

Azima ila Hayati – An invitation in to my life: Narrative conversations about sexual identity

By Sekneh Hammoud-Beckett

Sekneh is an Australian of Lebanese Muslim ancestry. She lives in Sydney, where she works at the Corner Youth Health Service, and is part of the teaching team at Macquarie University's Social Health course. Sekneh enjoys working with people from diverse backgrounds and holds a position of curiosity from which to explore and honour people's creative acts of resistance. She can be contacted c/- The Corner Youth Health Service, 101 Restwell Street, Bankstown, NSW 2200, or at sekbeckett@hotmail.com

This paper describes a therapeutic conversation with a young gay Muslim man and his brother which was shaped by the definitional ceremony metaphor. Through deconstructing 'games of truth' in relation to attitudes to homosexuality and the process of 'coming out', space was created for this young man and his brother to realign their relationship. In the midst of the current hostile climate affecting all Arab Muslim families, this paper describes the story of two brothers and their concept of loyalty.

Keywords: definitional ceremony, outsider witness, games of truth, Muslim, sexuality, queer, scaffolding

In recent years, I have made it clear in public settings that, as a psychologist from a Muslim background, I am most willing to speak with Muslims who are negotiating their sexual identities. At the same time, I have become known to the local queer community. These two factors have meant that I have found myself in conversations with people of Muslim heritage about sexual identity, which I very much enjoy.

My passion for hearing the stories of Muslims who are negotiating their sexual identity increased recently, when I learnt of attempts within the field of Islamic psychology to work in collaboration with Christians in order to 'rehabilitate gays and lesbians'. Within professional discussions, I have heard statements such as: 'You must know that the punishment for homosexuality is to be stoned to death, and that the body of a homosexual person must be cremated because they are diseased. We must save them'.

GAMES OF TRUTH

When listening to these sorts of views about homosexuality, I have noticed that these thoughts within any community become a 'game of truth'. This term was coined by Foucault to refer to the function of thought and its specific practices. Foucault defined such a 'game' as 'a set of rules by which truth is produced' (2003a, p.38). He further proposed that these 'games of truth' have real effects on people's lives:

In a given game of truth it is always possible to discover something different and to more or less modify this ... (2003a, p.39)

Foucault's interest in exploring the manifestations of truth games, and their relationship with power, is highlighted by his use of the example of medical institutions. He deconstructs the historical, social, and economic contexts that legitimised the prescription of medical labels to individuals presumed to be 'mad'. His argument is not designed to debate the therapeutic effectiveness of medical approaches, nor to invalidate them. He further states that he is not saying madness does not exist, but questions the political birth of the concept and seeks to make transparent the discourses at play within the field of medicine.

Making discourses transparent 'renders visible' games of truth and power. In turn, this exposes the practices embedded in the socio-political contexts that

support these truths, and opens space to discover something different (2003a). Let us now try to apply this approach to the experience of young queer Muslims.

What would it mean if a young person of the Islamic faith wanted to consult with a health professional about their sexuality and they received information that there is a service to rehabilitate them? What might be the effects of such messages when lesbian and gay youth are at elevated risk of suicide attempts, and that the mean age of suicide attempts precedes coming out and first same-gender sexual experience? (Nicholas & Howard, 1998). What might be some of the 'games of truth' for people of Muslim heritage who identify as homosexuals? How might I be able to engage in conversations that honour their religion, while at the same time exploring different identities that might not fit with religious scriptures? These questions have shaped my exploration of the complex realms of religious identification and sexuality.

QUEERING THE CONCEPT OF 'COMING OUT'

Not only are there 'games of truth' within the Muslim community, but also within queer communities. One such 'game of truth' relates to the thought and practices associated with 'coming out'. The following reflections have been influenced by conversations I have had with people who identify as Muslim queers about the isolation they have experienced when in contact with 'mainstream' gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and questioning (GLBTIQ) services.

The Gay and Lesbian Counselling and Community Services of Australia define 'coming out' as 'telling someone you are lesbian or gay? Someone who has not come out is referred to as being 'in the closet' (Gay and Lesbian Counselling and Community Services of Australia, n.d.). At times within the queer community, assumptions are made that in order to live a 'truly gay or queer life' it is necessary to 'come out' in certain ways.

The complexity of this idea has been highlighted by the historian Shannon Woodcock (2004). Woodcock identifies as an 'Australian ethnic woman who desires women'. Her paper discusses the globalisation of the same-sex politics and the queer rights movement. She states that the political form of identification

associated with 'coming out' in the West positions itself in the binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality, and this poses a problem:

It is vital to examine how western discourse of freeing LGBT individuals from repressed social positions through political action primarily requires local subjects who answer to those very specific names of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender ... (and yet) there have always existed communities that identify through same sex practices in eastern Europe, and these communities have performed their identities in a variety of ways, in a variety of social spaces. I argue that Romanian and Albanian women who desire women have had a detailed, dynamic and beautiful system of strategies for identifying themselves and others, and that the western project of developing LGBT communities attempts to contain this strategic dynamism. (p.2)

In her analysis, Woodcock questions whether this containment 'masquerades as salvation', and refers to Hoard who claims that:

... to assert the universality of a specific historical agent can, and arguably is, closing down spaces for these participants without replicating the set of historical circumstances which allowed gayness to have historical agency in the west. The universality that promises liberation ends up as oppression. (in Woodcock, 2004, p.2)

Woodcock interviewed women from Albania and Romania who had only experienced relationships with women and yet disclosed their discomfort with the 'western pressure to identify as lesbian'. While acknowledging the importance of coming out in creating a sense of community, and to support others who have come out, Woodcock explains that the idea of coming out for the 'desire for lesbians to become more visible is itself an incitement to discourse' (2004, p.8). Seen in this light, within western discourse, individuals are encouraged to come out and confess their sexual identity 'which in turn creates a new set of organising sexual identities which damage existing, more subtle, networks of communication of sexualities and identities' (Woodcock, 2004, p.11).

On the other hand, Irshad Manji (2003), an author

who identifies as a lesbian Muslim, 'thanks God for the West'. She testifies that 'the spirit of exploration' in the west is 'oxygen' for which she is grateful. She writes: 'In much of North America, Muslims have the freedom to be multi-dimensional ... Pluralism of people, pluralism of ideas, draw the connection. I did, and that connection has so far saved my faith in Islam' (p.216).

As I ponder on these ideas, I notice the many complexities and contradictions they contain. One might argue that, if it was not for the process of coming out and the queer communities this has created, we might not have the liberties or the language with which to write about this topic. In response, it seems appropriate to state that my curiosity is guided by Foucault's (2003b) interview entitled 'So is it important to think?'. Within this interview he states:

A critique does not consist in saying things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions; of established unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based. (p.172)

The work done in the field of supporting and developing GLBTIQ communities has been invaluable, and the concept of 'coming out' has played an important part in this. I acknowledge the importance of coming out as a community concept. It has given voice to the ongoing struggles to attain legal recognition and support services for the GLBTIQ communities, and played a significant role in rendering visible the human rights issues. I also wish to acknowledge that many queer groups take great care in leaving any decisions about 'coming out' to the person concerned (see, again, Gay and Lesbian Counselling and Community Services of Australia, n.d.).

Despite this, for some, including some young queer Muslims, the discourse associated with 'coming out' can be fraught. It has been my honour to witness alternative ways in which some queer young people define their existence and identifications. It has been these experiences that have led me to write this paper.

THE IDEA OF 'COMING IN'

In my therapeutic work, I have arrived at these points of reflection: How do we give thought and voice to people who might experience being marginalised

within the marginalised groups in society? What happens when certain practices do not speak to all members of the group? How can we, as counsellors, free ourselves from prescribed ideas about ‘identity acceptance’ and open ourselves to learn something new, something different?

In light of the above ideas, and after many conversations with my brother, we coined the term ‘coming in’. This term refers to the conscious and selective invitation of people into one’s ‘club of life’ (White, 2000). Although it might be a matter of semantics, I have found it an experience-near definition that has opened space for many queer Muslim people with whom I consult. The way the concept works is illustrated in a transcript later in this article.

ACTS OF RESISTANCE

I hold a strong fascination in therapeutic encounters for uncovering thoughts and actions of protest and resistance (White 1995; White & Epston, 1990). This opens the possibility to notice that ... *in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there was no possibility of resistance ... there would be no power relations at all ... if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere* (Foucault 2003a, pp.34-35).

With this in mind, my intention within therapy is to explore the art of resistance and to research and honour these creative acts. This idea is reinforced by the humorous, yet poignant Ethiopian proverb (cited by Wade, 1997): ‘when the grand lord passes, the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts’. This proverb has been a source of laughter when I have shared it with people I consult, and I have sometimes asked: ‘Has there been a time when you have done the silent fart when the grand lord passed?’ This highlights the relationship between oppression and creative acts of resistance (Mears, 2002). I am always curious about researching the presence of resistance in people’s lives.

UNCERTAINTY

Jamil is a young Muslim Arab gay man who was referred to me by a local queer support group. Jamil told me that he wanted to explore the concept of ‘coming out’, and the difficulties some assumptions

about this concept had caused for him. A process of deconstructing the concept of ‘coming out’ supported him to research alternative ways of defining his journey, ways that accommodated to his lifestyle and preferences. These are described later in this paper. Yet Jamil was experiencing ongoing tension with his brother, Hassan, who holds strongly to his Islamic faith and was experiencing difficulty accepting his brother’s sexuality. Jamil told me that he wanted Hassan to join our therapeutic conversations as an outsider witness (Russell & Carey, 2004; White 2000).

Initially, I was in doubt about whether this would be a helpful experience or even whether Hassan would be willing to join us. I engaged in some thought about this and reflected on the following questions: How do I orientate myself to take a position of interest and discovery given homophobic ideas might be presented? If I hold a certain attitude towards people who hold homophobic ideas, how might I be entering into ‘games of truth’?

In taking a position to embrace the idea that ‘there is no certainty, only degrees of uncertainty’ in therapeutic encounters (Amundson, Stewart, & Valentine, 1993, p.120), I prepared to meet with Jamil and Hassan. Two key concepts informed how I approached this conversation. The first involved a determination to explore, research, and honour Jamil’s resistance to homophobic attitudes. The second involved thinking through my responsibilities to scaffold the conversations in particular ways.

SCAFFOLDING CONVERSATIONS – THE ARCHITECTURE OF POSSIBILITIES

In my conversation with Jamil and Hassan, I hoped to assist these brothers to move from what was ‘known and familiar’ about their relationship (which had been characterised by conflict around Jamil’s sexual identity) towards what might be ‘possible for them to know’. When people consult therapists, it is often because they are telling stories about their lives and relationships that are stuck within the realm of the known and familiar. As therapists we have the responsibility to scaffold conversations to progressively and incrementally support specific learning tasks, and to facilitate movement towards what is possible for people to know about their lives. This, in turn, creates new options for action. Providing this scaffolding is akin to providing an architecture of possibility.

White (2006) in reviewing the ideas of Vygotsky, a developmental and learning theorist, states that learning is the product of social collaboration and that it is through interactions with significant others that people can explore what they might be able to accomplish in life. Therapeutically, White (2006) asserts that the therapist is required to effectively scaffold conversations to support people to incrementally and progressively distance from the known and familiar issues that affect their lives. This space in turn provides the foundation for people to develop a sense of personal agency and to start influencing the design of their own life. The gap between the 'known and familiar' and 'what is possible to know' was described by Vygotsky (1986) as the

'zone of proximal development' (p.86). Navigating this zone occurs through social collaboration, through scaffolded conversations, and with the audience of significant others.

During therapeutic conversations with Jamil, we tried to identify and expose the 'truth games' that supported the dominant story. Through this process, we began to traverse the gap between 'the known and familiar' and 'what is possible to know'. Jamil started to talk about the ways in which he responds to these 'truth games' and to reflect upon how he has come to value his life and identity.

The five categories of scaffolding described by White (2006), which can shape therapeutic conversations, influenced the questions that I asked:

Distancing task (from the known and familiar):	Therapist's task is to:	Sample questions include:
Low-level	Characterise specific objects and events	Can I get to know the issue a little better by asking some questions? What name, characteristic, or words might you give to describe this issue?
Medium-level	Bring into relationship specific objects and events of the person's world in order to develop chains of association	Can you tell me when you first started to notice this issue? Has it changed over time? Have you noticed what might be happening at those times?
Medium high-level	Reflect on these chains of associations	What influences has this had on the way that you see yourself? What effects does it have on your relationship with...? What do you think about this?
High-level	Abstract learning from the concrete and specific circumstances to form concepts about life and identity	When this is present, how does it get in the way of your hopes and dreams? What does this knowledge say about what you value in life, about what is important to you? Can you tell me a small story about a time when these values have played a role in your life?
Very high-level	Formulate a prediction about the outcome of a specific action founded on this concept development, and encourage the planning for and initiation of such actions	If you were to act in accordance with this value, what steps might you take? Who might support you in this journey? How?

These ideas provided the foundation for my conversations with Jamil. The first step was to deconstruct with Jamil many of the taken-for-granted assumptions about life that had led to negative effects on his life. The second step was to ask questions that honoured and acknowledged Jamil's journey in navigating his sexual, cultural, and religious identities.

The process of venturing from the 'known and familiar' to what was 'possible to know' involved engaging in a definitional ceremony (Myerhoff, 1982; White, 2000) with Jamil and his brother Hassan. In accordance with the definitional ceremony process, in the first stage of the ceremony Jamil shared the stories of his life before an outsider witness, his brother Hassan. In the second stage of the ceremony, Hassan was given the opportunity to respond by re-telling certain aspects of what he had been an audience to. These re-tellings were shaped by specific traditions of acknowledgement (White, 2000).

JAMIL'S STORY

Jamil is a twenty-four-year-old Australian-born Lebanese Muslim man who told me that he had 'identified as gay from the day I was born'. He was referred to me by a colleague from the local GLBTIQ organisation. During our meetings, Jamil engaged in conversations about the importance of unpacking the games of truth, naming various acts of resistance, and developing a process of inviting certain family members into his life. Jamil still resides at his parent's residence with his unmarried siblings. He informed me that in his family 'it's not a common practice to move out of home until we get married'. I was also informed that his relationship with his eldest brother, Hassan, aged twenty-six, had been volatile since they were very young.

I experienced this volatility when Hassan contacted me and said that I needed to 'help his brother' by endorsing the Islamic scriptures, and to 'stop reinforcing his sexuality'. When I shared the importance of my ethical position, one that is informed by the narrative ideas of curiosity and support, he hung up.

Later that year, I received another call from Hassan telling me that he had 'f—ed up'. When I said I didn't quite understand what that meant, he said, 'I tried to slap some sense into Jamil ... his tears killed me ... I know it's not his fault'. I took the opportunity over the phone to ask Hassan some

questions about the slapping, its effects on the sort of relationship Hassan wanted to have with his brother, and how he had got disconnected from his better judgement. He said to me, 'Why don't you get it? Aren't you a Leb? Aren't you from a Muslim family?'

I contacted Jamil to ascertain his safety and we talked about Hassan's surprising phone call. Jamil laughed and said that he knew that it would be handy to leave my number on the fridge in case other members of the family needed it! I discussed the possibility of inviting Hassan to our next session so that we could involve him in a definitional ceremony. Jamil said that he would invite Hassan, but was not hopeful that he would accept the offer.

As it turned out, Hassan took up the invitation. When he turned up to our next meeting, greeting him and acknowledging him was religiously sensitive. Out of respect, I did not offer to shake his hand, and did not hold eye contact. I talked at length about the definitional ceremony structure, and how this would provide a foundation for us to work together. The room was organised so that initially Jamil and I sat facing each other in the centre of the room, with Hassan behind his brother in an audience position to the conversation. It was important for me, given the potential precariousness of the situation, to be transparent about my ethical obligation to contact relevant services if I thought personal safety or the safety of others was compromised. In order to establish further safety and rapport, I asked them: 'If any of the following questions take you to a place that you do not feel comfortable, or perhaps you don't want to answer, could you please alert me to this? How might you do that?' These preparatory steps set a foundation for the conversation that followed.

I have included some of the transcript from this conversation here:

Jamil, Why is it important to you for your brother to join with us today?

I want us to get along. I know that he doesn't get me being gay, but I hope if he listens to us talk he can understand. If we are at home I don't get the chance to tell him about my life. We just bicker and bicker. I hope he can hear me because I want to be close. We are family. I want him to know how tough it is to be gay, Arab, and Muslim.

Jamil, I'm interested in hearing more of your thoughts about the relationship between being gay and being from an Arabic-speaking and Muslim background?

It's not something you would wish on your own enemy – to be Muslim and homosexual in today's climate – oh yeah, and an Arab. Think about it. In some Muslim nations based on interpretations of the Quran, the killing of gays and lesbians is enforced. Then there is a belief that homosexuality doesn't exist in the Arab world; that it's a disease of the West and it's only the weak that get contaminated.

We have spoken before about how some of these beliefs and ideas are like 'games of truth'. What might be some of the 'games of truth' played out in society?

Well the games of truth are more like what the politicians and religious leaders use to gain power. Every move they make they try and take a piece of you.

Can you tell me more about what you mean by that?

Well, just today, the Premier of this state has made unfavourable comments about a childcare centre because they read a book to the children there that features a little boy with two fathers. I think this book, *The rainbow cubby house*¹, is a great book, but people have argued about it in the media saying that kids shouldn't get involved in 'gay issues'. Some critics, including my family members, are saying that kids don't need to know about gay sex. This has confused me! Do books involving a mother and father educate children about heterosexual sex?

There is also a ban on gay marriages here in Australia and that shows us that homophobia is here in this country. I don't know how we are going to be protected by the law here in Australia. I'm certainly not protected by the law in Muslim countries. It seems discriminatory to me. Religious teachings include stories of conquering and bloody wars. I don't understand why certain religious leaders wish to prevent the teaching of inclusion and love. When suicide is so common in the queer community, it can never be too early to teach acceptance.

I get the sense that children learn about the world through the stories they're exposed to, so books like

the one you mention sound like a wonderful way to introduce them to same-sex relationships and diverse sorts of families. I suppose a question you are asking is: 'What does it mean when religious and political leaders do not take up responsibility to promote and encourage acceptance?'

Yeah, and these views seem to 'win the game' – they become a taken-for-granted 'truth' in society. That's a sad state of affairs.

We have previously talked about the challenges of 'coming out' and how this concept did not fit for you. Through our conversations you described the art of inviting people to 'come in' to your life. How have you been able to explore alternative and preferred ways of being when the games of truth try to dominate? What does this action say about the hopes you have for your life?

Well, when I started to visit gay organisations, some would prescribe to me how I should 'come out' and then let my entire extended family deal with this. They would say, 'To tell people is to say you're proud of who you are' or that I wouldn't be able to be a fully happy person if I didn't 'come out' in particular ways. They would say simply, 'People need to deal with it and get over it'. I felt some sort of pressure to make my sexuality public.

This didn't seem quite so straightforward to me. Perhaps it was because I am really proud of who I am, and I feel like I am a fully happy person, that I was able to look at other ways of living my life. I know that if I had the choice to be straight, I wouldn't choose it. Even if I don't tell certain members of my extended family about my sexuality, I don't view myself as in the closet, in a dark place that I must escape from. Far from it, this 'closet' is full of precious things, like things you could never afford to buy! It's my treasure chest. The way I see it, rather than me needing to move out of the closet, to make my sexuality public to everyone, including my grandparents, instead I get to choose who to open the door to, and who to invite to 'come in' to my life.

This different metaphor took away the pressure I had been feeling. I no longer feel a pressure to 'come out' to my entire family, and instead I have many precious people who I have invited to 'come in' to my life. I am hoping that other people in my situation

don't feel the pressure of these 'games of truth' to make a public move that doesn't fit for them. I like the fact that I choose people to 'come in' to my life. Importantly, I choose people who I think are valuable to support me and share things that are important to me.

Can you tell me how you have experimented with this 'coming in' idea?

Well yes. Once I started to think of inviting specific people to 'come in', rather than me 'coming out', I found it easier to think of ways to invite my mum, dad, and siblings into my life ... into my treasure chest. I wanted to share my jewels! I remember the day vividly. You and I talked about it together first and prepared a 'first aid kit'. We came up with some good plans.

Plan One: I took my family to a café, a public space. Plan Two: I said to them that I loved them dearly and I wanted them to be part of my life. I said that what I was going to tell them was to make it possible for them to come in to my life. When I said: 'I am gay and can never imagine being with a woman', Mum began to cry and said at first, 'Why are you doing this to me?'. My dad did not say a word. I could understand my mother was in pain and she needed time. But she is happy for me now. She has invited me and my boyfriend to dinner. She still worries about what Allah might do to me. The other day it was so cute when she said to me, 'Son, I love you and I will not let Allah put you in hell. I will stand before him and say you created my son.' She also tells my sisters to tell me to wear a condom!

My sisters are so accepting; they were like ... 'Why has it taken you so long to tell us?' But my brother – sorry Hassan – that's a different story. He fights with all of us. I know he means well, but he doesn't get it. He reckons if I go to the mosque, or pay for therapy, or be given some male hormone, then I will stop being such a queen and instead be a man. Hassan says he understands I'm gay, somehow different from him, because he could never imagine being able to root a bloke, but he says I should stay celibate to avoid going to hell. Dad's still is a bit quiet. He needs more time.

How are you able to hold on to this idea of inviting people to 'come in' to your life despite what you were up against?

I've been up against heaps of things: the attitudes of some people in the Muslim faith, the gay community about needing to 'come out', and then the political issues. I think I have become good friends with silence.

I'm interested in this friendship with silence. I have heard an idea about friendships with silence. Would you be interested in hearing about this?

Yep, that's okay.

According to the therapist, Johnella Bird², silence is sometimes a resource for people to use to survive. So, instead of people being silenced, they take up the silence when they need to. Does this idea resonate for you?

Mmm ... It's definitely an action I use to ignore the bullshit I hear.

So it is something you take up ... is its presence helpful?

Well yeah, it's like a loyal and reliable mate. It can help you get through the tough times. It keeps me sane. And it helps me ... it keeps me connected to my faith.

What is it that you hold precious and value about your faith? Why is this important to you?

I have never been asked this question. I suppose some people might think that I would dump my faith because it's not gay-friendly ... but that would just be playing into another truth game! I suppose my faith is important to me because it reminds me ... it keeps me close to my family and the memories.

What do you mean by the memories?

I used to love particular times we spent as a family. We would sit around our father while he would tell us stories about the Prophets. He would tell stories about how the Prophet advocated for women's rights at a time when they were being buried at birth, and how the Prophet didn't discriminate against colour. It was a black man, Bilal, who led the prayers in ancient times. I also love what Islam means, and that is peace.

Of course, Islam, like most religions, has its issues with sexuality. In some Muslim countries, we hear of honour killings and violence against gay people. These may have more to do with cultural beliefs, rather than Quranic, but I'm not sure if this is much comfort to Muslim women or gay people! In my experience, within the Muslim community there is interest in questioning Islamophobic rhetoric, but less interest in dealing with the political and human rights violations suffered by women or gay people.

Who else knows what you're up against?

I hope my family. I know my sisters do and other Muslim gay people, maybe.

What might they appreciate in the steps that you took to tell your story?

They know that I'm taking a big risk, but I know that it's important to tell my story because I'm challenging the thoughts of the gay community about coming out. I'm wanting to live a gay life but to keep my faith and stay linked to my society in general. It's a triple whammy, to be gay, Arab, and Muslim.

What might you contribute to other people in similar circumstances as yourself?

I hope I contribute to the sense that you can be whoever you want to be.

A DEFINITIONAL CEREMONY

Definitional ceremonies (Russell & Carey, 2004; White, 2000) provide a therapeutic arena for the performance of the preferred narratives of people's lives, identities, and relationships. In this therapeutic arena, Jamil invited his brother to witness a performance of the stories of his life. Hassan then had the opportunity to respond to these tellings by re-telling certain aspects of the conversation that resonated a fascination or new understanding for him. Hassan was invited to swap chair positions with Jamil. The questions that I asked Hassan were guided by a map that consists of four specific categories of inquiry (White, 2000). These four categories included:

1. Identifying certain expressions spoken by Jamil: Hassan was asked to reflect on what particular expressions from Jamil's stories struck a chord for him.

2. Describing the image: Hassan was asked to speak about what images of Jamil's life, of his identities, and journey, were evoked for Hassan as he listened to his brother.
3. Embodying responses: Hassan engaged in a process of exploring the aspects of his own experiences of life that resonated with these expressions, and with the images evoked by these expressions.
4. Acknowledging transport: In this concluding part of the process, Hassan was invited to reflect on how he was moved on account of being present to witness Jamil's expressions of his life.

The transcript below highlights the powerfully moving re-tellings that Hassan offered. In this process, Hassan was able to reflect on Jamil's preferred claims about his life and his identities. His brother's story became more visible to him, and there was an opportunity to articulate shared themes and values. This therapeutic arena provided a forum for these two brothers to acknowledge a different awareness of each other's lives, which may not have otherwise been possible.

Identifying the expression: *As you listened to Jamil's story, which expressions caught your attention?*

It's my brother ... Oh man, I didn't ... I didn't realise why he told us, why he put it out there ... it was not to shock me ... he chose to tell me because he wanted me to 'come in' to his life. I thought he just wanted to piss me off.

Describing the image: *What did this suggest to you about Jamil's purposes, values, beliefs, hopes, dreams, and commitments?*

I heard that he just wants to be accepted and respected for who he is, but everything around him rejects him and I have been guilty of that. I thought he gave up his faith and I'm scared for him because I don't want him to go to hell. I feel like it's my duty to protect him as his brother. I didn't realise how hard it was for him.

Embodying responses: *What is it about your life that accounts for why these expressions caught your attention or struck a chord for you?*

Well it's pretty tough for me being a Muslim with all the media hype about terrorists, wars, and rapists. I've wanted to change my name because, as soon as they think you're Muslim, people treat you like ... well they all get paranoid. But I can go to the Mosque and I'm accepted. But where can Jamil go? It must be even tougher if you add being gay to being an Arab and Muslim.

Acknowledging transport: *Where has this experience taken you to, that you would not otherwise have arrived at, if you hadn't been present as an audience to this conversation?*

I didn't realise how tough it was for him. I never have thought about what society says about the gay community, about how much he has had to go through. I just thought that gays are accepted in the west ... I didn't think of the politics and all the other stuff. Anyway, it makes me think, if you knew the consequence would be death or hell, why would you choose it? It's still hard for me to get my head around it because I'm a bit confused. Why would he choose it? It's hard to think something different to what you've been taught. I heard a quote from the Quran that 'Allah made us all different so that we can learn from one another'. I don't know ... I think this message needs to be spread.

That's a powerful quote, if people were able to hold this quote in their lives, what might be different?

I think people hear what they want to hear. Words are different to the practice.

Well, sitting here today to hear your brother's story, what does this practice speak to you of?

Loyalty.

At this point, Hassan put his head down and began to sob. No further words were said, but the tears spoke. They spoke to me of a bond of the womb, an honouring of two brothers' relationship. This honouring may have never appeared if certainty had taken me over, or if the 'games of truth' had not been exposed. The brothers embraced and I shed tears too.

REFLECTIONS ON THIS PROCESS

To me, this process reflects the importance of Foucault's (2003b) descriptions of making conflicts more visible:

It is a matter of making conflicts more visible, of making them more essential than mere clashes of interest or mere institutional blockages. From the conflicts and clashes a new relation of forces must emerge whose temporary profile will be a reform. (p.173)

In this instance, the conflict seemed to lie in Hassan's perception of Jamil's sexuality as opposing his values; however, this conflict was exposed and the definitional ceremony provided an opportunity for both brothers to speak more richly of what was important to them. A performance then took place that led to a re-definition of loyalty. It was loyalty that had brought Hassan to come to listen to his brother's story. It was loyalty that shaped his responses. And, by the end of this conversation, both brothers were leaving with a much richer appreciation of what loyalty meant to them, and what it would make possible in their relationship.

To make this performance possible, the stage had to be set in a particular way – the conversation had to be scaffolded. The backdrop was a deconstruction of certain 'games of truth', including the dominant cultural ideas about homosexuality and 'queering' the concept of coming out. Exploring the art of resistance was also significant. Enquiries into Jamil's intentions and hopes led to richer descriptions and explanations of why he was living his life in certain ways. Then, and only then, did Hassan have the chance to join the stories of his life with those of his brother. The categories of questions allowed Hassan to respond in ways that resonated with his brother.

Once the stage had been set, the performance took place. It was a performance of honesty, of brotherhood, and of loyalty. And from within their shared faith emerged a significant shared value: 'Allah made us all different so that we can learn from one another'.

As a woman from a Muslim heritage, I hope this paper has unveiled some of the pertinent issues that exist within Muslim GLBTIQ communities. I have been privileged to work in collaboration within these communities and witness the performances of different meanings of self, alternative stories of life, and the

generation of new possibilities for relationship. Exploring issues of sexuality in the therapeutic realm can be challenging, but in the process I have been invited to 'come in' to an amazing learning journey about people's knowledges and skills in the realm of sexuality, society, spirituality, and religion.

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NOTES

- ¹ (Harding & Harding, 2002)
² (see Bird, 2000)

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WEBSITES ABOUT QUEER, ARAB, AND MUSLIM ISSUES

- Queer Jihad** www.well.com/user/queerjhd/index.htm
According to this site, 'Queer Jihad is the queer Muslim struggle for acceptance: first, the struggle to accept ourselves as being exactly the way Allah has created us to be; and secondly, the struggle for understanding among Muslims in general'.
- GayMiddleEast.com** contains interesting and helpful country-by-country information with recent gay-related news reports.
- The Gay and Lesbian Arabic Society (GLAS)** www.glas.org
An international organisation established in the USA in 1988 with worldwide chapters, GLAS serves as a networking organisation for Gays and Lesbians of Arab descent or those living in Arab countries.
- Huriyah: A Queer Muslim Magazine** www.huriyahmag.com
An on-line magazine for Queer Muslims.
- Al Fatiha Foundation** www.al-fatiha.org
A North American organisation for gay and lesbian Muslims.