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Thinking Un-Straight Lives in the Hawza, the Islamic(ate), and Queer Refuge: Sociological Reflections from Contemporary Lebanon

While Islamicate histories and present(s) are loaded with multiple forms of ‘un-straight’ life (Ahmed 2015; Kasmani 2022), modern discourses posit the impossibility of a queer Muslim subject inhabiting both their queer and Muslim selves. Instead, standard modernist patriarchal scripts of a strict heteronormative gender binary dominate. This paper is based on longstanding ethnographic research alongside the Shia Hawza – the classical and primary educational institution responsible for training religious scholars – in Beirut, Lebanon and Qom, Iran since 2015. Specifically, the paper focuses on the lived experiences of three marginalised queer persons in the Hawza. It begins by thinking their agentive unambiguous but clandestine embrace of ‘un-straight’ gender roles to analyse their processes of meaning-making and the implications thereof – including on the ‘production’ of Islamic knowledge. In doing this, the paper explores Muslim queerness in relation to forms of being otherwise – beyond patriarchal, androcentric, rationalist, masculinist, categorical, and modernist scripts. Particularly drawing on critical affect theories, the paper argues that its interlocutors find Queer refuge in the Hawza: a complex space of ambivalences that both negates and affirms their different selves. The paper closes by reflecting on the relation between the queer and the Islamic(ate) – always already different in Eurocentric modernity/coloniality.



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