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Producing Public spaces under the gaze of Allah: Heterosexual Muslims dating in Kuala Lumpur

*Original*

Producing Public spaces under the gaze of Allah: Heterosexual Muslims dating in Kuala Lumpur / Nawratek, Krzysztof; Mehan, Asma. - ELETTRONICO. - (2018). ((Intervento presentato al convegno RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2018 tenutosi a Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK nel 28-31 August 2018.

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2712101 since: 2019-03-19T13:40:31Z

*Publisher:*

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

*Published*

DOI:

*Terms of use:*

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GENERICO -- per es. Nature : semplice rinvio dal preprint/submitted, o postprint/AAM [ex default]

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# RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2018

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<b>236</b>	<b>Exploring relationships: narratives, spaces and normativities?</b>
<b>Affiliation</b>	Geographies of Children, Youth and Families Research Group Gender and Feminist Geographies Research Group
<b>Convenor(s)</b>	Raksha Pande (Newcastle University, UK) Peter Hopkins (Newcastle University, UK)
<b>Chair(s)</b>	Peter Hopkins (Newcastle University, UK)
<b>Timetable</b>	Thursday 30 August 2018, Session 4 (16:50 - 18:30)
<b>Room</b>	Glamorgan Building - Committee Room 1
<b>Session abstract</b>	<p>This session will focus on relationships in terms of their analytical potential to understand identity, place and difference in multicultural societies. We are interested in exploring diverse forms of relationship narratives, spaces and normativities; we are also eager to focus on how relationship stories related to dating, marriage, friendship, family, intergenerationally, gender and sexualities can reveal the contested nature of household formation and family dynamics as well as broader debates relating to multicultural citizenship and everyday senses of belonging. Taking narratives, spaces and normativities as a point of departure - this session invites papers that explore the diverse ways in which young people from different religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds tell stories about their personal relationships and in so doing contest normative constructions of family, sexuality and intimacy. Papers can focus on (though need not be limited to) the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Marriage and intimacy</li> <li>- Dating, friendship, Romantic love and intimacy</li> <li>- Minority religious and black and minority ethnic marriages and matchmaking practices</li> <li>- Normative and non-normative relationship practices</li> <li>- Personal relationships, young masculinities, femininities and sexualities</li> <li>- Multicultural Citizenship, belonging and intimacy - Intergenerational relationships and the family</li> <li>- Social media and relationships</li> </ul>

Contact the conference organisers to request a change to session or paper details: [ac2018@rgs.org](mailto:ac2018@rgs.org)

## Changing relations: Young Muslims' narratives of their identities.

Laura Kapinga (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)

Place-based approaches in researching identities enable going beyond social constructs, for example identity markers, by approaching identity as a relational process (see Anthias, 2001). This paper aims to explain identity negotiation in relation to everyday spaces in an urban context during. More specifically, it focusses on young Muslims' narratives of experiences and understandings of their identities in relation to place in their late-teens and early-twenties. Generally, this is a period of social changes, self-reflection and self-exploration, in which one becomes more independent and thinks about future ambitions. In this period, also the meanings of places are likely to change. This paper draws on in-depth interviews and photo-elicitation methods with young Muslims in two urban contexts: Vancouver (Canada) and Groningen (the Netherlands). The narratives of the participants give insights into their past and present place-based experiences including understandings of belonging, experiences of inclusion and exclusion and strategies for inclusion or visibility. Using this data, the paper reflects on questions such as: What places become more or less important for young Muslims? Why does the meaning of these specific places change over time? How

do those changes shape (or are shaped by) relationships to parents and peers and how do they inform the identity processes of young Muslims?

### **Producing Public spaces under the gaze of Allah: Heterosexual Muslims dating in Kuala Lumpur**

*Krzysztof Nawrotek (University of Sheffield, UK)*

*Asma Mehan (Politecnico di Torino, Italy)*

Based on a small research project conducted in Kuala Lumpur (KL) in July - August 2017, the paper discusses places and practices of young heterosexual Malaysian Muslims dating in KL. In Malaysia, the law (Khalwat law) does not allow for two unrelated people (where at least one of them is Muslim) of opposite sexes to be within 'suspicious proximity' of one another in public. This law significantly influences behaviours and activities in urban spaces in KL. However, apart from the legal framework, the faith of urban users seems to influence significantly the way they perceive space and how they behave in the city. The paper questions the analytical usefulness of the notion of public space (as the Western construct) in an attempt to formulate new intellectual coordinates to discuss urban space in a context of the Islamic, post-colonial, tropical, and global city. The ultimate aim of this paper is to start discussing how religious imagination and narratives could lead to formulating a new typology of urban spaces.

### **'Bubbled wrapped in my culture': Affective citizenship among young British-Pakistani women**

*Raksha Pande (Newcastle University, UK)*

*Peter Hopkins (Newcastle University, UK)*

In postcolonial Britain, Pakistani people are represented as occupying a marginalized ethnic identity. Largely driven by a climate of growing Islamophobia, their cultural practices are judged as patriarchal and socially regressive while they are themselves seen as leading parallel lives at odds with the mainstream. In particular, their relationship practices such as arranged marriages, transnational marriages and cousin marriages are regarded as inferior to mainstream marriage norms. Moreover, since all these forms of marriage are inextricably linked with migration, the continuing insistence of British Pakistanis on these types of marriages is viewed with suspicion - seen either as an immigration strategy or as another evidence of their lack of commitment to integration. In this paper, I will argue that this paranoid view of Pakistani relationship practices has led to firstly, a misunderstanding of the various affective registers that underscore the finding of a marriage partner through these traditional channels and secondly, a lack of curiosity about the interpersonal nature of the relationships that result from these marriages has established the figure of the Pakistani, in the mainstream imagination, as an ungrateful citizen - one who is not interested in being part of mainstream British life and for whom (unlike other British citizens) marriages are less about desire, love and romance but more about preserving social, cultural and economic ties with their home country. My key contention in making this argument is that, in the absence of any alternative accounts of the emotions, feelings and desires that must drive British-Pakistani relationship practices, we run the danger of further marginalizing their ethnic and political subjectivities. Drawing upon interview data, I will highlight some key narratives of romantic love and intimacy that young women produce and consume to highlight the different expressions of British-Pakistani affective citizenship in relation to their families, the British state and, their transnational sense of belonging to Islam and Pakistani culture.

### **Where I belong? Groups formation among queer mobile women in two Western cities**

*Cecilia Nessi (Université de Liège, Belgium /Università di Milano Bicocca, Italy)*

The peaceful co-existence of different cultural groups is one of key issues of multicultural theories. But how are groups and cultures are formed in a specific place and time? Feminist and queer scholars have challenged the assumption of cultural homogeneity putting the emphasis on 1) the simultaneous co-existence of multilayered and intersectional identities and axes of oppression and 2) the fluidity and performativity of identities. The aim of this paper is to investigate how queer women create new ties and explore new places when moving into a new city. I use 28 in-depth interviews with bisexual, lesbian and queer women aged between 23 and 39 in 2 European cities - Milan and Brussels. In order to avoid the trap of methodological nationalism, I included both national and international migrants who live in the city since at least two years. Starting from sexual orientation as a mono-dimensional aspect of their identity, I observed how race, class, gender, age, language, ability and legal status significantly shape their access to new places, friendships and networks. I focused on the places of leisure and activism for their - in principle - inclusivity and free accessibility. The experience of mobility highlights how their sense of belonging is enacted when they navigate the opportunities and constraints of the city, "looking for someone like me". I argue that self-identifications play a major role in determining groups formation and consequently they have an impact on the access to spaces, places and meanings.

### **Intimate interactions: Sexual and partner relationships shaping young people's identities in the streets of three African cities**

*Janine Hunter (University of Dundee, UK)*

*Lorraine van Blerk (University of Dundee, UK)*

*Wayne Shand (University of Manchester, UK)*

The complexity of household and family formation across sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates the importance of context for understanding the ways in which inter-generational relations contribute to social, economic and cultural identities. Research has tended to explore the impact of shocks, such as AIDS, on the ability of households to survive, and focus less on the interpersonal relations between household members. Where partner and sexual relationships have been discussed, particularly for young people, this has tended to focus on the impacts of such relationships on education, health, economic survival and poverty reduction.

In the context of street life, research has yet to fully explore the importance of sexual and partner relations in young people's identities. This paper, drawing on findings from the Growing up on the Streets longitudinal research project, explores the diversity of sexual and partner relationships experienced by young people, aged 14-24, living on the streets of Accra, Ghana; Bukavu, DRC

and Harare, Zimbabwe. The data identifies that across the three cities young people are marginalised on the streets and discriminated against in healthcare settings, with little or no access to sexuality education; resulting in relationships which contribute to sexual ill-health, unwanted pregnancies, abortion, homophobia and gender-based violence. Relationships on the street can be coercive, exploitative, violent and abusive, yet they can also be transactional, reciprocal, agentic and romantic. Using young people's own voices, this paper shows how relationships contribute in different ways to daily survival, and how they shape identities across contexts and informal street settings.