



Navigating (homo)nationalism and heteronormativity; how Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch gay/bi men negotiate belonging in Amsterdam

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ABSTRACT

Current-day nationalist ideologies imagine immigrant communities, and particularly Muslims, as traditionalist and backward subjects. They often propagate the importance of sexual and gender equality as a way to 'other' non-white minorities ('homonationalism'). This study seeks to understand how (homo)nationalism affect senses of self and belonging for those who do not fit discursive binaries: non-heterosexual minorities. As such, we seek to contribute to geographical understandings of everyday experiences of sexual and racial politics in Western European cities. We interviewed seventeen Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch non-heterosexual cismen in the Amsterdam region, focusing on their spatial perceptions, everyday encounters, and negotiations of subjectivities in urban space. While almost all of these men are subjected by (homo)nationalism, they negotiate their social and spatial trajectories in diverse ways. These findings show how nationalist politics affect everyday lives at the urban scale, while also highlighting how those denied belonging navigate multiple forms of exclusion.

1. Introduction

Since the late 1990s, countries in Western Europe and North America have seen a rise in nationalist politics that are characterized by increasingly racialized discourses on immigration, immigrants and their descendants. Particularly Muslims are often framed as non-modern subjects, who are out of place in modern European white society (Razack, 2007; Garner and Selod, 2015). Religious and/or ethnic minority groups -and the conflation of these different yet intersecting identities- are confronted by various forms of exclusion in their everyday lives (Itaoui, 2020; Noble and Poynting, 2010). A recurring trope in nationalist discourse is the importance of protecting gender and sexual equality -markers of modernity - against the supposed influence of traditionalist Muslims. This championing of equality by conservative-minded nationalists has been criticized as 'homonationalism', which involves the integration and acceptance of the 'proper homosexuals' into neoliberal citizenship at the cost of rising Islamophobia and the exclusion of racial 'others' (Puar, 2006; Puar, 2007). Rather than promoting equality, discursively accepting (some forms of) homosexuality mostly serves nationalist politics of belonging.

These politics are also spatial: they rehearse and normalize socio-

spatial imaginaries that articulate where different social groups belong, effectively tying subjects to spaces at various scales: from continents and countries to cities and neighbourhoods (Antonsich, 2010; Watkins, 2015). As a result, essentialized imaginations of Muslims depict them as dangerous populations (Traynor, 2015), that are concentrated in certain areas of a city. Such socio-spatial imaginaries lead to the territorialisation of sexism and/or homo/bi/transphobia to specific urban neighborhoods, such as the French *banlieues* (Dikeç, 2007) or the Anneessens neighborhood in Brussels (Boussaleem, 2021).

Our study seeks to understand how exclusionary nationalist ideologies affect marginalised people in their everyday lives. More specifically, we are concerned with how (homo)nationalism, as an ideology, affects Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch non-heterosexual cismen in the region of Amsterdam: how encountering it affects their subjectivities (sense of self) and their sense of belonging, and how they negotiate it in everyday life. Like anyone falling outside the hetero-norm, minority gay and bisexual men may face hostility in heteronormative environments (Brown et al., 2016; Ghaziani, 2014). Yet, because they do not fit the binary classifications, they may also encounter 'othering' and racism within nationalist and Islamophobia frameworks (El-Tayeb, 2012; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011; Rahman, 2010). This paper aims to add to the

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growing -yet scarce- literature which empirically enquires how nationalist ideologies may produce everyday spatialities for non-heterosexual minorities.

There have been various studies that have focused on how non-heterosexual men with Muslim backgrounds cope, negotiate and queer their sense of self (e.g. Abraham, 2009; Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011; Rahman and Valliani, 2016). These social-psychological enquiries acknowledge the importance of spatial context at various scales (Yip, 2009), yet do not forefront the spatial in their theoretical and empirical investigations. The literature on geographies of sexuality, on the other hand, has engaged with the politics of sexuality in everyday life as being spatially dependent (e.g. Gorman-Murray et al., 2008; Knopp, 2004; Valentine and Waitt, 2012). While this literature acknowledges the intersections of non-heterosexual subjectivities with those of race, religion, gender and class in everyday life, the engagement with the lived experience of current-day nationalism has been relatively recent (see Browne and Brown, 2016; El-Tayeb, 2012; Boussalem, 2021). Such experiences have also been investigated by geographers that have engaged with the geographies of racism and Islamophobia (e.g. Itaoui, 2016, 2020; Noble and Poynting, 2010; Ruez, 2017; Veronis, 2007). This literature highlights how migrants, ethnic minorities and/or Muslims encounter and perceive exclusionary racist ideologies differently in various neighbourhoods, cities and regions. Population distributions, (shared) experiences and broader spatial imaginaries of tolerance all feed into, and reinforce, spatial perceptions and behaviour. This may contextually produce oppression and partial exclusion from public life (Garner and Selod, 2015; Itaoui, 2020). Like many geographies of sexuality, these studies are concerned with fractured urban geographies.

Building on these literatures, we seek to further our understanding of the geographies of sexual and racial politics, by studying how (homo) nationalist imaginaries relate to minority gay/bi men's lived experiences across urban space. To understand the construction of 'impossible' subjectivities (i.e. being gay/bi and from a Muslim background) and the role of space and place in it, we will use an intersectional approach. Intersectionality draws attention to the ways in which axes of social hierarchies -such as class, race or gender - do not operate separately but mutually influence each other (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins and Bilge, 2016). Geographers have deployed intersectionality to understand the connections between the production of space and the reproduction of power (Loopmans et al., 2020) by analyzing the role of space and place in constituting intersectional relations (Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina, 2018). This allows to understand how interlocking lines of power and oppression materialize in specific spaces and social contexts (Hopkins, 2018), and how these produce different senses of (un)safety and (dis)comfort in the people who inhabit and/or move through them (Rodó-De-Zárate, 2017). In this context, Rahman (2010) notes how an intersectional focus on the identities of LGBTQ Muslims already disrupts the binary East/West imagination that underpins the ontological binarization "Muslim or gay" (Puar, 2007), and renders LGBTQ Muslims as 'impossible' subjectivities.

By focusing on lived experiences of minority gay/bi men across urban space, we acknowledge the importance of the urban-regional context, but we also pose that the substance of nationalist discourses matters in everyday life (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2007; Benwell, 2014; Lizotte, 2019). Who is addressed and what norms are conveyed may structure how marginalised groups see themselves, and more importantly, how they are approached and addressed. In this way, nationalist discourses materialize and territorialize in everyday life. Such narratives are particularly relevant for *homonationalist* discourse which both includes and excludes historically-marginalized groups. While it is also a theme elsewhere, our case is typical for this type of discourse: sexual liberty and gender equality have featured heavily in Dutch nationalist discourse since the early 2000 s (Bracke, 2012; Mepschen et al., 2010).

The following section will cover social and spatial binary narratives found in the Netherlands. Our conceptual framework will outline how

subjectivities may be structured by ideological discourse through encounters, and how individuals may make 'impossible' intersectional subjectivities possible. We then present our study of Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch non-heterosexual men in the region of Amsterdam; showing how they orient themselves, how they encounter heteronormativity, identity questioning and racism; and how they conduct themselves and their lives in response. Our conclusion discusses the contextual importance of geographies of non-heterosexual minorities in view of ideological discourse.

2. Dutch nationalist socio-spatial imaginaries

Nationalist, or nativist, discourses in countries like Australia, Austria, Belgium, France, and the USA are characterised by racialized binaries that (re)constitute subjects and their belonging. While there are many similarities, nationalist ideologies often reflect particular self-images and anxieties that come from social, migration and colonial histories (Wekker, 2016b). In the Netherlands, nationalist discourse revolves around a set of binaries based on ethnicity, migration, religion, class and attitudes towards gender and sexuality. In short, non-native and non-white Dutch are racially 'othered' as lower-class traditionalists, in contrast to the largely unspoken norm of the white middle-class Dutch (Bonjour and Duyvendak, 2018; Wekker, 2016b). The binary also pertains to cultural and religious beliefs. Particularly Muslim communities, the largest of which originating from Morocco and Turkey, are seen as 'backwards', casting them as traditionalist, patriarchal, religious and essentially non-Western (Bonjour and Duyvendak, 2018; Bracke, 2012). These imaginaries are contrasted by a self-image of white Dutch as open-minded, tolerant and sexually liberal, while rendering imaginaries of non-heterosexuality as middle class, male and non-threatening (Mepschen et al., 2010; cf. Puar, 2007). These imaginaries create 'impossible' subjectivities for those people who identify as non-heterosexual but do not adhere to the specific imaginations of what constitutes being non-heterosexual in Dutch society.

Dutch nationalism also has its spatial imaginaries. Like elsewhere, nationalist spatial discourse pertains to nation-states or world regions: the liberal West versus the illiberal Orient (Puar, 2006; Watkins, 2015). Yet, imaginaries of Islamophobia and racism are also relevant at the urban-regional scale (Itaoui, 2020; Ruez, 2017). These notions may be transmitted through encounters (see below), or found in public and policy discourse. In the Netherlands, nationalist politics have pushed the need for 'integration', leading to the State managing and intervening in ethnic and religious relations (Uitermark 2014). As such, the politics of belonging are directly felt in urban governance and State actions that exclusively target marginal populations and urban peripheral areas (Dikeç, 2007; Schinkel and Van den Berg, 2011). Such interventions reinforce an imagination of urban space which sees the urban periphery as poor and racialised, standing in contrast to affluent white suburbs and gentrifying central neighbourhoods (Van Gent and Jaffe, 2017). How socio-spatial hierarchies of value affect subjectivities and belonging has been noted for marginalized white and non-white residents in ethnically-diverse urban neighbourhoods (De Koning, 2015; Hoekstra, 2017; Mepschen, 2016), as well as those living in lower-class white spaces (Pinkster, 2016; Wekker, 2016a).

3. Ideology and subjectivity

As nationalist discourses affirm and contest socio-spatial belonging, they may affect how individuals see themselves, i.e. their sense of self or their 'subjectivities', in certain situations. Poststructuralist work has emphasized how, through ideological discourse on identity and place, people come to know and potentially internalize practices, beliefs and norms, making them subjects and teaching them how to govern themselves in various settings (see Bazzul, 2016; Rose-Redwood, 2006; Weedon 2004). Yet, discourses do not only 'stick' to people and bodies (and thereby discipline them), they are also embodied by everyday

practices and performances. Judith Butler (1990) famously decoupled gender and sexuality from intrinsically-sexed identities and fixed bodily markers. The normalization of heterosexual desires has required a process of cultural iteration based on discourse as well as repeated performances (see Nelson, 1999; Segal, 2008).

Thus, nationalist ideology may be reconstructed in everyday life and structure subjectivities and belonging (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2007), leading to territorialisation. Yet, hegemonic discourses do not programme thought and behaviour like computer software. Ideological schemes may be unconsciously received but they are often recognized and reflexively challenged (Nelson 1999; Pfeffer, 2014, Yip, 2009). Subjectivities are 'never totally constituted with no hope of thinking or acting differently' (Bazzul, 2016, p.8). For marginalised groups, this is not easy though. Ideologies of belonging are typically built on binary oppositions, whereby socio-spatial othering is inscribed upon minority bodies. Conversely, whiteness, heterosexuality, and maleness are treated as the unspoken norm (Dyer, 1997; Weedon, 2004; Wekker, 2016b; Çankaya and Mepschen, 2019). The possibilities for individuals to employ different modes of subjectivity tend to be limited for those groups that are 'othered' based on gender, race, sexuality etc., compared to populations that adhere to dominant norms (Weedon, 2004). Nevertheless, politically-infused norms can be negotiated, contested, circumvented or accepted through conscious action, or performative agency.

4. Encountering and negotiating ideology

Multiple geographers, particularly feminist and queer theorists, have pointed out that the relationality of subjectivities –i.e. defining your sense of self in relation to what you are not– makes identity construction contingent on situatedness and social embeddedness, and therefore more fluid and messy than discursive frames allow for (Nelson, 1999; Noble, 2009; Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2011). Consequently, geographers have looked at how marginalised subjectivities relate to urban space and its landscapes (see Browne and Nash, 2013). The ability to move through various spaces is informed by multi-scalar relations of family, class, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality (Gorman-Murray and Nash, 2014; Parsons, 2017). Furthermore, navigating urban spaces is about encountering noteworthy (social) difference. As 'events of relation', encounters are always circumscribed by what constitutes the 'other' (Wilson, 2017). Yet, group-level conflicts often do not manifest themselves in everyday space. Individuals tend to separate their beliefs from actual conduct, often facilitated by an 'ethic of care' for marginalised others or by intersectional solidarity (Valentine and Waitt, 2012). When conflicts do arise, however, political notions of socio-spatial belonging may be felt. Based on the work of Sara Ahmed, Ruez (2017) argues that a focus on *bad* encounters may reveal how non-heterosexuals with migration backgrounds are affected by political notions that understand cities as a binary collection of unevenly shared spaces. Even when infrequent, bad encounters can have long-lasting, even traumatising, impacts, and structure how individuals orient themselves and their selves.

Given the risk of bad encounters, everyday practices of racialised and marginalised individuals in shared spaces can involve conscious actions for self-protection (Binnie and Skeggs, 2004; Knopp, 2004). Such actions may result in consciously adapting behaviour, mannerisms, attitudes and speech to what is recognized as legitimate and appropriate in a given social setting (Jaspal and Siraj, 2011; Noble, 2009). Another way to adapt is to avoid certain spaces. Itaoui (2016) shows that Muslim men in Sydney have developed specific mental maps that structure their movement. These mental maps are fed by broader political discourse, but also by bad encounters and shared experiences with racism. Combined with local geographical knowledge, they shape 'geographies of risk', i.e. how the potential of racist encounters shape their engagement with space (Itaoui, 2020; Noble and Poynting, 2010;). Urban context matters here though, as regions with concentrations of Muslim or

minority communities may offer individuals some (mental) respite (Itaoui, 2020). Such relief are arguably less afforded to non-heterosexual Muslims, who have to negotiate the risk of being othered in heteronormative settings (El-Tayeb, 2012).

To understand the complex interrelations of lived experiences, power structures and place, Rodó-De-Zárate (2017) builds on the notion of affective inequality, which is defined as the deprivation of love, care and solidarity (Lynch et al., 2009). Using the analytical and conceptual tool of 'relief maps', she shows how feelings at meaningful places in people's everyday lives are a powerful and insightful source to explore how "power operates in and through particular spaces to systematically (re)produce particular inequalities" (Valentine, 2007, p.19). So, to understand the everyday experiences of (dis)comfort and (un)safety in minority gay/bi men's lives and how they materialize in specific spaces allows us to understand how nationalist discourses matters in everyday life.

5. Our study

Following from the previous, we approach the constitution of subjectivities as an iterative process between norms and discourses, and critically reflexive, geographically-embedded subjects (Nelson, 1999, p.341). Such a perspective allows for conscious action and intentionality in various settings ('situated agency'), in response to nationalist discourses, personal desires and the need to be recognized and to belong. At the same time, we recognize that some (politically-infused) norms may be iterated *unconsciously* (Nelson, 1999). This stance implies an epistemological position that recognizes the limits to researching subjectivities. Notwithstanding, it does allow us to interrogate the role of nationalist discourses in conscious agency and intent, and how they affect social constructions, by internalizing and reproducing the underlying norms in everyday interactions, or rather negotiate or resist them.

To understand how non-heterosexuals from minority backgrounds orient themselves, we interviewed seventeen Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch adults living in the Amsterdam region. Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch are among the largest minorities in the Netherlands, and are racially othered on the basis of their "non-European" heritage and Islamic backgrounds. Amsterdam offers an interesting space for our research. This ethnically-diverse city has often been imagined as an open-minded 'gay capital' and as a liberal middle-class space. This urban context may allow our interviewees to lead their lives in a largely uncontested fashion, but it may also confront them with homonationalism and heteronormativity in the everyday. We focus on men who identify as gay or bisexual, not only because their spatialities tend to differ from other non-heterosexuals and from women (e.g. Wimark and Östh, 2014), but also because nationalist discourse frames non-white Muslim masculinity as most threatening to women and non-heterosexuals (Bracke, 2012).

Finding interviewees required substantial effort. Men were often hesitant to participate because they value their privacy and because of the personal nature of the topic. Initially, author 1 and 2 reached out to potential participants in their personal networks, and author 2 made contact with two professionals who are active in giving minority LGBTQIs voice and support: a social worker and a documentary-maker. They were interviewed for context but also connected us to potential respondents. Furthermore, by gaining trust with initial interviewees, we were able to gain access to a private Facebook group, where we could publicise our call for participants. We also used the snowballing method for finding respondents. In the end, we interviewed fifteen respondents who identify as gay ('homo') men and two as bisexual men. Three men were found in our personal networks, four via a professional, four through online efforts, and six through snowballing.

Most of our interlocutors were born in the Netherlands. Four men had moved to Europe from Morocco or Turkey as young children and three as young adults. Most participants lived in the municipality but we

also included men who had previously lived in Amsterdam and still frequented the city, but now lived in the region. Fifteen men lived independently, one in shared housing and one with his parents. Our interlocutors were mostly higher educated: thirteen held a bachelor or master degree and four had mid-level vocational training.

The interviews were structured around sets of questions on life course, residential and everyday mobility, and housing and neighbourhood preferences. Relatedly, questions were asked about how places and spaces were experienced, phrased as where interlocutors felt comfortable and where they could 'be themselves'. Inspired by neighbourhood studies (Tersteeg and Pinkster, 2016; Reinders, 2015), we also made use of a mental-mapping exercise. Interlocutors were asked to draw a map on a blank sheet of paper. The instruction was to draw "your version of the city, so we may map your everyday life", and mark "places of importance"; the maps were expanded and edited during the course of the interview. Such a visualization method can help to express certain ideas and emotions and to encourage interviewees to adopt a more geographical lens (Rust, 2000). The maps used in this study were not a tool of analysis in itself; rather, they served as the start of the conversation to discuss spatial perceptions and experiences.

The mapping exercise generally worked well in structuring the interview, in 'locating' experiences and in reflecting on spaces. In a few cases, participants were reluctant to draw, and reminding them led to a break in concentration. Here, the mapping exercise was abandoned during the interview.

The interviews were held during two periods between February 2016 and May 2017. The first ten were part of a master thesis on everyday practices and spatial negotiations, and an additional seven interviews were held for the purpose of this paper. They were scheduled at a location and time of the men's choosing; were recorded with permission; were held in Dutch (15) and in English (2); and lasted between 75 and 120 min. Transcripts were sent to the respondents, some of returning theirs with minor corrections or censored personal details. We analysed the edited transcripts with the use of Atlas.ti software, whereby the interviews were coded for mentions of nationalist politics, narratives of spatial negotiations and discussions of subjectivities.

Interviews were conducted by the second author, who self-identifies as a white-Dutch gay man. While a shared sexual identification facilitated moments of common understanding (and in one case flirtation), differences in intersectional subjectivity may have led to participants over-emphasising or translating aspects of their background and experiences to make themselves and their spatial orientations understood. The interviewees would often take ample time to explain aspects of sexuality, family and cultural norms in their Dutch communities and their family's country of origin. We can only speculate that the interviewees sought to make their position clear in a societal context where their subjectivities are often mischaracterised or misunderstood, and in a research performative setting where a relatively young white researcher was differently affected by those norms. Beforehand, we were conscious of our limited experience with the specific normativities our target audience might face. To prepare, the interviewer had performed a broad literature review and attended several gatherings and lectures. Also, the social worker and documentary-maker provided useful advice on context and sensitivities, and warned us that this group was often approached for research but would often not see any of the results. This last point refers to the ethical issue of white researchers 'retrieving' data from non-white subjects, an uneven, somewhat exploitative, relationship that parallels colonial-era geographical and ethnographic research (see Bourke, 2014; Fisher, 2015). At the time, we resolved three things. First, we would be clear in communicating our positionality as white European researchers with different sexual subjectivities. Second, in our questioning, we would avoid using problematic binaries ourselves, and be mindful of personal struggles and histories that arise from systemic oppressions. Third, we would seek to make this study benefit Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch non-heterosexuals in general. In addition to sharing our study with the interviewees and experts, the findings were

shared and discussed in a support group for 'bicultural LGBTs', and in a public conference during Amsterdam Pride. Also, this paper may inspire further public debate. In all this, we are careful not to impose ourselves as community spokespersons.

The other authors were not part of the interview setting,³ but analysed the final transcripts of the interviews. This analysis may reflect the fact that as white Dutch and Belgian scholars, and overall outsiders to Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch communities, we have limited personal knowledge with the experience of being racially othered. Although we have sought to constantly reflect on our positionality as white Europeans, these embodied experiences and perspectives will have affected how we have conducted and interpreted the interviews. The constant negotiations between outsidership (e.g. being white, native-Dutch) and insidership (e.g. living in Amsterdam, not adhering to heteronormativities, etc.) lead to a specific and unavoidable partial view, as research, researchers and the researched always co-construct each other (cf. England 1994).

6. Imaginaries and orientations of minority gay/bi men

Almost all men lead very mobile lives with networks of friends throughout the urban region and beyond. Yet, the mapping exercise revealed a binary spatial understanding. There was a strong orientation towards centrally-located neighbourhoods. These include the historic city centre, including the gay night life area concentrated in *Reguliersdwarstraat*, and centrally-located pre-war neighbourhoods, and, sometimes, the dockland redevelopments. These were marked as places of consumption, night-life, entertainment, work and education.

A more complicated relationship came to the fore with neighbourhoods with large concentrations of Moroccan- and Turkish-Dutch residents. Particularly the post-war western periphery (mostly *Nieuw-West* and, to a lesser degree, *Bos en Lommer*) would be drawn in for their population, or these areas would be omitted almost entirely. When asked, many expressed some unease with these areas, even when they were familiar with them. Multiple men indicated feelings of discomfort, anxiousness or unsafety when moving through them. Saad (22), who moved to Amsterdam for study, said:

In Nieuw-West, I have been there a couple of times since a friend of mine is living there. I am being stared at when I am over there, as if I am something disgusting. There is a very large Moroccan community over there, west of Westerpark. And I don't know, it just gives me a very bad feeling. I am being stared at the entire time and well I understand everything they say so... I feel very threatened then. I do not feel safe. It is also... you don't see any white people there while with a more multicultural population I feel much safer. (Saad, Moroccan-Dutch)

Saad was not very familiar with the area, but the sentiment was also shared by others, who knew the areas better. These quotes also draw attention to the bodily and sensory awareness of the surroundings that almost all respondents noted when discussing being in these spaces. Otmane (33) did not experience threat but does feel more aware:

I am more aware of the codes, if you can call it that. When I am in West, in Osdorp, where I don't go often, you see a different cultural diversity (...) Certainly because you know 'I am gay', and of course you don't know whether people can see that. So you ask yourselves these questions. You pay more attention to yourself (Otmane, Moroccan-Dutch)

Otmane indicated that when younger he would avoid colourful dress or feminine mannerism to conceal his sexual subjectivity. Many other interviewees would also consciously conduct themselves to avoid recognition and confrontation. They would not hold hands or show any kind of intimacy with another man in these neighbourhoods, whereas they would feel comfortable showing affection in central

³ Author 1 and 2 did discuss interviews during data gathering.

neighbourhoods. Participants also indicated that they don't like to display public affection, citing Moroccan and Turkish culture.

The men reproduced socio-spatial imaginaries very similar to that of (homo)nationalist understandings; central areas were seen as a diverse, cosmopolitan and tolerant space (although not by all, see below), while areas with large shares of Moroccan- and Turkish-Dutch were cast as more paternalistic, masculine and heteronormative spaces. These spatialities might point to the internalization of these (homo)nationalist imaginaries. However, their socio-spatial imaginaries were often related to personal experiences, and family-related struggles. Some participants shared stories of bad encounters with Moroccan-Dutch or Turkish-Dutch youth, with accounts ranging from sneering to harassment and violence. Yet, the level of stress or discomfort seems to relate mostly to -often painful- family histories of either concealment, or of dealing with denial or shunning from family members. Nearly all interviews contained stories of (perceived or real) unaccepting family members. Although there were also many instances of family support, for some, there was a sense that their family and friends belong to a different culture, particularly the older generations.

These binaries were not only in relation to urban spaces, but were also more likely to characterise their sexual subjectivity as being closer to 'Western' culture. For instance, when he was younger, Aydin had several bad experiences with heteronormativity in Turkish-Dutch communities and with partnerships with Turkish-Dutch men. In this context he stated that:

... macho culture is more with Turks and Moroccans and those kind of cultures. I see that much less in Dutch culture (...), if you look at acceptance, or let's say tolerance. (Aydin, Turkish-Dutch)

Their emphasis on cultural differences may be partly related to the positionality of the interviewer as a white Dutch man. When asked, participants would also explain that homosexuality and bisexuality are seen as 'Western' in Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch communities, often referring to heteronormative culture and religious beliefs. Multiple men would also explain how homosexuality and men having sex with other men also exist in Turkey and Morocco, albeit differently.

So, for some, personal experiences had led some neighbourhoods to feel like subjection; as places which made them feel surveyed and possibly recognised. For example, Driss (35), who lives in *Nieuw-West*, was very much aware of how he might be perceived in certain neighbourhoods, including his own.

East, Nieuw-West and Oud-West, a lot of Moroccans live there... and they just watch me because I am Moroccan. I feel their eyes. That's the way it is. They recognize me immediately and watch what I am doing, really feeling free in Amsterdam, no. <Except maybe> when I am in the centre. (Driss, Moroccan-Dutch)

Driss stated that his choice to openly live as a gay man is a choice for 'Western culture' and against a Moroccan-Dutch culture which he views as oppressively collective and masculine. Yet, this binary is not hegemonic nationalism. Later in the interview, Driss acknowledged that his situational awareness is very much related to his own personal struggles, leading him to appraise similar encounters differently.

Sometimes, white Dutch friends of mine say something like: 'oh that's very gay of you'. I get really irritated and angry. Stop that, I say, I am Driss (...) I have a feeling that I can't <say anything> in the company of Moroccans; it is my impediment... because I have too many associations with Moroccan men. (...) With a white Dutch man, I think, well he doesn't mean it like that. It is not judgmental or part of that we-culture. He is trying to make a joke, perhaps to show that he doesn't have any problems <with my sexuality>. (Driss)

Participants also expressed other spatial orientations. These men would also feel awareness and risk in some areas, and also argued that norms on gender and sexuality are a cultural trait that is essentially different from 'Dutch culture'. Nevertheless, their understandings were

less absolute. They would often point to the insecurities of young minority men and also to the first generation who came from poor rural communities. For that last group, some stated that they don't want to cause unnecessary offense by 'acting gay', electing to conduct themselves differently in encounters with 'others' (see [Valentine and Waitt, 2012](#)). Also, they would talk more about how they appreciated parts of their heritage. Such appreciation would be related to consumption (e.g. shopping in those neighbourhoods), dress, language, food, family festivities, and religion. Contrary to what the (homo)nationalism suggests, a good number of men self-identified as Muslim. Often religion was practiced in private, but, for instance, Talat, whose religious family largely accepts his sexual subjectivity, and who sees his religion as his only home ('thuis'), would go to the Mosque in Amsterdam.

So, while we find parallels in socio-spatial imaginaries to those found in nationalism, their usage cannot be merely explained by the internalization of homonationalist discourses. Rather, the foundations for the men's social and spatial discourse are based on very personal histories. Also, their stories indicate the complexities of 'intersectional subjectivities' which are often at odds with broader understandings ([Rahman, 2010](#)). The religiosity of some men exemplifies such complexity, but also Driss expresses great pride over his 'Berber' heritage.

7. Politics, encounters and subjectivities

For most, neighbourhoods with many Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch were symbolically significant. Yet, any accounts of risk and rejection were mirrored by those of encounters of racism and exclusion by white Dutch. That is, if they were recognised as Turkish-Dutch or Moroccan-Dutch. Interestingly, several men have had experiences where they were mis-identified. Typically, they would overhear non-native Dutch speaking about them in Turkish, Arabic or Amazigh. The men reported similar incidences of misrecognition with native-Dutch in public space or at work. Strangers would ask them where they are from and comment on how they don't look Moroccan or Turkish, having assumed that they were southern European. These misunderstandings were attributed to appearance and mannerisms but also to their dress and hairstyles, which they described as more fashionable, more loose and, in some cases, more feminine than what is custom for minority men of their age. Their dispositions and appearance were informed by embodied subjectivities that are not only non-white, but also non-heterosexual as well as middle class (see [Binnie and Skeggs 2004](#)). It is the specific intersection of a certain marker of class (e.g. fashionable clothes) with sexuality and gender (e.g. too feminine) that is usually assigned to white bodies, that makes it impossible for these men to be read as Moroccan- and Turkish Dutch. These encounters illustrate how they are precluded from having a Moroccan or Turkish background with a non-heterosexual subjectivities, and how they do not fit nationalist and heteronormative binaries that separate background, sexuality and urban space. Hence, they are recognised as white by white and non-white strangers in central areas.

Participants were bothered by instances of misrecognition, but not as much as by being recognised and excluded. There were multiple stories of being discriminated against in job interviews, leading some to change their names in their applications. A few men had had elderly white people telling them that they are untrustworthy, or saw them avoiding them in public space. Unsurprisingly, participants found these encounters of aggression, racism and othering upsetting and insulting.

When sexual subjectivity was also recognised, stereotyping could lead to questioning. A few men described white Dutch colleagues, acquaintances and friends struggling to come to terms with how their class and sexual subjectivities related to their family backgrounds. This led to emphasizing cultural stereotypes in minor but meaningful ways. Siddiq, for instance, recounted how acquaintances would joke about him not wearing an attire associated with lower-class Moroccan youth, or, to his confusion, they were asking him where his motor scooter was. Siddiq

(37) also recounted that.

In the street, in everyday life, you are puked out (...) but on one [web]site (...) you are very popular. They would even pay for it. (Siddiq, Moroccan-Dutch)

Siddiq referred to the sexual interest of white men who, he felt, would normally discriminate against him. Other men also recounted instances in gay spaces in Amsterdam where their ethnic background would be exoticised, and where they would hear that they should be grateful or lucky to be in The Netherlands because of social rights and liberties. These encounters of 'sexual racism' served as reminders of conditional belonging in the Netherlands (see Ruez, 2017; Wekker, 2016b), and show how (homo)nationalism constructs non-white 'muslims' simultaneously as anti-sexual (when being considered as sexually conservative) and deeply sexualized (when being exoticized, or when seen as a sexual perverse or dangerous) (Puar, 2006, 2007).

The most direct confrontation with radical (homo)nationalist discourse came from Talat. By choice, his circle of friends has been diverse and included many white Dutch. Some friends, he said, support a large radical right-wing party (PVV), which is radically Islamophobic.

A very good friend of mine has friends who are vehemently against foreigners. So, when they met me for the first time, they were vehemently against me as well. This and that, cunt foreigner and so on, but when they heard that I was gay, it was all like 'oh ok'. You know, the acceptance... when people have a stereotypical image of you as a foreigner, as a Turk or Muslim, but when you are gay all of a sudden it is all good. (...) In no way do I agree with it when people are judging me based on my origins or my sexuality, and accept me for other reasons, either my sexuality or my origins. (Talat, Turkish-Dutch)

Talat's experience shows how class and sexual subjectivities can render their background moot. This homophobia is not just limited to encounters with radicals, but is much more pervasive in Dutch society. A telling example is Iskender (24), who has a Turkish-Dutch middle-class background. Among our interviewees, Iskender was uniquely positioned. He had been a volunteer for a minority-LGBTQI organisation and had followed several workshops on queering. Also through his student life and internship at a prestigious firm, he had become familiar with liberal middle-class culture. When looking for work, being gay raised his 'level of being native (autochtoon)' compared to minority men from Nieuw-West who speak with a Moroccan-Dutch or Turkish-Dutch accent.

Iskender: (...) *It seems almost as if gay identity compensates for the other one (...) the stereotypical non-native.*

I: *Do you think that this is because of your sexuality?*

Iskender: *yes, because then you're empowered. Then you have embraced Dutch values and norms, and you have resisted your own barbaric culture, to put it bluntly. You notice people think: a good example of integration. As weird as it may sound.*

Iskender was able to reflect and act on how white Dutch have come to understand homosexuality and middle-classness as signs of Dutch whiteness, while young men who live in the urban periphery and speak differently become racialised others.

Encounters with (homo)nationalism in everyday life are felt as oppressive because they negate their belonging in the Netherlands as minority gay/bi men. This is particularly true for men, who, like Talat and Iskender, want to make their intersecting identities visible, and are able to recognise questioning as forms of domination. For them, these encounters are reminders that they constantly need to carve out an intersectional subjectivity that negotiate dominant identity discourse (Rahman, 2010). To illustrate, Remzi (22) who grew up in a village and came to Amsterdam to study, commented on his negotiations:

Already in school, I heard "oh, you are no longer a Muslim?", (...) they think it's surprising 'oh, you are gay and Turkish and Muslim, That's

interesting?' They think I would have to make a choice. That is pretty funny.

I'm just a 'Nether Turk'. (...) I've grown up here. I am a mix of Turkish and Dutch, and I am really happy with that. But... you have that stereotypical stuff. Islamophobia, a lot of fear, ignorance. I also have to deal with the ignorance on homosexuality <in Turkish-Dutch communities> (...) Yeah, you really notice this in your surroundings. (Remzi, Turkish-Dutch)

Remzi did not mind to answer questions to 'bridge cultures', but other participants were more likely to confront people. Talat confronted his friend's right-wing friend. Iskender would discuss the issues at his university. Suleyman strongly believes that you should 'not think about how you should act (...) just do as you want', and he had been in fights because of it. While his attitude is more forgiving, Remzi's words are typical for the men who insist that being outside of the binary is not 'impossible' (cf. Rahman, 2010).

7.1. Living intersectional lives

Our interviews revealed that men who would emphasize their intersectional subjectivities beyond binary oppositions are more aware of discursive violence (see Rahman and Valliani, 2016; Yip, 2009). Yet, making 'impossible' subjectivities possible is also a spatial practice, meaning that (urban) space has significance beyond politically-infused imaginaries and encounters (Knopp, 2004).

Interlocutors typically considered the city of Amsterdam as progressive, tolerant, cosmopolitan and diverse, particularly its centre. For many, the move was a transition into adulthood whereby the city offered them new opportunities for education and work, as well as access to nightlife and cultural amenities. These kinds of narratives are familiar in geographies of sexualities, as major cities in Europe and North America have often been portrayed as liberating for gays and, to a lesser extent, lesbians and bisexuals (Brown et al., 2016). Yet, the move to the city was also seen by some as liberating for its ethnic diversity. Talat, who is from a medium-sized town in the east, found that:

I don't feel a foreigner here, I don't feel a homosexual, I am just myself. In <my previous town> I was often the foreigner. Elsewhere, I was the homosexual or something. I don't have that here. In that regard I really feel at home. (...) In Amsterdam there are so many nationalities, so much diversity, you don't stand out. (Talat)

Most referred to the city centre when they discussed Amsterdam as diverse but Iskender appreciated the multifaceted nature of the city.

I have multiple needs and identities and I express one in one spot and another elsewhere. I don't need to express all my identities at the same time. And that's what I like about Amsterdam. On the same night, you can smoke Shisha with live music in West and chill in the 'Reguliers', and do something else later. I am not always busy with all my identities; they're in me and I act from one at one moment and from another one at different moment, but I feel accepted. (Iskender, Turkish-Dutch)

Iskender and Talat moved to Amsterdam as adults. Four participants were from Amsterdam and had a more nuanced view. Yet, all had moved away from their neighbourhood of upbringing. The move created a physical distance from their family and old friends in a similar way as those who came from outside. Driss explained how he came to live in Nieuw-West, and, while he felt stuck at the time of the interview due to housing market conditions, the move itself was important:

I got that place because I wanted to move out, so everything was good for me. It was also good for me because I wasn't fully living in freedom. When I moved to my own place, things happened fast. (Driss)

Moving away from their family, participants had found new surroundings and social networks in which they experienced more freedom to express themselves and to experiment in different ways that were difficult or even impossible before their move.

In terms of where to live, most men were oriented towards Amsterdam's gentrification neighbourhoods which they saw as places of diversity and consumption. Aksil (34), who is Moroccan-Dutch, explained why he feels comfortable living in *De Pijp*:

Aksil: Because, well, it is pretty anonymous. Pretty busy. Near Gerard Douplein it's really busy. Because of this, I don't know my neighbours. They don't know us. So, it has sort of an anonymous quality. Right now, I find that pleasant. On the other side, it's a bit of a shame that I don't know my neighbours.(...)

I: What does that anonymity offer you?

Aksil: (...) because I am not being bothered there. It's a pretty mixed neighbourhood, but also pretty white; a lot of hipsters. And there is a lot to do.

For Aksil and others the combination of urban amenities and anonymity were a plus. His assertion that *De Pijp* is 'pretty white' is likely related to its advanced stage of gentrification. For this reason, a few men indicated that they would rather live in more diverse gentrifying areas. The preference for central living was related to age and class status, but there was also a preference to live in relative anonymity, to not be recognised and subjected to identity questioning. Yet, these neighbourhoods may also be places of bad encounters. Iskender recounted multiple instances of homophobia and racism from white middle-class Dutch in *De Pijp* (see Çankaya and Mepschen, 2019).

A few participants sought residential comfort outside the city. Talat and Aydin chose to live in suburban municipalities. They framed their place of residence in terms of their daily mobility and work life, and as a place from where they could go out or visit friends. The environment also offered them safe anonymity. Aydin moved to an apartment building in small suburban town near Amsterdam to avoid recognition and the risk of bad encounters. Given his struggles with his family, his outlook was a bit different at the time, preferring to live among white Dutch:

When I first looked at the place, I first went downstairs to see who lives here. I first looked at the nameplates. I got that tip from someone. So, I looked whether any Turkish people were living there. That was not the case. A lot of Dutch people. For me, that felt safer. (Aydin)

This observation seems to be in line with research who have shown how the life trajectories of LGBTQ people are imagined to unfold in a direction that leads them 'out' of unsafety, namely those areas considered homo/bi/transphobic (Gorman-Murray, 2007; Wimark and Östh, 2014). Homonationalist imaginations see spaces inhabited by racialized-as-Muslim populations as unsafe (Hancock, 2008; Hancock, 2017; Boussaleem, 2021). However, the rigid distinctions between safe and unsafe spaces hide the multiple passages and encounters that happen at these sites, and fail to acknowledge how moving out of a certain area does not necessarily mean disconnecting with this area at all. Many men stressed that their neighbourhood does not factor into their social lives, but that it situates them. For instance, Aydin emphasized how his home served as a haven and as an anchor for mobility. He disaffiliated himself from his environment as much as possible, yet living near the city afforded him a way to remap and navigate nationalist discourse and family struggles:

How can I combine in this society? Am I more Turkish or Dutch? I have been searching until I thought 'I am just both, and that is wealth. I don't have to choose. This was a search. At the same time, as a homosexual, acceptance by your family and also, how do you find a place, well maybe not place, how am I going to set up my network. (Aydin)

His place of residence offered him distance to his family but also access to new social surroundings and networks. Aydin's case shows that self-actualisation is not contingent on living in or moving to the city

(Gorman-Murray et al., 2008; Shield, 2017). Yet, the city has a critical mass that sustains specific amenities and entertainment as well as organised support networks and activism (El-Tayeb, 2012).⁴

8. Conclusion

Nationalist discourses in the Netherlands revolve around a set of binaries based on ethnicity, migration, religion, class, and attitudes towards gender and sexuality. Through these discourses, non-native and non-White Dutch, particularly Muslim communities, are racially 'othered' as lower-class traditionalists and 'backwards', in contrast to a self-image of white Dutch as open-minded, tolerant and sexually liberal (Mepschen et al., 2010; cf. Puar, 2006, 2007). Those people who identify as non-heterosexual but do not adhere to the specific imaginations of what constitutes being non-heterosexual in Dutch society, therefore become 'impossible' subjectivities.

Our study illustrates how (homo)nationalist imaginaries relate to the spatialities and lived experiences of Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch gay and bisexual men across urban space in Amsterdam. For some of our interviewees, neighbourhoods with bigger populations of Muslims and/or of people racialized-as-Muslim (Boussaleem, 2021) represent spaces of risk, while the central neighbourhoods are seen as more diverse and tolerant. Their sexual subjectivities hinder their ability to find belonging in heteronormative spaces. Such spatial orientations resemble those in (homo)nationalist accounts. Yet, rather than buying into (homo) nationalism, the use of socio-spatial binaries are tied to –often difficult and painful– personal histories and their search for belonging, often away from their families and upbringing. Their experiences and dispositions lead to avoiding these spaces or to behaving and appearing differently when they are there. Spatial imaginaries are repeated through everyday discourse and performances (Butler, 1990; Watkins 2015), and so these men may unwittingly contribute to the narrative (cf. Puar, 2006). We present this not as a point of blame but as an insight into how (homo)nationalist discourse remains powerful and tenacious: it selectively speaks to certain truths.

Not all men feel caught between social and spatial binaries. Men who want to make visible their intersecting identities as both gay/bi and belonging to an ethnic and/or religious minority, negotiate their spatial orientations in different and often more complex ways. As they have learned to cope with the heteronormative elements of their ethnic or religious background, they are generally more comfortable when navigating Turkish-Dutch or Moroccan-Dutch spaces, even though they remain aware of their surroundings and sometimes encounter dismissal of their sexual subjectivity. These interviewees would also be more attuned to and bothered by encounters whereby people question belonging based on binary schemes. Hence, they experience bad encounters in white spaces differently, as they reject being considered 'impossible' subjectivities (see Abraham, 2009; Rahman and Valliani, 2016; Yip, 2009).

This paper contributes to an intersectional analysis of urban spaces by showing how nationalist discourses materialize and territorialize in everyday life. The results suggest that 'geographies of risk' are not only dependent on urban and regional social geographies (Itaoui, 2016, Itaoui, 2020; also Noble and Poynting, 2010; Ruez, 2017), but also on ideological discourse. The risk of bad encounters is structured by context-specific nationalist binary discourses as well as (shared) experiences of racism, heteronormativity and exclusion. As such, our study is part of a growing literature that seeks to understand how hegemonic discourses, space and the everyday lives of othered groups intersect (e.g. El-Tayeb, 2012; Browne & Brown 2016; Rodó-De-Zárate, 2017; Ruez, 2017; Loopmans et al. 2020; Itaoui, 2020; Boussaleem, 2021). Our contribution to geographical understandings of everyday experiences of sexual and racial politics in Western European cities is not only

⁴ Few had frequented support meetings or had been engaged in activism.

theoretical, but also empirical. Our study adds to the emerging yet scarce literature which investigates how nationalist ideologies may produce everyday spatialities for non-heterosexual minorities. Lastly, understanding the everyday experiences of (dis)comfort and (un)safety in minority gay/bi men's lives and how they materialize in specific spaces may potentially offer us ways to alter them.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Wouter van Gent: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition. **Gerald Brugman:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – review & editing. **Valerie De Craene:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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