9 recently scholars across multiple disciplines have started to explore and account for the ways that
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11 sexuality informs various kinds of social interactions that affect groups' and individuals'
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13 practices and constitute sociopolitical systems of inclusion and exclusion. In this paper, I relied
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15 on Halbwachs's theory of collective memory to present a sociological study of gay Iranian men's
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17 integration practices in Canada at the intersection of sexuality, gender, race, and nationality. My
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19 goal was to underline the importance of sexuality for understanding intra- and inter-group
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21 diversities and to argue for the insufficiency of the ethnic lens in studying migration and
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23 integration.
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29 Traditionally, mainstream assimilation and integration theories have strongly suggested that
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31 immigrants' lived experiences as an ethnic group or as members of a particular cultural
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33 community inform post-migration interactions and integration practices. However, I argue that
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35 sexuality also plays a significant role in regulating social relations, along with gender,
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37 nationality, religion, race, and ethnicity. Sexuality, as an analytical lens, can be used to explore
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39 the pre-migration experiences that inform social gaps and junctures in post-migration contexts
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41 vis-à-vis membership in various social groups. For instance, my findings demonstrate on the one
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43 hand that in post-migration contexts sexuality might supersede the unifying effects of ethnicity,
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45 mark intra-group differences along the lines of sexual orientation, and inhibit access to
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47 community resources that could facilitate integration. On the other hand, we saw that, at times,
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49 the hegemonic effects of ethnicity and nationality might nullify the importance of sexual
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51 orientation which, on the part of gay refugees, was expected to positively inform social relations
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3 in the host society. The incorporation of sexuality in our analyses of social integration enables us
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5 to address the analytical limits of race and ethnicity by magnifying the role of patriarchy as well
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7 as hetero- and homonormativity as social forces that regulate inclusion, exclusion, and
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9 belonging. It is evident that power relations around sexuality not only impact racialized sexual
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11 minorities' lives in their home countries, but also intersect with race, ethnicity, gender, and
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13 religion in regulating integration in host countries.
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17 Thus, I invite future researchers to revisit predetermined categorizations such as immutable
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19 ethnic or LGBT communities, and to prioritize an understanding of social phenomena based on
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21 specific kinds of social relations and the interplay of these relations in informing integration
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23 practices. To this end, an incorporation of critical literature such as queer studies as well as
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25 feminist and critical race scholarship into migration studies will facilitate drawing a more
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27 nuanced, but also comprehensive, picture of integration practices.
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