FACULTY OF POLITICAL
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

CHALLENGING QUEER AFRICAN NARRATIVES

A CASE STUDY OF LGBTIQ ACTIVISM IN NAIROBI AS A LOCAL NUANCE TO (TRANS)NATIONAL QUEER NARRATIVES

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Liselot Casteleyn
Student number: 01309132

Supervisor: Prof. dr. Marlies Casier
Co-Supervisor: Prof. dr. Julie Carlier

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Abstract

Queer African narratives tend to be limited to two generalising discourses, where queerness is nationally represented as a Western import to African countries and Africa is transnationally portrayed as an anti-queer bloc. *Queer Africa* is thus rendered an anomaly by these essentialising representations of African culture as either un-queer or anti-queer. The queer African erasure this entails extends to the field of academic knowledge production, where Western dichotomous frameworks understand bodies as either queered or racialised. This dissertation aims to challenge the dominant (trans)national narratives *and* make a local queer African counter-narrative visible. As a counterweight to the abstract, homogenising, (trans)national narratives, I analysed the concrete, diverse, local narratives provided by Nairobi's queer history, lives and activism. I reviewed the relevant queer (African) literature and conducted 14 qualitative interviews with Kenyan LGBTQ activists who embody the local, progressive, queer, African voices rendered invisible by the dominant narratives. On the one hand, this analysis indicates that the creation of these (trans)national narratives enables its narrators to employ queer bodies for the expansion and consolidation of their own patriarchal power structures. On the other hand, this analysis contests the dominant narratives by revealing that queerness was already a part of Kenya's narrative before the West colonised the country, while this colonisation entailed the beginning of a continuous Western influence on Kenya's anti-queer animus. These findings echo the need to move beyond Western-centred understandings of sexuality and gender in order to consider distinct local queer practices and the underlying causes of anti-queer animus. In the meantime, the resilient Kenyan LGBTQ activists are making a queer African counter-narrative visible while they are queering African studies and Africanising queer studies.

NEDERLANDSE VERTALING

Queer African narratieven zijn hoofdzakelijk beperkt tot twee veralgemenende discours, waarbij queerness nationaal wordt voorgesteld als een westerse import in Afrikaanse landen en Afrika transnationaal wordt afgeschilderd als een anti-queer blok. *Queer Africa* wordt een abnormaliteit door deze essentialiserende representaties van de Afrikaanse cultuur als on-queer of anti-queer. De queer Afrikaanse onzichtbaarheid die dit met zich meebrengt, vindt ook plaats in de academische wereld, waar Westerse binaire denkkaders lichamen ofwel als queer ofwel als zwart benaderen. Het doel van deze masterproef is om de dominante (trans)nationale narratieven uit te dagen en een queer Afrikaans alternarratief zichtbaar te maken. Als tegenwicht voor de abstracte, veralgemenende, (trans)nationale narratieven heb ik de concrete, diverse, lokale narratieven geanalsyeerd die worden gecreeërd door Nairobi's queer geschiedenis, levens en activisme. Om dit mogelijk te maken heb ik de relevante (Afrikaanse) queer literatuur bestudeerd en 14 kwalitatieve interviews uitgevoerd met Keniaanse LGBTQ activisten die de lokale, progressieve, queer, Afrikaanse stemmen belichamen die door de dominante narratieven onzichtbaar worden gemaakt. Enerzijds heeft deze analyse aangetoond dat de creatie van deze (trans)nationale narratieven toelaat om queer lichamen te instrumentaliseren voor de uitbreiding en bevestiging van de eigen patriarchale machtsstructuren. Anderzijds weerlegt deze analyse de dominante narratieven door te benadrukken dat *queerness* al een onderdeel was van Kenia's verhaal voordat het Westen het land koloniseerde, terwijl deze kolonisatie het begin inhield van een voortdurende westerse invloed op Kenia's anti-queer karakter. Deze bevindingen weerspiegelen de noodzaak om voorbij de westerse opvattingen van seksualiteit en gender te gaan, en te kijken naar de verschillende lokale queer ervaringen en de achterliggende redenen voor anti-queer veruitwendigingen. Ondertussen maken de hardvochtige Keniaanse LGBTQ activisten een queer Afrikaans alternarratief zichtbaar terwijl ze Afrikanistiek *queeren* en queer studies *Afrikaniseren*.

Preface

Upon finishing my studies in criminology, I had a hard time figuring out what I wanted to do next. I felt like I was missing something, and I had a persistent urge to learn more about the world around me to fill this void. It soon became clear that the master in conflict and development with its global, intersectional and critical approach provided the answer I was looking for. I quickly became attracted to the critical insights offered by postcolonial - , feminist - and queer studies, although their piercing analyses more often overwhelmed than reassured me. Recognising that I am only starting to get to know the surface of these areas of study, I have aimed to honour and adopt their critical approach in the making of this dissertation and in studying the diverse and resilient LGBTIQ movement in Nairobi. It has been a long and challenging but at the same time interesting and rewarding journey to complete this dissertation. Most of all, it is a journey that would not have been possible without the help of a number of people along the way.

In the first place I would like to thank my promotor, prof. dr. Marlies Casier, for indulging in my brainstorm sessions and guiding me into the right direction towards an interesting and at the same time feasible dissertation topic, and for always being available for feedback during this whole process. Secondly, I would like to thank Joshua McArthur Kodiaga for welcoming me to his beautiful country and city, introducing me to his colleagues and checking in on me and my progress, ready to assist in case I ran into any trouble. Thirdly, I would like to thank the humanitarian workers and LGBTQ activists who introduced me to the work of their organisations, and shared their personal experiences and knowledge with me. Lastly, but not least importantly, I would like to thank my parents for giving me the opportunity and support to study and research something that interests me this much.

Liselot Casteleyn

Ghent, 14 August 2019

“ Not queer like gay. Queer like escaping definition. Queer like some sort of fluidity and limitlessness at once. Queer like a freedom too strong to be conquered. Queer like the fearlessness to imagine what love can look like... and pursue it. ”

Brandon Wint

Canadian spoken word artist

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CAC	Cosmopolitan Affirming Community
GKT	Gay Kenya Trust
HOYMAS	Health Options for Young Men on HIV/AIDS/STI
ITGNC	Intersex, transgender and gender non-conforming
K-CLA	Kenya Campus Lasses Association
KHRC	Kenyan Human Rights Commission
KNHRC	Kenyan National Human Rights Commission
LBQ	Lesbian, bisexual and queer
LGBT(I)Q	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, (intersex) and queer
MSM	Men who have sex with men
MWA	Minority Women in Action
NGLHRC	National gay and lesbian human rights commission
SOGI(E)	Sexual orientation and gender identity (and expression)
SGD	Sexual and gender diversities
TEA	Transgender Education and Advocacy
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Introduction

Imagine Romeo and Juliet but set in 21st century Nairobi, where the daughters of two local political rivals (un)expectedly fall in love against a backdrop of bright colours and an Afro-pop soundtrack (Osinibu, 2018). Although this lesbian love story is only a fictional one[1], Wanuri Kahiu's *Rafiki* made international headlines at the end of summer in 2018. These headlines were not specifically related to its storyline but rather to the decision of the Kenya Film Classification Board's CEO Ezekiel Mutua to ban it from local cinemas for "promoting lesbianism". The censorship counterproductively provided widespread publicity and catapulted the film to international recognition. The international press especially became engaged with the consequences of the ban, as a film cannot be submitted to international film festivals if it has not been screened at a national motion picture venue for seven consecutive days. While Mutua targets the contents of the film as a threat to Kenya's national culture, the international gaze appears preoccupied with Mutua's ban as it glances over the contents of Kahiu's film and Arac de Nyeko's critically acclaimed short story it is based on (BBC news, 21 September 2018).

As reflected in the reaction to *Rafiki*, queer narratives of Africa tend to be limited to two generalizing, one emphasizing how homosexuality is un-African and another representing Africa as one homophobic bloc (Awondo, Geschiere & Reid, 2012; Ekine, 2013). The first story is usually narrated by political and religious leaders of African countries that have gained independence in the last couple of decades but are still battling the socio-economic inequalities that are being upheld by the neoliberal Western powers. Their ideological abomination of homosexuality is based on the colonial legacies of the Christian and Islamic faith and the Victorian moral values, which have since been woven into the national fabric. Their judicial persecution is supported by British anti-sodomy laws codified in many former colonies' Penal Code. Their political condemnation democratically stems from catering to their constituencies, whose attention to the evils of homosexuality is a useful lightning rod from the real-life challenges created by poverty, unemployment and state corruption. By claiming homosexuality is a Western import, African leaders underscore their independence in opposition to the neo-imperial Western values while covering up the human rights abuses that are happening in their countries. In reality, the roots of their arguments are un-African (Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018; Luft, 2016; Msibi, 2011; Nyanzi, 2013).

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[1] Kahiu's film is based on the critically acclaimed novel "Jambula Tree" by Ugandan author Monica Arac de Nyeko. Arac de Nyeko became the first Ugandan to win the Caine Prize for African Writing with her short story of two teenage girls falling in love in the face of an unaccepting community (de Nyeko, 2007; Osinubi, 2018).

The second story is usually narrated by Western governments and LGBTIQ organisations that highlight homophobic African voices in opposition to their own progressiveness. The acceptance of homosexuality becomes the most recent indication of a country's backwardness, while the continued exclusion of racial and sexual others in Western nation states remains overlooked. In reality, only the sexual others that conform to the capitalist heteronormative notions have (recently) been included in the fabric of the now homonormative Western nations. In the meantime, the white saviour complex leads Western governments and LGBTIQ organisations to impose acceptance of their Western narrative of queerness through aid conditionality on countries and populations characterised by different historical, political and social contexts. Moreover, it overlooks the socio-economic struggles faced by most African citizens, aside from discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, as a consequence of the economic and ecological inequalities created by the West's colonial legacy and neoliberal policies (Ekine, 2013; Ndashe, 2013; Puar, 2007; Thoreson, 2014; Wahab, 2016).

These, respectively national and transnational narratives erase a more nuanced reality of African queerness and queer activism. Moreover, they eclipse the progressive voices from the continent that at once embody Africa's queerness and oppose Africa's presumed anti-queer nature (Amakobe, Dearham & Likimani, 2018; Dearham, 2013; Epprecht, 2012; Luft, 2016; Ndashe, 2013; Thirikwa, 2018; Van Klinken, 2017). LGBTIQ individuals are defying these dominant narratives and becoming more visible, both in fictional stories such as the one of *Rafiki*, as in the reaction to the censorship of the film and other practices that silence their voices (Osinubi, 2019). In fact, *Rafiki*'s director, Wanuri Kahiu, successfully petitioned Mutua's ban in court. Judge Wilfrida Okwany lifted the ban for a week, motivating that she was "*not convinced that Kenya is such a weak society that its moral foundation will be shaken by seeing such a film*". It subsequently became the first Kenyan movie to play at Cannes. While Kahiu welcomed the support for her film, she stated that in the end the film was made by Kenyans for Kenyans, as local cinemas sold out during the 7-day release (BBC news, 21 September 2018). Commenting on the local reception of the ban, two activists working for Nairobi's largest MSM organisation stated in a personal interview:

> *"It was interesting, you see, the film… Mutua banned it, and people for some reason stood up to it. Even the people you would expect to hate gay people, they even stood up. They were against the censorship. And then they were like 'okay now I have to see this movie'. […] It was really cool. It changed the story."*
>
> - John & James, HOYMAS

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTION

While I in no regard want to minimise the discrimination, violence and hardship that queer Africans experience in their daily lives, I do not want to contribute to this being the sole focus or the single story that is told on queerness in Africa. Instead, I want to emphasize the resilience of the diverse LGBTIQ movement and the positive changes they are creating, for their own chosen families and for their society as a whole. In this regard, the objective of this dissertation is to nuance the (trans)national narratives of queerness that surround the African continent and make a local queer African counter-narrative visible by focusing on the diverse and resilient voices resounding in these same countries. More specifically, I will take the voices of queer Kenyan activists into account to research the creation and contestation of narratives enabled by Nairobi's LGBTIQ activism. The focus on LGBTIQ activism in Nairobi simultaneously functions as a demarcation to operationalise my objective, and a framework to challenge these reductionist narratives, as it embodies a local, progressive, African, queer narrative on the crossroads between national state building and transnational development. Through the lens of LGBTIQ activism, the interactions between the homogenising (trans)national narratives and the diverse local experiences become visible, and the ways in which these create, characterise and contrast each other can be considered. The central question that guides this research process is: *How do Nairobi's queer narratives challenge (trans)national narratives of queer Africa?* The limited time and size of this dissertation enables me to only scratch the surface of the rich and diverse possibilities offered by Nairobi's queer community to challenge the (trans)national narratives and provide a local queer counter-narrative. I have elected to focus on three aspects which reflect the continuous creation and contestation of queer narratives by consecutively analysing the narratives Nairobi's queer (1) history, (2) lives and (3) activism produce.

The value of this exploratory research can be located in its contribution to the ongoing critical debate nuancing dominant queer African narratives and the recognition of local queer narratives. First, considering Nairobi as the demarcation of this study transcends the common misconception in such narratives of Africa as a country (Epprecht, 2009; Ndashe, 2013). This local analysis expands the presumably universal Western view on queerness and complements previous authors' counter-narratives based on other African countries[2]. Challenging the generalising narratives from Nairobi's urban geography further complements the study of urban sexualities which is mostly limited to metropolitan centres in the Global North and their homonormative gay male identities (Brown, 2008).

[2] Several authors have nuanced the generalizing view on homosexuality and homophobia in Africa by focusing on specific countries such as Cameroon, Uganda, Senegal, South-Africa, Malawi and Nigeria (Awondo, Geschiere & Reid, 2012; Msibi, 2012; Thoreson, 2014; Wahab, 2016). Some larger volumes regarding queer Africa integrate Kenyan knowledge and experiences (Ekine & Abbas, 2013; Nicol et al., 2018).

Second, conducting qualitative empirical research complements the abstract, academic insights often offered in these critical debates, with concrete local stories and experiences. Amplifying the voices of Kenya's queer activists offers the possibility to reshape the dominant narratives *about* queer Africa with a queer-shaped counter-narrative. By prioritising the voices of the activists themselves, I further aim to meet the (post-colonial) academic shift to value local knowledge. Additionally, I wish to add a practical value to this research by resonating the mission of the activists to make the issues they face and their resilient work, visible. Third, the scope of the empirical research is extended to include the transgender community whereas most of the current debate focuses on homosexuality and homophobia. However, there are some limitations to this inclusive approach, since the obstacles faced on the basis of sexual orientation differ from those faced on the ground of gender identity, as for example only same-sex acts are criminalised. There is a danger that by including the transgender community, their specific issues will be reduced to those related to sexual orientation. I decided I rather risk overlooking some issues than excluding an entire community as I aim to create a more inclusive and expanded narrative. Additionally, sexual and gender diversities face discrimination on the ground of their *perceived* queerness as gender non-conformity is often equated to queerness due to society's limited knowledge of sexual orientation and gender identity issues (HRW, 2015; Mbugua, 2013; Thirikwa, 2018). Moreover, both communities struggle against the same oppressive system and an inclusive analysis could reveal the intersecting oppressions of gender and sexuality (Msibi, 2011).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research has taken many shapes and angles of approach before arriving at the result you can find today. The organisation of a school field trip to Kenya largely influenced the direction my research has taken, as the practical possibilities this offered guided my existing research interests. In the historical context of Kenya, its current political debates and its intertwinement with international discourses, I namely found a lot of my personal and academic interests aligning in the form of queer narratives and LGBTIQ activism. Considering the complexity of these themes and my restricted time to conduct research, I decided to conduct a case study, whereas Nairobi became my case to uncover the multiple narratives that exist concerning queer Africa. Due to practical limitations and ideological considerations, it further became desirable to conduct an exploratory case study that encapsulated the broad diversity of queer Nairobi and its queer activist voices. To be able to learn more about Kenya's queer identities and activism in relation to the dominant (trans)national narratives of queer Africa, a qualitative approach was preferable. While semi-structured interviews met the objective to find a balance between gathering general information and allowing room for personal explanations, participatory observations and informal conversations complemented this with a more informal

method to gain insight into the queer experiences and activism in Nairobi. Ultimately, I conducted 14 interviews with 21 queer activists of 12 LGBTIQ organisations, I attended 5 queer events and I had several informal conversations during my month-long research stay in Kenya.

As with most (qualitative) research, it is crucial to be critical towards the information that has been attained and to consider the methods and power structures that influence the production of this information. Most importantly, it is necessary to recognise my positionality as a *mzungu*, a visible outsider with a Western background, commenting on local conceptualisations and contestations of queerness. To meet at least some of the implications this holds, I aim to build upon and centralise African knowledge throughout this research, from the critical insights provided by African authors to the knowledgeable experience of Kenyan activists. My position simultaneously enables and complicates acquiring certain personal stories, especially since an interview setting is more formal and less enabling to build a relationship of trust. The shared stories are further shaped by the specific context of Nairobi and organised LGBTIQ activism, which cannot be generalized to account for the experiences of sexual and gender diversities in other subaltern settings or even other Kenyan queers. While this research focusses on pro-queer accounts of activism and personal experiences, this is inevitably embedded within and created in interaction with a larger context that is often characterised by its anti-queer discourse. The heteronormative and patriarchal context of LGBTIQ organising in Nairobi has not been actively researched as part of this dissertation and has only been analysed through the point of view of LGBTIQ activism. Out of both practical limitations and ideological considerations this necessitates a critical reading to avoid a one-sided analysis, but equally creates a valuable insight into a minority that is silenced or demonised by mainstream accounts. Following this, the objective of this dissertation can also be found in making these resilient LGBTQ activists and their knowledge, experiences and stories visible.

To achieve the objective of this research, a critical literature analysis will be complemented with a qualitative, empirical research. The methodological considerations of this research will be outlined in the first chapter of this dissertation. Following this, the second chapter consists of a careful deliberation of the central concepts used in this dissertation in light of their context and the preferences of the local activists. In the third chapter, the sharp insights provided by queer studies will be consulted to reflect on the need to Africanise queer studies and queer African studies, while shaping the intersectional, theoretical framework of this dissertation. In the fourth chapter I will systematically focus on three aspects of Nairobi's queer narratives by analysing the historical context, contemporary lives and diverse activism of the Kenyan capital. I will consult the historical, anthropological and political queer literature of the region, to lay the foundation of this analysis. Subsequently, the versed

knowledge of the queer Kenyan activists provides an illustration of the experiences, organisation and co-operation of queer activism in Nairobi. In this regard, the experienced account provided by the activists allows to build upon the academic information, by complementing, enriching or questioning the previous conclusions. I will bring this localised analysis back in relation with the global, transnational power structures in the last chapter, where I reflect on the epistemic and tangible influences that shape this relationship.

A NOTE ON STUDYING SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY IN KENYA

Our way of thinking about the world around us is shaped by narratives and words, which are neither neutral nor universal. Language is always construed in certain historical and political contexts and (re)produces power structures. While I extensively and carefully consider the labels I use to refer to Kenya's sexual and gender diversities later in this dissertation, it is necessary to recognise the choice to study *sexuality* and *gender* in itself and the implications this holds. These Western analytic categories are reified as ahistorical, universal, empirical phenomena while instead they are modern, Western and ruling-class (Eribon, 2001; Massad, 2002; Shakhsari, 2014; Thomas, 2007).

The demarcation of a research topic and population to the LGBTIQ community stems from the preliminary assumption that there are people and organisations identifying as queer or any other way on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity. This presumption is influenced by a Western view on sexual and gender diversities where someone's sexual preferences or gender identification is inherent to one's identity. Historically rooted in the repression and marginalisation of the "homosexual" community, there is now a "gay" counter movement where one's identity is proudly being claimed and expressed. Demonstrative of this Western discourse is the "coming out" narrative and annual Pride events, which started out as protests and have grown into celebrations of one's identity. This "out and proud" identity of many LGBTIQ identifying persons in Western countries should not be regarded as a universal characteristic for sexual and gender diversities in other regions in the world - and exceptions to this identity in the Western part of the world itself also need to be recognised (Alimamohed, 2010). I will return to these epistemic considerations in the second and final chapter.

Chapter one: **Methodology**

1. An exploration of queer Nairobi

1.1. INTRODUCING THE CASE

When you first enter Nairobi, you are immediately propelled into the hectic life characteristic for Kenya's capital. Kenya gained independence from the British Empire in 1963, and its cosmopolitan and multicultural capital has been growing rapidly ever since, with continuous infrastructural expansions to cater to the nearly ten-fold increase of the population. Nairobi houses one of the largest "slums", and one of the major economic centres of the African continent. This attracts both international businesses to set up their reginal offices in Nairobi, and it appeals to many Kenyans to navigate the country's unemployment problems by setting up their own businesses and hustling to make a livelihood in the capital. With a population of around 4 million people, it is not surprising that the busyness off the packed streets is what captures your attention most, although the pressing heath is quite overwhelming as well, as climate changes influence the prevalence of the seasonal long rains.

Nairobi's urban character not only attracts people looking for economic prosperity or mere employment, it also attracts those looking for privacy, equality and community. As characteristic for many capitals, Nairobi is home to numerous LGBTIQ organisations. Despite the country's criminalisation of *de facto* homosexuality and the (recently nullified) ban for LGBTIQ organisations to register as such, the LGBTIQ movement in Nairobi is diverse and manifold. As a metropolitan city, Nairobi offers more anonymity and diversity than rural areas, which creates an opening for LGBTIQ activists to organise in the city, provide support for their hundreds of community members and create queer (counter-) narratives. It is important to recognise the specific experience of Nairobi's queer community and activism and differentiate it from other, less visible, rural, subaltern sexual and gender diversities. The exceptionality of some of the possibilities Nairobi offers already becomes visible when compared to LGBTIQ organising in Eldoret, which is the fifth largest and fastest growing city in the country but the specialisation and co-operation of its LGBTIQ movement is still limited.

Nairobi's queer activism became the gateway and an integral aspect to my case study of queer Nairobi. On the one hand, Nairobi's LGBTIQ activism is one of the three aspects of queer Nairobi I analyse throughout this dissertation. On the other hand, the queer activists that shape this activism, also shape the rest of my analysis of queer Nairobi, as they provide stories and subjectivities concerning the country's queer history and the lives of queers in the country's vibrant capital.

1.2. MOTIVATING THE CASE STUDY AS RESEARCH DESIGN

Due to practical, academic and personal motivations, Nairobi became the location of my empirical research, and it evolved into an inherent part of my dissertation topic. Practically, I had the opportunity to extend my stay in Kenya, related to a school field trip, to conduct research for my dissertation in Nairobi and Eldoret[3]. Academically, complementing a literature study with empirical data offers the possibility to enrich the methodological process and the critical analysis. Personally, I was interested in diversity and intersectionality, frameworks and identities, and global political and historical connections, which all seemed to culminate in the existence of a vibrant queer community, opposing national and transnational powers and their ahistorical convictions. This alignment of possibilities allowed me to analyse the local materialisations and contestations of (trans)national queer narratives.

Fitting with the difficulties of completing preliminary fieldwork in an unfamiliar "field" and conducting an in-depth exploratory research of a complex phenomenon within its context, is the methodology of a case study. I believe I can best explain my choice and implementation of this research design using John Gerring's (2004, 342) definition of the case study as "*an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units*". First, the spatial boundaries demarcating my single unit coincide with the geographical boundaries of the city of Nairobi, as my case consists of the creation and contestation of queer narratives in the context of Nairobi. However, this local context is not isolated but co-constructed by regional and global processes. Second, the complexity of nuancing these narratives necessitates an intense study of Nairobi's queer narratives by analysing its historical, contemporary and organisational aspects with various qualitative research methods. Third, the purpose of this localised research is to gain insight into (trans)national queer narratives and African understandings of queerness and queer activism.

It was difficult to demarcate the case beyond Nairobi's spatial boundaries before entering "the field", without knowing what queer voices and stories were empirically accessible. Luckily, the flexibility of the strategy enabled me to enter the field without a clearly demarcated subject. In the beginning, this open-ended approach allowed me to reconnaissance Nairobi's queer activist scene. Once I discovered its complexity, I consciously decided to conduct an exploratory case study to actively research the diversity of the activism taking place in the field. In this regard, my research became defined and redefined by the practical opportunities and the knowledge encountered in the field while it

[3] I stayed in Kenya from the 23rd of March until the 26th of April, of which I resided three weeks in Nairobi, and two weeks in Naivasha and Eldoret. My time in Nairobi was completely devoted to conducting research for my dissertation, while my time in Naivasha and Eldoret was primarily related to another research as part of a methodological course within the Conflict & Development program. However, during my time in Eldoret I was able to interview two local queer activists.

continuously enriched my theoretical frame. This exploratory case study is valuable for providing an overview of queer Nairobi and some preliminary insights into the experiences, lives and activism it encompasses. This supplements more in-depth research that looks into one queer life phase or obstacle, one LGBTIQ organisation or one characteristic of LGBTIQ activism in Nairobi, which could be conducted in a follow-up research (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

2. Voices, stories and subjectivities

2.1. DATA COLLECTION

2.1.1. Literature review

One of the strengths of the case study that motivated the decision to use this methodology, is the flexibility to employ multiple research methods to study various data sources concerning the chosen case, which allows a greater validity of the research results. In this regard, the case study functions as the overarching methodological design of this dissertation, while the required data to analyse this case will be collected through the triangulation of qualitative methods and sources. The first method that has been used is a critical and comprehensive literature review of the concepts that are central to this dissertation. Firstly, such a review is important to explore the research topic and situate this within the broader academic and public debate. Secondly, an in-depth literature review is necessary to adequately prepare the research, from demarcating a relevant and feasible research question to preparing a topic list in order to conduct empirical research. Thirdly, the literature itself encompasses an important source of information to shape the theoretical frame of this research and provide context information to support the empirical results (Mortelmans, 2010).

The secondary sources that make up this literature review consist of the academic literature from anthropological, feminist, queer and African studies with regard to the conceptual, theoretical and historical background of this dissertation. This data has been collected through consulting the main academic online databases for articles relating to “homosexuality”, “LGBT”, “queer”, “activism” and “Africa”, “Kenya”, “Nairobi”. These secondary sources are complemented with research reports and newspaper articles on Kenya to take the local and current context of LGBTIQ lives and activism into account. This data has been collected through consulting popular search engines and following some of the main LGBTIQ organisations’ social media platforms. Since conducting a discourse analysis moves beyond the scope of this research, the information on these digital platforms was not systematically collected nor analysed. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge this online presence as a (growing) part of LGBTIQ identification, activism and community building takes place in the digital space.

2.1.2. Semi-structured interviews

The second method that has been used, is qualitative semi-structured interviews. The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews results from the aim of this dissertation to analyse queer African narratives through the voices and stories of local LGBTQ activists. Characteristically for a semi-structured interview is the use of a topic-list to ask open-ended questions. The topics that were questioned during these conversations can be divided into three categories, namely organisational characteristics, personal experiences and international influences. These categories allowed me to explore everyday and activist relations with national and transnational queer narratives. The order that these topics and their sub-topics came up varied from one interview to another, depending on the answers shared by the activists[4]. The benefit of this research method is the room it allows for flexibility and spontaneity to stimulate as much as possible an informal conversation despite the formal notebook-and-recorder interview setting. Simultaneously, the consequent use of the topic list allows the collection of generalizable information to enable a systematic analysis of the various aspects of my research while leaving room for the specific stories of the distinct communities of the acronym. In order to enable this analysis, the conversations were consensually recorded and/or taken note of when it appeared inappropriate or impractical to record the interview. Each participant voluntarily gave their written consent to be a part of this research, with all LGBTQ activists indicating the organisation they worked for could be mentioned in the report, and the majority even consented to the mentioning of their names. When I asked about their decision to waive all anonymity, the participants motivated that they welcome all the visibility they can get.

The nature and timeframe of this research required purposive sampling. Focusing on queer narratives and spending approximately a month in Kenya caused me to target the digitally present and locally known LGBTIQ organisations. With these criteria in mind, I scoured the internet for all (digitally) existing LGBTIQ organisations in Nairobi to establish some first contacts in preparation of my fieldwork. Despite repeatedly contacting several organisations through various digital platforms, only two replied (positively) to set up an initial interview[5]. This implored me to keep my research question open since any further demarcation risked being impossible to research in the field. Ultimately, this explorative approach fitted with the diversification of LGBTIQ activism and my preference to encapsulate all this diversity. Once I arrived in Nairobi, the *snow ball started rolling*. With each interview I conducted, I

[4] Because the denomination of "the researcher" in opposition to "the researched" overlooks the latter's active role in shaping an interview, I refer to the so-called "respondents" of my research as "LGBTQ activists". This follows the idea of their voices and stories being vital to this dissertation and the information it produces.

[5] Luckily, I had been personally introduced to a humanitarian worker who used to come in contact with SOGI issues and still had some contacts in the field he introduced me to, thus ensuring a smooth start to my research.

was able to enquire about other organisations and activists. This way, I stumbled upon additional organisations I had not yet come across, or I required the necessary personal contacts to arrange an interview with a previously unreachable organisation.

Following this, the primary sources encompass 14 interviews conducted between the 23rd of March and the 26th of April 2019. During these interviews, 21 activists contributed their voice, with the number of participants for each interview ranging from 1 to 4. These individuals work for (and represent) 12 organisations, ranging from 1 humanitarian organisation that works with SOGIE refugees as part of their general mission and 1 refugee led CBO, to 1 small-scale queer art project and 9 structural organisations of which many are members of the national LGBQ coalition. Of these formalised organisations, only 3 serve all queer individuals, 2 of which are based in Nairobi and 1 in Eldoret. The rest of Nairobi's organisations can further be categorised in relation to their target population, namely 1 organisation advocating for all sexual minorities, 2 targeting MSM's, 2 targeting LBQ's and 1 supporting specifically ITGNC's[6]. However, these demarcations are not set in stone as some individuals identify with multiple target populations and some organisation's target groups have and continue to evolve.

Date	Participant	Organisation	Community	Main strategy
25/03	1	Anonymous	SOGIE	Humanitarian
26/03	2	Minority Women in Action (MWA)	LBQ	General
28/03	3, 4 & 5	National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC)	LGBTIQ	Legal
29/03	6	Ishtar MSM	MSM	Health care
30/03	7 & 8	Nature Network	SOGIE	Media
31/03	9	Cosmopolitan Affirming Community (CAC)	LGBTIQ	Religion
03/04	10	To Revolutionary Type Love (TRTL)	LGBTIQ	Art
04/04	11-14	Jinsiangu	ITGNC	Health care
05/04	15	Kenya Campus Lasses Association (K-CLA)	LBQ	(Media)
14/04	16	Q-Initiative –*Eldoret*	LGBTIQ	General
15/04	17	Q-Initiative – *Eldoret*	LGBTIQ	General
21/04	18	Cosmopolitan Affirming Community (CAC)	LGBITQ	Religion
23/04	19	Gay Kenya Trust (GKT)	LGBQ	Media
24/04	20 & 21	Health Options for Young Men on HIV/AIDS/STI (HOYMAS)	MSM	Health care

Table 1: Overview of the interviews

[6] A comprehensive description of the specialized organisations can be found in attachment 1.

2.1.3. Participatory observations

The third research method that has been used follows a bit more an ethnographic tradition, as information was collected through participatory observations and informal conversations. While a true ethnographic approach seemed desirable for this topic, it was practically unattainable in a time span of one month. Nonetheless, upon conducting the interviews, I enquired about any gatherings organised for/by the LGBTIQ community that I could attend. This would allow me to learn about queer experiences and activism without directly inquiring about them. These gatherings consist of an LBQ support group[7], an MSM drag event, a feminist art presentation and discussion, and two Sunday Fellowships at an inclusive LGBTIQ church[8]. The last part of data was collected through informal conversations. The most important conversations are the intense fifteen-minute ones I had with two Uber drivers during a car ride from the apartment complex I was staying at to an interview location or vice versa. While two conversations do not produce any representative information, they complement the literature and interview data. Whereas during the interviews, the LGBTQ activists identified the causes of society's opposition to them and their work, the Uber drivers provided first-hand insight into this opposition[9]. In conclusion, the primary sources consist of the empirical data collected through these 14 semi-structured interviews, 4 participatory observations and 2 informal conversations.

2.1. DATA ANALYSIS

Throughout my research I conducted a critical and iterative literature analysis, to first broadly explore the research topic and later contextualise the data collected through my fieldwork. I analysed most of the empirical data by transcribing the interviews *ad verbatim*[10] and coding the relevant sections of the transcripts in order to reduce and structure my data. The coding process consisted of several phases and was also iterative, starting from a codebook based on my interview topics, evolving to one that was restructured and refined on the basis of the information provided by the participants themselves (Cope, 2010). After the parallel process of developing the codebook and coding each interview was finalised, I grouped the relevant information from all interviews per code. Lastly, I organised the code categories and subcategories in accordance to the structure of my dissertation. This coding process

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[7] Due to the sensitivity of the organisation and discussion, it was agreed that I could attend the meeting to familiarize myself with their work, but I could not report about it.
[8] An outline of these gatherings can be found in attachment 2.
[9] A vignette of these conversations can be found in attachment 3.
[10] I was unable to record and therefore transcribe 3 of the 14 interviews (GKT, Nature Network and the 2nd CAC interview), due to the more informal interview settings outside of the organizational context, which were either too loud and public, or too silent and intimate to introduce a recording device and make an audible recording. Instead, I took extensive notes which I later typed out and coded together with the transcripts.

can be considered as the first part of my analysis, where I already familiarised myself with the data and gained some preliminary insights. Following this, I read through each subcategory to form a coherent picture of the knowledge and opinions of my participants which would either complement, contradict or redirect my literature analysis. Because I do not simply want to reduce the interviews with the Kenyan activists to data, I have chosen to explicitly include their voices in my dissertation by displaying certain quotes from the transcripts. Lastly, I collected some data by attending events and holding informal conversations of which I (subtly) took concise notes during or directly after they took place. Since the set-up of these events and conversations already correlated with a specific component of my research, it was inefficient to code them further. I analysed these experiences in relation to the interviews, by complementing the stories of the Kenyan activists with my own "story".

I have chosen not to report the primary and secondary data in separate theoretical and empirical chapters of my dissertation, because I believe analysing them together and letting them interact with each other does more justice to the holistic nature of a case study. However, information concerning queer experiences and queer activism in Nairobi is largely absent from the literature and primarily researched through the empirical experiences in the field. Following this, the focus during the interviews was less on the historical backgrounds and transnational power structures, which ultimately rely more heavily on the literature. Once again, this ties back to the benefits of the case study to employ multiple methods and sources to paint a holistic picture. In this way, literature and empiricism will actively complement each other, contradict each other and above all, enrich each other. I will report the insights provided by the literature and the activists through critical descriptions, and quoted statements of the activists'[11] in order to let their subjectivities speak for themselves and not only become part of my analysis.

3. Some considerations

3.1. METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

It is crucial to not only be critical towards the collected data, but also towards one's own research and the methodology used to collect this data. I already mentioned the benefits of the case study as a research design and why this meets the purpose of this dissertation. Since my case concerns the local queer narratives of *Nairobi*, this has some consequences for comparing or generalizing the results. I

[11] At the end of each quote, I will refer to the name and organisation of the activist proclaiming the statement in case they indicated they do not want to remain anonymous and instead visibly want to advocate for queer issues. I will not quote the interviews that were not recorded in order not to falsely paraphrase any stories.

refrain from labelling the analysis in my dissertation as an analysis of queer *Kenyan* narratives, although I was able to interview two activists in Eldoret. Instead, these two interviews complement Nairobi's queer activism and they highlight its specificity. On the one hand, Nairobi's metropolitanism shapes queer identities, experiences and activism in ways which in all probability differs from rural areas or even other urban areas. On the other hand, Nairobi has a shared historical and political context with these regions which makes it differ from other capitals. The value of this research is therefore not as much its possibility to provide generalisable information concerning queer experiences and activism in the Global South, but its contribution of a *specific* testimonial to substantiate the general debate opposing (trans)national narratives of queer Africa.

My decision to nuance the (trans)national queer narratives by focusing on the progressive voices of Nairobi's queer *activists* entails some additional considerations. The experiences and knowledge that the activists in Nairobi shared with me, need to be valued for precisely that, the subjectivities of *activists in Nairobi*, as opposed to being representative for every Kenyan queer or even other Nairobian queers. My decision to focus on LGBTIQ activism was motivated by the identifiability and accessibility of these progressive queer voices and by their indirect and direct confrontation with the (trans)national narratives. However, this leaves out the voices of queer individuals who do not (openly) identify with the LGBTIQ identity, and those who are not a part of organising. Moreover, this exclusion results from individual choices and structural exclusionary mechanisms, as certain ages and classes are absent from organising. My dissertation therefore comprises an exploration of a certain kind of LGBTIQ activism: the urban, visible, young, middle-class, hierarchical, networked, NGO-ised and often Western funded organisations and individuals.

After weighing the limitations of and motivations for conducting a more inclusive research that considers both sexual and gender diversities in the introduction, I want to extend on the methodological imbalance of pursuing this *queer* inclusivity. First, this inclusivity has been more adequately realized in the empirical research than in the literature study. These literary shortcomings follow the heightened focus on *homosexuality* and *homophobia* in relation to the African continent, the activist and scholarly practice to reduce the LGBTIQ community to its first letters, and my own compliance to these trends (Tower, 2016). Although gender non-conforming expressions are included in part of the literature through its association with same-sex practices, this inadequately recognises the real and specific experiences of transgender, intersex and other gender non-conforming individuals. I have attempted to meet this absence by reading additional transgender focused and written literature and resonating the voices of gender non-conforming activists throughout this dissertation. Second, the organisational landscape is characterised by a quantitative disparity between

the number of organisations providing on the ground of sexual orientation as opposed to gender identity. This can be related to the magnitude of their respective target groups, the separation and consequent specialisation of the ITGNC movement and the (inter)national recognition of the MSM community as an HIV/AIDS Key Population. Although this organisational imbalance translates to my interviews, I was able to talk to multiple transgender activists. Lastly, I want to remark on the extent of this inclusivity, which does not encompass the complete ITGNC community, but only entails the transgender community. Because the academic literature mostly focuses on the LGBT(I) community and I was unable to complement this with the voice of Kenyan intersex activists, intersex issues only feature as part of the ITGNC community and are not specifically addressed in this dissertation.

The information enclosed in Nairobi's queer activists' stories is influenced by the research method used to enquire about it. The limited time in the field motivated the decision to conduct interviews, a method which makes it difficult to build a relationship of trust and informally share information. When these interviews are preceded by singing a consent form, taped by a recording device and conducted with the use of a topic list, this creates an even more formal setting. By introducing myself as an inquisitive student, and sometimes being personally introduced to one activist by another working for a separate organisation, this could partially be countered. Nonetheless, information can be distorted or withheld to provide socially desirable answers, or it can accidently not be disclosed when certain information is considered irrelevant or simply forgotten. The size of the research sample, which includes the majority of LGBTIQ organisations in Nairobi, and the interviewing of multiple activists per organisation (during the same or separate interviews), offers several opportunities to learn Nairobi's queer activist stories.

3.2. PERSONAL CONTEMPLATIONS

During the preparation of my fieldwork I struggled with reconciling my position as a student-researcher wanting to learn more about and *from* the world's diversity and my position as a *mzungu*, a white, European, middle-class student going to a post-colonial context, encapsulated in continuing unequal global power structures. I mention this positionality not to dwell on any personal discomfort, as Epprecht (2009, 1260) indicates that "*lack of research and excessive timidity are more problematic than occasional academic missteps or unintentionally colonizing overstatements*". However, this position entails certain implications to conduct this research and consequently engaging with "the field". On the one hand my background entails that African stories are once again approached from a Eurocentric view, while my unfamiliarity with the field and language limited my access to metropolitan, NGO contexts. On the other hand, my outsider position and the association between the West and

queerness might facilitate certain discussions which are sensitive in the local context. While my consciousness of my own outsider position enabled me to cautiously approach my methodology and analysis, it complicated critically engaging with the local activist's stories, especially in relation to culture and religion, as I valued them for both the information they held and as a counterweight for my own subjectivities.

I have attempted to take the implications of this positionality into account throughout the different stages of my research. Firstly, by embedding my research in literature that is not limited to Western academia but extends to the critical analyses produced by African authors. Secondly, by adopting a qualitative research method to empirically complement the literary insights with the knowledgeable experience of local LGBTQ activists, who themselves are more accessible and are versed in engaging with (foreign) outsiders. Thirdly, by reporting my analysis by way of directly echoing their statements throughout these pages and in this regard endorsing the activists' approach of challenging the discriminatory narratives with their visibility. I recognise the difference that remains between integrating local ideas and voices into my own framework as opposed to a research which has been conceptualised from the start by local activists. I nonetheless believe this result is also valuable for providing its own insights to a developing field of study.

While my identification as queer is less visible, as I do not identify with or tend to conform to the binary, essentialised identity categories that render queer identities "out and proud", *this* identification itself holds some implications for my (approach to my) research. My personal aversion towards the limited and static character of labels discouraged me from announcing any personal labels and from enquiring after the activists' own identification, nonetheless many shared this and did not question my own relation to my research. It could be speculated that a more transparent approach might have resulted in different stories, although I estimate the welcoming, queer setting of the interview and my inquisitive approach facilitated an open, conversationalist interview. My personal (and the critical queer studies') sensitivity towards identifications and my recognition of the value labels hold for other individuals and movements, caused me to carefully approach identity categories and consciously contextualise them. Besides this critical engagement with identities and the labels used to describe and therefore create them, I approached this topic by focusing on experiences over identities. Although this shared identification complements the aforementioned outsider position with an insider perspective, I recognise the intersectional character of identities and the distinctiveness of a *Kenyan queer identity*, the specificity and diversity of which is central to my dissertation. I therefore approach this dissertation first and foremost out of human solidarity, and secondly as a queer researcher.

Chapter Two: **Conceptual framework**

1. From homosexuality to a whole alphabet of labels

1.1. WHAT'S IN A LETTER?

Foucault dated the 19th century as the birth of homosexuality, when modern European medical science identified the homosexual as an *identity* which came to replace the previously considered sinful *practices*. Prior to the 19th century, there was no specific language concerning same-sex practices, there was only the broader legal and religious category of sodomy which encompassed all non-reproductive sexual acts. Moreover, there was no discourse on *sexuality*, until the binary categories that were already characterising gender in the medical language, were applied to sexuality to produce the ill homosexual in opposition of the heterosexual (Eribon, 2001; Msibi, 2011). Since then, the regulation and organisation of this non-normative identity has taken several shapes and designations.

In the African context, the entire movement on sexual orientation and gender identity is referred to as the *lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex* (LGBTI) movement. However, there are some considerations to be made before adopting this terminology, as it is derived from a Western historical and political context and reproduces a normative, binary view on sexuality and gender. The colonial erasure of local sexual and gender non-conforming traditions entailed a societal and linguistical erasure, while the English language became woven into the national fabric[12]. In a context of globalised capitalism, the organisations providing support for these discriminated communities need to appeal to Western donors. This, and access to the internet, leaves local urban queers to adopt the LGBTI terminology in naming their organisations and in self-identifying. It is in respect of the labels used by the Kenyan activist that I employ the LGBTI terminology in reference to the activists and the movement, without negating the complex nature of it. Additionally, discarding the terminology on the ground of its Western origin presumes these concepts remain foreign while they become intertwined with and shaped by local understandings of sexuality and gender, therefore altering both Western and local terms. The agency of local actors in redefining and strategically using the LGBTIQ terms should not be underestimated in critical considerations of this same terminology (Monro, 2018; Msibi, 2011; Shakhsari, 2014; Tamale, 2011). In what follows I will shortly detail what the different letters of the acronym entail in the Kenyan context, based on the discussions I had with the local LGBTQ activists.

[12] Although all the activists I spoke to naturally used the English designators, they identified some (derogative) Swahili terms used outside of the NGO context such as *shoga, msagaji, msago.*

(**L**) The motivation for a specific women-led and targeted organisation can be found in the radical feminist struggle against patriarchy, which extends to the gay movement. From its conception, the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) included a lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LBT) [13] organisation as one of its four initial member organisations. Dearham (2013) reported that the majority of the women that participated in her research into the queer women's movement in Nairobi around 2010, identified as lesbian, while the term queer was not very prevalent. During my own research, a few years after Dearham's, I found that the woman loving women activists I interviewed respectfully distanced themselves from the classic "lesbian" labels, with some opposing labelling altogether, others looking for labels that fit the Kenyan context and the majority identifying as queer.

> *"I don't know what I am because when you say you are a lesbian there are so many labels that come with it. When you are gay, there are so many labels. I just prefer myself being 'queer', and a woman who loves women and that's it."*
> – Caroline, CAC

(**G**) Most organisations for gay and bisexual men organise around the term men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM). This needs to be regarded in relation to the mobilisation around the HIV/AIDS crisis, as this terminology is medically accepted, facilitates co-operation with the government and allows the inclusion of risk groups that do not identify with the Western identity categories and the stigma's that come with them (Epprecht, 2012). Some activists indicated that self-identification before the digital age used to be difficult due to a lack of accessible information on sexual and gender diversities, leaving (gay) men to feel "different" while they were harassed for their femininity. Nowadays, the gay lingo of "top" and "bottom", in reference to someone's sexual position, has become integrated in Nairobi's MSM community. These terms reproduce society's heteronormative patriarchy by imposing the dominant gender frames on same sex-relationships. The introduction of the term "versatile" to the discourse, has enabled a more fluid and less binary identification.

> *"For MSM we noticed, as much as people are engaging in same-sex activities, there is a very huge group that didn't want to be termed as 'gay' or just grouped into 'bisexual' or 'queer'. They felt like that was stigmatising to them. [...] It is also an easier term to work with, because it is so medically acceptable"*
> – John, HOYMAS

[13] Following the Kenyan separation of the transgender and intersex (ITGNC) movement however, the organisational structure and denomination evolved to lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) (GALCK, 2016).

(**B**) The bisexual identity remains an international subject of contestation, through their defiance of society's dichotomies. Their authenticity as members of the LGBTI community is disputed, which leads to biphobia and bi-erasure in the Kenyan context (Amakobe, Dearham & Likimani, 2018). Stigma surrounding bisexual men and women further extends to the queer community, where they are accused of being indecisive and incapable of monogamy. Nonetheless, there is also a lot of confusion surrounding this term, with some misconceptions sex between a man and a woman or people with multiple partners is bisexuality (Ocholla, 2011).

> *"There is this idea that a bisexual person will eventually leave you to go settle in a heterosexual relationship. And based on that, mainly women feel that bisexual women are liars, they are cheaters, they are not faithful."* – Sonja, K-CLA

(**T**) Kenya has experienced a clear separation of its transgender movement. The decision to organise a specific intersex, transgender and gender non-conforming (ITGNC) movement was motivated by the transphobic character of the LGB community. Feeling *gaynised* and *gayjacked*[14], as their needs were pathologized and overlooked by a predominantly cisgender LGBTI movement focused on decriminalising consensual same-sex relations, they decided to organise for their own specific issues early on. The transgender community distinguishes itself from drag queens, cross dressers, effeminate gays and butch lesbians who sporadically *express* a different gender, while they aim to support those who *identify* with a different gender than the one associated with their biological sex (Mbugua, 2013; Theron, 2013). The transgender movement resists the call of the LGB community to pursue the declassification of gender identity disorders from the DSM-V in imitation of the removal of homosexuality from the DSM-II. Motivating that this diagnosis offers the means to gain access to the necessary medical treatments, they call for a need to educate the society on mental disorders instead of erasing mental disorders from the DSM (Ekine & Abbas, 2013c; Mbugua, 2013).

> *"It reaches a point you find yourself not fitting in spaces… Like in the lesbian, LBQ spaces, as a trans man who was once… You can't sit in those spaces because they don't understand, they don't understand anything to do with transitioning. […] It is hard to find a space for trans, ITGNC's only, without struggling. MSM's don't understand and they occupy a lot of space. LBQ's they came, they own their spaces."* – Evance, Q-Initiative

[14] Audrey Mbugua (2013, 130) criticizes homosexuals' reduction of the LGBTI community to the gay/homosexual community through two processes: "*Gaynising/lesbianising is the process of homosexuals turning transgender people into homosexuals. Gayjacking is the process of using transsexual issues and struggles to pimp up the gay/homosexual agenda."*

(**I**) While the community is limited to the four above mentioned identity categories in the West, it is expanded in African countries to include intersex individuals as well[15]. Intersex people are born with a combination of male and female physical and biological characteristics. When this combination is considered to deviate too much to qualify as either gender, parents of newborn intersex babies might elect to perform corrective surgery. This leads to the *creation* instead of the *correction* of a gender (Amakobe, Dearham & Likimani, 2018).

1.2. QUEER LIKE ESCAPING DEFINITION

In recognition of the historical and political distinctiveness of the LGBTI terminology, I alternatingly use the terms "sexual and gender diversities"[16] (SGD) and "queer". SGD encompasses all those identifying on the LGBT spectrum, but also those that do not conform to these identity categories while their sexual and gender identity, orientation or practices deviate from societal norms. Another response to the shortcomings of these concepts is the introduction of queer, which is more than an afterthought that is added as the last abbreviation to the LGBTI acronym. Paradoxically, queer is a reclaimed label offering an alternative for the existing labels in an attempt to overcome the restrictiveness of labelling. Queer is on the one hand used as an umbrella term for the LGBTI identities and other sexual and gender diversities, and on the other hand as a radical concept defying all binaries and normativities.

> *"I love that term because it doesn't really, like it defines people without really defining them. You can be queer, but you can be any type of queer. It is a very, it is an identifier but it is a very open one."* – Kawira, TRTL

Essentially, queer means different. In the 1960s and 1970s this had a negative connotation, referring to people who were living un-conventional lives. By the 1990s the label was reclaimed by predominantly white lesbians and gays, introducing a new time of inclusiveness and liberation to replace the separationist tradition. Now, there is power in reclaiming the difference that queer entails (Galinksy, 2013; Mason-John, 2013; Rosenblum, 1994). Although the notion of queer also originates from a Western context, the label is being critically (re)claimed in the Global South. Especially in the LBQ movement there is an awareness and aversion towards the use of labels, where the queer label is being embraced as an open-ended alternative to the restricting lesbian, dyke, femme, … designations.

[15] I will therefore refer to the Kenyan organisations, movement and activism using the complete LGBTIQ acronym. Conversly, I will shorten the acronym in reference to the activists as I only interviewed LGBTQ individuals.
[16] In response to the critique of the sexual and gender *minorities* designation, some recent articles propose the more inclusive notion of sexual and gender *diversities* (Monro, 2018).

"What made me begin this journey is, once you start naming yourself, based on these names from other countries, you find yourself trying to assimilate their ways, trying to live up to their ideas of those names. For me, redefining and finding words for ourselves would mean […] what does non-binary or trans mean to me, in a Kenyan context as opposed to a context I borrowed from maybe the US or Europe?" – Sonja, K-CLA

I recognise there is more than discursive debates and persistently weighing the pros and cons of each label. Especially for activists, debating labels might appear as a trivial activity compared to the struggle for legal recognition and medical access. Mason-John (2013) markedly questions why labels matter and who we are labelling for. In answering these questions, we might consider the work of Foucault in which he outlined decades ago how language is regulatory and determines the world around us, enabling power to be exercised through these regulatory discourses (Eribon, 2001). This is why I believe it is important to nuance the existing terminology and not adopt it unconditionally. How we talk about things determines how we think about it and how we ultimately act. Attracted by the possibilities that queer offers and the use of it by many Kenyan radical feminists as a label in defiance of labels, I have chosen to adopt this concept. I will use the term queer alternatingly with the LGBTIQ acronym in recognition of the diversity demonstrated by the acronym and those individuals that do not identify with the notion of queer. Theron (2013) pointedly questions how much further the acronym will be extended before it reaches its expiry date. As the world and the language used to describe it is ever changing, this time will surely come, but for now we have a common vocabulary that allows us to critically discuss the vocabulary itself and the lives, obstacles and resilience it encompasses.

"I don't think we ever thought about it in terms of, if we change the language it would mean more acceptance." – Gaitho, NGLHRC

2. From homophobia to anti-queer animus

The concept of homophobia emerged from the politicisation of psychiatry and sexuality in 1970s New York, however it is heavily used to describe 21st century African developments. The limitations of this terminology are intertwined with its linguistic structure, which equates anti-gay hostility to an irrational fear. While anti-gay prejudice might historically be related to certain fears, similar to xenophobia, conceptualising it as a *phobia* exaggeratedly presumes an irrational and pathological fear. In addition, this fear might be related to other anxieties besides homosexuality, such as HIV,

recruitment and the fate of the nation. Because this fear is commonly understood to be invoked by *male* homosexuals upon (male) heterosexuals, it also excludes the distinct oppression of women. While Herek (2004) recognises the relevance of homophobia to change the focus of the narrative from the homosexual to the heterosexual and the opportunities this offered for the gay rights movement, he contrasts this historical conceptualisation with contemporary understandings and materialisations of anti-gay hostility. For one, anti-gay hostility is currently believed to be closer related to feelings of anger, disgust and ignorance. Second, the individually attributed cause of anti-gay hostility further undermines an understanding of it as a structurally imbedded phenomenon, similar to racism and sexism. Third, the nature of anti-gay hostility has evolved, and is now often religiously or politically motivated and organised. Fourth, the target of anti-gay prejudice evolved as well, from a gay-identity-based discourse to a queer resistance to identity categories.

Furthermore, this Western conceptualisation of homophobia is usually placed in a binary categorisation opposite a vociferous acceptance of queerness, which overlooks other expressions and nuances of attitudes towards queerness. Indicative of homophobia's ambiguity is some activists' relativization of Kenya as a tolerant instead of a homophobic country. There is not only a need to recognise that the Western understanding of queerness is not universal and needs to be expanded with a localised African understanding, it is also crucial to expand our understanding of acceptance. Following historical traditions, acceptance in a Kenyan context is not necessarily openly proclaimed but rather characterised by quietness and tolerance.

> *"But acceptance mostly in our context, is like, I think it is quite different from the West or how we see acceptance portrayed in movies. Because in movies they are like, the parents realise and there is a whole party. But here acceptance is quite different, like your parent would know, but it is a thing they would just never talk about."* – Sonja, K-CLA

Moving beyond homophobia, I have chosen to adopt Thoreson's (2014) terminology of "anti-queer animus", which he developed in response to the crippling accusations of Africa's homophobia that obstruct a profound analysis of the underlying causes of the manifest opposition to queerness. Anti-queer animus overcomes the historically and politically specific Western conceptualisation of homophobia, by localising "*the manifold expressions of prejudice or violence against same-sex activity, LGBTI mobilization, and queer transgression and those associated with them*" (Thoreson, 2014, 25). As evidenced in the latter half of Thoreson's understanding of anti-queer animus, this conceptualisation also allows for a broader and more inclusive approach to consider the experiences and activism of both sexual and gender diversities as envisaged in this dissertation.

Chapter Three: Theoretical framework

1. Queering African studies and Africanising queer studies

Queer is not only a new identity category, it is also a critical field of study, hailed for its potential to re-imagine the world by analysing its intersecting, oppressive power structures and deconstructing its (binary) categorisations. Queer theory contends that sex, sexuality and gender are all connected and socially constructed. It follows the theoretical traditions of feminism and postcolonialism by denaturalising or de-essentialising formerly stable identity categories and even questioning the very notion of identities. In this regard, it moves beyond the LGBTI concepts as it renders sexualities, genders and spaces fluid in defiance of the binary categorisations of man/woman and heterosexual/homosexual. Queer studies offer the possibility to deconstruct identities, by overcoming essentialist, fixed notions of identity where you are either in or out of the metaphorical closet and instead challenging the power structures that create this regulatory closet. The goal is not to extend the norm to include sexual others, but to challenge and transgress this norm. It contains not only a critique of heteronormativity for producing a racist, patriarchal society, but it critiques homonormativity for upholding these normative notions in exchange for the assimilation of white, middle-class gay men in the national fabric. Queer theory also construes identities as multiple, recognising difference in the experiences of black, white, disabled, able-bodied, poor, rich, male, female and transgendered queers and the intersecting oppressions. However, queer studies does not live up to its liberating potential as of yet, often remaining too limited to abstract, academic knowledge production on white, Western, middle-class sexual and gender diversity, struggling to include race and class. Queer theory should propose a critique of the class, race and gender dimensions of these hetero- and homonormativities. It is not only about identities that defy the norm but understanding this norm and who is creating it why (Browne, 2006; Oswin, 2008; Puar, 2007; Punt, 2008; Rosenblum, 1994).

In this regard, there is an urgent call to queer African studies and Africanise queer studies. Those currently invested in knowledge production on Africa, namely the development industry, mainstream human rights and African feminists, do not consider queering African studies a priority (Nyanzi, 2015). Clarke (2013) denounces the marginalisation of African sexuality in Western queer studies, where it ranges from primitive, oversexualised and mythical to un-African and erased. Macharia (2016) warns that queer African voices too often become part of Western data instead of challenging and creating the existing theoretical frameworks and conceptual assumptions. The centre of (queer) knowledge production lies in the United States, where the homosexual is either “white washed” by overlooking

the multi-ethnic aspect of identity creation or the black homosexual is theorised through a Euro-American view. The knowledge that is being produced on African sexuality often derives from the hand of someone who's either African or queer, with a handful of queer African scholars who are predominantly white South-African men. The prevalence of early school drop out with queer Africans and the intrinsic heteronormative and patriarchal African education system complicates the entry of queer African scholars to the field of queer theory. Additionally, when Africa attempts to produce its own knowledge, it cannot escape the Western frameworks and the power this entails (Amory, 1997; Epprecht, 2009; Geschiere, 2017; Macharia, 2016; Riggs & das Nair, 2011; Tamale, 2011).

Queer does not only offer the possibility to *deconstruct* sexual and gender identities, queer enables the *decolonisation* of these identities. This entails a decolonisation of language, thought and theory, a struggle for self-determination and self-definition. There is a need to theorize about queer identities from a fresh start, based on African history, culture and identities but without reinforcing the binary problem. This requires an understanding of the distinctiveness of African queerness, its boundaries and how these create and are created by Western queerness. Moreover, this involves an understanding of knowledge production and the power structures shaping and being shaped by this knowledge. Right now, the gap between academic knowledge production and everyday queer activism needs to be bridged with queer African activists at once challenging the dichotomous norms and navigating within the oppressive structures this upholds (Blessol, 2013; Clarke, 2013; Nyanzi, 2015; Tamale, 2011).

2. Queer intersectionality

The term intersectionality was introduced in the 1990s, following a long-standing tradition in black feminism which recognised the simultaneity of oppressions faced by black (lesbian) women. This recognition can be traced back to the historical limitations of the feminist and civil rights movement, which left women of colour invisible, excluded or confronted with respectively racism and sexism. Kimberly Crenshaw ultimately coined the term to address the shortcomings of the single-axis framework employed by the court of labour discrimination, which obstructed the possibilities to defend women of colour. This singular framework considers race and gender as two separate discriminatory mechanisms, erasing the distinct intersecting discrimination faced by women of colour. Their experience exceeds the summation of the disadvantages faced for being black and being a woman, and encompasses the disadvantages specific for being a black woman. Intersectionality refers to the way these multiple oppressions do not act independently but are shaped by and work through

each other (Davis, 2008; Puar, 2012). For all its praise and ubiquity however, intersectionality remains ambiguous. At times understood as a theory, a heuristic device or a reading strategy, intersectionality has been conceptualised as a crossroad, axes of difference or a dynamic process. Although rendering the definition of intersectionality difficult, Davis (2008) outlines how this open-endedness and ambiguity does not complicate its potential but entails its success.

Most predominantly, intersectionality is employed *across* identity categories to consider the interaction of multiple identities. This intersectional framework is indispensable in feminist studies to primarily make the intersection of race, class and gender visible, but also consider sexuality, ethnicity, religion, citizenship and able-bodiedness. Blessol (2013) indicates how black, women and queers all face the same (racist, patriarchal and heteronormative) oppressive system. However, this ground for a shared struggle is often concealed by employing a dichotomous over an intersectional framework. As outlined above, an African and a queer identity are seldom considered as co-constitutive and mostly viewed as two exclusionary categories, implying that somebody can either be (American/European and) gay or African (and homophobic). By separating somebody's queer identity from their other identities, the possibility for solidarity across identities becomes obstructed. Moreover, this obscures a class struggle as someone can either be gay or poor, leaving LGBTI individuals as the designated scapegoats in times of social, economic or political tension (Epprecht, 2009). The sole existence of poor, religious, African queers contests this dominant frame while illustrating and necessitating an intersectional approach. Queer Africans are not located on both sides of this supposed binary, but on an intersectional location between the social and political structures, where oppressions work together (Nyanzi, 2013; Rahman, 2010).

As a study of difference, intersectionality does not only allow the analysis of multiple oppressions, but the recognition of privileges *within* minority categories as well. Riggs & das Nair (2011) distinguish 'majority minorities', namely those minorities with privileges and dominant social positions, from 'metaminorities', who are minorities within minority positions. This distinction often relates to the privileges held by white, middle-class gay men as the boundaries of the acceptable have evolved after years of struggle (Alimamohed, 2010). Duggan (2002) deems this a consequence of the new neoliberal sexual politics, which she terms 'homonormativity'. Homonormativity builds on the idea of heteronormativity, referring to the limited contestation of the heterosexual norm while sustaining and upholding the other dominant norms characterising this project such as marriage, consumption, settler-colonialism and white supremacy. Puar (2007, 2013) extends this idea with the analytical frame of 'homonationalism', which refers to the acceptance and inclusion of some homosexuals in the nation state at the expense of the exclusion of sexual and racial others. Homonormativity and

homonationalism do not only entail a critique of Western governments but also of those LGBTIQ organisations and individuals that assimilate with their discriminatory neoliberal policies. In this regard, homonationalism critiques the exclusionary mechanisms of the white gay movement similarly to intersectionality's primary critique of the erasure of black women in the feminist movement[17].

Most of these concepts and theories have been developed and employed to analyse the particular position of women and queers of colour in the multicultural context of the United States. This entails some considerations upon employing these same theories to study LGBTIQ activism in Kenya. First, the concepts of homonormativity and homonationalism meet our objective to nuance the binary categorisation of the West as gay-friendly and Africa as homophobic by emphasizing the exclusionary practices inherent to the West. The expansionist tendencies of these mechanisms are a critical part of the neoliberal (sexuality) policies of Western countries which are relevant to the transnational contextualisation of this research. The previously mentioned invisibility of queers of colour in general and African queerness in particular from knowledge production, is only one aspect of this (Alimamohed, 2010; Clarke, 2013; Nyanzi, 2015). Secondly, the local application of homonationalism is limited to the study of queerness in Western countries, as it does not meet the Kenyan reality where the structural inclusion of (certain) queers in the national fabric has not been realised so far. Similarly, the racial power structures which feature strongly in the concept of homonormativity are inherent to the Western context but absent as primary power structures in the local Kenyan context.

We can locate the call to Africanise queer studies and queer African studies in the tradition of women (and queers) of colour responding to their exclusion from theory and practice, by theorising the intersecting inequalities they face as a new epistemological framework and a form of resistance (Alimamohed, 2010; Clarke, 2013; Nyanzi, 2015). Both queer theory and intersectionality have made marginalised identities visible. A queer intersectionality deconstructs the dichotomies and universalisms in identity categories which allows us to move beyond the exclusionary categorisations of Africa as homophobic and queers as Western. This does not entail forcing African bodies in Western queer frameworks, but challenging the Western gay identity as only one version of modern queerness. In this regard, queer intersectionality illuminates the diversity in sexuality and gender beyond the "out

[17] Puar (2007, 2012) questions how intersectionality originated from and remains closely related to the specific difference of women of colour and has become an empty category. In response, she proposes the concept of assemblage (from the French *agencement*) to move beyond the identity-centred framework characteristic for intersectionality and revalue the interaction between bodies to conceptualise identification as a social process. However, I still find the concept of intersectionality valuable (and Puar does not necessarily want to replace it with assemblage, but supplement it with it), more accessible and applicable to this dissertation.

and proud" hegemonic queer identity and the intersecting invisibilities and oppressions queers face (Alimamohed, 2010; Rahman, 2010; Riggs & das Nair, 2011; Rosenblum, 1994).

It is not my attempt to reify the binary categorisations of the West/Africa, urban/rural, secular/religious, traditional/modern, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual by focussing on the intersecting identities[18]. Rather, I choose to counterbalance the norm-centred analyses by highlighting the "Other" identity categories that tend to be erased and marginalised (Alimamohed, 2010; Rahman, 2010). With these necessary considerations in mind I believe an intersectional approach aligns with the explorative nature and inclusionary objective of this research. While this results in a diversity of research results, queer experiences and activism, an intersectional approach considers both the interaction of oppressions and the presence of privileges within this minority group. A queer intersectionality in relation to my fieldwork in Kenya means considering differences *between* and *within* the queer communities while moving beyond homogenous, essentialist, universalising identity categories[19].

Society's discriminatory patriarchal power structures transcend to the queer community, which is both oppressed and *oppressing*. This refers first to the ITGNC community's separation from the larger LGB community following the latter's exclusionary and transphobic character. The collateral damage of this division is the MSM, LBQ and ITGNC organisations primarily employing a dichotomous lens towards sexuality and gender, disregarding that transgender individuals can identify as gay as well. Not only gender identity, but gender expression as well functions as a ground for discrimination inside the community where dominant gender norms and heterosexual frames reproduce the oppression of effeminate gays. The perseverance of patriarchy within the queer community further resulted in the specialisation of queer feminist organising to recognise the specific oppression of queer women.

Ocholla (2010) recognises queer *activists'* privileges and the oppressions they had to face in order to become an activist. Poverty, unemployment, physical and mental health issues impact the whole Kenyan community and the LGBTIQ community in particular, facilitating a less-than-ideal context to produce critical, knowledgeable, resilient activists. Amakobe, Dearham and Likimani (2018) critique

[18] Another identity category that is gaining recognition in feminist thinking is *able-bodiedness*. Although this does not feature as a central identity category in my research, the queer feminist event I attended specifically identified the able-bodiedness of the majority of the present feminists and applauded the additional resilience of the those who are not able-bodied.

[19] One identity category that structures Kenyan society but has remained invisible throughout this research is *tribe*. Deviating from the classical identity categories included in an intersectional analysis, I originally overlooked this in my data collection. It additionally did not come up spontaneously during my fieldwork, whereby I can only speculate whether this is caused by the sensitivity of this identity category and the lack of trust during the interviews, Nairobi's exceptionally urban and multicultural composition, the presence or absence of certain tribal identities in the LGBTIQ community and the professional, middle-class background of the organisations.

that oftentimes the organisational leadership is unaware or unresponsive to the intersectional oppressions their most vulnerable *members* face, and they inadequately pass down skills and opportunities to the community. The diversity of Nairobi's LGBTIQ movement primarily stretches across sexual orientation, gender identity and nationality/citizenship as the queer literature and Kenyan activists acknowledged the absence of certain queers due to classism and ageism. There is an apparent age gap in both LGBTIQ research and activism (Ekine & Abbas, 2013a; Dearham, 2013). The lower age limit is legally determined by the criminalisation of LGBTIQ services for minors, which is considered recruitment of minors and promotion of homosexuality. There are multiple factors which might contribute to the (self-)exclusion of older queers, such as fear of identification through association, changed priorities, absence of safe spaces and inapplicable services. Although the older queer generation appears mostly absent from organising, it is important to recognise and learn from their experiences, as change is intergenerational and does not come overnight. The exclusion of lower (and higher) classes from the LGBTIQ movement has also been acknowledged by the literature and the local activists (Blessol, 2013; Dearham, 2013). The exclusion of lower classes from organising itself is related to the NGO-isation and Westernisation of the LGBTIQ activism, which necessitates certain exclusionary terminology and hierarchical structures. The classism of the programming follows from the (in)accessibility of queer spaces, and the costs of attending (Amakobe, Dearham & Likimani, 2018).

> *"Most of the time it has been an issue of class. Because lesbian women are divided according to class. [...] And also some forums, some spaces have been deemed too elitist. Because even spaces like this [bar] are not really accessible. Because most queer youth do not have jobs and if they have jobs it are jobs that pay them like stipends that can hardly sustain them. So if you do an event in an expensive restaurant, where you are required to pay for a taxi, pay for your own drinks, and once this person gets there, they are not able to afford a drink, they do not feel comfortable in that place."* – Sonja, K-CLA

Another intersection of oppressions is experienced by SOGIE refugees who face discrimination on the ground of their queerness and lack of citizenship status, whereas their queerness is the ground for fleeing their nation, and their nationality leads them to be identified as queers. The inclusion of SOGI refugees and the emergence of refugee led LGBTIQ organisations counters responds to these multiple oppressions and contests the dominant identification of migrants as homophobic. One of the organisations supporting these refugees is a queer led church, which further defies the dominant binary categorisation of secularity as progressive and religiosity as oppressive.

Chapter Four: Case study of queer Nairobi

1. Historical background

1.1. Pre-colonial sexuality and gender expressions

Although the historical and anthropological evidence is scarce, the transgression of heteronormativity and (Western) gender norms is not a new phenomenon on the African continent and has been characterising African societies for decades. The scarcity of this local knowledge can be attributed to the dominance of Western history writing, which simultaneously universalised its own history and faded those of others into oblivion. In this regard, local oral traditions, such as the legend retold below, succumbed to the worldview and written accounts of those in power, which are mainly cisgender, heterosexual, white men. In recent years, anthropological studies of ancient paintings, traditional dances and tribal language fortunately enabled some of these histories to resurface (Epprecht, 2005, 2009). Among these marginalised cultural traditions is the Meru men's embracement of men dressed as women or their marriage with other men. Similarly, a dozen Kenyan ethnic groups, such as the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin, had (or still have) woman-woman marriages where an older woman takes up a younger woman as her wife to bear her children, while she fulfils the role of husband, obtaining economic independence and exercising male economic roles (Blessol, 2013; Luft, 2016). One of the activists affirmed that (self-) identification in these relationships echoes the terminologies present within the community, such as 'husband' and 'wife', whereby these terms are further reflected in the gendered role they perform in the relationship and the community (GALCK, 2016). What these traditions demonstrate is on the one hand the separation of biological sex and gender and on the other hand the intertwinement of meanings of sexuality with gender in African society. Identifying these same-sex relationships as strictly functional risks underestimating African queerness, while identifying them as wholehearted amorous connections and identity markers risks reproducing Western categorisations. The challenges in understanding these practices demonstrate the limitations of the Western-centred studies of sexuality and gender (Currier & Migraine-George, 2018; Epprecht, 2009; Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018; Geschiere, 2017; Ocholla et al., 2012; Msibi, 2011; Tamale, 2011).

"In my local native language, of whatever tribe, there is a myth or rather a legend, where people would be told that if you go around a Mugumo tree […] seven times, you change gender." – Toni, Jinsiangu

Remembering and retelling these histories of non-normative same-sex practices and fluid gender identities that took place in Kenya before the British colonisation is a vital step being undertaken to queer African studies and Africanise queer studies. First, it refutes the ahistorical condemnation of same-sex practices as un-African by re-entering the African diversity of precolonial sexual and gender experiences recorded in oral traditions into the local history. Second, it traces back an African tradition of tolerance towards same-sex practices in defiance of the Africa-is-a-homophobic-bloc narrative. Third, it expands the Western conceptualisation of homosexuality by its existence outside of the geographical boundaries of the West and its presumed white embodiment. It further transgresses the universalising Western conceptualisation of sexuality and gender norms with local understandings beyond the heterosexual/homosexual and male/female binary. Nonetheless, these pre-colonial practices cannot be overqualified as indicative of African queerness, as it discards contemporary diversities and experiences. Moreover, reasserting these precolonial traditions unintentionally confirms Africa's presumed primitive nature. Not only the practices itself, but also the attitudes towards it, should be valued in its historical context and for its contribution to Western understandings of anti-queer animus. However, this nuance of the inimical relationship between African societies and non-conforming sexual and gender practices was limited to a don't-ask-don't-tell attitude towards practices that had to be kept outside of the public eye, which is distinctive from contemporary queers' wish for societal acceptance (Clarke, 2018; Msibi, 2011; Nyanzi, 2015; Tamale, 2011; Thoreson, 2014).

1.2. COLONIAL REGULATIONS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER DIVERSITIES

When the British Empire colonised Kenya, they brought their reification and condemnation of homosexuality and other cultural practices deemed immoral with them in the same move as they erased local understandings of sexual and gender diversities. Although the aforementioned non-conforming practices were not accepted or encouraged in Kenyan society, they were neither punished let alone criminalised. Despite the existing normative man-woman marriage tradition with its vital reproductive value and the practice of imposing punitive measures for other sexual transgressions, there is little recording of similar reactions to homosexuality. In the meantime, homosexuality was criminalised in most European nations, who exported this criminalisation along with their territorial expansion. Upon their arrival in the colonies, the British colonialists habitually introduced written laws in replacement of the unwritten norms and customs. With regard to British Africa, this entailed the adoption of the previously developed Indian Penal Code, which was deemed more suitable for the colonial context than the existing English law. Among this legislation is section 377, which criminalises "carnal knowledge against the order of nature". Originally understood as encompassing all non-

reproductive sexual transgressions, this archaic formulation has come to be reductively interpreted in reference to anal sex, *de facto* criminalising consensual male same-sex practices. As a separate system of customary law was applied to Africans, the intention of these European laws was to regulate the behaviour of its European citizens in line with the norms that were being upheld in the metropole. Following this, the laws against carnal knowledge were rarely enforced during the colonial period as perceptions concerning homosexuality continued to evolve in Britain and the rest of Europe. By the time Britain decriminalised homosexuality in 1967, most colonies had gained independence and decidedly retained the majority of its colonial era laws, with Kenya adopting the related sections 162, 163 and 165 of its Penal Code after becoming independent in 1963 (Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018; Thirikwa, 2018). This historical contextualisation, in which the pre-colonial history and the influence of the colonial period feature, was also reflected in several interviews:

> *"We are trying to change the narrative on it being a Western agenda or a Western import. We very much try to root our work in Kenyan narratives of queerness, so a lot of the work that we do features stories or mythologies around queer experiences in Kenya. And we also make it a point to speak on the historical erasure of gay and lesbian, LGBTIQ generally, expressions in the past. We also like to emphasize the colonial impact […] for instance the colonial laws that penalise same-sex relations are British and not the homosexuality."* – Gaitho, NGLHRC

Another legacy of Kenya's colonial period are the Christian and Islamic faiths, respectively introduced by the European and Arab colonisers, which are paradoxically condemning homosexuality as un-African (Awondo, Geschiere & Reid, 2012; Blessol, 2013; Nyanzi, 2013). In her tentative research into the acceptance of the transgender community in eight countries in the Global South, among which Kenya, Tower (2016) strikingly demonstrates that countries which were colonised by a Western power whose religion came to replace indigenous spirituality, have a negative acceptance of transsexuality, while countries that were not colonised have a positive score. Missionaries did not only bring a new religion, they imposed *morality* and its corresponding sexual and gender norms.

However, limiting the responsibility for Kenya's discriminatory laws and practices to its colonial legacy denies a reality of continued exclusion and criminalisation sustained by the independent nation state. In addition, this history becomes part of the sovereignty discourse propagated by the independent nations as they reject criticism of one's own human rights abuses by emphasizing the colonial origin and double standard of the critics. Correcting the *homosexuality*-is-un-African declarations by identifying *homophobia* as a Western import, albeit a necessary nuance, offers a limited analysis and limited possibilities for legal and social change (Awondo, Geschiere & Reid, 2012; Jjuuko & Tabengwa,

2018; Ekine, 2018). Alternatively, Thoreson (2014) calls to revalue the nation state as level of analysis to reveal the complex and diversified roots of multiple *homophobias*, which extend a blatant fear of homosexuality. Next to this, Msibi (2011) argues for an intersectional understanding of homophobia in relation to other forms of oppression inherent to the patriarchal nation state, in order to comprehensively address the root of the problem. With these considerations in mind, I will now focus on queer experiences and activism in Nairobi as two examples of contemporary, localised contestations of the (trans)national queer narratives.

2. Contemporary queer realities

2.1. LIVING QUEER LIVES

The mere existence of Kenya's LGBTIQ community defies the legal, political and religious discourses and the hegemonic sexualities and genders these uphold, as they simultaneously embody queerness and Africanness (Nyanzi, 2013; Ocholla et al., 2012; Ombagi, 2018). Gradually, stories about the lived experiences of queer individuals in Kenya are being written as a testament to their intersectional existence and as a counter-narrative to those misguided discourses (GALCK, 2016; Osinibu, 2019). In recognition of the struggles urban queers face and overcome, I will outline some of the significant aspects of their lives. This concise overview is based on the experiences the LGBTQ activists generously shared of their own, their friends', community's and members' lives. Although this section focusses on the *queer* lives of Nairobi's LGBTIQ community, as distinguishable from the lives of Nairobi's heterosexual, cisgender population, it is also important to recognise that they share many struggles and experiences in their day-to-day lives as Kenyan citizens. Denying these commonalities only serves the patriarchal power structures, rendering alliances with other marginalised communities based on class, gender, race, religion, age and citizenship improbable (Alimamohed, 2010; Blessol, 2018; Ocholla, 2010; Ossome, 2013; Rahman, 2010).

> *"The thing we share here is gender, gender dysphoria. But once I leave that gate, that barrier, I have other issues just like any other human being."* – Toni, Jinsiangu

Several activists indicated they felt "different" growing up, but they did not know how. By the time they were in high school, those who visibly did not conform to the dominant gender norms often were bullied, ranging from verbal harassment to physical assault and rape. Changing schools offered those unable to "pass" to anticipate the violence by altering their physique and mannerisms in order to conform to societies' and their class mates' perceptions of masculinity and femininity. By forcing their exterior to conform, their internal struggle grew as they became isolated and depressed, unable to

openly be themselves and constantly pretending, as reflected in the quote below. This is further complicated by their experiences in church, where they are exposed to condemnations of homosexuality as a sin. For those that started experimenting during high-school, this could lead to being expelled upon the school finding out. As this would raise questions at home, some queer adolescents ran away from home while others were thrown out. However, not all have this negative experience, as several activists are accepted by their family and have a close relationship with "the family members that matter".

"At that time it was something that I was hating myself for, and I knew I was different but I never had an experience, I knew I liked boys but I was still telling myself 'this is a cultural thing, not something I am supposed to be'. There were so much suicidal thoughts, so much isolation, so much depression."
– Kelly, Ishtar MSM

Access to the internet, specifically to Western LGBGTIQ stories and local queers on social media, enabled many to identify as queer, realise they are not alone and come in contact with other queers. Upon coming to Nairobi and coming out, the isolation is partially muted by the welcoming cheers of the community. A lack of queer sober spaces facilitates a queer youth culture characterised by alcohol and drug (ab)use. Earning their livelihood, and sustaining this lifestyle is especially complicated for those who do not pass. This is particularly challenging for transgenders, who also require money for hormone treatments, binders and surgery if this is desired. As unemployment is already high in Kenya, especially with the youth, this creates a double burden for many queer youth, who were often unable to complete their education due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. For Ugandan LGBTIQ refugees in the search for employment, their Ugandan identity is tied to their LGBTIQ identity as there is no war in their home country, causing a double discrimination on the ground of their sexual and gender diversity and their refugee status (HIAS, 2013). This ultimately forces many Kenyan and Ugandan LGBTIQ's to perform sex work in order to survive or sustain a queer lifestyle, which further fosters substance abuse as a way to get in the right headspace or as a gateway to meet clients. The drug abuse and sex work additionally influences the high prevalence of HIV among the community (Thirikwa, 2018).

"Any queer space you go to, there is alcohol, there is drugs. It becomes part of the culture." – Sonja, K-CLA

These challenges often transcend to the dating life, as the queer community itself is not free from stigma and violence. Young gay men become involved with one or more older men who also provide

financial support, illustrating the thin line between dating and sex work. LBQ women experience intimate partner violence at home as their partner does not have another outlet to relieve the daily stress of navigating discrimination. Transgender men and women prefer going to straight clubs because they might be blackmailed by the LGB community in the dating scene, who threaten to out them to their families and employers (GALCK, 2016; Mbugua, 2013; Theron, 2013).

> *"They [the LBQ and MSM communities] have problems, but they are also problematic. You would think that because they have issues, because they have struggles like us, although different, they would be better."* – Arnest, Jinsiangu

The activists unanimously referred to the rampant mental health issues within the community, many starting the conversation with making me aware of its ubiquity. Discrimination, isolation, substance abuse and struggle for survival all contribute to depression, trauma and suicidal thoughts. However, mental health is taboo in Kenyan society, minimising the community's awareness of it while the affordable medication has side-effects, the service-providers might harass you for your queerness and donors are only now starting to recognise mental-health issues. In response, the community organises self-support groups and liaisons with friendly medical professionals (GALCK, 2016; Thirikwa, 2018). Activism especially takes a toll on those who are in the limelight, as many activists indicated that burn-outs are prominent within organising, with some alluding they themselves are in need of a break. They cautioned that activism makes you a target and a token, both within the own community and the rest of the population. The visibility which enables you to advocate on behalf of your community, simultaneously makes you and your family a target for those who do not agree. If it is undesired or unsafe to engage with the rest of the population, some activists start living in a queer bubble, which does not exempt them from being targeted or tokenised. Within the queer community you might be elevated to a superhuman status as you are expected to unconditionally be there for others and meet their high expectations.

> *"It is a huge task! Because everyone is looking up to you, they want to see how you are representing them. And listening to ITGNC's and their issues is kind of depressing. It is a lot of mental issues, and personally I am going through depression and all that. So listening to them again, sometimes it's… it's emotionally draining. But it is an amazing job."* – Evance, Q-Initiative

The invisibility of older queers in society and their absence from organising is explained by the activists through a number of developments. Priorities naturally change as people grow older, and a life of partying is exchanged for the responsibility and stability of a job. These jobs further enable adult

queers to socialise with new people, provide their own health insurance and thus eliminate the need to come to organisations who target a younger audience. Moreover, being associated with these organisations would reveal their sexuality and gender identity. In addition, many MSM and LBQ transition to a heteronormative life when they grow older and society's pressure and suspicion increases (Ocholla, 2011). Settling in a heterosexual relationship is the only possibility to have children for a same-sex loving individual (GALCK, 2016). A family life refutes any suspicion of a different sexual orientation, favours social inclusion among family members and colleagues as children and family gatherings become a central aspect of life, and ensures you will be cared for in your old age. But (un)married gay men tend to keep a younger boy on call, for who this arrangement offers financial benefits. For those maintaining a queer life, the lack of children equates even more economic power (in case they pass), allowing them to buy acceptance from their family and friends and to live in safer and more liberal high-class neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, both situations gravitate towards isolated lives with depression lurking around the corner.

> *"Others transition. They get married and get wives. Because once you have a wife, you automatically fit now. Because they won't think you are gay, nobody will think about it."* – James, HOYMAS

Currently, the community is becoming more empowered, visible and vocal. Although some queers prefer to live in a queer bubble with like-minded people, others actively and positively interact with the heterosexual, cisgender society on an individual and professional level. Society's perceptions are changing as well, due to the queer community's advocacy and visibility, but also by exposure to LGBTIQ representation in Western media and even slowly in Kenyan media[20], which contributes to a narrative that normalises queerness as only one aspect of someone's life. Consequently, the younger generation and the social media platforms shape more open-minded and liberal queer narratives, if not outright accepting then at least not blatantly aggressive (Ocholla, 2010).

2.2. SURVIVING IN A DISCRIMINATORY ENVIRONMENT

Proclaiming that Africa is *not* one homophobic bloc, is still a long leap from stating that African countries are void of anti-queer animus, a statement which is equally untrue for Western countries. While the objective of this dissertation is to highlight the positive and progressive voices from Nairobi,

[20] Several LGBTIQ organisations take their advocacy to radio stations and twitter. Simultaneously, discussions on sex, sexuality and gender norms are becoming more frequent on Kenyan radio, television and in newspapers, removing these previously undiscussed subjects from the shadows (Ocholla, 2010, 2011; Osinibu, 2019).

I do not want to minimise the reality. In this regard, I find it necessary to (briefly) recognise the existing discrimination that deeply impacts LGBTIQ individuals' lives and LGBTIQ organisations' mission while untangling the presumably insurmountable anti-queer animus. The brief overview of a queer life outlined above, is indicative of the pervasiveness of discrimination in every aspect of a queer person's life. This discrimination can take multiple shapes and forms: verbal abuse, forceful undressing, refusal of registration of an LGBTIQ organisation, blackmail and extortion, expulsion from school, eviction from property, hate speech in church, conversion therapy, disownment by family, physical violence, correctional rape, correctional surgeries (for intersex babies), female genital mutilation and so on (GALCK, 2016; Ocholla, 2011; KHRC, 2011). The police has an ambiguous role, although section 162 and 165 of the Penal Code are rarely applied, they legitimise a general climate of discrimination and extortion (Epprecht, 2012; HRW, 2015; Thirikwa, 2018). The LGBTIQ organisations therefore provide support to report a crime without disclosing your sexual orientation or gender identity, keep a detailed record of what happened, intervene in case of emergency and accommodate victimised members.

The people on the receiving end of these discriminatory practices are those who are perceivably queer[21], which results in masculine presenting women, effeminate men and transgenders who do not pass experiencing the multitude of discriminatory practices. This reveals the intertwinement of gender and sexuality, where a visible transgression of the dominant gender norms particularly threatens hegemonic masculinities. Heterosexuality, and more specifically heteronormativity, serves to reinforce oppressive patriarchal structures through the family, the church and culture (Ekine, 2013; GALCK, 2016; Msibi, 2011; Okech, 2013). Several activists denounced the transcendence of these patriarchal power structures into the LGBTIQ community itself where femininity is equalled to weakness, the gendered distinction between top and bottom roles reproduces heteronormativity, and transphobia renders transgender issues either invisible or marginalised. The internalisation of the society's and community's stigmatising discourses contributes to the prevalence of mental health issues.

> *"We are the champions of oppressing. That is an issue that people usually don't talk about. They are like 'as long as you can act as a […] heterosexual person, so you are one of those people that are fitting, you behave like a man'. There is an assumption that a trans person is just not behaving properly. 'Why don't you just present yourself well?'. And I know this is extremely discriminating."*
>
> – James, HOYMAS

[21] This also encompasses people *outside* of the queer community who transgress dominant gender norms or speak out in favour of queer issues, the latter making them gay by proxy.

Thoreson (2014) argues to look beyond abstractions of homophobia by bringing the national level back into focus and considering the contextual factors that motivate anti-queer animus. The heteronormative, patriarchal regulation of Kenyan society does not only work through prohibitions, but also through affirmations, specifically of heterosexual marriage and 'the family' as inherent to the national project (Ekine, 2013; Macharia, 2013). While society's patriarchal power structures facilitate an intersection of oppressions, the (manipulation of the) multifaceted colonial legacy further shapes the population's ignorance concerning sexual and gender diversity in a negative way (Ocholla, 2010). The main advocates of anti-queer sentiments are religious leaders[22], whose Christian or Islamic faiths have been introduced to Kenya by British and Arab missionaries and whose present-day conferences and litigations are occasionally funded by American right-wing evangelicals (Kaoma, 2012). Some political leaders further propagate homophobic discourses to enhance their popularity and reassert their legitimacy (GALCK, 2016; HRW, 2015; Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018; Nyanzi, 2013; Thirikwa, 2018). Their main arguments portray homosexuality as something inherently un-African imported from the West, a threat to Kenya's intrinsic moral values and religious prescriptions. Paradoxically, while affirming their sovereignty and propagating their resistance against further Western influences, this morality and religion are remnants of the colonial period. The resistance to homosexuality is part of a larger resistance to perceived westernisation, which also manifests itself in opposition to feminism and human rights as a form of cultural imperialism following the already devastating impact of the West's colonial and neoliberal policies (Dearham, 2013; Epprecht, 2012; Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Okech, 2013). The paradoxical resistance to westernisation usefully covers up other societal challenges and minimises the government's responsibility (Rahman, 2010; Wahab, 2016). In a country where unemployment, poverty and corruption are widespread, one-dimensionally painting queers as elites, financed by *mzungus*, incites blackmail and prevents class solidarity (Blessol, 2018).

"I think it is a combination of those two things, of having had our country controlled by the white men and then the white men leaving and continuing to perpetuate the power and the control from the sidelines or in the background. And at the same time African politicians latching onto the same notions that were introduced by the white men, just so they can further their own rules."

– Gaitho, NGLHRC

[22] The equation of religiosity with anti-queer animus needs to be nuanced as well. Illustrative of positive religious examples is the Cosmopolitan Affirming Community (CAC), an LGBTIQ (led and attended) church in Nairobi's town centre which promotes radical inclusivity. The co-operation between CAC's ministers and other Christian and Islamic leaders shows the changing role of religion in relation to sexual and gender diversity (HRW, 2015).

Some activists put the discriminatory environment in perspective, stating it is not outright homophobic but rather tolerant, since there is no specific anti-homosexuality bill (passed through parliament), LGBTIQ people are not endlessly outed in the media and the community *is* able to have organisations, be protected by non-discriminatory policies at some work places and go to court to fight the discrimination. Paradoxically, even the reinforcement and expansion of the colonially upheld laws creates an even more visible and vocal movement (Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018; Luft, 2016; Nyanzi, 2015; Ossome, 2013). Nairobi's urban space offers the possibility to be reinvented, and the queer activists claim it is more liberal and progressive than rural areas (Ombagi, 2018). Especially Nairobi's high- and middle-income neighbourhoods are characterised by diversity, artistic expression and an attitude of minding one's own business. Contrastingly rural areas are less exposed to queer activism, sensitisation and representation, allowing people's ignorance to be manipulated. Several organisations therefore started doing outreaches to support queer organising in rural areas.

> *"[…] we are able to go to court. […] And just fight for the community. In some countries you cannot do that. In Kenya we can do that because our constitution is more diverse and I think our constitution has changed a lot in terms of human rights that has made all of this happen."* – Kelly, Ishtar MSM

3. Nairobi's diverse LGBTIQ activism

3.1. STRONGER APART THAN TOGETHER

The organisation of LGBTIQ groups is a recent phenomenon in Kenyan society as the first organisation just came about at the turn of the century and other organisations have slowly been emerging and professionalising in the following years. LGBTIQ activism in Nairobi is primarily organized in clusters, with a few exceptions that serve the entire acronym. These clusters are shaped by the division between sexual orientation and gender identity on the one hand, and MSM men and LBQ women on the other hand. The transgender community first acted on the fact that their distinct needs, and consequently their goals, were overlooked by the larger LGBTIQ movement by separating from the LGBTIQ coalition body. They criticised the reproduction, and even enhancement, of transphobia within the movement. Their perceived queerness further makes them subject to society's homophobic discourses and policies although transsexuality, unlike homosexuality, is not criminalised. Once they moved away from a community that tokenised and stigmatised them, there could finally be a focus on transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming issues through a specialised ITGNC activism (Amakobe, Dearham & Likimani, 2018; Mbugua, 2013; Thirikwa, 2018; Theron, 2013).

"It is like there were two separate movements that formed. Which works for us. And I guess it works for them as well. But one thing we said, we shall not be thrown under the bus time and again and cry […] the ITGNC movement decided to start its own path and to just go. […] We have never wanted to conflate our issues with MSM or LGB issues. Because those issues, actually they are very different. I don't think they have to go through a name change, things like hormones. And it became a tug of war and a bone of contention. […] Then it also became like our issues are never that important." – Toni, Jinsiangu

While the remaining majority of the community initially feared that this separation would divide the movement, they recognise with hindsight that it was beneficial for everyone, especially for the transgender community itself which has made significant (legal) strides. Echoing the transgender community, queer women came to recognise that the patriarchal oppressions they faced in society where reproduced in the MSM community. In order to become truly empowered and free from oppressions, they needed to distance themselves from this, resulting in a second, albeit less severe, separation of the remaining queer community on the basis of gender a couple of years later (Dearham, 2013; GALCK, 2016; Ocholla, 2010). These developments left me to encounter a fragmented, but autonomous and specialised LGBTIQ movement, as this fragmentation allows each community to focus on their own struggles and put all their energy in this. They firstly empower the own community to knowledgeably and safely navigate through life, and secondly engage with the wider society in order to create a safer, more inclusive environment.

"Because each of them is dealing with different aspects, we find that collectively the movement is moving forward." – Gaitho, NGLHRC

The continuous development of this effervescent movement became apparent through the interviews with the local activists, and the contrast between the movement I met in Nairobi and the organisational landscape outlined in research dating back a couple of years when the movement was just emerging, separating and specialising (Ocholla, 2011). The young age and rapid rise of the Kenyan movement implies it is continuously learning and growing, as the activists have the necessary "fire" to ignite change but are still developing the required expertise. However, some warn that the movement is developing into an NGO business, characterised by competition over funding and dictated by the interests of donors while solidarity and member's needs should be paramount. It is necessary to recognise the NGO-isation and the narrative this produces as *one* possibility of LGBTIQ activism, which needs to be complemented with grassroots initiatives and intersectional co-operation to meet some of its exclusionary mechanisms (Amakobe, Dearham & Likimani, 2018; Dearham, 2013; Luft, 2016).

3.2. STRATEGICALLY NAVIGATING DOMINANT NARRATIVES

The covert names and location of the majority of the LGBTIQ organisations is demonstrative of the careful balance between visibility and safety they strive for in their activism, where safety prevails over visibly taking a stand to change the narrative[23]. Therefore, several LGBTIQ organisations strategically engage with the (trans)national power structures to create a more inclusive space for their queer citizens. This predominantly entails using public health and human rights narratives, which is reflected in several of the queer activists' tendency to only disclose to their families that they work for *a* human rights organisation. However, as these strategies use Western (material and discursive) tools to combat anti-queer animus, they risk a further Westernisation of African practices, identities and narratives, which fosters anti-queer animus (Epprecht, 2012; Ibrahim, 2015).

The rise of Kenya's LGB(TI) movement is strongly tied to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Although this affiliation further stigmatises the queer community, the correlation between the queer population's stigmatisation and the high prevalence and spread of the virus offers several possibilities for the development of the movement[24]. First, this brought in money from the international development industry which enabled the advancement of MSM organisations providing HIV services such as Ishtar MSM and Health Options for Young Men on HIV/AIDS/STI (HOYMAS). Second, the urgency to save a dying population and the money involved with this ensured that the national government opened their doors to the MSM community as part of the Key Population. Although this co-operation is facilitated under the guise of combatting HIV/AIDS, it enables activists to advocate with the government on behalf of MSM issues since the criminalisation and consequent secrecy of same-sex practices increases the spread of HIV/AIDS (Epprecht, 2012; Luft, 2016; Ocholla, 2011). However, the positive development and partnerships facilitated by this subversive strategy are limited to the MSM community, who do not include queer women, transgenders or a broader approach to sexual and reproductive health rights. For example, the transgender community is severely affected by HIV/AIDS, without being recognised as a Key Population by the government[25] and without having un-discriminatory access to MSM services. In the meantime, the transgender community is able to establish co-operation with

[23] In addition, the registration of explicit LGBTIQ organisations was hindered until NGLHRC's recent victory.
[24] On the one hand, the stigma contributes to drug use and sex work, causing a higher prevalence of HIV/AIDS. On the other hand, the stigma contributes to the secrecy of queer relations and practices while heterosexual relationships are being upheld as a façade, causing the virus to spread more (Epprecht, 2012). I do want to note that I in no regard want to minimize the severe and tragic impact the epidemic has caused and continues to cause by outlining some of the benefits of this correlation.
[25] During my time in Nairobi, some activists informed me that conversations are taking place with the government to include the transgender community as a Key Population.

medical services and distance themselves from homophobic discrimination on the ground of the recognition of transsexuality as a medical disease in the DSM (Ekine & Abbas, 2013c).

"I think they only really deal with us because of the HIV epidemic, and I think if we ride on that we can go really far." – James, HOYMAS

A second point of entry for LGBTIQ organising is a human rights-based approach. In 2010, Kenya adopted a new, progressive constitution in replacement of its 1963 post-independence constitution, which allows marginalised groups, such as the queer activists of the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commision (NGLHRC), to claim equal rights (Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018). Kenya's mainstream Human Rights Commissions' support for the litigations of the bold LGBTIQ human rights organisations and the positive judgements they reach together are demonstrative of this approach' possibilities to empower the Kenyan queer community and create a more inclusive society. It should be noted that this frameworks' potential especially flourishes in international and judicial contexts, while it risks alienating other queers and sounding imperial and donor-driven outside of NGO spaces. Although the underlying thoughts of equality and non-discrimination of the human-rights discourse are universal, the language of this narrative is not. However, the new constitution has introduced this language to the Kenyan context, enabling queer lawyers to base their litigation as much on Kenyan institutionalised values as on the international human rights discourses it is derived from. Moreover, these limitations are not an argument to leave this avenue, but rather to complement its effectiveness in combatting the criminalisation of queerness with other grassroots approaches to change both the legal and the public narrative. In addition, a focus on *human* rights over *gay* rights fosters a co-operation with other civil rights and women's rights organisations (Dearham, 2013; Epprecht, 2012; Roodsaz & Van Raemdonck, 2018).

"We have all our rights, the only thing is to claim them. […] And we can't wait for other people to come and claim them, it is really for us to ask for them."
– James, HOYMAS

3.3. PROVIDING QUEER COUNTER-NARRATIVES

The Kenyan activists unanimously identify ignorance as the main cause of anti-queer animus. Therefore, a second strategy of LGBTIQ activism consists of providing queer counter-narratives to demystify queerness and create an environment free of discrimination. The various queer organisations use arts, sports, media and other forms of (non-political) activism to empower their members and simultaneously make queer persons visible as Kenyan citizens. For example, Jinsiangu's

art programme is on the one hand a tool for their members' self-development and financial sustainability and on the other hand a tool for communication to others based on the belief that art makes stories more accessible, understandable and relatable (Amakobe, Dearham & Likimani, 2018). Minority Women in Action's (MWA) queer football team allows their members to pursue something they are passionate about while taking their advocacy outside of town and into other communities, changing social perceptions about lesbians wherever they play a match by providing a narrative of queers as capable and professional football players. While all organisations are active on twitter, some specialise in taking their advocacy on line and *on the air*, such as the ministers from the Cosmopolitan Affirming Community (CAC) that visit local radio stations, the SOGIE refugees from Nature Network who make their own radio shows and vlogs and the queer activists from Gay Kenya Trust (GKT) who annually host a film and arts festival with the Goethe Institute in Nairobi (HRW, 2015). This all offers the possibility to bring LGBTIQ issues out of the shadows and (re)tell queer Kenyan narratives in recognition of both its brightness and struggles.

"Visibility functions as a way to take a stand, to be countered. To be visible is a testament of the fact that you exist." – Caroline, CAC

While ignorance is identified as the overarching culprit in enabling discrimination, it is mainly the manipulation of this ignorance by religious leaders and their moral arguments which leads to anti-queer animus. Since religion is an inherent part of Kenyan society and social life, queer activists engage with Christian and Islamic religious leaders to educate them on LGBTIQ issues and interpret religious texts in a more inclusive manner. Nairobi's radically inclusive CAC furthermore embodies a religious pro-LGBTIQ counter-narrative. Their Sunday fellowships primarily offer a safe haven for those members of the queer community that are able to balance their spirituality with their sexuality, to celebrate themselves, their relationship with god and discuss relevant issues such as safe sex and mental health. Their intersectional approach is reflected in welcoming *all* marginalised communities in their church, and in providing materials for the *girl child* in their outreaches (Ibrahim, 2015; Van Klinken, 2017).

"The CAC works around creating safe faith spaces and changing the narrative, [for] example by having a same-gender loving preacher." – Caroline, CAC

The primary way to structurally combat discrimination concerning the activists, is through education. Firstly, this entails a *queering* of the educational content. This can be understood as a general inclusionary sexual education, informing all teenagers about their sexual and reproductive health with queer representation. This should be supplemented with a targeted inclusionary higher education for

those becoming service providers engaging with LGBTIQ people in the line of their work, enabling them to provide non-discriminatory care such as future lawyers, judges, police officers, doctors, nurses, religious leaders etc. In anticipation of the Kenyan governments' institutionalisation of inclusionary curricula, the queer activists organise trainings for several professional categories which fosters positive or at least non-discriminatory co-operations. Secondly, it comprises a *queering* of the educational structures, or making education more accessible in order to produce more queer scholars who can Africanise queer studies and queer African studies (Ocholla, 2010, 2011; Nyanzi, 2015).

"Our education systems are structured in such a way that they emphasize patriarchal norms and thinking and by extension really homophobic notions and basically create very little space for a critique of our current systems."

– Gaitho, NGLHRC

Chapter Five: Discussion

1. Gay imperialism

At the beginning of this dissertation I outlined my intent to challenge the (trans)national narratives of queer Africa through a local analysis. I have realised this by listening to the alternative story provided by the local queer history, lives and activism. Throughout this analysis it became apparent that external, transnational powers are not only proclaiming these homogenising narratives, but contributing to their creation. From colonialism to neoliberalism, Western influences have penetrated the African continent and co-constructed its narrative. In order to fully untangle these discursive powers, I will complement the local analysis performed in the previous chapters with a transnational approach to briefly consider the underlying complexities creating these narratives. Taking these external influences into account does not take away from the local LGBTIQ organisations' influence on shaping the movement and the local leaders' role in opposing this as I follow Eschle's (2004) argument that global processes do not unilaterally determine local contexts, but both are co-constitutive.

First, I want to extent on (the contestation of) the idea that homosexuality[26] is un-African. It has clearly been established that same-sex practices and gender fluidity are not foreign to the African continent and Kenya. However, following Foucault's insights in language and discourse, it could be argued that homosexuality as *the* (only) shape of these same-sex practices is un-African and characterised by a Western history and political context. Massad (2002) contests how this personified conceptualisation of same-sex practices has been naturalised as a universal category. Through the shift of HIV activism from the Global North to the Global South and the universalisation of (gay rights as) human rights, a new *gay* imperialism has emerged as the West's power stretches to the domain of sexuality. Western governments', LGBTIQ organisations' and scholars' missionary exportation of the visible, homosexual identity to where it previously did not exist implores local queer organisations to conform to this exclusionary discourse on sexuality in order to receive any of the funding involved[27]. This new identity

[26] Due to the specific transnational critique of *homosexuality* and *homophobia*, I refrained from my inclusive approach in order not to overlook ITGNC issues by generalising statements concerning the Western influence on LGBTIQ issues. This does not mean there is *no* Western influence on ITGNC understandings and realities.

[27] When I inquired about any international influences, the Kenyan activists referred to the financial support provided by donors and the shared platform of struggling for human rights. There was little critique on these donor relations, however the critique might simply not be expressed due to the interview methodology. Nonetheless, one activist identified the discrepancy between the white, male dominated funding environment and their own experiences, and the activists nearly unanimously critiqued the donor's lack of interest in mental health issues. Another activist working with SOGI refugees indicated that their identification as a specific category in need of specific aid, risks to isolate this already vulnerable group while leaving other non-queer groups behind.

and its relation with the acquisition of gay rights in other parts of the world is perceived as a threat to the national hegemonic masculinities, which instigates the policing of a previously undiscussed and invisible practice. The national response to this gay imperialism consists of the reinforcement of un-enforced colonial laws and the adoption of new anti-homosexuality laws. Instead of providing liberation, the Gay International thus facilitates repression (Amory, 1997; Massad, 2002; Msibi, 2011; Ndashe, 2013; Roodsaz & Van Raemdonck, 2018). The implications of this identity focused discourse are reflected in the following quote:

> *"But now there is this whole activism […]. You are attacking them with all these words and they are forced to actually acknowledge this identity. And that is not easy for people. Because in their heads, they know men interact with women sexually, and the other things, we don't talk about that. It is the whole identity thing that just causes people to react that harshly."* – John, HOYMAS

However, due to the erasure of local sexual and gender diversities and the accessibility of Western narratives, these narratives *do* shape the Kenyan framework of queerness. In this regard, these Western conceptualisations cannot be discarded as something that has been imposed by the West, as Massad's overly determinist analysis appears to do (Amory, 1997; Rahman, 2010). Although the activists recognised the Western origin of their urban discourse, they argued that this discourse provides an understanding of their personal feelings and experiences and it enables them to professionally advocate for their issues. While this global identity interacts with the local context in the creation of a queer identity, sexual and gender transgressions in other parts of the Global South take other shapes and meanings in line with their cultural history and the (lack of) transnational discursive powers (Monro, 2018). This diversity echoes earlier calls to recognise plural *homosexualities* and thus conceptualise sexuality outside its normative, binary, essentialised frames (Tamale, 2011).

> *"It is maintaining that balance, it is being able to plug in to what is happening [globally], but also still, by maintaining some of your identity, being able to contribute some[thing] to the space as well."* – Kawira, TRTL

2. Racialised homophobia

Second, I want to come back to the rebuttal that it is actually homophobia that is (un-)African. Without negating the responsibility of local leaders, the transnational powers that work alongside them need to be acknowledged to rephrase the homogenising discourse that opposes a homophobic South with

a gay-friendly West. I previously highlighted the legal and religious colonial legacies that led to the criminalisation and condemnation of homosexuality. In the meantime, the demographic centre of Christianity shifted from the global North to the global South. LGBTIQ rights have become a symbolic battle in the determination of the nature and future of Christianity. Following the legalisation of gay marriage in the United States, American right-wing evangelicals have exported their culture wars to the African continent by instigating homophobic discourses and policies[28] (Ibrahim, 2015; Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018; Kaoma, 2012; Van Klinken, 2017).

> *"A lot of the funding on the other side across the aisle when we are in court is still Western. The idea that there is a complete removal of Western influence in the perpetuation of homophobia is false."* – Gaitho, NGLRHC

Wahab (2015) problematises the way that homophobia is racialised (and Africanised) while homophobic Africa is a Euro-American co-production, both discursively and through the above-mentioned evangelical involvement. Therefore, we should move beyond the inefficient, monolithic understanding of homophobia and recognise plural *homophobias* by analysing the multi-dimensional, contextual causes of anti-queer animus which go beyond an irrational fear of homosexuality (Thoreson, 2014; Epprecht, 2012). Transnationally, African "waves of homophobia" function as indicators of backwardness, legitimisation of interventions and erasure of Western responsibilities. While the Gay International is universalising a Western sexual identity to pursue global sexual equality, it notably overlooks the West's responsibility in sustaining unequal power relationships in their own countries and on a global level (Puar, 2007). The West's "save the gays" narratives serve to *pinkwash*[29] their asylum policies and the war on terror, similarly to the white feminist movement's entanglement with colonial and military projects through "save the women" narratives (Bracke, 2012). Both imperial policies tend to overlook that gender and especially sexual equality are recent and sporadic realisations in the West itself (Rahman, 2010). Threatening with aid conditionality to incite queer-friendly policies from countries' whose population already faces socio-economic hardship due to the Western-imposed Structural Adjustment Programs, would hurt a whole population and especially its most vulnerable members such as the queer community (Ekine & Abbas, 2013b). Wahab (2015, 15) pointedly discards Western condemnations of Africa's homophobic discourses by indicating that "*the experience of*

[28] This transnational religious influence is not exclusively anti-queer, as the African-American The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries (TFAM) offers a countermobilisation to the right-wing evangelicals' instigation of anti-queer animus on the African continent by building a Pan-African LGBT-affirming Christian movement. One example of this is the queer led and targeted Cosmopolitan Affirming Community in Nairobi (Van Klinken, 2017).
[29] Puar (2013, 32) identifies pinkwashing as "*the practice of covering over or distracting from a nation's policies of discrimination of some populations through a noisy touting of its gay rights for a limited few*."

homophobia as the primary discrimination one faces in life is usually the mark of an otherwise privileged life", which is echoed in the next quote of one of Jinsiangu's activists:

> *"And I know people took it [Kenyan President Kenyatta's statement that LGBT rights are a "non-issue" in response to U.S. President Obama's call for equal rights] very personally but then this country was going on with so many things… People need food, people need better roads. So why are we talking about what people are doing in their bedroom?"* – Arnest, Jinsiangu

3. Moving beyond

The acclaimed authors referenced in this chapter and throughout this dissertation critically engage with the role of the West (Massad, 2002; Puar, 2007; Wahab, 2016). First and foremost, this provides a valuable counterweight to the invisibility of the West in the dominant queer narratives, where it was previously only recognised on the ground of its exceptionalism, while the pervasiveness of the underlying, unequal, racialised, transnational power structures are now revealed. However, this critical view at times becomes paralysing, especially when it exclusively highlights the negative side of Western contributions. In addition to questioning *if* there should be any Western support to local queer struggles, let alone what shape this should take, these authors' renunciation of Western universalisations in favour of local conceptualisations risks overlooking the local agency it premises to revalue. I propose to move beyond this transnational critique by listening to local actors to create a holistic understanding of the *transnationality* of queer struggles. Following Roodsaz and Van Raemdonck (2018, 18), I believe "a move beyond" differentiates from "a move away", and entails "*an expansion and further development of deconstructionist critique*".

I came to these considerations after recognising the tangible ways in which queer narratives are created and contested in the local context of Nairobi *and* the regional and global influences which shape the processes taking place in Nairobi. The local approach uncovered the multi-layeredness of these queer narratives, which are simultaneously shaped by local choices, regional developments, transnational influences and the *interaction* between those levels. Moreover, the local actors recognise these external influences, identify with their identifications, learn from their experiences and strategically use their engagement for their own development. A clear example of what I mean with this is the use of a human rights approach to challenge the constitutionality of remaining colonial laws or the establishment of a transnationally supported, radically inclusive church which reinterprets a colonially embedded religion. Therefore, consequently problematising these Western influences on

local *objects* in an attempt to respect the local's agency, discards the positive engagement created and experienced by the same local *subjects*.

While I acknowledge the inherent Western influence on both the local and global queer movement, and the problematic westernization this entails for knowledge production and local experiences, Western support should not be discarded as a presumed one-sided influence. In recognition of the engagement of the local queers with the transnational level, and my own engagement as a European student with Kenyan activists, I propose to revalue these interactions as the sharing of expertise and experiences instead of the exerting of influence. Keck and Sikkink (1998) identify shared values and principles as the basis of transnational networks of activists, instead of material gains. Additionally, these transnational advocacy networks not only operate in accordance to "universal" understandings but they also contest and reshape certain frames. Currier and Migraine-George (2018) further identify the incommensurability between local and global diversities not as an obstacle but an opportunity for new understandings and expressions. I believe these possibilities to reframe transnational co-operation allow a move towards supportive, reciprocal co-operations instead of moving away from transnational relations altogether. A similar solidarity and value based framework could also promote gender and class alliances, or more intersectional approaches, in both local and transnational co-operations. A prerequisite to the positive reframing of transnational support entails that local knowledge and experiences are valued, and there is space provided for local voices and regional understandings while transnational subjectivities star in a supporting role, as stated below:

> *"I think the movement needs to be led by and the voices that need to be heard are from the people on the ground."* – Humanitarian worker

Conclusion

The queer narrative provided by *Rafiki* is part of an emerging queer African visibility on screen, on paper and on the streets. The national reception of the Kenyan movie and the international reception to the consequent ban are demonstrative of national leaders' condemnation of homosexuality as a Western threat, and Western leaders' condemnation of Africa's unequivocal homophobia. However, *Rafiki* itself provides a narrative of urban, contemporary, African queerness, in defiance of the national narratives proclaiming homosexuality as un-African and the transnational queer knowledge production restricting queerness to its homonormative, white, male shape. The class differences represented in the film, and the queer publication house that published the short story it was all based on, counter the shortcomings of a non-intersectional and Western-centred queer scholarship. Ultimately, the successful legal petition against the ban reveals the progressive voices and developments present in a presumably anti-queer context. Following the subversive queer story *Rafiki* represents, both through the love story it entails and the reaction to it, I wanted to focus on the queer stories that Nairobi has to offer as an alternative and challenge to the dominant (trans)national narratives. In order to unravel these narratives, I complemented a literature analysis of the critical queer and African writing with a qualitative empirical research of Nairobi's diverse and resilient queer activism.

Both queerness and anti-queer animus have been a part of Africa' pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial narrative. The first, national narrative however contests the *Africanness* of this queerness. More specifically, national leaders proclaim homosexuality is an un-African, Western import. The conceptualisation of transgressive, non-normative sexualities and genders as visible, political, dichotomous *homosexual* identities is admittedly a product of Western historical processes. However, the emerging revaluation of African history reveals a diversity of same-sex and gender practices that were previously erased by Western history writing. In order to overcome these discursive pitfalls, I have chosen to adopt the notion of *queer* to describe transgressive sexual and gender experiences, following its reappraisal by queer African authors, Kenyan activists and its attractive open-ended (analytical) possibilities. The local histories allow us to recognise the authenticity of Africa's queerness at a time when African culture was only determined by its own practices and discourses. Furthermore, the cultural practices' unfathomability by Western conceptualisations of romantic or economic desires is indicative of the need to expand queer theory with both African understandings *of* knowledge production and African knowledge production.

Africa's queerness is not only an artefact of the past, but it extends to the contemporary, urban environment of Nairobi. The mere existence of the Kenyan queers I met, further demonstrates African leaders' and queer studies' blindspot as it defies the exclusive categorization of Africanness and queerness. The concise description of Nairobi's queer lives and activism in chapter four of this dissertation therefore offers a queer counter-narrative. Nairobi's queer narrative is not distinct from the rest of Nairobi's youth's and other Kenyan citizens', as it entails the same social and economic challenges, except these challenges are exacerbated for the queer community due to anti-queer prejudice. Instead of making a distinction on the ground of their sexual and gender expressions, the oppressions shared as Kenyan citizens could allow an intersectional struggle against the (trans)national power relations sustaining the local and global inequalities. Although there is a clear Western influence on the organisation of the LGBTIQ movement, the activists strategically engage with this external financial support and discursive expertise in order to provide HIV/AIDS services and defend the community's human rights. This external support does not take away from the influence of Kenya's own queer activists on creating an empowered and visible queer African community that changes the national narrative and complements the Western-centred queer knowledge production. While the Western support allows a professional development of the movement, the related NGO-isation leads to the exclusion of certain members of the own community, thus making it important to complement the urban, professional queer activism with other grassroots initiatives.

In addition to highlighting Kenya's queerness in order to challenge the national narrative and create a queer counter-narrative, I have attempted to nuance the binary categorisation of Africa as an anti-queer bloc as a way to contest the reductionist transnational narrative. Much like Kenyan leaders' proclamation that homosexuality is a Western import in opposition to their national morality, Western leaders' condemnation of Africa's homophobia functions to confirm their own progressiveness. In this regard, I challenge the binary opposition the transnational narrative entails by identifying both the West's complicity in anti-queer oppression and African progressiveness. The West's role in Kenyan anti-queer hostility can historically be traced back to the British colonisers' imposition of their Western norms through the introduction of their Christian religion and anti-sodomy laws, which emphasize patriarchal, familial values. Nevertheless, it would be reductionist to conclude that it is actually homophobia which is the Western import, as Kenya's political and religious leaders entrenched these practices into the national fabric, to confirm the independent nation's distinctiveness. The oppression of non-normative sexualities and genders did not become prevalent in Kenya until recent years. However, the West is not a neutral narrator of this oppression, as they are (deemed) partially responsible for bringing the target in sight and providing the weapons. First, it is the *visible* queerness

which is targeted as a threat to the presumably distinct national morality and the patriarchal structures it upholds. Although I previously established that morality instead of queerness is the Western import, Western governments' and LGBTIQ organisations' exportation of an essentialising identity framework does render previously undiscussed transgressive practices visible and consequently in need of regulation. Second, this regulation is not only necessitated in protection of the colonially embedded values, the stigmatisation is realised *by* this colonial legacy, as religious leaders take the lead on condemning sexual and gender diversities and the penal code legitimizes a climate of discrimination on the ground of perceived queerness. The Western responsibility is however not limited to the retrospective manipulation of their colonial remnants, as American evangelicals directly instigate anti-queer policies and discourses on the African continent. Moreover, efforts of this transnational community to stand up for the rights of an unjustly oppressed community overlook the own complicity in creating and upholding oppressive structures, and although the boundaries of these structures have been extended to include certain queer bodies, they continue to exclude other racialised (queer) bodies. The paradoxical Kenyan protection of colonially embedded values against presumably imperial Western influences and the Western protection of certain bodies at the expense of excluding others reveals the complex necessity to move beyond monolithic conceptualizations of homophobia and recognize anti-queer animus not singularly as a "disease", but as a symptom of other phenomena such as hetero/homonormative patriarchy and global capitalism.

In recognition of African counter-narratives, not only queerness and anti-queer animus should be part of Kenya's pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial narrative, but the tolerance characteristic for Kenyan society as well. While historians and anthropologists identified a don't-ask-don't-tell tradition with regard to non-normative sexualities and genders in the past, several activists similarly identify the queer possibilities offered by Nairobi's mind-your-own-business mindset. These local practices encourage a further extension of Western-centred queer studies and their binary conceptualisation of acceptance in opposition of anti-queer animus, where acceptance is prerequisite for progressiveness and anti-queer animus is the irrevocable indication of backwardness. Central to this dissertation was Nairobi's activism, which explicitly embodies a Kenyan queerness and progressiveness often rendered invisible by the (trans)nationally presumed absence of queerness and abundance of anti-queer animus. Although the activists indicate there is still a long way to go, positive changes are taking place in several aspects of Kenyan society. For example, the activists' resilience and the Kenyan judiciary's progressiveness already established significant legal precedents, while governmental and religious co-operations are improving the community's access to medical and spiritual support. Outside of these institutional structures a further tolerance towards, and even acceptance of, sexual and gender

diversities is taking place in Nairobi's urban spaces, online platforms and with the younger generations. Although the movement is still developing and finding an inclusive, intersectional way to bring about change, the (currently) fragmented community is bringing about acceptance, and continuous change is imminent.

Just as Nairobi's queer activism is not perfect, so is this dissertation. First, I have ironically been emphasizing the need for more African voices and knowledge, as a European student. While thus partially contributing to the shortcomings I aim to overcome, I believe any inquisitive engagement with the local level can expand the Western-centred knowledge. Second, while I have used a local analysis to transcend the generalizing narratives reducing Africa to a country, I sometimes placed this within the general context of "Africa". It is not my intention to make any homogenising statements concerning the diverse countries of the continent. Instead, this pan-African language encompasses the insights provided by comprehensive, transnational texts of other authors and an overarching contextualization of a continent that shares a colonial and cultural context and continuous invisibility. Third, the inclusive approach I propagated does not include any intersex voices while transgender issues are only limitedly reflected in the literature I reviewed, and their issues are limitedly distinguished throughout my concise analyses. Nevertheless, I believe even this limited inclusion trumps a full exclusion as the ITGNC activists I met provided valuable insights. Fourth, my position as a *mzungu* and my objective to challenge the paternalistic Western narrative made it difficult to be as critical towards African leaders' role as Western leaders'. In addition, my limited contact with the local queer organisations made it even more difficult to be critical towards their activism. However, the extensive and diverse sample of this research, which entails the majority of Nairobi's queer organisations, included several critical insights of the movement and provides a nuanced analysis.

Lastly, this dissertation only *begins* to scratch the surface of queer African histories, realities, activism and understandings as it provides a specifically urban, professional insight into the creation and contestation of queer narratives. While the exploratory, open-ended nature of my case study encompasses multiple interesting contributions to a queer African narrative, this approach and the limited time and space of a dissertation meant most aspects of this narrative are only superficially outlined. On the one hand, it could be complemented with a more extensive research into queer activists' engagement with HIV/AIDS prevention, intersectional queer feminism, progressive queer litigations and radically inclusive religious activism. The scope of the research could also be extended to encompass rural, lower-class and older queer narratives. This could also entail a more comprehensive study of the digital space and the possibilities this offers for the development of knowledge, activism and social perceptions. On the other hand, it could be enriched with a more in-

depth analysis of the (trans)national narratives and the underlying processes causing national and international leaders' control of the domain of sexuality and gender identity such as the perpetuation of patriarchal power structures and global capitalism (Ekine, 2013; Macharia, 2013; Msibi, 2011). There is a further need to move beyond the description of local realities and embark on the *theorisation* of African gender and sexuality, beyond the Western frameworks, dichotomies and embodiments (Clarke, 2013; Currier & Migraine-George, 2018; Nyanzi, 2015). The contextual, complex, and continuously developing nature of this topic demonstrates the importance and relevance to keep engaging with *queer Africa*, an anomaly turned into a possibility to expand both our understandings and *methods of* understanding sexuality, gender and the powers controlling it.

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Attachments

1. Nairobi's queer organisations

1.1. Radical queer feminists organising towards decriminalisation

In preparation of my fieldwork in Nairobi, I had closely been following the petition to repeal the colonially retained sections of the penal code which *de facto* criminalise consensual same-sex relations. One of the leading forces behind this petition is the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC). NGLHRC is a human rights organisation litigating for a society where every queer person's equality, dignity and freedom are respected. Although the ruling on the petition was eventually postponed until after my stay in Kenya, one week before my arrival in Nairobi NGLHRC successfully enforced the right to be registered by the NGO board despite their explicit queer designation. Luckily, I had the possibility to meet some of the radical, feminist lawyers working at NGLHRC, hidden behind a rainbow door in a green oasis.

The movement's legal landmarks can be ascribed to the unwavering persistence of the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) and Transgender Education and Advocacy (TEA), Kenya's prominent queer legal bodies, and the continuous support of the LGBTIQ coalition bodies and the Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR). After a three-year legal fight, transgender activist Audrey Mbugua legally overturned the NGO Board's ban to register TEA in July 2014, leading to the official registration of the organisation in 2017. Three months after the first court win, in October 2014, Kenya's High Court ordered the education authorities to amend Audrey's name and remove the gender designation on her academic certificates. Later, TEA won a ruling which allowed five transgender individuals to change their identity documents, setting a precedent for future name changes. In April 2015, NGLHRC enforced the right to register with the NGO Board in Kenya's High Court, a ruling which was immediately appealed by the NGO Board and eventually upheld by Kenya's Court of Appeal in March 2019. In September 2015, NGLHRC successfully challenged forced anal and HIV testing of men suspected of same-sex relations with Mombasa's High Court. As Kenya's High Court upheld the legality of forced anal examinations in June 2016, KNCHR joined NGLHRC's case of appeal, which received a positive ruling in March 2018 (NGLHRC, 2019; Thirikwa, 2018). After years of lobbying by ITGNC activists, there is currently a bill in parliament awaiting approval to add a third gender marker 'I' on identity documents. The national task force set up by the government to advise their decision, has recommended that intersex persons should be recognised as a third sex. These positive rulings are indicative of the progressive nature of

Kenya's laws and judiciary system, facilitated by LGBTIQ organisations' sensitisation of state actors and care practitioners that work with sexual and gender diversities such as magistrates and judges. The quote below pertains a fitting testament to the success of the movement:

> *"I think one of the biggest things is that our social advocacy has never been as bold and visible as it is now. […] The organising has also grown because there is an increased emboldening."* – Gaitho, NGLHRC

In 2016, the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC), the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) and Nyanza Rift Valley and Western Kenya (NYARWEK) filed a petition with the Kenyan High Court to repeal section 162 and 165 of the Penal Code, which would *de facto* decriminalise consensual same-sex acts between adults. The petitioners argued that the aforementioned sections of the Penal Code legitimise discrimination and violence based on someone's (perceived) sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. They challenged the constitutionality of these provisions, as article 27 of the 2010 Constitution of Kenya guarantees equality and non-discrimination (GALCK, 2016; HRW, 2015; Thirikwa, 2018). After a three-month postponement, the three-judge bench of the Kenyan High Court unanimously dismissed the petition on the 24th of May 2019. The judges motivated that the petitioners failed to prove beyond a doubt the discriminatory nature of the clauses and complemented that the constitutional rights to privacy and dignity are not absolute (NGLHRC, 2019). However, this judgement is not the end of the queer community's legal fight and losing this battle does not mean losing the war.

> *"We are ready for anything. We are ready to go to the supreme court with it."*
> – Imani, NGLHRC

1.2. MSM organising in the fight against HIV/AIDS

I was able to talk to two main MSM organisations in Nairobi: Ishtar MSM and Health Options for Young Men on HIV/AIDS/STI (HOYMAS). Ishtar was the first organisation to grow out of the social gatherings and support-groups of gay men in 1999. HOYMAS was founded ten years later by a group of male sex workers living positively (GALCK, 2019). Both organisations are located outside of the busy town centre, one in the industrial area and the other next to a highway, where their plain façades are overshadowed by the neighbouring car repair shops and successfully hide the rainbow world behind it, as there is no (clear) sign of the work taking place inside. Both organisations target MSM, which implicitly makes them a GBQ organisation and also encompasses sex workers. The favourable, broad

designation of MSM offers several opportunities. First, this terminology is medically accepted and facilitates co-operation with the government concerning HIV prevention. Second, men who do not identify themselves as homosexuals can still access their services without being confronted with the stigma of being gay or bisexual. Similarly, a young man dating multiple (older) men who are well off, does not necessarily identify as a sex worker. This allows an intersectional approach. The memberships of the organisations range from 2000 to over 4500 members and predominantly encompasses young MSM in their (early) twenties.

> *"It [being gay] is actually not an identity that people have. I think it is easier then, [because] the MSM has really been adopted as a term. We just continue working with MSM because many people understand it, especially people doing interventions."* – James, HOYMAS

Ishtar and HOYMAS provide stigma-free health care services for the MSM population, including HIV prevention and treatment. Following international trends, many of the other organisations commented that those organising for MSM receive a majority of international donor funding in response to Africa's HIV epidemic. On the one hand the HIV epidemic opened up discussions about (homo)sexuality in African countries, on the other hand anti-homosexuality groups use the same studies to strengthen their condemnation of homosexuality (Jjuuko & Tabengwa, 2018). Both organisations positively evaluate the association between gay and HIV issues as this does not only create financial possibilities to support their communities, but also enables cooperation with the county government and ministry of health as part of the Key Populations Consortium. Nonetheless, the work and the communities they support are still severely stigmatised through its association with homosexuality, which ultimately limits their reach. The governmental cooperation offers an important avenue to conduct advocacy concerning MSM issues and rights. Besides their health services and advocacy, they aim to empower their members through educational trainings and their employment in economic initiatives. Their work is not only grounded in their own experiences, but also in the research they conduct into different aspects of MSM lives.

> *"And then the younger generation also, the younger people are not perceiving HIV to be a thing. They are really getting infected, now they go to their families when they are very sick, and their family now confirms 'you are gay, it are those people that killed you'. But […] we are legally not allowed to see people below the age of 18, because apparently we would be recruiting them. In the government's mind people don't become homosexual until they are 18."* – James, HOYMAS

1.3. LBQ organising within a feminist framework

The first LBQ organisation I met in Nairobi was Minority Women in Action (MWA), who's offices are housed in the same building as Ishtar's and other members of the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya. During my interview with one of MWA's activists, she indicated that both organisations have a positive personal relationship, but MWA has gradually been severing their professional relationship. Female led and targeted organising has been a part of the Kenyan LGBTIQ movement from early on, as MWA emerged only a couple of months after the founding of GALCK in 2006, to meet the specific needs of queer women. The second LBQ organisation I was able to meet in Nairobi is Kenya Campus Lasses Association (K-CLA), which was founded in 2014 but has been confronted with a flow of volunteers and members coming in and out of the organisation as they complete their campus careers. In response, K-CLA is currently *revamping* its organising to overcome their (presumed) elitist "campus" character and become more inclusive. The evolution of their target groups from LBT to LBQ reflects the separation of the ITGNC movement in Kenya, upon which they adopted the queer designator to allow anyone who identifies as queer to come to their organisations. Both activists motivated the need to specifically organise for queer women in reference to an online fight which erupted around 2016 after someone called out the Kenyan LGBTI movement for being patriarchal.

> *"K-CLA works with lesbian, bisexual and queer persons in institutions of learning. Or rather that is how they started out. But now we have evolved to also include trans people and gender non-conforming persons. And generally just the youth, whether they are in school [or not]."* – Sonja, K-CLA

Through their feminist approach, these organisations aim to empower LBQ women as free, autonomous and self-accomplished citizens and to counter the discrimination they face. This discrimination is intersectional for queer women, who experience exclusion first as women in a patriarchal society, second as queers in a heteronormative environment and for masculine presenting women who transgress the binary gender norms this becomes a triple discrimination. To enable their members to make informed decisions in life, MWA organises financial and security trainings and conversations on human rights, sexual and reproductive health, black feminism, well-being and so on. Over the years, MWA's football team has professionalised as it simultaneously empowers their members and influences the social perception of LBQ women when they play in many (lower-class) areas. MWA has also been going out of Nairobi to support grassroots initiatives in rural areas. As K-CLA was confronted with a flow of activist volunteers and members coming in and out of the

organisation as they complete their campus careers are looking to be a more inclusive . The volunteers who run K-CLA want to complement MWA's NGO-ised work with inclusive media advocacy.

> *"[...] how do we empower our members? I feel it is through that concept of autonomy. Those politics are really necessary for survival. Not just as a queer woman but even as a woman. And not just to survive socially but also economically. How are they able to self-organise?"* – Muthoni, MWA

Queer and feminist thought were very present during my conversations with MWA, K-CLA and the other female activists I met in Nairobi, who predominantly identified as queer (feminists). However, a cooperation, let alone integration, of the queer movement with the mainstream women's movement in Kenya is improbable at this time according to the queer activists. In contrast to the exclusionary mechanisms of the mainstream movement I heard about, I was able to attend an inclusive, intersectional, artistic gathering of those who identify as "radical queer feminists". This intersectionality enables more successful partnerships with other marginalised communities, such as the abortion activists of Marie Stopes who un-discriminatively empower women to have an informed and safe abortion. MWA's partnerships stretch across national boundaries, as they are part of the Coalition of African Lesbians and exchange experiences with South-African queer feminists.

1.4. ITGNC organising to gain access to medical health services

Kenya has two major ITGNC organisations, with Transgender Education and Advocacy focusing on advocacy and legal issues since 2008 (and recently adjusting their target population to completely focus on transgender issues) and Jinsiangu providing social support and (a referral to) health services since 2011 (Amakobe, Dearham & Likimani, 2018). Jinsiangu's target population is reflected in the Swahili meaning of their name, which is a contraction of the words *jinsia yangu*, meaning *my gender*. I was able to meet several activists and a Tanzanian and Ugandan refugee at Jinsiangu's offices, which were hidden from sight in a gated neighbourhood far outside the centre of Nairobi. When asked about the location of their offices, they motivated that security and safety prevail over visibility, which is why they do not support the organisation of Pride. After having to leave their first offices due to a "silly" neighbour who threatened two of their members with a gun and called the police on them, and the landlord of their second office refused to repair the flooding problem, these more high-end offices ensure they are not disturbed and the spaciousness allows them to accommodate members in need. Jinsiangu has over 300 members, excluding intersex babies and their parents as they can hardly be considered 'members', with the majority of their members being transgender women in their twenties.

"One of the biggest strengths has been having an office." "A safe space."

– Arnest & Toni, Jinsiangu

Jinsiangu's offices primarily function as a safe space, as reflected in the quote above, and a resource center. One of Jinsiangu's primary focuses is their health program, for which they provide their members with safe and non-discriminatory access to health services. They originally had an in-house psychologist to provide mental health care, who now works from her own office where she sees several of Jinsiangu's members a week. Jinsiangu has developed a network of doctors and nurses to whom they can refer their members for hormone treatments, blood work, kidney and liver test and so on. Additionally, they are currently trying to have Kenya's transgender community recognised as a key population in the Kenya AIDS Strategic Framework as transgender people are simultaneously at a higher risk of contracting HIV, not recognised in current programming, and have difficulty accessing the existing discriminatory services. Their ultimate goal is to have holistic gender affirming health care in one place, with HIV services and hormone treatments available, as their members do not feel comfortable in MSM clinics where they are ridiculed and identified as sex workers. Jinsiangu is also doing outreach projects to sensitise rural communities about transgender and intersex issues as part of their advocacy and to support rural ITGNC communities in establishing their own networks. They have discovered the need to return to check up on these communities in order to sustain local alternatives for ITGNC individuals who otherwise have to travel to Nairobi in order to access any ITGNC friendly services. While I was at their offices, the artist who creates the sculpted vases and other artwork as Jinsiangu's income generating activity, also showed me his work. In light of homophobic upsurges in Kenya's neighbouring countries, they have also come to occasionally accommodate Ugandan and Tanzanian "brothers and sisters" who sometimes do not feel safe or recognised with the UN's Refugee Agency (UNHCR), in addition to some of their Kenyan members in distress.

"I want Jinsiangu to educate us *so we can take initiative to educate the whole community. We need them to come down here and educate us ITGNC's first."*

– Evance, Q-Initiative

1.5. SOGIE organising by and for LGBTIQ refugees

Kenya has an influx of around 500.000 refugees a year, most of whom come from Somalia, South-Sudan, Ethiopia and the DR Congo. The majority of these refugees reside in one of Kenya's two refugee camps, the first of which, Dadaab, is located close to the Somalian border in the East of Kenya, and the second camp called Kakuma, is located close to the border with South-Sudan and Uganda in the North-West of Kenya. A minority of refugees however resides in urban areas, of which Nairobi is the most

prevalent urban space for settlement. Most refugees are fleeing from conflict in the region, but the anti-LGBTIQ discourses, policy proposals and media outlets in some East-African countries cause a significant number of people to flee their home country on the ground of their sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). A limited number of SOGI refugees originally flees their country for other reasons and only discovers their sexual and gender diversity after leaving their home, but the majority leaves an otherwise safe environment for this specific reason which leads them to be easily identified as queer on the ground of their nationality. The latter is especially the case for Ugandan refugees, who make up the majority of SOGI refugees with over 1500 refugees coming in since the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Bill was issued in 2014. Until December last year, most Ugandan refugees resided in Kakuma and only 500 stayed in Nairobi, until SOGI refugees became targeted in the refugee camp and many were relocated to Nairobi. Ugandan refugees are easily identified as queer within the refugee community where they are scolded for being a "special minority" who (appears to) receive more support, and within the Kenyan community where they face double discrimination by guards, service providers, possible employers and the rest of the population. To prevent continuous discrimination after arriving in Kenya, it is expected that several refugees do not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity (Milo, 2013).

> *"Why do they cross the border to Kenya? The asylum regime or the policies here in Kenya, not the law per se, but especially the UNHCR policy on refugee protection is very open and welcoming here in Kenya."* – Humanitarian worker

While humanitarian aid agencies such as UNHCR and HIAS provide some cash-based support for refugees, they are predominantly expected to survive on their own in the city and they are advised to keep a low profile in order to do so. A group of young, mostly trans or gay, Ugandan refugees who came to Kenya after the Anti-Homosexuality Act came out, started the Nature Network in 2015. The ideology, and name, of this refugee led CBO refers to the fact that being queer is "in your nature" and cannot be changed. Although many of the original members have been resettled and some passed away, others have come in their place to use their interests in media and the arts to advocate for SOGI issues. While their original membership counted around 40 members, they are able to reach over 500 community members through their media platforms. I met two activists of the Nature Network in a café in Nairobi, because the gated compound where they work from and house a number of their members, is located in a remote village outside of Nairobi. Safety clearly prevails, especially after being evicted from their last house when the neighbours found out there were transgenders living there. In this first house, they used to receive counsellors and preachers from the CAC. Initially, the Ugandan refugees were numerous at the CAC's Sunday Fellowships, until their relocation severely increased the

transportation costs. The biggest challenges they face concern providing rent, food and medication, with many of their members engaging in sex work in order to survive since their identity complicates other employment options and the possibility to market their own business. Although they have some partnerships with the local LGBTIQ community, their objectives ultimately differ as the Kenyan community is focused on changing the Kenyan context, and the Ugandan community is focused on surviving while awaiting their relocation to a different context.

2. Nairobi's queer gatherings

The first event was a "*justice party*" organised by Ishtar MSM on the 29th of March. This event attracted dozens of people, and the Ishtar offices where crammed with excited men and a handful of women. One room was set up to create a runway with rows of chairs at both sides. Seated here, everybody could enjoy the performance of the Ishtar dolls and other drag queen icons who were voguing[30], showcasing the clothing they had designed and demonstratively play-backing to both Western and Kenyan pop music. At the end, drinks and snacks were distributed and everybody left their chairs to start dancing.

The second event was a "*rethink evening"* organised by CREA, an international feminist human rights organisation based in the Global South. On the 3rd of April, the 4th flour of the Crowne Plaza hotel in Nairobi was filled with activists, artists and allies, many of whom were queer, to "*rethink politics and resistance, reimagine change and transformation and reboot struggle and movement*". The first part of the evening, the program outlined numerous artists to take the stage and present their kanga's, slam poetry, music, short-films and dance. The second part of the evening allowed room for discussion, as several of the women present took the floor to talk about the feminist movement, its need for intersectionality, the resilience of women, and the future. The third part of the evening was a buffet.

The third event was the Sunday afternoon fellowship of the Cosmopolitan Affirming Community (CAC), the Radically Inclusive LGBTIQ led church. I attended the fellowship on two occasions, during the "*Thanksgiving fellowship*" on the 31st of March and during the "*Easter fellowship*" with visiting bishop Joseph Tolton on the 19th of April. The fellowships take place in a serene meeting room on the 3rd floor of a grill restaurant, located on one of the busiest streets of Nairobi town. Although what was being preached differed each time, there was a general structure that formed the basis of the fellowships.

[30] Vogue or voguing is a dance style inspired by the model poses of *Vogue* magazine. This style arose from the 1960s New York ballroom scene, which is part of the African-American and Latina LGBT subculture, where people can "walk" in drag for trophies at underground dance competitions.

At the beginning of the afternoon, a drum set, keyboard, speakers and a consulting chair are installed in the room. For the duration of the afternoon the room slowly fills as the minister and community members alternatingly take the floor to preach and sing about God, love and inclusiveness. At the end of the service, coffee and snacks are distributed.

3. Nairobi's anti-queer impressions

3.1. Vignette 1: How God shaped our sexual desires

After I finished my interview at the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC), I ordered an Uber to return to my temporary home. After checking the license plate, I got in the car and confirmed my destination address to the driver. Just as every other time, the driver was a man, I guessed probably in his forties, and he was exceptionally talkative and curious. Most Uber rides up until this point had gone by in silence, except for some were we exchanged a couple of words about the weather and the insane traffic in Nairobi. This time however, my driver was in the mood to talk and there was a specific topic he wanted to talk about: gays and lesbians. For the last couple of days, I had been deliberating if I would mention the reason of my stay and the research I was doing into lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex organisations in Nairobi, if I was asked about it or if a situation presented itself. Out of safety precautions and a lack of small talk, my dissertation topic had not come up yet. Until this Uber ride, where I had accepted the by GPS identified pick-up point as the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. As soon as we were pulling out of the driveway, my Uber driver enquired if I really came from an organisation that had to do with gays and lesbians. I explained that they are a legal organisation and that I had just had a meeting with them. This was the start of a fifteen-minute uncomfortable but educational Uber ride in which I finally got to hear the other perspective so often mentioned in my interviews.

For the duration of the ride, my driver emphasized how God created men and women to be with each other, and how he cannot fathom how two men could be together. Everybody I had interviewed up until that point had indicated how the main causes of discrimination of LGBTIQ people are religion and ignorance. With this information in the back of my mind, I decided not to shy away from the conversation. I tried to refute his biological argument that men and women, like all animals in the animal kingdom, only mate with a partner of the opposite sex. It was not much later that something else which I had heard and read about before became clear: the narrative on homosexuality is limited to, or at least heavily focused on sex. Although the explicit sexual and graphic language used by my Uber driver might have been more characterizing for him than for the general Kenyan population. He

repeatedly asked me to explain how two men can have sex with each other. It did not take long for him to drop the subtle wording, and to graphically explain how a man is made to penetrate and impregnate a woman, while a woman's breasts are made to attract a man. When I tried to counter his argument by adding that a woman could also appreciate another woman's breasts, and that this is not only for a man's pleasure, he misunderstood me and thought I confirmed his male point of view. After explaining how much he loves sex with a woman, he adds that he cannot fathom that he could have sex with another man – but he also respects the personal choices of people who actually do this. He then went on to further illustrate his point, by explaining how much he likes my smile – because how else was I supposed to respond to a stranger talking about sex so graphically other than smiling politely - and how I would like his cock. He often quickly added that he was only talking hypothetically, because he is married and I would probably not be interested in him because he is too old for me.

When we arrived at the apartment complex, he thanked me for the educational ride and I did the same as I paid him and stepped out of the car.

3.2. Vignette 2: How people are forced to be homosexual

Out of curiosity for my Uber driver's reaction after the educational Uber ride three weeks earlier, I decided to answer (almost) truthfully when my recent Uber driver enquired about the reason of my stay in Nairobi. I told him I was researching the rights of lesbians and gays, and whether they have access to the same human rights as everybody else. This Uber driver had a very strong opinion on this topic, especially on gays, because he said he could understand the rights aspect - although I felt like his words said the opposite. He immediately responded that homosexuality is a private issue and that this should not affect the public, meaning that gays should not receive specific rights in the public space for what they do in private. I replied that I agreed with his initial statement and that being gay could be a private issue, so it follows that they should be receiving the same rights as everybody else which is often not the case due to discrimination. He verified if I was only researching the human rights and I was not actually "one of them".

When we passed a little girl walking outside with her mother, he pointed to this girl and proclaimed that this is the danger of homosexuality: young children under 18 who do not know and should not know anything about sex, can become gay if they hear something about it because they do not know anything else. This resonated strongly with what I had heard in previous interviews, where the work of all LGBTIQ organisations is limited to people over 18 because it is considered promotion and recruitment when they provide services for people who are under-age, to which they always add that

it's as if somebody only becomes sexually active or aware the day they turn 18. I tried to refute the Uber driver's idea that other homosexuals can make someone homosexual, by pointing out that it is something individual and you are just born this way.

After this, he tried to emphasize the dangers of homosexuality to me by reiterating a story he read in the newspaper a couple of years ago about a Kenyan man who became homosexual against his will by having to take part in unlawful sexual acts with a muzungu, a white gay man in Mombasa. I could not get any word in, but when he finally finished his story I argued that this is a tragic but individual story of blackmail and extortion, which has nothing to do with homosexuality. I tried to explain how homosexuality is more than sexual acts. Nonetheless, he concluded his explanation with a comparison to single mothers who will prostitute themselves because they need money to provide for their children. In the same way, homosexuals do not actually want to do these sexual acts with other men, but they are directly or indirectly forced to do so and are royally payed for it.

Towards the end of the ride, he asked me whether I was religious. Feeling like I was already stating a number of controversial things I decided to lie at this point and indicate that I am Christian. In response to this, the Uber driver explained how homosexuality is considered a sin by God. I countered this with what I had heard at the CAC and with what I believed myself, namely that God loves everybody equally. As we arrived at the destination of my next interview and I paid him and got out of the car, he called after me to say that he hoped I did not hate him for his views.