

**“WHAT’S UP WITH ALL THESE WALLS?”
RACIALIZED LESBIAN/QUEER WOMEN IMMIGRANTS
AND BELONGING IN TORONTO**

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite government and scholarly interest in how Canada’s immigrants settle after arrival, there is limited scholarship on how queer female immigrants find spaces for belonging in a Toronto context in both immigration scholarship, and in theories of queer migration. Drawing on critical queer, critical post-colonial feminist, and critical whiteness approaches, the paper aims to demonstrate why a universal subject, and increasingly, a universal queer subject renders a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant living in Toronto marginalized, impossible, and unintelligible in mainstream and queer spaces. For the study, three racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants living in Toronto were interviewed. A reflexive analysis of the experiences of the three participants suggests that spaces of belonging for a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant in Toronto and beyond are limited, contradictory, and conditional.

Keywords: Belonging, Immigrant Identity, Lesbian/Queer Woman, Racialization, Toronto

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Dedication

In memory of my grandmother, Joan

And, in memory of my teacher, Ms. Maxwell

*Each time I find myself giving up on this country,
I have the persistent habit of realizing that all I have here
and did not have [in my country of origin].
It is annoying, this habit,
when I want to count and measure the difficulties of life here.
This is a miserable place, of course,
a miserable and glorious place that I love dearly.*

Valentino Achak Deng, in *What is the What*

*Walls protect, and walls limit.
It is the nature of walls that they should fall.*

Jeannette Winterson, in *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

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1.1 Establishing boundaries: the paper, the communities

Immigrating to Toronto can be both a thrilling and agonizing experience.¹ On the one hand, immigrants often express excitement for immigrating because it is imagined that Toronto will offer improved educational opportunities and a greater sense of personal freedom than in the country of origin. There is a promise that a variety of immigrants will belong and find a better home upon arrival (Ahmed 2010a; Anisef & Lanphier 2003).² On the other hand, immigrant stories illustrate that newcomers encounter challenges to this promise while searching out welcoming spaces of belonging in schools, communities, families, and intimate relationships, for example (Ghosh & Wang 2003). For many immigrants living in Toronto, finding spaces of belonging is a dynamic and painful process involving a constant negotiation of “uprooting”, “re-grounding”, and never quite arriving (Ahmed 1999c; Ahmed, Castaneda, Fortier, & Sheller 2003 p. 1; Fortier 2003; Sabra 2008). Identities that deviate from a white heterosexual Canadian-born male are not always captured within a national imaginary of who belongs (Ahmed 2010a; Anderson 1991). For immigrants, racialization, language barriers or ‘Other’ accents, gender, sexuality, age, class, and customs also often challenge and limit spaces for belonging. Where might this leave the promise of opportunity and belonging for a variety of immigrants living in Toronto?

For this Major Research Project, I interviewed three racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants living in Toronto.³ Regardless of the length of time each woman has been living in Toronto, all three continue to negotiate spaces of belonging in mainstream and queer communities through a myriad of shifting and unstable identities of race, class, age, sexuality,

¹ In this paper, I focus only on the experiences of immigrants, not of refugees, to Canada.

² I borrow here from Ahmed’s (2010a) notion that privileged bodies, or what is identified in this paper as a universal (queer) subject, live the promise of a good life, and ‘others’ long to live the good life, or the promise to belong. See, Ahmed, S. (2010a). *The Promise of Happiness*.

³ I employ both ‘lesbian’ and ‘queer woman’ to reflect the varying self-articulations from the three women who participated. Like Eves (2004), “I was reluctant to define lesbian...[since] some of the participants used ‘queer’ rather than ‘lesbian’ in discussing sexual orientation” (p. 483). Both ‘lesbian’ and ‘queer’ were often used interchangeably along with ‘gay’ to indicate a woman who sexually and intimately prefers women.

religion, and (heterosexual/heteronormative) societal/familial expectations.⁴ In the paper, I am not interested in focusing on how one identity influences the negotiation of belonging; instead, I am interested in allowing each woman to reflect on how a myriad of identities implicate and affect them differently. I choose this unrestricted approach to reflect the fluidity and complexities of each woman's identity as she searches for spaces of belonging in Toronto.

Despite government and scholarly interest for understanding how Canada's immigrants settle after arrival (see for example, Anisef & Lanphier 2003; Biles, Burstein, & Frideres 2008; Li 2003), there is limited scholarship on how queer bodies find spaces for belonging, both in immigration scholarship, and in theories of queer migration.⁵ Since the scholarship that *is* available on queer migrants tends to elide considerations of gender (Puar 2002), the experiences of a variety of queer women are often disregarded. My project begins to address this scholarly gap as I explore how a myriad of identities are formed and how discursive and societal reference points in the process of identity formation are not accidental (Butler 2004a; 1990c; Ahmed 2010a; 2006b; Puar & Rai 2004). As a result, I am concerned with how a universal subject, and increasingly, a universal *queer* subject reifies the notion of a so-called good immigrant, and a so-called loyal heterosexual capitalist male serving to isolate racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants from a variety of spaces in Toronto, and beyond. With these unbalanced power relations in mind, I am interested in exploring where each of the three women I interviewed differently and similarly negotiate spaces of belonging.

My research asks three main questions: What spaces, if any, are possible in personal and public spheres for a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant to negotiate belonging after migrating? How are these spaces mediated and determined through a myriad of intersectionalities that deviate from the universal (queer) subject, including immigrant identity, racialization, sexuality, gender, age, class, and family expectations? And, if spaces of belonging are challenged and limited, where does this render a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant in the promise to belong? From a review of the literature, as well as a reflexive and comparative

⁴ In this paper, I use 'mainstream communities' to refer to an explicit or implicit heterosexual community that is found almost everywhere in public and private spheres. I use 'queer community' to refer to spaces that interrogate heteronormativity. I remain open in my definition of both terms to allow for the participants to define each, respectively, as the terms become significant to each woman differently.

⁵ Here, 'government' refers to three levels of government in Canada's federal system. I am especially concerned with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the ten provincial ministries of Citizenship and Immigration, and individual municipalities across Canada.

analysis of the three interviews, I argue that because a universal (queer) promise of immigrant belonging is based on a universal (queer) subject, 'Other' bodies of racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants are rendered marginalized, impossible and unintelligible in mainstream and queer spaces. As a result, spaces of belonging for a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant are limited, contradictory, and conditional.

1.2 Positioning

Before continuing, I wish to acknowledge my race and class privilege as a white middle-class lesbian who was born in Toronto. Despite sharing some possible commonalities with the participants with respect to sexually queer identities and gender, I acknowledge that my race and class privilege means that there are a variety of significant differences and power relationships that my participants and I negotiate. A necessary aspect of this paper is recognizing where my race and class privilege causes opposition or defensiveness towards the knowledge of each woman as I position the paper to situate each woman's knowledge at the centre of the analysis (Britzman 2000; Haraway 1991a; Harding 1993). For these reasons, this project is both academic and intensely personal.

1.3 Chapters structured

A structuring of the paper is in order. Chapter 2 is the literature review and is divided into six main sections. The first section of Chapter 2 establishes the paper's four main research objectives. The second section of Chapter 2 presents the three foundational theoretical perspectives that I employ: critical queer, critical post-colonial feminism and critical whiteness. The third section of the literature review reconsiders discursive articulations of promise in immigration literature, and in theories of queer migration. The fourth section of the literature review explores the notion of identity and identity formation. Drawing on Butler's (1997b) notion of "performativity" (p. 146) and Goffman's (1959) metaphor of the stage as a place where identities are rehearsed, I review how identities are performed and constructed for and by another. Further, I review how this process of performing serves to marginalize 'Othered' identities in every day life. The fifth section of the literature review illustrates the character and

image of the universal (queer) subject and how a universal (queer) subject renders racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants marginalized, impossible and unintelligible to mainstream society, as well as in queer spaces. This fifth section is divided into two subsections. In the first subsection, I demonstrate who the universal subject is, and how this privileged subject creates notions of the so-called good immigrant and the so-called loyal heterosexual capitalist male. In the second subsection, I argue that a universal queer subject who can “mimic” (Lahiri 2003 p. 409) or replicate characteristics of a universal subject, renders other possibilities for queer marginalized, impossible or unintelligible. The final section reviews notions of lesbian belonging. While studies demonstrate that lesbians/queer women often find belonging in private/hidden spaces, I argue, with Ahmed (2010a; 2006b), that visibility and recognition in public spaces matters for racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants. Chapter 3 presents the methods of recruitment and participant engagement. This chapter illustrates how I used a snowball method of recruitment to find participants to join the study. The chapter also demonstrates how and why I employed a reflexive approach when analyzing each interview. Chapter 4 is the analysis. The section is divided into four sections. The first section presents a brief introduction to each of the three women who I call: Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, respectively. The next three sections allow me to engage with each participant individually in a reflexive manner. I conclude with where future research on racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants can go, and why queering public policy remains a significant goal for critical queer theorists.

2.1 Research objectives

This paper has four main research objectives. By presenting the paper's objectives, I do not suggest that my paper will pin down concrete answers once I reach the Conclusion. Rather, following the unstable and fluid nature of each woman's sense of belonging, I use these objectives as guidelines while I review the literature and when I engage with each woman and her stories. The first objective is beginning the conversation in the literature on the experiences of racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants living in Toronto. The second objective is demonstrating how the persistence of a universal (queer) subject affects spaces for belonging and visibility for racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants living in Toronto. The third objective of the paper is challenging Toronto as a space for immigrants, and as a space for queer bodies. The final objective of this paper is interrogating heteronormativity and universality by placing the knowledge of each of the three women at the centre of this paper's analysis. To work towards these objectives, it is necessary to establish my theoretical approach.

2.2 Theoretical approaches considered

My theoretical approach bridges complimentary aspects of critical queer, critical postcolonial feminism, and critical whiteness as each interrogates heteronormativity and the universality of particular subject positions. I also employ aspects of all three approaches as each engages with the messy, queer and contradictory lives of the three racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants I interviewed for this study. A brief review of how I apply each theoretical approach follows.

i. Critical queer theory

In this paper, I engage with critical queer theory for its ability to question the inherent heteronormativity in public policy and society that serves to undermine multiple forms of difference and (non)citizenship status, regardless of sexuality (Eves 2004; Luibhéid 2008;

Manasalan 2006; Moreton-Robinson 2003; A. Smith 2010). Since the work of queer theory often rejects the heteronormative and neo-colonial approaches of Western knowledge, as well as international and domestic liberal-democratic policies, queer theory is also interested in interrogating how scholars and students come to understand what is produced as knowledge or truth (Benson-Allott 2008; Browne & Nash 2010). Queer theory is useful, as Luibhéid (2008) articulates, for critiquing and “decentering...developmental narratives” (p. 173), or narratives that reproduce the universal (queer) subject’s “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991) of marginalization and exclusion. I also engage with critical queer theory because it questions the often un-interrogated assumption that “culture, community, nation, race, identity, settlement” are static formations or locations (Luibhéid 2008 p. 173). As a result, critical queer theory shows instead, how such constructions are fluid, dynamic, and yet bound by heteronormative expectations. Similarly, queer theory questions the role of the nation-state by implicating it as an agent of heteropatriarchy, rather than a passive by-stander. Benson-Allott (2008) argues that, “the state [is seen] not merely as an abstract notion or disembodied law, but an implied protagonist” (p. 443). While questioning knowledge production and the role of the state, critical queer theory offers a repositioning of real and abstract borders and space from private to public spheres on a variety of scales (Fortier 2003; Gedalof 2003; Gopinath 2003; Jennings 2010; Luibhéid 2008; Manasalan 2006; Morley 2008; Moreton-Robinson 2003; Puar 2002; Phelan 1997; A. Smith 2010).

With its interest in these real and imagined spaces, as well as the bodies that regulate and police them, critical queer theory has become increasingly important in challenging transnational migration, globalization, and (non)citizenship studies (Ahmed 2010a; Fortier 2003; Gedalof 2003; Gopinath 2003; Jennings 2010; Luibhéid 2008; Manasalan 2006; Morley 2008; Moreton-Robinson 2003; Puar 2002; A. Smith 2010). Since at least the 1990s, queer migration scholarship, or theories of queer migration, has increasingly interrogated the politics of global migration. As Luibhéid (2008) argues: “queer migration scholarship insists on recovering, theorizing, and valourizing histories and subjects that have been largely rendered invisible, unintelligible, and unspeakable” (p. 171). In this way, scholars may reflect on how a variety of bodies are often isolated from mainstream and queer spaces as the universal (queer) subject performs his regulatory and policing function on ‘Others’. Along with critical queer theory, I also find several concepts from critical post-colonial feminism useful.

ii. Critical post-colonial feminism

While I do not intend to undermine the contributions of critical queer theory, I suggest that additional perspectives must be simultaneously considered. By suggesting that alternatives be concomitantly considered, I do not intend to suggest that we are in a post-queer, post-heteronormative, or post-homophobic world. Instead, I present critical postcolonial feminism in tandem with critical queer theory as each bridges necessary scholarly concepts in this paper. I am particularly interested in a post-colonial feminist approach for its critiques of global power relations and the inequalities in which so-called First World women implicate so-called Third World (migrant) women. In other words, critical post-colonial feminism acknowledges that policies that address white First World women may not address the needs of another woman because of differing, unbalanced subject positions. Critical post-colonial feminism thus concerns itself with bridging these divides, admitting where bridges may not be built, and acknowledging differences (Lourde in Tong 2009). Additionally, I am interested in critical post-colonial feminism since it often includes an interrogation of power relationships that are reinforced by neo-colonial projects such as global markets, international corporations, and national policies that regulate and police transnational migration and (non)citizenship status (Brysk & Shafir 2004; Mayo 2005; Statsiulis & Bakan 2005). It also includes an examination of the neo-colonial process of knowledge production. Therefore, I am interested in a critical post-colonial feminist approach since it informs scholars—often First World feminists—how to begin to legitimize the experiences of bodies that are marginalized. Such an approach also guides scholars in how to begin to conduct a reflexive analysis in an anti-oppressive, and anti-colonial manner. A final point of interest as it concerns this project, is that critical post-colonial feminism is interested in beginning to build solidarity across geographical and discursive knowledge divides.

As Tong (2009) argues, critical post-colonial feminism is about making “the local, global and the global, local” (p. 216). Furthering such a critical approach, I follow the caution of a local-global/global-local focus from Gingra and Tiro (2008) in order to, “acknowledge the risk for exploiting the Other in our longing for connection...[and to work toward an] anti-colonial intervention that attends to inarticulate spaces, subjectivities, and myriad contradictions” (p. 376). In other words, it is necessary to situate each woman’s knowledge (Haraway 1988b; Harding 1993) at the centre of the analysis. Therefore I ask: what may it look like in my

research, to work toward an anti-colonial intervention that is aware of racialization and white privilege? How can we learn across the real and imagined borders of difference and marginalization that critical post-colonial (lesbian) feminists are concerned with?

iii. Positionality, revisited

To work toward such an approach means that a necessary aspect of this paper is outlining how I, as a white Toronto-born lesbian approach and justify my discussion of racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants living in Toronto. How do I demonstrate that I am beginning to work in an anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive framework to justify speaking about racialized women? Following Hoy's (2001) question, "What's a white [woman] like me doing in a place like this?" (in Blyth 2008 p. 64), I wonder with Patai (1991) how to, "write about the oppressed without becoming one of the oppressors" (in Black 2009 p. 10).⁶ I am, following Britzman (2000), concerned with, "what it means for the learner to encounter and engage with the experience of another" (p. 30). In other words, I am interested in how scholars and students must approach research and knowledge production that engages with another in a way that does not re-appropriate knowledge back into the hands of white bodies and instead, give voice to those who are marginalized (Harding 1993) by heteropatriarchy, homophobia, neo-colonialism, sexism, or racialization. Along with "situating knowledge" (Haraway 1991a p. 187; Harding 1993), I recognize that I must work through my presumptions and opposition toward another's experiences (Britzman 2000; Levine-Rasky 2010). This means working through "difficult knowledge" (Britzman 2000 p. 42).

According to Britzman (2000) "difficult knowledge" is,
a knowledge that demands something of the learner and a knowledge of the working through of the defense and the resistance to reorganizing one's ego boundaries in such a way that the original defense encountering the other is not reenacted (p. 42).

Part of remaining aware of and avoiding this reenactment is reflexivity—or relentlessly considering the reactions and resistance I have toward the knowledge of another. Gingra and Tiro's (2008) summary of Gordon (2007) suggests that, "a reflexive turn provokes a conception

⁶ I reject Hoy's use of 'girl'. I am over the age of majority, and therefore, I have edited her claim to identify as a *woman*.

of education that ‘lives the questions’ in order to confront discomfort and work toward an anti-racist and anti-oppressive approaches” (p. 378). To “live the questions” (Gordon in Gingra & Tiro 2008 p. 378), scholars must not feel that the point to knowledge production, or ethnography, is to *get* the experiences of another (Hyttén & Warren 2003). Instead, working through “difficult knowledge” (Britzman 2000 p. 42) is an ongoing process that involves engaging with each subject’s story as an interrogation to normative knowledge and discourse, thereby legitimizing the experiences of another (Harding 1993). With critical queer theory, critical post-colonial feminism, and my approach to my privileged positionality in mind, I turn to address the literature review. The first section reviews the two main promises for queer immigrants to belong once in Toronto.

2.3 Lifting the curtains: discursive articulations of promise: immigrants and queers in Toronto

For the federal Government of Canada, belonging is articulated by the static notion of settlement (see for example, *CIC Annual Report* 2010). The assumption is that immigrants who find employment, and participate in democratic political culture, for example, will arrive and integrate into Canadian society (Biles, Burstein & Frideres 2008). Ensuring this arrival into Canadian society is a significant project for the federal government department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). Instead, an integral component of CICs interests is immigrant integration, or managing how immigrants do once legally in Canada (*CIC Annual Report* 2010). Part of this interest, as set out by the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA)* (2001) in Section (3)(e) of “Objectives and Application” is, “to promote the successful integration of permanent residents into Canada, while recognizing that integration involves mutual obligations for new immigrants and Canadian society” (*IRPA* 2001, Online). CICs approach to integration is meant to place a mutual responsibility on the state and society to achieve integration and offer a distinctly different approach from previous paternalistic assimilation policies (Li 2003). These so-called mutual responsibilities are popularly referred to in policy and in scholarship as the “two-way street” approach (Biles, Burstein & Frideres 2008 p. 4; Sweetman & Warman 2008 p. 30), or the “two-way process of accommodation” (Li 2003 p. 50), where both immigrants and all three levels of government—federal, provincial, municipal—must work equally for immigrant

integration to occur. According to Biles, Burstein and Frideres (2008), Canada has turned the so-called,

integration of newcomers into a societal endeavour...where both immigrants, [government], and current citizens are expected to adapt to each other, to ensure positive outcomes for everyone in the social, cultural, economic, and political spheres (p. 4)

The two-way street approach is presented as an assurance that, with a little work, the promise that immigrants in Canada settle will be met. But has this societal endeavour translated into lived “positive outcomes” (Biles, Burstein, & Frideres 2008 p. 4) for a variety of immigrant bodies? What immigrant body is this promise based on? Further, how do we define these spheres and what is expected, or promised within them? Where might a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant be implicated in this promise to belong?

The notion that North American cities are sites where a variety of identities—including sexually queer identities—may be negotiated (Bailey 1999; Bondi 2006) challenges the claim that an intersectionality of immigrant identities are disregarded in a Canadian context. Such a challenge is supported in Canada by *IRPA* (2001), which, in 2001, “expanded the category of individuals,” in the family class who can immigrate or be sponsored for permanent residency to Canada to three categories of same-sex relationships: spouses, common-law partners, or conjugal partners (LaViolette 2004 p. 984). Another policy benefit for same-sex partners who are citizens or permanent residents of Canada is the right to legally marry in a civil union. In 2005, Bill C-38, *The Civil Marriage Act* (2005), extended the definition of marriage in Canada to include same-sex conjugal relationships (Bill C-38, Online 2005). Both the *IRPA* (2001) and the *Civil Marriage Act* (2005), create, at the very least, an environment of legal tolerance for same-sex relationships and queer bodies in Canada, and challenges the notion that an intersectionality of immigrant identities are not recognized in Canada.

Such a challenge is also implicitly supported by theories of queer migration, or the promise (Ahmed 2010a) that sexually queer bodies will *move out* of an oppressive family home to ‘come out’ in an urban North American queer homeland (Cant 1997; Eng 1997; Sinfield 1996; Watney 1995); it is here that a so-called true queer self is supposedly recognizable by others and the self (Cant 1997). And while all three racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants who participated in this study describe incidences of *moving out to ‘come out’* while searching for “liveable” (Butler 2004 p. 1) spaces in Toronto, each of their varied articulations do not follow a

singular and homogenized path that is implied in this so-called original trajectory. This brings into question the promise embedded in *moving out to 'come out'* that suggests that all queer bodies will belong in the public space of a diverse and cosmopolitan urban queer community (Cant 1997; Eng 1997; Sinfield 1996; Watney 1995). With challenges to the promise to belong in both mainstream and queer spaces, what (im)possibilities does this create for belonging as a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant living in Toronto? What spaces, if any, can a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant negotiate to belong in after migrating? With the curtains raised, we may begin to further consider who lives this promise, and who is often conditional and cast out.

2.4 Identities, audience members and blocked performances

To begin to address these questions, contextualizing notions of identity and identity formation is necessary. These contextualizations are necessary to understand the possibilities of a universal (queer) subject, as well as understanding why a universal (queer) subject is *seen* and another is often *not seen* in public policy, discourse, community, and culture. First, it is crucial to acknowledge that 'identity' is a concept that is not readily defined by a singular definition. Although an easily agreed upon meaning of identity does not exist, scholars from a variety of academic disciplines and epistemologies tend to generally concede that identities may be understood as socially constructed, relational or comparative, contextual in nature, and constantly negotiated (see for example, Ahmed 2010a & 2006b; Applebaum 2004; Butler 2004a, 1997b, & 1990c; Eves 2004; Foucault 1977; Gingra & Tiro 2008; Goffman 1959; Gopinath 2003; Kzyanowski & Wodak 2007; Norquay 2010; Podmore 2001; Puar & Rai 2004; Schick 2010; Shahsiah 2006). Conceptualizations of identity must reject static and concrete characterizations; instead, such conceptualizations must be thought of as an always changing and "ambiguous process" (Schick 2010). But these notions and characteristics alone may not help us address how the many challenges that racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants encounter may affect feelings or spaces of belonging. Therefore, it is also important to recognize the distinction between identity and the uneven struggle in the process of identity formation (Butler 2004a & 1990c; Kzyanowski & Wodak 2007; Lacan 1977; Shahsiah 2006; Schick 2010).

If identity is a fluid, unstable concept, we may also see the process of identity formation as a constantly negotiated, always changing endeavour. But this endeavour is bound in the uneven politics of identity, which relies on the real and imagined interpretation of the so-called differences of another. Butler's (2004a) writing on how gender identity is imagined, contested, and performed in relation to the "something that is considered different" (p. 3) is crucial to theorizing the politics of identity formation. For Butler, (2004a) "[o]ne is always 'doing' with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary" (p. 1). As Shahsiah (2006) states, identity formation, "cannot occur in isolation and can only be known and understood when contrasted to, or pitted against something that is different" (p. 3). This "doing" for another is the essence of Butler's (1990c) notion of "performativity" (p. 146). Here, Butler (1990c) argues that instead of identities being natural articulations of a self, identities are representations of a performance that is simultaneously *done* for a real or imagined audience. In this notion of "performativity" (Butler 1990c p. 146), there is little to no agency for a variety of bodies to negotiate identity *outside* heteronormative societal norms and expectations. Summarizing Butler (1990c), Applebaum (2004), notes that, "[p]erformativity...is not voluntaristic but is a "forced reiteration of norms" that brings into being or enacts gender identity upon the body" (p. 64). In this way, the identity formation of bodies who deviate from the universal (queer) subject are especially controlled and constantly watched by a real or imagined audience (Foucault 1977).

Here, Goffman's (1959) earlier theorizations of acting as a metaphor for identity formation in every day life are also useful. According to Goffman (1959), identities are rehearsed on a so-called back stage where the audience members—real or imagined—cannot see the so-called mistakes or imperfections made by the actors. These so-called mistakes or imperfections may be understood as actions or identities that deviate from heteronormativity/universality's societal expectations. These deviations render such bodies as marginalized, or even unintelligible and invisible (Puar & Rai 2004). For Goffman (1959), it is not until these actors perform on a front or a main stage, where an audience who performs normative social expectations of heteronormativity, loyalty and whiteness, gazes upon and reviews the actors. In Goffman's (1959) performatory conceptualization of identity formation, we are of course reminded of Butler's (1990c) notion of "performativity" (p. 146). However, for Butler (1990c), it seems that there is no back stage on which to rehearse as Goffman (1959) suggests. Instead, for Butler (1990c), actors perform identities immediately within, and aware of, public viewing and social

norms. Identities are always performed without the privilege of a private space in which to rehearse. For Butler (1990c) performing identity is, “without one’s willing,” and always “within a scene of constraint” (p. 1). And these power relationships have practical implications beyond the metaphorical stage and theatre.

The performance continues outside of the theatre in what may be loosely identified as the politics of identity; and the politics of identity is central to analyzing the experiences of belonging of racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants living in Toronto. Especially significant in the process of identity formation and the politics of identity is the role of the state. Here, the state is not the equal bearer of promise to all; instead, the state is a protagonist in reinforcing unbalanced power relations (Benson-Allot 2008). In the politics of identity, “the state exercises considerable power” (Abu-Laban & Gabriel 2002 p. 13). This power often shapes identity and discourse for the neo-colonial project of creating spaces or imagined communities (Anderson 1991), while marginalizing and disregarding and excluding individuals who do not perform *right* (Abu-Laban & Gabriel 2002; Butler 1990c). As a result, the role of the state cannot be underestimated. For Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002), “when it comes to the politics of identity, the state is a key player in determining which identities and identity claims are taken into account and how they are represented in actions or policy, and conversely which ones are downplayed or even ignored” (p. 14). Here, we see how the promise to belong then, may be awarded to some, but not all. The politics of identity may also be implicitly maintained to reinforce and remind bodies of their so-called place in nation, society, community, or home. According to Butler (1990c) who is summarized by Applebaum (2004), “ascribed categories of identity, such as ‘girl,’ ‘homosexual,’ and ‘delinquent,’ establish not only a sense of what the body is but also ‘its ‘location’ in terms of prevailing cultural coordinates” (p. 63). In this case, the so-called ‘Other’ actor remains in a marginalized location, constantly influenced and interpreted by the audience’s so-called “gaze from nowhere” (Haraway 1991a p. 187), and often rendered invisible or unintelligible. This “gaze from nowhere” (Haraway 1988b p. 187) can be understood as a ubiquitous and influential, yet abstract and underserved (re)empowerment of a few, with the effect of marginalizing many.

Through the politics of identity, or power relationships of difference, the roles of marginalized actors are blocked as they would be for a formal performance, so that privileged and empowered bodies in the front row audience may continue to interpret and project the actor

further into unintelligibility (Ahmed 2006b; Puar & Rai 2004) with its “gaze from nowhere” (Haraway 1991a p. 187). These blocked roles offer little room for difference from the ideal body of the universal (queer) subject, or for the negotiation of marginalized identities such as a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant. But who is the privileged body that perceives of these “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991) and performances of inclusion and exclusion? With the metaphors of the theatre aside, how can we understand the materialization of these relations in every day life? How may the politics of identity interpret, implicate, or disregard racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants living in Toronto?

2.5 Front row seats and queer replications: universal subject and universal queer subject

i. Front row seats: the universal subject

The privileged body that holds the freedom to watch and imagine the community, and who is recognized in public policy, discourse, community, and culture is the universal subject. This body, or notion, who is at once everywhere and nowhere, is recognized as a white upper – middle class male who is heterosexual (Ahmed 2010a; Kinsman 2001; Myers 2010; Puar 2002). Here, it is crucial to note that this universal subject is an abstract ideal type whose body is the starting point for most Western liberal-democratic policy, discourse, community, and culture. The notion does not refer to all middle-upper class heterosexual white men, and is not meant to be an essentialization; instead, the universal subject refers to a categorical body, empowered by public policy, discourse, community, and culture. At the same time, we cannot diminish the performative power that this body has in discourse, policy, culture, and community (Butler 2004a; 1990c; Myers 2010). This subject *is* the privileged subject in every day life, knowledge (Haraway 1988b; Myers 2010) and political recognition (Abu-Laban & Gabriel 2002; Puar 2002; M. Smith 2007). Returning to the metaphor of the theatre, the universal subject *is* the front row audience that can cast its “gaze from nowhere” upon bodies/actors it interprets and recognizes as ‘Others’ (Haraway 1991a p. 187). When borrowing from Ahmed’s (2010a) theorizations of the promise of happiness, we see that these unbalanced identity interpretations and formations materialize in the form of granting the “good life” (Ahmed 2010a p. 2) to the universal subject and often implicitly excluding those do not fit this profile—for example, the profile of racialized

lesbian/queer women immigrants. Ahmed (2010a) argues that, “understanding the role of happiness in imperial history gives us a lens through which to consider the relationship between happiness, nationhood, and citizenship” (p. 133). In other words, the universal subject, privileged in capital, mobility, and political recognition, is recognized and granted the promise of happiness while all ‘Others’ perform in an attempt to move close to happiness that the nation promises (Ahmed 2006b).

As seen from the discussion on identity and identity formation, the self, or Butler’s (2004a) “I”, is dependent on how the self is shaped by dominant cultures and discourses (p. 3). So the body of the racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant is marginally shaped and made perverse in several ways. Part of these perversions or impossibilities is the result of being a migrant body. With respect to migrant bodies, the discourse makes a so-called good (heterosexually reproductive) migrant part of the imagined community, while the so-called bad migrant is perceived as deviant or criminal (Puar & Rai 2004). Paradoxically, the exclusive nature of imagined communities tends to project the bodies of so-called bad immigrants as queer for being ‘Other’ (Capello 1996, in Fortier 2003 p. 126), but rarely queer, when appropriately identified, for their sexuality. The immigrant, who is an important part of imagining the national narrative (Bauder 2011), is not seen as sexually queer. To understand why this is the case, I borrow from Ahmed’s (2006b) discussion of the possibility for a queer phenomenology:

what ‘comes into’ view, or what is within our horizon, is not a matter simply of what we find here or there, or even where we find ourselves as we move here or there. What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations that we have already taken. Some objects don’t even become objects of perception, as the body does not move toward them: they are ‘beyond the horizon’ of the body, and thus out of reach. The surfaces of bodies are shaped by what is reachable. Indeed, the history of bodies can be rewritten as the history of the reachable (p. 55).

In other words, because Western knowledge has created the possibility for a universal queer subject that excludes the identity of those who are not white, we are not led to seeing the possibility of a queer post-colonial body. Therefore, even within queer discourse, queer post-colonial migrants are rendered perverse, if not invisible. As a result, Western knowledge, including notions of queer, must be problematized to see intersections of plurality in queer bodies.

But this privilege is not just about happiness. It is also about political recognition. In other words, many from this so-called front-row audience decide what performances are acceptable, and even, which ones are (in)visible. Reifying the power of its discourses, policy, culture and community, the universal subject watches the so-called deviant 'Other' who is in need of correction (Downes & Rock 2003). This is especially evident in a post-9/11 era where the policing of Muslim and South East Asian bodies are an often ubiquitous act carried out by North American and Western European governments, media and citizens (Falk 2004; Kaplan 2003; Morley 2008; Puar & Rai 2004). It also casts out 'Other' bodies including, queers, so-called bad immigrants, black bodies, or an 'Other' with an accent. Here, I borrow from Foucault's (1977) notion of the panopticon to demonstrate how pervasive the gaze on 'Others' is from the abstract notion of the universal subject: "The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. A central point would be both a source for light illuminating everything and a locus of convenience for everything that must be known" (p. 173). The universal subject's privileged profile, imaginings, and recognition in policy makes 'Others' *outside* of the promise of happiness, but nonetheless, observable, as in Foucault's panopticon. With this profile and privilege in mind, what role is left for sexually queer immigrant bodies?

ii. The walls are covered with mirrors: the universal queer subject

The above arguments lead us to understand how the gaze and the privilege of the universal subject can marginalize the so-called deviant queer (Downes & Rock 2003). Since the queer body is perceived to deviate from the imaginings of the universal subject's heterosexual nation by way of its 'unnatural' homosexuality, so-called rejection of so-called normal family values and the perceived inability to reproduce bodies, heteronormativity, and loyalty, the universal subject renders the queer body as a marginalized body (Adams 2004). However, despite this so-called deviation from the universal subject, a queer replication may be forming. In other words, a universal subject may be performing acts of what Lahiri (2003) identifies as "passing" or "mimicry", which is "usually motivated by a desire to shed the identity of an oppressed group to gain access to social and economic opportunities" (p. 411). Such performances, according to Lahiri (2003) are employed, "to gain inclusion into the diverse

imperial and national spaces of the West” (p. 409). I would add, more specifically, that a universal queer subject attempts to “pass” and “mimic” (Lahiri 2003 p. 409) in order to negotiate space and recognition in public policy, discourse, community, and culture of white middle-class heteronormativity. However, before exploring the notion of a universal queer subject, I want to emphasize that continued discrimination and homophobia toward white gay men persists and that the struggle is far from over. The visibility of white gay men is still rejected, questioned, and challenged by heterosexual backlash. To become complacent in the struggle for white gay male rights is not what this paper suggests. Instead, the paper aims to show how a universal queer subject, following the logic of the universal subject, emerges to dominate political recognition, discourse, culture, and community within and outside of *queer* (Bérubé 2007; Gopinath 2003; Kerr 2007; Kinsman 2001; Puar 2002; Wahab & Plaza 2009).

Aside from sexuality, the universal queer subject performs or mimics a similar profile as the universal subject. The universal queer subject that holds such privilege is a white middle-upper class, able, homosexual male whose recognition simultaneously renders other possibilities for queer—racialized, female, immigrant—for example, unintelligible. A universal queer subject marginalizes the body of a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant for example, by adhering to the same knowledge that can cast queer as deviant. The queer body is, “one that is increasingly relational, centered upon the (public) good gay couple, rather than the private ‘sexual actor’” (Casey, McLaughlin & Richardson 2004 p.388). This good gay couple that is seen outside of, and in the queer community is a white gay male. This subject is reinforced through popular culture. TV shows including MTV Canada’s *1 Girl, 5 Gays*, or CBC’s, *Stephen & Chris*, reify a universal queer subject through his visibility in popular public spaces. The absence of ‘out’ lesbians/queer women in such popular contexts further reifies this privileged presence and the marginalization and impossibilities for being an ‘out’ lesbian/queer woman. In other words, it matters *who we see* and *how we come to see him*.

The intelligibility of a so-called good public queer creates the conditions of (im)possibility and unintelligibility of racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants, keeping such bodies from view and from the promise to belong. But how does this happen? Indeed, critical race theorists like Bérubé (2007) wonder, “how gay gets white and how it stays that way” (p. 363). How did queer become a male category, excluding women, bisexual bodies, and transgendered bodies, for example? To begin to approach this question, I turn to Ahmed (2006b)

who argues that, “it matters how we arrive at the places we do” (p. 2). We can arrive at a universal queer subject, since his white-male, capitalist profile allows the queer to follow the orientation, or straight/heterosexual path of the universal subject. Borrowing an example from queer activism and queer theatre in Canada, Kerr (2007) demonstrates the process of how a queer universal subject is made possible whereby the notion of the Queer Nation reinstates “the dominant social structures, lending its power to those who are already invested in the system, with the exception of their sexual identification” (p. xviii). By way of his race and his class, a white middle-class gay male remains “invested” (Kerr 2007 p. xviii) and “oriented” (Ahmed 2006b p.2) similarly to a white middle-class heterosexual male. Accordingly, regardless of his sexual orientation, a white middle-class male often remains representative in public policy and discourse.

Revisiting Lahiri’s (2003) historical considerations of performing identity to “mimic” (p. 409), or replicate the heteronormative profile and community, it could be argued that the queer universal subject is possible since white gay men can gain political recognition in their ability to mimic the universal subject and “pass” (Lahiri 2003 p. 409) into varying scales of imagined communities of the neo-colonialist body. According to Alexander (1997), one of the most powerful tools that creates this condition of possibility is capital accumulation, or marketplace power: a universal queer is possible because, “white gay capital follows the logic of white heterosexual capital” (in Puar 2002 p. 935). Borrowing from Ahmed (2006b), we see that, despite sexual orientation, the white gay male has the so-called *correct* orientation towards the imperialist rationality of the universal subject. According to Ahmed (2006b) orientation matters:

Bodies...acquire orientation through the repetitions of some actions over others, as actions that have certain ‘objects’ in view...[such as] ideal objects that one identifies with. The nearness of such objects, their availability within my bodily horizon is not casual *it is not just that I find them there, like that*. Rather, the nearness of such objects is a sign of an orientation I have already taken toward the world as an orientation that shapes what we call, inadequately, ‘character’ (p. 58).

If the object is capital, and the white queer male follows it toward the universal subject, then no matter how ‘queer’ is used in scholarship or in activism, it is not re-situating recognition outside of the normative heterosexual Western discourses that excludes all ‘Others’ in the process. With the significant absence of such interrogations in queer studies, a universal subject who is out and about in the market, community, culture, and policy becomes possible, while rendering all other

possibilities for queer marginalized, impossible, or invisible. This is problematic when we later reflect on both the above discussion of identity and identity formation as well as the experiences of the three women who participated in this study insofar as the presence of a universal queer subject leaves little room for marginalized or invisible bodies such as Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren to negotiate identities and belonging in Toronto.

What might this mean for a sexually queer immigrant body? Indeed, as seen from the discussion on identity and identity formation, the self, or Butler's (2004a) "I", is dependent on how the self is shaped by dominant cultures and discourses (p. 3). So the body of the queer post-colonial migrant is marginally shaped and made perverse in several ways. Indeed, part of these perversions or impossibilities results from being a migrant body. With respect to migrant bodies, the discourse makes a so-called good (heterosexually reproductive) migrant part of the imagined community, while the so-called bad migrant is perceived as deviant or criminal (Puar & Rai 2004). Paradoxically, the exclusive nature of imagined communities tends to project the bodies of so-called bad immigrants as queer for being 'Other' (Capello 1996, in Fortier 2003 p. 126), but rarely queer, when appropriately identified, for their sexuality. The immigrant, who is an important part of imagining the national narrative (Bauder 2011), is not seen as sexually queer. To understand why this is the case, I borrow from Ahmed's (2006b) discussion of the possibility for a queer phenomenology:

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In other words, because Western knowledge has created the possibility for a universal queer subject that excludes the identity of those who are not white, we are not led to seeing the possibility of a queer post-colonial body. Therefore, even within queer discourse, queer post-colonial migrants are rendered perverse, if not invisible. As a result, Western knowledge, including notions of queer, must be problematized to see intersections of plurality in queer bodies. With these roles in place, what spaces are left for a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant to negotiate belonging in Toronto?

2.6 Lesbian belonging: limited, contradictory, conditional

Scholars of lesbian belonging including Jay (1997), Podmore (2001), and Stein (2000), for example, are critical of the notion that to be *seen* is to belong and *exist* for a lesbian/queer woman. The focus of queer bodies needing to find space to recognize sexuality is questioned through an understanding that often, many lesbians/queer women find spaces to belong in hidden or private spaces (Jay 1997; Podmore 2001; Stein 2000), away from the so-called “centre of gay life” in the queer community (Nash in Goldie 2001 p. 235). For at least Jay (1997), Podmore (2001), and Stein (2000), repositioning our understanding of belonging and space to recognize the legitimacy of finding space in private or hidden spheres is necessary to capture the social realities of where lesbians/queer woman often find spaces to belong. For racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants the city is a space to challenge heteronormativity, but not yet be liberated (Bondi 2006) from its gaze completely. Therefore, the city spaces/queer community as a cosmopolitan community where a variety of queer identities can fit in with ease (Cant 1997) is challenged. Regardless of the continued oppressive landscape in queer community that lesbian/queer women are often marginalized or excluded from the dispersed homes, businesses, and public social settings are significant emotional spaces of belonging. Podmore’s (2001) study of lesbian belonging on Montreal’s Boulevard St. Laurent demonstrates that lesbians are not amalgamated or ghettoized into an easily identified collective space of queer belonging. Instead, lesbians are often dispersed through a variety of hidden spaces and neighbourhoods outside of the so-called gay community (Nash in Goldie 2001).

At least for Jay (1997), Podmore (2001), and Stein (2000), a focus on territorially to define the existence and spaces of belonging encourages bodies to be confined to a singular identity. It is a 2D queer identity who lives and exists only in queer spaces. While all three participants in this study found a variety of spaces, that were hidden and away from public viewing, visibility in queer spaces remained important to all three. Although different for each woman, being visible, or recognized as sexually queer in queer spaces such as Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, or The 519 Community Centre, mattered for having a sense of belonging in queer spaces. Without visibility or recognition in these spaces, a sense of belonging was challenged for each woman. While belonging in private spaces is a reality and a source of pride for all three women, isolation from public spaces that one desires to belong in is also a reality. While

considering the spaces of belonging that can be recognized in private spaces, it is also necessary to continue to interrogate why a body that deviates from the universal queer subject is often still unintelligible once *in* queer spaces, and why her belonging to it is conditional, limited, and impossible. Considering the three participants here, it is also necessary to understand how race, age, immigrant identity, 'Other' accents, and family expectations mediate and limit public—and private—spaces that are available for belonging.

The focus on pinning lesbian/queer woman belonging to a single and supposedly homogeneous territory presumes that to be *gay* is to be *seen* at Church and Wellesley. Even though there are real and imagined spaces beyond these limits where racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants negotiated spaces for belonging, visibility in the queer community, and out of hidden spaces still matters. And this visibility matters because it tells us who can arrive or reach the promise to belong and who cannot. As well, visibility in public spaces tells us whose needs will be recognized in discourse and in policy and whose will be marginalized. Visibility and orientations toward a universal queer subject is why we recognize a white gay male, and we do not often recognize other possibilities including a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant. And as Eves (2004) argues, "visibility is one of the primary ways in which lesbian space is constructed and is part of a claim for recognition." (p. 492). For Eves (2004), visibility "is a key site in establishing...a claim to rights" (p. 492).

Before turning to Chapter 3, I wish to offer an overview of how I intend to refer to queer spaces in this paper. Here, I also offer an overview of the myriad possibilities of what queer spaces might *be* or *look like*—at least for Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren. When I speak of queer spaces in this paper, I am not referring to a single geographic location or area, such as a "centre of queer life" (Nash in Goldie 2001 p. 235) in the so-called gay village. Rather I intend, along with Jay (1997), Podmore (2001), and Stein (2000), to leave notions of belonging in queer space open to possibilities beyond the so-called gay village. Accordingly, we might be able to see queer spaces of belonging that are "hidden" (Podmore 2001 p. 333) from being immediately intelligible to policy makers, researchers, mainstream society, or a universal (queer) subject. In other words, by leaving notions of queer space open to a myriad of possibilities, we may be able to *see* or *recognize* queer spaces of belonging that are not within the so-called gay community where it is presumed that all queer bodies will necessarily belong (see for example, Cant 1997).

When I reflect on the queer spaces of belonging that are found in the stories of Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, a number of different possibilities are recognized. For one, my analysis of Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren will demonstrate that in Toronto, there are physical spaces of queer belonging outside of the so-called gay village. Borrowing from Podmore (2001), lesbian/queer women spaces might be found in domestic spaces of the private family home, or with a circle of friends. Other physical spaces of belonging for lesbian/queer women, according to Podmore (2001), can be found in a coffee shop, or another neighbourhood that is not the so-called gay village. These possibilities are not exhaustive. My understanding of Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren's experiences suggests that what might make a space a *queer space* is the atmosphere or environment that challenges heteronormativity to provide a sense of being accepted for her so-called differences and allowing her to feel like she can negotiate belonging. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that physical spaces of belonging might also be found in what is considered a space of the gay community including a queer pub, queer theatre, or queer event such as Pride Week's Dyke March. However, at least for Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, the sense of belonging in these spaces, as in others, is not static. Finding belonging involves a constant negotiation of longing and loss, and of a variety of societal and familial expectations (Ahmed 1999c; Ghosh & Wang 2003; Sabra 2008).

The stories from Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren will also demonstrate that spaces of belonging are not necessarily physical spaces. Although differently, queer spaces for Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren are sometimes imaginative spaces. Accordingly, I recognize the possibility at least for the three women, of finding belonging in queer spaces that are imaginative spaces. Such imaginative spaces might be formed in a memory or a longing for a place in the country of origin or for a space in the new county (Capello in Fortier 2003). Additionally, an imaginative space might be a non-geographical sense of belonging in a meaningful relationship with another (see for example, Ghosh & Wang 2003). I also acknowledge the possibility for queer spaces of belonging to be found in various creative representations such as literature where queer identities are represented, and heteronormativity is challenged (Gopinath 2003). Similarly, borrowing from Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, I recognize the possibility of finding queer spaces of belonging in art or music. Another non-geographic possibility that is worth noting is finding queer spaces of belonging in cyber-space. While not specifically referring to queer spaces, Ferreday (2008) acknowledges that online spaces and online interactions create possibilities to find non-

geographic spaces of belonging. These spaces of online belonging might be found in chat rooms, blogs, or Youtube channels, for example. In this paper, I do not suggest that one space to find queer belonging is preferred over another. What I do suggest is, because of the persistence of a universal (queer) subject, queer spaces of belonging – either in the borders of the so-called gay village, or elsewhere – are limited, conditional, and contradictory at least for Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren.

To engage with Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, a one-on-one semi-structured interview, and one short survey were conducted between each participant and myself. I aimed to maintain the confidentiality of each participant. And, while pseudonyms are used to refer to each participant, varying degrees of confidentiality were desired from each of the participants. The women I call Kelly and Michelle preferred for their identities and identifying information such as place of employment, or organizational affiliations to remain anonymous to readers of this study. The woman I call Lauren verbally expressed her comfort with allowing her identity – through her identifying information – to be possibly discernable to readers who may know her. By representing the women’s varying degrees of comfort with confidentiality in the study, I do not suggest that one preference is more valuable than another; rather, each degree of confidentiality is equally valuable. A section reviewing the demographics of each participant, respectively, is offered in the analysis section of the paper in Section 4.1. All interviews were conducted during the summer of 2011. To invite participants to the study, a snowball method of recruitment was used. According to the snowball method of recruitment, colleagues, friends, and relatives provide references to assist in connecting the researcher to potential participants (Neuman 2011; Wahab & Plaza 2009). The snowball method allows researchers to, “get cases using referrals from one or a few cases, and then referrals from those cases and so forth” (Neuman 2011 p. 267). A variety of individuals, personally and professionally known to me, assisted in identifying potential participants for this study. Telephone and e-mail communication was used to create and maintain the snowball. The snowball method is a non-probability sample where, “you do not have to determine the sample size in advance” (Neuman 2011 p. 267). While my own number of participants was not predetermined, I did estimate given the limitations of the paper, including the time permitted to conduct the study that I would interview between three and six women. From my snowball, three women voluntarily came forward to participate.

To participate in the study, each participant had to be 18 years of age or older, currently living in Toronto, and each, in some way, had to currently self-identify as a sexually queer woman who intimately and sexually prefers other women. I aimed to interview women whose voices are not often heard in public policy or discourse. Each of the three women fulfilled these requirements at the time of the interview. Once contact was made between the potential

participant and myself, a letter of invitation was offered, formally inviting the participant to join the study.⁷ When the participant voluntarily confirmed their interest, an interview date was established. Each separate interview was conducted in Toronto at a location that suited the convenience of the participant. These locations varied and included a pub in North York, Ontario, a queer space near Church and Wellesley, and a public library in Toronto's downtown core.⁸ At the time of the interview, each participant voluntarily completed a thirteen-question survey providing background information.⁹ For the interviews, I focused on questions that would elicit responses to what each woman imagined about Toronto before arriving, what promises have been met after living in Toronto for at least ten years, what challenges each encounters, and where each feels like she belongs. Each interview was audio-taped with a voice recorder and took between 35 minutes and 70 minutes to complete, depending on the nature of the participant's answers.

Once all three interviews had been conducted, I transcribed each recording. After transcribing the data, I coded and analyzed each of the three interviews in turn. To do this, I searched for emergent themes and points of interest in each personal narrative. After I coded the data, I reviewed scholarly literature on the concepts of employing a reflexive approach for analyzing qualitative interview data (Gingra & Tiro 2008). According to Ryan & Golden (2006) a reflexive approach, employed often in "standpoint" (Harding 1993) feminist approaches, is an approach that allows the researcher to understand how the researcher and the research participants "actively [participate] in a dynamic of boundary discussions" that reflect the inherent power differences between the researcher and the so-called marginalized participant (p. 1192). Ryan & Golden (2006) also acknowledge that a reflexive approach enables the researcher to engage in "honesty and openness" about the interview and data collection process. The intention of a reflexive approach is locating the "researcher as a participant in the dynamic interrelationship of the research process" (Ryan & Golden 2006 p. 1192). Applying my understanding of Ryan & Golden's (2006) explanation of a reflexive approach in my analysis means that I engage in what could be called a process of *stopping time* in my telling of Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren's stories. Through my own voice, this stopping of time allows me to expose my presumptions of another's knowledge, while also threading the women's knowledge

⁷ Refer to Appendix A: "Letter of Invitation"

⁸ Refer to Appendix B: "Interview Schedule"

⁹ Refer to Appendix C: "Participant Questionnaire"

through theoretical insights and concepts.

I use a reflexive analytical approach because, as Wear (1997) explains, “personal theorizing can be a transformative agent of social change [when it is] woven together with other critical projects that bring to light codified, ritualized, and often unquestioned practices” (in Gingra & Tiro 2008 p. 379). In this approach, I continue to actively engage with each participants’ knowledge as I let the interviews speak to me and guide my analysis. As well, I use a reflexive approach because, as Gingra & Tiro (2008) argue, it allows researchers to, “dwell deeply among the interstices of language and silence, subjectivity and culture, self and Other” (p. 376). A reflexive approach allowed me to situate the each participant’s knowledge at the center of my paper’s analysis by acknowledging the truth and reliability of each individual’s stories (Fish in Huddart 2008; Harding 1993).

I acknowledge that there is a small sample in the study. Wahab and Plaza (2009) note that there is a possibility in studies with a small human sample size to raise questions, for some, of “reliability and validity” (p. 9). However, I disagree with such questions since they tend to discount the knowledge and experiences of Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren. The strength of the interviews lies in the fact that each woman’s experience is given voice to interrogate a universal (queer) subject position, and facilitate the beginning of the conversation on racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants living in Toronto from three diverse points of view.

Before proceeding to the analysis, a comment on the participants who did *not* make it into participating in the study is noteworthy. I originally intended to engage with racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants from only one country of origin. I provide the country of origin for Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren since I was given consent to do so by each; however, I leave the country of origin unnamed for the participants who did *not* participate, because I was not given consent to do so. I acknowledge that there is the possibility to reinforce the unintelligibility of racialized lesbian/queer women from the particular country of origin by leaving it unnamed; however, my decision to leave the country of origin unnamed is an attempt to respect the complex and sensitive reasons that discouraged racialized lesbians/queer women from this country of origin from accepting the invitation to participate. Like Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, the voices of racialized lesbian/queer women from this country of origin are not often heard. Although I made two contacts to link me to participants in this community, participants were hesitant to come forward. I can only speculate about why there was difficulty reaching these

potential participants, but as recent newcomers, the women may understandably lack trust in the inherent power relationships between researcher and subject, especially since I am not from their country of origin. Hesitation may have also been caused by fear of what my affiliations may be with official immigration authorities. Language barriers, length of time in Canada, financial restraints, or the lack of leisure time to set aside for participating in the study may have also created barriers for connecting with lesbian/queer women newcomers from this country of origin. My class and race privilege may have also caused hesitation among women from this country of origin. As a researcher, these circumstances serve as a reminder of the challenges and barriers that racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants encounter in Toronto, as well as a reminder of why this project is necessary.

Following a reflexive analysis approach, I engage with each woman individually, allowing her responses to develop a narrative of how her multiple identities as a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant affects and limits her spaces for belonging in Toronto. My own reflections are threaded throughout each of the women's stories as I re-live the questions and interact with her story. Borrowing from Gingra & Tiro (2008), "these stories are personal and relational, complexly situated in one's hopes, dreams and desires, as well as in our collective aspirations for connection and recognition" (p. 377). As I present each woman's story and my reflections, each woman is given voice and positioned at the center of this paper's analysis.

4.1 Repositioning centre stage: introducing the women

Kelly

At 18 years old, Kelly is the youngest of the three participants. Kelly was born in Pakistan in 1993; however, she rejects the burdens of stating her place of birth due to the cultural assumptions and labels, such as 'Muslim' and 'South Asian' that come with being born in Pakistan. She feels that such labels do not define her and prefers to be recognized as Canadian. Kelly immigrated to Canada with her mother, father, sister, and brother when she was nine years old. Her parents decided to immigrate because of the promise of better educational opportunities in Canada. At the time of the interview, it had been ten years since Kelly immigrated to Canada. Three months prior to the interview, Kelly moved out of her parents' home in Mississauga, Ontario. Kelly currently lives in a shelter in Toronto. Kelly is finishing high school and searching for employment. She has been in a relationship with her girlfriend for seven months.¹⁰ Kelly identifies as a gender queer individual who sexually prefers women.¹¹ Rejecting the label 'lesbian' also for its limiting stereotypes of 'butch', 'lipstick', or 'stud', Kelly often refers to herself as 'gay'.

¹⁰ 'Partner' and 'girlfriend' are used interchangeably in the analysis, depending on the participant's preference. Both words refer to an intimate, sexual partner.

¹¹ I am able to use the pronouns 'her' and 'she' to refer to Kelly here, because while rejecting the category of gender, she does refer to herself in conversation as 'woman' and 'female'.

Michelle

Michelle was born in the early 1960s in Barbados. She was 16 years old when her mother sponsored her to immigrate to Toronto. Michelle was raised by her aunt in Barbados and immigrated to join her mother and stepfather who were already living in Toronto. At the time of the interview, Michelle had been in Canada for 35 years. She currently lives on her own and has stable, full-time employment in the public service. Michelle has not been in a relationship since her five-year relationship ended a year ago. During the interview, religious affiliations or religious expectations were not explicitly or implicitly discussed. She self-identifies as a black female lesbian.

Lauren

Lauren is 25 years old. At the time of the interview she had been living in Canada for 11 years. Lauren was born in Kuwait, and later moved with her mother, father, and sister to Egypt. When she was 15 years old, Lauren immigrated to Mississauga from Cairo, Egypt with her mother, father, and younger sister. Her parents were in search of better educational opportunities for Lauren and her sister. Two years ago, Lauren moved out of her parents' home and now lives in an apartment in Toronto with her partner of five years. Lauren holds an undergraduate degree from an Ontario university and currently works full-time as a theatre technician in Toronto. Lauren self-identifies as a queer Egyptian woman. She also identifies as Muslim.

4.2 “What’s up with all these walls?” narratives and reflections of marginalization, (in)visibility, and belonging

Kelly

Because Kelly was very young when she first arrived in Canada, she does not recall imagining what Mississauga would be like when she arrived. Kelly only remembers worrying about whether or not she would make friends at school or “whether or not I’d be able to connect with people.” In her first few years of elementary school, and on into middle school, Kelly remembers feeling comfortable. She reflects that she was surprised and pleased to be taught to “be herself”. Her middle school in Mississauga offered her more freedom to explore her identity

than she had at school in Pakistan. During middle school, Kelly embraced exploring who she was through her passion for drawing. But high school presented challenges and Kelly remembers that, “a lot of shit happened in high school.” Her difficult time in high school challenges the promise of finding a welcoming space upon arrival.

Before Kelly wondered about her sexual identity to herself, a group of female classmates began isolating Kelly for her presumed sexually queer identity. It began with Kelly’s art. As an artist, Kelly offered a drawing to each of her classmates. She remembers taking pleasure in creating a suitable drawing for each of her classmates and recalls that all of her classmates were eager to have one of her drawings. But one day in grade nine, all of her classmates returned the drawings to Kelly. She had no idea why, but the drawings piled up on her desk throughout the school day. It was not until many months later that Kelly learned why the students returned the drawings: “One of the girls who knew me [better because] she lived in my building said, ‘these girls aren’t talking to you because they think you’re a lesbian.’ And I was like, ‘What? How can you tell?’ Because I used to be a ‘Hijabi.’”

It was not until another judged her performances—and Kelly is still not aware of the so-called clues that her classmates had—that Kelly became aware that something may be different about her with respect to her sexual identity. Butler’s (2004a) notion of “doing for another” (p. 1) has a clear presence in Kelly’s story of isolation from her classmates in high school. Kelly has a difficult time articulating this memory—it is recent in her history and she is still distressed by how difference plays a role in her feelings of belonging.

For Kelly, it was difficult for her to have imagined that she was gay before her classmates accused her of it because she carried a so-called conflicting identity, and conflicting visual identifiers, as a Muslim woman wearing the Hijab: “I went through my high school years not even knowing. Apparently everyone knew—you wouldn’t think somebody in the Hijab was a lesbian! (laughs).”

I pause at this comment for its demonstration of why orientations matter (Ahmed 2006b). Even for Kelly, a Muslim identity could not “orient” (Ahmed 2006b p. 1) with a sexually queer identity. Looking beyond the assumptions of what identities ‘fit’ with a queer identity is challenging even for those who eventually contradict those assumptions, like Kelly.

As Kelly went through high school, her Muslim identity and her sexual identity began to shift. As she began to explore her sexual identity, Kelly felt like she “couldn’t breathe” in her house (Cant 1997) because of its heteronormative expectations, and the impossibilities for exploring her gay identity. Although Kelly tried being Muslim, she eventually felt like it was an

identity that did not fit: “it wasn’t something that was fulfilling me. I felt more like it was hurting me. I wasn’t Muslim.” Despite her disconnection to Islam, Kelly felt it still negatively influenced her life as it guided Kelly’s parents’ expectations of her: “they had this whole idea of where I was going in life and everything. South Asian girl, marries a guy, has babies. But I’m like, I don’t want to have babies—not me! (laughs).” Exploring her gay identity in the heteronormative spaces of her Muslim parents’ home caused Kelly to move out of her parents’ home in the winter of grade twelve:

I decided to move out of my family [home] because I wasn’t doing well in high school. The whole environment felt very threatening to me. I needed an environment where I was accepted and where I can just be myself and not have to worry about hiding things constantly. I use to draw a lot of art and my parents had a big problem with that. I just couldn’t do it.

Many queer bodies find that living in the heteronormative space of the family home is impossible and imprisoning, and that these circumstances will eventually result in having to move out to live so-called a queer identity (Cant 1997; Sinfield 1996; Watney 1995). It is said that queer bodies must be free from the pressures of home to find their voice and create their own histories in a queer community (Cant 1997). Kelly knows that negotiating her sexually queer identity in her parents’ home was impossible:

I moved out of my house because I know my parents wouldn’t be able to deal with [my sexual identity]. I remember I had a really tough time at home. Because I would go on the Internet and I would be like, ‘how do you tell your parents that you are gay, but your parents are over-bearing and over-protective and they have certain cultural identities that they strongly feel about?’

Because of the recent timing of Kelly moving out, our conversation focuses mostly on her identity, rather than other societal factors that regulate and influence her spaces for belonging. Through rejections of labels for her queerness and her colour, Kelly tries to reject how society influences her identity. Butler’s writings remind me of the impossibilities of owning what is written on our bodies by discourse, society, and culture, and Kelly remains aware of the burdens that labels and stereotypes play in her life each day. At the same time, I have a difficult time directing the conversation to societal influences, divisions within queer spaces, or how racism affects and limits spaces of belonging. Although it takes Kelly a while to begin to reflect on the social factors that affect her spaces of belonging, the factors are no less challenging for her to negotiate.

Although Kelly is confident about her decision to move out, she still longs for her parents’ home. Her so-called *moving out to ‘come out’* story challenges the notion of a so-called clean break from the family home. For many queer bodies ‘coming out’ from/in Muslim

families, there is a great sense of being torn between leaving the family home to 'come out', and leaving the community connection of the family (Parmar in Cant 1997 p. 10). Responding to what she misses about home, Kelly reflects on her parents again:

I think the only thing I miss is my parents' love. I don't really know what love is, but I know that at a certain point in my life, I didn't feel it anymore. It just stopped.

Kelly's story also challenges the notion that a queer diaspora assembles in the welcoming promised spaces of a queer community (Cant 1997; Sinfield 1996). For Kelly, her move has dispersed her further from a family community. Summarizing Bhattacharjee (1997), Gopinath (2003) states that:

any transgression on the part of [South Asian] women may result in their literal and symbolic exclusion from the multiple 'homes' which they as immigrant women inhabit: the patriarchal heterosexual household, the extended 'family' [in the] immigrant community, and national spaces (p. 140).

Kelly is caught in between what she is leaving behind in her family home and the spaces she has been unable to negotiate in queer settings. Kelly feels isolated from events and resources in the queer community:

[Toronto's] an ok place to live in. It's not perfect. If you know where to go, if you're the person who finds places, it might be fun, but for me, it's boring. It's very boring because I don't know where to go or if there's a certain program going on.

Kelly also notes how she feels isolated from most 'queer' representation, as she expresses her ideas about *Xtra*:

[To read] *Xtra*, it's like I have to come all the way downtown to get it, so annoying. But I'll pick one up. I'm not a party-person and I feel like [*Xtra*] has a lot of things that I can't relate to. They will have articles though that are very interesting. Articles about books—those are thing that I like more. Or things going on around the city, not just downtown then people can relate to them more.

The effects of her financial situation affect mobility and accessibility to queer resources. As well, with limited money, Kelly cannot, to borrow a term from Lahiri (2003) "mimic" (p. 409) or relate to the men represented on the party pages of Xtra. Her unstable housing condition dislocates her from belonging in these popular queer representations of a wealthy, popular, white gay male with leisure time to fill with drinking and dancing. Yet, Kelly tells me that she often connects more with the gay men she sees on Youtube channels than she does with lesbians/queer women. I struggle to understand what I continue to see as a contradiction. How have the gay men she sees on her Youtube channels elided the universalizing patterns of the men she criticizes in Xtra?

When talking about societal barriers to belonging in queer spaces, Kelly does feel that racism exists. Reflecting on a queer networking conference that she attended earlier in the year in Toronto, she remembers feeling ‘Othered’ and isolated because she is not white. Although the conference was open to all, the whiteness of the conference was central. Often, whiteness “goes without saying,” and remains unquestioned in queer social and activism settings (Bérubé 2007). She feels that because of her brown skin, people were reluctant to connect with her at the conference:

[At the conference] I tried to get to know people. Aside from this one lady who was nice to me, everything helped me to feel uncomfortable. I felt like I didn’t fit in. I think, the fact that I’m not white doesn’t help people. As you grow up it gets tiring to put in all this effort where no one is really recognizing you.

I pause to reflect on Kelly’s wish for a particular way of being recognized. From this comment, I see that she wants to be recognized as “just like everyone else”. It seems to suggest that she wishes she could elide her colour. Based on her rejection of labels and stereotypes, I am sure that she wishes she could also elide her sexuality and gender and simply find a space to belong where the promise to connect people in its interrogation of heteronormativity is met. Kelly reluctantly implies that queer spaces replicate universal patterns of exclusion based on a number of marginalized identities including racialization.

But Kelly is certain that the biases that immigrants have towards individuals of their own communities, and towards others plays a role in the fact immigrants and minority groups have difficulty organizing for visibility. Kelly is confused by the barriers she encounters from the queer community, immigrant communities, and mainstream society:

“It’s like, what’s up with all of these differences? What’s up with all of these walls?”

I sense that Kelly is not fully aware of why white bodies are often better organized in activism. Even in queer activism, white bodies tend to pose the “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1984 p. 81) necessary to be recognized in public policy, discourse, and community. Borrowing from our understanding of the orientations of the universal (queer) subject, white bodies are often able to accumulate cultural capital, while ‘Other’ racialized bodies encounter challenges to accumulating cultural capital (Bartee & Brown 2007 p. 24). Bodies with limited cultural capital by way of an ‘Other’ identity such as a racialized queer for example, are not often recognized in activism or, public policy, discourse, and community. I wonder how Kelly’s perception of the lack of racialized bodies on queer Youtube channels might change as she engages with the knowledge of unbalanced power relationships that allow white bodies to often easily accumulate cultural capital while challenging ‘Other’ bodies to accumulate cultural capital.

Kelly also tells me that there are not many resources available that represent a diversity of queer bodies that are struggling with moving out, leaving family, or belonging. As a result, the Youtube channels that she has turned to for advice—Davey Wavey, beaver bunch, Queer Factor—often only represent white bodies. She continues to note that white bodies are better at mobilizing than immigrant and minority groups, whereby the latter is not represented in queer culture:

I think the reason why you see Caucasians mostly on the [movie] screen is not just because of the fact that they are white, it is because they are more organized sometimes. There's a lot of issues within minority groups where they don't even like *each other*. That's one of the things that I've noticed, even my parents don't like their friends.

Kelly says that she does not find it necessary to have a variety of bodies represented in films or novels for example, so long as the bodies that are represented are open to all possibilities for queer identities. Media is a powerful and pervasive tool for many queer bodies exploring sexual identity. But many media sources, especially when represented by white bodies, reinforce oppressive national communities (Kaplan 2003) that reflect the universal (queer) subject's imaginings who belongs in the community.

I am struck by two points of interest here. The first is my surprise that Kelly does not look to 'South Asian' forms of popular culture for readings of homoeroticism. Gopinath's (2003) work demonstrates the availability of South Asian popular films that present interrogations to heteronormativity in South Asian households, and I am surprised that she does not reflect on these sources in our many minutes discussing queer novels, films, Youtube channels and Bollywood. I begin to see how Kelly tries to reject the impossibilities of identifying with Muslim and with South Asian because of her impossible spaces of queerness in her Muslim and South Asian settings of the family home. Her stage of in-between is evident as she constantly refers to how she feels, and how her parents would alternatively react. Another point of interest is the pervasion of social media and the Internet in Kelly's connectedness to a queer community. With the increasing activity of the Internet and social media as spaces for connecting and belonging, how may we begin to articulate these spaces of belonging for a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant in future scholarship?

Although racism in the queer community does affect her experiences of belonging, Kelly's story focuses on reflecting upon her personal wonderings of what she is meant to do now that she has left her parents' home. Because she is living in a shelter, and was unemployed at the time of the interview, her concerns focus on survival and moving forward in her own life:

Right now I'm just focused on getting through school and getting a job. For me right now, it's not being gay that's the challenge, but my overall identity. What kind of career do I want to have? What do I want from life? That's the

big question that I struggle with most of my days.

Having moved away from spaces of impossible queerness, Kelly recognizes the freedom she has to explore her gay identity openly, including being able to walk down the street holding her partner's hand without consequences. But as she focuses on her personal challenges, Kelly does admit that the freedom she has can be challenging: "the freedom doesn't [always] help—it's too much freedom, too much time to think about who you are. I just wish I knew and didn't have to think about it." For her, freedom has benefits and weaknesses: while Kelly imagines the difficulty she would have had 'coming out' in Pakistan, and reflects on the homophobic space she moved from three months ago, she recognizes the benefits of living in Canada and can find spaces where she can recognize her gay identity without physical consequences. At the same time Kelly wishes for more guidance in order to find employment, and plan for her future career.

Without diminishing the personal and societal challenges that Kelly encounters as a racialized queer immigrant body, she acknowledges the benefits of living in Toronto. She especially recognizes the benefits of living in Canada as she reflects on the physical dangers that being a queer woman in Pakistan would mean for her. Because of the impossibilities for being queer in Pakistan, Kelly cannot comprehend returning and feels no sense of loss towards her birth country:

I know that if I were back in Pakistan, the way that I'm living right now would not be accepted. And not just for, like, lesbian and gay people, but for anyone really who tries to be themselves. You can't even talk openly, it's just twisted there. [I don't want to go back] and visit—it's too much.

It is frequently recognized that immigrants who are unable to return, or who would have difficulty returning to the country of origin because of sexual queerness, often experience feelings of nostalgia toward the country of origin (Parmar in Cant 1997; Gopinath 2003; Sabra 2008). For Kelly, her only moment of longing for Pakistan is when she recalls a transgendered man who tended to her family's yard. Being only eight years old when she left Pakistan, she does not remember much about the man, other than his sexuality. She marvels at the fact that he survived as long as she remembered, and wishes she could ask her parents about him, or return to speak with him. Otherwise, Kelly does not miss anything about Pakistan. In fact, she does not feel as though she is an immigrant:

I think for me I never felt like an immigrant: I was a person learning about a newer culture. My parents were worried that they had to conform, and I felt

like I could continue to be myself.

She says that what surprised her most was that generally, people in Toronto are friendly. Despite the isolation she experienced at school, and the 'Othering' she encountered at the queer networking conference, she is happy to meet many friendly people.

Kelly also recognizes the benefits of living in Toronto specifically because she has access to queer resources and services. Although she says she feels disconnected from the variety of services that are available, she does access counseling services in the queer community. For Kelly, even if she cannot find information to access resources, the fact that resources are available to someone who is struggling as a queer body is important to her: "Just to know that people actually care enough to have a program like that makes the difference." Kelly has similar feelings about the significance of the Pride Parade and Pride Week in Toronto. While she acknowledges that it plays on stereotypes, she feels that the fact that there is a week where people can celebrate being who they are is significant in a hetero-dominated society. Kelly appreciates the fact that one exists: "Just knowing it was going on made me happy." The interrogation of heteronormativity is significant for Kelly's appreciation of queer spaces in Toronto, even if she senses that she is isolated, or marginalized from such spaces.

Kelly also recognizes that part of her isolation from a queer community may be that it exists as an imaginary space that is glorified for being a cosmopolitan safe haven for all queer bodies, as the suggestion of *moving out to 'come out'* would have us believe. Kelly's suggestion that her imaginary of a queer utopia did not come to fruition challenges the notion that a welcoming queer community exists: "I thought there was a place where gay people were, and I tried to find it. And I started to become more aware that maybe there wasn't such a place (laughs). Well, except for Church and Wellesley. Like, I know that it has like certain programs, but I still haven't found that place."

S: Is it important to you to find a queer community?

K: I think that was just a childhood fantasy. You know how when you're a kid you hear of a certain place and you think that place looks like *this*, and that all of these people are going to be there. And then you actually get there and you think, 'why does everything look so disorienting?' (laughs).

S: What did you imagine?

K: I don't know. I just know I had some sort of notion that there was a place where all the gay people go. Like, *all the gay people*. (laughs). And—there was no such place!

The promise of what this queer community is supposed to be, and look like despite her admission that it may have been a “childhood fantasy” still plays in Kelly’s mind as she searches for spaces of belonging. She perhaps has not found her dispersed spaces of belonging. Part of this (un)belonging may be the fact that she is currently a shelter-resident and preoccupied with her immediate needs. Another factor contributing to her continued search for queer space—despite her recognition that a queer utopia does not exist—is the newness of her leaving her family’s home. Escaping from the confines of impossible queer spaces can be exhilarating. As a lesbian with my own ‘coming out’ process, I can imagine the sense of pride and excitement Kelly feels for leaving the spaces where she could not be gay, and the anticipation of finding new spaces that might welcome and accept her.

Kelly’s spaces for belonging are limited since she has left her parents’ home, and is living as a shelter resident. For Kelly, her narrative reminds us that the spaces we arrive at, or belong in are not necessarily mapped to a geographic location. Belonging can happen in-between the spaces of leaving and arrival (Capello in Fortier 2003), in our memories (Sabra 2008), or with the people we take comfort in. For Kelly, her most cherished space of belonging is in her relationship: “The only place that I’ve found comfort is with my girlfriend. She makes everything a lot easier. She just accepts me for who I am, not a lot of people do.”

I sense another possibility for non-geographic belonging is her artwork, but financial circumstances seem to restrict this possibility currently. And a painful space because of the classmates isolating her, and because of her parents’ rejection of her art work. I felt the sadness in Kelly’s voice as she remembered her mother ripping up of Kelly’s drawings in front of her. The destruction of her art is simultaneously the destruction of a space of her belonging.

Kelly’s advice for future racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants reflects her recognition of being able to take advantage of “being yourself” in Canada. Kelly recommends to,

not be afraid of people here. It’s ok to open up, and you should obviously be careful about who you open up to; to not look at the skin colour—there’s so much more that unites us than divides us; and to use the resources that are out there...I slowly start to realize as more time passes, that everything is going to be okay.

While she is hopeful that racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants can negotiate spaces for belonging, she does shift her advice toward a criticism of Canada and its lack of comfort with acknowledging that queer bodies exist in Canada:

I would say, there is one difficulty because with LGBT, it is very hard to find

those kinds of resources. In society, it's not put out there that much, it's hidden still. And if there was one thing I had to criticize Canada about it would be that—it should be a lot more open. I think they've done a good job, but they could do better.

I have met Kelly at a significant moment in her life. As Kelly winds away from the scheduled interview questions, the two of us chuckle and share information about novels and films we enjoy. But amidst her humour and literary critiques, I sense that Kelly is anxious about how to keep moving forward with her life. Her struggle to find employment and discover what she wants to pursue as a career is central in Kelly's story. Living as a shelter-resident complicates this process.

Another central aspect of Kelly's story is the isolation she feels from family and the queer community. After moving out three months ago, Kelly has become isolated from her parents. She longs for the love of her parents, but feels that it is impossible for her to share her queer identity with them. Moving out for Kelly did not result in the arrival at a welcoming queer homeland. Instead, Kelly continues searching for spaces of acceptance in the queer community where she can connect with others who look beyond her colour and befriend her, regardless of so-called difference. I note however, that although Kelly wishes to elide her colour in social settings, I am not advocating colour-blindness since a necessary component of post-colonial feminism is recognizing differences and appreciating the differences of another. I especially do not wish to advocate colour-blindness because recognizing how Kelly is racialized by another is crucial to understanding how Kelly is identified as an immigrant. I find it troubling that even though Kelly does not identify as an immigrant because she has lived in Canada for the majority of her life, a white mainstream society may well recognize Kelly as an immigrant. Such differences between mainstream society's (mis)recognition of Kelly and Kelly's self-identification may be elucidated by Isin and Siemiatycki's (2002) argument. Isin and Siemiatycki (2002) demonstrate that although a white mainstream society creates a binary between the model racialized Muslim immigrant citizen and the so-called illegal alien, immigrants might "engage in practices that dissent from accepted norms and question these dominant images" (p. 207).

In other words, Kelly's rejection of being labeled as an 'immigrant' might be her own practice of opposing mainstream society's assumption that she must necessarily be an immigrant since she is a racialized and presumably, Muslim body. While not diminishing Kelly's agency, as a racialized body that is presumed to be Muslim, Kelly does not immediately fit in to the national imaginary of who belongs (Razack 2008). Applying my understanding of Isin and Siemiatycki's (2002) argument to the expectations of the model immigrant, I suggest that the notion of the model immigrant is reified through the goal that immigration policy serves to attract individuals who can enhance Canada's social and cultural diversity through so-called ethnic and cultural differences (see for example, IRPA Online, 2010). Accordingly, Kelly's presumed difference, based on her racialization and presumed Muslim identity, might continue to present challenges to her rejection of being labeled as an immigrant.

I also find it noteworthy that Kelly seems to long to openly belong in both the heterosexual family home, and in the queer community. A longing to "openly belong in two

worlds” of the heterosexual family home, and the queer community, has been noted by scholars of queer migration (see for example, Cant 1997 p. 1).

With her understandable distractions of sorting out her future, Kelly’s responses are often inward-looking. Momentary fragments where racism implicates Kelly from belonging in queer spaces surface, but they are not central. Kelly often wonders if it is her own inability to connect with others that keeps her isolated from spaces she longs to belong in. She admits that the notion of a queer community is an imaginary notion, yet she still longs for a space to negotiate belonging where other queer bodies have found belonging.

I find it difficult to write a final moment of reflection for Kelly, because I feel that my interview with her has ended at the moment she is beginning to understand the significance of her identities, and how her rejections of identity are limited with the persistence of a universal (queer) subject. I do not intend to diminish her agency. Kelly has certainly negotiated spaces for livability by moving from her parents’ home, and establishing a cherished relationship with her girlfriend. Yet, it is difficult to elide the barriers that another places upon ‘Othered’ bodies. This may be especially true when isolation from resources and social circles is concerned. Despite her challenges through racism, class, and grief over the loss of her parents’ love, Kelly remains hopeful about her future. She acknowledges the importance of her girlfriend’s love and concern and recognizes the space of belonging her relationship provides. Kelly tells me that as time passes, she feels more certain that things in her life will “be okay”.

*

Michelle

Michelle says she “lives life great” in Toronto. She enjoys her career in the public service, taking care of her aging mother who lives close by, playing golf every day, and spending time with her friends. Many of Michelle’s friends are gay and lesbian, and others are married in heterosexual relationships. She feels most comfortable in her home, at the golf course, or at a neighbourhood pub, which since its opening in March, has primarily attracted a middle-aged lesbian crowd. Michelle misses Barbados and her family—aunt, cousins, brother—that still live there. She visits her birth country every few years. Michelle also expresses that she recognizes the benefits of living in Canada for its opportunities and freedom. But immigrating to Canada was not Michelle’s idea; instead it was her mother’s: “Basically I had no choice, because I was

the youngest of my mother's kids. Now it's either she brings me here, or she leaves me at home. And she thought it would be better for me [to have], as they call it, 'a better living' [in Canada]."

For Michelle, the promise of what Canada will be like molds with the potential reality of Canada offering "a better living" through her mother's lived testimony.

Before migrating, Michelle imagined the promise of freedom (Ahmed 2010a; Ghosh & Wang 2003) that she would have in Toronto, compared to living in Barbados: "I thought of [Canada] as a big old country where I'd have a lot of fun and everything would be where I wanted it when I wanted it that I couldn't get at home (laughs)." This positive comparative imaginary guided her thoughts as she prepared to leave Barbados. Once Michelle's sponsorship to immigrate was accepted by the Canadian government, she got on a plane for the first time, making the trip to Toronto on her own. Her excited anticipation over the freedom she would have in Toronto met with feelings of regret. From her thoughts on the plane and her lived experiences during the first few years in Toronto, Michelle remembers feeling torn between her family in Barbados and the unknown in her new country:

It was scary—a new country. When I first left [Barbados] I thought—I was excited, my first trip! It's going to be living in this big old country. Then I got here and started living here and I got home sick. I wanted to go back home because I missed my family there...I guess for a couple of years, I was thinking 'did I do the right thing coming here?'

Longing for the family she left behind played a role in Michelle's sense of regret (Fortier 2003; Ghosh & Wang 2003). For female migrants especially, feelings of guilt or regret about leaving obligations to family behind often make migrating difficult (Jennings 2010; Pratt 2006; Stasiulis & Bakan 2005). But migrant women are also not 'fixed' to a singular location of the private home (Gedalof 2003). Once Michelle lived in Toronto for a year, her regret over leaving Barbados diminished.

After attending high school in Toronto for about a year, Michelle started to make friends. She began to feel more comfortable about being in Toronto: "When I got further on in school, I started meeting some friends and you know, hanging out and doing teenage stuff. And just started getting settled." These positive relationships provided Michelle with a sense of belonging in Canada (Ghosh & Wang 2003). Michelle began to accumulate social capital. Social capital is especially important for easing newcomers' stress of being in an unfamiliar place. It is also significant for creating ties to the new environment through employment, community groups, or

family that is also in the new country (Bergeron & Potter 2006; Frideres 2005). For Michelle, joining her high school basketball team also helped her build social capital and offered her a space for belonging after immigrating to Toronto.

Michelle seems to talk about her high school years with ease, laughing to herself as if recalling memories and secrets between high school friends from locker rooms and cottage partying weekends. I find myself laughing along with her, even though we have not shared specifics. But I remain curious about what the socio-economic backgrounds were at Michelle's high school. Was it an ethnically diverse population? Was it common for black immigrant students to be at her school? Is this why she was accepted? I wonder if there are difficult moments that she left out from her time trying to fit in?

Since her reason for migrating was her mother's, Michelle did not come to Canada to escape impossible spaces of heterosexuality in Barbados, or to search out lesbian-friendly spaces in Toronto (Jennings 2010). Michelle did not identify as a lesbian when she first arrived in Canada, although she remembers how she wondered about her sexual identity throughout her early teenage years:

when I first came [to Canada] I think I was going through the transition of whether I knew something was different. And I guess whenever I thought it was different I never let it come to the surface. I knew something was different about me. You know, I'd look at women and stuff [in Barbados], but I couldn't figure it out until I got here. I'd say I was kind of unsure until after a couple years here...I just didn't identify with it at the time.

This reflection suggests alternative paths in the notion of moving out to 'come out'. Instead of migrating because of the heteronormative and homophobic circumstances in the country of origin (Cant 1997; Eng 1997; Sinfield 1996; Watney 1995), Michelle has already moved to a perceived safer space before 'coming out'.¹² Her migration and her sexuality are not related in this trajectory; yet the two are significant. The so-called original move out to 'come out' journey is still evoked, but as a reflective possibility/necessity. Being in Canada where she feels safe as a black female lesbian allows Michelle to reflect on the impossibilities of safely 'coming out' in an intolerant Barbados. As she re-locates herself in this (im)possibility through her lived trips to Barbados and her imaginative reflections of what it might have been like to 'come out' there, she imagines an original move out to 'come out' journey.

Not feeling like she had the space to explore her sexuality in Barbados stems from the reality that being a lesbian there in the 1970s, and even in many ways today, is often intensely rejected and

¹² 'Coming out' is not a one time experience, it is a process that many queer bodies encounter each day of their lives. I use the term here to refer to a rough time frame for when Michelle could identify her 'difference' as being a lesbian. I use the term 'come out' since it is a process she describes for herself, regardless of its burdens as a North American term.

met with severe homophobia (Wahab & Plaza 2009). Comparatively, the personal freedom she experienced living in Toronto with respect to exploring her sexuality, helped Michelle begin to articulate her sexual identity:

[It was] being more freely around the people I lived around. I guess meeting more lesbians and it started from in high school. My high school teacher was gay. One of the girls in my class was gay. So it brought that to the surface a lot more, and me being a lot more comfortable.

While her brothers struggle to understand Michelle's sexual identity, she acknowledges the significance of her mother proudly accepting Michelle as a lesbian: "My mom is my biggest partner in all of it. My mom will turn you down for her daughter who is a lesbian. My mom is great!"

While she was 'coming out' to herself, Michelle had role models who were gay. Her basketball coach was a lesbian, and one of her closest high school friends was a lesbian. This social support helped Michelle find space to explore her sexuality where she was not able to in Barbados. This support is significant for Michelle's positive feelings toward Toronto. But Michelle and I do not talk about spaces of impossibility in Toronto during her high school years, and this surprises me. Certainly, in the 1970s, acceptance for gays and lesbians was growing, but police raids, physical assault, and bans on queer stores, for example, were rife (Clément 2008). I wonder how, or if, these social realities affected—or did not affect—Michelle's memories. While the possibility of living as queer surfaces in Canada, this reflection seems to demonstrate that it is not without the struggle for visibility.

The difference between Toronto's real possibilities for being an 'out' lesbian, and the impossibilities of being an 'out' lesbian in Barbados, remains significant to Michelle's feelings of belonging in Toronto. Michelle has a sense of security in Toronto in comparison to Barbados because she can "be herself" and does not have to hide her sexual identity:

I feel safer in Toronto being a black lesbian. I don't feel like I have to worry when I walk around downtown, you know, whether anybody knows about me or not.

Michelle relives the impossibilities of living as a lesbian in Barbados when visiting her country of origin and other Caribbean islands, including Jamaica, every few years. For Michelle, being a lesbian means that taking trips to her family and vacationing in other Caribbean countries is often uncomfortable and even horrible. While she describes herself as someone who does not "push" her sexual identity on others, she still articulates a sense of fear and discomfort being in the Caribbean (Wahab & Plaza 2009). We must see how "lesbians...have responded to the oppressive qualities of heteronormative space...often protecting themselves and concealing their

sexual orientation and ‘passing’ as heterosexual” (Bondi 2006 p. 7). Michelle, is often glad to leave:

I’ve been back to Barbados many a time. I’ve been there with partners, and I see the difference. Unless your friends and stuff accept it, your family—as far as [most of your friends and family] are concerned it’s kind of wrong. I know in Jamaica it’s extremely bad. With my partner a couple of years ago, that was ugly. We were in Kingston and it was ugly, it was intense. I couldn’t wait to get out of there!

Comparing the possibilities in Toronto to the impossibilities in Barbados makes Michelle recognize the benefits of living in Canada.

For Michelle, finding spaces in the queer community also offers her a sense of belonging (Bondi 2006; Cant 1997; Eves 2004; Jennings 2010). Finding spaces in the queer community also contributes to Michelle feeling safer in Toronto: “I think that’s where I found my comfort zone, in the gay community. Not so much as being in love, but they didn’t care who you were. And that’s where I found a whole lot of friends.” Although Michelle spends the majority of her time working, golfing, or taking care of her mother, she does like to spend time with her friends at the bar. While many lesbian women including Michelle find belonging in spaces that are not immediately visible, or even recognizably queer such as the private home (Podmore 2001), or the private homes of close family and friends, public spaces remain important. Specifically, having a lesbian/female space for older women is important to Michelle, although the option has not always been available:

For the longest time, I wouldn’t go to bars because basically, there were none for women for younger [women] there are bars. Now there’s this new bar that just opened down the street from me and if I have anywhere to go, that’s where I’ll go.

Michelle suggests that the reason for a lack of space for older queer women is because men tend to have more money than women and as a result, can afford to take over female spaces: “[Men] are the ones with the money!” Sexual queerness is increasingly recognizable as a male experience since it follows the capital accumulation of white gay men (Puar 2002). But the shortage of public space for older lesbians/queer women is not the only issue that Michelle takes up concerning lesbian and gay recognition in Toronto. Reflecting on Toronto’s Pride Parade, she expresses her irritation about the financial focus of Pride and participating corporations’ insincere and inconsistent celebrations of an LGBT community:

When I was going to the Pride Parade it was *pride*—when it was usually just gay people in the streets. And then things just changed. It's all about the money now. So they didn't really care who participated in Pride as long as they made the money. All the businesses that were jumping on board were only doing it for the weekend, or for the week. And then everything went back to normal. And when you wanted to go back into their store after, it was like, 'well, no. We don't want you here no more.'

Michelle also demonstrates why a focus on money creates a lack of representation for diverse bodies, especially women, in *Xtra*. Although she used to find articles about a diverse community of queers across the city, she has become frustrated with the newspaper for more recently focusing on "the money" and on "the men": "I used to pick up *Xtra* all the time, but just like with anything I found now that it's a lot about [advertisements]. It's either about ads, or it's about the guys—and like, nothing interesting for the girls. It's like, 'forget it!'"

Prior to conducting the interview, I was expecting Michelle to focus on challenges of finding public spaces in the queer community for belonging as an older lesbian, as well as frustrations with white gay men often being the so-called image and space holder of the queer body. While she does speak of such challenges, my interview with her shifts to an alternative focus: this focus is the racism she has experienced both within and outside of queer spaces in Toronto. I recognize this oversight as a white privilege bias of mine. To begin to understand the many ways a lesbian may negotiate space, researchers must always consider how racialization affects this process differently.

Negotiating public spaces that are dominated by white gay men is not what primarily concerns Michelle as she articulates the challenges and benefits of living in Toronto as a black female lesbian. Michelle tells me that because she is black, she has difficulty finding women to date and be in a relationship with: "because of being a black woman—let's say [my friends and I] go out to a bar and we start partying and stuff like that. I complain that they can get picked up quicker than I would. And that's because a lot of people aren't into the black culture." The racism Michelle experiences as a black female lesbian causes her to carry the weight of many layers of marginalization:

I might be a lesbian, and I might be a woman, but then I'm black. And that makes a little bit of a difference. I've always said to people that [I have] three strikes against me: I'm a woman, I'm a lesbian, and I'm black. You have two, I have three! And that's how I've always put it.

Michelle expresses that the racism she often encounters from gays and lesbians contributes to her sense of (un)belonging in queer spaces (Wahab & Plaza 2009). She says that her experiences in a queer community, "has its ups and downs: people will either accept you or they won't. And like I

said you still have people that are willing to talk to you or go out with you and not see colour and then you have people that do see the colour.”

I find it noteworthy that Michelle does not hope, for example, for people to “accept colour” or accept difference. Instead, her comment implies to almost erase colour. Does Michelle suggest to erase colour because of the burdens that white privilege places on so-called people of colour? I see this articulation not as an act of feeling guilty for her blackness, but as a strategy for easing the social-economic burdens of the white and black binary.

Her experiences of racism are not limited to or experienced only in the queer community. As Michelle describes the difficulties of being an immigrant in Toronto, she places the racism that she encounters at the center of her challenging experiences. Having her marginalized identity compared to the so-called acceptable white Canadian-born body taught her that she was different (Butler 2004a; 1997b; 1990c). Michelle remembers becoming aware of her so-called difference as a black woman soon after arriving in Toronto:

I remember when I first came here, and not being ‘lesbian’ or ‘black’, just being a woman walking through a neighbourhood...And there were apartment towers and somebody shouted out the window, ‘Why don’t you go back to where you come from?’ And I looked around and I was the only one walking and I thought, ‘well, that’s got to be directed at me because there’s nobody else around’ (laughs).

I struggle with how to continue to engage with Michelle’s story at this moment. Her difficult knowledge causes me discomfort as I hear the disappointment ring in her voice all these years later. Even though Michelle laughs, I sense that she may still be trying to pass this painful moment off as “just the way it is”—a comment she repeats often throughout the interview. Does this suggest that the gaze from the universal queer and the dominant community is so powerful that Michelle has been forced to live her body in relation to how she is racialized instead of other possibilities?

Often during the interview, Michelle articulates that she has tried to learn to accept racism as an inevitable aspect of living in Toronto: “I guess I’ve learned to live with that for years now: accept that I’m black and that not everything you’re going to want is going to be there, or that it’s going to come to you.” She continues saying, “there’s nothing I can do to change it.”

This comment articulates restrictions to Michelle’s idea of the promise to belong in a country that offers many opportunities and is in stark contrast to Michelle’s original imaginings of being able to get everything she wanted in Canada. I see that the promise to belong and have improved opportunities is restricted by her racialization.

Without downplaying the challenges that Michelle faces as a black female lesbian, Toronto feels like home for her. Her sense of Toronto as home remains possible, partially because of the length of time she has been in Canada compared to the length of time she has

been in Barbados: “I’ve lived here longer than I’ve lived there, so for me, [Toronto] is my home and you’re not going to take that away from me no matter what I am—you’re not going to take that away.”

As a legal immigrant, who would take Toronto away from her? But I am reminded of the person in the apartment who told her to “go back home”. I am aware that people like this have challenged her confidence in belonging in the past, and she has struggled to own this confidence. It is obvious today, that she feels proud to make this statement confidently now.

Michelle’s sense of Toronto as home also remains comparative to the freedom she has to be an ‘out’ lesbian in Toronto, and the discomfort of being an ‘out’ lesbian in Barbados: “I go to see my family and sometimes its almost—I’m not saying I’m relieved, but I’m happy to be back home and be myself. I can just take a deep breath when I get back [to Toronto]...I have fun with them, but then it’s like ‘ok, let’s go back to my more comfort level’ once I come back home.” Her recognition of Toronto’s benefits guides her advice for other racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants coming to Canada: “Be yourself and just be respectful of what the country’s got to offer you. They’re giving you an opportunity—be who you are and go take advantage of it.” Regardless of Toronto as home, Michelle encounters challenges to her sense of belonging thirty-five years after immigrating as a result of her sexuality, and of racism. Her final comment in the interview astutely reflects this ongoing struggle:

The fact that I’m a black lesbian doesn’t mean that I want anybody to disrespect me or find that I’m different. I might be different in colour, but I’ve got the same heart. And I want people to start treating people that way. Even if you’re not lesbian or gay, but we will have the harder time. But just to realize that we are people too—not everybody’s going to be the same, but get to know us! Don’t judge us!

For Michelle, finding spaces in her every day life—work, leisure, walking along the street— where people do not use her black skin colour to judge who she is, remains central in her story. Racism tends to define her challenges in Toronto as she experiences how people ‘Other’ her as a foreign racialized body. She has found comfort mostly in queer spaces, such as the pub down the street from her apartment, and her gay and lesbian friends that she goes golfing with. But her spaces and friends are not necessarily queer, as seen in her relationships with heterosexual couples with children, and the treasured relationship she has with her heterosexual mother. Michelle finds comfort and freedom in Toronto because she can walk down the street and not feel scared of verbal or physical consequences if she is ‘found ‘out’ to be a lesbian. This sense of freedom and comfort is often weighed comparatively to how uncomfortable and impossible it is and would have been to live as a lesbian in Barbados. While Michelle does not specifically note her spatial location in Toronto as a reason for feeling comfortable and having a sense of freedom, I suggest that it matters. Michelle’s apartment is in a unique area where there is a large immigrant population, as well as a queer

population that is gentrifying the area. The fact that the area has immigrants and queer populations living in the same neighbourhood likely influences her sense of freedom and belonging as a racialized lesbian.

Since it was her mother's choice for Michelle to immigrate to Canada, and since Michelle was not 'out' even to herself at the time of her immigration, Michelle did not move out to 'come out' as the original journey suggests. Yet, knowing the homophobia and discomfort from traveling to Barbados every few years to fulfill familial obligations, she knows that had she stayed living in Barbados, she likely would have had to leave to live safely as a lesbian elsewhere. Michelle is also recognizes the significance of Toronto being an accepting space of queer bodies, despite the racism that challenges belonging, and the corporatism that insincerely recognizes queers only once every year during the Pride Parade.

Toronto still presents challenges to her intersectionalities of 'black', 'female', and 'lesbian'. She articulates feelings of not wanting to be 'out there' as a lesbian, and have her sexual identity be the first identity people see. I sense that she employs this as a strategy in order to not bring any unwanted negative attention to her. This desire for invisibility, or "passing" (Lahiri 2003 p. 409) in a space of acceptance is most likely a strategy Michelle uses to negotiate the heteronormativity of spaces in the public service, and most of Toronto, generally. Michelle wishes that people would stop seeing colour and accept her for who she is—"a person first".

Although Michelle may not want recognition, scholars are missing queer female immigrant bodies if we cannot see the body of an older black female lesbian who has immigrated to Canada. Scholars of immigration, and of queer migration must remain open to interrogating how racialization continues to challenge an immigrants' sense of belonging in Canada—even years after migrating. And since people see Michelle's colour first, it is what we focus on, limiting the possibilities of understanding how her identity as a lesbian implicates and challenges her spaces for belonging in Toronto, in addition to racism. Scholars must continue to challenge the image of 'the immigrant' and the image of 'the queer' that has been created in Western discourse in order to see a black female lesbian body. From Michelle's story, we see why visibility matters (Ahmed 2006b).

The length of Michelle's interview was shorter than Kelly's or Lauren's by roughly twenty-five minutes. I wonder if this is because as we learned at the end of the interview, she did not hear me identify myself as a lesbian before the interview began, and therefore did not feel a sense of solidarity with me through our similar sexual identities. Does the shorter length of her interview suggest that Michelle feels more secure in her life being older, financially secure, and having close, stable relationships with her mother and her friends? Did age, race, or class differences have anything to do with the shorter length of the interview? Did these differences create a disconnect between Michelle and I? Does it have something to do with the fact that Michelle has lived in Canada for 35 years, and has had more time to make home in Toronto? I am certain it is a delicate combination of each of these factors.

*

Lauren

Lauren is energized by the space in which the interview takes place. For her, this space of queer theatre is where she can explore her shifting identities, her politics, and her career. It is a familiar space to her and where Lauren discovered that there is a community of queer people. She says that she belongs here. But her liveliness and determination to be an (out)spoken queer Egyptian Muslim woman also comes from the strife of her past: “There are times where you’re going to want to kill yourself, and if you survive—when you survive—there’s nothing that can stop you after the point where you say, ‘I’m okay with who I am.’” Reflecting on her desperation and misery before moving from her parents’ home in Mississauga, and the lasting guilt she struggled with from “betraying” aspects of her religion through her sexually queer identity, makes Lauren recognize the benefits of finding the few spaces of acceptance and freedom she is negotiating now.

Like Kelly and Michelle, Lauren’s struggle as a queer Muslim woman did not necessitate her original migration from Egypt to Canada; instead, it was her parents who decided Lauren’s family would leave, pushed by the promise of better educational opportunities in Canada (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). Her parents imagined a better place for Lauren and her younger sister to grow up and go to school: “my parents decided to move here because my uncle had told them about Canada. My [uncle] mentioned that it was a really great country to raise children and it had a better education system because the school system in Egypt is very difficult.” The decision to move was sudden, and Lauren remembers that until the announcement of her family’s move, she had not thought much about North America. Her only imaginings came from a few Hollywood movies, although she had only ever heard about the United States:

I knew nothing about Toronto and I knew nothing about Canada. The summer that we were supposed to move [from our house], we were also told we were moving to Canada. And I had to ask the question: ‘What’s a Canada?’ I didn’t know this country existed. And so what I imagined was that I was moving to what I saw in the Julia Roberts’ movies with the nice suburban houses with the triangle roofs and trees every where.

Despite glimpses of a picture perfect space in Lauren’s imaginings of Canada, she mostly remembers that the immediacy of being in a foreign place made the immigration experience frightening: “It was the scariest—yes—the scariest experience of my life to get out of a plane and all of a sudden be in North America.” During the first few years in Mississauga, Lauren

experienced mixed feelings of excitement for new opportunities, such as writing, or exploring her interest in music, as well as anguish because she was bullied and threatened throughout high school: “I felt like I was about to embark on a path of freedom, but at the same time knew that it was going to be the hardest path of my life because I was very young. It was terrifying because the kids were mean—in high school they were very, very mean.”

Lauren articulates a significant concept in theories of queer migration: that even after immigrating, she still felt that she had a journey to go on. Despite the geographic arrival, Lauren imagined that her journey was only beginning. While this comment plays on a cliché, it serves to interrogate the static and normative notions of immigrant ‘settlement’. Lauren’s comment challenges the notion that immigrants ever arrive and that the personal struggle to find spaces of belonging is endless.

Because her fellow students were cruel, Lauren remembers that high school was a traumatic experience. The World Trade Centre and Pentagon attacks on September 11, 2001, reified the popular construction of the so-called bad Muslim terrorist who is a threat to so-called good democratic Western beliefs and values in policy discourse and community. Accordingly, the proliferation of Western states and its white Western citizens to police the “archetypal enemy” of the Muslim (non)citizen (Razack 2008 p. 12). Lauren reflects on how she was ‘Othered’ as a Muslim woman in a post-9/11 era:

When you first enter high school, and they find out that you’re an outsider...I had a British accent because I learned British and Arabic at the same time. The first day of school I got chased home with a knife because of my accent. That set the tone for the entire year. And that was the year of being called ‘the immigrant.’ And then the year after that was September 11th, so that was the year of being called a ‘terrorist.’ It wasn’t easy at all.

As I listened to Lauren’s memories of high school, I actively reviewed Britzman’s (2000) notion of “difficult knowledge” (p. 42) in my mind: How could I begin to work through Lauren’s disturbing memories without evoking “defense” or “resistance” (Britzman 2000 p. 42)? I nodded, offering Lauren the space to continue sharing her experiences. My desensitization to racism as a white woman was scrambled. You and I are offered a difficult reminder that Lauren’s fellow students ‘Othered’ her through the construction of a so-called ‘disloyal immigrant’. The historical and current relationship between a white Western body and a “Muslim-looking terror suspect” has “accomplished” the project of “casting out” the ‘Other’ as a body that threatens the national imaginary, and accordingly, does not belong (Razack 2008 p. 6). In Lauren’s story, this relationship clearly challenges her spaces for belonging throughout high school, and currently in both mainstream and queer spaces. Despite the IRPA (2001), which in theory, welcomes ethnic and cultural diversity (see for example, IRPA, Online 2010), social constructions of the disloyal immigrant subject challenges the welcoming environment of Canada and its cities.

Along with the ‘Othering’ that Lauren experienced in high school, another point of conflict was coming to terms with her sexual identity. Although she does not describe a ‘coming out’ experience, or an *a-ha* moment during high school, Lauren knows that coming to identify with her sexually queer identity was a messy, unstable experience of wondering what was so-called different about her, if anything at all. As well, the absence of awareness for queer or gay bodies in her high school, family, and teenaged life made ‘coming out’ to herself difficult and impossible during her teenage years. She recalls that being an immigrant augmented her naivety about the possibilities for sexual diversity. It is often not considered in immigrant settlement services that immigrants may need assistance with accessing queer services or resources (Laing 2008). While the *IRPA* (2001) recognizes same-sex relationships in its family class of immigration, it is overwhelmingly assumed in public policy discourse and the literature that immigrants are heterosexual. The focus in immigration debates on the preference of a so-called good migrant (Isin & Siemiatycki 2002) who brings his education and employment skills to enhance Canada’s economy, and a bad migrant who, for example, arrives in the family class and becomes a so-called drain on Canada’s welfare system with her lack of language and employment skills, can overshadow discussions on multiple identities and differences among a variety of immigrants to Canada. Once again, the possibility of an immigrant being sexually queer is disregarded. This disregard carries through to the provision of settlement services for immigrants in a Canadian context.

S: Did you identify as sexually queer before immigrating to Toronto?

L: I knew, I hesitate to say this, but I knew something was not normal before I knew what the word ‘queer’ was, before I knew what the word ‘gay’ was. But no, in terms of the actual label, no: I couldn’t identify myself as queer because I didn’t know. I thought, I guess, that everybody felt like that.

S: How did this wondering affect your years in high school?

L: I would say for most kids, high school is the most traumatic experience of their lives—especially for an immigrant, and especially for a queer person who has no accessibility to anything whatsoever in high school. There were no resources.

As a student of immigration and settlement studies, I have spent a great deal of time reading and discussing issues concerning the delivery of immigrant settlement services. Reflecting on my readings and classroom discussions, I am confident saying that sexually

queer immigrant bodies are almost always disregarded or forgotten in this context. Lauren's comment reflects this trend. The normative-liberal bias that assumes that an immigrant body and a queer body are not synonymous resultantly fails queer immigrants in conversations of immigrant settlement service delivery. This is especially true as conversations and geographies shift from Toronto's downtown core to other neighbourhoods and cities where queer immigrant-and queer non-immigrant bodies are perceived not to live.

The notion of 'queer' or 'gay' was impossible and unknown to Lauren throughout high school.¹³ She did not have the resources such as friends, media, or services to challenge heteronormativity and become aware of possibilities for sexual diversity. In high school, Lauren was isolated from queer possibilities. Because of her isolation, Lauren explains that she only became aware of a queer community when she learned about Toronto: "I didn't know that there was such a thing as an LGBT community in high school—I didn't know that one existed. I didn't know that it was allowed to exist. I did not know that Toronto existed as a city until I started shopping around for universities."

I grapple to conceptualize Lauren's isolation from Toronto, a city that is less than a twenty-minute drive away from Mississauga. I wonder if she was unaware of Toronto because of how difficult high school was—her focus was likely surviving the immediate spaces she was in and not considering other surroundings close by. Perhaps her parents were also isolated, or focused on a social community in Mississauga creating no need to explore. Perhaps my confusion is also a bias as a Toronto-born woman who had opportunities to explore surrounding cities when visiting family. Lauren's isolation demonstrates the need to increase research and resources for immigrants beyond the city of Toronto. At the same time, her comment reinforces the reality that queer bodies are more visible and are better recognized in Toronto, than elsewhere in Ontario.

University was also challenging for Lauren and she remembers "nearly flunking out" because of the "guilt" she felt being a queer Muslim woman. In her first year, a few of Lauren's professors directed her to a queer theatre in the hopes of offering her a queer space to explore her sexual identity in: "[my professors] could tell I was having a hard time, so they were trying to reach out to me to give me accessibility to places that I could go because they could see me struggling and it was taking a toll." The theatre remains a meaningful space for Lauren, providing her with a location to negotiate her sexually queer identity, meet queer artists and audiences, as well as engage in a queer culture through theatre, film, cabaret, music, and drag performances. Finding a space that challenges heteronormativity and heterosexuality is important

¹³ For Lauren, I use 'queer', 'gay', and 'LGBT' interchangeably to reflect her use of all three terms.

for many queer bodies (Cant 1997; Jennings 2010; Morley 2008; Sinfield 1996). Although queer theatres tend to under represent women's work (Newman 2012), the queer theatre is often a significant site to interrogate heteronormativity (Kinsman 2001). Although Lauren began to come to terms with her queer identity, the shame and confusion from her Muslim identity and from her family persisted. These feelings continued even after she had moved out of her parents' house in Mississauga:

I was letting the guilt from my family take over. I basically locked myself up in my house and did nothing. It was starting to take a toll on my relationship because I didn't want to burden my partner with speaking about my family every single day. Every other conversation with my [family] was 'when are you coming home'; 'don't come home unless you're planning to stay' and; 'nice Muslim girls don't move out'.

Lauren's story is fragmented from her time in high school in Mississauga, moving to the apartment she now shares with her partner, to being introduced to her queer space in Toronto—the process is not easily mapped, and I find myself losing track of the years as I try to trace the chronology of Lauren's teenaged and early adult life. These disconnected memories suggest that Lauren's knowledge is difficult, even for herself. As well, these fragmented reflections show you and I that identities and imaginaries are fluid and shifting. Her story also illustrates that the process of 'coming out' can be a dynamic, scrambled, and distressing experience. Lauren continues to work through her attachments, pain, grief, guilt, and new opportunities since migrating to Toronto.

For Lauren's family, being 'queer' is impossible, especially since Lauren is a Muslim woman (Puar 2002). As a result of the impossibility, Lauren has currently lost her relationship with her father. Her relationship with her mother is unstable, and her sister, although supportive of Lauren's sexual identity, has become distant. Because her parents' home was an impossible site for a sexually queer body, Lauren abruptly moved out of her parents' home a few years ago. She did not tell her family why she was moving as an attempt not to shame her family with her sexual orientation. Lauren knows that it was necessary for her to move out of her parents' home and asserts that it is a decision that most queer bodies, especially queer Muslim bodies, will have to make:

Until you leave that environment, you will always feel guilty, you will always feel gay-bashed, you will always gay-bash yourself, and you will feel like the scum of the earth. Until you actually come out of the mentality that you were raised in and make your own—that's when you realize that everything you went through was worth it.

Aspects of *moving out to 'come out'* are illustrated in Lauren's story since she left her parents' home and searched for spaces of acceptance in queer spaces (Cant 1997; Eng 1997; Sinfield

1996; Watney 1997). The move helped Lauren continue to search for spaces of belonging and says that Toronto is a “good place” to live as a queer woman. A significant measurement of why Toronto is a safe place for Lauren as a queer woman is that in most spaces, she can walk down the street holding her partner’s hand and often only encounter the consequence of a few threatening looks.

Lauren did experience aspects of the moving out to ‘come out’ journey since she had to leave her parents’ house to feel like she had the freedom to live her queer identity. At the same time, her story challenges many aspects of this so-called original trajectory. Lauren’s story challenges the notion of assembling in public spaces (Sinfield 1996). Lauren’s story also defies the notion of a clean break from the original home (Fortier 2003; Gopinath 2003; Jennings 2010) since Lauren longs for a relationship with her sister, and to live in Egypt. As her story unfolds, you and I learn that there are barriers in the queer community that challenge the notion of finding a welcoming queer community after moving out. Homophobia and racism complicate the promise to find an inclusive home in the queer community, free of challenges.

Creating a queer space for belonging in private spheres is also important to Lauren. Because of the gendered nature of space, women, even lesbians, often find belonging in private/hidden spaces (Jay 1997; Podmore 2001; Stein 2000). For Lauren, this private space of belonging is in her apartment, where her partner and she have found a small circle of Egyptian women to call their family. While Lauren says that these women are not sexually queer, their open-mindedness challenges heteronormativity and heterosexuality. Coming over to belly dance in Lauren’s apartment each week, her chosen family helps Lauren stay in touch with her Egyptian culture in a safe queer space.

S: Is it important to you that your spaces are queer spaces?

L: No, not necessarily because if I start saying that then I’m already excluding certain people. I’ve met people over the years who I’m very close with now, they’re basically my sisters, and they happen to be Egyptian, but they’re also heterosexual. They don’t have the slightest problem with my partner and I. They see us both as sisters. And they’ve become my chosen family, which is great because I keep my culture alive. It tends to be queer because [my heterosexual sisters] identify more as queer for the sheer fact that they’re just very open minded.

Despite her confidence in her decision to move out, Lauren expresses longing for her family and for Egypt. This longing can be a particularly gendered experience, where women miss the intimate spaces of home and community that have been physically left behind (Ahmed

1999c; Fortier 2003; Gopinath 2003; Jennings 2003). Lauren is saddened by the reality that her sister, while supportive, is not as close to Lauren as she used to be. More than her family home in Mississauga, Lauren also longs for her home and community in Egypt. The pain of being uprooted from Egypt, and knowing that because of her sexuality, a return would be dangerous or impossible, is unsettling for her. She is torn between the freedom she has to be an ‘out’ queer Muslim woman in Toronto, and her memories of Egypt:

S: Is there anything you miss about Egypt?

L: Everything! Are you kidding me? I wish I was back home, *I wish I was back home!* I love being in [Toronto], I love doing what I do for a living. But I would love to be at home in Egypt. I still call it my home. I belong in Egypt. There’s so much pain involved in that, for example, to not just pick up with my partner and take her there, and have her meet my family. I would have to not tell anybody if I were to go back home—my dream is for my partner to see my country. I wouldn’t be able to take [my partner] to where I grew up, unless it was in a car, tinted [windows]. But of course I miss back home. I would love to be there right now. My heart is still in Egypt.

The intensity of Lauren’s voice, eyes, and physicality is branded in my mind as she struggled to articulate her relationship with Egypt now. I select this quote deliberately because of the repetition, reifying her longing to be “home”. Her poetic articulations reinforce how deep this sense of loss is as she dreams of sharing a piece of her heart with her partner and as she realizes the impossibilities of this dream. I sense that Lauren is continuing to work through how her sexually queer identity causes spaces of impossibility for her as a Muslim woman, especially spaces of familiarity in Egypt. You and I become aware that moving out to ‘come out’ does not simply allow queer bodies to leave the past and longings for the past and for family behind. Longing for what is lost can challenge belonging in the new country (Gingra & Tiro 2008).

At the same time, the impossibilities for being a queer woman in Egypt also makes Lauren recognize the benefits of being a Canadian citizen living in Toronto. As she imagines the dangers of being an ‘out’ queer in Egypt, Lauren acknowledges that she did not have to make the choice to either leave Egypt to ‘come out’, or risk her life by staying. She is also aware of the freedom Toronto offers for Lauren to be an ‘out’ queer Muslim woman rap artist. Through her music, Lauren aims to “infiltrate the mainstream” with her anti-homophobic, anti-racist lyrics. She is conscious that her music could influence and improve circumstances and recognition for queer issues in Egypt:

[The Egyptian government] is aware of queer issues outside of Egypt, which opens

the possibility for more prosecution. People are usually given a choice: you either leave and never come back, or you put up with the consequences because you don't know what is going to happen to you. No lawyer would ever defend you. I'm glad that I'm [in Toronto] because I can say whatever I want as an Egyptian who is standing on Canadian soil. I am so blessed to be here so that I can make changes there.

This plan and articulation for transnational political activism is Lauren's vocation. Acts of transnational political activism are common for immigrants living in Canada (Preston, Kobayashi & Siemiatycki 2006; Wayland 2006; Wong & Satzewich 2006). Often, these political activities take the form of protesting, joining transnational political organizations, or raising awareness through writing, art, or social media in the new country, to improve oppressive conditions in the country of origin (Wahab & Plaza 2009). Increasingly, queer transnational activists from a number of countries utilize the legal rights, recognition, and acceptance of queer bodies in Canada to justify the interrogation of their country of origin to ease homophobia and laws against queers (Wahab & Plaza 2009). For Lauren, increasing the visibility of queer Muslim Egyptian women in Canada, and in Egypt, is why she recognizes the benefits of living in Toronto. Here, she has the space to negotiate these possibilities.

Although Lauren undoubtedly feels that she belongs in a queer community—especially the theatre—she acknowledges that the universalizing image of who a gay body is can disregard her difficult experiences as a possibility for queer. Reflecting on *Xtra*, Lauren notes that she is disappointed with the newspaper for not covering the strife that a variety of queer bodies encounter, and for making “gay look fun all the time.” She is also dissatisfied with not being able to find stories of people who have experienced their families breaking up because of their sexuality, or of people who live beyond Church Street:

“I need to see faces I *recognize*, not the pretty, perfect faces that I watch come in here every Saturday.”

Lauren implicitly articulates the divide between the perceptible universal queer subject, and the ‘Other’ imperceptible bodies that are rendered impossible, even within a queer community. Her comment reifies the notion that the image of a queer community tends to privilege a white gay male, and continues to marginalize other possibilities for queer, including a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant.

But issues of under representation in comparison to a white gay male is not what Lauren focuses on as she speaks of the challenges of being a queer woman from Egypt. Like Michelle, experiences of racism are central to Lauren's barriers to belonging in many spaces. Outside of

the theatre and the queer community, Lauren has experienced racism from people in her area of residence, which is a twenty-five minute drive from the downtown core, because she does not look like she belongs. Lauren recalls being identified as a racialized 'Outsider', causing her neighbour to lock Lauren out of her apartment building: "an older lady who refused to let me into the building because she [didn't] believe that I live there, saying things like, 'I look too 'ghetto' to live there.'" Her 'Othered' Arabic language and her belonging in Toronto has also been challenged:

I was getting out of the subway speaking to one of my cousins in Arabic. An older white [man] passed by me and said, 'We don't need to hear this shit here—if you want to speak it—go back home!'

The racism she experiences in the queer community, including in the theatre, challenges the notion in *moving out to 'come out'*, that a welcoming queer community will be arrived at. Lauren recalls that she has, "experienced [prejudice] from both sides being a queer person and an immigrant; and, from both the heterosexual population and within the queer community. For Lauren, racism creates barriers to her sense of belonging in the queer community: "the most racism I've experienced is from queer people who have grown up here and see queer as something that belongs to them. And I feel sometimes that I don't have a right to the queer community as much as they do." Lauren suggests that her race is why she is often rendered invisible to white gay men:

I do experience more prejudice from [men]. Being an Egyptian and being queer, [there have been] men who have worked in my space and have said, 'Where's the *real* technician, you don't look like a dyke!'

She also suggests that her invisibility is a bias that is written in queer history. Because queer history is a history of white bodies, even Lauren admits that she has felt that queer is 'only a white possibility: "There's *a lot* of racism in the queer community—because, even to me, the idea of being queer, was in my mind, a Caucasian idea. To me, only white people were gay."

Expecting racism now to affect her overall feelings of Toronto, I ask Lauren how she feels about Toronto as a place to live for a queer woman from Egypt. Without explicitly asking, I want to offer her the opportunity to reflect on whether her original mixed imaginings of Toronto refigure here. Which promises are met? Which ones are not? These are questions I hope Lauren will answer as she reflects:

L: I love Toronto, but I hate Toronto. I will give it this credit: to a certain extent, I have certain freedoms here that I don't have anywhere else. I have accessibility here to things I wouldn't be able to have accessibility to, like queer health services. In terms of why I hate Toronto: because there are more people, there's more ignorance. (...) You have your veterans of Toronto who feel that we're taking over their city and we shouldn't be working in their jobs, which is something I hear all the time. (...) There's lots of us here, we're all different colours, we all speak different languages, but none of us really want to get along—that's what it feels like. So I love it and hate it.

S: Do you feel like you belong in Toronto?

L: Yes! Yes! That's why I love it and hate it! Because I *do* feel like I belong here. I do feel like I was supposed to be here, even just doing my art, it will do great things for me just to be in the city and have accessibility to different things and different people. I love being here. I can be who I am. In Toronto, I feel like I'm allowed to say I'm queer, and Muslim, and Egyptian, and that won't be disputed. There will always be ignorance, but for the most part, I can be who I am!

⁴As the journey continues to find spaces of belonging, Lauren has found her voice to create her own interrogations and her own history (Cant 1997) as a queer Muslim Egyptian woman. And for Lauren, she has found that her "voice is very loud." While the mainstream and queer community is rife with racism, Lauren remains confident in her decision to move out and search for a variety of spaces in these racist landscapes. For Lauren, moving out to find spaces of acceptance for her queer identity is a clear narrative in her story. It is especially evident as Lauren offers her advice for other racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants migrating to Toronto:

the first thing you do if you find you're in an environment where you're not going to be accepted—leave that environment. Find a way to secure yourself, financially, emotionally, mentally, physically, and leave that environment. That's what I had to do, to actually be who I am right now.

As well, for Lauren, finding spaces in the queer community is important for securing these financial, social, and personal resources:

Exhaust all of your resources, but be very smart about what you do, because you never know the circumstances of the families you come from. If there's some event that's going on, or a secret LGBT community meeting somewhere, exhaust the shit out of it. (...) Take all the good things you learned from your family in your new chosen family.

As a lesbian who grew up in a male-dominated heterosexual household, I too have locked the door behind me with the intention to never return to my family home. Yet, after a while, I always do. I tell myself, 'just a little longer'. Juxtaposing my returns with Lauren's abrupt and final move, I am left to wonder still, just how impossible these spaces of Lauren's family home were. I try to position myself in the sadness of the evenings that I leave my own home in, with only a few items of clothing and schoolwork in hand. The anguish of lost memories and homely comforts of food, shelter, and familiarity get the better of me. The divide between my experiences of impossibility and Lauren's are profound.

But I do not speak of my ability to stay as a privilege. And neither do I glorify Lauren's choice to leave. As a queer woman, spaces to find belonging in are limited, conditional, and contradictory. The 'Othering' that Lauren has experienced living in Toronto, especially as a Muslim woman in a post-9/11 era, is central to her story. These experiences of racism and discrimination challenge the notion that Toronto is a welcoming and accepting space of a variety of diverse bodies. And, even though Lauren negotiates belonging in a queer space each day that she goes to work, she continues to encounter racism and homophobia. Lauren's experiences of racism and discrimination in the gay community challenge the notion that all queer bodies will belong in this community. Although Lauren has moved out of spaces of heteronormativity to 'come out', her path to belonging is not a linear one. The restrictions to mobility and belonging that Lauren experiences as a result of racialization and 'Othering' from another, renders her spaces for belonging in Toronto—and beyond, as limited, conditional, and contradictory.

Throughout Lauren's story, and as I continued to re-read the interview transcript, I find myself actively deploying Britzman's (2000) notion of "difficult knowledge" (p. 42). How can I conceptualize Lauren's loss? How do I make sense of her joy and determination? For Lauren, her conceptualization of loss is eased with writing and performing her rap music. I sense that her writing and her music help Lauren imaginatively bridge impossible gaps and negotiate her unintelligibility and impossibility in the heteronormative and homophobic spaces of the family home, Egypt, and in several spaces, the queer community in Toronto. While Lauren acknowledges the benefits of finding her space of belonging in the theatre, her narrative illustrates that she has not yet arrived. She is torn between her life with her partner and her friends in Toronto, and her longing and memories of her life in Egypt. Following Fortier (2003), I wonder, is arrival for an 'Other' body ever possible?

*

Through a reflexive analysis of the experiences of Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, this paper demonstrates that a universal (queer) promise of immigrant belonging and of queer belonging is based on a universal (queer) subject. The promise to belong can be achieved by bodies who hold this universal (queer) subject position, while 'Others' - including racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants - are left to continue to negotiate belonging in spaces that are limited, conditional, and contradictory. The promise to belong for Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, can be a fragmented, agonizing experience. Moments of joy and acknowledging the benefits of living in Canada filter through the challenges. Since the universal (queer) subject renders a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant marginalized, impossible, or unintelligible, the presence of this 'Other' body is not always accepted or recognized in mainstream or queer spaces. Although differently, Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, demonstrate that a myriad of identities affect how spaces of belonging are negotiated. Immigrant identities, language barriers or 'Other' accents, racialization, gender, age, class, and family expectations mean that the process of finding friends, safe spaces at work, recognition in queer spaces, or simply walking down the street is a delicate balance of "mimicry", "passing" (Lahiri 2003 p. 409), and rejection. Negotiating belonging in these spaces is further complicated by the fact that while each woman took issue with divisions and exclusion in queer spaces, Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren still search for space in the queer community. In some way, each woman articulated a hope for the queer community to be more accepting of racial differences and to see her as a person before the assumptive burdens of her identity are pinned upon her.

The persistence of a universal (queer) subject in discourse, policy, community and culture restricts the visibility and intelligibility of a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant, even within private spaces. The interviews demonstrate that the comforts imagined in the space of home are not readily available for an 'Othered' body like Kelly, Michelle, or Lauren's. For each woman, negotiating space in private realms is also challenging. For Kelly and Lauren, a queer identity cannot currently be negotiated in the family home. Familial expectations of performing the identity of a so-called good Muslim girl render the identity of 'queer' impossible for Kelly and Lauren. For Michelle and Kelly, establishing circles of friends is challenging because trust of another is also limited and conditional.

In other words, no space is a given. And each space of belonging that Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren occupy required an intricate negotiation of a myriad of ‘Other’ identities. Differently, each of the three women demonstrates that the spaces they do find belonging in are not always geographic. Instead, belonging can happen in the fragile spaces of relationships with friends or girlfriends/partners, in the imaginary of reaching one’s personal goal of rapping or golfing, or in the hidden spaces of connecting with a Youtube channel once every one else has fallen asleep. Further contextualizing these “inarticulate spaces” (Gingra & Tiro 2008 p. 376) is necessary in future research to understand what spaces are left to belong in, and how.

From the experiences of Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, Toronto is challenged as a space of promise for immigrants and queer bodies, respectively and collectively. A so-called good immigrant who is able to mimic the loyal white heterosexual male capitalist can recognize the promise to belong in Canada. This promise to belong may be realized through recognition in public policy, the market, and mainstream culture, and community. Those who deviate by race, gender, and sexual identities find that what they hope for is not always available. Although each woman acknowledges the benefits of living in Canada by comparison to the countries of origin, Toronto is not a queer utopia, or an immediately accepting “rainbow of people,” to borrow Lauren’s term. The notion to *move out* and ‘*come out*’ in a welcoming urban cosmopolitan queer community is challenged. The notion is also challenged because none of the three women originally immigrated from the country of origin to Toronto as a result of sexual queerness—instead, it was always the choice of the parents that caused the migration. For Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, the process of beginning to recognize sexually queer identities did not occur until the freedom of Toronto was encountered over time. On the one hand, Toronto offers a space of freedom that is not found or imagined to exist in the country of origin. Despite an appreciation for Toronto’s freedom for queer bodies, all three women continuously illustrate that Toronto is not the immigrant or queer utopia that is promised. Spaces in the queer community are limited. Accordingly alternative trajectories from the notion of *moving out* to ‘*come out*’ must be further considered in future research to include bodies that *move* and ‘*come out*’ later.

With the conclusion of the paper, the conversation on racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants has been extended beyond the few scholars that write on how an intersectionality of identities implicates and limits spaces for belonging ‘Other’ queer immigrant bodies (see for example Wahab & Plaza 2009). Yet, the conversation is far from over. Future research must

involve more voices of racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants to broaden the interrogation of the heteronormative and universalizing subject positions that a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant encounters living in Toronto. Which voices, currently silenced, might complicate belonging further? For example, how would the experience of negotiating space change if a woman was previously married to a male partner? How would it be altered if the woman has a child or children? Further, scholarship needs to continue to make a distinction between the experiences of a queer refugee who often migrates to Canada as a result of sexual orientation, and an immigrant who arrives as a child and ‘comes out’ later on.

Reflecting again on the intentions of critical queer theory and critical postcolonial feminist theory, future scholarship must continue to look for how a variety of racialized lesbian/queer women immigrants may be accounted for. The notion of queer carries many white male assumptions—how can we queer public policy without simply eliding difference once again? While we cannot escape how our identities are shaped by the ‘Other’ who perceives a racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant, as different, spaces that interrogate his subject position are vital for attracting visibility and perhaps building bridges. Visibility matters, and to be visible, we need to take down the walls of assumption and impossibility to build open spaces in public and private realms. The joys, grief, isolation and dreams of Kelly, Michelle, and Lauren, illustrate that there is much that scholarship does not know about the intricate and varying experiences of searching for belonging in Toronto.

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Appendix A: Letter of Invitation

July 2, 2011

Dear Participant,

My name is Sheila and I am a researcher from Ryerson University in the Immigration and Settlement Studies program. I am currently working on a research study that explores the experiences of lesbian immigrants in Toronto. My research aims to give voice to lesbian immigrants in Toronto and to begin to fill a gap that exists in scholarly literature in Canada.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study, and to share your experiences as a lesbian immigrant living in Toronto. As a participant, you will be asked to complete one, hour-long interview at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will be completely confidential and conducted between the participant and me. During the interview, you will be asked to reflect on your experiences of settling and your sense of belonging as a lesbian immigrant living in Toronto. A small and equal token of appreciation will be provided to each participant following the interview. However, the most important exchange in this process is that the knowledge and experiences you share will add to a growing body of research on lesbian immigrants in Canada, and will allow people to understand some of the contributions that queer/LGBTQ immigrants have made to the queer/LGBTQ community in Canada.

Your choice to participate or not is voluntary and will not affect any of your existing or future relationships with Ryerson University.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me by e-mail at --- or by telephone ---.

Sincerely,

Sheila Pardoe
Masters Candidate
Immigration and Settlement Studies
Ryerson University

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

1. *Warm-up question:*
Tell me a little about yourself. Can you tell me how old were you when you immigrated to Canada? Who did you come to Canada with?
Follow up: Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like for you when you first arrived?
2. How do you identify, including your sexual and gender identity?
Follow up: *did you identify this way before immigrating to Toronto?*
3. Tell me a bit about your family: Do you have a partner or children? Do you have family in Canada—if you do, do they support your identity?
4. Before immigrating, what did you imagine living in Toronto would be like?
Follow up: If you identified (as a lesbian/queer woman) before arriving in Toronto, do you think your sexual orientation influenced how you imagined Toronto?
5. Why did you immigrate to Toronto? Was the promise of Toronto being an accepting place for LGBT/queer people important to you in coming here?
Follow up: *is it important to you living here now?*
6. Can you tell me about what life is like here for you as a (racialized lesbian/queer woman immigrant)? Can you reflect on some of the benefits of living in Toronto as a (racialized lesbian/queer woman) immigrant?
7. ...And, what are some of the challenges of living in Toronto as (racialized lesbian/queer woman) immigrant?
Follow up: *what do you feel is the greatest challenge?*
8. What are some of the leisurely activities you take part in? Could you tell me about your social settings and where you often spend your free time?
Follow up: *is it important to you that these spaces are gay/lesbian?*
9. How would you describe your experiences with the (gay and lesbian or queer community) in Toronto? How do you think being an immigrant affects this?
10. Do you take part in, or make use of community services in Toronto, such as the 519 Community Centre?
Follow up: *what about when you first immigrated to Canada?*
11. Do you know about *Xtra* or 'Proud FM'. Tell me about your experiences with (gay and lesbian/queer) media like this newspaper or this station. Or with films, blogs, books...
12. How do you feel about Toronto? How does it do as a place to live as (a racialized lesbian/queer woman) immigrant?

13. Do you feel like you're at 'home' in Toronto? Or like you belong in Toronto?
Follow up: what makes Toronto feel/not feel like home?
Follow up: was there an individual or organization that influenced this feeling?
14. Based on your experiences, how do you think making Toronto home could be made better or easier for someone like yourself?
15. Can you think of anything you miss about (where you immigrated from)?
Follow up: what do you miss?/not miss most?
16. If asked to give advice to other (racialized lesbian/queer women) immigrants coming to Toronto, how would you respond?
17. We have come to the end of the interview, but before we finish, is there anything you feel must be mentioned, that you would want people who are reading this paper to know?

Appendix C: Participant Questionnaire

Please answer the following (13) questions. Only circle one response per question. Leave any question blank that you do not feel comfortable answering. Please ask any questions for clarification.

1. Circle your age range:

18 – 28 / 29 – 38 / 39 – 48 / 49 – 58 / 59 – 68

2. What is your current employment status?

**Employed / Unemployed / Student / Prefer not to disclose /
Other: _____**

3. If you are employed, what industry are you currently employed in? (ie: social services, public service, entertainment, education...)

4. Is this the industry you are trained in?:

**Yes / No / Unsure / Prefer not to disclose /
Other: _____**

5. If you are unemployed, what industry are you trained in/currently looking for employment in?

6. If you are a student, note your area of study AND the level of education that you have completed:

7. Are you 'out'? / Do you self-identify as a lesbian?

**Yes / No / Almost always / Sometimes / Unsure /
Prefer not to disclose / Other: _____**

8. Are you currently in an intimate relationship?:

Yes / No / Casual / Unsure / Prefer not to disclose

9. If yes, how long have you been in this relationship? Please circle the range:

Under One Year / More than One Year, Less than 5 years /

**More than 5 Years, Less than 10 Years / More than 10 Years, Less than 20 Years/
More than 20 Years / Prefer not to disclose**

10. Were you 'Out' when you immigrated to Canada?

Yes / No / Unsure / Only to myself / Prefer not to disclose /

Other: _____

11. What is the length of time you have been in Canada (in years)?:_____

12. What country were you born in?: _____

13. With respect to your ethnicity, how do you self-identify?:
