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INTRODUCTION



Systemic Invisibilities, Institutional Culpabilities and Multicultural-Multifaith LGBTIQ Resistances

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I simply do not believe that one aspect of myself can possibly profit from the oppression of any other part of my identity. I know that my people cannot profit from the oppression of any other group which seeks the right to peaceful coexistence. (Lorde 1999: 306)

Welcome to the Special Section of this issue of *The Journal of Intercultural Studies*. We thank the very patient and collegial editors, Vince Marotta and Paula Muraca, for giving us the opportunity to bring together four pieces from four renowned Australian academic-activists that specifically address how social, political, legal, religious, health, educational and cultural systems and their institutions impact on the health and well-being, human rights and sexual citizenship of multicultural-multifaith (MCMF) LGBTIQ individuals, families and communities. We use the term academic-activists deliberately as these four contributors theorise, analyse and take action in health, law, education and religion. Thus, in addressing the intersectionality of identities and positionalities, the contributors present papers that intersect with and border academic theory, research, community engagement, policy and programme implementation, and personal reflection. Thus, the purpose of the four contributions in this Special Section are to develop an understanding of:

- the perspectives, realities and needs of MCMF LGBTIQ subjects and how health, legal, educational and religious systems and institutions are culpable in their invisibilisation, marginalisation and invalidation;
- future recognition, and directions in policies, resourcing and strategies in these four institutions that would improve the health and well-being of MCMF LGBTIQ subjects, their families and communities; and
- agentic strategies of resistance, reconstruction and self-determination transforming MCMF LGBTIQ subjectivities

‘Intersectionality, kyriarchy and refraction’: Theorising MCMF LGBTIQ in Diaspora

As Dalacoura writes, ‘Homosexuality has [...] become a source of intense cultural contestations at a global level’ (2014: 1290). In parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East,

opposition to homosexuality has become a means of 'affirming cultural integrity and authenticity' almost always 'defined and asserted in juxtaposition to the West, which either epitomises the threatening cultural outsider or becomes a tangible opponent through the actions of governments, NGOs and individual activists' (2014: 1291). She refers to 'historical amnesia' combined with a 'deliberate overlooking of the continuing and widespread existence of same-sex practices' in all cultures, faiths and geographical settings (2014: 1302). These realities then manifest in further complexity and multiplicity in migration, refugee and asylum seeking. Indeed, as Kosnick asserts, homophobic repression and regulation of sexuality in cross-border mobilities, and subsequent multicultural-multifaith communities, has received 'scant attention' in mainstream migration research (2011: 126). Indeed, heteronormative and gender-normative assumptions and principles have structured much intercultural research. LGBTIQ repressions and resistances still tend to be 'relegated to the realm of the personal and local [...] seemingly irrelevant to general conversations about globalisation, transnational capitalism and migratory movements', thereby preventing the recognition of the culpability of the state through its systems and structures (2011: 127). 'Epistemic decolonisation' needs to be embedded within 'issues of theory, identity and thought' (Clarke 2013: 180). For example, where policy and practice in health, education, law and religion do engage with LGBTIQ needs and queer theory, 'white queers tend to be the dominant subjects of Western queer theory' (Clarke 2013: 182).

People's positionality greatly influence what they have access to and how societal systems and structures interact with them. Race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality are relational, complex and shifting rather than fixed and independent. As Misawa writes, 'all parts of our identities are shaped by socially constructed positions and memberships [...]. Such automatic categorisation is embedded in our society as a system and is pervasive in education' and other institutions (2010: 26). Various theories have endeavoured to articulate these inter-category and intra-category permutations of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and religion, as well as disability, class and Indigeneity. Indeed, the recognition of internal hierarchies and intra-group oppressions is referred to by Harris as the 'problem of the 21st century': 'the further fragmentation and relegation within already oppressed groups, causing intragroup marginalisation' from the more privileged group members to the less privileged members (2009: 431; see also Freire 1970). This calls to mind Crenshaw's (2012) seminal work on intersectionality, as well as other models of interweaving/interlocking such as Anzalduan *mestizaje*/borderland models and interweaving of difference models (see Anzaldua 1987; Pallotta-Chiarolli 2004). *Kyrarchy*, a term less often used, extends patriarchy in order to explain 'a more complicated relationship of power based on multiple intersecting structures of domination such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and gender' (Ekine 2013: 80). As Kosnick explores in her work on the intersections of migrant ethnicities and queer sexualities: 'anti-immigrant racisms and homophobia are mutually constitutive to produce different kinds of visibility, invisibility and contradiction' (2011: 122). Hence, the politics of representation influences the ways that 'access and excess' are experienced; the ability, capital and opportunity to assert agency because of varied privilege; and the experience of restriction and interlocking oppressions, which limit opportunities for agency and self-determination (Pallotta-Chiarolli and Pease 2014). Structural and institutional heteronormativity, heteropatriarchy and heterosexism are major determinants of the experiences of invalidation, marginalisation,

pathologisation for LGBTIQ people. Gomez and McFarlane refer to the theory of ‘refraction’, defined as ‘a both/and tension that ultimately depoliticises’ factors such as race and gender while seeking to conceal that depoliticisation (2017: 363). They argue that refraction is more than ‘just simple contradiction or obfuscation’ in current representations of identity and community, it is ‘a conceptual process of revealing and concealing, a constant bending that has a tendency to depoliticise’ racial, ethnic, gender and sexual minorities (2017: 364–365). What is needed by and within systems and institutions is ‘self-conscious, self-reflexive critique’ on its machinations of refraction (2017: 374). This would then encourage and collaborate with ‘the colonised [who] have a right to self-determination, self-definition and decolonisation’ (Clarke 2013: 179).

Previous research has shown that being LGBTIQ within a minoritised ethnic and/or faith community requires the negotiation and interweaving of varying and multiple regulations, expectations and social codes in relation to gender, sexuality and ethnicity (Abraham 2009). These regulations, expectations and codes are coming from the person’s ethno-religious families and communities; predominantly white LGBTIQ communities; and a wider predominantly white heteronormative and gender-normative society and its systems and institutions (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2014; Rajkhowa and Thompson 2015). Likewise, within and between these societal frameworks, MCMF families, communities and LGBTIQ individuals require various policies, programmes and practices to be implemented in order to facilitate support and affirmation (Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005a). Many MCMF LGBTIQ people want to belong to and feel that they have a place in their families and faith. Their family and community can nurture a cultural identification, offer a deep sense of ethnic heritage and faith values, and provide a sense of self within the context of a family that shares struggles and oppressions such as racism, classism, Islamophobia and refugee trauma (Beckett et al. 2014; Low and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2015).

Simultaneously, some MCMF families may see LGBTIQ as a manifestation of secularisation imposed by a ‘morally decadent’, urbanised Western white culture (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010; Shannahan 2010; Beckett et al. 2014). Hooghe et al. concluded that MCMF LGBTIQs and their families must connect and collaborate in ‘demonstrating and upholding family values can be fully compatible with a respect for LGBT rights’ (2010: 68). For example, the breaking of religious regulations for LGBTIQ young people from diverse Islamic backgrounds may lead to mental, physical and emotional distress and violence due to guilt, intimidation and excommunication from the family and community (Hammoud-Beckett 2007). Savin-Williams (1998) presents three main developmental tasks of LGBTIQ people from MCMF backgrounds that are not necessarily experienced by LGBTIQ people from dominant Anglo-white backgrounds. First, the person needs to cultivate a sexual/gender identity and an ethnic/religious identity. Second, the person must resolve any conflicts that may arise in claiming allegiance to an ethnic/religious reference group and to a queer community; and third, the person needs to negotiate any stigmas and discrimination encountered because of the interconnections of homophobia, transphobia, racism and sexism.

Victorian-specific research addressing the needs of MCMF LGBTIQ people and their families within wider social, political, legal, religious, educational and cultural sectors include:

- a community consultation research project on LGBTIQ young people from MCMF communities hosted by the Centre for Multicultural Youth and Victoria University and the resulting report, *Teaching Diversities: Same-sex Attracted Young People, CALD Communities and Arts-based Community Engagement* (Harris 2011);
- *Nothing For Them: Understanding the Support Needs of LGBT Young People from Refugee and Newly Arrived Backgrounds* (Noto et al. 2014) followed by
- *Something for Them: Meeting the Support Needs of Same-sex Attracted and Sex and Gender Diverse Young People Who Are Recently Arrived, Refugees or Asylum Seekers* (Mejia-Canales and Leonard 2016);
- The Multicultural Centre for Women's Health report, *Coming Out, Coming Home or Inviting People In? Supporting Same-sex Attracted Women from Immigrant and Refugee Communities* (Poljski 2011);
- a Social Cohesion Policy Brief from the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) which reports on a consultation with 'less visible' faith leaders, *I Can Make a Change: A Rose by Any Other Name* (Gopalkrishnan 2016); and
- *Supporting Same-sex Attracted and Gender Diverse Young People of Multicultural and Multifaith Backgrounds: Executive Summary and Full Research Report* (Pallotta-Chiarolli 2016) from the Equality Branch of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

An NSW example of research and consultation is *We're Family Too: A Report into the Effects of Homophobia in Arabic-speaking Communities in NSW* (Kassiseh 2012): a range of individuals and organisations connected to the Arab community and the LGBTIQ community in NSW collaborated to investigate the effects of homophobia on same-sex attracted people from Arabic-speaking backgrounds, while also drawing attention to racism and stereotyping within NSW's LGBTIQ community. The report recommends a range of initiatives that can address the effects of homophobia and racism in multicultural communities.

From within the LGBTIQ community, the establishment of the AGMC Inc. (Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council Inc; agmc.org.au) as a queer MCMF community leader organisation in Victoria in 2004, and the many multicultural and multifaith LGBTIQ state and interstate 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. In Victoria alone there are now at least 20 groups representing over 34 cultures, including 3 queer-specific Muslim or queer-inclusive Muslim groups (e.g. Marhaba, Muslims for Progressive Values, Queer Muslim Network). These self-determining agentic groups provide vital ongoing support and perform developmental roles but require collaboration from mainstream MCMF community services and homopositive state and federal institutions and structures. These groups aim to break down the association of non-Anglo ethnicity and faith with homophobia, and develop a relationship of trust between systems, institutions and MCMF LGBTIQ individuals and communities.

The Inaugural National AGMC LGBTIQ Conference, 'Living and Loving in Diversity', the very first conference of its kind held anywhere in Australia, was achieved in October 2004 (Pallotta-Chiarolli 2008). Over 200 people attended each day. The participants represented a mix of government and not for profit organisations and individuals. A member

of both ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association; ilga.org) and FECCA (Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia), AGMC Inc. produced its own recommendations and strategies for the inclusion of multicultural LGBTIQ identities and issues into multicultural, mainstream and LGBTIQ community policies, programmes and practices (Chang and Apostle 2008). Some of the recommendations were reinforced in the most recent Victorian Equality Branch Report (Pallotta-Chiarolli 2016), and are addressed in this Special Section. They include:

- Research, policy and programme development need to be more inclusive with a greater understanding of and engagement with the intersections of ethnicity, religion, class, disabilities, spiritualities, age, sexualities and genders.
- A relationship of trust has to be established between government bodies, service providers and the multicultural community.
- Stronger community collaborations and consultations in the development and implementation of policy to avoid a top-down approach, and to successfully navigate between general policy statements and implementation specificities.
- Academic and Research Networks need to make their research accessible to communities and engage the MCMF LGBTIQ communities through the entire process.
- The adoption of more inclusive terms such as Multicultural Multifaith (MCMF) to replace Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) allows for greater understanding of and engagement with diversity in research, policy development and programme design.
- Programming and resourcing strategies must address the complex needs of MCMF communities when developing specific LGBTIQ programmes, for example, unemployment, financial hardships and discrimination.
- Faith and community leaders, as well as community service providers, to establish culturally and religiously specific support groups for parents of LGBTIQ MCMF young people.
- Faith leaders to encourage visible signs of welcome, programmes and resources in religious places of worship which promote LGBTIQ inclusion, participation and leadership.
- Faith leaders to be engaged and educated through inter-faith and intra-faith forums, roundtable discussions and other events, in consultation with and/or with the presence of LGBTIQ MCMF people.
- In consultation and collaboration with faith leaders, government bodies, community organisations and cultural community leaders will clarify rights and responsibilities, develop policies and statements, resources and programmes pertaining to spiritual leadership, social leadership and the pastoral care of community members in settings such as hospitals, schools and the courts.
- Marriage equality policies require an understanding of and frameworks about the multiple positions of MCMF LGBTIQ in relation to culture, privilege and other social health needs.
- Government educational bodies to build on existing educational policies, programmes and resources which address the needs of LGBTIQ MCMF young people in schools.
- Any state or national educational policy, initiative, programme or resource such as the Safe Schools Coalition must be undertaken with thorough and ongoing consultation

- and collaboration with MCMF communities to ensure cultural relevancy and to prevent negative and fear-inducing mis-information from gaining authority in these communities.
- School-based LGBTIQ MCMF groups to be established that are resourced and supported to conduct youth-led projects.
 - Remove religious exemptions in schools which negatively impact on the health and well-being of MCMF LGBTIQ students, staff and families.
 - Universities and other tertiary education sectors to develop stronger policies, programmes and resources in order to support the inclusion and social and civic participation of MCMF LGBTIQ people, particularly international students.
 - Counsellors and counselling services to build on existing research, resource-development and education in order to encourage access by LGBTIQ MCMF people.
 - Health researchers to undertake research with LGBTIQ MCMF young people and their families in regard to appropriate and effective mental health service provision.
 - Training of bilingual/bi-cultural health educators to facilitate MCMF LGBTIQ programmes.

The AGMC's forthcoming book of essays, poems and personal memoirs, *Multicultural Queer Australia: Then, Now, Future* (in press, 2017), funded by a Victorian government multicultural LGBTIQ grant, is the first such volume dedicated to this rich terrain since Jackson and Sullivan's groundbreaking *Multicultural Queer: Australian Narratives* in 1999. It is also indicative of the possible outcomes when systems and communities collaborate in mutual recognition, resistance and reconstruction.

LGBTIQ MCMF representation in cultural and literary productions and in community projects such as the forthcoming AGMC book can play a significant role in augmenting community consciousness, and making what are often considered 'untold stories' accessible. While it would be difficult to evaluate the specific impact of each endeavour, initiative and artefact, it is nevertheless clear that literary, cultural and community projects can invigorate and strengthen community bonds, and sometimes even precipitate a sense of belonging within the broader MCMF socio-political framework in Australian society.

The media as a socio-cultural institution is one area that is not represented in the four papers of this Special Section. Given that a lot of literary, cultural and community projects are initiated and undertaken outside the 'mainstream' of MCMF engagement (the public broadcaster SBS could be considered an exemplar), they involve a degree of local networking, groundwork and outreach that cannot be replicated on the macro planes of MCMF activity. Many of these projects or activities are geographically and spatially delineated by local council area, and demographically delineated by ethnic or language group.

Productions that involve the documentation of views, experiences and stories could be conceptualised as oral history projects. These projects involve significant collaboration between artists and community members (Allen and Montell 1981; Tonkin 1995; Thompson 2017 (1978)). As they are predicated on trust and disclosure, and involve and emerge through the sharing of confidences, storytelling and reflective analysis, oral history projects are intrinsically collaborative in nature, and necessarily entail community investment (see Rajkhowa *forthcoming*). The oral history archive, as a conceptual category, is a receptacle of socio-historical experiences. It may additionally be considered a repository of 'real' community bonds and linkages.

Against the backdrop of a range of access, visibility and resourcing issues surrounding Australian media historically, the genre of the radio documentary has proven particularly amenable to queer MCMF representation. At least two radio documentaries have ventured to tell the stories of LGBTIQ MCMF individuals in Australia. Both were broadcast initially on community radio before they were syndicated on mainstream radio networks like Radio National and SBS. The first of these, *Muff Divas and Drag Queens*, by Abby Duruz, was broadcast by 2SER FM in Sydney in 1996. Duruz's participants, lesbians and gay men of Jewish, Fijian-Indian and Indigenous heritage, articulated understandings of both sexual and cultural identity that resisted any unifying or monolithic conceptualisation of 'multicultural gay and lesbian identity' (Duruz 1999: 169).

A second project, *We Weren't Born Yesterday*, produced by the Queering the Air collective at Melbourne's 3CR station in 2015, featured a series of four radio documentaries, each dedicated to a particular ethno-linguistic community – Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic and Indian (Queering the Air 2015). This series explored issues surrounding heritage and cultural belonging; queer-themed art, music, cinema and literature; sexuality and identity; cultural change; familial tensions and reconciliation; relationships and other topics; and featured inter-generational dialogue between LGBTIQ-identifying individuals in each community, both 'in language' and in English (Rajkhowa [forthcoming](#)). By focalising queer MCMF subjectivity and offering critical, deliberative reflections on issues around culture and social change, this series encapsulated some of the changing social, political, cultural and conceptual currents influencing LGBTIQ and MCMF subjectivity in Australia. Indeed, this series could be seen as offering an inflection on, or response to, an important contention raised in Jackson and Sullivan's anthology about spatial and identitarian binaries:

If they choose to become involved with the gay and lesbian community, it means having less to do with members of their cultural heritage group and taking on Anglo ways. If they choose to spend a lot of time with their families or ethnic communities, this may mean having to be in the closet about their sexual orientation and limiting their participation in the lesbian and gay community. (Jackson and Sullivan 1999, p. 17)

This series and other new projects in this space encapsulate some of the changing ways in which LGBTIQ MCMF individuals are articulating their subjectivity and describing how they negotiate identity and belonging within family and broader social frameworks in Australia (Rajkhowa [forthcoming](#)). They help to nuance dichotomous understandings of belonging.

Community engagement and art are interwoven in artistic and cultural productions. We want to highlight, for example, producers' reflections that demonstrate, in the first instance, how artistic endeavours are closely enmeshed with (and often emerge from) community-building and community-seeking actions:

I found comfort in the personal stories of older queer Chinese Australians. Family and filiality is essential to Chinese culture, but family relationships can be fraught for many LGBTIQ people. Transphobia and homophobia are only some of the many reasons why queer people of diasporic backgrounds might be cut off from their elders. As a first-generation Chinese migrant to Australia, I need to have a sense of my own lineage or I feel kind of untethered, living on stolen land and so far from my ancestors. On the rare occasion that queer Chinese people are represented here, we are often shown to be young, always new, always emergent.

That doesn't help you feel your life is solid, that you can ever become established or belong, that you have a future. (Qian in Qian, Thanh Hang and Rajkhowa 2015)

This second excerpt points to how community engagement through creative projects can spur reappraisals of critical issues:

A significant challenge I encountered while making the documentary was the reluctance of many gay Indian men I knew to speak about their lives and experiences. Although the interviews were anonymous, many were uncomfortable speaking out, and at least two prospective participants, both first-generation migrants, questioned the appropriateness of the labels 'gay' or 'queer' to their identity. To me, this was a reminder of the many difficulties and complexities involved in ascribing identity labels to individuals within the broader Indian community, for whom discussing sexuality remains deeply problematic. In terms of the welfare of older members of the community, a lack of self-recognition and an inability to communicate one's experiences remain concerns. (Rajkhowa in Qian *et al.* 2015)

Whether conceptualised as art or community engagement, projects that are representational in nature complement academic research and theorisation in this area.

As noted earlier, this Special Section, curated by the AGMC, presents reflections on LGBTIQ MCMF-themed topics by four Australian academic-activists. In this introductory article, we have so far summarised some of the theoretical literature in the field; presented an overview of the sociological research that has been undertaken in Australia, elaborating on a few key reports; and highlighted some Australian literary and cultural projects. We will now introduce the four papers in this Special Section, outlining how they engage with institutional and structural homonegativity and strategies of LGBTIQ resistances.

Health: Contextualising LGBTIQ Well-Being

Pioneering researcher into lesbian health and LGBTIQ families, Ruth McNair addresses strategies in the health sector for the successful integration of multiple identities. MCMF LGBTIQ health is increasingly receiving attention in international and Australian health systems, services and institutions, as health research evidence continues to demonstrate how invisibilisation and exclusion within hospitals, community services and other sites of health service provision exacerbate, if not create, health and well-being concerns. Muller argues that 'invisibility' encompasses two related concepts: 'queer symbolic annihilation' and 'queer (un)intelligibility' as a 'consequence of this systemic erasure' (2017, p. 1; see also Butler 1990). Symbolic annihilation refers to unequal representation via omission, trivialisation and condemnation (Tuchman 2000). As Rosario (1997) highlighted, health inequities in relation to LGBTIQ people is embedded in heteronormative healthcare knowledge and structures constructed over two centuries of biomedical discourses. Interwoven into these culpabilities are ongoing annihilations based on racism, religious bigotry and socioeconomics. As Ruth McNair discusses in her paper, discrimination and 'suboptimal care' of LGBTIQ people demands we 'think through what it means to be an (un)intelligible body, or to perform (un)intelligible acts, in an epistemological system predicated on being able to read (and treat) bodies' (Müller 2017: 1). In the health sector, the National LGBTI Health Alliance Australia continues to advocate for policy reform and enhancement of health-related programmes, services and research,

including the annual ‘Diversity in Health’ conference and report (see also British Psychological Society 2012; Positive Spaces Initiative, CA 2009).

Law: Reviewing LGBTIQ Asylum-Seeker Frameworks

The paper by a leading researcher on queer refugees and the law, Senthoran Raj, reminds us how legal systems ‘conveniently ignore the Western history of racism, colonialism and homophobia and ... colonial culpability in homophobic laws’ (Ekine 2013: 89). LGBTIQ refugee and asylum-seeker laws are framed by the global albeit varying ongoing dilemma that ‘the law serves to authorise, normalise and legitimise the discrimination [of LGBTIQ] by criminalising the sexual conduct of sexual minorities. In almost all cases, governments will gladly own up to the laws and justify their existences’ (Ndashe 2013: 161). Migration and refugee regimes have generally used heteronormative and gender-normative standards of sexuality and family in policies and laws regarding family reunification, marriage, moral control and conditions of residence (Kosnick 2011). The Organisation for Refuge, Asylum and Migration (ORAM International) estimates that as of 2012, there were roughly 175 million LGBTI individuals living in ‘persecutory environments’, out of which only 5000 each year are able to apply for asylum based on their sexuality or gender identity, and out of which only 2500 are successful (Kaleidoscope Australia 2015: 3). Governments and refugee law need to have ‘reliable information regarding what constitutes best practice in determining refugee status’, ‘properly and fairly assess applications’, and provide legal and other advocates with tools ‘to assist them in effectively representing asylum seekers in their claims’ (Kaleidoscope Australia 2015: 3).

Education: Contentious Activism and Political Backlash

In her paper, Roz Ward explores how educational systems can challenge racism, sexism and homophobia equally, consistently and in interconnected ways, via curricula (such as the provision of texts, lessons, research projects, community involvement); student welfare policies (such as anti-harassment and equal opportunity policies) and behaviour management (such as homophobic behaviour dealt with alongside other behavioural issues) (Emslie 2005; Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005b, 2014). Universities and other post-secondary education centres can also make provisions and policies in relation to health centres, student services and student clubs and organisations – such as MCMF and GLBTIQ clubs – that actively promote and implement anti-racist and anti-homophobic policies, as well as catering for the specific concerns of LGBTIQ MCMF people (Misawa 2010).

Having played a pivotal role in designing and implementing the successful Safe Schools Coalition across all state government schools in Victoria and many religious private schools, Roz Ward has contributed considerable sex- and gender-diverse resources and programming to the education system, yet culturally diverse queer students and staff remain largely invisible. The reluctance of schools to work with MCMF families and communities is often premised on what can be called ‘the Ethnic Excuses’, listed and deconstructed in *When Our Children Come Out* (Pallotta-Chiarolli 2005b). These are assumptions that school principals, boards, and teachers make that are rarely based on

school community audits, consultations and collaborations with supportive community leaders and families. The excuses are:

- ‘We’ve got enough to handle with racism and sexism. This is too much.’
- ‘This issue is too controversial. We don’t want to alienate anyone.’
- ‘This is a moral issue that our religious families will object to.’
- ‘It’s racist to challenge ethnic people and communities on their homophobia as you’re not respecting their traditions or their rights to their beliefs.’
- ‘Ethnic parents will complain.’

Religion: Bridging the Social and the Noumenal

Shinen Wong’s paper looks at queer corollaries of spiritual community and their relation to secularism and religiosity, drawing on personal experiences as well as those of other Asian gay men of religiously diverse backgrounds. The negative approach of religion towards a LGBTIQ person’s sexuality or gender non-conformity can correlate with a ‘damaging internal conflict’ (Gahan *et al.* 2014: 204). How an LGBTIQ religious person resolves these conflicts between sexual orientation and spirituality may have a ‘profound effect’ on mental, spiritual and other health (Gahan *et al.* 2014: 206). Although it can be argued that in increasingly secular societies religious institutions have a decreasing hold on LGBTIQ people, leaving a religion that is part of one’s MCMF family and community heritage can be very painful and isolating. Some MCMF LGBTIQ people leave homonegative religion and seek out homopositive spiritualities that affirm their sexualities and genders. As Wong demonstrates, religion and LGBTIQ identity are no longer seen as absolutely oppositional, and the intersection between spirituality and sexuality is now being researched, explored and experienced. In their study with British queer Muslims, Jaspal 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; see also Yip 2008). Thus, an Allah that endorses a sense of respect, freedom and benevolence is reclaimed, in contrast to the dominant mainstream Muslim Allah and non-Muslim God that seeks retribution and persecution for the perceived abomination of diverse sexualities and genders (Habib 2009; Siraf 2012; Siraf 2014). However, as Gahan *et al.* point out, ‘as homopositive religious voices have become more prevalent in Australia, we have witnessed greater debate among the competing discourses and consequently a more virulent and vocal homonegative religious discourse’ (2014: 223). This is similar in many countries such as in the African continent where queer sexualities as ‘un-African’ is a dominant narrative largely based in religious fundamentalisms ‘which insist on strict literal interpretations of religious texts’ (Ekine 2013: 78).

In the most recent Victorian government report (Pallotta-Chiarolli 2016), the absence of research participants’ LGBTIQ realities in faith-spaces was deeply felt (see also Abraham 2009). Of particular significance was the need to differentiate between spiritual/theological leadership, social leadership and the pastoral care of community members. This separation between theological and social leadership could be symbolised by a separation between the responsibilities of the religious place of worship, and the

organisations responsible for the social and cultural health and well-being of communities of faith. All participants believed their MCMF community leaders needed to take responsibility and be accountable for the safety, health and well-being of LGBTIQ people by working with parents, families and the whole community (see also Eidhamar 2014).

In Continuation

In 2017 in Australia and globally, there still exists the silencing and exclusion of sexual and gender diversities in heterosexist MCMF policies, discourses, community spaces and services. Multiculturalism as policy and practice cannot sit comfortably and confidently with global citizenship and ethical engagement with diversity if it does not include LGBTIQ histories, heritages and contemporary realities (Low and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2015; Murray and Roscoe 1997; Tamale 2011). There are ongoing dilemmas, concerns and strategies in placing ‘multisexuality’ and ‘multigender’ on the ‘multicultural’ agenda, particularly in relation to policy development and research. Systematic transformation is of critical importance: from inequality, injustice and systemic violence into societies of recognition, reconciliation, reconstruction, diversity, justice and non-violence. We began with Audre Lorde explaining interweaving as experience, expression and examination. We end with Adrienne Rich reminding us that our MCMF LGBTIQ elders faced devastating levels of criminalisation, pathologisation and condemnation. Much has been achieved in making systems and structures accountable for their culpabilities and empowering the resistance and agency of MCMF LGBTIQ persons and communities and systems themselves. And there is much more to be done locally and globally.

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:

so much has been destroyed

I have to cast my lot with those

who age after age, perversely,

with no extraordinary power,

reconstitute the world.

Rich (1978)

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

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Department of Health and Human Services LGBTI Working Group. Her books include *Someone You Know* (Australia's first AIDS biography); *Border Sexualities, Border Families in Schools* (a recipient of a Lambda Literary Award, 2011), and her novel, *Love You Two* (co-winner of a 2010 Lambda Literary Award). Her most recent publication is *Women in Relationships with Bisexual Men: Bi Men by Women*. She is currently conducting research with Aboriginal people with Southern European heritage, exploring the contestations and connections between colonialism, racism and multiculturalism.

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