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'Gays who cannot properly be gay': Queer Muslims in the neoliberal European city

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Abstract

The article traces the framing of Muslim Europeans as the continent's Other by focusing on the silencing of queer Muslims within public debates around 'Islam and homosexuality'. Ignoring class as a factor in the violence produced by the gentrification of urban spaces, the pitting of the (implicitly white) gay community against the (implicitly straight) Muslim community posits the latter as a threat to the continent's foundations that needs to be contained through forms of spatial governance in line with the neoliberal restructuring of the city. Maintaining that this is a Europe-wide phenomenon, the article looks at Amsterdam as exemplifying the European metropole as a site of pseudo-homophile Islamophobia. Simultaneously, with activist groups like the queer of color collective Strange Fruit, it is also representative of the strategies of resistance developed by groups whose presence is virtually erased through culture clash discourses, namely queer Muslims. The article argues that an intersectional queer of color activism, as practiced by Strange Fruit, and a queer of color critique building on it, allows to undermine binaries from the Muslim/European dichotomy to the normative coming out narrative, invariably positioning queers of color as 'not properly gay'.

Keywords

anti-Muslim racism, creative city, homonormativity, Netherlands, queer of color

It is often assumed that all minorities have psycho-social problems, leading to lots of questions about 'problematic' behavior . . . criminal behavior, runaways, drugs, prostitution . . . sexuality and supposed taboos in the diverse communities, often based on the assumption of backwardness/underdevelopment. (Strange Fruit, 1997)¹

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The many personal stories of gays of color are to a certain extent comparable. A *coming-out* like the one experienced by many Dutch gays is not (yet) seen as a necessary step by the majority and is not common. Many migrant/minority gays and lesbians live a double life and do not see any chance of living openly as gay, because, according to them, that would bring shame for their families within the community. (*Homosexuality and Citizenship*, Forum, 2003)

Our civilization is moreover based on values like the separation of church and state, democracy, freedom of speech, equality of men and women etc. . . . On the other hand at the beginning of the 21st century West-European cities are confronted with substantial Islamic minorities, which are not in the least assimilated and which concentrate in constantly expanding ghettos. ('Cities against Islamization' charter, 2008)

This article traces the discursive framing of Muslim Europeans as the continent's Other by focusing on the positionality of queer Muslims. The latter are largely invisible as agents within increasingly heated public debates around 'Islam and homosexuality', constructing a relationship that is assumed to be antagonistic, without intersectional spaces (see e.g. Buruma, 2006; Haritaworn, 2010). Thus, queer Muslims, if such an identity can be envisioned at all, occupy a place close to that assigned to Muslimas, i.e. they are perceived as being too oppressed and alienated from their own needs to speak up as long as they still identify with Islam. It is only when they can make the step into western modernity – a step that necessarily requires the break with, the coming out of the Muslim community – that they can claim an individualized identity as feminist or queer, usually by expressing gratitude for being saved by their 'host society'.² I argue that the Othering of Muslims, including queers, is a European phenomenon, that in fact the Europeanization of the continent's nation-states is in no small part manifest in a shared Islamophobia and a framing of immigration as the main threat to the continental union. In what follows, I therefore first sketch these intersecting discourses as they play out across Europe. Then, I look closer at Amsterdam as exemplifying not only the European city as a site of 'homophile Islamophobia', but also as paradigmatic for the strategies of resistance developed by groups whose presence is virtually erased through these discourses, namely queer Muslims.³

Since the fall of the Soviet empire more than 20 years ago, the uniting Europe has struggled to create a postnational system of governance able to address the challenges posed by an increasingly interconnected 21st-century world and to offer globally applicable solutions to problems left unresolved within a nation-state model prone to creating divisions rather than transnational alliances. Ironically though, while the postnational Europe frequently defines itself around shared values of humanism, equality and tolerance, there is an increasingly intolerant and repressive attitude towards migrants and racialized minorities – justified by their supposed threat to exactly these values, especially when they are identified as Muslim.⁴ The growing centrality of the (second generation, Muslim) migrant as internal threat to Europe can also be read however as being caused by and at the same time hiding an important change: the continent-wide shift to a 'migrant' population that is increasingly minoritarian, i.e. consisting of the so-called second and third generation, born and raised in their countries of residence, which in effect have become multi-ethnic and multi-religious.⁵ This shift (and its political, social and economic consequences) continues to be denied however in policy debates

and public discourse. Until the 1980s, West European perceptions of labor migration were shaped by the belief that the vast majority of migrants and their children would simply 'return home', once they were not needed anymore. This same rhetoric rings increasingly hollow though, when referencing a population whose only home *is* Europe, their experiences if not passports making them part of the continental community. Rather than acknowledging this reality however, policy and media debates seem stuck in assessing how exactly racialized minorities will have to assimilate before they can conditionally be considered European. Meanwhile, their socioeconomic marginalization remains unaddressed as it is seen as merely an indication of their failure to adapt.⁶ Accordingly, their perceived Otherness is primarily framed as one of fundamental *cultural* opposition to everything Europe stands for. Thus, while there is a reluctant and belated admittance that (West) European states have become 'immigration nations', the increasingly popular claim of 'the failure of multiculturalism' still manages to position racialized minorities outside of the space of 'proper' Europeaness.⁷

One of the most striking examples of this is the role of gender and sexuality in discourses around the continent's Muslim communities.⁸ The hijab in particular serves as the key symbol of Muslim difference, representing parallel societies that are shaped by ancient and primitive rather than modern, western structures. Its presence underlines the perception that Muslims and Europeans are like oil and water, unable to mix and merge; instead archaic Muslim enclaves, separate *qua* space and time, are supposedly surviving unchanged within the larger European societies, which in turn are forced to push these resisting populations into modernity through increasingly punitive measures (see e.g. the expanding anti-hijab legislation). The undeniable presence of minoritarian Europeans is thus reframed as a threat to the continent's foundations that needs to be contained through new forms of spatial governance: while borders within Europe are becoming increasingly diffuse with the progressing unification, the divide between 'Europeans' and 'non-Europeans' is reinforced along lines of race and religion. In other words, the construction of Muslim communities as static and repressive, preventing their members from moving – literally in case of women or intellectually in case of men – goes hand in hand with and hides legal, political and economic restrictions imposed on these communities, limiting their ability to move across borders between and within nations, often even within cities.⁹ While the delegitimizing difference of visible minorities is still most obvious in rural areas, their presence is most contested in urban spaces, which they are frequently accused of polluting or taking over.¹⁰ Thus, when addressing the interplay between discursive and material presence of European Muslim communities, my focus is on issues of containment and mobility in particular in cities. I am less interested here in explicit forms of state violence and racial profiling than in the policing of urban spaces through a neoliberal discourse bent on controlling the public through privatization and through framing the city as a site of consumption. The result is spatial politics, in which marginalized groups are not completely expelled from the city/nation, but remain excluded and contained through their failure to achieve consumer-citizen status. This failure in turn is linked back to the discourse of a cultural deficit of Muslim communities. The link becomes especially relevant in the neoliberal city where (white, middle-class, male) gay consumer-citizens represent the successful integration of minorities into the mainstream (Haritaworn et al., 2008; Manalansan, 2005).

Completely erasing class as a relevant factor in the violence produced by the gentrification of urban spaces, the increasing pitting of the (implicitly white) gay community against the (implicitly straight) Muslim community posits the former as a victim of the latter, creating further common ground between neoliberal and white supremacist interests: a discourse on culturally motivated 'hate crimes' targeting white gay men allows for the implementation of punishment, re-education and control toward not only individuals but the communities producing them (see Haritaworn, 2010). At the same time, they justify the neoliberal reordering of the city, interpellating the mainstream gay community as successful subjects of the 'creative city', which in turn justifies their full inclusion into the (post)nation. Urban metropolises, the 'global' and 'creative' cities, become increasingly central to neoliberalism as the nation-state – with its promise of stability, reliable and permanent borders, unambiguous group and class identities and normative life-paths – loses importance to global capitalism. The apparent dissolution of binaries that have characterized modernity is visible in conceptualizations of the city that move away from a functional model, in which urban spaces figure largely as containers into which different populations are sorted. In line with a postnational, 'borderless' Europe, the former instead prioritizes the flexible, mobile consumer-citizen, equally at home everywhere, unconcerned with limiting national or personal loyalties and thus achieving ultimate freedom from 20th-century constraints. The relationship between cities and their inhabitants appears as dynamic, both constantly shaping each other, adapting to conditions produced by a global economy and its translocal citizens.

A closer look at this (not so) new model shows however that neoliberalism's diffusion of old binaries and borders merely reconfigures rather than destabilizes familiar forms of domination. Not all kinds of mobility are equally desirable: while the transnational entrepreneur and global bohemian exemplify the proper cosmopolitan subject, the capital-less labor migrant embodies its opposite. And this undesirability is extended to the descendants of migrants, even if their mobility is simultaneously curtailed: while postwar industrial metropolises had been in need of unskilled migrant labor, contemporary postindustrial centers have moved to the service sector, which draws from an entirely different pool of potential employees. As a result, a working migrant population, frequently concentrated in poor neighborhoods directly adjacent to factories, has been replaced by a largely unemployed multi-ethnic underclass, stuck in these increasingly deteriorating spaces. Responsibility for this process is transferred onto racialized communities through the trope of 'self-segregation' and 'self-ghettoization', supposedly caused by their fundamentally different and inferior culture, increasingly identified with Islam.¹¹ In other words, the visible presence of racialized populations, whose concentrated presence implies a threatening violation of the 'normal', makes the city the primary battleground for the culture wars between Muslim invaders, threatening to destroy 'European values' and those defending them – the latter an ever-growing coalition of neoliberals, progressive white queer activists, conservatives, feminists, homonationalists and white supremacists.

What they have in common is an understanding of Islam as not a religion, practiced in a variety of forms, but as an all-encompassing ideology, stripping its adherents of all individuality. The content of this ideology in turn is determined not so much by Muslims themselves, but by European experts. This, of course, is in line with a long Orientalist

tradition (Said, 1979), in which Muslims appear as lacking individuality and agency, their collective actions determined by an archaic religion/culture dictating their every move. Aggressor and victim at the same time, unable to make the necessary transition into modernity on their own, Muslim societies need western intervention, in the form of (neo)colonialist 'humanitarian missions'. Through the process of civilizing the East, the West defines itself, creating an internal coherence impossible to achieve without the external Other. Part of this process is the appropriation of groups whose status within the nation is contested but whose conditional inclusion serves both to assure their loyalty and to affirm the West's superior ability to tolerate difference. The role of feminists and more recently gays and lesbians in the mobilization of the nation around the (neo) colonial civilizing mission has been extensively analyzed (Puar, 2007; Spivak, 1988). Critical deconstructions of contemporary versions of this 'strategic humanism' tend to focus on the United States however as the dominant military power and self-declared leader in the 'war on terror'. Less attention is paid to the ways in which Europe exerts economic control over formerly colonized spaces. The latter, less obvious system of domination is firmly situated within human rights discourses that tend to hide rather than address economic violence by drawing on the larger framework of civilizing West/ underdeveloped Global South (see Williams, 2010). This dynamic plays out in international relations, but also in the neoliberal restructuring of European cities, in which class is replaced by notions of culture that deeply racialize urban hierarchies.

The exclusion of Muslim Europeans through the claim of Islam being incompatible with a European commitment to human rights builds on a larger tradition. Still, its current specifics have led to a transformation of the continent's political landscape, seemingly reconfiguring left/right binaries in renewed debates on the city and its cultural significance. Europe's far right over the last decade became an increasingly important factor in electoral politics across the continent, both through direct government participation and by justifying 'moderate' parties' move to explicitly Islamophobic and anti-immigrant positions.¹² Simultaneously, groups like the Belgian Vlaamse Belang, the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid or the British National Party have moved away from a traditional right-wing anti-urbanism to claim the city as a site of the fight against an 'Islamization' of Europe and in defense of values such as gender equality and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights that they have not been traditionally known to care much about. But positing homophobia and sexism as defining characteristics of Muslim communities to the point that they have become *the* shorthand for the supposed incompatibility of 'Islam' and 'Europe' requires at least a rhetorical commitment to the threatened values by Europe's defenders, even if their actual investment in them is more than doubtful.¹³

The hijab and 'honor killings' have become symbols of a social order that violently and necessarily oppresses women and more recently, hate crimes by Muslim youths against gay men have become another seeming proof of Islam's inherently and uncontrollably violent nature (see Bernhardt, 2007; Wolter and Yılmaz-Günay, 2009). Thus the reference to the status of women in the introductory quote from the charter of 'Cities against Islamization' (CAI), a translocal network founded in 2008 in Antwerp by right-wing parties from across Europe – Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, France and Spain.¹⁴ Since the participating organizations are explicitly nationalist and

anti-European, their choice to create a continent-wide city-based network in order to combat 'Islamization' is significant. It reflects not only the growing internationalization of white supremacist organizations, but also indicates the importance of the urban space for anti-Muslim activism: it is here that the trope of a continent overrun by foreigners can be bolstered by the presence of 'ghettos'. In addition, the question whether Muslim communities should be allowed to build publicly identifiable mosques has become an extremely successful site for Islamophobic mobilization, producing a consensus on the presence of minarets as indication that multiculturalism has indeed gone too far (since it would establish the presence of Muslims as permanent rather than preliminary).¹⁵ A protest against the construction of a mosque in Lier in Belgium, organized by 'Cities against Islamization', sums it up: 'With the coming of the mosque that district and the whole of Lier are going to Islamize in a fast way. Big mosques attracts [*sic*] new Muslims. As you well know a mosque is not only a house of prayer but also a cultural centre.'¹⁶ This characterization of Islam as a culture rather than a religion is another central element in the de-Europeanizing of Muslims. According to the CAI charter 'Islam is more of a social order rather than a religion. This social order . . . is at odds with the entirety of values and standards, which are part of our European society.'¹⁷ The framing of Islam not only as a 'social order' dictating every aspect of the life of every Muslim, but as an order incompatible with, if not actively opposing, 'European values' of tolerance and democracy has been thoroughly mainstreamed. The urban clash between 'Muslims' and 'gays' exemplifies this more than any other trope and while white supremacist groups are still somewhat hesitant to embrace gay rights, there is a growing segment, represented among others by the Dutch Lijst Pim Fortuijn and Geert Wilders' Partij voor de Vrijheid, both quite successful in national elections, that does. More important for the successful placing of Muslims as unacceptably and gays as acceptably deviant though, is the rise of the creative city model; identifying affluent gay men as a valuable constituency for economically struggling cities.

Reacting to the crisis of the industrial city that began in the 1970s, a crisis that produced forms of situated resistance like the squatter and hip-hop movements, authors such as Richard Florida appropriated and tamed the subversive impulses produced within these movements into a neoliberal market model of the city, postulating a creative class as the new driving force behind the resurrection of urban spaces. Florida's (pseudo) quantitative creative city model offers ethnic diversity, patent applications per head and the number of gay (male) residents as the three main indicators of an urban community's desirability within the new 'creative' economy (Florida, 2002). This index seemingly legitimizes the presence of sexual as well as racial minorities, thus presenting a move beyond earlier models aimed at pushing non-normative populations outside the city limits; there is a difference however not only between types of culture but also between those embodying creativity, the 'gay residents' and those representing 'ethnic diversity'. The former are defined along the lines of a rather tired stereotype – the wealthy, artistic, (white) gay man, favoring the aesthetic over the political, consumption over activism and participation in the status quo over change – which gained new credibility and positive value with the discovery of the gay market in the 1990s.¹⁸ As cultural sociologist Andreas Reckwitz and others have shown, however, this postmodern model, while superficially celebrating a dynamic mode of living opposed to the static restrictions of the modern

age, in fact contains and constrains the shifts taking place in late 20th-century city life and integrates them into a new binary, whose Other is quite familiar, namely 'the non-Cultural, that is the sphere of that which does not see itself as cultural or is not (initially) accessible to cultururation' (Reckwitz, 2009; 18), in other words: the ethnic.

Operating through interpellation as much as exclusion, the creative city makes use of what Lisa Duggan termed homonormativity (Duggan, 2002): a mainstreamed gay discourse that attempts to expand rather than dismantle heteronormativity by internalizing a conceptualization of LGBT identity that constructs legitimacy and rights along established lines, challenging neither the exclusion of those who do not or cannot play by the rules nor a system whose very existence depends on such exclusions. In turn, homonormative queers are offered protection through an Islamophobic consensus that frames the policing of poor, racialized communities as a protection of human rights.¹⁹ As a result, despite the stated openness of the creative city, white, middle-class and male once again seems to constitute the unquestioned norm and certain groups occupy similar marginal positions in hetero- and homonormative discourses, among them the Muslim community – including queer Muslims – which provides color, exotic food and sexual objects, but also stands for restrictive morality, crime and poverty.

The city is not only a site of gay consumption however, but also of queer activism. As Halberstam and others have argued, the urban space long held the promise of allowing for a radically anti-assimilationist queer identity rejecting the spatio-temporal foundations of the nation-state:

Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death. (Halberstam, 2005: 2)

But while those markers – marriage, childrearing, military service – have moved to the center of mainstream gay and lesbian activism, progressive queer conceptions of space and time, rejecting notions of mainstreamed LGBT normalcy and respectability, are not necessarily in opposition to neoliberal demands. Despite being critical of the effects of homo- and heteronormativity, white queer organizations fail to develop a new political language and practice adequate to the changed structures of global domination.²⁰ Instead, the old arsenal of anti-establishment political rhetoric can be kept useful by directing it toward a new target: Islam. The Muslim community stands for an outmoded form of heterosexuality – intolerant of difference, violent toward women and gays, oppressive, static and unwilling to go with the times – in the eyes of radical queers (and feminists) as much as in those of liberals, conservatives and right-wingers. Embodying the failed essentialism of identity politics, religious fundamentalism, political correctness and the doomed industrial class system of 20th-century capitalism, they are positioned in opposition to the new values of diversity, tolerance and mobility. Identifying homophobia and misogyny as main characteristics of the global and European Muslim cultural practice allows white feminist and queer activists to remain within an analytic developed in response to forms of repression that seem to have vanished from Western European societies – except in its Muslim enclaves. Muslim minorities as the source of gays and

lesbians' victimization finally validates the latter as it can be recognized by the majority, which becomes the protector, rather than the oppressor of the LGBT minority.

Within this binary discursive formation, the (West) European LGBT community plays the part of civilizer, while queer Muslims have nothing to offer, as they, like all Muslims, are cast as products of a culture that is fundamentally inferior to the secular West. This logic is exemplified in the second quote introducing this article, taken from a 2003 report on *Homosexuality and Citizenship* in the Netherlands. Published by Forum, the independent Dutch Institute for Multicultural Affairs, it reflects dominant perceptions of a normative, healthy and desirable LGBT identity, centered around 'coming out' and represented by the white, western gay subject. This norm is complimented by its underdeveloped Other, embodied by racialized queers, held back from achieving the former's liberated state by their homophobic culture of origin. Emancipation thus can only be achieved by assimilating into dominant culture.

Absent from this discourse is a progressive queer critique that applies intersectionality in order to analyze the effects of race and class on this seeming clash between progressive, tolerant, dynamic European society and the traditional, intolerant, static Muslim community. Instead, as the Dutch queer of color collective Strange Fruit observed as early as 1997, it is 'assumed that all minorities have psycho-social problems', expressed in a deindividualized cultural deviance that threatens the nation's core values and thus needs to be cured through a mixture of (forced) assimilation, punishment and (re) education. That is, both queer and straight Muslims appear as misfits within 21st-century models of identity: while the former, still culturally stuck in the age of shame, are incapable of embracing a modern queer identity manifest in particular in the normative coming out process, the latter cling to a repressive model of heterosexuality, out of synch with the age of neoliberal consumer citizens, offering participation to anyone willing and able to pay the price, including those formerly excluded, such as women and queers. Thus, while the European Muslim community as a whole is judged to present the 'wrong', i.e. misogynist, homophobic, type of heterosexuality, feminist and queer Muslims too are confronted with the demand to take sides in the imaginary clash of cultures in which 'the West' stands for liberal and progressive cosmopolitanism.

This legible and thus acceptable image of the victimized queer Muslim saved by western humanitarianism (often via white queer organizations; see Haritaworn et al., 2008) is directly opposed to the position expressed in the quote by Amsterdam-based Strange Fruit introducing this article. The collective, whose name simultaneously references queer positionalities and African diasporic traditions, almost perfectly represents the subaltern of contemporary European discourses around race, religion and migration in their implied impact on gender and sexuality. Active from 1989 to 2002, the group was founded by queer youths of Muslim and Afro-Caribbean background, for the most part welfare recipients and/or sex workers, who came together intending to challenge their marginalization within both their ethnic communities and the Dutch gay scene. Committed to a non-hierarchical self-help approach, the activists offered an insider's perspective to other queer youths of color, rather than that of aid workers delivering 'expert knowledge'. Instead, they used the expertise present within the community itself in order to challenge authoritative discourses such as the one producing the Forum report, thus questioning the assumption of a deficiency of non-white/non-western queerness and

identifying racism and Islamophobia as intrinsically linked to dominant models of gay liberation.

It is likely no coincidence that a Dutch queer of color group was among the first observing the pinkwashing of post-1989 Europe.²¹ Over the past two decades, the Netherlands in many ways has become the paradigmatic site of the Othering of racialized Europeans via a discourse that presents Islamophobia as the logical, in fact necessary, response to Islam's homophobia.²² Cracks in the idealized narrative of Dutch liberal tolerance have largely been defined as caused by the nation's growing Muslim population, unwilling and unable to partake in the 'live and let live' mentality that for centuries managed to maintain a delicate equilibrium between diverse populations.²³ Several studies devoted to the issue of Islam and homosexuality in the Netherlands produced results that seemed to confirm the adversary relationship between the two. One of the first, a survey of local high schools published in 1996 by the City of Amsterdam, identified rampant homophobia among minority youths, especially Muslims (see Strange Fruit, 1997: 25). This claim gained wide attention in part by feeding into an ongoing larger debate on 'senseless violence' supposedly originating in migrant communities, in part by tying into growing concerns about the rise of 'black schools', i.e. schools with a high number of students of color, and the negative effect of this trend on white Dutch students (see Arts and Nabah, 2001). The study's findings were complimented by the 2003 Forum report mentioned earlier, exploring the status of non-white queers. The publication presents the familiar dichotomy of stories of oppression representative for queers of color and narratives of liberation exemplifying Dutch queer identity (with 'Dutch' and 'minority' being conceived of as mutually exclusive); thus queers of color appear as 'not there yet', as trying to catch up with white society, victims not of Dutch racism but of an oppressive, archaic ethnic culture:

The risk of expulsion from family and/or community is real. Thus, these are reasons to avoid a confrontation with cultural and/or religious traditions and to hide their sexual preference from family and community. For gays of color it is often already a big step – towards self-realization – to use the meeting places created by migrant/minority gays. Initiatives such as Strange Fruit and Secret Garden of the Amsterdam COC and the Melting Pot of the Hague's COC. These initiatives have diverse aims: from help and support to the organizing of informal meeting nights. (Forum, 2003: 11)

The model character of the 'autochton' gay Dutch community and the usefulness of the linear coming out binary as indicator of a successful 'self-realization' remain unquestioned. By focusing on minority queers' inability to come out and live openly, the Forum report puts them firmly on the wrong side of the oppressed/liberated dichotomy. Consequently, it presents the step of approaching one of the minority LGBT organizations working under the umbrella of larger Dutch queer organizations, namely the COC, as the only way to cross over to the right side, out of the (cultural) closet.²⁴ The dichotomy between pre- and post-pride gay identity as Marlon Ross, Hiram Perez and others have argued, posits the closet as 'ground zero in the project of articulating an "epistemology" of sexuality' (Ross, 2005: 162). Strikingly reflected in the Forum report, this understanding of the closet 'narrativizes gay and lesbian identity in a manner that violently excludes or includes the subjects it names according to their access to specific kinds of privacy,

property, and mobility' (Perez, 2005: 177). The link between linear mobility and progress ties the normative coming out story to the larger discourse around racialized minorities in the neoliberal European city as both present communities of color as spaces of oppression that need to be permanently left in order to enter the domain of the liberated consumer-citizen. At the same time, 'being out' becomes increasingly manifest in forms of commercialized mobility that neatly tie into creative city models, in which race and class are the true signifiers of who can be properly gay: 'Needless to say, the mobility that modern gay identity requires is not universally available. Here we encounter trouble in the form of noncanonical bodies (not surprisingly, also quite often brown bodies) nonetheless interpellated as gay. Gays who cannot properly be gay' (Perez, 2005: 177).

This clash between mobile modern gay identity and those who cannot properly be gay is enacted in particularly evident ways in a city like Amsterdam. It in many ways exemplifies the neoliberal creative city, with its mixture of quaint architecture and edgy metrosexual culture, idyllic canals and multicultural markets, liberal drug laws and its own version of the low income neighborhoods, meant to temporarily house labor migrants, that can be found in most European cities. These neighborhoods, such as the (mostly black) Bijlmer and (mostly Muslim) Slotervaart, have become permanent home to an increasingly segregated, criminalized and policed multi-ethnic population of color, disproportionately poor and young (see Amsterdam-Slotervaart City Council, 2007, 2008; Open Society Institute, 2009); out of sight of the millions of visitors who come to the city each year, but at the same time available when needed to mobilize fears around a foreign, fanatical, violent Other or to provide an accessible, exotic and titillatingly dangerous site for the more daring traveler, straight or gay, local or international. It is exactly this combination that made the city one of Europe's most popular tourist destinations and the prime site of what Hiram Perez calls gay cosmopolitan tourism (Perez, 2005). This is a tourism that affirms a particular gay identity as normative by tying liberation to specific types of mobility. Gay cosmopolitan tourism thus requires, and produces, the same kind of seemingly fluid but in fact strictly hierarchical urban spaces provided by the neoliberal creative city, including poor communities of color in its landscape, but containing and isolating them to ensure that movement takes place only in one direction, conceiving of them primarily as a resource – of labor, food, sex and other commodities valued by the consumer-citizen. These racialized communities are thus defined as lacking the individualized and commercialized mobility of the (homo- and heteronormative) western subject, while they are at the same time forever reduced to a hypermobile, uprooted state. Their presence is a marketable touristic commodity exactly because it is perceived to exist outside of the normative. It thus includes an element of danger, of the excessive exotic within the confines of the civilized city, a permanent potential threat to the humanist consensus of postnational Europe.

This characterization aligns with *Strange Fruit's* assessment of why minority queers are ambiguous about white organizations like the COC, namely the fact that:

It is hardly ever discussed what problems these minority youths encounter within the Dutch society/the Dutch education system, in gay and lesbian organizations, subcultures, in contacts, friendships, relationships with Dutch peers/adults, hardly ever is there room for survival strategies, statements by the youths themselves or for the insights of black/migrant experts. (Strange Fruit, 1997: 23)

Instead, the coming out becomes a decontextualized fetish around which the familiar superiority of western individuality is built, while queers of color are expected to catch up, to overcome their inherent cultural disadvantage. Racialized queers and in particular queer Muslims are forced to negotiate an incredibly complicated terrain, constantly confronted with silencing, appropriation, exclusion and the overwhelming demand to adapt their reality to ideologies proclaiming them an oxymoron. Challenging as this is, queer activists of color have managed to successfully circumvent this pressure, resisting the divisions imposed on them by minority and majority communities through a politicized creolization of traditions and identities. This creolization, which I have called a queering of ethnicity (El-Tayeb, 2011), acknowledges the fact that supposedly incompatible cultures and histories have already merged in European practices and uses the 'improper', 'inauthentic' and impossible positionality of racialized Europeans as the starting point for situated, specifically European strategies of resistance. I will end this article by briefly exploring how Strange Fruit exemplifies this employment of an intersectional queer of color politics resisting racism and Islamophobia.

The possibility of a queer Muslim identity beyond homonormative western models and heteronormative interpretations of Islam was from the beginning a central concern for the activists, it was however never the only one.²⁵ The group included members from a variety of backgrounds, North African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, Afro-Dutch, Asian and Asian-Dutch. What they shared was the experience of being racialized within Dutch society and the very heterogeneity of the group allowed the activists to explore the common patterns of this racialization. Strange Fruit's strategies reacted to the process of Othering directed at European migrant and minority communities by speaking from the position of racialized subjects, emphasizing exactly this Othering rather than accepting it as reflecting an essential truth, thus engaging in the queering of ethnicity by claiming autonomy without authenticity.

Throughout its roughly 13-year existence, Strange Fruit organized a wide variety of activities, from weekly radio programs and safer sex education workshops to a monthly club night and refugee support groups.²⁶ The collective went against dominant notions of progressive queer identity by drawing on non-western traditions, persistently seeking contact with community organizations and elders while maintaining explicitly queer positions. In doing so, it challenged the dominant Dutch (and European) gay and lesbian consensus of the mainstream white community as normative, as the model of emancipation to which migrants and minorities from less enlightened backgrounds necessarily aspire to. Instead, they creolized various traditions in order to adapt them for their own purposes. Building for example on the presence of oral tradition in Afro-Caribbean and Muslim cultures, they subverted the linear western coming out narrative through the use of *Toris*, a Surinamese storytelling tradition whose collective and non-linear structure more adequately reflected the experience of negotiating same-sex desire among queers of colors, emphasizing the complex and ongoing dynamic between them and their communities, which can be and often are both safe havens and sites of oppression.²⁷

Strange Fruit persistently explored this tension, as well as others buried under the LGBT moniker: transgendered members were a small but vocal presence from the beginning and while most of its original members had been men, the group soon included an equal number of women. For more than a decade, the group was able to maintain an

intersectional practice in which identities and discourses were eclectically appropriated, rearranged and transformed without a single model of ethnic, gender, or sexual definitions becoming normative. This rather unusual success I believe is due to a number of factors: the fusionist approach to cultural influences, reflected in outreach strategies; the self-help principle minimizing the hierarchy between members and target group; the gender balance bringing different perspectives into constant dialogue; and a local, peer group focused activism combined with a global perspective connecting the group to a large transnational feminist/queer of color network, reaching as far as Morocco, South Africa, South Korea and Zimbabwe, but just as importantly, across national borders to other European queer and feminist of color groups, facing very similar conditions and debates.²⁸ The neoliberal city thus also appears as a source of new strategies of resistance by queer of color activists such as Strange Fruit, who eclectically mix influences, challenging the link between purity, authenticity and legitimacy dominating European (and often migrant) discourses of belonging by embracing the impure, inauthentic, illegitimate position assigned to Muslims and other Europeans of color. Rejecting culturalist categorizations, these activists resist divide and conquer policies that not only pit 'gay' against 'migrant' communities but also separate the latter into assimilable Christians and unassimilable Muslims. Instead they apply an understanding of cross-communal solidarity that allows for alliances without denying differences, practicing a form of resistance rooted in women of color feminism's intersectional analytical framework. As Grace Hong observed:

While 1960s and 1970s black feminism's intersectional analytic was, as it is often narrativized, a critique of the sexism within black nationalist movements or of racism within white feminism, we must also understand the larger implications of intersectionality: it was a complete critique of the epistemological formation of the white supremacist moment of global capital organized around colonial capitalism. (Hong, 2008: 101)

I believe that a queer of color analysis, drawing on intersectionality and on the practice of groups like Strange Fruit can offer a similarly complete critique of neoliberal capitalism. And while I certainly could not provide it in the space of this article, I did hopefully indicate that contemporary Europe is a promising site for such a critique. European minority queers' attempts at self-articulation are routinely stifled by seemingly antagonistic groups with supposedly opposing aims who are however united in their claim to authenticity. Be it authentically queer or authentically Muslim values, they allow them to 'speak for' rather than with, not to mention listen to, queers of color who are primarily defined through their lack of authentic claims to either identity or culture. This accusation of inauthenticity links minoritarian queers back to the larger group of racialized communities who are neither perceived as proper Europeans by the majority nor properly fit the definition of 'migrant' attributed to them, their supposed 'in-between state' justifying their silencing and exclusion. The unambiguous identity that frequently is uncritically posited as normative and desirable in this discourse in turn is not merely a reflection of reality but a narrative in whose production considerable energy is invested and on whose internalization by those it targets the system of exclusion fundamentally depends. It remains stable as long as the structure as a whole is left unquestioned and the 'failure' is located within those who exceed the boundaries of normative identifications

– such as European Muslims. The framing of the inability to belong as an individual/cultural failure rather than as the outcome of structural and discursive exclusions works to disempower and alienate groups who threaten the binary identifications on which Europeanness continues to be built. The ongoing purging of Europe's internal racial Others, black, Muslim, Jewish, Roma, from the continent's history keeps alive a narrative that presents Europe as eternally untouched by any form of hybridity or creolization. According to Stuart Hall,

This has been the dominant narrative of modernity for some time – an 'internalist' story, with capitalism growing from the womb of feudalism and Europe's self-generating capacity to produce, like a silk-worm, the circumstances of her own evolution from within her own body. (Hall, 1991: 18)

This isolationist story requires the silencing of voices representing a creolized version of Europe, most recently through the postulation of the 'failure of multiculturalism'. The discourse on Europe's universalist, secular identity as threatened by the particularist politics of the continent's Muslim minorities not only seemingly confirms the impossibility of multiculturalism, but also characterizes racialized minorities as inhibiting the inevitable progress toward a postnational 21st-century Europe. Accordingly, if racialized populations are granted a voice at all, it is one that fits into the dominant narrative and leaves binary notions intact (in the case of Muslim Europeans the angry, fundamentalist, anti-modern male and the silenced, oppressed, veiled woman). The European city emerges as the primary site for an implementation of the discursively produced binaries, but with its intersection of communities, it also provides the source for activist strategies of creolization (as opposed to the assimilation demanded by white society). A queer of color critique allows the theorization of these creolized positionalities, deemed impossible in dominant identity formations, making them the source of a new discourse rather than attempting to enter the existing one as legitimate subjects. This inter-minority counterdiscourse embracing inauthenticity in turn might be among the most important developments in Europe after 1989, offering an interpretation of a postnational and 'postethnic' continent that is radically different from the model celebrated in official narratives and far more promising for exactly this reason.

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Notes

1. All translations from Dutch and German are mine.
2. This is especially pronounced in the case of (former) Muslimas who not only give testimony of their escape from incredibly violent and oppressive circumstances, but confirm that their

individual fates are representative of a barbaric culture that needs to be combated by the West in the name of human rights (see e.g. Hirsi Ali, 2007; Kelek, 2005).

3. To be clear: my topic here is not whether Muslim communities are homophobic, but the discursive use of this proclaimed homophobia for an entirely different purpose, namely the justification of the social and economic marginalization of these communities. I argue that the discourse around 'Muslim homophobia' does nothing to counter anti-queer attitudes among Muslims, that it in fact disempowers groups effectively combating intersecting oppressions within as well as toward minority communities, such as the Safra project in the UK, SUSPECT in Germany, or the Dutch Strange Fruit, whose work I address briefly in this article.
4. 'Identified as Muslim', since this ascription is less a matter of religious practice or self-identification than of culturalist assignments that assume the existence of a homogeneous version of Islam shaping the cultural (rather than religious) identity of all members of communities originating in majority Muslim nations.
5. This is not to say that this is a new phenomenon: the long presence of Roma, Jews and Muslims among others is testament both to the traditionally multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of European societies and to the continuous attempt erase this diversity (see El-Tayeb, 2011).
6. See e.g. the short-term recognition of economic segregation and discrimination in response to the 2005 French uprisings – and the subsequent failure to put any of the measures deemed necessary into practice (see Coleman, 2006).
7. While German chancellor Merkel's statement to this effect in October 2010 made international headlines, 'the failure of multiculturalism' as the failure of Muslims to become 'European' is largely treated as a fact in mainstream debates now (see Conolly, 2010).
8. According to a 2005 BBC study, based largely on government estimates, in most European nations (with a few exceptions like Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina) Muslims make up 3–7 percent of the population; at: news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4385768.stm.
9. People born within the EU whose parents do not possess EU citizenship face larger hurdles on the way toward naturalization and often grow up without access to many of the services and privileges available to EU members. As Seyla Benhabib observed, 'a two-tiered status of foreignness is thus evolving: on the one hand there are third-country national foreign residents of European countries, some of whom have been born and raised in these countries and who know of no other homeland; on the other hand are those who may be near-total strangers to the language, customs, and history of their host country but who enjoy special status and privilege by virtue of being nationals of states which are EU members' (Benhabib, 2002: 158). The situation is further complicated by a two-tiered EU membership which grants Eastern European states lesser influence in the Union.
10. See e.g. the 'Cities against Islamization' network discussed below.
11. The accusation of migrants' self-segregation is a staple of the recent Europe-wide consensus on the 'failure of multiculturalism', which is taken to mean the failure of minorities to assimilate into majority culture (leaving unexplored the question how such an assimilation into a culture that is explicitly racist and Islamophobic might work) (see El-Tayeb, 2011).
12. Interestingly, far right parties fare especially well in European Parliament elections; at: www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,629142,00.html.
13. In the Netherlands, these debates are tied to the rise of openly gay and racist politician Pim Fortuijn (who was assassinated in 2002 by a white Dutch environmentalist), the murder of Theo van Gogh by a Dutch-Moroccan Muslim in 2003 and the continuing success of Gert Wilders' Islamophobic but 'pro-gay' Party for Freedom (see Buruma, 2006; Jivraj and De Jong, 2011).
14. See 'Cities against Islamization', 20 January 2008; at: gatesofvienna.blogspot.com/2008/01/cities-against-islamization.html.

15. According to José Casonova, 'As liberal democratic systems, all European societies respect the private exercise of religion, including Islam, as an individual human right. It is the public and collective free exercise of Islam as an immigrant religion that most European societies find difficult to tolerate precisely on the grounds that Islam is perceived as an "un-European" religion' (Casonova, 2004: 7).
16. 'Cities against Islamization'; at: www.citiesagainstislamisation.com/En/2/.
17. 'Cities against Islamization'; at: www.citiesagainstislamisation.com/En/2/.
18. As Alexandra Chasin has shown, the research behind early 1990s studies claiming above average income for gay men and lesbians was deeply flawed, focusing disproportionately on white, middle-class men (2000: 36). Thus, while the discovery of the 'gay market' was clearly a symptom of the larger developments described here and an important step toward the ideology of homonormativity, which sees the interpellation of gay men, and to a much lesser extent lesbians, as consumers as a sign of integration and integration in turn as symptomatic of equality, this discursive shift is not reflective of actual economic gains.
19. See for example the controversy around the 2010 East End Pride, targeting a Muslim London neighborhood for its 'rampant homophobia'. The march was cancelled after protests from a coalition of Muslim, queer of color and progressive organizations once the organizers' connection to right-wing groups was revealed; at: www.decolonizequeer.org/?p=60.
20. This is true for the European left in general, which has been slow in letting go of class as the sole marker of oppression, in favor of a more intersectional approach. And while gender and sexuality have been included to a certain extent, race as an analytical category (rather than a biological 'fact') and intersectionality as a methodology are still largely absent from European Marxist analysis (see e.g. Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999).
21. Popularized by the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions movement, 'pinkwashing' refers to the Israeli government and its supporters countering criticism of Israel's large-scale human rights violations in the occupied territories by referencing its supposedly exceptionally queer-friendly policies as sufficient proof of its self-proclaimed status as 'the only democracy in the Middle East'. Thus, like the older 'greenwashing', the term describes the practice of massively publicizing a specific achievement in a particular sector in order to distract from the larger damage one is doing in that same sector (See BDS Movement, 2010).
22. The focus on homophobia rather than sexism is in part due to the centrality of 'homonormativity' to the liberal Dutch self-image (Jivraj and De Jong, 2011). But while this sets the country apart from other European nations, it is important to note that in the Netherlands, too, gender was the first site of conflict. See the pioneering role of Ayaan Hirsi Ali in the Europe-wide rising popularity of 'escape narratives' by (ex)Muslimas (El-Tayeb, 2011).
23. Fittingly, the Netherlands first ever 'anti-radicalization' task force was established in Amsterdam's Slotervaart area in 2008, targeting Muslim youths and thus confirming that it is this group, and this group alone, that embodies a radicalism threatening the nation (Amsterdam-Slotervaart City Council, 2007, 2008).
24. The COC, short for Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum (Center for Culture and Leisure), was founded in 1946, making it the oldest surviving LGBT organization in Europe. Today, it functions as an umbrella group, with a national board focusing on lobbying and about 20 local centers, organizing a variety of activities (see www.coc.nl).
25. Strange Fruit went through a number of transformations, including the splitting off of activists who felt the group needed to specifically address the concerns of queer Muslims (Strange Fruit, 1997). Reconstituting themselves as Secret Garden, they are still active as a COC workgroup.
26. For more details see El-Tayeb (2011).

27. The first of these Toris was held in 1994 at the Cosmic Theater in Amsterdam, the center of Dutch black theater; it had two Surinamese men, an Antillian boy and a Moroccan girl talk about their identities and understanding of queerness (Strange Fruit, 1997: 10). While Toris were queered by the way the activists appropriated them, Strange Fruit also collected queer traditions already present in the various communities, such as traditional forms of recognized same-sex relationships among women in Nigeria, South Africa or Suriname (for the latter see also Wekker, 2006).
28. It speaks to the success of Strange Fruit's strategy that it gradually became the main hub of queer of color activism in the Netherlands, a major access point for people looking for help and information, increasingly sent there by other organizations or the state. But while its radically non-hierarchical approach worked as long as Strange Fruit remained an informally organized group, structured around bi-weekly round table meetings, it became increasingly difficult with the group's growing interaction with authorities and the social services sector, forcing the activists into a position they had always resisted, namely that of representatives, spokespeople, mediators and service providers for migrant and minority queers, demanding from them a complicated balancing act between autonomy and playing by the system's rules.

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