Are You Really Gay, Though?

The Consequences of Differences in Dutch Immigration Services' Perceptions Surrounding Homosexual and Religious Identities Versus How Queer Asylum Seekers Live Their religion

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Master thesis

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Abstract:

This research aims to shed light on how the Dutch discourse surrounding homosexuality and religion influences the asylum procedure, and what the consequences are for queer refugees that do not fit the discursive expectations regarding their identity. The oppositional pairing of religion and homosexuality in general in the public debate has led to certain ideas about whether people can hold both a religious and queer identity at the same time. While these ideas might be true for some people, they are problematic for others - notably queer refugees - who have a completely different cultural background and now find themselves being judged and categorized according to standards that are not their own. Because of the presence and use of these stereotypes in the asylum procedure, people who fall outside of the expectation run the chance of being wrongfully dismissed as not credible in their story, possibly leading to deportation to a country that does not take kindly to people being part of the LGBT community.

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1. Introduction and problem statement

On the 9th of November 2020, Happy, a lesbian refugee from Nigeria, was informed by Dutch immigration services (the IND) that her request for asylum had been denied and that she was to be deported back to Nigeria (van Raay, 2020). The reason for this decision appears to have been that they did not believe that Happy was truly lesbian, the grounds on which she applied for asylum in the Netherlands. While this case is not the only one of its kind – with the IND not believing someone to actually be gay - this one caused particular outrage because of what happened to Happy some months before. In the summer of 2020, she was doused in boiling water because of her sexuality – causing secondary and third-degree burns – by other Nigerian refugees when she visited her girlfriend in another refugee centre (Yalgin, 2020).

That this person, who had been so viciously attacked because of her sexual orientation, was refused asylum because the IND did not believe she was a lesbian shows an existing problem existing within Dutch immigration services. Sandro Kortekaas, a spokesperson for the NGO 'LGBT asylum support', says that the methods used by the IND to determine someone's sexuality are still backwards, even though they have been modified in 2019 (van Raay, 2020). According to Kortekaas and several other asylum lawyers, part of the problem is the Western perspective that many IND staff members have and that is often assumed to apply to all queer refugees (van Raay, 2020). As we will see later in this thesis, Dutch stereotypes and ideas about what queer people are supposed be like have become part of the interviews and have formed the standard according to which people's claims to asylum are being judged. For this reason, one could say that that the IND is unable to look objectively at someone's case, leading to potential wrongful deportations.

These wrongful deportations can have dangerous consequences when the refugees in question are deported back to a country where they face life imprisonment or even the death penalty. According to ILGA - The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, which publishes a map of all legislation surrounding homosexuality - as of 2020 there are 57 countries in which LGBT+ people face prison sentences and 11 where they could face the death penalty (ILGA, 2020). Next to this, even in countries where there is no legislation forbidding homosexuality, LGBT people often face discrimination and violence, possibly at the hands of their family members or local communities. Being deported back to such a country could thus spell disaster, and it is a mistake that should be avoided at all costs. Furthermore, regarding the situation in those countries, it should be no surprise that queer people decide to flee to the Netherlands, a country famous (whether rightly or wrongly) for its tolerance towards queers.

Before continuing, I first want to note that it is important to be at least somewhat critical of people who claim asylum on basis of their sexuality. A recent example of why is an investigation by the IND into anonymous tips they received about a course for Ugandans on how to fake homosexuality in order to receive asylum (Zwaan, 2020). With this thesis, I thus do not mean to deny

that it is necessary to investigate the sexuality of the person in question in order to make sure that people do not enter the country under false pretences. This would not only be unfair to the actual queer people who are being prosecuted for reasons regarding their sexuality, but it would also open the door for everyone to claim asylum based on sexuality. Still, we might need to rethink our restrictive immigration policies altogether so that people who flee from war or for economic reasons have no incentive to lie about being queer. It is even argued by some that Europe needs immigrants in order to prevent issues with its aging population. Regardless of what one thinks about Dutch immigration policies, it cannot be denied that an investigation into someone's sexuality is exceedingly difficult to conduct and that the result mostly depends on the credibility of a story rather than hard evidence.

To make sure that people are not wrongfully deported, and all refugees get the fair process they deserve, it is important to make sure the interview is conducted as objectively as possible. It is therefore needed to find out where Dutch perceptions, ideas and misconceptions surrounding homosexual (or lesbian or bisexual) identities lie, and how that might influence the asylum procedure for queer refugees. One of the areas of contention is the supposed incompatibility of a queer sexual orientation and religion, an idea supported by the fact that laws penalizing homosexuality are often based on religious law as in Iran for example.

This idea is further amplified by the concept of homonationalism. Homonationalists use a rhetoric of needing to defend gay rights in order to spark fear against immigration from those who are perceived to be intolerant towards queers and therefore backwards (Puar, 2017). Generally, these intolerant others are presented as religious people, most often Muslims. In the article 'from saving women to saving gays, it is said that the sexual exceptionalism of Dutch national identity – reflected in the particular ways in which gender and sexuality are discussed and regulated – is providing a fertile ground for homonationalism in the Netherlands (Bracke, 2012). The idea that gays need to be saved from their backwards and, importantly for this thesis, religious countrymen is rather prevalent in the Netherlands. While later in this thesis I will delve deeper into this fact, for now it suffices to say that the Dutch discourse presents the relationship between religion and homosexuality as solely a negative one.

The prevailing idea is that - since queer refugees likely fled their country because their sexuality did not conform with the religious views held by the majority - they would look on religion at least unfavourably. An example of how this idea is applied during the asylum procedure can be seen in how the IND connects sexuality to religion in the questions they ask. Questions such as ''What is the meaning of your religion in relation to your homosexual orientation?'' are all too common (Veenhof, 2018). This question, coupled with the fact that the person being interviewed is expected to have an inner struggle between these identities they can explain, clearly shows that a certain bias exists concerning the intersection of queer and religious identities (Veenhof, 2018).

Through personal contact with several queer refugees, however, I learned that religion can still be an important part of their lives. This thesis will thus investigate the prevailing Dutch ideas

surrounding the intersection of queer and religious identities in refugees, whether these ideas are actually correct, and what the effect of those ideas is on the asylum procedure for queer refugees who do not seem to conform.

These topics were researched with the following question in mind: *How does the disparity between the Dutch discourse surrounding the intersection of religious and queer identities and how queer refugees actually live religion influence the decision on whether someone receives asylum in the Netherlands?* This question was answered in three parts. Firstly, I explained what exactly the assumptions, prejudices and misconceptions existing in the Dutch-secular discourse surrounding the intersection of religious and queer identities are. Secondly, through interviews, I looked at how queer refugees actually negotiate their religious and queer identities. Lastly, I investigated what the consequences of the combination of religious and queer identities for receiving asylum are.

I chose the Netherlands as the focus of my research since as a country it is somewhat unique regarding the topics this thesis focuses on. The fact that it was the first country to adopt gay marriage and the presence of a specific discourse surrounding sexuality means that homonationalism finds fertile ground here (Bracke, 2012). The tolerance of the Dutch people towards different sexualities is famous - whether that is deserved is a different discussion - which makes it an interesting country to look at when discussing the sexuality of migrants and refugees, a group that often in itself provokes intense discussions. As we will see, there is also ample research on the intersection of homosexuality and religion in the Netherlands which will help greatly with conducting my own project. Other reasons for choosing the Netherlands are the fact that I volunteer at the COC and have my internship at a refugee centre which means I could find participants for my research there and that I am in contact with people who experience the problem that I researched.

There are several reasons why this is an academically interesting issue. According to Spijkerboer (2013), LGBT+ refugees' experiences of negotiating asylum in the global North remain a significantly under-researched area, which in itself an obvious indicator that more research is needed regarding this specific group of refugees. Furthermore, LGBT+ and HIV-positive refugees are a particularly vulnerable group as they are often subject to discrimination, harassment and abuse (Chang-Muy & Congress, 2015). This is true not only in their country of origin but also in the asylum centres where they are supposed to be safe. It is thus important that we find out more about the people that are in this vulnerable group, so that we may better fulfil the extra needs that they might have. Lastly, but also importantly, we see that when LGBT+ applicants continue to self-identify as Muslim, their claims are often dismissed by decision-makers in the global North for that reason only (Berg & Millbank 2009).

Here the problem is noticeably clear as well. Being part of the LGBT+ community while also being religious seems to not make sense to immigration officials. It can lead to someone being denied asylum because this combination of their religious and queer identities is not believed to be able to exist without internal conflict. Thus, there are three main reasons as to why the group of queer

refugees, in general, is an important research subject and for why the religious views of this group need to be investigated.

The objectives that I aimed to achieve in this thesis were several. As mentioned before, people deserve a fair and unbiased asylum process. Exploring the discourse surrounding homosexuality and religion creates more awareness of existing biases which, in turn, might decrease the influence these biases have on the procedure overall and, more importantly, on the final decision on whether someone is allowed to say. I consequently hope my thesis can have a practical effect in that regard. Next to the fact that being sent back wrongly can have dangerous implications for them, it might give queer refugees already in the procedure some psychological respite to know that they can practice their religion without having the feeling that they need to conform to Dutch 'gay standards' in order to receive asylum.

More generally speaking, I aimed to contribute to the debate surrounding religion, gender and sexuality since multiple commonly held misconceptions – in this case the supposed incompatibility of a religious and a queer identity – are in need of clarification. This will also add to the academic debate about how secularity is not the neutral position that many feel it is. In that sense, this thesis will try to achieve the same as organizations such as Maruf, COC (of which I am a volunteer) and Christenqueer: creating awareness so that the intersection of religious and queer identities can become more commonly accepted.

This thesis is also meant to add to the often fierce debates surrounding migration and immigration. For many people, refugees are something abstract and are defined only by their refugee status. Exploring how they live their lives and experience their identities will help in humanizing refugees and consequently make people realize that, whether one is for or against migration, these are people in need of help that we are talking about. As long as we do not understand individual refugees or migrants, we will not understand immigration.

Now that I have given an introduction about what this thesis investigates and means to achieve, I will explain the methodology used in this research project. In chapter one, I answer the first sub-question about the Dutch discourse. This will be followed up by chapter two, containing the results of the interviews that explain how queer refugees live religion. Chapter three will be devoted to explaining how the intersection of a gay and religious identity combined with the prevailing Dutch prejudices might affect the asylum procedure. Lastly, chapter four answers my main question by combining the answers to all sub-questions and summarizing the findings.

2. Methodology

2.1 Approaches and methods

Throughout the research project, I adopted an interpretive approach as identity is very much something socially constructed. While writing (and reading) this thesis, it was and is important to keep an open mind and to realise that ideas surrounding identity differ according to cultural background. During the research stage, this approach provided me with more insights into identity construction and discourses surrounding supposedly incompatible identities. The question of how queer refugees live religion was answered through a phenomenological approach since I sought to describe the combination of identities from the perspective of those who have experienced it. The combination of these approaches allowed me to look at the situation with an overarching view while remaining as objective as possible, since I too am a part of the Dutch discourse.

These approaches were chosen with the concept of intersectionality in mind. They are both connected to and found in intersectionality theory which has often been used for research regarding queer migrants or queer people of colour in general (Crenshaw, 1991; Aydemir, 2012; Knibbe, 2018; Prins, 2006;). The term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in her article 'Mapping the Margins' (1991). Here, she sets out intersectionality as an analytical framework for understanding how certain aspects of a person's identity combine and can lead to discrimination and privilege. Examples of factors that should be considered are gender, sexuality, race, religion and disabilities. The intersecting and overlapping of these social identities can lead to either empowerment or oppression. Furthermore, just like this thesis, intersectionality relies on a phenomenological approach that focuses on how people experience certain events or realities.

It needs little explaining that, for this research, it was important to be aware of these intersectionalities regarding the people that will be interviewed and researched. We see an example in Aydemir (2012), where it is written that queers are often understood as normatively white, whereas the homophobe is portrayed as a religious person of colour. For the people that were interviewed in this thesis, both identities (their homosexuality and being a religious person of colour) will often intersect, which means that they are in a specific position and, as we shall see, often in opposition to what the Dutch discourse expects.

Next to this, we also find the interpretive approach in intersectionality theory. Prins (2006) explains that categories like gender, ethnicity and religion are constructed externally while also co-constructing each other. Identity and the intersection of different identities is therefore dependent on historical and social factors, making it something that is beyond doubt socially constructed. As Knibbe (2018, Pg. 659) notes: ''Intersectional approaches that analyse the ways race, gender and religion come together to trivialize, mute or make invisible the interests of certain groups can be helpful for critiquing such processes''. Since this thesis looks at how religious queer migrants are dependent for

asylum on a Dutch discourse that looks at the intersections of these identities in a certain way, this approach was very fitting.

The first and third sub-question have been answered through background research and information available from Immigration services and projects related to queer refugees. I used existing literature to try and get a clear image of what the general ideas surrounding the intersection of religious and queer identities are in the Netherlands. The articles and books used here consist mostly of secondary sources, but because of the target group, some primary sources were used a s well. Primary sources included, for example, documents from immigration services on how to go about interviewing refugees or statements made by queer refugees whose application was denied on grounds of the IND not believing they were gay because of their religion. For the first sub-question I aimed for a thematic analysis by identifying broad patterns and discourses whereas the third question mainly relies on specific examples taken from past IND interviews, in order to show the effects of the existing discourse.

The second sub question was answered through conducting semi-structured interviews with religious queer refugees and analysing the results from those. I wanted to make sure that the interviews are somewhat like an informal talk but with the possibility of being able to steer the talk back on to the topic at hand if necessary. I therefore chose to use a topic list comprised of open questions for the structure of my interviews. This allowed me to discuss a wide range of topics without implicitly pointing in a certain direction or toward a specific answer. Additionally, since the topics discussed can be rather private, this approach allowed people to share as much as they feel comfortable with without feeling pressure of having to answer a big question as if it was an IND interview. Preferably the interviews would have been recorded but as is also explained in the ethical statement, this was not always a possibility. Participants for my research came from either the COC – an LGBT+ rights organization for which I volunteer in the refugee focus group – or from my internship taking place in the AZC of Ter Apel, which took place while I drafted my thesis.

Because it proved difficult to collect enough data with interviews alone, for example because people had a transfer to a centre far away, because they were not comfortable to meet with someone they do not know or because of the coronavirus, I also created a survey containing the questions present in the topic list. This way, I was able to get some more material to analyse.

One might have noticed that I keep using the words gay, homosexuality, queer refugees or queer identity interchangeably. This thesis focusses on refugees that are attracted to people of the same gender, people that would by Western standards be labelled homosexual, lesbian or bisexual. I chose to use the label queer when speaking about people or identities as an overarching term group in order to keep it as inclusive as possible. Homosexuality is used when describing sexual orientation, when translating or when people describe themselves as such. I decided to exclude in this thesis the experience of transsexual refugees not because their experiences are less interesting, less valuable or less important but because I think that they are different from the experiences of a queer/homosexual

refugee. I wanted to keep this thesis focussed on sexuality instead of gender since the experiences in connection to religion might differ and because society often looks at the two concepts through a different lens. An example is that, in Iran, sex changes are allowed and even partly paid for by the government whereas homosexuality is illegal (Barford, 2008). Next to this, it was rather difficult to find participants that identify as trans, since I did not know any refugees who identify as such. This is of course not to say that these people do not face similar problems as queer refugees. I only believe that since their experiences might be different and because I have no trans participants, these people deserve a research that focusses on them especially instead of being included in name only.

Because I took the aforementioned approaches, my thesis can be regarded as qualitative. It is mainly about exploring a social phenomenon and gaining understanding of certain assumptions and how these can differ from lived experiences. Even though I use examples, I do not aim to create an all-encompassing image of the problem at hand. The idea is mainly to point out that a problem with Dutch biases surrounding the intersection of religious and gay identities exists, and to explain several cases of how others (the refugees in this case) might see this intersectionality in order create more awareness. The results of the interviews are therefore also not an exhaustive list of possible identities but just show several examples of how queer people from various places have constructed their identities.

2.2 Ethics

Of course, in conducting research with a group like refugees, one must take ethics into consideration. To interview refugees about these topics, which may be sensitive generally but are probably extra sensitive in their particular situation is not something to be undertaken lightly. It is possible that people might have trauma's that could be re-experienced because of certain questions. Still, deeming whole populations or categories of people as vulnerable lacks sensitivity to context and fails to consider what exactly people might be vulnerable to (Block, Riggs & Haslam, 2013). It was thus important to realise that all individuals might be vulnerable in different ways or in different gradations so to speak. In the end, I made sure not to group them all together or victimize them as an outsider whereas I did realise that there were special needs to be catered to and possible consequences to be considered.

Another thing I took into consideration is that there is always a disparity in power between researchers and researched (Block et al, 2013). I made sure that participants of my research will not experience any negative consequences. These people are, for example, still dependent on the IND regarding whether they will receive asylum. Most did not want to be recorded for fears of the IND hearing things that they do not want them to hear. To also mediate this concern, the thesis will remain confidential between me and my supervisors. That way, no outside institution can get a hold of it and use it against any of the participants. This will be the case at least until all participants have received

their final decision regarding their asylum procedure. In the same vein, I want to make a more general point that all participants were anonymized so that nothing that has been said might lead back to them.

Next to this, it is important to mention that – while the thesis was written as objective as possible – it is not completely free of ethical considerations. As you will see, there is indeed a discrepancy between Dutch ideas about queer refugees and religion and what is actually the case, and these underlying assumptions thus needed to be unravelled and have their impact pointed out in order to be able to change the process. This is because holding people accountable to ideas that are not in line with reality – leading to people not receiving asylum – is a huge mistake with enormous possible consequences. It would be unethical to not point out such a mistake and to name it as such. The fact that people might not like that these mistakes are pointed out shows again that it is necessary to make sure there is no way that my research is traced back to the participants.

Now that I have highlighted the ethical considerations, I will explain the Dutch discourse surrounding homosexuality and religion and explain what prejudices arise from it in the next chapter.

3.1 The Dutch secular discourse

In order to find out whether the lived religion of refugees differs from the existing prejudices within the Dutch discourse, we need to know what exactly the Dutch discourse surrounding the relationship between homosexuality and religion is and what its main elements are. This chapter will therefore investigate the common themes and ideas present in this discourse by investigating two separate issues. First, I will identify the common themes existing in the general discourse surrounding the relation between homosexuality and religion. Second, I will look specifically into the discourse surrounding the intersection of queer and religious identities. These two parts must be identified separately because, as we will see, the discourse surrounding identities is framed by the general discourse.

There has been extensive research on the discourse surrounding the relationship between homosexuality and religion by different authors (Derks, 2017a; Derks, 2017b; Mepschen & Duyvendak, 2012; Bracke, 2012; van den Berg et al., 2014; Bos, 2020; Buijs, Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011;). Within these works, we find specific examples of the discursive opposition between religion and homosexuality, while also finding out that reality is not or has not always been as black and white as the discourse makes it seem. Two opposing groups or camps have been constructed in this discourse, one 'secular' group supportive of gay rights and one 'religious' group which holds more conservative values. The discourse as a whole, however, can be labelled as secular since that group seems to be the largest.

3.1.1. Focus on religious people and stances

The first common theme that can be identified from the research mentioned above, is that the Dutch secular discourse focusses very extensively on religious leaders, narratives and people, and puts a magnifying glass on their stances, statements and utterances. An example of this is discussed in Derks (2017a). This article explains the Dutch social discussion surrounding the so called weigerambtenaar, a civil servant who refuses to conduct gay marriages because of conscious objections. After the bill allowing marriage for homosexual couples was passed, a large debate surrounding these weigerambtenaren sprang up. As Derks explains, a lot of politicians, media and activists found themselves fixated on weigerambtenaren and why they would refuse to officiate gay weddings. In this discourse, religious views were presented as if they were the only possible grounds on which someone would refuse to marry a queer couple. People were surprised and annoyed that this was possible in a secular country. Through cartoons, tv shows and other images thus came into being the, as Derks calls it, socially constructed character of the weigerambtenaar: a grumpy, old, male Christian from the bible belt bent on robbing queer people of the most beautiful days in their lives.

In 2014, a ban was instituted that disallowed refusing to marry a couple because of conscientious objections. Even though the public discussion was fierce, the actual issue of the weigerambtenaar was rather small (Derks, 2017a). According to Derks, only 104 out of thousands of civil servants would refuse to officiate a gay wedding because of conscious objections and there was not one wedding that did not go through because of a weigerambtenaar. This example thus shows us that Dutch society puts a magnifying glass on the attitudes of religious people toward queers even though their influence is relatively small.

In a second article by Derks (2017b), an example is given about how the Dutch secular discourse focusses on specific statements while ignoring others. Here, the discussion is about a speech made by the pope. In this speech, several comments were made about the family and human nature that could be interpreted as making negative judgements on queer people, gay marriage and people with a different gender identity. Even though queer people were not explicitly mentioned, many newspapers and organisations like the COC started publishing articles about how the pope was outright attacking them.

The pope talked about several other topics in the same speech, but Derks makes it clear that the Dutch public discussion focussed mostly on what this religious leader says about sexuality, gender and the family. In the article it is explained that this is likely because the Dutch regard gay rights as one of their primary 'export products'. With his comments, the pope is thus not only seen as attacking queers but the values of the entire country. Derks also explains that most arguments presented by the head of the Catholic church were refuted with the idea that religious ideas are, per definition, biased and unscientific unlike secular ones.

From these two examples we can conclude that the Dutch secular discourse surrounding the relation between homosexuality and religion focusses very much on religious people and their views

regarding homosexuality. Even though these religious people in question might be a relatively small group and their views can be explained in multiple ways instead of simply being aimed against queers, they are presented as if they are a large danger for gay rights. There also is a clear focus on the parts where religion and homosexuality seem to be in conflict, while other topics that are discussed by religious figures are ignored. Furthermore, we see a tendency of dismissing religious viewpoints as biased and unscientific whereas secularity is presented as a neutral through which all things can be seen objectively.

3.1.2. Gay rights at the centre of cultural imagination

Another theme present is found in Mepschen & Duyvendak (2012). They agree with Derks (2017a, 2017b) that gay rights issues have moved to the centre of cultural imagination and explain that this fact is fuelling Dutch sexual nationalism (or homonationalism). Whereas gay rights are presented as the foundation of Dutch and European culture, immigrants in general and Muslims especially are presented as homophobic and backward. According to Mepschen and Duyvendak, support for gay rights from Muslims and minorities is seen as a 'test' for a successful integration. They call this the culturalization of citizenship, where religious newcomers must adopt the (secular) values of the host culture in order to be considered as full citizens. In this article, another discursive example of the (perceived) incompatibility of homosexuality and religion is shown, this time focussed on Islam instead of Christianity. Anti-gay violence by Muslims is said to be highlighted in the media and politics while being contrasted to the supposed Dutch secular tradition of tolerance. It also mentions Dutch homonationalism, where Muslims are presented as 'backwards' because of their religiously inspired values are presented as being incompatible with Dutch secular tolerance toward same-sex couples. As in the articles by Derks, we see secularity being presented as a neutral standpoint and newcomers are expected to leave their religion behind in order to be a good citizen.

The same point is made by Bracke (2012). She explains how the discursive focus in the Netherlands on saving women from their oppressive religious men, now has turned to saving queers from these same religious and backwards countrymen. Again, this discourse focusses especially on Muslims and the Islam in Dutch society. In this article, homonationalist tendencies are explained to be related to a rescue narrative where queer Muslims or queers of colour in general are victimized and seen as needing Dutch secular emancipation. In order to be emancipated, however, Bracke explains that queers of colour are expected to do the same as women of colour, namely, to shed their damaging cultural and religious attachments in order to succeed in being emancipated. Thus, according to Bracke, not only are homosexuality and religion – in this case Islam – not seen as compatible in the public discourse, queer Muslims are also victimized and thought of as in need of saving from their religion. They are regarded as too oppressed by their religious countrymen to speak out for themselves and are expected to leave their religion behind if they want to be emancipated and fully free from oppression.

3.1.3. Negative focus and historical positives

According to van den Berg et al (2014) migration is a factor that is contributing to the apparent tensions between the perceived secular gay right supporters and the religious conservatives because of these homonationalist tendencies. They agree with Mepschen and Duyvendak (2012) that acceptance of homosexuality is seen a test of tolerance and a criterium for good citizenship. Furthermore, van den Berg et al explain that public debate focusses on religious leaders or people predominantly in a negative way, with examples of liberal churches that support homosexual couples being ignored. Next to this, within the discourse, religion versus homosexuality is explained to be seen as a zero-sum game. One apparently can only agree with religious arguments against, or secular arguments in favour of gay rights because the two sides of the debate are presented as exclusively being opposing each other. It is also mentioned that the debate is part of a larger whole about the role and the place of religion in society.

As mentioned in this article, it is important to realize that there is a lot of focus in the discourse only on the negative side of the relationship between homosexuality and religion. Furthermore, the debate surrounding homosexuality is seen as a zero-sum game. People are expected to choose one side of the debate to agree with because the two topics are always presented as incompatible.

Historically speaking however, religion has not only been a negative influence on the promotion of gay rights and the life of queers, even though that is what the current discourse seems to focus on. Bos (2020) mentions multiple historical examples of religious actors being quite supportive of queer people. Already around 1750(!), there were pastors who denied the sinfulness of same-sex love. Furthermore, in 1961 catholic priests published a book that basically called for the acceptance of homosexuals with the protestant church following suit some years later. These are just some examples mentioned in the text, but there are several more. This is not to say that all clergy members at that time were supportive of homosexuality, but it is intriguing that the issue is not as black and white as it is portrayed today. According to Bos there is little evidence that religion was more hostile to homosexuality than any other social institution. He furthermore also mentions that the relationship between religion and homosexuality started to become more negative in 1970, with the appointment of a very conservative catholic bishop in Utrecht (even though there was pushback against this appointment from clergy and laity alike). After this, gay rights organizations like the COC started to stop working with all organizations related to the church, even the ones who had been supportive of their goals thus snuffing out cooperation that could possibly have been helpful for many people and would have kept the discourse more nuanced.

From this article, the most important thing we learn is that the relationship between homosexuality and religion is not as straightforward and has not only been negative even if it is often presented like that today. Furthermore, to quote Bos (2020, pg. 50):

''Cultural amnesia has led many to believe that sexual diversity requires the defeat of institutionalized religion. This underestimates the lasting influence of other societal institutions—notably gender norms—and does no justice to the contributions some religious figures have made to the social acceptance of homosexuality.''

We can thus also conclude that, while the modern discourse focusses very much on religion as being the problem for the acceptance of homosexuality, other factors are ignored. Furthermore, by ignoring the positive contributions made to the acceptance of homosexuality by religious figures, the discourse makes it seem as if the only possible relation between homosexuality and religion is a negative one where both secular and religious groups are opposed.

3.1.4. Other reasons for anti-queer opinions

An article about other reasons why people stand opposed to gay rights that I want to shortly discuss is that of Buijs (et. al, 2011) in which are investigated the reasons for violence against homosexual men by talking to the perpetrators. They actually found that many of them agreed with the fact that homosexuality is normal, and most were - ironically I must say - proud of Dutch tolerance. What triggered their violent acts was more related to aversion against the idea of anal sex, irritation at feminine behaviour, public displays of pride or affection and attempts at seduction by homosexual men. Buijs et al can thus be said to have found that the supposed tolerance the perpetrators themselves claim goes away, when they are confronted with aspects of homosexuality that do not fit with what they see as normal gendered and sexual practices. According to these men, at the time of the violent act, it was more about 'gay behaviour' rather than being gay as such because that challenged the average image that people have of masculinity. It seems that antigay attitudes are adopted to strengthen membership of a masculine group, this was also the case for perpetrators with a religious background. Homosexuality being against their respective religions was not mentioned once as a reason for the violence.

It is important to realise that antigay attitudes and acts in Dutch society thus do not necessarily come from religious views only even though the discourse seems to present it that way. Furthermore, acts of violence against queers by immigrant minority groups can mistakenly be portrayed by media and in the public discourse as being inspired by the religious views of these groups even though that might not have been the case. We thus have to ask ourselves how much of the idea that people are opposed to gay rights because they are religious is true, and how much of the opposition is related to certain expectations of gender roles for example.

3.1.5. Holding two supposedly opposing identities

The oppositional pairing of homosexuality and religion in the general Dutch discourse as described above has led to certain ideas and prejudices about people who identify both as queer and religious. In

this paragraph, we will thus be looking at the Dutch discourse surrounding the intersection of queer and religious identities based on research by (Derks, 2018; Jivraj & de Jong, 2011; El-Tayeb, 2012; Ganzevoort, van der Laan & Olsman, 2011;).

In Derks (2018) it is explained that because of the discursive oppositional pairing of homosexuality and religion, many assume that one of these two identities must have supremacy over the other. In the Netherlands, the phrase 'be yourself' is often used when talking about homosexuality and people are expected to be out and proud so to speak in order to be considered an 'authentic' homosexual. This kind of thinking renders sexuality as a core aspect of one's identity and one's self. In the prevailing secular discourse, homosexuality is thus seen as something that is a part of one's identity, whereas religion is something that one chooses, or is raised into. From the religious side of the debate, orthodox protestant in this case, Derks mentions the fact that many religious people consider sexuality irrelevant. God is greater than one's sexuality and the relationship to Him is seen as more important. This side also makes a distinction between one's homosexual orientation, which could possibly be acceptable, and someone having an explicitly homosexual lifestyle which would likely be classified as sinful.

This article shows that in the public discourse about queer and religious identities, both are seen as contradictory and irreconcilable with each other. People are expected to choose one identity over the other and make a conscious choice for what their 'main' identity is. The discourse has created the image that only two sides exist in this debate and pays little attention to viewpoints that fall outside of these two sides. The sides in question, (secular and religious) see the other side as being a choice. The religious camp sees homosexual behaviour as a choice (even though they might believe people are born gay) and the secular camp see religion as a choice. If one holds that position, it becomes possible to expect that people actually make that perceived choice. It seems that there is little room in the debate for the idea that these identities can exist at the same time within one person. Furthermore, it is important to realise that there are more sides to the debate, even if it does not appear that way. Religious queers (whether they be Dutch or refugees) are one of the distinct groups that exists in society, but they are very much underrepresented in the public discourse. As such, this thesis tries to shed some light on their point of view in comparison to the two camps the discourse has constructed.

In Jivraj & de Jong (2011), the same principle is explained in relation to Muslim youth. Dutch government policy surrounding queer emancipation focusses on speakability. To be truly gay is to come out and talk about your sexuality. One of the main target groups of this policy is religious communities, especially Muslims. However, the focus of coming out means that for many non-Dutch queers, there is some sort of pressure to choose between their religion/culture and their sexuality and consequently Dutch secularism. Jivraj & de Jong further mention that both identities are seen as exclusive. If you are gay, then you cannot be Muslim – because as explained above in the public discourse, Muslims are seen as anti-gay – but if you are Muslim, you cannot be truly gay (meaning out and proud) unless you leave Islam. Next to this, because people believe that Muslims are anti-gay,

queer Muslims who come out are expected to take up the cause in their community and promote gay rights. They are thus somehow absorbed into secular Dutchness by coming out and are then expected to do something about real or perceived hate against queers by Muslims.

This article is backed up by what is mentioned by El Tayeb (2012). Coming out is not seen as something necessary even though it is uncommon for many gays of colour because it would complicate the relation with their community and family. Next to this, queer Muslims are often treated as if they are too oppressed to speak up as long as they still identify with Islam. El Tayeb agrees with Jivraj & de Jong that queers of colour are seen as 'not really gay' in the Dutch discourse unless they leave behind their culture/religion.

We can thus safely conclude that for many religious homosexuals in general and Muslims in particular, the question of their identity is regarded as a zero-sum game by the secular Dutch discourse. Queers of colour who do not leave their religion behind are seen as too oppressed to speak for themselves. People – not only queers of colour but also by extension religious gays in general - are thus basically expected to make a choice between remaining in the closet and remain as a member of their religious group or coming out and leaving the perceived oppression of their religion behind. Within this context there seems to be little place for people who regard both their queer and religious identities as equally valid.

This is summarized by Ganzevoort et al (2011) very well when they claim that high degrees of polarization between homosexuality and religion makes it hard to find compromise and, importantly, allow for multiple loyalties. The consequences of the public discourse can be several: people might abstain from their sexuality because of religious reasons, people may be alienated from spiritual sources and communities but mostly there are often feelings of guilt and shame.

Ganzevoort et al mention as well that both homosexuality and religion have become identity markers. According to the Dutch secular discourse, someone is either primarily religious or queer. When both communities of which each identity functions as a marker actively see each other as being opposed or even a danger to themselves, having both of these identities becomes impossible. It also is important to see this in the larger light of belonging. People want to belong to a group, but they can only be accepted in a religious group if they struggle with their homosexuality and only in the gay community if they are not religious. In order to be a member of a group, you need to be accepted as one and that is part of the difficulty here. People themselves might regard themselves as a member of both groups, but others might not believe that is possible.

This last part perfectly sums up the Dutch discourse surrounding having both a religious and queer identity. Because of the negative discourse surrounding the relation between homosexuality and religion, it is difficult for people to identify with both identities at the same time. Part of the problem is group membership, when being an open and visible member of one group it is hard or maybe even impossible to become a member of the other. This leaves the people who the discourse is actually talking about in some sort of limbo of never truly belonging to either group.

3.1.6. Interim conclusions

Concluding, in the Dutch secular discourse there basically exist two sides: a majority gay-rights supporting secular side and a minority religious side that is regarded as fiercely anti-gay. The debate is clearly dominated by the secular side of the debate, which should come as no surprise in a country where most people do not see themselves as being part of a religious group. We get four main points that define the general discourse of the relation between homosexuality and religion and one result of those for the intersection of both identities.

Firstly, the secular dominated discourse focusses on what religious persons, institutions and leaders say about homosexuality. Certain negative stances and examples are focussed on and magnified regardless of whether something is actually a large problem (as was the case with the weigerambtenaar) or whether something can be interpreted in multiple ways and was only mentioned on the side (such as the pope's speech).

The second point brings us to why that magnifying glass exists. Gay rights in the Netherlands have moved to the centre of cultural imagination and are seen as the core of the Dutch national identity. Everything related to those rights is thus seen as important, and everything even remotely seen as opposing them can be taken as an attack on the country's values as a whole. Furthermore, these homonationalist tendencies in the Netherlands have created an 'Other' out of religious foreigners who are seen as oppressing queers in their own country and will do the same here when nothing is done about it. Religious people in general are thus seen as a threat to gay rights. Foreign and Dutch queers are seen as in need of being protected from their oppressive religious countrymen thus making supporting gay rights a successful test for integration.

Thirdly, next to focusing on what religious people say, the debate focuses largely on the negative stances that exist. Positive examples are ignored or at least not presented as large as the negatives. Furthermore, people seem to be unaware of historical examples where the relation between religion and homosexuality was less black and white. Whereas now religion is presented as being only an 'enemy' of gay rights, there used to be more cooperation between gay rights organisations like the COC and religious groups meaning that they can and have historically been allies to the cause as well. Secularity here is considered as neutral and free of bias, whereas religion is seen as unscientific and biased. Because of this focus on the negatives only, the relation between religion and homosexuality is seen as a zero-sum game where one needs to choose between one side of the debate.

Fourthly, there is a lack of attention toward other factors that might be the cause for people's negative opinions about queers and homosexuality. Examples here could be the fact that homosexuals are sometimes regarded as breaking gender roles. By presenting religion as the only factor that causes negative opinions, it becomes difficult for people to imagine that other factors might play a role too and reinforces the idea that religious people specifically are some sort of enemy.

This discourse has had the following effect on ideas surrounding holding both a queer and religious identity. Because the discourse is presented as being a zero-sum game, people are expected to fully

choose one side to agree with. It appears as all nuance has been lost and there are only these two opposing fronts where people forget that it is not as black and white and that many people are caught in between. It is expected that one identity is supreme (their religious or queer identity) or that people fully leave behind one of their identities. Both identities have become identity markers, and both are seen as being a choice by the other side of the debate. The secular side sees religion as a choice, whereas the religious side sees a homosexual lifestyle as a choice (not necessarily homosexuality itself). In order to belong fully to one group, people are expected to actually make a clear choice and make one of their identities superior to the other.

Furthermore, the Dutch secular discourse focuses on coming out and the speakability of homosexuality in order for someone to be considered as authentically queer. This focus on coming out leads to problems for many queers of colour or religious queers because this might cause negative consequences for themselves or their families in the community of which they are a part. Coming out also includes the implication that one leaves their religion behind as one is absorbed into the secular Dutch group. It is thus not only hard for people to hold both identities but also to be considered as fully belonging to both groups at the same time.

Because the debate focusses so much on the negative side of the interactions between homosexuality and religion, it should not be a surprise that for people who grew up and live and possibly participate in this discourse, it is hard to imagine that people might identify both as queer and religious. As stated in the beginning of this thesis, IND members are part of this discourse or at least are members of the society in which it takes place. The ideas and prejudices surrounding homosexuality and religion that exist because of this discourse will inevitably find their way into the interviews as those are held, developed, and judged by people who all live their lives hearing the same discourse.

It is important to remember that this discourse does not necessarily present the true practical situation or, at least, presents only part of reality and that is where the problem lies. There are ample examples to be found of a more positive interaction between religion and homosexuality, but the general discourse does not focus on that. People who hold both a religious and queer identity are expected to experience conflict between the two, or at least make one identity supreme to the other. In the next chapter, I will give some information and examples of how Dutch gay religious people as well as refugees actually go about negotiating both of these identities. Some ways of negotiating their identities are completely lost in the discourse as described above.

3.2 Negotiating queer and religious identities

Now that we have seen how the Dutch discourse presents the interaction between a religious and queer identity, we need to find out how that discourse differs or is aligned with how queer refugees actually negotiate their religious identities. As said, this was researched through interviews with a survey being

used as an addition. Before I present the results of the interviews, however, it is important to create a framework that investigates how people negotiate a religious and queer identity so that there is a clearer image on what we can expect and to put the results of the interviews into a larger context while drawing parallels between them.

3.2.1. Negotiation strategies

I read through several sources in order to put this framework together, but two stood out in utility for this thesis. One of these is the book 'Islam en Homoseksualiteit' by Omar Nahas (2001). In this book, he gives general information about the interactions of homosexuality and Islam while also suggesting ways of interpreting certain verses and dogmas in a way that is less or not at all condemning of homosexuality in order to create a more nuanced picture for queer Muslims and their families. From this book, the most essential information for this thesis is found in the four types of identity negotiation strategies employed by queer Muslims. They are the following (Nahas, 2001):

The first strategy is to completely let go of Islam and its values and ideas in order to completely escape any discussion about conflicting identities. Important to realise here is that, according to Nahas, many queer Muslims are shut out from their communities upon coming out. It is thus important to remember that this strategy is not always a voluntary one and it can lead to people feeling unfulfilled spiritually or religiously.

The second strategy mentioned is to turn exclusively to religion in order to stay away as far as possible from any temptation that is regarded as sinful. Some people, for example, decide to stay celibate altogether. This is the strategy that, according to Nahas, is being recommended by Imams worldwide. The downside here is of course that it is exceedingly difficult for people to completely supress their sexual feelings their entire lives.

The third strategy is one that this book in general also seems to support. Reinterpreting parts of the Quran and other Islamic texts in a way that does not disallow homosexuality or at least gives a more nuanced view of the matter within Islam. Nahas explains that this strategy is mostly used by queer Muslims who live in Europe or North America in order to reconcile both their identities and remain a part of both groups. According to many Islamic scholars, however, it is difficult and, in some cases, impossible to reinterpret Islamic texts. It can thus be a solution for an individual but – at least right now - it is far from being a solution that is supported by Muslim clergy and people worldwide.

Lastly, the fourth strategy used is accepting both elements of one's identity while also accepting that they may conflict. Homosexuality may be forbidden in Islam, but there are also certain freedoms granted to people by God. This is a strategy that focuses a lot on the personal relation that individuals have with God. As long as they can justify their actions toward God, it is possible to have both identities at the same time.

Important to note here according to Nahas (2001) is that many queer Muslims do not choose one strategy specifically. They switch around between strategies depending on the context they find

themselves in. We can thus conclude that queer Muslims can be somewhat fluid while negotiating their identities. Something else of note is what is mentioned about the asylum procedure. He says that many queer Muslims, having fled their country for that specific reason, are very reluctant to be clear and direct about their sexuality because they have never been able to freely talk about this (Nahas, 2001). It is obvious that this could affect their procedure and their credibility since, according to the Dutch discourse, people are expected to be 'out and proud'.

Essentially the same strategies as explained above are mentioned in the book 'Adam en Evert' by Ganzevoort, van der Laan and Olsman (2010). In this book, they also try to explain the plight of queer religious people, who in this case are/were Christian. Since they mention similar strategies, we can later distil some common themes from both books for the theoretical framework used for analysing the interviews. Specifically, the following strategies are mentioned (Ganzevoort et al., 2010): Fully choosing for religion and God is the first one. A queer identity and feelings are repressed or there are attempts to 'cure' it in order to try to become straight. As in the above example, here we again see that people could decide to remain celibate in order to keep faith with God.

The second strategy is leaving one's beliefs and religious identity behind in order to express their homosexuality without having to have discussions over what is allowed and what is not.

The third strategy is that people lead some sort of a double life. As mentioned in the other example as well, people remain religious while also looking to express their homosexuality. This often leads to a lot of internal conflict and doubt on whether one is doing the right thing. Here, we see conflict between what signals people receive from their religious background, and what they feel they need to do with their homosexual feelings. They accept their sexuality while also accepting that it is or might be problematic in the eyes of God. The last strategy is again having the two identities at the same time. People who use this strategy might reinterpret the bible in order to reconcile both of their identities, for example. They believe that God loves everyone, and that homosexuality is not a sin or a 'mistake'. They cannot imagine that God wants them to remain alone their whole lives and thus they are allowed to express their homosexuality. This strategy allows them to have both identities without having to feel guilty about what they do.

As we saw, the Dutch public discourse almost exclusively focuses on the first two strategies of negotiating a religious and queer identity. It expects people to make a choice between the two identities and to stick to that choice. It neglects to note that the strategies used can be more fluid and that people might change between them. If people that have both identities are mentioned in the discourse, such as queer Muslims, it is often in the context that they have just not made their choice yet and are not really gay or really religious. There thus is always the expectation that people will end up choosing the first of the second strategy.

Taken together, we can ourselves define the four separate strategies which will form the basis on which the results of the interviews and survey were analysed. The first of the strategies is to fully turn to religion. People who use this strategy try to supress their queer identity by, for example,

remaining celibate. The second strategy is the opposite of the first. People who employ this strategy leave their religion and its beliefs behind in order to live their sexualities without having to feel guilty or sinful. A third strategy is one where the two parts of one's identity are accepted separately, including the fact that they may conflict. Lastly, the fourth strategy is about accepting both parts of one's identity but believing that the two do not conflict (much). This happens through reinterpreting certain texts or by focussing on the personal relationship that people have with God. This allows people to hold both identities, like the third strategy, but leads to less doubt about whether on what they are doing is right.

A fifth strategy that I want to keep separate is people that see the two identities are seen as separate from each other and therefore not conflicting. Also important to note here is that the first two strategies are mostly in line with what the Dutch discourse expects. People who follow the third, fourth and fifth strategy would probably be seen as just not having made their choice yet between their two identities.

3.2.2. Interview analysis

Through several interviews and a survey with queer refugees about their religions, I have gotten more insight in how they negotiate both their religious and queer identities. For the reason of anonymity, all participants have been given a letter of the alphabet and will be indicated by that letter in this thesis as if it were a name to maintain readability. Please note that this thesis does not mean to reduce people to only the religious and queer aspects of their identities, but that it is meant to find out how they negotiate their identities. Furthermore, keep in mind that each letter represents an individual human being with feelings, ideas and opinions and it is only for the reason of anonymity that they are not mentioned by their name. An overview of all participants with their religions and countries of origin can be found in appendix A.

The interviews were designed to be and feel more like an informal talk than a true interview since the questions were rather personal, and I felt that this would be a more effective strategy. There were questions, to be sure, but they were meant to steer the conversation in the right direction if it drifted towards other topics or to get a bit deeper into the subject matter. Only a part of one interview was recorded, whereas the rest and the other interviews were not in order to respect the wishes of the participants. During all interviews, however, I was allowed to take notes of what was said exactly. In order to not taint the results, the things that were said are written down as literally as possible.

In this chapter, I have decided to first present the results of all interviews and the survey with the discussion and analysis happening afterwards. First, we will look at two participants whose identity negotiation strategy is more in line with what the Dutch discourse expects. We will call them participant A and participant B. These two participants were interviewed at the same time because they felt more comfortable that way.

Both participants in this interview identify themselves as homosexual men. Participant A is from Lebanon and regards himself as spiritual if nothing else, whereas participant B is from Kazakhstan and identifies himself as agnostic. Firstly, we will look at the story and ideas of participant A, after which the same will be done for participant B.

Participant A explained that he grew up in a religious household and that he himself also considered himself as religious (Muslim) when he was younger, mostly because he was brought up to do so. However, there was always the feeling that he did not fully belong and that something was different about him. He explains that he basically went through three stages in his religious identity: religious, irreligious and he would now describe his religious identity as being spiritual rather than anything else.

The reason for this changing religious identity is the fact that A sees religious people as being hypocritical because they do not seem to practice what they preach. Furthermore, his religious identity was clashing with his homosexual identity, which manifested in him feeling very guilty about being gay because religion condemned it so much. After getting into university, he began to think increasingly about religion and the place it had in his life because religion condemns homosexuality. He thus had the feeling that his existence in itself was condemned by religion. He thinks that, if there is a God, he would want everyone to be happy. A is completely happy with himself and his sexuality. Eventually, the conflict between these two identities led to A removing himself further and further from his religious identity.

For A, the biggest changing point was his coming out. He did not want to practice religion publicly while doing something else behind closed doors. He knows for himself that he is a good person, and he thinks that it is not for religion and religious people to have an opinion about him. Instead of being religious, A has become more spiritual later in his life. He believes that there is a power that connects all people, he says that we could call it the power of the soul. Everyone has a soul, making all of us more similar than different which is also something that he himself has discovered through the years. His spirituality does not conflict with his homosexuality. His homosexual identity is something separate and private, even though it is still connected to the soul because it has to do with the way you are. It is thus an integral part of one's being and there is no reason for that to clash with his spiritual ideas.

The story told to me by participant B is similar to the process as experienced by participant A. He too was disillusioned largely by what they both call the hypocrisy of religious people. He feels that they are being judged for being gay, even though he saw people eating pork not receiving that same judgement even though that is forbidden by religion, in this case Islam, as well. Both A and B do not understand why homosexuality specifically is this important to people as other things seem to matter much less. B has the feeling that religion gives people no choice but to judge homosexuality.

B told me a story of someone he knew from his home country. When that person's parents found out that he was gay, they forced him to undergo conversion therapy in a mosque. The fact that

such therapy is even offered in such a mosque is a sign for queer Muslims that religion is not likely to ever be their friend.

When asked if they think that religion or culture is the cause that people are so negative about homosexuality, both A and B answer that religion has had a negative influence on the culture in their respective countries. Culture and religion are very much intertwined in Lebanon, explains A. Even though he loves his culture and heritage, he thinks that religion has had a negative influence on how people perceive others. He says that they were even taught in school that they should not accept other religions for example. It is thus considered something that is creates divides between separate groups. On this matter, B fully agrees and says that in Kazakhstan, religion has influenced culture in mostly a negative way as well.

Next, we will look at participant C from Uganda who identifies as a lesbian woman who is religious, Pentecostal specifically. As you will see, her story is much different from what the Dutch discourse expects.

Participant C was raised in a Pentecostal church as she always used to go with her family when she was young. This never really changed as she still went when she was older and would still go now if not for the corona virus. She is still a member of that church in Uganda but has not found a church in the Netherlands yet because of the global pandemic. However, she still has the intention to become a member somewhere here as soon as that is possible.
For C, religion is a large part of her daily life. She watches services online and also prays each day. She explained that Pentecostal churches are more into loud music, like a gospel choir, and that music is particularly important for her. Music is a way of feeling God and really connect to Him rather than just praying.

When asked about her having two identities, she explains that it feels kind of weird to hold both a Lesbian and religious identity at the same time. She used to hide her sexual identity for quite a long time. Eventually, her parents found out and dutifully going to church started to feel as a way to kind of covering it up. Even now, she would be more secretive about her sexuality if she went to church. Going to church without talking about her sexuality is something that she has done her entire life and she is fine with that.

She explains that, for her, sexuality is something private while church is for God. This is something that other members of her former church have also told her. Sexual preference is none of their business. One could say that there is a non-speaking policy in church. If C would find a church where homosexuality is a big issue, she would leave that church to find a new one. She is in church for her relationship with God and for her beliefs, not for the discussion on homosexuality.

C says that, according to the church, homosexuality is indeed a sin. However, she also believes that everyone is created by God the way they are. She says that she is God's child and that nothing could change that. She mentions the same problem that participants A and B mentioned concerning religious people: who are they to judge? Why is homosexuality specifically a problem whereas other

things mentioned in the bible are completely ignored. Everyone is human and there are people who do a lot worse than love someone of the same sex. She also thinks it is hypocritical that, for example, members of the Catholic clergy abused children while they were being protected by the higher ups in the hierarchy while she is judged for being a Lesbian.

Being a Lesbian cannot stop her from believing in God as she says that her beliefs in God and homosexuality are two different things. Nobody is perfect and the church should focus more on the love and do not judge part of Christianity.

Participant D identifies himself as a gay man and a spiritual Baptist. His home country is the island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. He has been in the Netherlands for several years now since he has already received his residence permit from the IND. He was raised in a religious setting where being gay was a sin, leading to him having feelings of being under constant pressure from both sides. He is the last of 9 kids and there were a lot of different religions in his household. His mum was a Hindu, his father did not have a religion and did not care for it, one of his siblings converted to Islam while others became Catholic.

He was a member of the Catholic church for most of his younger years. Around the age of 14, however, he started to become more interested in the practices of Spiritual Baptists because he started going to services held by a friend of his mom. Furthermore, D explained that he was a very curious child and had a lot of questions for his priest. He started questioning catholic teachings and eventually started going to a Baptist church of which he has been an official member since the age of 16.

In his daily life, religion is very important for him. Even though the religion is a Christian denomination, it differs in some respects. D explains that it is a religion with a lot of focus on spirituality - as the name implies. For him, the most important teachings in his daily life are those that teach that you can become a good person by doing virtuous deeds. I was told that for him, his religion is more of a lifestyle since if you do good, good things will come to you and your loved ones. It is basically a Christian version of what many people know as Karma, D explains. Keeping positive is another important aspect as negative energy can cross over through feelings such as jealousy.

The first thing D does when he wakes up, is pray. He also prays in the evening and at noon. Even though there are specific times that are considered the best time for prayer, the most important thing is to do it every day. Prayers are personal communication between you and God. He furthermore explains that when someone is baptised as a Spiritual Baptist, the priest whispers words from the bible in your ear which will function as a sort of chant. That chant then becomes your key and if you recite it while in trouble it can help you. In challenging times, D turns to religion and prayer for help.

D explains that he always had to hide his sexuality. He beliefs the fact that he was allowed to stay in the Netherlands, where he does not have to do that anymore, is because he had good karma. He beliefs the fact that he got a second chance here and because of that he does volunteer work. He beliefs that he needs to help people just like he was helped himself.

When asked, D explains that he is unsure about whether his religious and sexual identities are connected. When he was young, it was indeed a fight because the church did not support his sexuality. However, his Mother – a female pastor in this case – knew that he was gay and told him that God is always there for you, even if you are gay. God sees all things, knows who you are and loves you for it. It does not matter if you are in love with a guy because God will love you. Even though it took some time to understand that message and even though there is still sometimes a clash between both identities, he beliefs the same now. He says that all religions have different opinions on several topics. Everyone has their own opinions and ideas and none of those are wrong or right. D likes guys, someone else might not. He like spicy food, someone else might not. As long as you do not hurt anyone you can be yourself.

3.2.3. Survey results

As an addition to the interviews that were held, I created a survey with the same questions in the hopes of receiving some more responses that could be insightful. This was done because I had trouble finding more participants for the interviews. I hoped that the survey would be easier for some people because they could do it in their own time, they would not have to tell personal stories to a stranger, and it was even more anonymous than the interviews because they would not have to fill in their names. The survey was only filled in five times, but it gave me some extra information that will be explained below. Out of the 5 people who filled it in, 4 people answered that they were religious, with one of them explaining to be non-religious. From this, admittedly small, sample we get the image that the combination of homosexual and religious identities might be more widespread that one might assume from the Dutch discourse. Three of the people who filled it in, also filled in the other questions about their identities.

These other three cases are the following. Participant E, a homosexual catholic man from Trinidad, explains that he has been religious since he was young. He has experienced internal struggles from being Catholic and homosexual at the same time since he was a teenager but also beliefs that God himself sees things based on an individual basis.

Participant F, also from the survey, is a homosexual Christian man from Nigeria. He has been a member since he was young but is still an active Christian now. He beliefs in God, goes to church, prays and tries to live life as good as he can. He too experiences conflict between his two identities.

Participant G is a homosexual Muslim man from Guinee. He is Muslim because he was introduced to the faith by his parents when he was younger. He prays and beliefs in God and does not believe that his identities conflict because being a Muslim is a choice whereas being Gay is something natural. He thus sees these identities as separate from each other.

3.2.4. Private religion

An important similarity that can be seen in several of these interviews and that deserves some more attention is the idea that people seem to distance themselves somewhat from institutional and organised religion when it comes to talking about their homosexuality and focus on their personal relationship with God. This part of the fourth strategy warrants some more explanation because it seems to be prevalent in this case. We find this in the cases of participants C, D and E who all believe to some degree that God himself looks at homosexuality differently than official church doctrine and thus I need to explain how exactly this process works.

We see this tendency explained in the book 'Faith in the familiar' by Knibbe (2013). In this book, it is explained that there is a tendency to privatize and individualize religion. Where people are disillusioned by scandals such as those in the Catholic church and with churches losing their power through the secularization process, religion is increasingly privatized. It is explained that people might start to 'believe without belonging' and turn to the one coherent source left to them: their own subjectivity. Regarding this thesis, this focus on a personal relationship with God instead of sticking rigidly to church doctrine is a possible escape for people who feel that they do not fully belong in their respective churches because of their sexuality.

However, as is mentioned by Knibbe (2013), these people might still identify as Catholic, Pentecostal or something else. This is explained through an example in the Dutch province of Limburg, where people's identity as a Limburger is tied to them being Catholic. Catholicism here is an identity marker, regardless of whether someone is a strict Catholic or only identifies as such in name only. This might be the same case for queer refugees, who feel that their religion is part of their identity but who have individualized and privatized their beliefs in such a way that those do not conflict with their sexual identity.

The same can be said for the spirituality of participant A. As we see in the introduction of 'Secular societies, spiritual selves' by Fedele and Knibbe (2020), one of the most important reasons people identify as spiritual is that they are looking for ways to navigate between the religious and the secular. In that sense, we could see the spirituality of participant A as a way to hold on to certain believes in a way that does not relate to a religious denomination or the secular world in which he does not feel at home. As they put it in the book (Fedele & Knibbe, 2020, pg. 7): ''…spirituality positions itself as an alternative to both religion and the secular, without completely rejecting either''. Furthermore, as we saw in the paragraph above, spirituality allows for a degree of private beliefs and choices surrounding those beliefs so that people feel no conflict between it and their sexuality.

3.2.5. Interim conclusions

So, in this chapter we looked at several people with each having different views on religion and spirituality. Whereas participants A and B seem to follow the Dutch discourse relatively close, participants C, D, E, F and G negotiate their religious and queer identities in another way. First, we

will discuss participants A and B and relate them to a strategy that we saw in the first part of this chapter. Afterwards, we will do the same with the rest of the participants.

Both Participants A and B have chosen the second strategy that was identified; they are no longer religious (although participant A is spiritual) because of the conflict they experienced between their religion and their sexualities. Still, this was clearly a process that took some time in order to eventually come to this position. A, for example, described himself as religious when he was younger. Eventually when he found out that he was gay, he started to doubt his religious views and thus can be seen to move toward the third strategy where he held both identities but where there was a lot of conflict internally leading him to becoming irreligious, thus adopting strategy number two when talking about religion. When speaking of his spirituality, we can see that he has adopted strategy number four. For him, there is no clash between his spiritual and queer identities. It is telling that there is little information about spirituality and homosexuality in the Dutch discourse, as spirituality could possibly be a 'replacement' for the fact that people leave their religions. As said, spiritual people might hold certain beliefs without placing themselves in the secular or religious sphere while, at the same time, their sexuality is also not conflicting with this particular part of their identity.

This leaves both participants in a position where they can practice their sexuality and, in their words, be themselves without having to explain anything to anyone or feel guilty about what they believe is natural. Concerning what we learned last chapter about the Dutch discourse surrounding homosexuality and religion, participant A and B follow the expectations of that discourse rather closely. Basically, both were brought up in a religious household, their sexuality and religion eventually began to conflict leading to both leaving their respective religion in order to be able to be themselves and live their sexualities. Their experiences thus closely align with what the Dutch discourse expects, a negative relationship between both aspects of one's identity and the fact that one has to choose either one because it is regarded as a zero-sum game.

For participants C and D, the story was very much different. Participant C can be seen to be a rather devout person, with religion playing a large part in her daily life. She can be seen to have adopted the third, fourth and fifth strategy at the same time depending on the circumstances. We see the fifth strategy because she tries to keep both her identities separate by not talking about it in church. Her sexuality has, according to her, nothing to do with her belief in God. At the same time, she can be seen as having adopted strategy four by focussing on her personal relationship with God and explaining that God loves her regardless of her sexuality. Strategy three can be seen in the fact that she has accepted that her church might see her identities are conflicted, even though she does not fully agree with this.

Together with participants A and B, participant C holds the view that the focus on the sinfulness of homosexuality held by many religious people is hypocritical as there are other sins, actions and mistakes that are a lot worse than loving someone of the same sex. We thus do find that they all think critically regardless of whether they are religious themselves are not.

Participant D also does not follow the standard Dutch narrative. He too is devout, with religion playing a significant role in his daily life and being a constant factor in actions that he takes. He seems to be using the fourth strategy mostly where he accepts both his identities. identities taking the words of his Mother – again, a female pastor – about the fact that God loves him no matter what to heart. Still, he sometimes still has conflict over his religious and sexual identities, and we could say that he also uses or has used strategy three in negotiating his religious identity. Here, we again see a focus on a personal relationship with God that does incorporate the customs and ideas used by a wider religion. It should be clear that participants D and C defy the expectations of the Dutch discourse because they are both devout believers with religion playing a large part in their daily lives. They might still feel conflict at time, yes, but they both agree that both of their identities are equally important.

Participant E for his part can be seen to use the third and fourth strategy mentioned where he feels an internal struggle about both his identities, he understands that the church might not like his homosexuality but he also beliefs that God thinks differently which means that there is also a focus on the personal relationship that one has with God, just like participants C and D. Participant F can be seen to follow strategy three. Both identities are accepted and part of his life, and he has accepted that they might conflict with each other since he still identifies as having both identities. Participant G on his part feels that both identities do not conflict, thus following the fifth strategy. For him, his identities are separate from each other since he was born with his sexual identity whereas being a Muslim is a choice that he makes. He regards them as being without influence on each other.
We also saw that people can prioritize their own relation with God rather than adhering strictly to religious doctrine. Whereas this often still means that they identify with a religious group because of its function as an identity marker, it also maintains that they possess a degree individuality in which their sexual and religious identities need not conflict.

One thing that almost all participants agree on is that the combination of their religion and sexuality is an internal struggle at times or that is has been a struggle in the past. This is not to say that this is true for all people who hold two identities, but it can be an indication that many people experience this conflict. This is something that is rather in line with the Dutch context, where there is an expectation of internal conflict. It is also important to realise that people change their strategies and switch back and forth depending on the situation. This is less in line with the Dutch discourse because people are expected to make a choice while also sticking to that choice.

Regardless, it seems that while the Dutch discourse expects that people use strategy one and two the most by making a choice, this is not the case at all for queer refugees. Most people who were interviewed seem to use strategy three and four, but they use them fluently and see their identities differently depending on the context of a certain situation. Many people can thus be said to not fit the expectations of the Dutch secular discourse as they regard both their religion and their sexuality as equally important in their lives and they are not about to make a choice between the two. The most important thing we can conclude is that each person's story is fundamentally different and that there

are a myriad of ways in how refugees negotiate their religious and queer identities beyond what the Dutch discourse expects. Even though the Dutch discourse has been shown to come from a certain (historical) context and there are people who fit (parts of) its expectations, this is not at all the case for everyone. This should be no surprise since all these people come from different corners of the world, from diverse cultural backgrounds. Even though in this chapter I tried to identify certain strategies in the stories in order to compare and contrast them, each is a unique story that cannot simply be boiled down to one or more aspects without taking away most of the context. In reality, each strategy is thus individual and personal although some similarities between them may be defined.

In the next chapter, we will look at how the differences between what the Dutch discourse expects and reality – combined with the strategy used for the interviews – affects the decision on whether someone receives asylum.

3.3. The asylum procedure and its consequences for LGBT+ refugees

Now that we have seen that the Dutch discourse about how people negotiate a religious and queer identity allows only for a limited number of strategies of identity negotiation in comparison to the number of strategies that queer refugees actually seem to use, I will explain how this discrepancy has influence on whether or not someone receives asylum. For this, it was necessary to look at official IND documents surrounding the way the interviews are conducted with people who claim asylum for reasons of sexual orientation together with reports by several scholars. Because the paper trail here is quite long - with various kinds of documents, reports about those documents and reactions to those reports - I will first present a clear timeline and explain how certain documents are connected to one another before explaining why the contents of those documents can affect the asylum procedure for religious queer refugees. Keep in mind that quotes have been translated as literally as possible from documents originally written in Dutch.

3.3.1. Different werkinstructies and their contents and histories

Our point of departure here is the work instruction: 'werkinstructie (WI) 2015/9' – which from now on I will call WI 2015/9. This document was the basis on which IND employees conducted interviews with LGBT claimants from the 7th of October 2015 until the 1st of July 2018. Starting from that date onward, WI 2018/9 was introduced in order to remedy some of the problems that were found with 2015/9 (more about that later). Eventually, WI 2018/9 itself was replaced by WI 2019/17 on the 30th of December 2019 which added a part at the end about LGBT coordinators, while leaving the rest of the contents unchanged.

Next to these specific documents governing the rules surrounding interviews with queer refugees, there is a document that explains the rules on how to determine the credibility of the interviews. This document is called WI 2014/10. All three of the aforementioned documents were/are

beholden to the rules of 2014/10 which has not changed since its implementation in 2015. According to Jansen (2018), credibility is the main criterium on which the IND judges someone's claim to asylum, making this document especially important for the procedure. Of the cases researched by Jansen, in 75 out of 76 cases where requests for asylum were denied for other reasons than the contents of the asylum request - having a Dublin claim in another country for example – the denial was for reasons of credibility, or specifically, the lack of it (Jansen, 2018).

Briefly, the process and ideas surrounding establishing credibility rest upon the following matters (IND, 2015b): First, the IND establishes so called 'relevant elements' such as nationality, identity and sexual orientation after which each element is assessed separately according to credibility. If there is no objective evidence in support of the aforementioned elements, a situation that is quite likely when people have fled their country for reasons of sexual orientation, the IND examines the elements using so-called internal and external 'credibility indicators'.

One internal indicator is how detailed and specific a certain story is, since a certain level of detail is expected if it is a personal, individual experience. Another internal indicator is consistency, as there are to be no inconsistencies or contradictions in one's story. This is a difficult criterium to live up against when people might have pretended to be someone else for their entire lives. Examples of external indicators include provided documents, consistency with information from witnesses - such as family members who also applied for asylum - and consistency with other information known about the situation in the country of origin.

Sources used are to be objectifiable and the motivations should be cognisable. Cultural differences and the condition of the interviewee are to be considered and a subjective assessment has to be avoided. Mitigating circumstances, such as age, educational level, shame and intercultural obstacles, are to be considered. Since in this type of case asylum seekers are often not able to support their narrative with evidence, the benefit of the doubt should be given if the story in general can be considered credible, according to WI 2014/10. From this document, we can conclude that the story of an asylum seeker is really important and that they should be prepared to recount all kinds of details from (possibly) a long time ago.

What until now I have called the story of the asylum seeker can also be called a 'narrative of the self' and it is something that in itself needs some commentary. By McAdams (2001), it is explained that identity itself can be seen as taking the form of a story, complete with setting, scenes, characters, plot and theme. People are explained to be reconstructing the personal past, perceiving their present and looking forward to the future through their ever-evolving life story. While according to McAdams, life stories are based on biographical facts, they also go beyond those facts as people selectively choose certain parts of their experiences to create stories that make sense to them and their audiences. Individual stories are explained to be reflecting on cultural values and norms as they come from a certain cultural context. When looking at identity in such a way, it makes sense that the IND asks for someone's life story in order to find out things about their identity.

Even though they might consider cultural differences, the IND fails to consider that the way stories are constructed in the first place and the aspects that are incorporated also differ according to culture. In an article by Altunnar and Habermas (2019), it is for example established that people from individualistic Western societies like the Netherlands tend to have a more coherent story that contains more autobiographical arguments whereas people from more family-oriented, traditional societies focus more on role based, synchronic identities. In this specific research, it was shown that life narratives of people with a Turkish background contain more family-related events and is generally more negative.

Considering that the people interviewed are all from distinct cultures, it is problematic that queer refugees are expected to create a narrative of the self that is then judged according to different, Dutch, standards. In different cultures, distinct aspects might be more important or not warrant an explanation where Dutch culture expects one. To judge people by their life story can therefore, in itself, be considered problematic. Regardless, that simply is how the process works and therefore we need to dive into how these interviews are held.

Before we go into the more specific issues with the structure of the interviews themselves, it is good to establish some other, more external, factors that could also have an influence on how the interviews go. According to a 2019 memorandum written by the scientific research and documentation centre under the ministry of justice, there are some possibilities for improvement regarding credibility assessment. One problem is that translators from the same ethnicity might hold negative ideas surrounding homosexuality, and this might reflect in choice of words and posture of the translator toward the interviewee, or it might make the interviewee afraid to be completely open out of fear that their story will come out in the ethnic community (Schans & van Lierop, 2019).

It is further explained that psychological research shows that if events do not fit neatly into someone's frame of reference, established by the Dutch discourse in this case, it is likely to be branded as less or not credible. Especially in these cases of sexual orientation, it is not possible to completely shut out the possibility that differences between interviewers has an impact on whether someone is labelled as credible (Schans & van Lierop, 2019). Another possible problem is that people who have never been able to talk about their sexuality in their home country are now expected to talk freely. Talking freely about such a private topic is likely to be problematic and might lead to people leaving out details, something that was established to be important. Since credibility in this case basically rests on someone's story and not on hard evidence, this fact is especially important. The most important problem, however, is that several researchers point out that stereotypes, such as the idea that discovering that a person has a homosexual orientation will lead to negative feelings and emotions, are still expected to be true (Schans & van Lierop, 2019).

In order to understand what the situation is like today; it is important to look at what it was like when WI 2015/9 was still in use. This is because most research on the topic has been done with a focus on that WI and there are multiple examples that are useful in this research. I will thus first

explain the situation of several years ago before relating it to the situation today. There are ample examples of how WI 2015/9 put an emphasis on certain Western stereotypes when deciding on the homosexuality of asylum seekers. Regarding the interviews done with WI 2015/9 in mind, the following parts of that document are important for this thesis (IND, 2015a):

''Questions based on stereotypes may be asked, but the foreign national being incapable of answering those is in itself not enough grounds for the judgement that the orientation is not credible. If someone satisfies the stereotypical image of LGBT, it is allowed to take that into account in favour of the foreign national.''

In the footnote connected to the part described above, examples of stereotypes are mentioned to include the following:

''Examples of stereotypes: feminine behaviour and appearance regarding homosexual men and masculine behaviour and appearance regarding lesbians, being always active in the gay scene and nightlife, certain way of dress etc. etc.''

Stereotypes here are quite literally mentioned to be important to the process. Even though it is mentioned that stereotypes should only be considered when it is in favour of the foreign national, it is telling that asking questions based on stereotypes is official policy.

Questions that are asked are generally related to four themes mentioned in the document (IND, 2015a). These themes include private life, relationships and contacts with homosexuals and homosexual groups in the country of origin, contact with homosexuals in the Netherlands and knowledge of the Dutch situation, discrimination, repression and persecution in the country of origin and the future. People are expected to declare their story and experiences in all these spheres, after which they will be judged for credibility. What is problematic here is that people are asked to recount possible traumas while they have no or limited evidence in order to prove them. You do not have to be homosexual in order to know that homosexuals are prosecuted in the country of origin, for example, and it is difficult to prove that you were ridiculed or harassed and that you are not just making something up. As said, whether they believe your story or think that you are lying is completely depended on the subjectivity of the IND in question rather than hard evidence.

Other examples of what is expected of a queer refugee are to be found in the following part related to assessing credibility and the centre of gravity (IND, 2015a).

*''Generally speaking, the centre of gravity is put on answers to questions about personal experiences (among others **realization and self-acceptance**). During the assessment of credibility of the sexual orientation, the IND does not use as a starting point the idea that in all cases an internal struggle has*

*had to take place before the foreign national has accepted his LGBT orientation. However, it can be expected that a foreign national who originates from a country where people do not accept an LGBT orientation and where it is possibly punishable, there has **been a process of becoming aware**. In doing so, the foreign national will, among other things, be faced with the question what it means to **be different** than that what society expects/desires. In assessing the credibility of the LGBT orientation, weight will be attributed to the process of becoming aware of the orientation and the way the foreign national states he dealt with it.''*

While this part may say that an internal struggle need not necessarily have taken place, the IND still expected people to have been through a process of becoming aware and realising that they were different. This fact combined with that people are later asked about whether or not they have accepted themselves, shows that there is the expectation that this took time or that people might not accept themselves. Even though it might not be called an internal struggle, the implication that a process took place and the idea that people felt something was off ends up with basically the same meaning. At least the idea is that there is something to explain. This fact is further proven by examples of questions used during interviews (Veenhof, 2018):

- *''Did you think this was strange?''*
- *''Did you think you were sick, psychologically not in order or inhabited by an evil spirit?''*
- *''Were you afraid that others would find out?''*
- *''Did you know if your family or environment would not accept this because of their culture or religion?''*
- *''Did you feel lonely?''*
- *''Did you withdraw from social life because you were scared?''*

These questions all focus on negative aspects or associations people might have after realising their sexual orientation. The questions imply that people are expected to have worried about their sexuality and the idea seems to be that people thought there was something wrong with them at first. While it might not be called an inner struggle in the document itself, there is a clear idea that people needed to have experienced conflict between their sexual orientation and other parts of their lives such as their society or religion.

This thesis, of course, focuses on the stereotypes surrounding having a sexual identity and a religious one and therefore I will now focus on the fact that a struggle or a problem is expected on the basis of holding these two identities which, of course, rests on stereotypes found in the Dutch discourse. Some questions used during interviews that prove this include (Jansen, 2018):

- *''What is the meaning of your religion in relation to your homosexuality?''*
- *''What does your religion say about your homosexuality?''* when answered that the religion in question does not allow it, the following question is asked *''Then why do you keep adhering to your faith?''*
- *''Homosexuality is not in line with your faith. What is the reason you don't turn away from your religion, but keep praying and go to a mosque where you are with people who totally disapprove of homosexuality?''*
- *''Islam does not accept homosexuality, how can you be a member of this religion when you are a Lesbian, how do you reconcile that for yourself?''*

The fact that these questions are asked shows that the IND expects homosexuality and religion are related in some way and people themselves feel that having two identities is problematic. This ignores the fact that for some people, the two might be unrelated. Furthermore, it is clear that they wonder how it is possible that people are still religious even though that religion disapproves of their homosexuality. The questions themselves imply that there is something to be explained, even though the refugees themselves might not see it that way.

From these and other examples it appears that regularly during the interviews, the relation between religion and sexual orientation is discussed in a very stereotypical manner. Just as in the processes of realization and self-acceptance, the relationship between religion and sexual orientation is expected to cause a struggle for the person in question (Jansen, 2018). Another very telling example of how stereotypes are present is the following text from a letter notifying that this person's request for asylum has been denied. This person identifies himself as Muslim, even though he has doubts about whether or not he would hesitate to describe himself as practicing.

''It is striking that what he explains about the impact of his religion on his orientation is little more than that it is not allowed, he experiences shame and that he is not a practicing Muslim…. It might be expected that he is more nuanced and personal when explaining how he deals with being gay in the Netherlands as in his country of origin. Especially because he originates from a country where Islam is the official religion and because it is public knowledge that Muslims are not tolerant regarding homosexuality.''
- Translated from Jansen (2018) by the author of this thesis.

From this specific quote it appears that even if there is shame and thus struggle about being queer while also being a Muslim, it is not explained well enough or that more negative emotions next to shame are expected. Apparently, next to using stereotypical images of religion, it is also important to what extent someone struggles and if this struggle continues to this day. If there is shame but no struggle, it is not deemed valid. The expectation here is that queer religious refugees have thought

carefully and extensively about what their faith means for their sexuality even though they might see it as not connected at all.

From the interviews I conducted, most participants have indeed faced some sort of inner struggle or at least thought process about the effect of their religion on their sexual orientation and vice versa. Of these, participants A and B stand out because they decided to leave their religion completely and thus largely fit the common Dutch narrative that has influenced the interviews held by the IND that the conflict will eventually lead to people adopting one of their two identities or at least struggle with having the two.

It is important to realise here, however, that not all LGBT refugees experience an inner struggle in relation to their society or religion. Rather, while religious or cultural circumstances might make it hard to practice their sexuality, it does not mean that they have a challenging time accepting themselves (Veenhof, 2018). When we look at participant G, for example, we learn that he sees the two as unrelated. His point of view that being a Muslim is a choice and being gay is natural means that the two identities are separate and do not conflict. A second example is that of a young Iraqi man who had received asylum several years earlier and recalled that he had felt that even his lawyer did not believe that he could 'really be gay' and 'really be Muslim' at the same time. His friend chimed in: 'The Dutch, they don't understand this. It is like an impossible thing', to which the Iraqi man responded, 'Understand what? I just *am*!' (Mole, 2021). For the people in question, it might not be something that they have questioned because they see their identities as unrelated or as something that is simply a fact of life and that they feel no need to change.

Other examples concerning religion in interviews, include an asylum lawyer that explains that some queer refugees join the same Pentecostal Church that promoted homophobia in their country of origin and notices that the IND thinks this is non-credible (Veenhof, 2018). Participant C explained during our talk that she too thinks about joining a Pentecostal Church once the pandemic over. For her, her homosexuality is something private and not the reason she goes to church. She explained that if the church would talk a lot about homosexuality, she would try to find another one. Generally speaking, however, homosexuality is not a church topic. She is in church for her relationship with God and nothing else. It is thus fully explainable that someone would join a church even though the official church doctrine can be described as homophobic. The fact that someone believes in God and wants to go to church because of that does not mean that their homosexuality becomes less credible. It just shows that people have other interests and things that are important than their sexual orientation only.

Even if there is an internal struggle that takes place, it seems that it is not always explained well enough or that the struggle is expected to be harder and more present than is explained. Concerning the combination between religion and homosexuality, we can take participant D as an example. It is clear that he struggled with his sexuality at first. Even so, eventually and with the help of a member of his faith (somewhat ironically) he learned to accept himself for who he is regardless of whether the religion officially condemns homosexuality. It is thus possible that people do struggle,

yes, but that they are eventually able to put that struggle aside. The IND, however, seems to expect people to always keep struggling with the combination of their two identities.

This type of questioning and ideas that the IND has may lead to sad situation where people must hide their religious beliefs from authorities. People are asked questions such as 'How can you be both gay and Muslim?' where implications clearly is that that is not possible. Such questions leave asylum seekers with the sense that they must disavow their faith or face deportation (Mole, 2021). A woman from Uganda said several times that she felt IND officials were 'very suspicious' of queer people who are practising Muslims. Several other queer Muslim asylum seekers stated that they too felt targeted and that they did not believe asylum seekers of other religions would be asked questions like this, or about their religions in general (Mole, 2021).

3.3.2. Changes?

Remember that all these examples are made regarding WI 2015/9, which is no longer in use since it has been replaced by WI 2018/9 and WI 2019/17 respectively. WI 2015/9 was replaced in order to 'fine tune' the process, but it was said by the state secretary of justice at the time that it did not entail a change in policy. Even though the focus on a process of becoming aware and self-acceptance is scrapped, the state secretary explains that the terms might still be used in future interviews if there is reason for it (Harbers, 2018c). For the purpose of this thesis, it suffices to talk about WI 2018/9 since WI 2019/17 is exactly the same apart from the addition about a passage about LGBT coordinators who have to be present and consulted in LGBT asylum cases (IND, 2019). Even though that might improve the situation somewhat this thesis focuses on a different aspect of the procedure and the problems with the old werkinstructie can be said to remain there.

The main change in WI 2018/9 is that the focus is now on the so called 'authentic story' of each foreign national who claims to be LGBT (IND, 2018). Other changes include (only) mentioning that the employee in question should be aware of their western perspective, consider culture, education and age, and some small elaborations surrounding the themes which are focussed on (private life, contact with homosexual groups etc.). Substantial changes to the policy, however, are not to be found. This is in line with the fact that this WI is meant to 'fine tune' the process, not drastically change it. According to the COC, the new instruction for the interviews is not executed correctly and has not changed the process in practice. After a year of working with WI 2018/9, the COC concludes three things according to 15 cases used as examples. The first is that processes of becoming aware and self-acceptance regularly still form a significant role in the final decision. The second point is that the IND pays too little attention to the declarations of third parties such as partners and advocacy. Lastly, but most importantly for this thesis, the IND extensively uses prejudices and stereotypes in making its decisions. Examples include the idea that there is one specific point of coming-out, the idea that religion and LGBT orientations do not go well together, and that LGBT people would not take the risk

to meet each other or seek each other out in the country of origin out of fears for persecution (COC, 2019a).

Examples from this letter regarding religion and sexual orientation are the following cases. In the first one, someone appealed their negative decision in court. The court held that (COC, 2019a):

''...*The person in question has grown up with the Islamic faith and he knows that that faith condemns homosexuality and can thus be expected to be able to explain his thoughts and feelings regarding the negative position from the Islamic faith against his homosexuality. In the circumstance that his faith did not play a role in the process of awareness and self-acceptance, the IND is reasonable to see further derogation in the credibility of the claimant's sexual orientation according to the court.*''

The second example is the passage from a file about another claimant who identified as Muslim as well as homosexual (COC, 2019a):

''*Concerning the amount of non-acceptance in society and the religion in question, it can be assumed that the person in question is able explain how his self-acceptance is connected to his faith and surroundings*''.

Remember that these interviews were held according to the new WI 2018/9 which was instigated in order to take the focus from self-acceptance, and which specifically states that for the decision, stereotypes may not be used. Instead, the importance is the individual experiences and personal circumstances of the foreign national (IND, 2019). Clearly, the practice differs from how it is supposed to go in theory. Furthermore, half a year after WI 2018/9 was implemented, the IND mentioned in someone's file that (COC, 2019b):

''*Processes of becoming aware and self-acceptance are the pillars against which the claimed sexual orientation is judged...those are still the same*''.

Furthermore, these processes were called *'The core of the sexual orientation'* in a different part of that same file. According to these facts, I think it is safe to conclude that, even though the new instructions regarding the interviews were meant to change the way people were judged on their sexual orientation, in practice there is little difference. People are still assumed to have struggled and ideas about these struggles are, for example, based on Dutch stereotypes regarding the interplay of homosexuality and religion. Furthermore, the passages described above still show the stereotypical idea that people who identify is Muslim or Christian strictly hold to all official dogmas. As explained in the last chapter, it is possible for people to identify as religious because of its function as a social

marker while having privatized their religion and beliefs to such an extent that it does not conflict with their sexuality regardless of whether they reject the doctrines in itself.

3.3.3. Interim conclusions

As a conclusion to this chapter, we can safely say that the fact that people hold a religious and queer identity at the same time can have enormous impact on their procedure and on whether they will be given a legal status. To begin with, the fact that people are judged according to their life stories in itself can be considered problematic due to differences in culture and how people construct such a life story. Other problems present in the interviews surrounding the translator, difficulties in talking about these private topics and traumas, difficulties in providing proof for situations in the country of origin and the differences between the interviewers. Still, the biggest hurdle in the light of this thesis remains the fact that stereotypes about religiosity and queerness from the Dutch discourse have found their way into interviews.

Stereotyping was all but official government policy while WI 2015/9 was still in use. We see ideas about people having experienced a struggle, experiencing negative emotions and, most importantly, ideas about people's religious and queer identity. People who identify as both queer and religious could expect questions about this fact. It is clear that having both identities was seen as strange and as something that needs explaining which shows that the Dutch discourse surrounding religion and homosexuality is present in the interviews themselves. Not fitting that image might result in being denied asylum for not being deemed credible. While the questions as such might not always be the problem, the fact that such questions are asked in itself has implication and gives the interviewee the idea that something is wrong with holding both identities and that they need to explain that fact. Furthermore, it was shown that the IND does not take into account that people – through privatization of their religion – might not follow all official dogma's and focus on their personal relationship with God while still identifying as a member of the larger religious group.

Even though the 'werkinstructie' used has since changed, it can also be said that the practices have changed little overall and that the same ideas underpin interviews regularly even today. The same types of questions are asked, and it appears that the basis on which the interviews are done remains the same. From several examples and even quotes by the state secretary in charge, it can be concluded that the basis has always remained the same regardless of which WI was in use at the time. Furthermore, the fact that 2014/10 has not changed shows that only half of the problem with the WI's was looked at since this is the basis on which credibility is judged. Interviews regarding LGBT cases should be held to a different account than others, which would require an all-new type of werkinstructie regarding credibility. It should be specifically based on the needs of LGBT refugees and the specificity of those kind of cases. The current ways in which stereotypes are present is problematic to say the least and dangerous for the people in question in the case that people get deported back to a country that is dangerous for them. The process should thus change, and I think that becoming aware of stereotypes

coming from the Dutch discourse might already help a lot in that regard. In these kinds of interviews, an open mind is needed, and it appears that that is not always present at this time.

4. Conclusion

Now, as a conclusion to this research, I will sum up all that we have learned while connecting all the dots in order to come to a clear answer to the research question. The question researched in this thesis was: ''How does the disparity between the Dutch discourse surrounding the intersection of religious and queer identities and how queer refugees actually live religion influence the decision on whether someone receives asylum in the Netherlands?''.

In short, we found that there indeed exists a disparity between the expectations and prejudices surrounding homosexuality and religion in the Dutch secular discourse and how refugees actually negotiate their religious identities. This discrepancy between expectation and reality was shown to possibly have large consequences on the final decision about whether someone is allowed to stay because stereotypes have found their way into the asylum procedure.

To come to this answer, three sub questions were identified and answered in turn. The first of those investigated the assumptions, prejudices and misconceptions existing in the Dutch discourse surrounding the intersection of religious and queer identities. We found four main characteristics in the general discourse surrounding religion and sexuality. The first is the fact that there is a magnifying glass on everything religious people and leaders say and do. Problems that might be relatively small, such as the weigerambtenaar, are likely to be presented as excessively big and cause public outrage. Furthermore, as we saw in a speech by the pope, there is a lot of focus on what religious leaders say in relation to sexuality whereas other parts are ignored.

The second characteristic we found is likely the reason of why this magnifying glass exists. Gay rights were shown to be at the centre of cultural imagination in the Netherlands while homonationalist tendencies are evermore present. Gay rights are seen as a test for successful integration for any foreigner because religious people and religious foreigners especially are seen as 'Others' and a threat to the supposed core of Dutch national identity, gay rights.

Thirdly, the Dutch discourse almost exclusively focusses on the negative side of the relationship between homosexuality and religion whereas positive examples are ignored. Most nuance is lost to a point where people are seen as having to make a choice between supporting gay rights or supporting religion. Historical examples, however, show that there are enough cases in which religion and religious figures were committed to the cause of gay rights. The idea that a negative relation is the only one that exists is thus not true and the positive side of things should receive more attention in order to present the situation as less black and white.

A last characteristic is that religion is presented as the one and only reason people hold anti-queer attitudes. Reasons like broken gender norms, ideas about masculinity, aversions against anal

sex, public displays of affection and attempts at seduction are not very much looked at in why people stand negatively against homosexuality. All these characteristics of the discourse have led to ideas about holding both a religious and queer identity at once.

Sexuality is seen as a core aspect of one's identity by the larger secular side of the debate, whereas sexuality is seen as irrelevant by the religious side because they prioritize the relationship with God. Furthermore, the religious side of the debate often sees a difference between being queer and having a queer lifestyle, actively practicing one's sexuality. As such, and because the debate is presented as a zero-sum game in the Dutch discourse, people are seen as only being able to hold one of these two identity markers. Furthermore, people in the Netherlands are expected to be out and proud in order to be considered as authentically queer. In that sense, coming out (or deciding not to do so) can be seen as actually making the choice between the two identities where one needs to be left behind. If you are religious and not out of the closet, you are seen as not really queer. If you are out of the closet but still religious, you are seen as not really religious. This is especially the case for queers of colour, where coming out often means that they are shunned from their home community and therefore less likely to be open about their sexuality. Additionally, because of the homonationalist idea that foreign queers have fled their religious and oppressive countrymen, the debate does not allow for these foreign queers themselves to hold a religious identity since that is the exact thing they fled from.

This discourse was shown to only hold part of the true ways people negotiate their religious identity in the chapter that looked at how queer refugees actually live their religions in practice. According to the theory, there are roughly four possible strategies that people take when they are religious and queer at the same time. The first strategy means to turn completely to religion while supressing their queer identity by, for example, remaining celibate. The second strategy is people focussing exclusively on their queer identity and deciding to leave their religion in order to not feel guilty about themselves. The Dutch secular discourse can be seen to focus almost exclusively on these first two strategies, since people are expected to make a choice between these discursive oppositionally paired concepts.

However, in strategy three we see that people accept both sides of their identity, as well as the fact that they might conflict with each other. The fourth strategy sees people who accept both identities without them feeling conflicted about either of them. They might reinterpret certain religious texts to make them more nuanced or focus on their personal relationships with God. It includes people that think both identities are unrelated to each other. Both groups see both identities as important and defy the Dutch discourse by not deciding on which one to keep. The fifth possibility is that people see the two as unrelated and therefore do not experience conflict.

Regarding the interviews, we saw participants A and B follow the Dutch discursive expectations rather closely by following the second strategy. Participant C can be seen to move between strategy three, four and five depending on the context. For participant D, it seems that he used to use strategy three whereas he now beliefs that his two identities not conflict, thus moving to strategy

four. Both C and D focus heavily on what their own ideas surrounding God are and on their personal relationship with Him. Participant E was shown to have an inner conflict between his queer and religious identity, whereas he also focussed on his personal relationship with God. This means he uses strategy three and four. Participant F used strategy three, as he has accepted both of his identities while acknowledging that they might conflict. Lastly, because he sees his identities as unrelated, participant G uses the fifth strategy and does not experience internal conflict.

Regarding a personal relationship with God, I explained that some people privatized their religion while still identifying as a member of the larger group. This allows them to express their own ideas and beliefs while not abandoning their roots. It is thus very much possible that people feel their sexuality and religion do not conflict and that they remain a firm member of both groups. Furthermore, spirituality was shown to be a possible third option that allows people to express their beliefs while not placing them in either a religious or secular group.

It was thus proven that the Dutch discourse does not fit everyone, as strategy three, four and to a lesser extent five, are a lot more prevalent than one would expect from how the situation is presented. It was also shown that most of the participants experience at least some struggle within their identities. The most important conclusion is that people's strategies are fluent and dependent on the context while remaining individual strategies. The five strategies discussed can provide some general connections between everyone's stories, but it remains the case that everyone uses a unique strategy. Trying to establish a full list of possibilities regarding identity negotiation would thus take something away from each person's individual agency.

Lastly, it was researched what the effects of having a discrepancy between what the Dutch discourse expects and the situation in practice might mean for someone's asylum procedure. For this, we discussed the main documents involved in the interviews. Before we got into that however, this thesis first questioned whether asking people for their life stories is problematic in its entirety because of the differences in which those are constructed according to culture, which can certainly be said to be the case. Even though this might be problematic, this thesis still looked at the interviews themselves simply because that is the way the process works.

During all IND interviews analysed in this thesis, the criteria for credibility were to be found in WI 2014/10 in combination with an instruction for sexuality specifically. In WI 2014/10, consistency and details are said to be the most important. This is possibly problematic because people might be reluctant to talk about their sexuality because it is something private and they likely were not open about it to strangers before. Furthermore, it is difficult to provide hard evidence for one's story and experiences, while at the same time people are expected to remember details from long ago in order to be deemed credible.

Before 2018, the main document in use for LGBT+ interviews was WI 2015/9. It was shown through multiple examples that stereotypes found in the Dutch discourse surrounding self-acceptance, inner struggles were important for the interview and were even official government policy.

Furthermore, questions focussed largely on negative emotions related to finding out that one has a queer identity meaning that they also expect people to have experienced such emotions.

Next to this, several questions that were shown made clear that secular Dutch discursive ideas about religion, homosexuality, and the relationship between the two have also found their way into these interviews. People are asked questions that assume and insinuate that the combination of identities was problematic, that they struggled between making a choice and that it is strange that people have not yet made such a choice. People who experienced no struggle between their identities were deemed not credible. Furthermore, stereotypes about what homosexuals are supposed to be or how and what people exactly believe without regard for possible spiritualities or beliefs unrelated to official dogmas were shown to be present.

For people such as participant G, the two identities are unrelated and to question their relation would make no sense. Furthermore, participants C would still join a Pentecostal church even though it might officially have a negative opinion about homosexuality. For her, the church is not for discussing her sexuality but for her relationship with God. Participant D did struggle at first, but not (as much) anymore and when is an amount of struggle enough? All these examples proof that the interviews are riddled with stereotypes that are untrue and problematic for the people who must do them.

One might question whether the people I have interviewed were actually homosexual or not and how I knew that they were. The simple answer to this question is that I, just like the IND, cannot be 100 percent certain about their sexual orientation. Even though I know some of the interviewees personally and know that some of them have (had) same-sex relationships, I did not ask for proof of these. However, I do think that if people can come up with a story about how their homosexual and religious identities connect (or not), than there is a real possibility that this identity combination exists. Thus, even if all participants made something up, the case remains that all of these stories were believable and could possibly exist or have basis in reality. The aim of this thesis to show different 'types' of queer identities that exist thus remains intact, regardless of whether the participants were actually part of the LGBT+ community.

Eventually, WI 2015/9 was changed to try and solve the issue of stereotyping. Nevertheless, it was proven in this thesis that in WI 2018/9 and WI 2019/17 the old practices that they tried to end continue to this day. Processes of becoming aware of one's sexuality is still important, even though it is not as literally in the instruction anymore. The change in WI's can thus be seen to be mostly a theoretical one, with the practical situation still having the same issues as it had before. Together with that, WI 2014/10 was never changed at all. This means that, even if changing the WI's would have worked, only part of the problem would have been solved as people were still required to remember details from long ago and to be completely open about their sexuality.

On a final note, I want to reiterate that this thesis is not meant to simply criticize the IND. The work that they do is incredibly difficult and important. Not only is it unfair for the actual queer refugees who must relive their trauma's during the interview whereas others might make something

up, it is also needed to prevent everyone from claiming they are part of the LGBT community just to receive asylum. The employees at the IND no doubt try to do the best they can, but they remain members of a discourse that does not accurately present the situation in practices. As was mentioned in the last chapter, people have a challenging time believing things that are outside of their frame of reference. This thesis was thus meant to enlarge that frame, so that it becomes easier to go into the interviews with an open mind and to recognize that not everyone fits the discourse of this country.

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Appendix A: Overview of participants

In the following table, you can see a quick overview of all participants of this research together with the characteristics as described by themselves. If they specified their religion (such as Pentecostal within 'overarching' Christianity) it is described as such.

Participant	Gender	Sexuality	Religion	Country of origin
A	Male	Homosexual	Spiritual	Lebanese Republic
B	Male	Homosexual	Agnostic	Republic of Kazakhstan
C	Female	Lesbian	Pentecostal	Republic of Uganda
D	Male	Homosexual	Spiritual Baptist	Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
E	Male	Homosexual	Catholic	Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
F	Male	Homosexual	Christian	Federal Republic of Nigeria
G	Male	Homosexual	Muslim	Republic of Guinea