

Queer Muslims in South Africa: Engaging Islamic Tradition

Francesco Piraino and Laura Zambelli
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Abstract

In this article, we show how Islamic traditions interact with queer practices and identities. By presenting the example of The Inner Circle, a Muslim queer association in Cape Town, and the figure of its leading Imam, Muhsin Hendricks, we argue the need to overcome the separation between the Islamic tradition and queer rights and struggles. Drawing from empirical data, and focusing on Imam Hendricks' approach to queer issues as being non-normative, bottom-up, and inclusive, we present an example of an intersectional approach, which illustrates one way of breaking the triangulation between Muslim queerphobia, homocolonialism, and Islamophobia. The Inner Circle is the product of South African Islam, it is multicultural and multi-ethnic, and is shaped by the apartheid struggle and its claims for social justice. At the same time, we will argue how this association is also the expression of a globalised Islam.

Introduction

The study of queer rights, identities, and claims in Islamic contexts is a challenging task. It risks reifying and essentialising both Islam and queer practices and identities, which in reality are intersectional and internally

differentiated.¹ Moreover, the field of sexuality and gender is particularly sensitive because it is one where the supposed ‘clash of civilisations’ takes place.²

Our understanding of Islam and queer rights and identities is intersectional; in other words, it focuses on the mutual influence of social phenomena and takes into account many spheres at once (gender, race/ethnicity, religion, sexuality, social class), while avoiding any essentialism³.

The word ‘queer,’ as employed throughout this article, is intended as an umbrella term which includes non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people.⁴ It takes into account both the aspects of sexual orientation and gender identity.⁵

In this article, we present the example of Imam Muhsin Hendricks and The Inner Circle,⁶ a South African non-governmental organisation (NGO) operating a mosque gathering queer Muslims; this will be described and

- 1 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer and Now,” in Donald Hall *et al.* (eds.), *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 3-17; Momin Rahman (2014), “Queer rights and the triangulation of Western exceptionalism,” *Journal of Human Rights*, 13, 3: 274-89.
- 2 Ibrahim Abraham (2009), “‘Out to get us’: Queer Muslims and the clash of sexual civilisations in Australia,” *Contemporary Islam*, 3, 1: 79-97; Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996); Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Momin Rahman (2010), “Queer as intersectionality: Theorizing gay Muslim identities,” *Sociology*, 44, 5: 944-61; Rahman, “Queer rights and the triangulation of Western exceptionalism.”
- 3 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York; London: Routledge, 1990); Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Queer and Now”; Rahman, “Queer as intersectionality”; Yvette Taylor (2009), “Complexities and complications: Intersections of class and sexuality,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 13, 2: 189-203.
- 4 Cisgender describes people whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth (Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook, 2009, “Doing gender, doing heteronormativity: ‘gender normals,’ transgender people, and the social maintenance of heterosexuality,” *Gender & Society*, 23, 4: 440-64.
- 5 Our understanding of the term ‘queer’ relies on the works of, among others, Teresa de Lauretis, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Leo Bersani and Jack Halberstam.
- 6 In May 2017, The Inner Circle changed its name to “Al-Fitrah Foundation,” with a new website <http://al-fitrah.org.za/>. The Foundation has recently launched a safe house for ostracised and refugee queer Muslims.

understood in the context of Cape Town, and related to other Islamic actors, such as the Claremont Main Road Mosque, the Muslim Judicial Council and the Open Mosque.

The Inner Circle is an example of an intersectional approach,⁷ in which issues of religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, social class and ethnicity are taken into account, and are considered to be coexisting and with a mutual influence on each other. This approach challenges both queer-phobia and homo-colonialism in the Islamic context, by resisting the imposition of a specific (western) way of living queer lives and politics.

In order to comprehend this organisation, we have to contextualise it within South African Islam, which was strongly influenced by the anti-apartheid struggle and which is now multicultural and multi-ethnic. The Inner Circle is a 'global' phenomenon,⁸ and Imam Hendricks' commitment could be described in terms of post-islamism,⁹ as "an endeavour to fuse religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty."¹⁰

Indeed, we will show how this movement is an expression of a globalised Islam, reaching a global audience, reconfiguring religious authority and deploying new instruments of communication.

Methodology

This research is based on secondary data analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, and qualitative interviews. We analysed various secondary data, such as newspaper articles, blogs, Facebook pages, and the website of The Inner Circle in order to understand its relationship with other local and global Muslim communities. Moreover, we participated in the Mawlid, the celebration of the birth of the prophet Mohammed, at The Inner Circle in December 2016. This ritual lasts from early afternoon to the evening,

- 7 Momin Rahman (2014), "Queer rights and the triangulation of Western exceptionalism," *Journal of Human Rights* 13,3: 274-89.
- 8 Roland Robertson (1994), "Globalisation or glocalisation?," *Journal of International Communication*, 1, 1:33-52.
- 9 Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 10 Asef Bayat, *Islam and Democracy: What is the Real Question? Isim Papers, Volume 8* (Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 19.

and gathered more than sixty people, from different social and ethnic backgrounds, with a slightly higher number of women. Moreover, we conducted an in-depth interview with Imam Hendricks and interviewed two key witnesses, one belonging to the LGBT rights activist sphere in Cape Town and the other to the Claremont Main Road Mosque and to a Sufi order.

Queer Sexualities and Islam: Cultural Translations

In this section, we analyse the academic literature on queer sexualities, gender, and Islam to contextualise and analyse The Inner Circle's activities. The first step is to conduct a cultural translation;¹¹ thus, if non-heterosexual acts and relationships and the plurality of gender roles are indeed trans-religious and transcultural, then the ways in which they are lived and conceptualised change according to the geographical, cultural, religious, and temporal contexts.

This cultural translation in the field of gender and sexuality is not an Islamic peculiarity; indeed, we could find evidence for it in the case of *femminielli* in Southern Italy,¹² who represent *ante litteram* queer subjects, since they do not correspond to the categories of transsexuals, transgender or homosexuals; instead, they have to be comprehended in terms of the Neapolitan and Catholic cultural context.

It is crucial to consider the translation of categories if we are to understand the tensions in these fields. Other scholars have employed the concept of cultural translation, although with the meaning of transfer and relocation of an exogenous concept. For example, Joseph Massad states that the category of homosexual identity does not exist in the Middle East and that LGBT politics are the result of colonialism,¹³ reducing the complexity of this field.

11 Talal Asad, "The concept of cultural translation in British social anthropology," in James Clifford and George Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 141-64.

12 Francesco Piraino and Laura Zambelli (2015), "Santa Rosalia and Mamma Schiavona: Popular worship between religiosity and identity," *Critical Research on Religion*, 3, 3: 266-81; Eugenio Zito and Paolo Valerio, *Corpi sull'uscio identità possibili: il fenomeno dei femminielli a Napoli* (Napoli: Filema, 2010).

13 Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Among many Muslim populations, there is a high level of queer-phobia.¹⁴ Other scholars employ the term heteronationalism, which is ‘legitimized through Islam, with examples ranging from Indonesia, Pakistan, and Iran.’¹⁵ Queer-phobia has ancient origins in the Islamic context; indeed, homosexual intercourse between males, particularly anal sex, is considered to be a punishable offence by the legal schools, although more recently, punishments have hardened, due also to the Wahabi influence.¹⁶ Queer people are variously identified as being alien to the Islamic culture, modern, western,¹⁷ ‘incommensurable’ and ‘ungrammatical.’¹⁸ Many Muslim public figures deny the very existence of queer Muslims; for example, the Iranian president Ahmadinejad said in a conference: “We don’t have homosexuals, like in your country. I don’t know who told you that.”¹⁹

In contrast to these views, western stereotypes picturing an Islam incompatible with homosexuality and queer subjects are spreading in many western countries,²⁰ which is ironic if we understand that Muslims were depicted as bloodthirsty homosexual predators in the Christian Europe of the Middle Ages.²¹

- 14 Mark Halstead and Katarzyna Lewicka (1998), “Should homosexuality be taught as an acceptable alternative lifestyle? A Muslim perspective,” *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 28, 1: 49–64; Jytte Klausen, *Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Asifa Siraj (2009), “The construction of the homosexual ‘Other’ by British Muslim heterosexuals,” *Contemporary Islam*, 3, 1: 41–57; Asifa Siraj, “Islam, homosexuality and gay Muslims: Bridging the gap between faith and sexuality,” in Yvette Taylor and Ria Snowden (eds.), *Queering Religion, Religious Queers*, (New York: Routledge, 2014) pp. 194–210.
- 15 Rahman, “Queer rights and the triangulation of Western exceptionalism,” 283.
- 16 Scott Siraj al-Haq Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2010).
- 17 Momin Rahman (2008), “In search of my mother’s garden: Reflections on migration, sexuality and Muslim identity,” *Nebula*, 5, 4: 1–25.
- 18 Tom Boellstorff (2005), “Between religion and desire: Being Muslim and gay in Indonesia,” *American Anthropologist*, 107, 4: 576.
- 19 Rusi Jaspal, “Sexuality, migration and identity among gay Iranian migrants to the UK,” in Yvette Taylor and Ria Snowden (eds.), *Queering Religion, Religious Queers* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p.45.
- 20 Abraham, “Out to get us.”
- 21 John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

The supposed western exceptionalism and superiority²² set the only viable way for LGBT/queer people to claim civil rights, imposing categories, lifestyles, and modes of action. This imposition of a specific way of living queer lives and politics has been defined differently as homonormativity, reactionary queer politics and homo-colonialism.²³ This is in itself a form of Orientalism,²⁴ and is both the product and the generator of Islamophobia, in that it stigmatises Muslims as a homogeneous group bearer of backward values. A good example of homonormativity in action is the Dutch queer politics described by Hekma²⁵ and Jivraj and de Jong.²⁶ Homonormativity has effects on the Muslim community and cultures which could exacerbate the stigma attached to queer people. In some Muslim contexts, queer subjects are not only discriminated against but also considered to be traitors in cultural and religious terms.²⁷ Queer-phobia, homonormativity, and heteronormativity have the same intellectual structures describing the Other as “unviable (un)subjects” who dwell within the ‘domain of unthinkability,’ existing within discourse ‘as a falsehood.’”²⁸

22 Rahman, “Queer rights and the triangulation of Western exceptionalism.”

23 Abraham, “Out to get us;” Lisa Duggan, “The new homonormativity: The sexual politics of neo-liberalism,” in Russ Castronovo and Dana Nelson (eds.), *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002) pp. 175-94; Fatima El-Tayeb (2012), “‘Gays who cannot properly be gay’: Queer Muslims in the neoliberal European city,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 19, 1: 79-95; Rahman, “Queer rights and the triangulation of Western exceptionalism”; Momin Rahman, “The politics of LGBT Muslim identities,” *E-International Relations (E-IR)*, 2 April 2015, www.tinyurl.com/mlr7qtb; Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip (2008), “The quest for intimate/sexual citizenship: Lived experiences of Lesbian and bisexual Muslim women,” *Contemporary Islam*, 2, 2: 99-117.

24 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

25 Gert Hekma (2002), “Imams and homosexuality: A post-gay debate in the Netherlands,” *Sexualities*, 5, 2: 237-48.

26 Suhraiya Jivraj and Anisa de Jong (2011), “The Dutch homo-emancipation policy and its silencing effects on queer Muslims,” *Feminist Legal Studies*, 19, 2: 143-58.

27 Rahman, “The politics of LGBT Muslim identities”; Siraj, “The construction of the homosexual ‘Other’ by British Muslim heterosexuals”; Yip, “The quest for intimate/sexual citizenship.”

28 Judith Butler, “Imitation and gender insubordination,” in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.20.

Other scholars choose to deepen this supposed incompatibility between Islam and queer people by engaging in a theological and legal debate.²⁹ Kugle, in particular, provides an exegesis of the Qur'an, the ḥadīth, and the shari'a regarding homosexuality and transgenderism by applying a liberation theology method. He concludes that the Qur'an does not address homosexuality directly and that the story of Lot has been misinterpreted. He also argues that those ḥadīth condemning homosexual acts are not reliable since their chain of narration is not consistent.³⁰

Another branch of academic literature investigates how queer Muslims negotiate their sexual, gender, and religious identities.³¹ Various authors notice that one of the most common strategies used by queer Muslims is the separation between Islam and the queer sphere, which leads inevitably to the essentialisation of Islam and to homonormativity.³² In this article, we discuss how queer Muslims are trying to create their own pathways negotiating practices and meanings.

LGBT/Queer People in South Africa

The South African Constitution is one of the most advanced in the world regarding queer rights, and is the result of post-apartheid political negotiations and the democratisation process.³³ Nonetheless, high levels of homo-bi-transphobia and discrimination permeate the country,

29 Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics in Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (London: Oneworld, 2006); Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*.

30 Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, ch. 3.

31 Scott Siraj al-Haq Kugle, *Living out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Wim Peumans (2014), "Queer Muslim migrants in Belgium: A research note on same-sex sexualities and lived religion," *Sexualities*, 17, 5-6: 618-31; Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip (2005), "Queering religious texts: An exploration of British non-heterosexual Christians' and Muslims' strategy of constructing sexuality-affirming hermeneutics," *Sociology*, 39, 1: 47-65.

32 Abraham, "Out to get us"; Asifa Siraj (2016), "British Muslim Lesbians: Reclaiming Islam and reconfiguring religious identity," *Contemporary Islam*, 10, 2: 185-200; Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip (2003), "Spirituality and sexuality: An exploration of the religious beliefs of non-heterosexual Christians in Great Britain," *Theology & Sexuality*, 9, 2: 137-54.

33 Tamar Klein (2008), "Querying medical and legal discourses of queer sexes and genders in South Africa," *Anthropology Matters*, 10, 2, n.p.

especially in the townships.³⁴ The number of attacks upon, and the frequent discrimination against, queer people are denounced by many scholars and activists as taking the form of corrective rapes and sexual and physical assaults.³⁵

Since 1996, the South African Constitution has prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Today, queer people are granted cutting edge rights such as same-sex marriages, adoptions for same-sex couples, and the amendment of official documents without sex reassignment surgery for transgender individuals.³⁶ These rights are the product of a strong and effective gay lobbying initiative, and a well-planned political strategy following the end of the apartheid era.³⁷ The National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality/Equality Project has been one of the most prominent gay and lesbian organisations in South Africa for more than a decade, and has played an important role in the new 1996 Constitution.³⁸ Some scholars emphasise that the struggle was led by gay men,³⁹ and that the National Coalition was elitist and unrepresentative of the grassroots, the ‘poor, black gays and lesbians.’⁴⁰

34 Jacklyn Cock (2003), “Engendering gay and Lesbian rights: The equality clause in the South African Constitution,” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 26, 1: 35-45.

35 Kevin Graziano (2004), “Oppression and resiliency in a post-Apartheid South Africa: Unheard voices of black gay men and Lesbians,” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 10, 3: 302-16; Thabo Msibi (2012), “‘I’m used to it now’: Experiences of homophobia among queer youth in South African township schools,” *Gender and Education*, 24, 5: 515-33.

36 Klein, “Querying medical and legal discourses of queer sexes and genders in South Africa.”

37 Cock, “Engendering gay and Lesbian rights: The equality clause in the South African Constitution;” Natalie Oswin (2007), “Producing homonormativity in neoliberal South Africa: Recognition, redistribution, and the equality project,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 32, 3: 649-69; Ryan Richard Thoreson (2008), “Somewhere over the Rainbow Nation: Gay, Lesbian and bisexual activism in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34, 3: 679-97.

38 Oswin, “Producing homonormativity in neoliberal South Africa: Recognition, redistribution, and the equality project.”

39 Cock, “Engendering gay and Lesbian rights: The equality clause in the South African Constitution.”

40 Oswin, “Producing homonormativity in neoliberal South Africa: Recognition, redistribution and the equality project,” 659.

The existing advanced constitutional and legal rights have not been fully implemented in South African society.⁴¹ This is due to many reasons which include the legacy of the apartheid era and the biased attitude which considers homosexuality as exogenous⁴² or the use of the term ‘queer,’ considered by many to address only white male homosexuals.⁴³ Also, the racial/ethnic inequalities and the overt discriminations of the apartheid era are aligned with contemporary socio-economic and cultural inequalities,⁴⁴ which preclude most of the population from accessing legal advancements.⁴⁵ These include the full enjoyment of queer rights in the country.

Islam in South Africa

The history of Muslims in South Africa begins with European colonialism.⁴⁶ Thus, the first Muslims were brought to South Africa by Dutch colonisers in the seventeenth century. They originated from the Moluccan Islands and were intended to fight the Khoi and San native populations; however they were deemed second-class citizens.⁴⁷ During the Dutch colonial period, many slaves were imported, mostly Muslims, from elsewhere in

- 41 Klein, “Querying medical and legal discourses of queer sexes and genders in South Africa.”
- 42 Wendy Isaack (2003), “Equal in word of law: The rights of Lesbian and gay people in South Africa,” *Human Rights*, 30, 3: 19-22; Mikki van Zyl (2011), “Are same-sex marriages unAfrican? Same-sex relationships and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa,” *Journal of Social Issues*, 67, 2: 335-57.
- 43 Klein, “Querying medical and legal discourses of queer sexes and genders in South Africa.”
- 44 Klein, “Querying medical and legal discourses of queer sexes and genders in South Africa.”
- 45 Isaack, “Equal in word of law: The rights of Lesbian and gay people in South Africa.”
- 46 Hermann Buhr Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Ebrahim Moosa (1993), “Discursive voices of diaspora Islam in Southern Africa,” *Jurnal Antropologi Dan Sosiologi*, 20: 29–60; Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons, Religion in Africa* (Gainesville, Fla: University Press of Florida, 1999); Abdulkader Tayob, “Race, ideology, and Islam in contemporary South Africa,” in *Islam in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Michael Feener (Santa Barbara, California; Denver, Colorado; Oxford, England: ABC-CLIO, 2004), pp. 253-82.
- 47 Tayob, *Islam in South Africa*.

Africa as well as South Asia, and South-East Asian Islands.⁴⁸ Moreover, the Dutch colonisers exiled Muslim political prisoners from the Indonesian archipelago to the Cape of Good Hope.⁴⁹ The last wave of the nascent South African Muslim community was formed by the new Indian labour force under the British Empire at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁰

South African Islam has always been a cosmopolitan Islamic community, composed of different ethnicities, cultures and theological schools. Moreover, it was strongly influenced by Sufism,⁵¹ considering both the presence of important Sufi orders and widespread Sufi practices. These practices soon lost their connection with Sufi organisations and became part of Islamic practices themselves; for example, the weekly dhikr, the celebration of the Mawlid, and Imams revered as Sufi Masters.⁵²

The apartheid apparatus racialised the heterogeneous Muslim community by applying the categories of coloured-Malay and Indian. The overall aim was to separate different races and ethnicities, which only partially succeeded. The coloured-Malay and Indian Muslim communities suffered the oppression of apartheid, although to a lesser extent than black Africans. Many Muslim organisations struggled against apartheid,⁵³ although one of the main South African Islamic authorities, the Muslim

48 Robert Shell, "Islam in Southern Africa, 1652-1998," in Nehemia Levtzion and Pouwels Randall (eds.), *The History of Islam in Africa* (Athens, Georgia: Ohio University Press, 2000), pp. 327-48.

49 Achmat Davids (2002), "Muslim-Christian relations in nineteenth century Cape Town," *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 19: 80-101.

50 Sindre Bangstad, *Global Flows, Local Appropriations: Facets of Secularisation and Re-Islamization among Contemporary Cape Muslims* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007); Tayob, "Race, ideology, and Islam in contemporary South Africa"; Abdulkader Tayob, "Muslim shrines in Cape Town: Religion and post-Apartheid public spheres," in Barbara Bompani and Maria Frahm-Arp (eds.), *Development and Politics from Below* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 56-73.

51 Sufism is the mystical, esoteric and spiritual dimension of Islam. From the eleventh century it has been organised in orders, with specific hierarchical and ritual organisations (Mark Sedgwick, *Sufism: The Essentials* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2000); John Spencer Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Gilles Veinstein and Alexandre Popovic, *Les Voies d'Allah: Les Ordres Mystiques dans l'islam des Origines à Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Fayard, 1996)).

52 Tayob, *Islam in South Africa*.

53 Tayob, "Race, ideology, and Islam in contemporary South Africa."

Judicial Council, was criticised for not being active enough in the struggle and for being too cooperative with the apartheid institutions, despite its condemnation of apartheid.⁵⁴

In the post-apartheid era, the South African Muslim community faces the same global tensions encountered by many Muslims elsewhere in the world; these include the changing relations between modern and traditional values, and their intersections with sexuality, politics, economy, and the like. Moreover, the Muslim community in South Africa had to come to terms with the South African Constitution, which is quite progressive with regard to race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality issues, as we will show in the next section.

The South African Muslim community is heterogeneous and has been strongly influenced by the anti-apartheid struggle and its cosmopolitan origins. This facilitated the creation of different Muslim associations; for example, the Claremont Main Road Mosque, committed to progressive values, such as the implementation of human rights and democracy.⁵⁵ Other Muslim movements do not partake in this progressive perspective regarding gender and sexuality issues, and they ‘work within and around’ the Constitution to reach their goals, assuming an ambivalent position.⁵⁶

The tension between several approaches within Islam is one of the peculiarities of Cape Town’s Muslim community, which is also the biggest in the country.⁵⁷ The Islamic public sphere in Cape Town is variegated and crosses local and national borders. The term ‘public sphere’ refers to the space where the boundaries between religious authorities and non-specialists are blurred, and where the focus is not on the cosmological-

54 Muhammed Haron (1994), “Towards a sacred biography: The life and times of Imam Abdullah Haron,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 14: 63-83; Gert Lubbe, “The Muslim Judicial Council – A descriptive and analytical investigation” (Unpublished PhD dissertation in Theology, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1989).

55 Tayob, *Islam in South Africa*.

56 Abdulkader Tayob, “Islam and democracy in South Africa,” n.d., www.tinyurl.com/ktmp4te.

57 Muhammed Haron, *Muslims in South Africa: An Annotated Bibliography* (Cape Town: South African Library in association with Centre for Contemporary Islam, UCT, 1997).

theological dimension, but on the common good and common living.⁵⁸ The main actors in this public sphere are: 1) the Muslim Judicial Council, representing the conservative Sunni orthodoxy – the Ulamā; 2) the Claremont Main Road Mosque, one of the protagonists of the anti-apartheid struggle, a reference point for progressive Muslims;⁵⁹ 3) Muslim scholars and activists, such as Sa’diyya Shaikh, a social scientist and feminist committed to progressive Islamic discourses;⁶⁰ 4) the Sufi orders, heterogeneous and growing in importance and numbers;⁶¹ 5) the Salafi groups, progressively gaining space;⁶² and 6) The Inner Circle, a non-governmental organisation, the subject of this article.

As we will show further on, Imam Hendricks and The Inner Circle embody many characteristics of South African Islam: he has Indonesian origins, and the form of Islam preached and practised at the The Inner Circle is imbued with Sufi rituals and doctrines. In the 1980s, Imam Hendricks took part in the activities of the progressive movement Call of Islam, a branch of the Muslim Youth Movement.⁶³

The Inner Circle, its Activities and Impact

Imam Muhsin Hendricks

Imam Muhsin Hendricks is the founder of The Inner Circle in Cape Town. He comes from an important Muslim family of Indonesian origin. He told us, during our interview in 2016, that he grew up with a mixed message of Islam: on one side, a compassionate and loving God, on the other, a God

58 Armando Salvatore (2000), “Social differentiation, moral authority and public Islam in Egypt: The path of Mustafa Mahmud,” *Anthropology Today*, 16, 2: 12–15; Armando Salvatore and Dale Eickelman, *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

59 Tayob, *Islam in South Africa*.

60 Sa’diyya Shaikh, “Islamic law, Sufism and gender. Rethinking the terms of the debate,” in Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger (eds.), *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), pp. 106–31.

61 Muhammed Haron (2005), “Da’wah movements and Sufi Tariqahs: Competing for spiritual spaces in contemporary South(Ern) Africa,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 25, 2: 261–85.

62 Yunus Dumbé and Abdulkader Tayob (2011), “Salafis in Cape Town in search of purity, certainty and social impact,” *Die Welt des Islams*, 51, 2: 188–209.

63 Kugle, *Living out Islam*, 24.

who punishes you if you are gay. He overcame this paradox by deepening his knowledge of Islamic theology, and applied for a scholarship to study in Pakistan. He soon discovered that he had been sent to a Salafist school. There, Imam Hendricks studied classical Arabic and tafsir (the interpretation of the Qur'ān).

After he returned to South Africa as an Imam, his family and society pressured him to marry and by doing so, set a good example for the community. He duly married, believing that marrying a woman could change his homosexual orientation. He fathered three children, but after six years of marriage, he left. He spent time with a friend, sleeping in a barn and fasting for eighty days, looking for guidance from God. Then, he realised that it was less intimidating to confront his community and to come out as gay than to meet his creator without having been sincere about himself.

His story is also marked by the anti-apartheid struggle, in that he participated in the Call of Islam, a branch of the Muslim Youth Movement. This struggle for social justice is what drove him to organise activities to support queer Muslims.⁶⁴

It was 1998, and he was twenty-nine years old when he came out to the media as homosexual. He received many calls from other queer Muslims, who were mostly supportive. A few Imams also confessed to him that, despite their will, they were not able to support him publicly because of their connection with the Muslim Judicial Council. When he came out, he was teaching at the Claremont Main Road Mosque, one of the most progressive mosques in Cape Town – and was fired, although Claremont's Imams supported him secretly.⁶⁵

He then started gathering together queer Muslims, who for years have been meeting every Thursday in his garage. This group of people later grew into an organisation: The Inner Circle. After separating from his wife, Imam Hendricks married a man, and they have been living together in Cape Town ever since. Furthermore, his Indian husband was pressured by his family

64 Kugle, *Living out Islam*.

65 Muhsin Hendricks, "Interview with Imam Muhsin Hendricks," 7 December 2016.

to marry an Indian woman, in order to continue the family name and tradition, and he consented. The new wife, confronted with the reality of a pre-existing homosexual relationship, agreed to accept the gay couple, and to cohabit with them both: ‘so, polygamous relationships can work.’⁶⁶

The Inner Circle’s Activities

The origins of the Inner Circle, today known as the Al-Fitrah Foundation, can be traced to the Gay Muslim Outreach founded in 1997 by Imam Muhsin Hendricks. The Inner Circle is among the oldest queer Muslim associations in the world, together with Al-Fatiha in the US.⁶⁷ They organised monthly get-togethers, dhikr circles, weekly group discussions, and lectures on spirituality and sexuality. It also provided social and spiritual counselling through the Internet. In 2000, a branch opened in Johannesburg, showing the characteristics of a social club rather than a support group.⁶⁸

The Inner Circle was established in 2004 and is a non-governmental association currently based in Cape Town and Johannesburg,⁶⁹ with the aim of creating a Muslim community free from discrimination based on religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation. The Inner Circle offers many services: it hosts religious practices, it provides spaces and services for queer people, and is part of an international network for queer Muslims (The Global Queer Muslim Network, GQMN).

The Inner Circle runs a mosque, and also offers training courses for becoming Imams, counselling activities, and a psycho-spiritual programme for queer Muslims. Every Thursday, The Inner Circle hosts a dhikr⁷⁰ attended – at the time of our research – by between ten and fifteen people. Usually, between fifteen and twenty people attend the Friday afternoon prayer, while in the case of Eid prayers, an average of sixty-five people attend the mosque.⁷¹

66 Hendricks, “Interview with Imam Muhsin Hendricks.”

67 Siraj, “Islam, homosexuality and gay Muslims: Bridging the gap between faith and sexuality.”

68 Kugle, *Living out Islam*.

69 Kugle, *Living out Islam*, 30.

70 The Inner Circle, “Flyer of The Inner Circle,” 2016.

71 Hendricks, “Interview with Imam Muhsin Hendricks.”

The Inner Circle welcomes queer people and offers them guidance and support. Membership includes Muslims, Hindus, Christians and even atheists.⁷² The Inner Circle's communication strategy involves the production of documentaries, podcasts, and online training courses 'to create greater awareness around homophobia, transphobia and the negative impact of patriarchy in the global Muslim community.'⁷³ The Inner Circle's website hosts documents dealing with Qur'ān exegesis and other texts analysing gender identity and sexual orientation issues. Other periodical activities are hosted, such as the Friday sermon by Imam Hendricks, and the weekly Madrassah (Islamic school) class for converts and for 'Muslims estranged from Islam due to discrimination or rejection based on sexual orientation and gender identity.'⁷⁴

The Inner Circle is an active member of the Global Queer Muslim Network (GQMN), together with other European and African associations.⁷⁵ It organises an annual retreat, which attracts an increasing number of delegates every year. It also hosts many activists, scholars, LGBT/queer people, feminists, and Muslims from all over the world.

The Relations with Cape Town's Islamic Community

The Inner Circle takes part in the Pride Parade, one of the traditional marches to support queer and LGBT rights, although its main focus is the Islamic community, rather than the queer scene. "I'm not a flamboyant queen running around in my underwear in bright colours. I have a mobile mosque on wheels during Cape Town's Gay Pride, but that's as far as I ever really venture into the gay scene," explains Imam Hendricks.⁷⁶

The relationship between The Inner Circle and the Islamic community in Cape Town is generally good, despite The Inner Circle's focus on sensitive topics and its presence in the public sphere. It is interesting to note that

72 Hendricks, "Interview with Imam Muhsin Hendricks."

73 The Inner Circle, "Flyer of The Inner Circle."

74 The Inner Circle, "Flyer of The Inner Circle."

75 Currently, the Network is formed by four associations: Merhaba, Bedayaa, Al-Fitrah Foundation, and Maruf. The Network website is: www.gqmn.weebly.com.

76 Sertan Sanderson, "I am an Imam, but I'm also gay. And I'm prepared to die for this," *The South African*, 17 July 2014, www.tinyurl.com/mnr3je3.

the Open Mosque has been attacked at least twice for criticising Islamic mainstream orthodoxy and for publicly giving support to queer Muslims.⁷⁷ It is crucial to be aware of the huge difference between the Open Mosque and The Inner Circle in order to understand queer Muslim politics, and this difference will be discussed later. The Inner Circle organises a range of events aimed at including people already attending their activities or prayers at the mosque as well as reaching out for new potential members. For example, during Ramadan, they invite the local community to break the fast together and to celebrate the end of the month. Also, The Inner Circle recently bought a van to help people living in areas not served by public transport, by giving them lifts to the mosque.⁷⁸

The Muslim Judicial Council, which represents the conservative mainstream orthodoxy, is not engaged with The Inner Circle. Indeed, it condemned The Inner Circle through a fatwa,⁷⁹ issued after the release of the documentary “A Jihad for Love.”⁸⁰ Imam Hendricks informed us that the Muslim Judicial Council discouraged Muslims from watching the movie, saying that whoever went was going to hell together with him.⁸¹ Moreover, the Muslim Judicial Council discouraged the one-time participation of Imam Hendricks at the Muslim radio broadcast *The Voice of the Cape*.

In contrast, the relationship between The Inner Circle and the progressive Claremont Main Road Mosque is completely different, and has been changing over the years. The Claremont Main Road Mosque was strongly committed to gender justice and the anti-apartheid struggle during the 1970s.⁸² Imam Hendricks had been teaching at the Madrassah of the Claremont Main Road Mosque for a very long time; however, when

77 Sa'diyya Shaikh and Manjra Shuaib, “The Open Mosque saga: Progressive politics or neo-colonial posturing,” *Zubeida Jaffer*, 13 October 2014, www.tinyurl.com/mpH7jg5; SAPA, “Arson attack suspected on Open Mosque | IOL,” *IOL*, 5 October 2014, www.tinyurl.com/mozhcyh; Murray Williams, “Cape’s ‘Open Mosque’ attacked again | IOL,” *IOL*, 14 October 2014, www.tinyurl.com/kccxskj.

78 Hendricks, “Interview with Imam Muhsin Hendricks.”

79 Carl Collison, “Queer Muslim women are making salaam with who they are,” *The Mail & Guardian Online*, 10 February 2017, www.tinyurl.com/k5g67xp.

80 Hendricks, “Interview with Imam Muhsin Hendricks.”

81 Hendricks, “Interview with Imam Muhsin Hendricks.”

82 Kugle, *Living out Islam*.

he declared his homosexuality, he was forced to resign, and he agreed to do so on the condition that he could give a workshop for all the teachers at the Claremont Main Road Mosque on Islam and homosexuality. He was granted this opportunity, although only half of the teachers attended it. He also resigned from the other two mosques where he was teaching and was forced to turn to his previous activity of sewing wedding dresses.

After the Orlando shooting in 2016, where 49 queer people were killed,⁸³ the Claremont Main Road Mosque sensed the need to address the issue of queerphobia in the Islamic community. In the Khutbah, the Claremont's Imam said: "We recognise that an injustice was done unto him when he left under those circumstances. A key lesson that we learnt from that experience brings me to where I think we have to start in our endeavour to combat homophobia in our communities."⁸⁴ They apologised to Imam Hendricks, although without naming him directly. Nowadays there is a renewed collaboration between Imam Hendricks and the Claremont Mosque: they recently asked him to organise a workshop on queer issues.

The Inner Circle's Principles and Approaches

The Inner Circle's core is constituted by the Islamic religious practices and doctrines. Imam Hendricks challenges mainstream Islamic orthodoxy about queer issues, gender roles, and familial norms. Moreover, he teaches the same Islamic values and norms that we could find in several progressive mosques. It is important to stress that The Inner Circle is acting as an instrument of Islamisation, reaching for those queer people who are both lifelong Muslim and converts, and who otherwise would not have relations with Islam.

"I've encountered thousands of gay and lesbian Muslim
(sic) on my journey now. Literally thousands. But I'm not

83 "Orlando Shooting," *BBC News*, 13 June 2016, sec. US and Canada, www.tinyurl.com/kh6lxwf.

84 Rashied Omar, "Id Al Fitr Khutbah: Towards intersectional social justice: Confronting homophobia in our communities by Imam Dr. A. Rashied Omar," *Claremont Main Road Mosque*, 6 July 2016, www.tinyurl.com/m75nxyl.

interested in people's sexuality. Beneath all that, there's always a soul that's yearning to understand itself. And that's what I'm interested in. I've been through such struggles trying to reconcile my religion with my sexuality. I saw other people who didn't have such tools to reconcile. So I wanted to provide others with tools to make sure that they don't get into drugs or commit suicide or lose themselves in any other way."⁸⁵

Another core element of Imam Hendricks' doctrine and practice is Sufism. Hendricks practices Sufi rituals, such as the dhikr, every Thursday and he visits the Sufi tombs in Cape Town. His definition of Sufism is quite classical:

"The mystical path to connecting with God, to be one with God... I am in a constant struggle to embody all the qualities of God. The essence of our being is God. When we love people, when we yearn to be good, is to be more similar to God. Sufism is this, being one with the goodness of God."⁸⁶

He embraces a particular kind of Sufism, which we could term diffused Sufism. Imam Hendricks does not belong to a Sufi order, nor does he follow a Sufi master. In his opinion, Sufi spirituality goes beyond the borders of Sufi orders.

If Islam and Sufism are the frameworks for The Inner Circle's social engagement, then social justice is one of its core values, addressing racism and gender inequalities. Imam Hendricks strongly criticises the patriarchal stereotypes of both Islamic and South African cultures. The pursuit of social justice is strictly connected to the anti-apartheid struggle, which has shaped his life. Social justice has a universal spirit, which surpasses cultural, ethnic and religious borders, following Omid

85 Hendricks interviewed by Sanderson; Sanderson, "I am an Imam, but I'm also gay. And I'm prepared to die for this."

86 Hendricks, "Interview with Imam Muhsin Hendricks."

Safi's conceptualisation of progressive Muslims.⁸⁷ The entanglement between Islam and social justice is evident by looking at the pictures of Nelson Mandela at the entrance of the The Inner Circle.

The next section of this article deals with how The Inner Circle approaches queer issues. As we have argued, the combination of queer and Islam is a matter of increasing importance and is reflected in the peculiarity of The Inner Circle's approach, which is inclusive, non-normative, and bottom-up. This approach is fundamental if we are to comprehend the complex intersections between western discourse on queer rights, Islam and postcolonial issues, which we will address later in this article.

The Inner Circle's events, both religious and social, are attended by people of different ethnicities, colours, sexual orientations, social classes, and religions. The participants include outspoken queer people as well as those who are not open to their friends or families. The Inner Circle has changed over the years:

“Initially when I came out starting my work, it was – it was mostly men, because that’s just the privilege that men come with, ... [we can] take advantage of the patriarchal system ... And that’s constantly been constantly our struggle for us to get women – to push women to take leadership roles, because in our – women can lead prayers – in our mosque they don’t have to cover up. ... Previously it was mostly just queer people, ... these days ... it’s half queer half straight ... The mosque should be a place for anybody, whether they’re sex workers, males, female, whatever.”⁸⁸

This extremely heterogeneous group which includes men, women, straight, queer, and transgender people, has been fostered by The Inner Circle's inclusive approach, which encourages the participation and commitment of the local community, also in decisive events. Imam Hendricks, in particular, encourages women to lead prayers in the mosque.

87 Omid Safi, ed., *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).

88 Hendricks, “Interview with Imam Muhsin Hendricks.”

We can also detect the non-normative and bottom-up approach in Imam Hendricks' lack of interest in labels and theories on queerness, sexual orientation and gender identity. Indeed, since sexuality is fluid, he focuses on the soul, not the body; the soul does not have a sexual orientation or a gender. He would prefer not to use any label, such as queer or LGBT for example; however, he needs one for social acknowledgement.

“Sometimes labels can be politically useful, but they can also create divisions ... I don't really identify as gay. I'm just a man who happens to be in love with another man. I'm a multiplicity of complexities and a vast ocean of possibilities. God created me, but he ain't finished with me yet.”⁸⁹

Although he is not interested in labels, he prefers the more inclusive term queer. In contrast to other progressive Muslim scholars, such as Kugle,⁹⁰ he does not define homosexuality as a fixed and unchangeable sexual identity. He is also not interested in regulating all the emotional relationships with marriage, and accepts – both personally and on a theological and religious level – polygyny and polyandry.

As stated previously, The Inner Circle's focus is mainly religious: its focus is to reach those Muslims who abandoned religious practices because of the supposedly incompatible relationship between Islam and their sexual orientation or gender identity. Its participation in the Pride Parade, which was accused of being dominated by white upper-class gay men,⁹¹ could be described as an unreflective positioning in the LGBT field in Cape Town, rather than being “complicit and compliant with the logic of the neo-liberal secular state.”⁹²

The importance of The Inner Circle's approach is more apparent when compared to the Open Mosque's impact on society in Cape Town. The

89 Brian Pellot, “Queer Muslims find solace and solidarity at South Africa retreat,” *Religion News Service*, 25 October 2016, www.tinyurl.com/kfd5ozg.

90 Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*.

91 Sa'diyya Shaikh and Mujahid Osman (2017), “Islam, Muslims and politics of queerness in Cape Town,” *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa*, 23, 2: 43–67.

92 Shaikh and Osman, “Islam, Muslims and politics of queerness in Cape Town,” 61.

inauguration of the Open Mosque in Cape Town in 2015 was an important media event. That Mosque is ‘gender-equal, interracial and non-aligned – meaning that Sunni and Shia Muslims can attend the same service;’⁹³ also, it accepts homosexuals and transsexuals, as many international newspapers reported.⁹⁴ Ironically, the Open Mosque is just a few meters away from the Al-Fitrah Foundation, which never raised the same level of interest, despite many years of activity.

The founder of the Open Mosque is Taj Hargey, who called for “‘a religious revolution’ ... [of which] the Open Mosque is the start.”⁹⁵ His attitude towards Cape Town’s Islamic community was quite confrontational, defining “the Indo-Pak and Arabic communities as tribally archaic ... filled with ‘Neanderthals’ harking back to the seventh century.”⁹⁶ Furthermore, he claimed to have created “South Africa’s first Qur’ān-centric, gender-equal and non-sectarian Islamic house of God,”⁹⁷ which the same authors argue as being false.

The problematic position of the Open Mosque is not limited to its founder’s aggressive communication strategy, but is deeply rooted in his values and biases. In the UK, Hargey launched a campaign to ban the burqa, described as “an archaic tribal piece of cloth,”⁹⁸ without taking into account women’s voices but instead, perpetuating stigma and stereotypes. This ambiguous position is even more evident regarding homosexuality; indeed, if Hargey stated that his mosque was open to homosexuals, he also said: “I don’t endorse homosexual living. I think this is not what the koran teaches, but like I’ve said earlier, I do not have the right to

93 “Storm over new Open Mosque in Cape Town,” *News24*, 15 September 2014, www.tinyurl.com/mtpkldo.

94 Stephanie Findlay, “Muslim academic gets death threats over women and gay-friendly Mosque,” *The Telegraph*, 16 September 2014, www.tinyurl.com/kkyv4bo; Annie Mebaley, “Everyone’s welcome at South Africa’s controversial ‘Open Mosque,’” *This Is Africa*, 1 October 2014, www.tinyurl.com/lzryxa2; “Is Cape Town’s women and gay-friendly Mosque a sign of new Muslim attitudes?,” *PBS NewsHour*, n.d., www.tinyurl.com/pfcqbsp.

95 Raesa Pather, “Sexuality, sacred spaces and Cape Town’s ‘Open Mosque,’” *The Daily Vox*, 19 September 2014, www.tinyurl.com/lkge16d.

96 Shafiq Morton, “Taj Hargey: A rebel without a pause,” *Voice of the Cape*, 17 September 2014, www.tinyurl.com/l2s5lv3.

97 Shaikh and Shuaib, “The Open Mosque saga.”

98 Shaikh and Shuaib, “The Open Mosque saga.”

condemn people.”⁹⁹ Moreover, he threatened legal proceedings against anyone “defaming, libelling and smearing us as gay or homosexual.”¹⁰⁰

There is a complete lack of public support from queer and women’s organisations as far as the Open Mosque is concerned.¹⁰¹ This attitude mirrors the poor participation of the Cape Town community in its activities. Hargey’s approach is the opposite of Hendricks’ if we consider the absence of wider debates at the community level, and the non-inclusive approach of the former, whose aim is not to improve people’s lives but to attract media attention. Therefore, the Open Mosque could be a fitting example of homo-colonialism, where women’s and queer rights are imposed from the top. “Patriarchal, patronizing and neo-colonial. Perhaps Taj Hargey ... would do well ... to refrain from sensationalist sound bites that sound superficially progressive but are in fact disrespectful, dismissive, degrading and disempowering.”¹⁰²

A journalist inadvertently portrayed this lack of engagement towards the Cape Town community and the Islamic tradition, by describing the Open Mosque as a brand to reproduce:

Easily reproducible franchise model for rolling his ideas around the globe with the full warp-speed of twenty-first century culture. There’s a brand here, and if he can just keep it together, and take on the medieval majority, Hargey could change the world in much more meaningful ways than his hardline counterparts have ever managed.¹⁰³

Conclusions

If we are to comprehend the struggle of Imam Hendricks and The Inner Circle for queer people, then we have to contextualise it in the Islamic, South African, and global frames. The Islam he professes is

99 “Is Cape Town’s women and gay-friendly Mosque a sign of new Muslim attitudes?”

100 Shaikh and Shuaib, “The Open Mosque saga.”

101 Shaikh and Shuaib, “The Open Mosque saga.”

102 Shaikh and Shuaib, “The Open Mosque saga.”

103 Gavin Haynes, “The British Muslim who founded a controversial gay-friendly Mosque,” *Vice*, 15 January 2015, www.tinyurl.com/kcruhjz.

based on universal love and compassion. His quest for spiritual/mystical experiences and knowledge, which we could define as diffused Sufism, is crucial in his struggle.

The Inner Circle is a typical global phenomenon,¹⁰⁴ strongly influenced by the South African context, and at the same time the expression of a globalised Islam. The local dimension of this phenomenon is strictly related to the success of Imam Hendricks and The Inner Circle, which is not due to the organisational or media management (the Open Mosque was better advertised), but rather to the fact that he engaged the Islamic tradition both in exegetic terms, doing the *ijtihad*, and in social terms, by being an Imam available to the Islamic community.

This social engagement, both with the Islamic community and queer people, has been facilitated by the peculiarity of South African Islam. Indeed, we argued previously that South African Islam has been, from its origins, multicultural and multi-ethnic, and was strongly influenced by the anti-apartheid struggle and its social justice claims. Thus, the anti-apartheid resistance of Imam Hendricks shaped his universal longing for social justice, beyond the categories of gender, sexuality, race, class, and the like.

We could describe this commitment, rooted in the Islamic faith and the struggle for social justice, as a form of post-Islamism.¹⁰⁵ Post-Islamism is a political engagement which, in contrast to Islamism, is not focused on state powers and legal production, and does not aim to create an ideological community. Instead, it:

Represents an endeavour to fuse religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty. ... By emphasizing rights instead of duties, plurality in place of a singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scriptures, and the future instead of the past. ... To achieve what some have termed an 'alternative modernity'.¹⁰⁶

104 Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: SAGE, 1992).

105 Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*.

106 Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, 8.

This post-Islamist engagement is connected to a process of secularisation, intended as the reconfiguration of Islamic religious authorities and religious knowledge, but, we would like to stress that it does not imply the loss of importance of religion, nor its privatisation. On the contrary, it represents an Islamisation of queer claims and politics.

The Inner Circle is not only a product of South African Islam, but also a global phenomenon, influenced by large-scale trends. Thus, we described how it is becoming one of the centres of a Global Queer Muslim Network, which implies not only an engagement with the local Islamic community but also a 'global audience' and an 'Islamic ecumenism,'¹⁰⁷ which goes beyond cultures, ethnicities, languages, and the like. This global engagement is only made possible because of the new media and information technologies.

Two other characteristics of this global Islam are the reconfiguration of religious authority¹⁰⁸ and the expression of the democratisation of religious knowledge.¹⁰⁹ Imam Hendricks and The Inner Circle created an informal environment in which the distance between the believer and the religious authority is reduced. This reconfiguration entails not only the use of new instruments and techniques (movies and social media), but also the organisation of events outside the mosque's frame, such as study circles, workshops, and conferences. Moreover, there is a return to the religious sources (Qur'ān and ḥadīth) for new interpretations.¹¹⁰ We can find all these characteristics in other globalised Islamic movements.¹¹¹ Finally, Imam Hendricks reconfigures the religious authority in the sense that he embodies both its old and new possible configurations. Indeed, he has a classical Islamic formation and he is an Imam, but at the same time he is the reference point for many queer Muslims around the world.

Imam Hendricks does not follow western queer/LGBT identity politics,

107 Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), p.381.

108 Salvatore and Eickelman, *Public Islam and the Common Good*.

109 Roman Loimeier (2005), "Is there something like 'Protestant Islam'?", *Die Welt des Islams*, 45, 2: 216–54.

110 Jocelyne Cesari (2009), "Islam and the West: From immigration to global Islam," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, 8: 148–75.

111 Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*.

informed by an understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity as being fixed, stable, and essentialist. Neither does he repeat the coming-out narrative, which has been criticised by many as forwarding a western conceptualisation of sexual diversity. On the contrary, he promotes a path of acceptance, inclusion, and activism from a religious point of view. Indeed, from his perspective, Islam and the Qur'ān promote the idea of social justice, to which all human beings are entitled, regardless of their sexual or gender identity.

The attempts of Imam Hendricks and The Inner Circle to break the triangulation between homocolonialism, Muslim queerphobia, and Islamophobia, are based on the refusal of the very logic on which this connection is based.¹¹² A pluralist and open conceptualisation of both queer/LGBT subjectivities and rights and Islam is forwarded, which refuses any monolithic narrative regarding sexual diversity and religious belonging.

112 Momin Rahman, *Homosexualities, Muslim Cultures and Modernity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).