LINDA SÓLVEIGAR GUÐMUNDSDÓTTIR &
UNNUR DÍS SKAPTADÓTTIR

LGBQ Migrations:

Racialization and (Un)belonging in Iceland

SAMMANFATTNING

Artikeln studerar LHBQ-migranters erfarenheter av att leva på Island, med tonvikten lagd på LHBQ-migranter från den globala södern. LHBQ-migranter kan tillhöra många olika gemenskaper, som till exempel deras etniska grupp, den queera gruppen och det större, omgivande isländska samhället och samtliga påverkar deras upplevelser. På Island har det skett en rad olika samhälleliga förändringar rörande LHBQ-gruppen under de senaste decennierna, samtidigt som antalet internationella migranter som bosatt sig på Island ökat kraftigt. Artikeln använder teorier om tillhörighet på LHBQ-migranters subjektsposition i samhället och använder rasifieringsteorier för att studera hur migranter upplever exkludering och xenofobi. Den använder en intersektionell ansats för att analysera hur frågor kring människors genus, sexualitet, ras, etnicitet, nationalitet och klass överlappar varandra och formar deras erfarenheter under hela migrationsprocessen och i deras dagliga liv. Resultaten visar att LHBQ-migranter har en bifokal världsåskådning och belyser hur de upplever rasifiering och en känsla av (icke-)tillhörighet i den isländska kontexten. Dessutom visar denna undersökning att migration kan skapa möjligheter till nya livsvägar och praktiker i fråga om deltagarnas sexuella läggning och identitetskonstruktion.

Keywords: LGBQ migrations, racialization, outness, belonging, Iceland

UNTIL THE TURN of the century, migration to Iceland was primarily from other Nordic countries, but has since then become more nationally, ethnically, and religiously diverse (Júlíusdóttir et al. 2013). In the last twenty years, the number of international migrants in Iceland has

increased extensively challenging images of Iceland as a homogenous society.[1] At the same time, various societal and legal changes have taken place regarding LGBQ people.[2] Nicola Mai and Russel King (2009) have called for an "emotional" and "sexual" turn in migration studies, and suggest that love and sexuality are important elements to consider within the migration process. The transformations in terms of LGBQ people's rights, along with increased immigration to Iceland in recent decades, provide an interesting context for examining Mai and King's notion.[3] This paper examines the experiences of LGBQ migrants from the Global South, applying theories of belonging to examine queer migrants' subject position (Spivak 1998), and theories of racialization to explore the ways in which queer migrants experience exclusion and xenophobia. The paper poses the question: What kind of challenges do LGBQ migrants from the Global South face, and how do they find a sense of belonging, within their ethnic communities, the queer community and within wider Icelandic society? Drawing on ten semi-structured interviews, we address these issues, and demonstrate the ways in which participants express their sexual identities and practices within the context of cross-border migration.

As this study focuses on LGBQ migrants, it engages with the act of queering the paradigm of migration studies. Adi Kuntsman (2003) noted that queer theory's perspective on gender and sexuality is a useful tool for destabilizing heterosexuality as something natural and taken for granted. Similarly, the stability of borders, belonging, and ethnicity are undermined by transnational perspectives on location and migration. The destabilizing effects of queer theory and transnationalism can be applied to make room for those who do not fit neatly within the ideology of heterosexual national belonging. Postcolonial critiques of tradition and modernity decenter queer Western-centrism by rethinking and challenging the relationship between the West and "the rest," framing queer life, non-heterosexuals, and non-procreative sexual practices in national or local ways. A postcolonial approach further aims to identify the multiplicity of non-heterosexual politics, love, and sex, while considering Western powers and United States' global dominance when

it comes to sexual discourse, as well as political and economic power (Wilson 2006). This approach emphasizes the ways in which sexuality relates differently to communities, rights or possibilities and holds different meanings in the non-Western context, for example with regards to coming out and liberties for queer migrants, thus recasting identities as syncretic, diasporic, and hybrid (Strongman 2002).

Edward Said's (2003) analysis of orientalism shows that those who are defined as the racialized Other in society are portrayed as contradictory to "the norm" and are further systematically used to create identity for those who constitute the predominant norm. Both LGBQ people and migrants have, at some point, been labeled as the Other, although lesbians and gays have increasingly become integrated (some might say assimilated) into the national imaginaries of Western countries in recent years (Puar 2007). Concerning sexual orientation, heterosexuality is the predominant norm, which produces a culture of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980) and heteronormativity (Warner 1991), sometimes also referred to as heterosexism, along with homophobia (Corrin 1999). As Suzanne Pharr (1997) explains:

> [H]eterosexism creates the climate for homophobia with its assumption that the world is and must be heterosexual and its display of power and privilege as the norm. Heterosexism is the systematic display of homophobia in the institutions of society. (Pharr 1997, 16–7)

Concerning migrants, former ideas held by policy makers and also in the social sciences, centered on assimilation into host societies where migrants were expected to leave behind their original culture (Brown and Bean 2006). In the 1980s, assimilationist approaches were increasingly replaced with ideas of multiculturalism, integration, and acceptance of ethnic diversity (Grillo 2007). However, multiculturalism is commonly used to emphasize the cultures of the Other, or of non-Western migrants, and thus the process of othering continues (Baumann 1999; Grosfoguel et al. 2015). Explaining discrimination toward migrants by referring to people's culture and using racist discourse thus

reinforces old colonial and racial hierarchies (Grosfoguel et al. 2015). LGBQ migrants from the Global South thus potentially face various simultaneous forms of discrimination within Icelandic society. This relates to Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) notion of intersectionality, or the ways in which constructions such as class, race, sexuality, and ethnicity function as mutually constructing systems of power.

For the purposes of this study, these important theoretical and contextual perspectives on migration, colonialism, and sexuality must be linked to theories of belonging and racialization in order to show the framework within which LGBQ migrants to Iceland operate. bell hooks (2009, 1) has noted that sense of belonging is "the making of lives that we feel are worth living," while Nira Yuval-Davis (2011, 10) makes a distinction between belonging and the politics of belonging, noting that "[b]elonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home' [...]. The politics of belonging comprise specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivity/-ies." We need, she claims, "to look at what is required from a specific person in order for her/him to be entitled to belong, to be considered as belonging, to the collectivity" (Yuval-Davis 2011, 20). Floya Anthias (2013, 6), on the other hand, claims that this differentiation is not necessary "because the arenas of the social and political infiltrate all social life, including our feelings, values, and orientations." Sara Ahmed (2004) has also argued that emotions or feelings are shaped by social structures and, as such, there is no clear-cut distinction between the politics of belonging and belonging. Elspeth Probyn (1996) further notes that the term belonging captures the desire for some sort of attachment to people, places or modes of being better than the term identity.

Despite the lack of scientific basis for the concept of race and scholars' view of race as a cultural category, it continues to be an important part of everyday life in Europe today (Silverstein 2005). Indeed, race continues to be constructed as a natural and essential part of individuals' lives. According to Paul Silverstein (2005) racialization,

> refers to the process through which any diacritic of social personhood – including class, ethnicity, generation, kinship/affinity, and positions within fields of power – comes to be essentialized, naturalized and/or biologized [...] and indexes the historical transformations of fluid categories of difference into fixed species of otherness. (Silverstein 2005, 364)

Increasingly, the study of racialization has included the critical analysis of whiteness as a relational construct and a category of racial privilege (Ahmed 2004; Loftsdóttir and Hipfl 2012). Richard Dyer (1997) has noted that making whiteness visible dislocates the us/them binary from its position of power. Fatima El-Tayeb (2008) has pointed out that in theory, "belonging to" Europe is a question of one's passport, but in practice, this is further built on notions of non-belonging, such as racial and religious profiling, through which "visible minorities" are determined by fraudulent biological or latently racialized concepts of national or European identity, and invariably positioned as the Other.

The Icelandic Context

The expansion of societal and legal rights for LGBQ people, especially gays and lesbians, in Iceland has been relatively swift in the last two decades, although these changes have been less extensive for queer[4] people more generally (Þorvaldsdóttir 2007; Ellenberger 2017). Gays and lesbians have struggled for, and gained, various citizenship rights, for example, adoption rights and the right to access artificial insemination in 2006, and marriage equality in the state-sponsored Lutheran church in 2010. Nonetheless, Iceland is increasingly lagging behind other European nations in many ways. This is evident in ILGA's "Rainbow Map" (2017b), which measures the status of human rights and equality for lesbian/gay/bisexual/trans/intersex people, where Iceland stands at 47% while other Nordic nations range between 60% and 78%. According to the ILGA-Europe's *Annual Review* (2017a) the main reason for this rating is Iceland's general lack of policies and laws concerning,

> protections for LGBTI people in anti-discrimination legislation, gaps in hate crime legislation and no legislation or positive measures in the area of asylum. Current legislation still imposes a series of deterring conditions on trans people to access legal gender recognition, and there is no legislation to protect the bodily integrity of intersex people. (ILGA-Europe 2017a, 118)

Regarding migrants from the Global South, the process of gaining work and residence permits, as well as citizenship rights in Iceland can be a strenuous undertaking and takes several years because of exclusionary processes. Iceland is not a member state of the EU but is part of the Schengen Area and the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement, which implies free movement of persons, services, goods, and capital within the EEA member countries. Moreover, in 2006, the Icelandic labor market was opened to workers from new EU member states, and since that time it has become almost impossible for people from other parts of the world to acquire work permits in Iceland, except as specialists or for family reunification, because people from EEA countries are given priority (Bissat 2013; Skaptadóttir 2015).

Íris Ellenberger (2017) has argued that in recent years the image of Iceland has become associated with a "gay utopia," or a "safe space" for gays and lesbians, and refers to it as a recreation of older images of "Icelandic exceptionalism." This discourse also relates to the representation of Nordic countries as a "gender equality paradise" (Þorvaldsdóttir 2011). The fact that a minority group such as gays and lesbians is now included in constructions of Icelandic identity indicates that this privileged group of white, Christian, cisgender, gender conforming, able-bodied, monogamous, middle-class gays and lesbians, is to a lesser extent being branded as the Other in society, while othering is still firmly associated with certain groups of migrants (Ellenberger 2017). These processes have also been described through Lisa Duggan's (2002) concept of homonormativity as a politics, which sustains dominant heteronormative institutions and assumptions within the LGBTQ communities instead of resisting this normalization. Jasbir Puar (2007) has extended

Duggan's formulation and put forth the concept of homonationalism to describe how homonormativity aligns with hegemonic forms of nationalism, as it seems to promise inclusion in the state, when it in fact reinforces and reflects cultural, racial and other hierarchies within the queer communities.

As Kristín Loftsdóttir (2011; 2014) has argued, Iceland's relationship to racism has in many ways been marked by attempts to demonstrate its innocence, since the country did not participate directly in the colonial project and has in the past been under Norwegian and later Danish rule. She has further pointed out that Icelandic national identity was, nonetheless, constructed in close dialogue with both colonialism and racism, embedded in masculine characteristics, and based on whiteness as a normative and distinctive category. This proposed innocence from racism can also be seen in other Nordic countries and is commonly referred to as "Nordic exceptionalism" (Browning 2007). Studies in Iceland have shown that migrants do experience racism and prejudice in their daily lives there. For example, many Filipinos have encountered incidences of overt racism in public spaces and at work, as well as prevailing stereotypes of Asian women as docile and submissive (Pétursdóttir 2013; Skaptadóttir 2015). Furthermore, Asian women of different nationalities are often categorized together as Thais, which is in many ways a representative example of racialization and Othering in present day settings (Skaptadóttir 2015).

The struggle for women's and gay and lesbian rights, and the emerging social changes that followed, have not strategically been used to exclude Muslim migrants, as has been the case in the Netherlands, Britain, and Germany (Mepschen et al. 2010; Haritaworn and Petzen 2011). However, the perceived threat of "Middle Eastern terrorists" has recently become established in Icelandic discourse and islamophobic sentiments have been voiced, for example, during the Reykjavík municipal elections in 2014 (Jóhönnudóttir 2015). Thus, it is only recently that Muslims have become part of the image of the foreign Other in Iceland, as the vast majority of migrants are Eastern-Europeans, mostly Poles, arriving mainly for work purposes. The largest groups from the

Global South hail from the Philippines and Thailand, and again, have largely migrated for work or family reunification (Skaptadóttir 2015). Out of a total population of about 338,000 persons, almost 10% are immigrants (Statistics Iceland 2017b). Only a minority of them has arrived as refugees. Since 1956, 645 individuals have been resettled as quota refugees (Velferðarráðuneytið nd), and from the year 1997 to 2016 about 350 individuals were given refugee status or permission to stay in Iceland based on humanitarian grounds; most of them in the last few years (Statistics Iceland nd). As previously noted, Icelanders have a rather naïve approach to race and racism, for instance, with regards to terms that are seen elsewhere in Europe as highly racist (Loftsdóttir 2014). The term *nýbúar* [new residents] has become loaded with negative connotations, as it is usually coded in terms of cultural difference and mostly used to refer to non-white individuals (Skaptadóttir 2015). The Icelandic language plays a central role in defining Icelandicness, and in migrants' inclusion within the national context (Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017).

The Study and Methods

The findings presented here are based on the analyses of interviews with ten individuals from the Global South. The participants came from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The interviews took place in Reykjavík during 2013 and 2015 and were conducted in English or Icelandic. Participants' class status varies, as they came from both working-class and middle-class families. Most of the participants had attended university, had a university degree, or were working toward getting one, either in Icelandic for foreigners at the University of Iceland or in other areas. All the participants were engaged in full-time employment or study, or a combination of the two. They worked in the tourist industry, the health care and educational systems, social services, and in catering. Most of the participants in this study had a relative already living in the country, a close friend, or a partner, and this was the main reason they gave for migrating. While many wanted to experience life in other countries or moved for work or study, one person came seeking asylum. Many of the participants already had Icelandic citizen-

ship when the interviews took place, and others were in the process of acquiring citizenship. Participants' ages ranged from twenty-six to forty years old. Three are ciswomen, while seven are cismen, and, as previously mentioned, all of them are, more or less, gender conforming in their everyday life. The gender ratio in this sample seems to be representative of LGBQ migrants from the Global South, as more men are out with their sexual orientation, while women seem under more pressure to conceal it. Whether participants could presumably "pass" as white or not, during the interviews they often mentioned that people could see that they were not ethnic Icelanders.

LGBQ migrants in Iceland do not form a specific community or a subculture as such; in fact, participants in this study talked about the lack of such a community. This is a diverse group of people, with different ethnic and national backgrounds and different experiences of being LGBQ. Linda Sólveigar Guðmundsdóttir located participants for the study and conducted the interviews; she used personal friendships and social media groups for the initial interviews and then a snowball sampling technique along with convenience sampling. Interviews were analyzed with open and then focused coding to identify relevant themes (Esterberg 2002). Heather McCosker et al. (2001) have argued that the study of groups in which there is fear of stigmatization may be considered sensitive research. This may be applicable to the current study, especially for participants who are not out to co-workers, friends, or family members. Recognizable details of the participants are therefore withheld when possible and all names are pseudonyms.

The Findings and Analysis

The aim of this study accords with the aims discussed by Eithne Luibhéid (2008), namely that queer migration scholarship attempts to validate subjects and histories that have largely been rendered unspeakable and invisible. In our analysis of the interviews three main themes were developed. Firstly, the participants experienced a bifocal world view, in which they compared their current social situation to that in their country of origin, mainly with regards to sexual norms and ways of being

non-heterosexual. Secondly, there was the issue of identity construction in connection to the migration process and one's degrees of outness. Finally, there was a discussion of participants' sense of belonging regarding various social and cultural exclusionary practices.

Bifocal World Views

As Martin Manalansan (2006) has noted, queer migrants experience a transformed and continued commitment to the power structures that have modulated their lives. The critique of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003) and the recognition of transnational perspectives have challenged the unidirectional assumptions of integration theories. A transnational perspective sheds light on the ways in which transnational activities such as interacting through modern communication technology, sending remittances, and traveling back and forth affect the cultural, social, and cognitive orientation of migrants (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). All the participants in this study used various communication technologies to maintain their connections with people in their country of origin. All but two had travelled back "home" for visits, one because of a refugee status in Iceland and the other for affective or emotional reasons. Two participants sent remittances to support elderly parents. All participants expressed what Steven Vertovec (2004) calls a bifocal view, in which they compare or reflect on life "here" and "there." Basim discussed the extent to which normative social structures in his country of origin had molded his ideas of gender and sexuality, and the way in which residing in another country or culture assists him in deconstructing these same ideas:

> I grew up in a very conservative society and dealing with homosexuality, it took a while for me. I was always under the impression that a woman equals inferior, and I keep pushing this idea away, trying to educate myself better. [...] There is one thing that I kind of gained from moving to Iceland, concerning different gender roles or types, and meeting people who come out to me as transgender. Because in [country of origin] they would have been hidden deep, deep in the closet somewhere.

It is important to bear in mind that because of the small population, it is relatively easy to meet people from all walks of life in the same location, which can further potentially open for connection between different individuals. Faizah, who had lived in Iceland for about two years, noted that her experience of racism in Iceland is not a problem for her compared to the discrimination toward her sexual orientation in her country of origin. Although not experiencing these two forms of discrimination in the same way, they materialized similarly as biases toward her personhood. Her gender, ethnicity, and sexuality clearly intersected differently within different power structures. Faizah described her bifocal view on same-sex sexualities in this way:

> I had a girlfriend for the longest time, but I was scared to hold her hand and be affectionate with her in public, and it took a while for me adjust from that, because I had that fear in [country of origin]. Being here where the family and such are so accepting, it's not even an issue, nobody really discusses sexuality. You know, it's like saying I had a cup of coffee.

This quote reflects Faizah's complex migrant subject position in many ways, and illustrates how "being yourself" is a privilege, obtainable to some and to a lesser extent to others. Many societies have experienced a significant shift as gays and lesbians have, at least to some extent, been integrated into political and social life as "normal citizens." Nonetheless it is important to realize that they have been constituted in accordance with heterosexual norms (Richardson 2004). Most participants thought it was affirmative to be able to get married in Iceland, and perhaps more importantly that gay and lesbians had, to an extent, gained the same legal rights as heterosexuals. Thomas, who had gotten married in a civil ceremony, described his view on marriage:

> People know that I have gotten married here and my parents' question was, why is it okay to be married in another country, but why not in [country of origin]? Yeah, they were really surprised and a lot of my friends were really surprised.

Thomas' life "here" seems in some ways at odds with what the norm is over "there," and thus this quotation is a valid example of a bifocal view. Participants mentioned that there are similar norms, values, and prejudices within the queer community as in wider Icelandic society, for example, regarding issues such as getting married and having children. According to Gloria Wekker (quoted in Mepschen et al. 2010) it is necessary to take seriously the complexity, diversity, and questions of power within LGBTQ cultures, and consider the possibility that queer migrants might choose forms of sexual freedom that deviate from normative representations. Faizah mentioned that in her experience, the queer community in Iceland was non-existent, as it was mainly visible within the club scene and once a year at Reykjavík Pride (formerly Gay Pride). In her country of origin, she used to associate daily with people from the community and find support there but she lacks this connection in Iceland. She said:

> I think it's important for the queer community to come together and not just once in a while but whenever it can, basically. Especially immigrants, as that's a group of people that may have had a very troubled experience in regard to their gay life. If you know somebody that is like that, it can be very helpful just be able to talk to someone and feel comfortable.

The participants' comparison of experiences "here" and "there," we argue, are indicative of a necessary strategy to make sense of cultural differences and to help them to adjust to their present cultural context. Nevertheless, being yourself and finding a sense of belonging in a society where queer people do not form a stable support network, can be a challenge for LGBQ migrants.

Degrees of Outness

In queer migration scholarship, sexuality is understood as a construction that takes place within intersecting and multiple relations of power, concerning issues of citizenship status, geopolitical locations, class, race, ethnicity and gender (Luibhéid 2008). Some participants viewed their

sexual orientation as innate and an unchangeable part of their identity, while others did not. The construction of individuals' identity presumably has its foundations in early life, but it is also in a sense transfigured though the migration process and the continuous process of coming out with one's sexual orientation. Participants' degrees of outness, for example to their family and ethnic community varied, but was further connected to their sense of belonging within those collectives. Carlos, who had lived in Iceland for five years, described the way in which his sexual identity and degrees of outness had been molded in his country of origin:

> There is a Catholic background in [country of origin] which makes it okay [to be gay], but not okay, because it's not okay for a Catholics, but not many people in [capital city] are ultra-right Catholics [...] I started exploring it [his sexuality] a little bit more when I came here, because in [country of origin], I kind of had to be careful about that. It's like a "don't ask, don't tell" thing. I would never say I'm straight, but I just wouldn't talk about my personal life.

Carlos' experiences reflected in this quote support Roberto Strongman's (2002) point that the most predominant disparity between Latin American homosexual categories and those of the United States lies in the issue of secrecy and disclosure. The image of "the closet" has been highlighted in the North American gay discourse, especially through Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1990) description of the closet as "a structured silence." This structure of silence is broken by coming out, and is further a key factor in producing the gay subject, as every instance of coming out is a reproduction of that closet. Many Latin Americans, on the other hand, "do not rely on the same notion of disclosure to exist; the performance of desire is a much more defining moment than the declaration" (Strongman 2002, 181). The ignorance of the closet can bring many Latin American homosexuals freedom, as it is difficult for society to condemn something that is not part of popular discourse.

As Gill Valentine (1992) asserts, gays and lesbians may attempt to

pass as heterosexuals by concealing their sexual orientation at various times and places, to avoid stigma. Some participants were not "out" to their parents and had no plans of discussing their orientation with them. Others had informed their parents after they had moved from their country of origin, while yet others were out with everyone, including their families. Nilakshi, who migrated to Iceland some twelve years ago, stated that she had not realized she was attracted to women until she met her current partner. She was in many ways still in the closet and did not particularly relate to the labels of LGBQ, but noted that she was most likely a lesbian. Nilakshi described her realization in this way:

> When I met her, I realized that I had never experienced this strong emotion, which comes with being in love with someone. But it took me more than a year to get my head around the idea that I was attracted to a woman. Because in my mind it was somehow clear, as I am a woman, I had to marry a man if I wanted to get married. [...] I just became physically ill when I thought about these things. So eventually I just told myself, okay, just do what makes you content and if that is being with her, then so be it.

Nilakshi's quote emphasizes her struggle with predominant notions of heteronormativity, it further demonstrates how accepting the subject position of being at odds with the norm can be a strenuous process. Luibhéid (2008) has pointed out the importance of using the analytical lens of heteronormativity when analyzing those who may identify as LGBTQ (without assuming these categories to be transhistorical or essential in any way) to create a space for those whose gender and sexual practices do not align with their identities. Participants' experiences of coming out to one's family differed a great deal. One person recounted that he had more than once been severely beaten by a family member when he was a child and a teenager for being gay or too feminine, even before he realized that he was attracted to men. Another participant, Duyi, who had moved to Iceland some fifteen years ago as a teenager, explained how he had successfully queered his family home at an early age:

> I came out when I was born, in [country of origin], there was no way of hiding it.
>
> /Interviewer: Was it because you were feminine? /
>
> Yes, I was very feminine in school and at home. I remember one time when I was around six years old there was this Latin American soap opera on TV and there was this very handsome guy in it, I said out loud to everyone in the room, I want to marry a man like that. Everyone just said okay, no problem.

Coming out with one's same-sex attractions as a child or as an adult does not have the same weight or impact, consequently, Duyi's story does not fall under the definition of a coming out-narrative. Nonetheless, his self-expression demonstrates the variety of experiences when it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity. In the lives of many LGBQ people, movement is connected to actualizing one's sexual identity, desires, and relationships (Knopp 2004). However, uncertainty of belonging can arise from stigmatization and as a result, people's social connections can become sensitive information (Walton and Cohen 2007). Salah, who was not out to his family in his country of origin, described his father's views on belonging and sexuality in this way:

> My father always says that my place is in [country of origin]. He is a very religious person, and I think it would kind of break his heart [if he told him he is gay]. That his eldest son will have a horrible death and will burn in hell for ever and ever.

This quote reveals a strong argument for staying partly in the closet, namely Salah's understanding of his father's religiously based fears. Moya Lloyd (2005) has noted that a hidden feature of conceptions of non-Western ethnicity is presumed heterosexuality, and that normative heterosexuality is a central component of nationalist and ethnic ideologies, while the cornerstone of ethnic communities is traditional family life. Participants' participation in their immigrant or religious communities varied, two of them were quite active in their immigrant com-

munities and felt accepted there, even though they lived openly with a same-sex partner and their communities were shaped by Catholic values. Unlike these men, Sebastian mentioned that he did not find a sense of belonging in his immigrant community. He said:

> I don't feel comfortable with them, I have actually never been much of a nationalist and I'm also an atheist. I feel I have to be very careful about my queerness around them, cause I'm not sure how they will take that [...], of course there are nice people from [country of origin] that I talk to regularly, but I feel I don't really fit in there for many reasons.

Living in another country or culture seemed to unlock other ways of being and becoming for the participants in this study. Although coming out and being out has been a political strategy aimed at gaining acceptance within society, it is imperative to grasp that it is based on Western ideologies and is a somewhat privileged subject position. However, various degrees of identity management can be more applicable regarding LGBQ migrants.

Feelings of (Un)belonging

The politics of belonging in Iceland has become more complex for individuals from the Global South in recent years, due to racialization, but also because of difficulties in gaining residential status and work permits, as described above (Bissat 2013; Skaptadóttir 2015). However, other factors also affect people's sense of belonging and connectedness to a place and its local population. Salah who arrived three years ago, described his sense of (un)belonging and "foreignism" as follows:

> I have come to the realization that I feel I don't really belong in [country of origin], for different reasons, and sometimes I still feel like a bit of an outsider in Iceland. Maybe in ten years, I will truly integrate and when I talk to someone they won't notice my "foreignism" [...] I think for a foreigner to live here and not feel like an outsider is a more of a society change.

The term foreignism is used in linguistics to indicate a word or an expression that has been borrowed from another language, but has not yet been integrated into the recipient language and is perceived in terms of non-belonging (Fischer 2008). The Icelandic language has numerous foreignisms, some from Danish, but most of the current ones are from the English language. The linguistic usage of this term coincides, in many ways, with how participants experienced their belonging to Icelandic society. The extent to which participants felt they belonged differed, some talked about obstacles connected to breaking into close-knit social groups, as ethnic Icelanders often maintain childhood friendships instead of seeking out "new" friends (although this also depended upon whether they themselves had lived in other locations). Nilakshi described her experience in this way:

> It's very different making friends here as people are very cautious, you talk to a lot of people but they sort of keep you at a distance [...]. I could make friends there [in London] and it happened really like instantly, but here it's a really long process and it gets lonely and boring sometimes.

Other participants described how they already felt a sense of belonging to the Icelandic contextually; although adjusting to a new society was sometimes demanding, one just had to try to learn the language and have a positive outlook on things. Studies have shown that the Icelandic language plays a central role in the construction of Icelandic national identity and in determining who can claim to belong (Hálfdánarson 2003; Þórarinsdóttir 2010; Skaptadóttir and Innes 2017), and passing an Icelandic test is a compulsory element in gaining Icelandic citizenship (Innes 2015; Innes and Skaptadóttir 2017). Accordingly, most participants discussed the fact that language was in many ways a key to Icelandic society, but that at the same time, Icelanders commonly spoke English with foreigners. Bayani, who migrated to Iceland some twenty years ago as a teenager, described his experience with language:

> The first few years here were very difficult, and it was primarily the

> language that caused these difficulties. If I would have come to grips with the language sooner I would have been able to do something more [...] today I have studied Icelandic at a university level, and finished other studies, but as of yet I haven't found work connected to my studies.

As previous studies in Iceland have also shown, Bayani's experience reflected in this quote suggests that proficiency in Icelandic is not enough to be accepted as equal within the labor market and wider society (Kristjánsdóttir and Christiansen 2015). Other factors play a part in this process as well, such as racialization and xenophobia. Indeed, as Ahmed (2004) has noted, a different approach would thus be useful to study whiteness critically and particularly white racial privilege and fantasies of anti-racism. Usually whiteness is seen as the non-color, the unseen or the unmarked, while all other colors are measured as a form of deviance (Dyer 1997). Bayani discussed his experience relating to what he characterized as substantial societal changes in Iceland in recent decades:

> It's okay now, but about fifteen or seventeen years ago, Icelandic people simply hated foreigners and especially people from Asia. It was very difficult to live here back then, but today it's much more tolerable, the change is so substantial that it's a bit like moving from black to white.

Bayani's observations reflect how Icelandic society in the last twenty years, through increased immigration, has moved toward more multicultural formations, which again, is closely linked to the expansion of the labor market. Participants mentioned that in work situations, attitudes toward migrants varied greatly between workplaces, as different employers and co-workers' class belonging and educational levels played a significant role. The components of participants' "foreignism" were not consistently overt, nor were the causes of peoples' negative reactions toward participants, but language fluency and a "Nordic" appearance (or Eurocentric features), seemed to be defining factors. Robyn Wiegman (1999) has noted that white racial supremacy and apartheid structures have universalized whiteness through its power of invisibility,

as well as mobilized white particularity, for example, through spaces "for whites only." Mariana was born in the Global South, but had parents from Southern Europe and had lived in Iceland for seven years. When asked, she described her experience of workplace exclusion:

> The language is the main reason but also because of my look, some people look at me and notice I'm not local. I have had some situations at work where people say to me, I don't want any foreigner touching the patient, or my family member. It's not just an isolated case, but most people are polite and nice.

Mariana's quote indicates an experience of distinct racialization. Guðrún Pétursdóttir (2013) has shown that many immigrants or people of foreign origin living in Iceland have encountered the kind of attitude Philomena Essed (1991) called everyday racism, and how it manifests itself in day-to-day situations. This kind of racialization is latent and repeatedly performed as casual incidents or occurrences, but when accumulated can lead to physical and mental illnesses. Many of the participants talked about how some ethnic Icelanders did not realize how challenging gaining access to various communities and the general society was. Duyi described his experience of exclusion from the queer community as follows:

> The first few years after I moved here, my greatest disappointment was with the queer community. Guys didn't want to date me because they thought they would have to pay me money, which I would send to home to my relatives. To be honest, I have never participated in Gay Pride, as I somehow feel that it's a celebration of hypocrisy. Still today, I don't really have gay friends.

This quote suggests that in Duyi's experience, the queer Icelandic community reflects predominant norms of racialization present within wider society. It also shows how racist words, comments and attitudes can resonate and affect one's emotions and behavior over time (Hübinette

2012). As discussed above, the politics of belonging along with the concept of "foreignism," which incorporate both language fluency and physical characteristics, relates to LGBQ migrants experiences of (un) belonging.

Conclusion

This article has aimed to shed light on some of the obstacles that LGBQ migrants from the Global South face in Iceland, as well as their sense of (un)belonging to the queer community, their immigrant communities, and wider Icelandic society. It further illustrates how migration can, in some sense, pave the way for other ways of being and becoming. Moreover, it shows how Iceland's rather liberal approach to LGBTQ issues is counteracted by racialization, as well as increasing restrictions on the politics of belonging for migrants coming from outside the EEA. Participants who migrated more than fifteen years ago had somewhat different stories to tell than those who arrived later, as society has moved toward a more multicultural framing along with increased immigration. This article thus in many ways, shares findings with other studies undertaken in Iceland among migrants from the Global South (Skaptadóttir 2015; Loftsdóttir 2016), in that it illuminates how language and appearance play a part in participants' sense of belonging and exclusion. As Raewyn Connell (2007) has noted, addressing topics of race, gender, and sexuality are central to social relations of empire and hierarchies of populations. Further, while a privileged group of gays and lesbians has now, to some extent, shifted away from being identified as the Other in society, specific migrant groups are still othered. LGBQ migrants in Iceland belong to various minority groups, and thus potentially face multiple discrimination, for example, regarding the politics of belonging – being non-white or a "foreigner," in connection to language fluency, and relating to the performance of the "correct queerness," in connection to ones to degrees of outness and identity management. These various factors need to be further addressed and discussed, in public policies and academic settings, as they are crucial to improving the acceptance and inclusion of migrants within Icelandic society. The aim

of this article then, has not so much been to "give voice" to LGBQ migrants hailing from the Global South, but rather to show how processes of othering and racial exclusion challenge fantasies of Icelandic culture as innocent and devoid of racism. It shows the lived experience of LGBQ migrants residing in the Nordic region, and thus aims to expand and diversify the international body of research on the social and cultural contexts of sexuality.

LINDA SÓLVEIGAR GUÐMUNDSDÓTTIR has a BA in Sociology from the University of Iceland and a MA in Sociology from City University London. She is a PhD candidate in Social Anthropology at the University of Iceland.

UNNUR DÍS SKAPTADÓTTIR has a PhD in Anthropology from the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York. She is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Iceland.

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NOTES

1. In 2017, the proportion of foreign nationals was 8.9% of the total population, compared to 1.9% in 1996 (Statistics Iceland 2017a).
2. This is how the interviewees for this study defined their sexual orientation, i.e., gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer, and consequently that is how they are identified in this paper. All the participants who agreed to take part in this study were further cisgender and more or less gender conforming in their day-to-day life, presumably due to the small size of the queer community in Iceland.
3. It should be noted that these societal changes are considerably less extensive with regards to queer persons more generally, i.e., individuals who identify as pansexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex+.
4. Queer here includes transgender people, intersex people, and others whose gender or sexuality is considered non-normative.